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The Role of Occupational Therapy in Unplanned Motherhood

Cierra Stewart

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, c.stewart1@usa.edu

Karen Park

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, kpark@usa.edu

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The Role of Occupational Therapy in Unplanned Motherhood

Cierra Jae Stewart, OTS; Karen Park, OTD, OTR/L, BCP

BACKGROUND

For women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy, the thought of becoming a mother can increase stress and affect the mother's mental health. Maternal adjustment can include depression, anxiety, worry, stress, and happiness (Mihelic et al., 2016). The impact that this new role has effects daily demands, leading to a disruption in occupational engagement, environmental changes, and overall less time for the mother (Horne et al., 2005).

PROBLEM

There is currently not a well-defined role for occupational therapy within pregnancy medical clinics to support women experiencing unplanned pregnancy and their transition to motherhood.

PURPOSE

To provide care to new moms and support, educate, provide resources, train, and care for the mother both prenatal and postnatal as they transition into this new role of motherhood.

Learning Objectives:

1. Conduct a needs assessment
2. Identify the gaps in services provided to new mothers
3. Learn what services are currently provided to new mothers and what professional work with women experiencing unplanned pregnancy

Outcome Objectives:

1. Use the findings to develop a program that meets the needs of women experiencing unplanned pregnancy in their transition to motherhood

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Themes:

- Lack of time management skills
- Occupational disruption
- Lack of sleep and self-care skills
- Balancing multiple roles
- Lack of occupational balance
- Lack of time for self

Observations:

- Enjoy discussion
- Find support through conversation
- Cultural norms. Mental health is a low priority in Hispanic culture. Many pressures placed on the mother.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

6-week Occupational Therapy Group Program with a focus on mental health. Incorporated *The Sensory Connection Program: Curriculum for Self-Regulation* (2015) by Karen M. Moore.

1. Goal Setting
2. Crisis Intervention
3. Healthy Sleep
4. Stress Management
5. Healthy Ways to Feel Good
6. Balancing Work, Rest & Play

Bilingual Curriculum and Materials in English and Spanish.

TESTIMONY

"I really appreciate her giving us tools to push ourselves and be motivated to achieve our goals...and learning to take care of our MENTAL HEALTH."

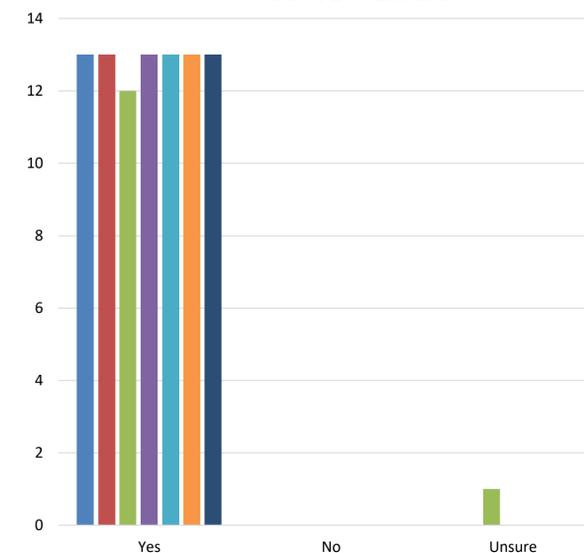
- Participant of program

RESULTS

| Themes | Background | Quotes from Participants about Strategies Learned |
|---|--|---|
| Occupational balance | Women experiencing unplanned motherhood may find it hard to balance occupational demands between role as mother and work role or individual role for example. | "To balance all the work that has to be done at work with some time that I have to dedicate to myself and my husband." "To manage my work and rest and play and to learn how to communicate to my husband better." "To balance my day with my children and my husband." |
| Support | Mothers with greater amounts of social and familial support are linked to higher levels of positive maternal adjustment (Mihelic et al., 2016). | "Joining a community with others that are going through similar situations is so important and essential. It creates a sense of belonging and a support system." "That I'm not alone and I can get help and resources." |
| Stress management | New moms can experience an overwhelming amount of stress, especially when their pregnancy is unplanned. | "The stress is more manageable. It helped me a lot the way Cierra taught us to destress." "I have had more patience for work, my kids and home." "Taking a break to breathe and stretch when I start to feel overwhelmed." "How the breathing skills that I have learned have really helped me a lot." |
| Prioritizing mental health & self-care | Women experiencing unplanned pregnancy are at higher risks for depression during and after pregnancy (Musckens et al., 2022). Participants identified that their culture does not prioritize mental health or self-care. | "That we have to take care of ourselves and make time for ourselves as moms." "Becoming more aware of my needs." "Taking the time to assess my mental health and making time for myself." "I try to prioritize myself a lot more and take care of myself as a whole." "Not feeling guilt for taking time for myself." |
| Confidence | May be low, possibly because they don't feel equipped or because others have put them down or responded poorly to their news of pregnancy. | "My insecurities have changed and I have a more positive outlook." "Before doubting myself I remember that I am a good mom and I am doing a good job." "My mindset has changed." |

- I have learned how to take care of my mental health through this program.
- I have learned about self-care and incorporated self-care activities into my routine.
- Has it become easier to manage daily routines?
- Through this program my self-confidence has increased.
- Through this program my knowledge has increased.
- I have learned how to manage my stress and have utilized stress management techniques.
- I feel more supported after participating in the program.

SURVEY RESULTS



References



Program Protocol & Curriculum



Program Protocol & Curriculum Continued

DISCUSSION

The program was successful, and results show that the participants did benefit greatly from OT services. Increases in mental health were recorded and participants felt equipped with new skills to continue to prioritize their mental health and well being. Bilingual curriculum was a strength of the program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OT

The results indicate a great need for OT working with this population. OTs can support women through this program by providing mental health intervention, practicing client centered care, providing resources, equipping women with tools and strategies, self-advocacy training, etc.

Survey Results

