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## Engagement in Occupational Activities and Purpose in Life amongst Older People in the Community and Institutions

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### Abstract

Engagement in occupational activities facilitates a sense of purpose in life. However, information about pattern of occupational activities and purpose in life amongst community-dwelling and institutionalized older people in Malaysia is scattered and inconclusive. The results of this cross-sectional study indicate that there are significant differences in occupational activities and purpose in life. Older people in the community have a higher level of engagement in occupational activities and purpose in life. Engagement in occupational activities should be encouraged to older people in institutions to facilitate a sense of purpose in life that subsequently will enhance the quality of life.

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*Keywords:* Older people; occupational activities; purpose in life

### 1. Introduction

Occupations or occupational activities defined as daily activities in which people will engage with (AOTA, 2014). Occupations and activities are two terms that often used interchangeably and synonymously especially in occupational therapy profession. There are eight categories of occupations as outlined in Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (3rd Ed.) (American Occupational Therapy Association - AOTA, 2014); i.e. 1) basic activities of daily living (ADL) which are activities that aims to taking care of own body such as bathing, showering, dressing, eating, feeding, functional mobility, bowel and bladder management. 2) instrumental activities of daily living (IADL) which are activities that support ADL within home and community, such as shopping, meal preparation and

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cleaning up, communication, community mobility and financial management, care of others, health and home maintenance, religious activities and safety maintenance, 3) rest and sleep which include sleep preparation and participation, 4) Education activities which includes formal or informal education, 5) Work-related activities. Some activities included in work categories are employment interest and pursue, seeking employment, job performance, volunteer exploration and participation, 6) Play activity. Play defined as spontaneous or organized activity that provides the positive effect, diversion or enjoyment that includes play exploration and participation, 7) Leisure activities. Leisure activity defined as non-obligatory activity that are internally motivated and engaged during discretionary time that includes leisure exploration and participation, 8) Social participation which is a pattern of organized behaviour that is expected in given social system such as social participation in community, with family, peer and friends (AOTA, 2014)

Previous studies indicated that older people who live in the community in Malaysia are actively participating in physical, cognitive, social and productive occupational activities. For example, a study conducted in Selangor indicates that the leisure and recreational activities such as watching television, playing sports are the most occupational activities engaged by the older people in community, followed by cognitive related activities, such as reading books, Quran, writing or drawing, social participation activities such as meeting or visiting friends or other family members and work-related activities such as cooking, gardening and making crafts (Minhat, Rahmah & Khadijah, 2013). Similarly, study conducted in Australia indicated that older people in community spent their time with resting and sleeping (34%), followed by domestic activities (13%), educational activities using computers (11%) and their time are filled with enjoyable activities (42% of the day), followed by activities that is consider as necessary such as IADL and work-related activities and ADL activities (6%) (Chilvers, Corr, & Singlehurst, 2010).

However, literature consistently shows that older people, who live in the institution live a sedentary lifestyle, seldom engage in occupational activities (Haslam, 2008; Dahlan & Sultan Ibrahim, 2014; Almeida & Rui, 2014). They spent a high proportion of their daily life being inactive, alone or immobile, spent many hours in bed and frequently taking a nap during the day (Neikrug & Ancoli-Israel, 2010) and seldom engage in activities (Chuang & Abbey, 2009; Cook & Stanley, 2009; Harmer & Orrell, 2008). Although they have a positive attitude towards physical activities, however, the opportunity to engage in the activity seldom occurs (Almeida & Rui, 2014). Besides, activities organized by the institutions are often infrequent, insignificant to the older people, conducted by a non-professional, and for 'passing time' (Kolanowski & Litaker, 2006). Social relationship amongst residents in institutions is infrequent, non-intimate and a fragile type of relationship (Hauge & Heggen, 2008; Kolanowski & Litaker, 2006), whilst social relationship with staff is often formal in manner as a result of the forced routine or the daily tasks imposed on the staff (Berglund & Kirkvold, 2007; Wilson & Davies, 2009; Wadensten, 2010; Morgan-Brown et al., 2011). Furthermore, due to safety, many older people in institutions are not allowed to go out of the institution to actively participate in the community (Li et al., 2010).

Purpose in life (PIL) defined as an intention or a goal to be fulfilled or achieved (Hedberg, Gustafson, & Brulin, 2010). Greater purpose in life is associated with greater life satisfaction (Bronl et al., 2009), shaping the sense of happiness (Wnuk, Marcinkowsk, & Fobair, 2012), ability to maintain greater functional status and reduce risk of developing, coronary heart diseases, cognitive impairment, impairment of mobility and daily activities, (Boyle, Buchman & Bennett, 2010; Geda, 2010; Kim. et al., 2013).

Furthermore, American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA, 2014) reported that an engagement in occupation is a source of individual's satisfaction in life. It supported by Kielhofner (2007) and Nilsson (2006) which engagement in occupation has potential to influence health and well-being. Previous studies indicated that there is positive relationship between engagement in occupations with purpose in life among older people in Western countries (Low & Molzahn, 2007; Mozley et al. 2007; Eakman et al. 2010; Bensimon & Gilboa, 2010).

Lack of engagement in occupational activities and lack of meaningful social relationship can contribute to the lack of purpose in life (Hedberg, et al., 2010). They do not have something to look forward to or to hope for in the future and also intention or goals to be fulfilled or achieved in terms of activities or relationship. Hence, there are many older people in institutions stated that '*... Every day is the same* (Chuang & Abbey 2009: p.1644), and they felt that the '*... Time stands still* (Cook & Stanley (2009: p. 397).

Information regarding occupational patterns and purpose in life amongst older people in western countries well established. However, information about occupational patterns and purpose in life amongst community-dwelling and institutionalized older people in Malaysia is scattered, scarce and inconclusive. Hence, the aim of this study is to

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