Experiences of apathy in people with Parkinson’s disease: A qualitative exploration

Research has suggested that people with Parkinson’s disease (PD) can experience apathy. Given that the dominant paradigm for psychological outcomes of PD is neurobiological, apathy has also been attributed to the neurological degeneration associated with PD, with an absence of research exploring alternative conceptualisations. This study therefore explored lived experiences of apathy in people with PD. Seven participants were interviewed and the data analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The findings were understood within three overlapping themes: 1) “The apathy creeps into jobs that I used to be able to do and no longer can do”: Reduced motivation in response to the consequences of impairment; 2) “I hate at the end of the day if I’ve achieved nothing”: The (un)acceptability of apathy; 3) “They say ‘come on you lazy bugger, get something done’”: The social context of apathy. These themes are compared to wider research on apathy, PD and chronic illness. The clinical implications for research and practice are discussed. This study offers insights into possible psychological processes of apathy for people with PD.

Key Words: Parkinson’s disease; apathy, psychological, qualitative.