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Quality of Life and Leisure Participation Amongst Malay Older People in The Institution

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Abstract

Leisure activities can influence health through complex and interconnected biopsychosocial mechanism by becoming as a medium to balance the rhythm of life. This study aims to identify the benefits of participation in leisure activities and to understand how the benefits affect the quality of life amongst Malay older people in institutions. In-depth interview was conducted with twenty-one Malay older people who live in government-funded elderly institutions. The interview transcripts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. One superordinate theme and three subthemes emerged indicates that the participation in meaningful, valued and individualized leisure activities leads to an internal and external benefits.

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1. Introduction

Leisure activity is one of the major components in the Occupational Performance Area (OPA) besides Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and Work. It is also one of the crucial elements that an Occupational Therapist (OTs) needs to be prioritized when dealing with their client to maximize functioning and permit a better health quality and well-

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being. Participation in leisure activity is a part of the domain in Occupational Therapy Process (OTPF) second edition (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2002). The Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF) second edition (2002) as defined the definition of leisure as:

“A nonobligatory activity that is intrinsically motivated and engaged in during discretionary time, that is, time not committed to obligatory occupations such as work, self-care, or sleep” (pg. 632).

Leisure activities can influence health through complex and interconnected biopsychosocial mechanism by becoming as a medium to balance the rhythm of life. It can be used as a diversion medium to divert the psychological distress into enjoyment phase. There is a large volume of published studies describing the benefits of leisure participation, such as improving health status, reduce loneliness, improve positive mood, increase life satisfaction and promote psychological well-being (Blace, 2012; Lu, 2011; Nilsson & Fisher, 2006; Diener et al., 1999). These benefits subsequently will improve the quality of life.

Many researchers agreed and found that actively participate in leisure activities have a negative relation with stress (Iso-ahola & Park, 1996) and depressive symptom (Lu, 2011; Dergance et al., 2003). For an example, a study by Dergance et al., (2003) indicates that participation in leisure activity, improve health status, provide the opportunity to meet new people and reduce depression. This study supported by a quantitative study conducted by Lu (2011) to 1143 older people in Taiwan he found that the older people who actively engage in leisure activities have a negative relationship with depression.

Leisure activities have a strong connection with social relationship (Cheung, 2007). By participating in leisure activities, it will create a meaningful relationship with friends and family members. Also, leisure activity provides an opportunity for older people to meet new people and build a significant relationship (Dergance et al., 2003; Rudman et al., 1997). Also, Newall et.al (2009) conducted a cross-sectional and longitudinal study over five years and found that greater social engagement will lead to reducing loneliness among older people which subsequently decreased mortality.

According to Scarmeas & Stem (2003), the concept of cognitive reserve proposes the intrinsic aspect of previous life experience (such as life achievement and educational level), will supply reserve in the brain to deal with the progress of cognitive impairment and neuropathological change. Similarly, another researcher found that leisure activities can provide a protective effect on the cognitive function by inhibiting the degradation of brain functioning (Scarmeas & Stem, 2003).

To date, many researchers have examined the relationship between leisure participation and dementia and cognitive impairment. For an example, Wang et.al (2002) and Verghese et. al, (2003) stated that the risk of dementia can be reduced by frequent participation in leisure activity. After a few years, in 2006, Verghese, and his colleague extended his previous study and found cognitive activities can help decrease the risk of cognitive impairment. A study was done by

Verghese et.al (2009) found that engagement in cognitive activities has a relationship with reducing risk in Vascular Cognitive Impairment (VCI) for older people with or without dementia. As a conclusion, cognitive activities that including in leisure activities can improve cognitive function.

According to Cheung (2007), he stated that leisure activity is an important and essential aspect of every person with a different age level. According to Silverstein & Parker (2002), when the individual engages in the leisure activities, it can contribute to the positive outcome in later life. Also, Cheung et. Al (2009) in the cross-sectional study of community-dwelling elderly people, they found that higher level of participation in especially in social and cognitive activities can contribute to better Health-related Quality of Life (HrQOL). This research was supported by Blace (2012) which found that functional activity, participation in activities and life satisfactions have a significant relationship with each other. The researcher concludes that higher activity participation promotes greater satisfaction in life.

However, the information about the benefits of participation in leisure activities amongst Malay older people in institutions and its affect their quality of life is scarce and limited.

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