

Spring 4-14-2022

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Recommended Citation

Saunders, F., Truog, H., & Griggs-Stapleton, L. (2022, April 14). The Intersection of Breastfeeding Dyads and the Impact on Perinatal Mental Health. Poster presented at the Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium, University of St Augustine for Health Sciences. Retrieved from <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstones-spring2022/4>

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The Intersection of Breastfeeding Dyads and Impact on Perinatal Mental Health

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BACKGROUND

Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders are amongst one of the most common obstetric complications (Wisner et al., 2013). The transition to motherhood involves physical, psychological, social, and psychosocial changes due to the changes that occur transitioning from pregnancy to the postpartum period (Mazor-Karsenty, 2020; Barnekow, 2010). As a woman transitions from pregnancy to the postpartum period the individual roles, occupational identity, and occupational routines maybe be challenged by internal and external factors (Slootjes et al., 2016).

PROBLEM

There is a lack of evidence-based research to support the role of occupational therapy in perinatal/postpartum care, specifically in the approaches to practice with breastfeeding dyads and how this co-occupation impacts perinatal mental health.

PURPOSE

To explore occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) confidence levels, opinions, and approaches to practice specific to the interplay of the breastfeeding dyad and the impact on perinatal mental health.

Objectives:

- Determine the confidence levels, approached to practice, and opinions of OTPs in addressing the intersection of breastfeeding dyads and impact on perinatal mental health with the perinatal/postpartum population.
- Discuss preliminary findings and direction for future research based on results.

METHODS

This descriptive pilot study utilized a snowball recruitment technique through social media to recruit participants. The study consisted of a one time 27-question survey developed by the researcher and the researcher's mentor, recruiting occupational therapists specializing in perinatal/postpartum care with an interest in mental health.

- Direct messaging and posting on social media (Facebook, Instagram, websites)
- 25 participant's total
- 16 participants meeting inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Participants required to have more than 2 years practicing in the specific niche area of perinatal/postpartum care

Survey distribution week 1:

The survey was distributed to private Facebook groups (OT Lactation Community, Occupational Therapy in Postpartum Care, OTs for Pelvic Health) and AOTA Women's Health Community of Practice at week 1 following IRB approval.

Survey distribution after week 1:

Upon changes and approval to the IRB for recruitment techniques, the survey was distributed consistently and frequently by direct messaging individuals on Instagram and Facebook until March 11, 2022.

Survey questions focusing on:

- Background
- Area of practice
- Levels of agreement
- Levels of confidence
- Option for participants to provide additional comments

Theoretical Frameworks:

- Biopsychosocial Model
- Occupational Adaptation (OA)

RESULTS

Research Questions

- How are OT professionals addressing perinatal mental health with breastfeeding clients?
- What are the confidence levels of OT professionals in providing evidence-based practice with breastfeeding dyads and perinatal mental health?
- What other educational resources have OT professionals sought out to practice in perinatal/postpartum care?
- Were perinatal/postpartum topics included in OT education?

Data Analysis Tools

Qualitative and quantitative data reported

- Qualtrics Survey Website and data analysis embedded into website.
- Data analysis includes descriptive statistics for quantitative data.
- Identifying themes in the additional comments provided by participants for qualitative data.

Future Directions

- Continue collecting data to increase number of participants for future publication.
- Future research focusing on exploring the OT process with OTPs working with breastfeeding dyads.

Preliminary Findings

- OT professionals are addressing perinatal mental health through specializing in specific areas of women's health such as pelvic health, lactation, perinatal mental health, mom and baby groups, doula services, and infant feeding.
- OTPs specializing in these specific areas feel very confident or extremely confident in addressing topics related to breastfeeding, infant feeding, and perinatal mental health.
- Common educational resources OTPs have sought out to practice in perinatal/postpartum care are reading research literature, PMH Certifications, webinars, podcasts, the IBCLC pathway, doula certification, and pelvic health education.
- Participants report having to rely on the contributions of other allied health professionals to seek better understanding of perinatal/postpartum mental health considerations and breastfeeding-dyad considerations.
- Most participants somewhat disagree (43.75%) or strongly disagree (31.25%) that they feel AOTA actively supports and promotes the co-occupation of infant feeding and breast-feeding dyads as an important aspect of the occupational identity for women and families.

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