

## **Differences between Meaningful and Psychologically Rewarding Occupations: A Cross-Cultural Perspective**

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**Introduction/Rationale.** There is a hypothesis in occupational therapy literature that participation in meaningful occupations is healing because it leads to psychologically rewarding experiences that cause a release of neurochemicals, producing elimination of stress hormones and a sense of well-being. The present researcher hypothesized that meaningful occupations were different from psychologically rewarding ones, and it was the psychologically rewarding occupations that caused the above stated health producing benefits.

**Objectives:** To investigate whether: 1) psychologically rewarding occupations were different from meaningful ones; 2) there were cultural differences between South Dakota and South African research participants regarding perceptions of meaningful and psychologically rewarding occupations; and 3) psychological rewards predicted perceived meaningfulness of occupations.

**Methods.** The study was conducted using a cross-sectional survey design and Experience Sampling Method (ESM). Fifty two individuals from the United States and Cape Town, South Africa participated in the study.

**Results.** There were differences between United States and South African samples but in general, occupations that were perceived as the most meaningful were those that were perceived to connect participants with other people, physically stimulating, and mentally stimulating. Occupations that were most rewarding were those that were perceived as fun, connecting one with other people, and physically stimulating. Positive mood (psychological rewards) predicted meaningfulness of occupations.

**Conclusion/Implications.** Occupational therapists could optimize therapeutic benefits for clients by choosing occupations that are fun, physically, and mentally stimulating for use as therapeutic media. Such benefits could be enhanced even further by using group processes as a method of administering therapy.