

**University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program**

**Research Study Abstracts
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Abstract

Telehealth became a well-known service delivery method in the past 3 years due to the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. This research was conducted to explore the utilization of telehealth and its effectiveness in terms of outcomes in counties alongside the border areas of South Texas. This paper focused on gathering the perspectives held by occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and speech-language pathologists. This study's research aims were to report the following: the perspectives of clinicians practicing along border regions in Texas on the use of telehealth, how clinicians incorporated telehealth into their current practice, and identify recommendations for the future use of telehealth in pediatric settings. According to the data reported, all research aims were met. Data indicates that clinicians were able to effectively deliver treatment sessions through telehealth, however, 78.6% of participants do not recommend for future use of telehealth in their current setting of practice. Telehealth is an effective service delivery model; however, it comes with challenges such as internet instability, environmental distractions, lack of parent/caregiver support, and lack of materials and resources.

Abstract

After graduating from high school, individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) struggle with the transition into adulthood (Eastman et al., 2020; Alverson et al., 2019; Hume et al., 2018; Anderson et. al, 2016). Whether it is pursuing postsecondary education, seeking employment, living independently, or community involvement, young adults with ASD must be provided with adequate help and resources in order to attain these traditional markers of adulthood. While there are services in place to assist these individuals with the transition process (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), research shows that there is variability in the coordination, effectiveness, and types of services currently being provided (Alverson et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this quantitative study was to identify what types of transitional services are provided for high schoolers with ASD by special education personnel (special education teachers, teachers, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, counselors, etc.). The Ecology of Human Performance model was the theoretical framework utilized in this study. Participants were recruited via digital flyers posted online, and eligibility to participate included having worked with or instructed a student with ASD for ≥ 1 year at the high school level. The data was collected using a policy based Qualtrics survey and analyzed via descriptive statistics. The results from this study (n=23) demonstrated that the most frequently used transition services are Instruction, Daily Living Skills, and Functional Vocational Evaluation. The most reported factors that influence the type of transition service utilized for students with ASD were the students themselves, followed by the ARD Team/IEP and the parents of the students. Results from this study inform of the types of transition services currently being provided for this population, the specific activities utilized, and by which

Abstract

Background: The prevalence of adults diagnosed with congenital disabilities (CD) has risen significantly, establishing them as one of the largest demographics with physical disabilities worldwide. Despite this, existing research predominantly overlooks the unique transition experiences of adults with congenital disabilities, particularly regarding healthcare, employment, and community integration. Prior studies have largely focused on specific conditions, ignoring the wider spectrum of CD. This study aims to: (1) explore the transition to adulthood for individuals with congenital disabilities in the United States; (2) investigate the resources utilized by individuals with congenital disabilities to facilitate their transition; and (3) identify factors impacting the transition outcomes for those with congenital disabilities.

Methods: This phenomenological qualitative study explored the perceptions and experiences of six participants with CDs, aged 18 or older, and who attended/graduated from US schools using semi-structured interviews guided by the Kawa model.

Outcomes: Five key themes emerged: Feeling Lost During Transition, Availability of Resources, Significance of Social Support, Societal Attitudes and Perceptions, and Information Gaps and Future Recommendations. The study found that adults with congenital disabilities are experiencing a decline in occupational performance in various areas due to an inadequate and inefficient transition process into adulthood.

Conclusions: Occupational therapy practitioners must collaborate with individuals with congenital disabilities before, during, and after their transition to adulthood to improve occupational performance different aspects of their lives.

Keywords: *transition to adulthood, congenital disabilities, adults, transition process*

Title: Experiences and Training of Occupational Therapists in Texas in Incorporating Empathy Into Their Practice

ABSTRACT

According to the Texas Board of Occupational Therapy Examiners, approximately 11,770 occupational therapy practitioners practice in Texas (Executive Council of Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy Examiners, 2022). However, no research has explored how occupational therapists in Texas are being trained to learn how to empathize, what kind of training they got at Occupational Therapy school, and how they incorporate empathy into their practice to provide outstanding health services. This study explores the experiences and training of occupational therapists in Texas in incorporating empathy into their practice. A face-to-face, semi-structured, qualitative interview was conducted with six licensed occupational therapists with more than three years working and living in Texas as occupational therapists to understand how they learned to be empathetic, if they received any training to be empathetic and the techniques they use in clinical practice to have a better understanding of the patient's needs. The data was analyzed by using a thematic analysis approach to generate themes. The results revealed that occupational therapists in Texas value empathy as an essential aspect of their practice. Currently, they do not receive any training in empathy during their education and professional development. The findings suggest that there is a need for more training and support for occupational therapists in Texas to enhance their ability to provide empathetic care to their clients. The themes that emerged from the coding included: 1) Definition of empathy, 2) Empathy starts from home, 3) Rejection of empathy, 4) Similar experiences, more empathy, 5) More empathy, better outcomes, 6) No current empathy training in OT school, 7) Need of empathy training, 8) Understanding somebody's why, 9) Techniques and tactics to develop empathy skills, elements necessary to incorporate in training to develop empathy.

ABSTRACT

Grief during COVID-19 has been called “a pandemic within a pandemic”. Due to an unprecedented number of bereavements as well as other stressful circumstances ranging from lockdown to illness, more elderly adults are experiencing greater amounts than in previous years, and in greater quantities. This presents a significant and immediate social threat to an already vulnerable population. Occupational therapists are in a unique position to treat grief and consequences specific to COVID-19 such as reestablishing routines in the middle of being quarantined and helping individuals adjust to new norms and disabilities. This narrative research study seeks to understand the experience and perception of grief on behalf of bereaved elderly individuals during COVID-19 through the lens of occupational therapy. To do this, one elderly individual (male, 67-years-old) was interviewed in-depth about his experience losing his ex-wife during this period. Common themes were coded for and analyzed and will be explored in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Background/literature review

Losing a loved one is an unfortunate part of life, and thus, so is responding to that loss, also known as grieving. Grief is a nearly universal experience among humans. It has been shown to cause multiple physical and mental ailments, including increased risk for diseases, affective disorders, and behavioral disturbances (Averill, 1978). Elder groups, often defined as people 65 years of age or older (Sabharwal et al., 2015) have insufficient time to fully grieve due to loss occurring much more frequently as age increases (Kastenbaum, 1969). These preexisting risks, paired with the increasing social isolation of elderly populations (Rubinstein, 1994) makes them

Transition Program and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder

RIVAS 2

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to explore the experience of young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and social skills at transition programs. Additionally, it aimed to (1) explore the experience of young adults with ASD within their transition program, (2) describe how young adults with ASD perceive their transition program has impacted their social skills, and (3) identify factors relating to the transition program that have impacted their social skills.

Methods: This is a qualitative phenomenological research study in which semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from young adults with ASD. Interviews were conducted both in person or through the video-conferencing app called Zoom. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in order to code and find emerging themes.

Results: The four emerging themes were the following: (1) Member Feelings Towards Group, (2) Personal Development, (3) Social and Learning Experiences with Program, (4) Aspirations.

Conclusion: The results of this study indicate that young adults with ASD tend to have a positive experience within their transition program. The participants stated that this program has helped them develop numerous skills such as social skills, job skills, money management, home management, and various other skills through classes and activities. In addition, two participants mentioned they held a job recently. These young adults expressed aspirations for themselves such as making a better life for themselves, getting a job, and becoming more independent.

KEYWORDS: *Autism Spectrum Disorder; Transition Program; Young Adults; Social Skills*

Introduction

Alcohol use disorder (AUD), otherwise known as alcoholism, is characterized by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th edition as an individual using alcohol in a manner that could result in clinically significant impairment or distress (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). When a person struggles with AUD their behaviors, attitudes, and relationships are all usually affected in a negative way. This means the individual with AUD is not the only one affected by this condition. For example, those who excessively consume alcohol struggle to maintain close relationships, can become aggressive, and/or neglect their loved ones (Haverfield et al., 2016; Kimball et al., 2022). Usually, those around the individual with AUD such as partners or family members are the ones most affected. These affected family members (AFM) may experience changes in family dynamics such as communication issues, aggressiveness, or conflicts with the individual with AUD (Berends et al., 2012; Haverfield et al., 2016; Kimball et al., 2022; McCann et al., 2019a). Family members of individuals with alcoholism often play a crucial role in providing support to their loved one with AUD. However, changes in family dynamics such as those previously mentioned can place a great deal of stress on the AFM causing negative effects on their support giving role (Haverfield et al., 2016; McCann et al., 2017; McCann et al., 2018). Due to this, the AFM must find ways to cope with having a family member with AUD. When looking at previous studies on Hispanic families it is shown that they display changes in family dynamics when there is an individual with AUD in the family. For example, Hispanic men experience social consequences and have higher rates of violence towards intimate partners due to alcohol-related reasons (Valdez et al., 2018; Valdez et al., 2019). According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, alcohol use is increasing in older adults which means that this is an increasing

Abstract

Background: Occupational therapists, physical therapists, and athletic trainers use different intervention approaches when treating an upper extremity injury, resulting in different functional outcomes and occupational performance. However, there are limited studies regarding the efficacy of interventions relating to occupational performance post-injury. **Purpose:** The purpose of this quantitative cross-sectional descriptive study was to determine the type of interventions former and current collegiate athletes received based on an upper extremity injury and the impact it had on their occupational performance. **Methods:** A 30-item online Qualtrics survey was created using the Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance (PEOP) model and was distributed to former and current collegiate athletes in Texas who sustained an upper extremity injury. Data collection was administered for roughly five months and was analyzed using descriptive statistics through SPSS. **Results:** Purposive and snowball sampling of 25 participants were recruited, with only 20 participants completing the survey. Overuse syndrome (25%) was the most common injury, with physical therapy (60%) and RICE (50%) being the most common interventions. Most participants experienced an occupational unbalance when receiving interventions and increased their occupational performance after interventions, with a few participants who did not. About 50% of these participants expressed concerns and issues with their strength, pain, and discomfort. **Conclusion:** These collegiate athletes are still experiencing pain, discomfort, and decreased strength, hindering their occupational performance. Thus, occupational therapists can provide a different perspective on intervention and educate collegiate athletes about their post-injury management.

Keywords: upper extremity injuries, occupational performance, collegiate athletes, occupations, post-injury

Abstract

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disease that affects their ability to interact others, repetitive behaviors and some individuals have difficulty to function in a typical school, leisure, and/or work environment (NIMH, 2022). The purpose of this quantitative research study is to identify the constraints that are affecting individuals with ASD development in maintaining a relationship with friends or romantic relationships. The researcher hypothesized that individuals with ASD have a significant impact on developing and engaging in personal relationships due to their limited knowledge of the topic. This was a quantitative study used the Occupational Performance Process Model with an inclusion criteria of being independent in their ADLs, 18 years or older, and self-reporting their diagnosis. The Sexual Behavior Scale-III (3rd ed) was modified into five constructs that include Socializing and Friendships, Sexual Behavior, Romantic Relationships, Sex Education, and My Concerns. The 124 subject age groups ranged from 18-24 (30.4%), 25-34 (36%), 35-44 (22.4%) and above 44 years (11.2%). The data showed that individuals with ASD have interest in developing friendships and romantic relationships, but social communication factors and social skills impede their development of social, romantic, or intimate relationships. Occupational Therapists are not addressing sexual concerns secondary to being an uncomfortable topic to speak about, lack of knowledge, prioritizing other occupations, or personal values (McGrath & Lynch, 2014). OTs can educate individuals or caregivers about safety, health education and answer concerns to prevent them from engaging in dangerous behaviors and practice intimate behaviors safely.

Keywords: [romantic relationships, intimacy, ASD, friendships]

Abstract

Introduction: Within the literature, there is an understanding of the symptoms that dictate the successes or hindrances of occupation performance and participation for individuals with Parkinson's Disease (PD), but there is very limited information on the lived experience of these individuals. There is barely any emphasis on how occupational therapy (OT) intervention can be prescribed once a patient is diagnosed with PD. There is also a gap in understanding what influences individuals to cope with their progressive disorder. **Methodology:** The following study is a qualitative phenomenological study of semi-structured, in-person and online interviews. Six participants (N=6) were recruited for the study. **Theoretical Framework:** The theory used to create themes and analyze this research study's results is the Ecology of Human Performance model. This model incorporates the person, their tasks, context, and how these factors impact their occupational performance. The transaction between the person and context helps determine the person's performance range (numbers and types of tasks available to a person). **Data Analysis:** By utilizing ATLAS.ti, thematic coding was utilized to find the themes to answer the research aims and understand what factors influence how an individual with PD copes with their progressive disease. **Results:** The following six themes were created from the interviews utilizing thematic coding: *Individual Mindset, Family Support, Community Support, Reveal of Diagnosis: Physician to Patient Communication, Adjustment to Lifestyle Changes, and Impact of Rehabilitation in PD.* **Conclusion:** One's context plays a huge factor in how one copes with their progressive disorder by dictating the kind of mindset they will have when adjusting to their new lifestyle and how much they'll continue to participate in their daily occupations.

Keywords: Parkinson's Disease, Ecology of Human Performance Model, Coping, Occupational Participation and Performance

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the impact of irregular sleep patterns on the family dynamics of the firefighters by using a phenomenological approach. Little data is known on how the sleep patterns of firefighters affect their homelife. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 participants and their families across the Rio Grande Valley to discover the challenges posed by the firefighting profession. The data analysis revealed key themes that illustrated shift in parental roles, communication, and adaptive strategies to manage homelife. These findings provided a boarder perspective on occupational health, emphasizing the importance of sleep for maintaining stability within the home and profession.

Keywords: firefighters, sleep patterns, occupational stress, emergency services, occupational therapy, home life

Abstract

Introduction: Previous research has explored experiences of non-Hispanic parents of children with autism, with moms being the most common participants. Traditionally, in the Hispanic culture, men are associated with “machismo”, expecting them to be “valiant”, breadwinners, and decision-makers of their household (Lindsey, 2018). Since culture shapes the foundation of our values and actions, these expectations can affect lived experiences and coping strategies. Fathers play a role in their child’s development, so consequently, their stress influences their quality of life and their family (Ahmad & Dardas, 2015). **Research Question/Aims:** The research question is, what is the impact of culture on the childrearing practice of Hispanic fathers with a child with autism? The three research aims were: to explore the perceived cultural expectations of Hispanic fathers rearing a child with Autism, to identify parenting skills/roles and coping strategies for stressors of Hispanic fathers rearing a child with autism, and to describe the Hispanic cultural influences on the child rearing practice of a child with autism. **Methodology:** Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with Hispanic fathers of children with autism via Zoom and in-person. Transcriptions were generated, and manual coding was done to develop themes. **Results:** The findings generated these themes: Parenting Occupation, Stressors, Coping Mechanism, and Cultural Expectations within the Environment. **Discussion:** The findings indicated that Hispanic fathers are not influenced by the Hispanic cultural expectations in their father role but continue to follow a type of male culture. Fathers are balancing work and family life to spend more time with their children and use various types of coping mechanisms. This is important for practitioners so they can better fit the intervention to Hispanic fathers, not only the mother and child, to help explore resources that will meet the fathers’ needs.

Key Words: Hispanic fathers of children with autism, Hispanic culture, coping experience, stress

Abstract

A person's average age for undergoing total hip replacement surgery (THR) is 66 years old, as stated by Passias and Bono (2006). The purpose of this narrative research study was to explore and identify the feelings, emotions, expectations, and process of an individual who have been through THR surgery. The researcher hypothesized that currently there are no set programs dedicated in preparing individuals before undergoing a THR surgery, as well as hypothesizing that having prior preparation before undergoing a complex surgery can help reduce negative feelings and emotions experienced by individuals. This research study recruited two participants, a 76 year-old female who had undergone a posterior THR and a 79 year old female with an anterior THR. The results showed that both individuals had experienced negative feelings prior and during the surgery, however one individual (anterior THR) received therapy prior to her surgery which she stated that she believes helped her with her recovery (gaining strength and muscle mass). The second individual (posterior THR) reported having a background in the medical field as a nurse which helped her in knowing the precautions necessary to be taken once discharged home. Both participants reported not having any "professional" training prior/after to having their surgery teaching them how to take care after being sent home.

Keywords: [total hip replacement, THR surgery, pre-operative education]