

Identifying the Link between Occupation and Wellbeing in the Homeless Population: Methodological Issues

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Introduction

The link between occupation and wellbeing is frequently discussed in occupational therapy literature and is a foundational tenet of the profession. Wilcock (2006) proposes that human beings are by nature occupational beings and therefore engagement in occupation should be included in the health promotion agenda to improve health and wellbeing. Identifying the relationship between occupation and well-being in the homeless population is the goal of the authors' doctoral studies and presents methodological challenges in relation to this population.

Objectives

This paper will explore the literature regarding the importance of occupation to well-being from different perspectives. Definitions of well-being will be discussed in relation to the experience of homelessness and poverty. Some initial findings from the research will be shared.

Methods

The link between occupation and wellbeing as discussed in occupational therapy literature was explored to provide a theoretical basis for this project. The relationship between meaningful occupation and homelessness was explored and applied. Cultural definitions of well-being were also reviewed to provide a basis for the study which included both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Results

The existing literature pertaining to occupation and wellbeing focuses largely on the experiences of those with physical or mental illnesses and the process of recovery and rehabilitation. There is minimal literature regarding the experiences of those that are occupationally marginalised for reasons of social exclusion and poverty, and yet these are perhaps the most vulnerable to lower levels of well-being. This discovery resulted in the development of a range of methods utilised to explore the meaning of wellbeing to people experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

There is a need for further research to back the professions claim for the health promoting effects of meaningful occupation. The development of specific tools and strategies that will enable research to be conducted is required.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy.

This paper discusses possible research methods to explore the relationship between health and wellbeing, and therefore adds to the research capacity of the profession.