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Urban older adults creating and maintaining social participation

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Introduction:

How do older adults living alone maintain their social participation within an urban environment? Using photovoice research methodology (photographs/narratives), participants communicated social participation strategies. The results inform OT community practice to support older adults' social participation. This study fits the conference theme of Human Rights due to its focus on social participation and how city policy/resources influence social opportunities. This study also fits with the conference theme of Occupation, Daily life, Subjectivity and OT, through the opinions and lived experiences of the participants who are multicultural older adults living alone within an urban context.

Objectives:

1. How community resources influence opportunities for social participation.
2. What problems/strengths exist for older adults to maintain their social participation?
3. How occupational therapists can help older adults' social participation within urban environments.

Methods:

Using photovoice methodology, participants answered social participation research questions through photographs and descriptions to communicate their lived experience. The results of this action research study were shared with legislative leaders and health care providers through a photo exhibit at San Francisco City Hall in California, USA to influence policy, and the provision of services and resources.

Results:

Four major themes that support social participation for older adults living alone within an urban setting were identified:

1. Connections with diverse people
2. Expressing deeply held values through advocacy & visibility
3. Engagement and curiosity
4. Community resources

Conclusions/Contributions to the practice of OT:

This topic is significant as there are no studies using photovoice with well older adults. OTs can build on this research and promote social participation by helping the people with whom they work tap into their deeply held values to engage in fulfilling activities. OTs may also act as political advocates for community resources that support social participation identified by the study results such as safe and accessible transportation and affordable activities.

Keywords: Human rights, public policy, social participation

Scope: Social health

Age group: Elderly people

Presentation type: Poster