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A Critical Review of the Evidence Base for Occupational Therapy Mental Health Practice for Children and Young People

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The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) is developing a Master Plan for Mental Health

Why was this review conducted?

• To more clearly outline and promote the role of occupational therapy in mental health services
• To define specific educational components to better support occupational therapy practice in children and young people, as the onset of mental illness commonly occurs in adolescence.

AIMS and OBJECTIVES

To review the evidence base to clarify the role and effectiveness of occupational therapy in the promotion of mental health and in prevention and recovery from mental illness for children, adolescents and young people (25 years).

Methodology

1. Literature Search

- Databases: Cochrane library of systematic reviews, MEDLINE, AMED, PsychINFO, Child and Adolescent Development Studies and OTsviewer databases.
- TIME FRAME: Articles from 2011–2015 were selected to update a previous WFOT literature search from 2004–2012 (Ceramiadis et al., 2012; Reid, 2012).

2. Critical Appraisal

- McGill Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), was used (Pluye et al., 2011) to enable qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies to be critically appraised.

3. Thematic Analysis

- An inductive approach was taken to explore and interpret themes that emerged from the selected articles (Thomas and Harden, 2008).

4. Literature Search

- 13 articles met the inclusion criteria:
  - 5 literature reviews, 4 qualitative, 3 quantitative studies and a PhD thesis
  - A thematic analysis was then conducted to explore the themes that emerged from the included articles.

- Intervention component analysis to characterise key components of complex interventions for children requiring services at intensive level. Social skills programs are effective in improving social functioning for children with mental health and learning difficulties. Tiered service delivery for children with or at risk of difficulties. They can provide building and positive parenting services that work with children and their families to use health-based interventions to promote joint play. Preschool children with disabilities can develop social competence through peer-mediated strategies and social interactions.

- The majority of participants did not enter the group programme with a clear experience of anxiety.

- The effectiveness of an 8-week group programme for young people with or at risk for mental health problems is described, but lack of clear effectiveness of the intervention for children requiring services at intensive level. Social skills programs are effective in improving social functioning for children with mental health and learning difficulties. Tiered service delivery for children with or at risk of difficulties. They can provide building and positive parenting services that work with children and their families to use health-based interventions to promote joint play. Preschool children with disabilities can develop social competence through peer-mediated strategies and social interactions.

- Recommendations for practice: Enabling mastery of skills through personally valued, self-directed activities in a supportive, normalising environment, mental health, recovery, mental health and well-being in CYP.

- Occupation-focused interventions can be effectively provided by other staff, e.g. following assessment, intervention planning and education from OT.

CONCLUSIONS

- The effectiveness of occupational therapy interventions for mental health is influenced by:
  - A positive relationship with the client, e.g. the ability to engage and connect with young people.
  - A supportive social context enabling access to positive peer relationships and role models.
  - Participation in play and self-directed activities, enabling mastery of skills to promote acceptance and belonging.

- Different roles of the occupational therapist include:
  - Supporting parenting/care-giving occupations to encourage ownership and relationship building, and modelling of social positive interactions for the younger generation.
  - Enhancing social-emotional development of CYP.
  - Advocacy to promote positive self-identity, autonomy and adaptive transitions from adolescence to adulthood.

Recommendations for practice & Research

Key knowledge gap:

- Child and adolescent perspectives on well-being.

- Priorities for future research:

- Rigorous outcome measures required
- Studies to ensure the voices of adolescents are heard

- Intervention component analyses to characterise key components of occupational therapy interventions

- Inter-disciplinary studies incorporating neuro- psychological models, role-focused concerns and anxiety in young people with mental health issues.

- Recommendations for practice:

- Interventions enabling mastery of skills through personally valued, self-directed activities in a supportive, normalising environment, mental health, recovery, mental health and well-being in CYP.

- Occupation-focused interventions can be effectively provided by other staff, e.g. following assessment, intervention planning and education from OT.

References for Included Studies