**Introduction**

**Background**
- Caregivers often sacrifice their own leisure time, exercise, family activities, and social activities to accommodate their child with autism’s needs for care.1,2,3 These caregivers have poor well-being compared to caregivers of individuals with other disabilities, and to the general population.4,5 Leisure and exercise have been demonstrated to have positive effects on well-being for the general population.6,7 Leisure and exercise has the potential to help caregivers manage the stressors and promote their wellness.

**Purpose**
- This study investigated whether satisfaction with leisure participation and exercise would be related to self-rated well-being for experienced caregivers of children with autism, aged 8 to 21.

**Hypothesis**
- Leisure and exercise will be positively related to well-being of caregivers of children with autism.

**Research Design & Methods**

This exploratory study is a part of a participatory action research project, Lifestyle Redesign for Caregivers. This project uses focus groups to design the intervention program, activity card sorts to select goals, and monthly occupational motivational coaching to facilitate goal achievement. Data for this study were drawn from pre-intervention surveys completed during the initial focus group.

**Participants**
- 11 experienced primary caregivers of children (age 8 to 21) with autism, recruited from the Wisconsin Autism Society Conference.

**Measures**

**Leisure Time Satisfaction Measure (LTS) –**
- Six items (α = .80)7 rating:
  1. How satisfied are you with the amount of time spent ...
  2. Scale: 0=Not at all; 1=A little; 2=A lot; max score = 12

**Caregiver Occupational Well-Being Questionnaire (COWBOQ) –**
- 2 items that best captured occupational well-being for caregivers were rated:
  1. τ“How balanced do you feel your lifestyle is”7 rated 1 to 7 on a Likert Scale: 1=Very Unbalanced; 7=Very Balanced
  2. τ“How satisfied are you with the way you usually spend your time?”7 rated 1 to 7 on a Likert Scale: 1=Very Dissatisfied; 7=Very Satisfied

**Analysis**
- Preliminary analysis of the LTS to determine selection of correlations (Figure 1)
- Spearman Rank Correlations
  - LTS total score vs lifestyle balance
  - LTS total score vs total time-use satisfaction
  - LTS exercise score vs lifestyle balance
  - LTS exercise score vs total time-use satisfaction
  - LTS exercise score vs LTS total score

**Results**

**Caregivers were least satisfied with amount of time exercising**
- Of six leisure categories on LTS, caregivers rated satisfaction with exercise lowest.

**Exercise was related to Lifestyle Balance & Leisure Satisfaction**
- Scores on exercise item of LTS were significantly related to lifestyle balance item (r = .686) of the COWBOQ, and to total scores on the LTS (r = .803).

**Leisure Satisfaction was not related to Lifestyle Balance**
- Other null findings include relationships between Total Time-Use Satisfaction and LTS, and Total Time-Use Satisfaction and Exercise.

**Conclusions**
- A novel finding that supported the hypothesis was that although exercise was participated in less than desired compared to other leisure activities, it was significantly related to lifestyle balance and also contributed to how satisfied participants were in spending overall leisure time (Figure 2). In addition, caregivers seemed to be only “a little” satisfied with time spent in almost all leisure categories (Figure 1).
- It appears that participation in exercise is an important indicator of well-being for caregivers of children with autism. However, it may be difficult for caregivers to plan time for exercise due to unpredictable needs of their child with autism.
- We found that satisfaction in the amount of time spent in leisure activities was not related to occupational well-being for caregivers (Figure 3). Considering the positive effects of leisure activities on well-being reported in the literature,8 our finding was surprising.

**Implications for Practice**
- This evidence may guide occupational therapists and other healthcare providers to responsibly tailor family-centered care, and to facilitate wellness promotion within caregivers’ realities, without adding more burden on caregivers.
- Pre-intervention data informs occupational therapists to consider utilizing Lifestyle Redesign9 to collaborate with caregivers to strategize fitting exercise into their busy and unpredictable schedule.
- Future research using Lifestyle Redesign intervention should gather more extensive data on the caregivers’ level of participation of exercise and how it relates to well-being.

**References**


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