

# The Role of Occupational Participation and Purpose in Promoting Well-Being for Older Adults

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**PURPOSE:** What people do has profound implications for personal and social role identity, health, and well-being. Meaningful participation plays a role in the relationship between occupation and well-being. Even when meaningful participation is not accounted for, there remains a relationship between participation in certain categories of activity and psychological and physical well-being. During the recent pandemic, people changed their daily habits and forewent participation in various social and leisure. This study aims to expand literature by examining the relationship between participation and life purpose.

**DESIGN:** We used a cross-sectional, correlational design. Secondary data from the Health and Retirement Study 2020 Core Survey was analyzed.

**METHOD:** Life purpose was measured using a 7-item scale, where higher scores reflect greater sense of purpose. Participation was measured by 5 sub-types: Volunteering, physical, sedentary, goal-directed, and social. Variables were measured from never (1) to daily (7). Univariate analysis, zero order correlations, and a linear regression were performed.

**RESULTS:** Older adults (n = 4406) reported having high levels of life purpose (M = 4.61, SD = .948) during the COVID-19 pandemic. We observed a positive relationship between purpose in life and all categories of participation ranging from  $r = .15-.28$ ,  $p < .001$ . Regression explained 13.3% of the variance in life purpose. Goal-directed, physical, sedentary, and volunteering independently predicted life purpose.

**CONCLUSION:** The results support that participation is related to purpose in life, a factor related to health and well-being.

**IMPACT STATEMENT:** Results from the current study indicated the importance of an occupational perspective to explore life purpose, participation and health outcomes. This connection suggests that life purpose is a relevant measure to assess occupational therapy services and has implications for preventative health behaviors, resilience, and well-being.

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