The Influence of Occupations and Roles Within Family Life on Perceived Quality of Life Among Chinese and Korean American Elders

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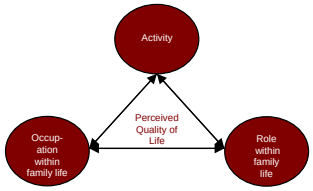
Introduction

In this pilot qualitative study, our aims were to explore **(1)** the daily activities/occupations and roles within family life, and **(2)** the perceptions of quality of life influenced by those occupations and roles among groups that often remain invisible, yet are growing in numbers specifically, Chinese and Korean American older adults in the US (Crowell et al, 2002).

This body of knowledge seeks to contribute to cultural competency among occupational therapy practitioners. Community interventions that are culturally appropriate support meaningful occupational engagement and participation in all aspects of life, including family life. Increased understanding of Chinese and Korean older adults supports occupational therapy's focus on providing effective holistic and client-centered interventions.

Culture is embedded in the everyday lives of individuals. Individuals are heavily influenced by family and culture. Thus a frame of reference is needed. It is important to understand the individual in relation to family and culture (Fitzgerald, 2004). The graying of our multicultural nation requires research to increase understanding of the perceptions, values and needs of ethnic populations. Access and utilization of health and human services is needed to support occupational engagement, health, and quality of life (Pang, 2003).



Methodology

Subject:

• 39 cognitively intact community-dwelling Chinese and Korean American elders age 55 years and older

Recruitment:

• Study participants were recruited from two community churches in the New York City metropolitan area

Instruments:

• Each participant was given either a Chinese or Korean translated: consent form, a demographic form, and the assessment tools, the Role Checklist and Short Form-36 (SF-36) Health Survey prior to a focus group discussion or an individual interview.

Focus group/Interview:

• Each focus group and individual interview was conducted in either the Chinese or Korean language by the bilingual research students. Open-ended questions focusing on roles and occupations were used to facilitate both focus group discussions and/or individual interview. The duration of each focus group and individual interview session was approximately one hour long.

Open-ended questions:

• Researchers asked participants to describe their living situation, how they spent a typical day, the activities and roles they engaged in, and the level of satisfaction within their roles and occupations. Individual interviews were conducted one-on-one.

Qualitative Data:

• Focus groups and individual interviews were audio taped, transcribed, summarized, translated, and reviewed by bilingual student researchers.

• SPSS and N-Vivo were used to organize and analyze data.

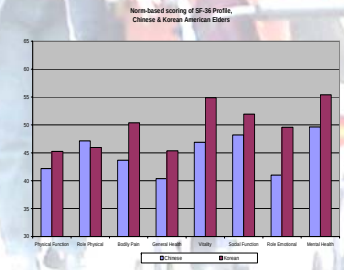
Results

Demographic Characteristics of Chinese & Korean American Elderly

	Chinese	(N=17)	Korean	(N=22)
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Age	71.94	7.44	63.86	7.10
Years in U.S.	25.12	13.36	21.41	11.21
Gender	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Male	5	29	7	32
Female	12	71	15	68
Marital Status				
Single	0	0	0	0
Married	12	71	15	68
Separated	0	0	1	5
Divorced	0	0	0	0
Widowed	5	29	6	27
Living with				
Alone	1	6	3	14
Spouse	6	35	10	45
Family	10	59	9	41
Speaking English				
Uncomfortable	12	70	8	36
Somewhat Comfortable	2	12	11	50
Comfortable	3	18	3	14
Retired				
Yes	16	94	8	36
No	1	6	14	64

Present Participation in Roles

Roles	Chinese (%)	Korean (%)
Student	6	0
Worker	6	64
Volunteer	25	50
Caregiver	44	50
Home maintainer	88	91
Friend	88	73
Family member	88	91
Religious participant	81	100
Hobbyist/Amateur	69	82
Participant in organization	63	73



Conclusions

Family remained a core institution in the lives of many Chinese and Korean American elders residing in the US. In fact, the influence of occupations and roles on perceived quality of life cannot fully be explored without the context of family life.

• **Aging**: Aging is viewed as an inevitable process with passive acceptance.

• **Life Satisfaction**: Activity and the ability 'to still do' is associated with satisfaction or happiness in life.

• **Strong Work Ethic**: For a majority of those who worked in paid employment, a strong work ethic is preserved in old age.

• **Family Support**: Interdependence between generations in a family is valued. The elders perceive themselves as either "helping out" or "being helped out."

• **Residency Patterns**: The majority of elders either lived with a spouse or with their adult children and/or grandchildren.

• **Caregiving For Grandchildren**: Majority of elderly play an active role in the lives of their grandchildren and value the role of a grandparent.

• **Leisure & Recreation**: Home entertainment for the elders included passive indoor activities.

• **Homemaking:** A homemaking role occupies the daily lives of the elders. Both men and women engaged in a homemaking role.

• **Volunteering:** the church and the community offer many volunteer opportunities for the elderly.

References:

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