

California Foundation of Occupational Therapy Funded Research Projects: Innovative Investigations at a Family Homeless Shelter

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Objectives:

Identify CFOT's purpose to advance the profession through scholarships and research

Identify how theories and research questions are linked

Understand how two different theories framed research investigations at an emergency homeless shelter for families

Discuss how small grants can support advancing the profession

Role of CFOT



Advancing the occupational therapy profession

Awarding scholarships and traineeships to directly support individuals who will become occupational therapy practitioners

Awarding small grants and larger research grants to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession

This presentation discusses two projects funded by small research grants

Family Homelessness

Why would occupational therapy be involved with homeless families?

AOTA Vision 2025

Occupational therapy maximizes health, well-being, and quality of life for all people, populations, and communities through effective solutions that facilitate participation in everyday living.

Background on family homelessness

On any given evening, an estimated 553,742 individuals in the United States experience homelessness (Henry, Watt, Rosenthal, & Shivji, 2017).

Homeless individuals face many challenges participating in meaningful, everyday occupations including lack of resources and overwhelming stress that negatively influences engagement in preferred activities (Roy et al., 2017).

Homeless mothers would benefit greatly from OT services. There is a need to "identify, understand, and evaluate [OT] practices that are applied or applicable to the needs, desires, rights, and occupational characteristics of this population" (Roy et al., 2017, p. 2).

Specific setting

Emergency shelter in Northern CA

Designed exclusively for families but a family can be ANY configuration

Each family is provided with a small room and beds

Three meals a day provided (sack lunch provided)

CFOT has supported other investigations conducted at this shelter

Overview of two projects

- Homeless mothers engaging in leisure pursuits
- Majority of homeless families are headed by single mothers
 - Extreme demands on time and energies

- Homeless mothers learning simple infant massage strokes to bond with infant/toddler
- Issues of anxiety and stress experienced by homeless mothers
 - These emotional issues can negatively impact on bonding and developing a feeling of competence as a mother

Theories Connected to Evidence

Occupational therapy theories offer a process to understand a phenomenon

The clinical question(s) arises from examining a clinical situation while using theory to understand what information is needed to direct practice

Theory directs the collection of evidence and application of evidence to practice

Theoretical Models and Research Questions

- Homeless mothers and leisure pursuits
- What are the lived experiences of homeless mothers participating in an occupational therapy leisure craft group?
 - Occupational justice framework used to examine the literature and design the investigation

- Homeless mothers and use of infant massage
- What is the lived experience of homeless mothers who participate in an infant massage instructional class?
 - The Model of Human Occupation served as the framework to understand the roles, habits and routines of homeless mothers and what might be changed with the introduction of infant massage

How is theory linked to an investigation?

Occupational Justice and homeless mothers

Homelessness not only deprives the family of basic shelter but deprives the family of occupational engagement in daily occupations

Occupational deprivation: exclusion from engaging in meaningful occupations; may be seen in populations that are severely limited from participation in occupations

- Illnesses preventing occupational engagement
- Seen as the most prevalent form of occupational deprivation described in the literature

Occupational marginalization: loss or diminished opportunity to make everyday choices and decisions; seen when people experience a loss in decision making for everyday activities

- Results from "informal norms and expectations within a sociocultural infrastructure" Durocher et al., 2014, p 422

How is theory linked to an investigation?

Occupational Justice and homeless mothers

Occupational justice asserts that it is not enough to meet the basic needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, such as food, housing, and security.

- Individuals need and have the right to participate in varying occupations that give meaning to the human experience.
- Occupational therapists working with homeless populations can support and promote access to productive and leisure occupations (Roy et al., 2017).

How is theory linked to an investigation?

Homeless mothers and use of infant massage

Model of Human Occupation and the Role of the Mother

For a homeless mother, the "mother role" can be compromised and challenged due to the instability, stress, and emotional toll caused by homelessness itself.

- The context of homelessness can also lend itself to the inability to effectively create roles and identity which over time, can lead to occupational deprivation and loss of the sense of self (Levin & Helfrich, 2004).
- Homeless mothers reported feelings of stress and concern regarding their children's care and felt a sense of powerlessness that they were unable to meet their children's basic needs (Averitt, 2003).

How is theory linked to an investigation?

Homeless mothers and use of infant massage

Model of Human Occupation and the Role of the Mother

- Role and habits examined in context of the shelter environment
- Volition system for mother viewed from a perspective of choices
- Performance capacity addressing skills for mother to bond with infant/toddlers

Homeless Mothers and Leisure Pursuits

Types of leisure pursuits:

Passive leisure describes activities that do not require active physical participation, such as reading, watching television, or listening to music.

Active leisure, in contrast, involves some measure of dynamic participation, whether it is physical, such as exercising at the gym, or stationary, such as knitting or having coffee with a friend.

Crafting is a long-standing medium for OT intervention due to the variety of motor and processing skills required, portability, and ease of access for those with limited resources (Griffiths & Corr, 2007).

Homeless Mothers and Leisure Pursuits

Benefits of Leisure Pursuits

Leisure has also been shown to support populations with mental health challenges (Griffiths & Corr, 2007; Lloyd, Wong, & Petchkovsky, 2007), provide opportunities for social participation (Iwasaki, Mackay, Mactavish, Ristock, & Bartlett, 2006; Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000), and create a means for practicing occupational performance skills like problem solving, sequencing, initiation and completion of tasks (Griffiths & Corr, 2007).

Leisure is identified as having a positive role in processing and coping with acute and chronic stress in both mainstream and marginalized populations

Homeless Mothers and Leisure Pursuits

Leisure coping strategies are active behavior patterns, including companionship (creation and use of social support), palliative coping (temporarily removing stress while engaged in leisure), and mood enhancement.

Leisure coping beliefs highlight the power of individuals subjectively believing that leisure is supportive, encourages autonomy and empowerment, and provides social support (Iwasaki and Mannell, 2000)

Homeless Mothers and Leisure Pursuits

Creative leisure is shown to be beneficial in the lives of those with severe mental health challenges

Social interactions around leisure occupations demonstrate positive support for community building between disadvantaged populations and the larger community

Homeless adults reported that limited access to active and passive leisure is a barrier that negatively affects their lives

Homeless Mothers and Infant Massage

Homeless parents have a higher rate of risk indicators (e.g. number of past traumatic experiences and higher rates of mood disorders) than people who are homeless without children

Homeless mothers have shown higher levels of depression, health issues, and social difficulties (Roze, Vandentorren, Van der Waerden, & Melchior, 2018)

Women feeling invisible, disregarded by society, helpless in the protection of their child, and a general lack of control in their circumstance of homelessness

Homeless Mothers and Infant Massage

Infant massage has beneficial effects for pre-term and full term infants

- Increased weight gain
- Increased attentiveness
- Less agitation during sleep

Mothers had beneficial effects when they used massage with their infants

- Decreased levels of stress
- Improved bonding

Research at the Homeless Shelter

Intervention based research conducted at the shelter

Shelter supported the research by providing space

Recruitment was challenging

Leisure Pursuits

- Group sessions offered 2x/week
- Low-cost to no-cost crafting materials
- Instruction in craft with positive support and guidance

Research at the Homeless Shelter

Leisure pursuits – lived experience

- Qualitative investigation to understand the experience of mothers participating in the craft group
- Semi-structured interviews with mothers following participation in the groups
- Interviews recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Interview data coded by research team independently and then compared across researchers
- Coded data further using thematic analysis

Research at the Homeless Shelter

- Results obtained – leisure pursuits
- Interviews completed with three mothers
- Each interviewed coded separately by each member of the research team
- Three themes emerged from the data
 - Craft experience
 - Perceived benefits
 - External factors

Research at the Homeless Shelter

- Infant Massage – lived experience
 - Use of a standardized measure of parental stress before the start of infant massage classes (Parental Stress Inventory – Short Form)
 - Mothers attended the group sessions
 - Semi-structured interview to determine the experience of the class and the use of infant massage in everyday childcare tasks

Research at the Homeless Shelter

- Infant Massage
 - PSI-SF scores were at the higher end of the normal range but not in the clinically elevated range upon pre-test administration
 - Mothers did not consistently attend the sessions
 - Various scheduling changes were tried to provide an opportunity for more mothers but limited participation
 - Challenges in scheduling and interviews could not be completed

Challenges to intervention research

Time constraints as graduate students
Environmental constraints since the shelter expects families to be out of the shelter during the day to search for housing and employment
Transient population - since it is an emergency shelter, families can only be at the shelter for a maximum of 3 months
Contact with families to create a connection

Application to Practice

Mothers in the craft group appreciated the opportunity to engage in leisure pursuits
Engaging in leisure pursuits is restorative and meaningful
Mothers reported the crafts were personally beneficial and offered a means to engage in activities with their children

Suggestions for future investigations

How to improve research projects at the shelter
What are the "lessons learned"?

- Necessary to be flexible
- Leisure is a valued occupation
- Need for further study of homeless population

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Questions?

Thank you to CFOT for the small grant funding for these investigations

Thank you to the participants

Thank you to the emergency shelter for the support

OTAC 2018 Panel Presentation
Session 71: Innovative Investigations at a Family Homeless Shelter

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