

Activity Participation and Life Satisfaction of Older Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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PURPOSE: The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed and shaken human behaviors and how we interact with one another. Despite this, there is a limited understanding of how older adults in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic adapted their roles, routines, and rituals from an occupational perspective (Fiese et al., 2002; Yamashita et al., 2021). Although Occupational Therapy theory includes that there is a positive relationship between the frequency of activity participation and life satisfaction, recent evidence of this is needed in the literature. The 1998 Well-Elderly Study established a connection between occupational therapy intervention and improved life satisfaction. This study aims to expand on previous literature by examining the relationship between the frequency of activity participation and life satisfaction for older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DESIGN: Secondary data from the 2020 Health and Retirement Study (HRS) COVID-19 Project (Early, V1.0), was analyzed using a cross-sectional, descriptive design.

METHOD: For the outcome, life satisfaction was measured using 5 questions from the HRS Psychosocial questionnaire. This was measured using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 through 7 with 1 = Strongly Disagree, and 7 = Strongly Agree; with a Cronbach's $\alpha = .875$. Three areas of activity participation were analyzed: Participation in hobbies, 20 minute walks (exercise), and computer use. Each variable was recorded by frequency of participation ranging from daily to never. Each were transformed into three levels, never, infrequent participation, and frequent participation. Univariate analysis was conducted in order to create scale scores and assess distribution normality. One-way ANOVA was used to detect differences between the frequency of activity participation and life satisfaction.

RESULTS: Overall, older adults ($n = 2074$) were satisfied with life ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.43$) during the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of this, there were statistically significant differences in life satisfaction based on the frequency of activity participation for all activities. For exercise: $F(2, 1992) = 21$, $p < .001$. Tukey's HSD indicated that the mean life satisfaction for frequent exercise ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.37$) was significantly different from infrequent engagement ($M = 5.0$, $SD = 1.4$) and never ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 1.62$). For hobbies: $F(2, 1966) = 11.2$, $p < .001$. Tukey's HSD indicated that the mean life satisfaction for frequent hobby participation ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.35$) was significantly different from both infrequent engagement ($M = 5.1$, $SD = 1.43$) and never ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.49$). For computer use: $F(2, 1994) = 7.96$, $p < .001$. Tukey's HSD indicated that the mean life satisfaction for frequent computer use ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.41$) was only significantly different from never ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.53$).

CONCLUSIONS: The results demonstrate that a nationally representative sample of older adults in the US, individuals who had higher levels of participation in the three leisure activities examined reported higher levels of life satisfaction within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The current study's findings are consistent with the philosophical base of OT that asserts that participation in occupation has a relationship with well-being and provides recent examples of this during the pandemic of 2020.

IMPACT STATEMENT: The results suggest the importance of incorporating an occupational science perspective to explore the connection between life satisfaction and health outcomes in order to base future broad national policies supporting occupational therapy telehealth services and home safety for increased participation older adults in the US (Johnson et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021).

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