Being on the trail of ageing.
Functional visual ability and risk of falling
in an increasingly ageing population

Jeanette Källstrand Eriksson

Akademisk avhandling

Avhandling för medicine doktorsexamen i vårdvetenskap,
som kommer att försvaras offentligt
fredagen den 30 maj 2014 kl. 10.00
Haldasalen, Högskolan i Halmstad

Opponent: Professor Heather Waterman
Manchester University
Great Britain

Örebro Universitet
Institutionen för Hälsovård och Medicin
701 82 Örebro
Abstract


The elderly population is estimated to increase worldwide. One of the major health determinants identified in this population are injuries where one of the most prevalent causes are falls. The overall aim of this thesis was to describe and explore visual impairment and falls of inpatients and independently living elderly in the community and how daily life activities were influenced by visual ability and risk of falling. Methods in the studies were a quantitative retrospective descriptive design for study I followed by two quantitative retrospective and explorative studies where in study II perceived vision related quality of life and in study III performance-based visual ability were investigated. Study IV was a qualitative explorative study using classic grounded theory. In study I all falls of inpatients at a medical clinic 65 years and older (n=68) were registered during one year. In study II and III a random sample (n=212) of independently living elderly between 70 and 85 years of age participated in both studies. In study IV seven women and six men between 73 and 85 years of age from the two previous studies and six visual instructors (n=19) participated. The data in study I was collected during 2004, study II and III between February 2009 to March 2010 and study IV December 2009 to January 2013. The results in study I showed that most falls in five hospital wards occurred at night and those most affected had an established visual impairment. Almost half the population in study II and III fell at least once. Perceived vision when performing daily life activities showed a positive association between visual impairment and falls (II). No associations were found between performance-based measured visual ability and falls (III). Visually impaired elderly did not consider risk of falling as a problem (IV). Their main concern is to remain themselves as who they used to be which is managed by self-preservation while maintaining their residual selves and resisting self decay. Maintaining residual self is done by living in the past mostly driven by inertia while resisting self decay is a proactive and purposeful driven strategy. It is a complex issue to do fall risk assessments and planning fall preventive action where the individual’s entire life situation has to be taken into consideration.

Keywords: elderly, experience, falls, independently living, perceived vision, performance-based vision, visual impairment

Jeanette Källstrand Eriksson, School of Health and Medical Sciences, Örebro University, SE-701 82 Örebro, Sweden, jeanne.kallstrand.eriksson@hh.se