ABSTRACT
THE EXPERIENCE OF SIMPLE LIVING: A CONSENSUAL QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

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Voluntarily Simplicity (VS) is a lifestyle encompassing an array of characteristics that have varied over time, but is principally and enduringly characterized by minimal material consumption (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Shi, 1986). VS lifestyles are associated with increased Subjective Well-Being (SWB; Brown & Kasser, 2005; Monopolis, 2010). In contrast, evidence suggests that mainstream consumeristic lifestyles that emphasize material consumption are associated with lowered SWB (Kasser & Kanner, 2004). While there may be positive psychological consequences that result from abandoning a consumeristic lifestyle in favor of VS, VS lifestyles remain poorly understood, especially in the context of psychological outcomes.

This qualitative study sought to better understand VS lifestyles: the motivations of individuals who adopt VS, the factors that facilitate or impede the adoption of VS, the characterization of current VS, and the outcomes of living that lifestyle. Findings suggest that VSers in this study were motivated to adopt VS for varied reasons (e.g., to eliminate debt, clutter, or busyness), and often only after a meaningful life event. These VSers tended to emphasize financial success more so than was anticipated, and experienced numerous positive outcomes including increased mindfulness, decreased anxiety, and an increased sense of independence. In addition, most of the motivating factors, lifestyle characteristics, and outcomes fit neatly with processes of psychological need satisfaction suggested by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Findings implicating psychological need satisfaction both replicate those of prior studies (e.g., Monopolis, 2010; Rich et al., 2017) and shed new light on possible pathways through which VS may facilitate need satisfaction.