

## Perspectives of Children with Disabilities About Their Engagement in Occupation and Quality of Life

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**Introduction:** Quality of life (QOL) is frequently cited as an important outcome of engagement in meaningful occupation. Further, enhancing QOL is typically an overarching goal of occupational therapy (OT) interventions to enable occupational engagement. Yet literature reporting evidence of the relationship between occupational engagement and QOL is sparse. For children with ID/DD almost nothing is known concerning how occupational engagement contributes to QOL, particularly from their own perspectives. However, their voices must be heard in order that practitioners can engage them in occupations in a truly client-centred way that contributes to their QOL.

**Objectives:** This qualitative study examined quality of life and engagement in everyday occupations from the perspective of children with ID/DD themselves. QOL was defined as: the child's own perceptions of what makes his/her life good and not so good.

**Methods:** Two adults with ID/DD collaborated on this research as lived-experience experts. Participants were nine pre-adolescents (9 - 12 years) with ID/DD, some of whom had challenges in verbal communication. Each participated in three types of videotaped sessions differing in: (a) amount of control by participants (i.e., ranged from interview facilitated by researcher to video session directed/filmed by participant) and (b) environmental context (e.g., home, school, community). Participants and their parents provided descriptive sociodemographic and disability-related information.

**Results:** Text-image analysis of videotapes (about 30 hours' footage) was conducted using a Modified Grounded Theory approach and a constant comparative method. Partial findings are presented for participants with diverse ID/DD diagnoses. These themes concerning **how occupational engagement contributes to QOL** emerged from the analysis: occupations with friends; occupations promoting independence; choice in doing leisure occupations; and supports for occupational engagement (parents, special equipment, therapists, educators).

**Conclusion:** This research indicates that several aspects of occupational engagement do contribute to QOL for this group of pre-adolescents. Further, video methodologies are promising in terms of illuminating these children's perceptions, including those of children with communication challenges.

**Contribution:** The findings provide: (a) support for specific aspects of occupational engagement that contribute to QOL for children with ID/DD and (b) suggestions for and examples of how OTs can apply these findings in their practice and research.