

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY FOR PERSONS IN LATE ADULTHOOD

Current state and desired directions for change

Summary

The book *Occupational therapy for persons in late adulthood: current state and desired directions for change* deals with issues related to the application of occupational therapy as a means of self-improvement and activating people in late adulthood.

European societies are constantly ageing, a problem which also concerns Poland. The elderly (people 65 years of age and older) now comprise over 15% of society. Most no longer work, as they have retired. However, they still have to engage in basic activities in their everyday life. The activity theory is based on the assumption that elderly people have to remain active if they want to enjoy good health and life satisfaction. Therefore, a wide variety of interesting activities should be available for them. One such form is occupational therapy.

Chapter One is devoted to late adulthood. The discussion of this developmental period includes various classifications of personal development phases and the transformations that take place in this particular period of life, i.e. changes of a physical, social, psychological, cognitive and emotional nature. Other issues dealt with in this chapter include: the relevance of the term "elderly 50+", the image of the elderly in culture and the particular situation of the people in their late adulthood living in rural areas.

Chapter Two focuses on occupational therapy. First, the history of occupational therapy as a method for improvement is discussed. The author goes on to explain the definitions and theoretical approaches related to this kind of therapy both in Poland and abroad. She then covers the acts and regulations determining the way occupational therapy and therapists' training should be conducted in Poland. This is because occupational therapy is defined differently in Poland as opposed to elsewhere. Some Polish researchers perceive occupational therapy as a form of vocational rehabilitation, while in other European states, as well as within the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) as the key institution devoted to this kind of therapy, occupational therapy is seen as a means to improving people's health and well-being through various activities with the aim of providing

for the full participation in everyday life activities. In countries other than Poland, therapists work in the elderly patient's actual place of residence. They cooperate with their families, the surrounding social and institutional environment.

Chapter Three presents the methodological basis, problems and research hypothesis, as well as the tools employed in the research. This chapter is also devoted to presenting findings. It opens with an analysis of activities available for elderly participants in Poznań apart from occupational therapy. These include such centres as the University of the Third Age, Culture Centres and various associations. A separate sub-chapter deals with Social Welfare Centres and Social Welfare Day Centres, the activities they offer and the law regulations that structure how they operate.

The study was conducted in Social Welfare Day Centres around Poznań and with the help of two research technicians. The first study, which deals with a group of occupational therapists, took the form of an interview that was categorised as a diagnostic research method. The second study concerned participants of occupational therapy sessions and was based on completing a questionnaire, a survey research technique like the previous diagnostic poll. This research used an original tool, a Well-being Evaluation Questionnaire, which allowed the well-being of senior citizens resulting from their participation in Social Welfare Day Centres occupational therapy sessions to be defined. Well-being was acknowledged as a measure for adapting occupational therapy sessions to elderly participants' needs. The six sub-scales on the 30-question questionnaire referred to six key areas for senior citizens to function – cognitive, emotional, social, physical, self-acceptance and a sense of personal development.

The questions used in interviews with six occupational therapists concerned such subjects as the aims of occupational therapy, the ways therapists can define it and the range of sessions and activities offered in this type of therapy. It transpired that occupational therapy is on the whole poorly adapted to the needs of individuals with higher education. In such sessions participants are often engaged in such activities as making flowers from crepe paper or Christmas decorations. Jewellery-making and crocheting are also very popular, though such activities are not of great interest to male participants. Occupational therapists in Poland do not work directly in elderly participants place of residence, but only in centres for these kinds of activities. The 60 respondents completed the questionnaire were the most active participants in their occupational therapy centre. They also constituted the entire group qualified to participate in the research in Poznań. This study showed how the worst well-being was identified in male participants and those with a university degree, who were also the groups least satisfied with their occupational therapy sessions.

The book closes with a chapter defining the consequences of the particularly Polish approach to occupational therapy. It also points to the need to take a wider range of factors into account when organizing this process, which would foster better use of occupational therapy's potential in Poland and increase the satisfaction participants derive from sessions.

Translated by Rob Pagett