

The Relationship Between Active Engagement in Everyday Occupations and Quality of Life for Older Adults in Residential Communities

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Demographic challenges face many countries today. Advanced age increases risks for chronic illness and disability requiring new models of care. In the United States approximately 1 million older adults reside in assisted living facilities (ALFs) to preserve independence and obtain residential and personal care services. Most require assistance in one or more ADLs or IADLs.

Occupational therapy historically posited a relationship between participation in occupation, health and quality of life (QOL). Current literature finds that engagement in physical, cognitive and social occupations can positively impact health, function, and quality of life; involvement in life activities is a goal for successful aging. Preventive programs, in ALFs or other settings, that promote engagement in physical, cognitive, and social activities, offer a new model to support functional abilities and community living.

This cross sectional research investigated the social, instrumental and leisure activities that ALF residents engage in, relationships between importance of an activity and continuance of participation, and relationships between activity participation, QOL, and life satisfaction. Interviews were conducted with 131 ALF residents 65 years and older. It was hypothesized that there would be: 1. A positive relationship between perceived importance of leisure, social, and instrumental activity and continuing activity participation, and 2. A positive relationship between continued participation in leisure, social, and instrumental activities, life satisfaction, and quality of life. Instruments included Baum's 55 Item Activity Checklist, the SF36v2, the Life Satisfaction Index-Z Scale, and demographic questions. Data was analyzed using SPSS, Version 16. Results found significantly more subjects continued participating in activities they identified as most important. Significant correlations were found between life satisfaction and continued participation in activities identified as most important and between life satisfaction, quality of life, and total activity participation. These results highlight the importance of client centered programs to engage older adults in meaningful activities and provide data supporting a positive relationship between engagement in meaningful activity and life satisfaction. The study increases understanding about occupational engagement in congregate living settings and supports a role for community client-centered occupational therapy preventive health and long term care programs.