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Occupational Time Use: Predicting Quality of Life in Typically Developing Adolescents and Adolescents with Physical Disability

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Introduction: People choose to participate in activities that are important, that provide satisfaction, and that they feel competent in doing (Kielhofner, 2008); these activities are felt to influence well-being. Adolescence is a time of significant change in social relationships, responsibility, identify, and independence (Marn & Koch, 1999). The extent to which occupational performance contributes to quality of life in adolescents is unknown.

Objective: The purpose of this descriptive study is to explore relationships among areas of occupational performance and quality of life in adolescents who are typically developing and who experience a physical disability. The potential of occupational engagement to predict quality of life in these groups is also examined.

Method: 40 adolescents with physical disabilities and 50 typically developing adolescents completed the Comprehensive Quality of Life Scale (ComQOL: Gullone & Cummins, 1999) and a time use survey on two typical school days. The ComQOL measures objective and subjective quality of life in seven domains. Time use surveys provided a record of participant activity engagement during two typical school days. Participants recorded where and with whom they did the activities; they also rated the importance, competence, and enjoyment they felt in each activity. The time use surveys were coded for areas of occupational performance; interrater reliability for coding the measures was established between two coders. Quantitative results were supplemented with participant interview data.

Results: Magnitude and significance of relationships indicate that occupational activities contribute differentially to adolescent quality of life; differences between the groups (typically developing adolescents and adolescents with physical disabilities) are presented. Occupational engagement was a significant predictor of quality of life in adolescents.

Conclusion: This study provides evidence to support the view that engagement in occupations contribute to quality of life in ways that are specific to adolescence. It also provides information about the function of occupation in adolescents with disabilities, who are frequently the recipients of occupational therapy services.

Contribution to occupational therapy: The results of this study should help therapists to provide client-centered care to adolescents, and assist them in providing interventions that support quality of life.