

Bugbee Senior Center - Programming and Quality of Life

Professor Rogers

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Literature Review: This research aims to understand how senior center programming influences the quality of life among senior citizens, a demographic whose well-being is crucial for healthy aging. Halaweh (2018) and Brajša-Žganec (2010) suggest that leisure activities and individual perceptions significantly affect subjective well-being by fulfilling personal values and needs. Our study adopts a holistic approach, considering not just the physical, but also the emotional, social, and psychological aspects of seniors' lives. Verdugo (2005) views the quality of life as the extent to which individuals experience valued life events, emphasizing the importance of subjective experiences. Cornwell's studies (2008, 2009) highlight the challenges of social isolation and disconnectedness among aging individuals. Focusing on the Bugbee Senior Center, this study explores how active participation in its programs can counteract social isolation and enhance overall well-being. By examining the relationship between program participation and quality of life, particularly through the lens of social connections formed, the study aims to reveal how these activities contribute to the quality of life of senior citizens.

Based on the literature, our proposed relationship between variables is that participation in programming activities results in an increase in senior citizens' quality of life. This is supported by several prior studies. Bora's study dives into the impact of educational programs on the life satisfaction of individuals 65+, with educational programs being physical activity, arts, cognitive, and technology programs (Bora 2017). Participation in these programs was associated with increased social connection, resulting in better emotional status and enhanced life satisfaction (Bora 2017). This supports our proposed relationship of participation in programming resulting in an increase in social connections that then improves seniors' quality of life. The operationalization of life satisfaction aligns with our operationalization of quality of life in key ways that create the connection between the two concepts.

Our independent variable is operationalized as time spent in programming and the type of programming, with prior literature offering support for both of these aspects in relation to our dependent variable. One study looked at the activities individuals use to increase their happiness and enjoyment and found that the amount of time the participants spent performing each activity mattered because it affected the impact each activity had on participants' enjoyment (Parks et al. 2012). This supports our proposed relationship between time spent in programming and quality of life, with one of our four domains being enjoyment. We also claim that the type of programming matters and could impact our dependent variable differently based on the specific activity. This is supported by Bora's study, which found that the different types of educational programs impacted the different domains of the dependent variable (life satisfaction) in different ways (Bora 2017). Going a bit deeper, we specified our types of programming as meals, social, and exercise programs. We believe that meals as a type of programming leads to social connection, our mediating variable, which is supported by one study's findings that meals are a mechanism for facilitating social connections (Dunbar 2017).

Our mediating variable is social connection, with our claim being that participation in programming leads to social connection, which then improves quality of life for seniors. Our mediating variable is supported by one study's finding that making friends in a nursing home and then having social interactions with them improves one's individual well-being (Wolff 2013). Specifically, we are claiming that participation in social activities creates social connections with peers that then positively impacts quality of life. This is supported by one study's findings that making friends through social activities had "significant and positive effects on self-assessed life satisfaction", with this "self-assessed life satisfaction" aligning especially well with our domain of enjoyment (Wolff 2013). Looking now at the second component of our mediating variable, we

are claiming that social connections with staff impact seniors' quality of life, which is supported by one study that found nursing home staff played an essential role in creating social connections between seniors using technology during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wu 2020).

Prior literature offers support for all four of the domains we are using to operationalize our dependent variable, quality of life. The first is relationships, which we are measuring with survey questions such as, "I consider one or more staff to be a friend." This is supported by Bora's operationalization of emotional health (a component of the dependent variable life satisfaction) as "humanity" in his study, which determined that the participants who regarded the staff as friends rather than having the relationship of a client and service provider experienced better emotional health (Bora 2017). Our second domain, meaningful activity, is being measured through questions such as, "The activities I do help me take care of myself." This is supported by Bora's operationalization of cognitive satisfaction as "usability of knowledge", indicating that participants who were able to apply what they learned in the cognitive programs to their lives and utilize this knowledge to help themselves had greater overall life satisfaction. Enjoyment, the third of our four domains, is being measured with questions such as, "I like the variety of programming events offered at the senior center." One study supports this by operationalizing individual well-being as measuring mental health and asking questions such as, "I am very satisfied with life", which speaks to a measurement of overall enjoyment (Gene 2001). Finally, our fourth and final domain of dignity was identified in one study as being a key part of preserving health and wellbeing for seniors, specifically noting that preserving dignity is "pertinent to older adults' life spirit" (Anderberg et al. 2007). Notably, the attitudes/activities of caregivers and staff contribute greatly to preserving dignity among seniors', which supports our claim that social connections with staff relate to dignity as a domain of quality of life (Anderberg et al. 2007). Additionally, Kane et al.'s study identified all four of our domains as key measures of quality of life, specifically for nursing home residents in the context of the study (Kane 2003).

Overall, prior literature demonstrates consistent evidence of the positive impact of programming on seniors' quality of life, specifically activities that facilitate social connections. However, there are a few notable gaps that we are seeking to address with our study. First, there is a lack of literature surrounding senior centers specifically. The studies we found (such as Wolff, Wu, Kane, etc.) focus on nursing homes and the elderly population in general, but a study like ours focuses on senior centers as places that offer programming without housing, and how senior centers improve seniors' livelihoods, thus contributing to the literature surrounding caring for senior citizens. Additionally, while we are utilizing Kane's quality of life domains, we are applying them to a senior center rather than a nursing home, which could result in different findings. Furthermore, there is a lack of literature surrounding the impact of staff facilitating relationships with seniors directly rather than facilitating relationships between fellow seniors (as described in the Wu article). Therefore, our study seeks to determine how social connections between Bugbee seniors and Bugbee staff affects the seniors' quality of life. Finally, our study being specific to Bugbee Center and its needs will give them the knowledge they require as they evaluate their programming and consider expanding.

Our proposed research at the Bugbee Senior Center is designed to fill a notable gap in the existing body of literature on senior care and quality of life, leading to our research question, "How does the frequency of participation in Bugbee Senior Center programming impact the quality of life for seniors in the Upper Valley?". The specific goals of our research include measuring the long-term effects of participation, assessing the sustainability of positive outcomes beyond the duration of the program, and finding strategies to ensure these benefits continue over

time. We emphasize the enduring legacy of such programs on senior citizens' lives. Thus, our research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how senior centers can enhance the well-being of the elderly population. From a broader sociological standpoint, our study will help evaluate the efficacy and impact of senior centers like Bugbee on seniors' quality of life, which will be important for Bugbee to consider as they tackle expansion.

Methods: We are recommending that Bugbee Senior Center utilizes a physical survey tool. Synthesizing information from our comprehensive literature review as well as the perspective of the Bugbee Senior Center, we devised a conceptual framework that informs our research design (attached in the appendix). Referring to Figure 1 in the appendix, participation in programming represents the independent variable being measured. We further operationalize this broad category into time spent in programming and the types of programming (specifically divided into categories of meals, social events, and exercise programs). For the dependent variable, we narrowed the broad concept of quality of life into the operationalized definition, comprising the four domains of meaningful activity, relationships, enjoyment, and dignity. These domains were derived from Kane et. al.'s work on quality of life, narrowed from eleven domains to the chosen four in accordance with the anticipated relationship between variables in the conceptual model as well as feedback from the Bugbee Senior Center to increase relevance. Lastly, social connection represents the mediating variable, operationalized as both social connection with peers (measured as collaborative versus independent programming) and with staff.

In accordance with our literature review and conceptual model, we anticipate a positive correlation between the independent variable and the composite dependent variable. More specifically, we expect strong positive relationships between: the amount of time spent in programming and overall quality of life; attendance at mealtimes and the domains of relationships and enjoyment; exercise and meaningful activity; and social events and relationships, enjoyment, and meaningful activity. We anticipate all types of activities will be positively related to dignity. Additionally, we expect that the operationalized definitions of the mediating variable will impact the dependent variable differently, as represented by the red dotted arrows above; that is, we foresee social connection with peers strongly relating to enjoyment, whereas social connection with staff will strongly associate with dignity.

In terms of the survey itself (available for review below), the tool will include both qualitative and quantitative questions that measure the three variables listed above. We chose to omit questions regarding personal and demographic information in order to increase the anonymity of responses and to focus particularly on the variables being addressed. To this point, the first two questions target the independent variable: time spent in programming is quantified as monthly rate of participation and types of programming is broken down into three distinct subcategories in order to standardize responses for ease of comparison. The next two questions measure the mediating variable, separated as relationships between peers and between subjects and the staff. Finally, the last section contains sixteen questions, each with the same set of responses for convenience, that measure the dependent variable. The set is divided into four sections according to domain, though this aspect is not explicitly stated or referenced anywhere on the physical survey tool. Questions were not randomized between domains to ease in the flow of completing the survey, grouping like subject matter together.

The target population for the survey is all participating members of the Bugbee Senior Center. In order to generate the largest possible sample, we propose using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. Benefits of this methodology include that it maximizes the

number of respondents that are involved in the study and that it requires minimal resources, both in terms of manpower and finances, to execute. Conversely, disadvantages include that the results will not necessarily be completely representative of the population and there could be selection bias; these lead to potential issues when creating generalizations based on our gathered data. The Bugbee Senior Center should not make generalizations on subsets of the population based on the findings; convenience sampling does not allow for such conclusions. More active participants in a robust variety of programs may feel more inclined to participate than those who participate less, thus skewing the data. We nevertheless maintain that convenience sampling is the optimal method, and we plan to mitigate potential drawbacks by emphasizing survey completion by underrepresented populations. This may take the form of purposefully identifying individuals or by encouraging snowball sampling techniques, having more active participants take two or more copies of the survey to distribute amongst their network of peers.

We propose distribution of the survey in person at the Bugbee Senior Center following the completion of a programming activity. This temporal proximity ensures that all participants receive an equal opportunity for their voice to be heard as part of the study sample; however, in order to decrease the potential for response bias upon completion of a physical survey within center itself, participants will be encouraged to fill out the form at home, to be returned either in person or via mail. The survey will not be proctored by staff members, but taking the survey at home maximizes feelings of comfort and security, thereby bolstering the truthfulness of the reported data. Moreover, distribution at the end of programming means that no additional recruitment or other materials will be necessary. Given that the Bugbee Senior Center is a local non-profit organization, we do not recommend offering financial compensation for respondents. Ideally, the sample size would approach (or exceed) half of all program participants in order to reach the greatest possible degree of representativeness; we believe that 25% is a realistic target. The Center will know when the sample is large enough, however, when the responses represent a range of experiences (ex. multiple types of programs and levels of involvement).

Interpretation of the survey findings will necessarily involve the drawing of relationships between the operational definitions of each variable. To do so, responses in the section measuring the dependent variable will be coded, converting the responses of the Likert scale into numerical values that can be tallied for analysis. Given that each of the four domains have four questions (ensuring equal relative weight), scores can be assessed in terms of specific domains and in terms of quality of life more broadly. Furthermore, the mediating variable will be converted into scaled numerical values, with collaborative/interactive coded positively and independent coded negatively. We acknowledge the influence of time order by administering the survey after respondents participate in programming; their perceptions of quality of life are gauged following programming participation. Moreover, rival explanations for the relationship between independent and dependent variables are accounted for in the analysis of the mediating variables; we theorize that in helping to elucidate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, the model decreases the likelihood of additional sources to change.

In applying feedback from the presentation session with Mark, Professor Rogers, and classmates from Sociology 11, we also have considered the possibility of expanding the survey to a longitudinal study design. As currently formatted, the survey measures the participation and attitudes of subjects at present, without considering the potential for changes over time of long term results. Should the Bugbee Senior Center want to gather this type of data, important considerations would include the standardization of questions across trials, consistency in data interpretation methods, and the potential for adapting questions pertaining to the independent

variable should services change or expand. We believe that in accordance with the conceptual model and plan for interpretation, the survey tool can be used in the manner most suitable to the needs of the Bugbee Senior Center.

Ethical Considerations: In designing the research, we followed the principles outlined in the Belmont Report to address ethical concerns. Respect for persons ensures the individuals we survey are treated as autonomous people who can make their own decisions, and also means protecting people who may not have the capacity to practice autonomy. The next principle is beneficence which refers to the duty researchers have to maximize benefits and minimize potential harm for participants. Researchers must be sure that research benefits outweighs potential harm. The final principle is justice, which means researchers must ensure a fair distribution of benefits from the study amongst research participants. The selection of participants should be conducted fairly and carefully, choosing the participants from whom the study will benefit the most.

We structured our research in accordance with these principles to safeguard against any violations. Regarding respect for persons, we plan on each participant checking a box on a consent form showing that they voluntarily completed this survey. Checking a box, rather than signing their name will help ensure the anonymity of this research. Additionally, we plan on only surveying people who have the capacity to participate autonomously. We avoided any sensitive questions, and refrained from asking questions about personal information that was not crucial to our research, limiting potential harm. For beneficence, since we only survey Bugbee participants, the people in our study will benefit from research. And since our survey asks standard questions on participation in Bugbee Programming we do not foresee harm from the survey, therefore making sure benefits outweigh risks for participants. For the final principle, justice, we plan to distribute this survey to only those who are actively involved in the Bugbee Center, eliminating the risk of including research participants who wouldn't benefit from the research.

Feasibility and Significance: The Bugbee Senior Center is a non profit organization that provides meals, along with various activities and programs to elderly people in Vermont. The center is looking to either renovate their current building or relocate their center. Before the Bugbee Center makes any final decisions, they want to better understand their community impact. Since the center is a non-profit, we designed this research proposal to minimize necessary resources in conducting research. The use of a survey with close ended questions, allows for easy analysis and collection of data. We plan on having the center distribute the survey to those who come to the center to participate in programming, allowing for an easy distribution method and ensuring we are surveying our target population. A survey also allows the Bugbee Center to maximize response numbers. This method is time and cost effective, making it feasible for the Bugbee Center.

This research is worth pursuing because it directly helps the Bugbee Center in their decision to renovate their existing building or relocate. This research is academically significant because there is a lack of research focusing on senior centers specifically. Most research focuses specifically on nursing homes or the elderly population in general. Therefore, our research will be adding a new consideration by exploring the efficacy and impact of senior centers and their relationship to senior citizens. Additionally, since we are using previously defined domains of quality of life but applying them to senior centers, this research may yield new findings. We will also contribute to existing research as our study specifically analyzes the impact that senior center staff has on seniors. Therefore, our focus on how the social connection between staff affects the quality of life of senior citizens is academically significant.

5. References

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6. Appendix

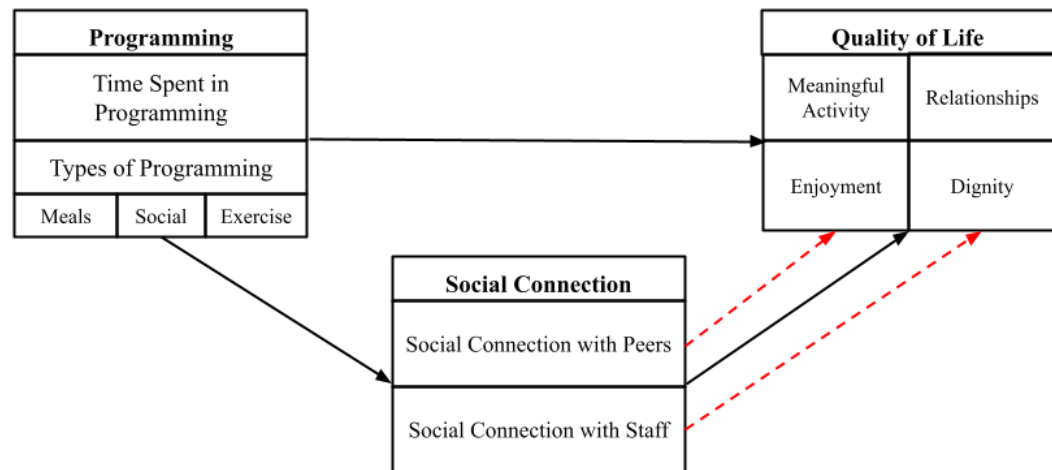


Figure 1: Operationalized Model

Consent Form:

Informed Consent

Introduction: You are being asked to take part in a research study. Taking part in research is voluntary.

What does this study involve?

We would like to learn more about your experiences with the Bugbee Senior Center. We will ask some questions about your participation in their programs, along with your experiences with them. Participation in the study will take approximately 15 minutes.

Who is eligible to participate?

You must be an active senior citizen participant in the Bugbee Center to take part in this study.

Will you be paid to take part in this study?

You will not receive any compensation for the participation in this study.

What are the options if you do not want to take part in this study?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time with no consequences to you.

Will you benefit from taking part in this study?

The Bugbee Center is either going to renovate or relocate their current center. Before they do that, they are looking to gather more information on their communal impact, more specifically, the impact their programming has on the senior citizens who participate. If the Bugbee Center gathers data that shows that they are making a positive impact, they will likely choose to renovate their existing facility and not relocate. Therefore, this study will help keep the Bugbee Center located where it is, which will continue their current programming.

What are the risks involved with taking part in this study?

There are no known risks of participation in this study.

How will your privacy be protected?

The information collected for this study will be kept secure and confidential. Your name will not be linked to your responses in any way. Only the research team will have access to your data.

Whom should you contact about this study?

If you have questions about this study, you can contact the research director for this study, at mark@bugbeecenter.org

CONSENT

I have read the above information and agree to take part in this study. If you do not wish to participate, do not check the box below. Check if you agree to participate.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study

Survey Tool:

Bugbee Senior Center Quality of Life Survey

On average, how many times per month do you attend Bugbee Senior Center programming events? *Programming events include, but are not*

limited to, meal services, health and fitness classes, social events, etc.

Fewer than once per week

Once per week

Twice per week

Three times per week

Four times per week

Five times per week

Six or more times per week

What are the main types of programming that you participate in?

Mealtimes

Social Events

Exercise Programs

Other

Overall, would you say the activities you participate in tend to be more collaborative with other participants or independent?

Mostly Collaborative

Somewhat Collaborative
Neutral/Mixed
Somewhat Independent
Mostly Independent

Overall, would you say the activities you participate in tend to include interaction with Bugbee Senior Center staff?

Mostly Interactive
Somewhat Interactive
Neutral/Mixed
Somewhat Independent
Mostly Independent

For the following section, indicate the frequency with which you find the statement to be true.

The activities I do give me a sense of satisfaction.

Often
Sometimes
Rarely

Never

The activities I do contribute to my feeling competent.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

The activities I do help me take care of myself.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

The activities I do give me a feeling of control.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

I find it easy to make friends at the senior center.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

I consider any resident to be a close friend.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

BSC staff stops just to have friendly conversation.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

I consider one or more staff to be a friend.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

I like the food at the senior center

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Not Applicable

I enjoy mealtimes at the senior center

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Not Applicable

I like the variety of programming events offered at the senior center

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Not Applicable

I enjoy participating in the programs at the senior center

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Not Applicable

I believe that the staff treats me politely.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

I believe that the staff treats me with respect.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

I believe that the staff handles me with care.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

I believe that the staff takes time to listen to me.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never