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Exploring a Piloted Occupational Therapy Toolkit for Military Children and Youth in Addressing Occupational Performance

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Exploring a Piloted Occupational Therapy Toolkit for Military Children and Youth in Addressing Occupational Performance

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Background

- In the United States (U.S.) there are more family members than military personal in the Department of Defense force with 62.8% of the 2,619,788 family members being children (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019)
- Children of active-duty service members experience unique challenges compared to same age peers due to military life and culture that create occupational disruptions (Cramm & Tam-Seto, 2018; Huebner, 2019; Kaelppler & Lucier-Greer, 2020)
- 52% of military families say that children's mental health has worsened due to Covid-19 with only 51% of military families reporting they can access high quality mental health care for their children (Blue Star Families, 2020)

Problem

There is not an evidence-informed assessment for occupational therapists to utilize for military connected children and youth who face social, academic, psychological, and behavioral health problems secondary to parental military service (Cram & Tam-Seto, 2018; Moore et al., 2017; Ohye & Bui, 2016; St John & Fenning, 2020).

Purpose

Explore the feasibility of an evidence-based screening tool that can be used by occupational therapists to screen for occupational performance deficits and address mental health concerns in military connected children and youth.

Research Questions:

- What do occupational therapists see as the barriers to the implementation of the *Educator Toolkit to Increased Awareness & Support to Military Children in Schools*?
- What segments of the toolkit (Cover the Bases, Conversation Starters, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) did occupational therapists perceive as the most useful sections to address occupational performance?

Theoretical Framework

Donabedian model (Donabedian, 1966)

Three Generation Model (Ohye et al., 2015)

Methods

Design: Qualitative study

Recruitment: Snowball sampling method, Email, Social Media, and CommunOT

Participants:

- Licensed OT's who work with military connected children and youth.
- U.S. and its territories including Armed forces Americas, Europe, and Pacific.

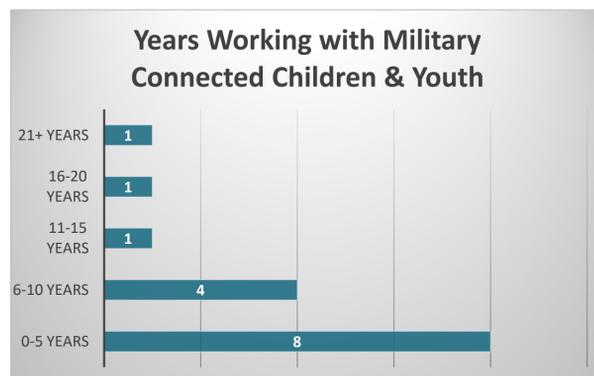
Data collection: Virtual interview via Zoom

Participants completed a virtual consent, introduction to the toolkit, and a semi structured interview (N=15)

- General Outpatient : 1
- Schools: 5
- Pediatric Home Health: 2
- Outpatient Pediatrics: 5
- School & Early Intervention: 2

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using speech recognition software. Transcription analysis followed the Braun and Clarke's phases of thematic analysis utilizing an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



Results

Themes	Examples
Implementation	"...mental health is the most important thing. You can't do anything if you are not paying attention to those types of stressors... in the beginning it was hard because I didn't have some. I mean, it would have been great to have when I first started working because I didn't have any military affiliation, so I didn't understand the stressors. I didn't know what to look for... So having all that information in one spot would be really helpful I believe." -Occupational Therapist
Barriers	"I think that that is the barrier to really getting a good picture. It's being able to have that open communication with the family, but also knowing that you're not going to get it all from a questionnaire if you're filling it out yourself as the practitioner." -Occupational Therapist
Mental Health	"I have a few coworkers that aren't OT that have told me before, "Oh, your kid doesn't need services, that's not related". That person isn't an OT. They shouldn't be saying that, but I think that's one barrier for mental health services is understanding what OT is and it's not just the physical aspect, it's the mental aspect of completing those occupations." -Occupational Therapist
Feasibility	"It highlights some of the resources out there. It identified some of the stressors that kids face, how that each phase of the deployment cycle brings its own unique challenges to them and kind of making people aware of what could be triggering in each component... and the strengths and difficulties assessments, highlighted definitely some of the questions that should be there but sometimes I worry that they overlap with other issues and may not be as military specific as they should be." -Occupational Therapist
Adaptations	"...different set of questions to look at. I think it would be more helpful if it just provided strategies for what ways you can support a child like help them create new family routines. Help them create a way to understand what their parent might be experiencing, whether it's like through an activity or journal or whatever" -Occupational Therapist

Conclusion

Appreciated about the toolkit

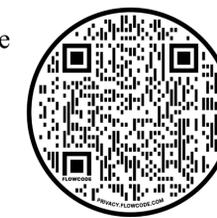
- Resources
- Intent and information
- Categories in the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

Questionnaire requires

- OT perspective
- Open-ended questions
- Developmentally relevant

Additional adaptations

- Different sets of questions that provide an OT lens
- Include transitions and moving
- Consider children with special needs
- Guidelines and approaches



"Occupational therapy practitioners play an important role in mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention with children and youth. Children and youth with or without disabilities or mental illness can benefit from occupational therapy in the schools and community settings. Occupational therapy can help all children develop and maintain positive psychological and social functioning, productive activities, and resilience in the face of adversity" (AOTA, 2020).

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