History of Fear of Falling Among Community-Dwelling Older Adults:
A Narrative Inquiry

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Introduction

- Falls are a common and dangerous occurrence among older adults, often leading to serious injury or death.

- FOF is defined as “a lasting concern about falling that can lead an individual to avoid activities that he/she remains capable of performing.” (Tinetti, Richman, and Powell)

- Fear of falling (FOF) is common and occurs among fallers and non-fallers (Boyd & Stevens, 2008)
Implications for Occupational Therapy

- FOF is an **important area of concern** for Occupational Therapists (OTs):
  - Leads older adults to **avoid activities**
  - Impacts the ability to **successfully age** (Landers, Durand, Powell, Dibble & Young, 2011).
  - Is a **risk factor for falls** (Lee, Mackenzie, & James, 2008).
  - Associated with **lower quality of life** (Lee et al., 2008).
### Purpose

- Past literature indicates a **need for more research on the subject of FOF** among community-dwelling older adults. (Leland et al., 2012).
- The purpose of this narrative study was to **understand the personal history of FOF** in community-dwelling older adults.
- **Question**: *How do community-dwelling older adults describe the historic development of their FOF?*
Methodology

Research Design
● FOF is a subjective phenomenon, thus a qualitative study would best explore this issue from the perspectives of those most affected.

Participant Demographics/ Inclusion Criteria
● Community-dwelling adults aged 65 yrs or older
● Self-reported FOF or worry related to falling

Recruitment Methods
● 6 participants selected via the snowball method
  ○ Key informant referred researchers to local seniors with FOF with the use of a flyer
## Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Sex:</th>
<th>Lives with:</th>
<th>Fall Status:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>65 yrs.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>Non-Faller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>71 yrs.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Faller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>72 yrs.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Faller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>76 yrs.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Faller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>85 yrs.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>Non-Faller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>85 yrs.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>Faller</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology

Data Collection:
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant and were all audio-recorded.
- Interviews were intended to elicit a description of older adults’ history of FOF, including past, present, and future elements.

Data Reduction and Analysis: (Polkinghorne, 1995)
- Narrative-type analysis: generate condensed chronological story
- Paradigmatic-type narrative analysis: derive major themes and categories across the participants’ narratives
### Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAST</th>
<th>PRESENT</th>
<th>FUTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development of Concern</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fall Prevention</strong></td>
<td><strong>View of the Future</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Personal experience</td>
<td>● Environmental modifications</td>
<td>● Loss of independence</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Vicarious experience</td>
<td>● Modification of behaviors</td>
<td>● Social support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Natural process of aging</td>
<td>● Activity restriction</td>
<td>● Change in activity levels</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Cautious, Not Fearful

- Reluctance to admit being fearful
  - “But to say that I’m afraid, I don’t… I’m just cautious I think.” (Jane)

- Personal feeling of control
  - “Right. I think so. If you give into it and don’t do anything then of course you will become afraid... I feel like I’m learning to control it.” (Sherry)

- Precautions as automatic behaviors
  - “It just comes naturally to me you know... just being conscious that I might fall if I don’t do certain things.” (Kate)
Interpretation of Results

Proactivity versus Avoidance

- Participants did not view activity restriction as a consequence of FOF, but rather as a proactive precaution taken to avoid injury.
- The term fearful denoted lack of control over uncertain, externally controlled situations.
- Taking such proactive measures demonstrated perceived control over fall outcomes, which may indicate an internal locus of control.
- Internal locus of control may therefore help ensure continued activity engagement.
<table>
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<th>Limitations</th>
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<tr>
<td>● Findings in this study are <strong>not replicable</strong>.</td>
</tr>
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<td>● Participants were predominantly female.</td>
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<td>● Data collection and analysis were <strong>time consuming</strong>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Researchers obtained <strong>IRB clearance</strong> and completed the <strong>NIH training</strong> course.</td>
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<td>● Researchers obtained <strong>informed consent</strong>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● <strong>Anonymity</strong> and <strong>confidentiality</strong> were preserved.</td>
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</table>
Conclusion

- **Objective:** Interview community-dwelling older adults in order to obtain past, present, and future perspectives on FOF.
- **Paradigmatic-type narrative analysis** to derive major themes.
- **Results:**
  - Concern stemmed from previous fall experience and natural aging process.
  - Participants adopted many precautions to avoid unwanted future outcomes.
  - Participants labeled themselves as cautious, not fearful.
- Proactive measures highlight a perceived control over avoiding falls.
- This may illustrate an **internal locus of control**.
- Internal locus of control **useful to inform OT interventions** among those living with FOF.


References


