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## **A Literature Review Exploring Potential Negative Consequences of Meaningful Occupation**

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### **Introduction**

Current conceptualisations of occupation focus on positive contributions to health and well-being. In the past, problematic or “pathological” behaviour (i.e. injection drug use, pyromania) deviated from socially acceptable behaviour. Today, the focus has shifted towards a problematic pattern of participation in meaningful occupations that are a part of the social fabric of our lives, such as shopping, Internet use and exercise.

This paper undertakes a literature review to suggest that “problematic behaviours,” “addictive behaviours” and “impulse-control disorders” meet the current definitions of occupation that guide occupational therapy education and practice internationally.

### **Objectives**

To critically consider the potential health limiting attributes of occupations, in light of assumptions in the occupational therapy field that portray occupations as contributing to improved health and well-being.

### **Methods**

A selected literature review was conducted to integrate knowledge from the following sources:

- i) Literature describing the occupational therapy role in addictions.
- ii) Key reference texts used in the fields of occupational therapy, addictions and impulse-control disorders.
- iii) Journal articles published between 2000 and 2009, across various disciplines, that contribute to the current conceptualisations of the nature of occupations and “problematic” behaviours.

### **Results**

The results of this paper problematise taken-for-granted understandings of occupation in the occupational therapy literature. The findings highlight that not all occupations contribute unequivocally to improved health and well-being. The purpose of an occupation may not always be positive, nor is the meaning always “rational” or perceived to be in “best interest” of the person.

### **Conclusion**

Occupations may have the potential for negative consequences that can impact the individual in all areas of their life. Occupational therapists have unique qualifications to address problematic participation in occupations, including a broad scope of practice and specialised understanding of the relation between occupations and well-being.

### **Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy**

- i) This paper critically examines taken-for-granted conceptualisations of “occupation”, emphasising the complex relationship between occupational engagement and health.

ii) The findings highlight the need to advance an understanding about occupations that may contribute to negative mental and physical health consequences.