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Occupational therapist identifies link between playfulness and wellbeing in adults

Delegates to Occupational Therapy Australia's (OTA) 2020 Virtual OT Exchange have been told that playfulness is significantly related to a range of wellbeing indicators in adults.

The investigation was undertaken by Miss Arlena Farley, a newly graduated occupational therapist from the University of the Sunshine Coast.

"Playfulness is well researched in children; however, much less is known about its relationship with wellbeing in adults," said Miss Farley.

In total, 175 adult participants (63% female) completed the online survey which used the Other-directed, Light-hearted, Intellectual and Whimsical (OLIW) playfulness scale, and the Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA-Profiler) wellbeing scale.

Miss Farley then used statistical analysis techniques to investigate whether playfulness predicted wellbeing.

Of the eight models which were analysed, six showed that adults' playfulness was a significant predictor of their wellbeing. Specifically, Other-directed with Relationships ($p=0.001$), Overall Wellbeing ($p=0.002$), Engagement ($p=0.008$), and Positive Emotion ($p=0.019$), and Intellectual with Meaning ($p=0.005$), Negative Emotion ($p=0.006$), Overall Wellbeing ($p=0.012$), and Positive Emotion ($p=0.030$).

In statistical analysis, the p-value is a number between zero and one. It indicates the likelihood that the results occurred due to chance. A p-value of less than 0.05 is considered statistically significant, meaning the likelihood that the results were random is less than five percent.

"This indicates that adult playfulness is robustly related to positive emotions, engagement when with others and during activities, relationships, finding meaning in one's life, and overall wellbeing," Miss Farley said.

More research is still needed to determine whether this relationship is causal. That is, does playfulness enhance wellbeing, or do they simply occur together for another reason?

Nonetheless, the findings present a promising development in the study of adult wellbeing.

"The research suggests that incorporating elements of playfulness into work, leisure and activities of daily life could potentially nurture an individual's wellbeing," Miss Farley noted.

Approximately 500 occupational therapists have converged – virtually – on the 2020 OT Exchange, the first of OTA's national conferences to be delivered entirely online.

The conference features 93 scientific presentations and three workshops focussed on four key areas of occupational therapy practice: Driving, Rehabilitation, Paediatrics and Environmental Modifications. It runs from 14 to 15 September.

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