

EMPOWER: An Occupational Therapy Program for Survivors of Human Trafficking

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BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The purpose of this capstone project was to develop an occupational therapy program for survivors of human trafficking, in order to expand the current OT program within Call to Freedom's service delivery model. Human trafficking is a global, public health crisis endangering individuals of all races, genders, and ages. The complex trauma associated with a trafficking experience has the potential to create devastating consequences on ones' overall health and wellbeing. The physical, emotional, and psychological trauma survivors face often leads to dysfunction and lack of engagement in meaningful occupations. Extreme restriction of freedom often results in severe occupational deprivation, leading to occupational performance deficits and long-term instability of roles and behaviors (Cerny, 2016).

METHODS

Needs Assessment

Prior to developing *EMPOWER*, a needs assessment was completed to determine areas of need and the feasibility of expanding the current OT program. The needs assessment consisted of client and staff surveys regarding occupational performance problems, client observations, a SWOT analysis, and administration of the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) (Law et al., 2014)

OT Service Delivery

Based on the results of the needs assessment, *EMPOWER* was designed and implemented. OT interventions were both client-centered and occupation-based to ensure individualized care was given. OT sessions were delivered in both individual and group settings. Based on the results of the measures used in the needs assessment, OT interventions were designed in the areas of health management and maintenance, community mobility, personal care, rest and sleep, work, and leisure participation. The six guiding principles of Trauma-Informed Care were integrated into OT service delivery (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018).

IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Due to the holistic, client-centered nature of occupational therapy, these practitioners play an integral role in navigating the recovery process with survivors of human trafficking. OT's have the clinical expertise required to identify occupational performance problems and collaborate with survivors to overcome these challenges.

The results of the *EMPOWER* program support the involvement of OT services in human trafficking related trauma recovery. This preliminary data indicates that OT interventions may be beneficial for survivors reintegrating into daily life. Although the results are not statistically significant, clients demonstrated improved occupational performance and satisfaction in meaningful occupations.

Further research regarding the effectiveness of OT services for survivors of human trafficking is strongly encouraged, as resources available for this population are limited. Further education regarding the nature of human trafficking is also needed, in order to increase awareness and improved quality of care provided to survivors.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The Model of Human Occupational (MOHO) guided the development and implementation of *EMPOWER*. MOHO, originally developed by Kielhofner and Burke (1982), described the human as the being made up of three subsystems: volition, habituation, and performance skills. The interaction between the person and his or her environment is described as an "open system." The environment responds to the person's "output" (behaviors), and the person adapts his or her output accordingly (Kielhofner & Burke, 1982) MOHO was used as a guiding framework as the goal of *EMPOWER* is that survivors of human trafficking will establish healthy, balanced roles, routines, and habits through engagement in occupations the client finds valuable. Interventions are based on occupations the client identifies as valuable to increase engagement in program. The individual's volition and positive feedback from the environment serve as the means for change.

The Behavioral/ Cognitive Behavioral theory was also used as a guide to develop and implement *EMPOWER*. Key principles of this theory that are integrated into *EMPOWER* include relaxation strategies and the elimination of distorted thoughts (Ikiugu, 2007). Throughout *EMPOWER*, the client explores relaxation strategies, in order to manage symptoms of anxiety, PTSD, and depression. The client also becomes educated on the process of eliminating maladaptive thought processes and irrational beliefs, leading to more positive thoughts and behaviors.

Dunn's Sensory Processing Model was used to evaluate client's ability to self-regulate and modulation skills. Dunn describes behavioral responses to sensory input as poor registration, sensation seeking, sensitivity to stimuli, and sensation avoiding (Dunn, 1997). This model provides insight regarding sensory processing behaviors and strategies for improving one's ability to self-regulate. Interventions are designed to increase the client's awareness regarding their sensory processing patterns and provide education for improving self-regulation ability and modulation skills.

RESULTS / CONCLUSIONS

Pre and post test scores of the COPM are provided in Table 1 below. The client identifies their five most important occupations, then rates his or her perceived occupational performance and satisfaction regarding that performance. Ratings are provided are reported on a ten-point scale. Averages are figured based on the individual performance and satisfaction scores of the client's five most important occupations. Although four out of five participants reported improved occupational performance and satisfaction, a Wilcoxon- Signed Rank test determined the improved values were not statistically significant. (Performance: $p = .345$; Satisfaction: $p = .138$)

Results of Canadian Occupational Performance Measure

Participant	Average	Average	Average	Average
	Performance	Satisfaction	Performance	Satisfaction
	1	1	2	2
1	7.2	6.6	7.6	7.2
2	8.6	8	7.4	6.8
3	6.6	5.8	6.8	8
4	4.2	4	5.2	5.6
5	7.8	6	9.2	9.2

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