

Sociology and Occupational Therapy: An Integrated Approach, 1e

Opinion

Using population-level time use datasets to advance knowledge of human activity, participation and health

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Occupational science,
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Time use is of enduring interest to occupational therapists and occupational scientists. However, occupational researchers have yet to exploit fully the potential of large population-level time use datasets. A brief overview of the historical development and current activities within time use research internationally is presented. Whilst acknowledging the challenging nature of this type of research, the authors explore some of the opportunities offered by the secondary analysis of large time use datasets for occupational therapy and occupational science researchers who seek to advance knowledge of human activity, participation and health.

Introduction

In 2003, Farnsworth asked whether time use was occupational therapy's core business or someone else's, and more recently Pemberton and Cox (2011) have asked 'What happened to the time?' A conference hosted by the International Association of Time Use Research at the University of Oxford gave the opportunity to reflect on these questions. The authors were among the conference delegates, from a range of disciplines, who were urged to consider how they could mine large population datasets to measure and map human activities.

A concern for time

In considering humans as temporal beings and patterns of time use in daily life in particular, contemporary scholars (Farnsworth 2003; Christiansen 2007) acknowledge the influential ideas of Adolph Meyer, the American psychiatrist who, in his seminal address to the National Society for the Promotion of Occupational Therapy, called for 'the awakening to a full meaning of time as the biggest wonder and asset of our lives' (1922, p642). He asserted that it is the use we make of ourselves, our doing in time, that 'gives the ultimate stamp to our every organ' (p641). The founders of occupational science similarly positioned a 'concern for time' as central to understanding human occupational behaviour, with consideration required of 'how a person occupies time, how satisfied she or he is with the use of time, and how well time use supports values and goals' (Yerxa et al 1990, p85). Despite this enduring interest, we believe that occupational researchers have yet to realise fully the potential that time use research using existing population datasets offers the profession.

International research

Although the use of time budgets or time use surveys can be traced to the end of the 19th century, most scholars identify the defining contribution of Hungarian sociologist Alexander Szalai in the coordinated gathering of time use data. In 1965, under the auspices of the United Nations Educational,

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