PARKINSON'S, EMPLOYMENT & QUALITY OF LIFE

BY

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ABSTRACT

Parkinson's is a progressive, neurological condition generally viewed as a disease of the elderly although a large proportion are of working age when diagnosed (15% diagnosed Scant attention has been given to employment concerns in the before age 50). Parkinson's psychosocial literature. The aim of this research was to explore the work experience of people with Parkinson's using qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first study comprised interviews with six individuals with Parkinson's who were working full-time, part-time, or had recently left the workforce. Using a grounded theory approach, the role of work emerged as extremely important in maintaining social participation, a daily routine and sense of purpose. Fatigue, job demands, control, selfefficacy and social support (both positive and negative) were identified as the factors most influencing the experience of people with Parkinson's at work. The second study tested the application of the Job Strain Model (Karasek, 1979) to people with Parkinson's and incorporated these factors as work and personal characteristics specific to this population. One hundred and sixteen working Australians with Parkinson's (age M = 53.61 years) completed an online survey in relation to their employment subsequent to diagnosis. As predicted, job demands, job control, social support from family and friends, negative social support and self-efficacy were associated with depression. It was hypothesised that, after controlling for age, disease severity and fatigue, the constructs of job demands, job control, self-efficacy and social support (both positive and negative) would predict quality of life and depression. hypothesis was only partially supported with job demands and self-efficacy emerging as predictors of depression. Self-efficacy buffered the effects of job demands on depression but, contrary to the second and third hypotheses, no other interactive effects were evident. This version of the Job Strain Model adapted to people with Parkinson's did not fully explain the employment experience of this population but emerged as a valuable tool for future research. The occurrence of depression in people with Parkinson's who were working was much lower than that found generally in Parkinson's populations. It was concluded that interventions to improve and maintain employment for people with Parkinson's need to be targeted at increasing self-efficacy rather than decreasing job demands.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any
other higher degree or graduate diplomas in any university and to the best of my
knowledge and belief the thesis contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously
published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text
of the thesis.

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