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Living in a time of COVID: exploring the lockdown experiences of people living with long-term Physical and mental health conditions in the UK

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Introduction: During the pandemic, the UK imposed lockdown measures to slow the transmission, minimise hospitalisations and protect the population's physical health from the COVID-19 coronavirus. However, this was implemented with little consideration of the broader mental health and wellbeing implications for those with pre-existing physical or mental health conditions. This study explored the lived experiences of adults deemed vulnerable and required to shield, and the psychological, social, emotional and physical impacts of the lockdown upon their daily lives.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 adults living in London with stroke, Breathing difficulties or a mental condition during the first COVID-19 lockdown. Physically distanced Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed.

Findings: The main identified themes were: learning to self-manage, psychological and emotional resilience, occupational disruption and redefining connectedness. The participants' previous knowledge and experience empowered them to make healthy decisions and establish meaningful routines to curb the adverse effects of occupational disruption. Their pre-COVID realities influenced their perspectives and adaptability. The lockdown prompted them to re-evaluate their relationships, social opportunities, emotional status, loss of roles and identity.

Conclusion: The participants' experiences of lockdown offer an insight into a period of occupational disruption for those who were particularly vulnerable, with contributing evidence for the value of meaningful occupations, providing person-centred care, enhancing occupational balance, and promoting psychological, emotional and social wellbeing.

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Conference theme

Innovating our profession

Keywords

Adult physical health, Long-term conditions, Mental health

RCOT Career Development Framework Pillars of Practice

Evidence, Research and Development; Professional Practice

Ethical approval

Brunel University London 23163-MHR-May/2020- 25475-1

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