

Occupational therapy in carceral settings: Qualitative study of practitioner experiences & perspectives

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Introduction

Research shows occupational therapy within the carceral state can fill critical service gaps. [3,10,12]

Occupational therapy (OT) has been slow to delineate scope of practice & role in the carceral system. [8, 9, 10]

Evidence base still forming & availability of assessment tools specific to carceral system practice areas limited. [2-6, 8-9, 11]

Aim: to understand occupational therapy practitioners' (OTPs) perspectives & experiences relative to evaluations, interventions, & OT role in the carceral state

Purpose: to identify what OTPs are currently doing in context of practice to further inform development of resources to support OT practice in the carceral state

Qualitative Research Methods

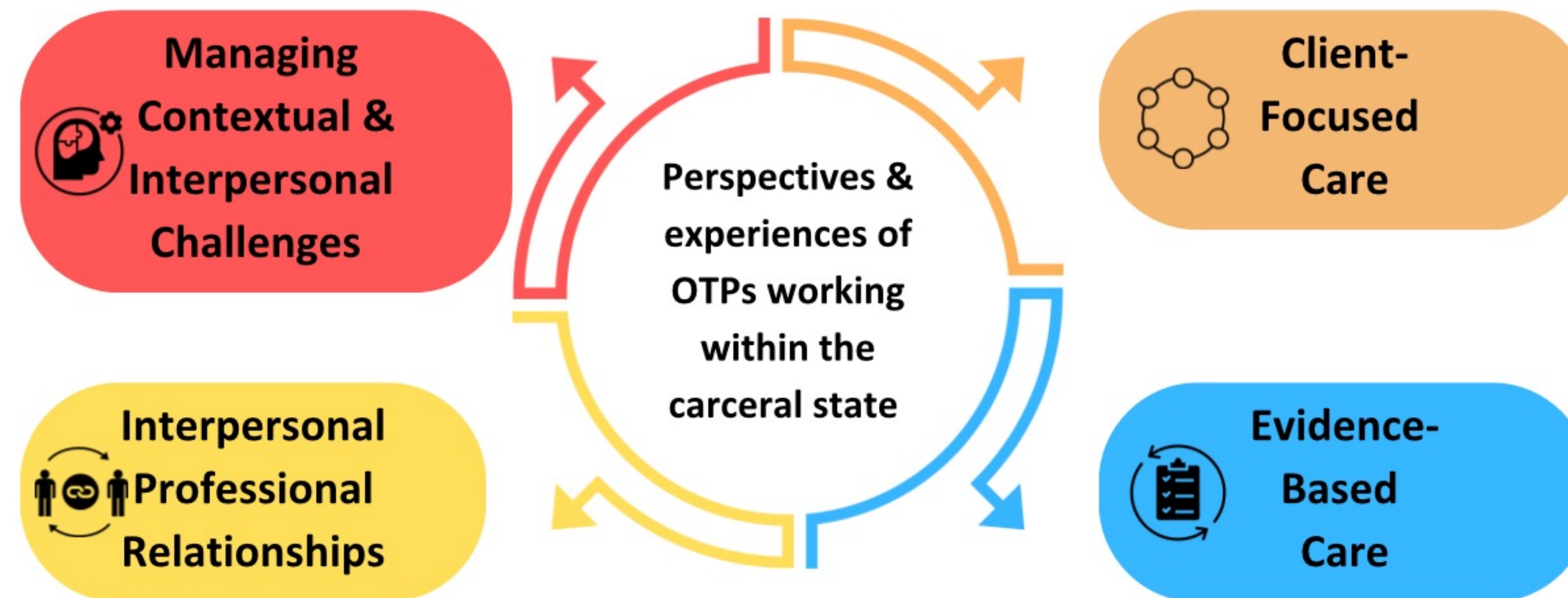
- **Semi-structured interviews**
- **Line-by-line coding** (2 independent coders; 3rd for consensus)
- **Thematic analysis** used to categorize participants' experiences & perspectives relative to OT role, evaluations, & interventions

Participants

Inclusion Criteria: OTP, OT/s or OTA/s with minimum 3 months experience providing re-entry services, 18+, lives in the US, speaks English

Sample Size: 7 OTPs
Gender: 7 females
Age: average 27.5 years old (23 years- 33 years)
Experience: average 16 months (3 mos. – 3 yrs.)
States (6): MI, HI, CA, OH, IN, MO
Practice Settings (5): Prison, Jail, Juvenile Detention, Community, Conditional Release

Results



- Advocacy: self & OT Role
- Systemic Barriers
- Restrictive environment
- Inter-professional resources
- OT capacities
- Lack of clinical resources
- Setting-specific challenges

- Inter-professional communication
- Therapeutic relationship
- Using play/leisure to facilitate relationship
- Educating staff
- Inter-professional collaboration

- Recognize impact of cognition & trauma
- Address emotional regulation & sensory needs before cognitive tasks
- Guided-discovery [7] problem solving
- Flexible evaluation methods & diverse range of assessments
- Practice Models & Frames of Reference

- Advocacy for clients
- Client-led & centered
- Choice
- Holistic
- Trauma-Informed
- Activity analysis & grading
- Preparing for the future
- Flexible & adaptable

Related forms of Professional Reasoning

Pragmatic Reasoning	Involves attending to contextual factors that inhibit or facilitate therapy, including practice context & practitioner's personal context ^[1]
Interactive Reasoning	Used to make & sustain human connections to encourage, motivate, & develop understanding of client's culture/worldview to engage in collaborative problem solving ^[1]
Procedural Reasoning	Way in which therapist considers & uses intervention routines for identified conditions based in science &/or culture/habits of setting ^[1]
Conditional Reasoning	Process of using all forms of clinical reasoning, flexibly responding to changes & imagining client trajectories to anticipate future story ^[1]

Participant Quotes
Assessments
Interventions
Theories



Discussion

Findings show complex experiences & perspectives of OTs in justice-based settings. As members of interprofessional care team, OTPs can fill critical service gaps by using unique skills to address, multiple areas of need, offering education, managing aspects of the environment, & building strong interpersonal professional relationships with clients/interprofessional team. Results supported by current literature on professional reasoning in OT.

Pragmatic: navigating the broad challenges & facilitators a key component of OT in carceral system

Interactive: trust, recognition of power dynamics/positionality, & trauma informed approach essential in developing strong therapeutic relationships

Procedural: necessity of understanding effects of cognitive impairments, value of activity analysis, focus on guided-discovery problem solving, need to address emotional regulation, sleep, & sensory needs.

Conditional: constant need to be flexible; simultaneously considering client's past, present, & future context, holding a hopeful 'future story' for the client

Conclusion

Findings provide a road map & considerations for OT practice in the carceral system. Specific resources & tools should be developed to support practitioners. Future research should be conducted to further examine professional reasoning in this practice area.

Limitations: small sample size leading to limited generalizability, decreased dependability due to only using interview methodology, small research team, potential researcher bias in analysis & interpretation of data

Future Directions: larger sample size, multiple methods of data collection, focus specifically on professional reasoning



References: Scan QR code
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