

Going Out to Lunch: Impact on Continuity of Identity in Older Adults Residing in Assisted Living

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Introduction

- Number of older adults in US increasing. Many will move to assisted living³.
- Transitioning to assisted living (AL) can result in occupational and identity loss. Leads to decreased quality of life(QOL) and well-being².
- Sustaining occupational engagement mediates transition to AL, maintains identity, and increases QOL^{1,4,5,6}.
- Lack of research on specific planned programming in AL and how this facilitates continuity of identity in older adults living in AL.

How does the social occupation of going out to lunch with the activity director impact continuity of identity in older adults residing in assisted living?

Methods

Participants: Four adults between 60 and 92

Design: Qualitative phenomenological study

Sampling: Purposive

Structure: Four semi-structured interviews

Data Analysis: Thematic coding

Results

Occupation as a vehicle for identity continuity

	Past	Present
Social Belonging	<i>When I was socially in a church group called Sisters of Jubilee, we would get out and go eat together...maybe once a month (Viola).</i>	<i>I've been a few times by myself to get [fried chicken]...I believe it tastes better if you go with a friend (William).</i>
Financial Considerations	<i>When I was raising my son, I would cook more because it saved us money...and I would go out to eat when I felt like it and when I had the money (Viola).</i>	<i>We go to fast food restaurants most of the time. Low-cost places. Nothing too high maintenance (Dolores).</i>
Freedom and Choice	<i>And it was a big thing to go into Morrison's Cafeteria at that time.... as a little kid, I get to pick what I want to eat tonight as long as I don't go overboard (Ted).</i>	<i>You can't have control of your life like you used to...it feels good to be able to go out and eat...so then [you] can eat what [you] want (William).</i>

Discussion and Conclusion

- The occupation of going out to lunch acted as a vehicle over time to maintain participant identity through social belonging, finances, and a sense of freedom and choice.
- Despite dynamic changes in context over time, the occupation remained constant and provided participants with identity-constructing components across the life course.
- Continuity of identity maintained through occupational engagement has the potential to positively impact quality of life and well-being.

Implications for OT Practice

- Occupational therapists (OT) are ideally situated to understand client meaning behind occupational engagement. OTs can use this information to promote client identity through alternative identity-promoting occupations.
- OTs can integrate evidence-based programming into pre-existing AL structures to enhance QOL for older adults through identity maintenance.

References

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