

# ‘What you do matters’: How Engagement in Meaningful Activities Contributes to the Quality of Life of Dwelling Older Adults in a Time of Crisis

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**PURPOSE:** Bio-psycho-social changes experienced by older adults result in functional decline, affecting health and well-being. Older adults were also affected by the covid-19 pandemic’s restrictions and health risks. The association between engagement in meaningful activities (EMA) and QoL is known; however, there is a need to evaluate this association during adversity, such as the pandemic, among older adults. This yields two research questions: (a) what is the contribution of EMA on the QoL beyond socio-demographic variables and health conditions? and (b) how older adults experienced the effect of the pandemic on their health and QoL?

**DESIGN:** Cross-sectional mixed methods design (quantitative and qualitative). The convenience sample consisted of 302 dwelling old adults, ages 65 and older.

**METHOD:** Participants completed 4 questionnaires: PHQ-4, EMAS, WHOQOL-BREF, socio-demographic and open-ended questions, during 4th-6th waves of covid-19 in Israel. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and hierarchical regression were used for quantitative analysis. Qualitative analysis was conducted using hybrid structured tabular thematic analysis.

**RESULTS:** EMA and activities frequency positively correlated with QoL during the pandemic; these factors explained an additional 16% of the QoL variance beyond socio-demographic and health factors, which explained 47% of QoL’s variance. Four main themes emerged: Activities (less/more/differently); Physical and mental health; Restriction in environment; and Activities defining QoL.

**CONCLUSION:** EMA contributes to older adults’ QoL and health. The significance of daily activities in older adults’ routine is also evident as they defined health and QoL during the pandemic based on the changes in their activities. This study can provide insight into potential protective factors for the QoL of older adults and supports theoretical occupational science that highlights the importance of EMA in improving QoL in general and in adversity.

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