

Cultural relativity: The moral superiority of being active versus 'hanging-out' in Greece

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Introduction

Understandings of occupation, including that it is active, have been predominantly constructed within English language discourse influenced by the Western socio-cultural context. As a result 'being active' has emerged as a particularly powerful concept: the active individual achieves their goals, takes control and keeps busy. Being active is not only a requirement for survival and adaptation but has become the morally superior, health promoting alternative to being idle.

Objectives

This presentation aims to discuss and compare the construction of 'being active', with particular focus on 'hanging-out', in Greece; a context different to that of Western, English speaking countries.

Methods

An ethnographic and narrative study into the everyday activities of adults living in a Greek village, is exploring the social conditions in which possibilities for action emerge together with the form and function of daily activities. Over two years data is being gathered through observation of public places and activities, together with participation in activities with family groups and narrative interviews. An ongoing iterative process of analysis is leading to the emergence of themes and a theoretical account. Ethical approval has been given by the appropriate body.

Results

The early stages of data collection and analysis from the study, together with personal reflection on lived experience, will be combined in a discussion supported by relevant literature. The extent to which 'hanging-out' is an occupation will be considered, including how many of its characteristics are diametrically opposed to current conceptualizations of occupation, despite the possible importance and health promoting aspects of 'hanging-out' in Greece. The social construction of the values and beliefs associated with this occupation in different contexts will also be explored.

Conclusion

Current conceptualizations of occupation have emerged within specific socio-cultural contexts. Local research together with critical reflection promotes awareness of these influences and the possible imposition of values regarding 'ideal behaviour' on local populations.

Contribution to the practice of occupational therapy

As occupational therapy develops worldwide, occupations supporting health and well-being should be identified and promoted. Particular caution should be taken in applying professional concepts and theories without recognition of their cultural relativity.