

Low vision and leisure: The challenges of participation for older adultsSue Berger¹¹*Boston University, Boston, United States, ²University of Massachusetts, Boston, United States*

Vision loss significantly impacts participation, defined broadly as engagement in life activities. Participation in life activities, particularly work and leisure, has been shown to be related to improved quality of life, successful aging, and decreased depression for older adults. Research has demonstrated the positive relationship between participation in leisure activities and quality of life for persons with physical disabilities. Yet few researchers have explored participation beyond ADL and IADL for persons with acquired low vision. No studies have specifically explored the importance of leisure participation for older adults with low vision or how participation in leisure activities influences their health and well-being. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to learn about the lived experience of older adults with acquired vision loss, specifically related to participation in leisure activities.

This phenomenological study provides an understanding of the experience of vision loss related to leisure participation. Twenty six individuals who were 70 years or older, in good health, living in an urban environment, living with acquired vision loss that resulted in an acuity of 20/70 or worse for two years or greater, and reporting a subjective vision loss of fair or poor were included in this study. In-depth repeated interviews were combined with observation of leisure participation for triangulation of data, increasing confidence in the results. Analysis included open coding and constant comparison until saturation of data occurred. Several key themes emerged from analysis of field notes, transcriptions, and analytic memos. The daily struggle of “getting out” quickly surfaced as a challenge to participation in leisure activities. Several sub-themes related to this topic including the challenge of transportation, limited social support, increased vulnerability, having less fun, and lack of community accessibility were evident.

These results have implications for occupational therapy practitioners working with older adults living with acquired vision loss. Addressing engagement in leisure activities for these older adults, specifically those activities that occur outside the home, along with advocating for policies that eliminate barriers and support leisure participation should be incorporated into occupational therapy practice.