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Improving Occupational Engagement: An Occupation-Based Virtual Program For Caregivers of Individuals with Dementia

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BACKGROUND

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), dementia is “the leading cause of disability and dependency among older people worldwide” (WHO, 2020). Due to this, individuals with dementia are in constant need of care to stay safe. Each year, more than 16 million Americans provide more than a total of 17 billion hours of unpaid care for family and friends with Alzheimer's disease or other related dementias (CDC, 2019). As a result, many informal caregivers experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, and caregiver burden (Amato et al., 2021). Occupational therapists are qualified to help ameliorate the unmet needs of informal caregivers of individuals with dementia through leisure engagement. However, the literature shows that there are not enough programs available to informal caregivers of individuals with dementia that focus on leisure engagement (Lee et al., 2020; Regan et al., 2019).

PROBLEM

The problem is that informal caregivers of individuals with dementia are not participating in occupation-based programs that incorporate leisure to improve occupational engagement.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the program development type project is to implement an occupation-based program for informal caregivers of individuals with dementia that incorporates leisure to help improve occupational engagement.

METHODS

The program development type project relied on the use of Zoom as a virtual platform. This allowed informal caregivers of individuals with dementia to participate in a 5-week program where sessions were held 1x/week for 30 minutes.

- Originally 10-15 caregivers were envisioned to participate in the program
- Over 20 caregivers were invited
 - Via e-mail, Facebook support groups, through the phone, and use of flyers.
- 6 caregivers participated in the program
 - English and Spanish speakers
 - Age range: 65-70 years old
 - No restrictions were placed on age, gender, ethnicity, or years of caregiving experience.

Topics covered in the weekly sessions:

Leisure Awareness

Leisure Appreciation

- Laughter Yoga
- Dance it Out
- Arts & Crafts
- Leisure Demonstration

Post-session survey: 6 questions were delivered using Google Forms.

- Questions focused on whether the session was engaging, content was easy to understand, session was beneficial, and future areas of improvement.

Program effectiveness survey: 15 questions were delivered using Google Forms.

- Questions focused on level of satisfaction with the program, whether the program improved the caregiving experience, etc.

Theoretical Framework:

- Model of Human Occupation (MOHO)

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Population Sample: Caregivers shared similarities with the population described in the literature review.

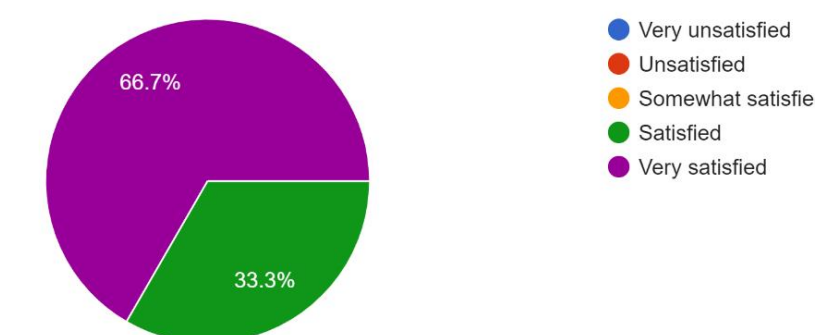
Strengths: Individual virtual program sessions allowed for a more client-centered approach, better assessment of home environment and opportunity to make modifications when necessary.

Limitations: Virtual setting utilized to conduct the program, number of caregivers who participated, kind of activities that were implemented, and the length and duration of the program.

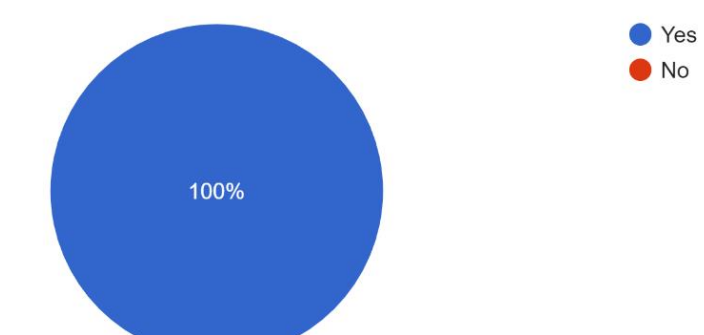
Participants and Responses: A total of 6 caregivers (4 Spanish speaking and 2 English speaking) completed a post-session survey at the end of each week, except for the final week when completing a program effectiveness survey.

Data collected demonstrated the following:

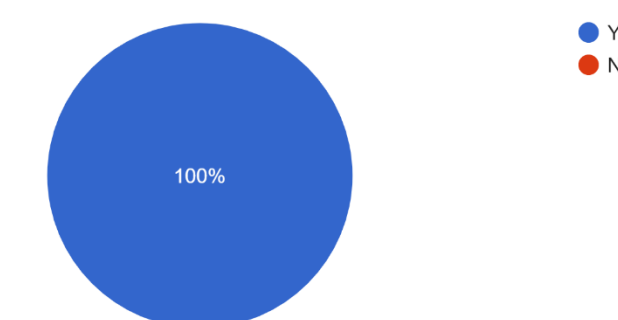
How satisfied are you with the program?
6 responses



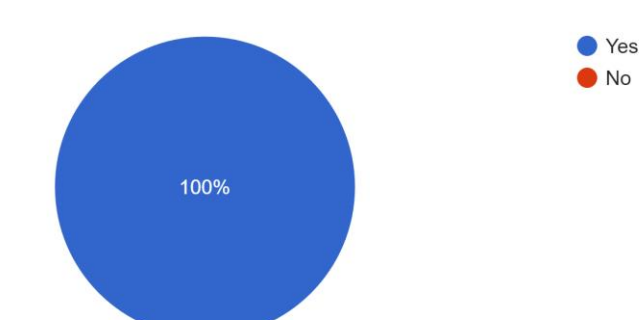
Was the program meaningful and engaging?
6 responses



The program helped improve my engagement in leisure activities?
6 responses



The program helped improve my caregiving experience.
6 responses



Conclusion and Implications for OT

Emphasizes the exceptional role of OT in promoting leisure engagement. The implementation of leisure activities that were meaningful and engaging to informal caregivers was significant since it helped motivate and encourage caregivers to participate in the program. Increased leisure engagement helped ameliorate the negative ramifications of caring for a loved one with dementia. Further advocacy efforts must take place to highlight OT's positive impact in the promotion of leisure engagement, especially considering the caregiver population.

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