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E-B Environment - Behaviour Proceedings Journal

AicQoL2024KotaKinabalu

https://www.amerabra.org

e-IPH e-International Publishing House Ltd., United Kingdom

12th AMER International Conference on Quality of Life
The Magellan Sutera Resort, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, 26-28 Jan 2024

Level of Occupational Balance among Retirees in Malaysia

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Abstract
Occupational balance has been proven to benefit retirees' health and can significantly improve their life satisfaction and quality of life post-retirement. This study aims to examine the level of occupational balance among retirees in Malaysia. A cross-sectional study was conducted using purposive sampling to recruit 400 participants from the retiree population. Based on the findings, the mean of OBQ11 total scores was 22.96 (SD = 4.79), with a minimum score of 10.00 and a maximum score of 33.00. To conclude, this study showed that retirees in Malaysia have a high level of occupational balance.

Keywords: Occupational balance; Retiree; Retirement; Quality of life

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v9i27.5609

1.0 Introduction

Retirement is a period in which a person physically and mentally withdraws from the workforce at a certain age (Boveda & Metz, 2016). The increment of retirement age in Malaysia was enforced several times, starting with the age of 56 to 58 in 2008 and later raised to 60 years in 2013, which has been set to be the minimum age requirement for retirement in Malaysia ever since (Ruiz Estrada et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the number of people aged 60 and over in Malaysia is also steadily increasing in the working-age and total populations, even though the proportion is still far off if compared with the developed countries (Mansor et al., 2019; Subramaniam, 2020). The number of Malaysians aged 60 and older has increased from 1.45 million in 2000 to 2.25 million in 2010. It is predicted to reach over 13.8% of the total population in 2030, with 5.1 million elderly citizens (Mansor et al., 2019). Although there are no official statistics on the current retirement rate in Malaysia, the retiree population will undoubtedly grow in tandem with the ageing population.

As people retire, their everyday tasks become less varied, and they spend more time doing passive leisure activities (Lee, 2011). Indirectly, this will have an impact on a retiree's personality, cognition, psychosocial, and occupational pattern during this transitional phase (Schwaba & Bleidorn, 2019). During retirement, one may have limited opportunities or be deprived of daily occupations, affecting

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v9i27.5609

one's physical and psychological health and well-being and increasing the need for a long-term healthcare plan (M. O. Park & Lee, 2022). Additionally, a retiree lacks life's purpose due to insufficient occupational engagement and meaningful relationships (Doroud et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2018). This can also lead to health-related conditions such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive respiratory disease, and mental health illness, attributing to the imbalance of activity choices by the retiree (Beran et al., 2019).

This study investigates the level of occupational balance among retirees in Malaysia. Occupational balance refers to a sense of equilibrium and attribution of meaningful and purposeful activities or occupations within an individual's life (Dür et al., 2015). It entails effectively allocating one's time and energy to a variety of activities to attain a feeling of contentment, wellness, and gratification (Dür et al., 2015). This notion is frequently linked with occupational science, highlighting the significance of a varied and balanced involvement in activities to promote health and enhance the quality of life (M.-O. Park & Lee, 2022). Achieving occupational balance techniques may be beneficial for post-retirement life as it may aid in creating new daily routines when undergoing effective occupational transition (S. M. Park et al., 2017). Hence, the objective of this study is to identify the level of occupational balance among retirees in Malaysia.

2.0 Literature Review

Adjusting to retirement is a highly individual process that can contribute to a retiree's well-being and satisfaction in their retirement life (Bačová & Halama, 2020). It involves role relinquishment and an increase in leisure hours, which often impacts the structure of daily activities among retirees (Bačová & Halama, 2020). In retirement, a lack of purposeful activities and limited physical or mental engagement in daily routines can contribute to declining physical and cognitive abilities (Heller-Sahlgren, 2017). Individuals must engage in various occupations to achieve and maintain an occupationally balanced status (Hovbrandt et al., 2019). In this transitional phase, applying the concept of occupational balance can be useful as it is vital to health and well-being in reducing the stereotypical negative impacts of retirement (Mohamad Sabri et al., 2021).

In individuals over 65, maintaining a sense of equilibrium in their activities positively contributes to safeguarding their health (S. Park et al., 2021). Additional advantages of attaining occupational balance include reduced stress levels and heightened well-being or overall health (S. Park et al., 2021). Increased levels of occupational balance positively impact subjective health, quality of life, and health-related variables among relatively healthy older adults (S. Park et al., 2021). These findings endorse the importance of employing the notion of occupational balance to protect the health and quality of life of elderly individuals (S. Park et al., 2021). However, there exists a need for more research exploring the impact of occupational balance as a standalone factor that can influence health or quality of life.

The correlation between occupational balance, health, and well-being is vital in occupational therapy practice, theory, and research. Considering the recovery process through occupational engagement, occupational therapists can tailor their practice to consider the balance of meaningful and purposeful occupations, incorporating personally meaningful and evidence-based activities for the success of the intervention plan (Doroud et al., 2015). Clients are often told to engage in an occupation to achieve a particular outcome, even if it is not meaningful to them (Yazdani et al., 2018). Occupational therapists believe that the foundation of an individual's well-being, satisfaction, and health is allowing one to gain various experiences through participation in various occupations, which may broaden one's identity (Doroud et al., 2015). This holistic approach to occupational balance implies that participation in various activities is essential for establishing a sense of life structure, creating opportunities for socialization, and fostering a sense of belonging and purpose (Yazdani et al., 2018).

Numerous studies have been done to identify the association of occupational balance with health and well-being in the general population, although there are still inadequately published studies in the literature that mainly focus on the retiree population (Gonh, 2018; Wagman et al., 2021). More empirical studies need to be conducted to identify the variables that influence occupational balance after retirement, especially in Asia. Future research should look at additional variables linked to health and well-being to fully explain the impact of occupational balance (Wagman et al., 2015). Considering the importance of occupational balance for one's successful retirement, it is vital to investigate the predicted well-being that could help in attaining occupational balance in one's everyday life and how occupational balance is associated with the health and well-being of retirees in Malaysia.

Most previous studies regarding occupational balance were done in Western countries (Aas et al., 2020; Hovbrandt et al., 2019; Nissmark & Malmgren Fänge, 2020). Only a few studies address occupational balance conducted in Eastern countries (Gonh, 2018; M.-O. Park & Lee, 2022; S. Park et al., 2021). The results of these studies vary depending on the participants' culture, as they have different occupational needs (S. Park et al., 2021). More research is required to explore the impact of occupational balance across diverse cultures and age groups to ascertain its influence.

Occupational balance has been explored in various populations, such as mental illness, stroke, brain injury, rheumatoid arthritis, normal adults, and also older people population (Aas et al., 2020; Håkansson et al., 2021; Nyman et al., 2020; S. Park et al., 2021). Prior studies on occupational balance within diverse populations have yielded varied results, indicating the necessity for a more targeted and thorough elucidation of occupational balance to offer enhanced insights specific to retirees.

3.0 Methodology

The Ethics Committee granted the approval required for this study. A cross-sectional study using a purposive sampling method was conducted with 400 retirees across Malaysia. This sampling method facilitates an in-depth understanding and focuses on individuals with a relevant phenomenon of interest.

3.1 Participants

This study's inclusion criteria were male and female retirees aged 60 and above. The retirees who consented to participate in this study must be able to read and understand the questionnaire given. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria were those with critical illnesses that interfere with their daily functioning skills. Retirees who are non-Malaysians or those who chose early retirement were also excluded from this study.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	**Exclusion Criteria**
Malaysian retirees	Expatriates
Aged 60 years and above	Have critical illnesses that affect their physical, cognitive, and psychological function to engage in their daily activities
Currently residing in the community	Retirees who opt for early retirement
Consented to the study	
Able to read and understand Malay	

3.2 Data Collection and Location of the Study

The data was collected using a demographic and retirement details questionnaire and the Occupational Balance Questionnaire (OBQ11) in Malay.

The demographic and retirement details questionnaire comprised age, gender, religion, race, marital status, education level, residential location, working sector, retirement scheme, and financial adequacy. This questionnaire determined the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the respondents while also providing details that are aimed at achieving this study's research objective.

The Occupational Balance Questionnaire (OBQ11) is a self-administered questionnaire designed to assess an individual's contentment with the quantity and variety of their daily activities (Wagman & Håkansson, 2014a). The overall score is calculated by summing up the individual item scores, varying from 0 to 33. Thus, a higher score reflects more excellent occupational balance (Günal et al., 2020). Cronbach's alpha in the sample was 0.936, reflecting good internal consistency (Wagman & Håkansson, 2014a). The correlation (Spearman's Rho) for the overall score was 0.926, while the individual's kappa coefficient ranged from 0.61 to 0.83 (Sousa & Rojjanasrirat, 2011). The questionnaire was translated and validated into Malay to obtain the OBQ11-M. The test-retest reliability of the OBQ11-M was 0.86, and Cronbach's alpha for the OBQ11-M total score was 0.96.

The data collection lasted from November 2021 until April 2022. Public health and social measures have been implemented globally to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including lockdown enforcement, social distancing, and quarantine measures. Hence, the data collection for this study was done using online survey platforms such as Google Forms and Qualtrics Survey and online interviews using Google Meet. Furthermore, there is evidence that when purposive sampling is merged with a computerised communication approach, research members gain an effective involvement of large samples that are otherwise inaccessible (Barratt & Lenton, 2015). Therefore, this method was optimal for this study as it involved gathering a large sample size from various communities of the retiree population in Malaysia during a pandemic.

Participants were approached through collaboration with Persatuan Pesara Kerajaan Malaysia, the National Council of Senior Citizens Organizations Malaysia (NACSCOM), and Persatuan Kebajikan Usiamas Malaysia. Research members approached the president of the organisations through social media (Facebook) and emailed to gain their cooperation in distributing the online questionnaire. A social media post on the organisation's social media account was also done to gain participation from the retirees in the organisation. Participants were able to choose the mode of data collection, which was completing an online survey questionnaire or conducting online interviews.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data was analysed using descriptive analysis with IBM SPSS Statistics version 28.0. Demographic characteristics are presented as number (N) and percentage (%) values and, when appropriate, mean and standard deviation (SD). The findings of OBQ11-M for each item were shown as the mean and standard deviation (SD) for normally distributed data.

4.0 Findings

The questionnaire distribution among retirees was conducted through physical (hand-delivered) and online methods. A total of 400 questionnaires were received and deemed suitable for analysis, indicating a favourable response rate. Notably, after the data underwent a meticulous data cleaning process, complete and incomplete data was identified, ensuring the integrity and completeness of the dataset. Subsequently, a comprehensive descriptive analysis was carried out to comprehensively comprehend the demographic characteristics and criteria of the participants involved in the study. This method allowed for a detailed understanding of various demographic factors within the retiree population, providing essential context for the subsequent analyses and interpretations.

4.1 Gender

The sample consisted of 400 participants, with a nearly equal gender distribution. Table 2 displays the gender distribution among the participants.

Table 2. The demographic data of the participants.

Demographic variables	N (400)	%
Gender		
Female	199	49.8
Male	201	50.2

The sample included 199 female participants, constituting 49.8% of the total, and 201 male participants, comprising 50.2%. This gender balance ensures a representative composition within the study population.

4.2 The level of occupational balance among retirees in Malaysia

The level of occupational balance was described using descriptive analysis to carry out the objective of this research study. The findings were shown as mean and standard deviation (SD) for normally distributed data. The study's findings regarding the scores on occupational balance items and the total score derived from the OBQ11-M have been summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. The mean and standard deviation of OBQ11-M for each item and total score.

Items	Female Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	Total Mean (SD)
Item 1 (having sufficient things to do during a regular week)	2.11 (0.57)	2.11 (0.61)	2.11 (0.59)
Item 2 (balance between doing things for others/oneself)	2.05 (0.54)	2.04 (0.59)	2.05 (0.56)
Item 3 (time for doing things wanted)	2.20 (0.55)	2.24 (0.55)	2.22 (0.55)
Item 4 (balance between work, home, family, leisure, rest, and sleep)	2.08 (0.64)	2.07 (0.61)	2.08 (0.63)
Item 5 (have sufficient time for doing obligatory occupations)	2.12 (0.49)	2.18 (0.53)	2.15 (0.51)
Item 6 (balance between physical, social, mental, and restful occupations)	2.00 (0.60)	1.98 (0.63)	1.99 (0.66)
Item 7 (satisfaction with how time is spent in everyday life)	2.19 (0.51)	2.11 (0.58)	2.15 (0.55)
Item 8 (satisfaction with the number of activities during a regular week)	2.15 (0.58)	2.02 (0.62)	2.09 (0.60)
Item 9 (balance between obligatory/voluntary occupations)	2.01 (0.58)	1.96 (0.61)	1.98 (0.59)
Item 10 (balance between energy-giving/energy-taking activities)	2.01 (0.63)	1.94 (0.62)	1.98 (0.63)
Item 11 (satisfaction with time spent in rest, recovery, and sleep)	2.17 (0.53)	2.18 (0.56)	2.18 (0.55)
Total Score	23.08 (4.68)	22.86 (4.91)	22.96 (4.79)

The mean scores for each item ranged from 1.98 to 2.18, indicating a generally high level of occupational balance among retirees in Malaysia. The total mean score was 22.96 (SD = 4.79), suggesting a consistently positive perception of occupational balance in the sampled population.

Among female participants, the mean scores for occupational balance items ranged from 2.00 to 2.20. Conversely, male participants' mean scores for occupational balance items varied from 1.94 to 2.24. Notably, minor variations were observed between female and male retirees on individual items, and the overall pattern of occupational balance was similar. No significant differences in the total score were found between genders. The mean total scores for occupational balance quantified at 23.08 (SD = 4.68) for females and 22.86 (SD = 22.86) for males did not exhibit a statistically discernible disparity between the genders regarding their perceived occupational balance levels.

5.0 Discussion

This study investigates the level of occupational balance among retirees in Malaysia. The findings suggest that retirees in Malaysia perceive a high level of occupational balance, reflecting positive engagement in various daily activities. Since the participants in this study consisted of people in the retirement phase, a possible interpretation of the result mentioned above could be that the participants are satisfied with the amount and variety of occupations they currently engage in in their retirement lives. Some participants may value 'active ageing' and rate occupational balance as high if they feel they participate much in daily activities. On the other hand, and in line with the disengagement theory, others may be inclined to withdraw from activities and social life and tend to rate occupational balance as high if they feel they can be less active. This is attributed to their past excessive work and commitments that constrained their involvement in other meaningful activities. Therefore, they intentionally choose a less active lifestyle in their retirement life.

Concurrently, the results indicate no notable distinction in the overall occupational balance scores between female and male participants, which aligns with the findings in a study on the same population criteria in a different country (Wagman & Håkansson, 2014b). However, studies on occupational balance were also done with different populations, resulting in significant differences between the gender variables (Aas et al., 2020; Uthede et al., 2022). Prior studies reported that female participants tend to have lower occupational balance levels than men due to traditional societal roles. This could be influenced by the fact that most female participants in previous studies reported having a high total workload, which leads to insufficient time for leisure occupations after work. In contrast, men usually have this opportunity (Håkansson & Ahlborg, 2010). This is due to the traditional role of women at home to engage in domestic work, which requires more time and energy compared to men's domestic work. Given that the current study focuses on retired

women, they generally have reduced caregiving and home maintenance roles compared to the broader population.

Utilising a validated and reliable questionnaire, such as the OBQ11-M, contributes to the study's overall validity. However, a notable limitation lies in the necessity for a predetermined cut-off score within OBQ11-M. This requirement could result in either underestimating or overestimating participants' perceptions regarding their occupational balance. This aspect could influence the overall interpretation of the participants' perceived levels of occupational balance within the study.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The outcomes of this research significantly enriched the field of occupational therapy by delving into the concept of occupational balance among retirees in Malaysia. The distribution of occupational balance scores among participants followed a typical pattern, showcasing similarity in scores between males and females. Despite certain limitations within this study, such as potential constraints in scope or methodology, it contributes substantially to understanding occupational balance among retirees. Furthermore, these findings will guide future investigations in this field and can be crucial in supporting a balanced and fulfilling post-retirement lifestyle, given the widespread benefits of maintaining occupational balance for their overall health and well-being. Being that the participants in this study comprised healthy retirees, future research endeavours should examine the concept among populations confronting adversities in their daily circumstances.

Acknowledgment

The authors express their gratitude to all involved in this study, especially the participants. Permission to conduct this study has been granted by the Ethical Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), REC/12/2020 (MR/435). This study's research methods and procedures were done according to the relevant guidelines and regulations. This study was funded by the Fundamental Research Grant, Universiti Teknologi MARA (Ref No: 600-IRMI/FRGS 5/3 (296/2019)).

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper significantly contributes to the field of study by providing comprehensive insights into the occupational balance among the retiree population. The findings could contribute to healthcare providers and policymakers that can address the needs of the retiree and ageing population. This study could identify how occupational balance and other variables could influence a retiree's quality of life and life satisfaction when they cease to work.

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