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The Development of Purpose in Marginalized Older Adults: Health and Social Barriers

Ameesha Narine

Abstract (300 words):

A sense of purpose is defined as a “central, self-organizing life aim that organizes and stimulates goals, manages behaviors, and provides a sense of meaning” (Mcknight & Kashdan 2009). Purpose is crucial to guide individuals’ choices and decisions across their lifespans (Lewis, 2020). Particularly in older adulthood, having a sense of purpose is linked with positive overall well-being, including in the physical (Musich et al., 2018), cognitive (Boyle et al., 2012), and socioemotional/psychological domains (Lewis & Hill, 2021). Although a sense of purpose fosters well-being in late life, it remains understudied whether purpose is a resource for resilience in older adults who identify as marginalized, as well as the barriers to having or carrying out a sense of purpose. Marginalization includes facing challenges due to factors such as race, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and age (Kanna, 2018). This study fills this gap by exploring two main research questions: 1) how do marginalized older adults develop purpose across their lifespan? and, 2) can purpose be used to overcome health and social barriers? Using the life story framework, participants (age 60+) were asked how purpose has helped them through events in their life. Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. Preliminary results show that participants kin/ family or their career helped to develop their purposes can also help overcome health barriers by motivating them to keep a healthy lifestyle.

