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"Values and Occupations: Impact on the Life Experiences of the Oldest-Old"

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Introduction/Rationale: Older individuals in America and other parts of the world are living longer than ever before in human history, yet research and evidence-based practices to serve this group of people seem exceedingly insufficient.

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of individuals older than eighty years of age in various living environments. This investigation addressed the oldest-old via questioning about their lifestyles, challenges, reliance on others, coping mechanisms, and life satisfaction.

Method: The design of this study was qualitative with rich narrative description. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were audio recorded with a convenience sample in supervised senior living environments. These settings were a senior independent living apartment complex, a personal care facility, and two skilled nursing units- all in a northeastern state. There were 12 interview participants, 10 females and two males, ranging in age from 83 to 98.

Results: Rigorous examination of interview content via thematic analysis illustrated the participants' predominant "Values" and "Occupations." Values were: "happy childhood produces fond memories", "marriages are vital", "families are essential for life fulfillment", and "religion and spirituality often provide inner peace." Themes under occupation were: "traditional female occupations are important", "working and serving others continues to generate intrinsic gratification", "leisure occupations bring pleasure", and "life satisfaction and socialization offer comfort."

Conclusion: Past memories, meaningful occupations, and socialization were vital in this population. Understanding of these results can help occupational therapy practitioners and other professionals prepare for the specific needs of the large influx of advanced aged individuals.