Meaningful and Psychologically Rewarding Occupations: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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• Occupational therapy is based on the premise that participation in meaningful occupations facilitates health and wellbeing (AOTA, 2014; Arbesman & Mosley, 2012)

• Ikiugu et al. (2016) found that there is a difference between:
  – Meaningful; and
  – Psychologically rewarding occupations (which cause good mood and a sense of wellbeing)
Purpose

• The purpose of this study was to replicate a study by Ikiugu et al. (2016) with a larger, more culturally diverse sample

• Research questions:
  • Were occupations perceived as meaningful by study participants different from those that were psychologically rewarding (elicited positive mood)?
  • Were psychological rewards (as indicated by positive mood) predictive of perceived meaningfulness of occupations?
  • Were there differences between United States and South African study participants when compared on perceived meaning of participation in occupations and associated mood?
Methods

• **Design**
  – Experience Sampling Method (ESM)

• **Participants**
  – 20 students, faculty, and staff from the University of South Dakota
  – 31 students from Stellenbosch University and one occupational therapist from Cape Town, South Africa
Methods

• **Research Instruments**
  – Rewarding and Meaningful Occupation Identification Tool (RMOIT)
    – Part 1 – Occupational documentation
    – Part 2 – Brief Mood Introspection Scale (Mayer & Gaschke, 2013)
    – Part 3 – Rating occupational Type
    – Part 4 – Engagement in Meaningful Activities Survey (EMAS) (Goldberg, Brintnell, & Goldberg, 2002)
Procedure

• Cuing by phone to elicit a response:
  • 5 times/day
  • 6:00 am through midnight
  • 7 days

• Data Analysis
  – Discriminant Analysis
  – Linear regression
  – Crosstab analysis
  – Independent samples t-test
  – Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA)
Findings

• Meaningful and psychologically rewarding occupations discriminated among types of occupations, $\lambda=.78$, $\chi^2=148.89$, $p<.0001$, partial $\eta^2=.08$; and $\lambda=.79$, $\chi^2=228.77$, $p<.0001$, partial $\eta^2=.08$.

• Mood predicted perceived meaningfulness of occupations, $F(1, 610)=156.97$, $p<.0001$, adjusted $R^2=.20$ (S. Africa); $F(1, 948)=131.53$, $p<.0001$, adjusted $R^2=.12$ (S. Dakota).

• Differences between South African and South Dakota participants when compared on perceived meaningfulness of occupations and mood, $t(1238.37)=-31.10$, $p<.0001$ and $t(1603)=8.86$, $p<.0001$.

• Participants in S. Africa chose different types of occupations compared to S. Dakota participants, Pearson $\chi^2(df=6, N=1623)=35.00$, $p<.0001$, $L\chi^2(df=6, N=1623)$, $p<.0001$, Cramer’s $V=.15$. 
Table 1.
Frequency of participation in various types of occupations (N=1623)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Type</th>
<th>Percentage (%) of Total Participation within Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentally stimulating</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically stimulating</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A way of passing time</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with others</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Bolded percentages indicate the occupations in which one group participated more
Discussion

• Findings in this study confirmed what was found by Ikiugu et al. (2016)
  • Both types physically stimulating and connecting people to others
  • Meaningful occupations more mentally stimulating
  • Psychologically rewarding occupations more fun
• For South African participants, psychologically rewarding occupations were also the most meaningful – Perceived to connect one with others
Conclusion

• A combination of both psychologically rewarding and meaningful occupations would be the best method of optimizing health and wellbeing

• Participating in occupations that are: mentally and physically challenging, connect one with others, and are fun


Goldberg, B., Brintnell, E. S., & Goldberg, J. (2002). The relationship between engagement in meaningful activities and quality of life in persons disabled by mental illness. *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health, 18*, 17-44. doi:10.1300/J004v18n02_03
