



A Qualitative Study Exploring the Lived Experiences of Occupational Therapy Practitioners in Cardiac Rehabilitation

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Introduction

BACKGROUND

- Cardiovascular disease is a prevalent and deadly condition that individuals in the United States face
- Heart disease can impede occupational performance
- One way to decrease symptoms and improve occupational performance is through an individualized treatment plan known as cardiac rehabilitation
- Physical, vocational, social, and psychological functioning is targeted in cardiac rehabilitation
 - Done so through patient education, exercise, and lifestyle management
- Occupational therapy (OT) can help to improve the lives of individuals with heart disease through meaningful activities and interventions

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do registered occupational therapists within the United States practicing cardiac rehabilitation help individuals with heart disease improve their occupational performance?

- The purpose of this project is to explore the lived experiences of occupational therapists working in cardiac rehabilitation.
- Specifically exploring their routine practice, barriers they faced, and support they wished to have.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this session, participants will be able to....

1. Gain an understanding of the supports that occupational therapists feel are needed cardiac rehabilitation.
2. Obtain knowledge of the barriers that occupational therapists working in cardiac care are facing.

Methods

- This research project was submitted and approved by the University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board prior to contacting potential participants.
- One on one semi-structured interviews completed on Zoom
 - Interview questions intended to explore occupational therapists' experiences and perspectives regarding rehabilitation experiences, barriers to practice, and personal perspective of most effective interventions in cardiac care
 - Interviews recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Data was analyzed in-depth using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) for common themes and individual experiences (Smith et al., 2022)

Participants

- Registered and licensed occupational therapist with experience in cardiac care
- Exclusions were not made based on age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, or number of years of experience in cardiac care
- Initial participant identified through professional networking
 - Other participant identified through snowball sampling
- Two total participants
- Each assigned a study number to protect their identity

Results

PARTICIPANTS

- Two registered and licensed occupational therapists
- Female
- White, non-Hispanic
- 22-35 years of age
- Highest level of Degree: Masters of Occupational Therapy
- Two or more years of experience in occupational therapy
- Received training related to cardiac care

THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

- Theme 1: Challenges Faces as an OT in Cardiac Care and Supports Needed
 - Subtheme 1a: Advanced Providers Attitudes as Perceived by OT
 - One of the biggest barriers that participants faced was that there were healthcare workers, specifically advanced providers, who did not know what OT was
 - Participants expressed frustration and lack of respect for OT's professional opinion by advanced providers
 - Subtheme 1b: There is A Lack of Research
 - Participants claimed there was a lack of research for interventions and a lack of interventions to show other professions why occupational therapy is important in cardiac care
 - Subtheme 1c: Education is Needed on What OT is
 - Both participants identified education being the biggest need to improve cardiac care
 - It is believed that advanced providers need education on what OT is and how OT can help patients in an effort to improve some of the barriers to practice that OTs in cardiac care are facing
- Theme 2: A Need for Co-treatment Between OT and PT
 - Subtheme 1a: OT and PT are Beneficial When Working Together in Cardiac Care
 - Both disciplines were identified as needed to help the other discipline make their interventions happen
 - Co-treating is effective for the patient to understand OT better
 - Subtheme 1b: OT Can Feel Overshadowed by PT
 - Advanced providers are only focused on PT and getting the patient up walking, leaving OT to feel unimportant
 - PT is not to blame for this feeling of being overshadowed
 - Advanced providers trust the opinion of PT over OT

Discussion

- Previous studies align with the findings from the current study that there is a lack of research regarding OT interventions in CR
- More research is needed to support the need for OT in CR and the role of OT
- Lack of research could explain the misunderstanding of OT
- Interprofessional education is needed to educate providers and other professions working alongside OT
- Education may also be needed on referral process

Discussion continued

LIMITATIONS AND AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

- Small sample size
- More time needed to conduct interviews/await responses
- Email vs phone correspondence
- Larger geographic region of participants
- Interview guide with specific order of questions to prevent leading

Conclusion

IMPLICATIONS

- The field of occupational therapy should consider establishing what occupational therapy's role is in cardiac care
- The misunderstanding of what OT is contributes to practitioner's feeling overlooked, unimportant, and not respected
- Occupational therapists in cardiac rehabilitation are facing barriers to practice caused by a lack of research

FUTURE RESEARCH

- More research is needed on what occupational therapy interventions are effective in cardiac rehabilitation
- This study could be more beneficial to the profession if done on a larger scale with more participants

References

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