



Falls and risk perceptions on falls among community living older persons in rural Kerala: insights for developing a fall risk assessment tool

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Abstract

Falls in ageing persons is a public health problem and fall risk is a state comprising of physiological, psychological, and environmental factors predisposing ageing persons to experience falls. Fall risk identification and prevention are being included within a community-based local government driven interventions for healthy ageing for older persons in Kerala, India. Using mixed-methods, we estimated proportion of falls and explored the experiences and perceptions of community living older people regarding falls. We did a cross-sectional survey with purposive sampling of 235 persons (150 women) aged 60 years or older from 20 neighbourhood groups in Manickal Panchayat in rural Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Age and sex standardized proportions, based on Census 2011 population, for at least one fall in the preceding 12 months was 26.7 percent (95 percent confidence intervals 12.7 to 38.3) and for multiple falls 10.6 percent (95 percent CI 3.3 to 18.3). Loneliness and chronic respiratory problems were significantly associated with increased falls. In the qualitative phase we conducted 10 freewheeling interviews and eight in-depth interviews. Within a discourse of ageing, and increasing frailty, falls were described as unwanted events caused mainly due to weakness, carelessness and fate. Fear of fall included general apprehension, unease during movement and a state of continuous vigilance. Perceptions were also gendered, implicating women's physical weakness, and repetitive roles for falls. Fall risk assessments and fall reduction interventions for community living older persons in Kerala and similar low- and middle-income countries need to balance simplicity and situational variance.

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