

Participation as agency and engagement

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Introduction: The study had a special focus on participation in occupation as experienced by older adults who have received home-based rehabilitation services, including occupational therapy. Participation in occupation is considered the main aim of occupational therapy intervention. However the concept of participation is under discussion. In the occupational therapy literature the concept has mainly been discussed theoretically; however, empirical studies have started to be conducted.

Objective: The purpose of the study was to explore how older adults with a disability experienced participation in occupation during the period they received home-based rehabilitation.

Methods: A prospective case-oriented design was used, with repeated interviews with three older adults during the period they received home-based rehabilitation. The interviews were analysed with a constant comparative method.

Results: The participants' experience of participation could be understood through two main categories that seem to be opposite of each other. 'Continuing to be an agent in daily life' captured the participants' decision-making, choosing and acting in daily life; while 'Life itself is the agent' identified how the participants, in spite of their strong will to be an agent, could let their engagement in the unfolding daily life also be an agent. The participants' engagement in life itself was seen in the two sub-categories; 'Engagement in everyday matters directs daily life' and 'Health-care services and impairments direct daily life', this showed that the clients were more engaged in their ongoing daily life than the services given.

Conclusion: The findings of this study identified participation as a dynamic engagement - ranging from individual agency, through decision making, choosing, and acting in daily life - by taking into consideration the clients' different strategies to continue to be an agent. Participation was also found to be a social process, involving both the social environment and society.

Contribution to the practice: The emphasis on agency in the participants' experiences challenges occupational therapists to find further means of facilitating their clients' possibilities to be in charge of, and engage in, their daily life; and indicates that participation will hold different meanings and develop in interaction with the ongoing daily life.