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Jasmine Shahin

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

Pam Kasyan-Howe

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences - Miami, pkasyanhowe@usa.edu

Kristin Domville

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

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Occupational Therapy in Youth Violence: An Occupation-Based Program for At-Risk Youth

Jasmine Shahin, OTDS

Doctoral Coordinators: Dr. Pamela Kasyan-Howe, OTD, OTR/L; Dr. Kristen Domville, DrOT, OTR/L

BACKGROUND

- At-risk youth are disadvantaged in engaging in safe and health-promoting activities due to limited resources or opportunities (Farajzadegan et al., 2018; Gallagher et al., 2015a).
- Factors including socioeconomic status (SES), social support from family/friends, and mental health impact on an individual's opinions, attitudes, and interests as well as their occupational choices (Gallagher et al., 2015b).
- Poor social participation and self-regulation skills impair initiating and maintaining positive relationships and the ability to cope and adapt to the social environment (Leigers et al., 2016; Mcdaniel et al., 2016).
- When constantly faced with traumatic or significant life challenges, at-risk youth are more likely to have lower self-efficacy or beliefs in their capabilities (Leigers et al., 2016; Mcdaniel et al., 2016).
- OTs can further develop social participation and self-regulation skills; however, they are underutilized on intervention teams for the at-risk youth population (Leigers et al., 2016; Parsons & Saffer, 2018).

PROBLEM

The problem is children and adolescents who participate in youth violence do so because of poorly developed social participation and self-regulation skills (Cid, 2016; Forrest-Bank et al., 2016; Shea & Jackson, 2014). A second problem is that OT used to fill in the role of mental health professionals, but now they do not (Baltag et al., 2015; Cahill & Egan, 2017b).

PURPOSE

To implement an occupation-based program to improve social participation and self-regulation skills in at-risk youth to prevent youth violence and decrease maladaptive behaviors.

Project-based Objectives

- Conduct a needs assessment at Covenant House Florida to learn the types of services provided, social participation skills currently taught, and by which disciplines by 1 month of my program development project
- Develop and implement occupation-based program to improve social participation skills and self-regulation skills for at-risk youth
- Develop and collect assessment of the program at the end of the 8-week program
- Educate staff on an occupation-based program to improve social participation and self-regulation skills for at-risk youth by 4 months of the program

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METHODS

- Covenant House Florida
- Open group; voluntary participation
- Heterogenous
- Ages 16-21 years old

Assessment Tools

- Survey questionnaires after each session
- General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES)
 - Pre-, mid- & post-measure
- Social Skills Assessment
 - Pre-, mid- & post-measure

Development & Implementation

- Suggestions and interests from youth and staff were considered
- Program development occurred prior to and during first 2 weeks of implementation phase
- Program held for 8 weeks, 2x a week for 1-hour sessions
- Activity, open-discussion, survey questionnaire

Program Activities

Painting	Monopoly
Vision boards	Clue
2 Team building exercises	Movie Synopsis
Cooking lab	Tie-dye shirts
Charades	Social bingo
Survival simulation	Hedbanz
Debate	Field day
Gardening	

Theoretical Frameworks

- Model of Human Occupation (MOHO)
- Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)
- Social and Emotional Learning Process (SEL)

Program Outcomes

Population Sample: Participants shared similarities within the at-risk youth population described in the literature review

Strengths: group activities allowed for increased engagement, minimal negative behaviors appreciated, similar interests were shared, opportunities to problem-solve, decision-make, and listen to opinions of others.

Limitations: open group vs closed group, adolescent stage, engagement in discussion, times of sessions, duration of program/sessions, dishonesty in measures, COVID guidelines

Participants & Responses: 79 survey questionnaires collected. 37 participants total not counting duplicates.

Items 1-4 on Survey Questionnaires	Total Participant Responses from Sessions 1-16			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	33	41
2	1	10	34	34
3	4	7	32	36
4	2	15	32	30

Conclusion & Implications for OT

Highlights how OT could help the at-risk youth population. Providing activities and occupations based on the youths' interests provides a means to motivate and engage them to participate which also helps to improve their mental health and self-awareness. The occupation-based program provided activities that were engaging and pleasurable for the youth, thus allowing the youth to participate in safe and healthy leisure, social participation, and play occupations.

More advocacy on the profession of OT needs to be made aware of and how mental health is a component for OT interventions, especially when helping at-risk youth.

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