Providing Occupational Therapy to Those Who Are Homeless: A Beneficial Support

Francesca Petracco

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Providing Occupational Therapy to Those Who Are Homeless: A Beneficial Support

Francesca Petracco
Seton Hall University

Causes and Effects of Being Homeless
- Prolonged sitting, standing, and sleeping in upright positions
- Personal contact in overcrowded shelters
- Extreme heat and cold, lack of protection
- Spread of Tuberculosis (TB)
- Reduced life expectancy
- Decreased functional capacity
- Swelling of feet and legs

What is Occupational Therapy
Occupational Therapy (OT) is the use of assessment and intervention to develop, recover or maintain the meaningful activities or occupations of individuals, groups, or communities.

Linking Identified Performance Problems with OT Practices

Top eight occupational performance problems (n=25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
<th>% of sample identifying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>employment</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active recreation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quiet recreation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finances</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>return to school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal care</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples
- Employment: Beautification of shelters or community organizations through art-based projects
- Relationships: Culturally-oriented activities
- Active & Quiet Recreation: Social skills training and community participation helps secure employment.
- Personal Care: Health and safety management
- Active Recreation: Access to employment opportunities
- Finances: Assistance securing and maintaining housing

Barriers and Areas of Weakness
- Many people who are homeless lack health insurance.
- Goals of intervention should prioritize basic needs.
- Clients have trouble reaching services because of service location.
- Attitudes of health workers limit the number of professionals willing to help those who are homeless.
- Clients are hesitant due to previous experiences.
- Physical health conditions prolong unstable employment.

Statistics
- Baltimore study proves 1/3 of the men in a shelter had arthritis and other musculoskeletal disorders.
- Those who are homeless 15 times more likely than age-matched domiciled patients to have peripheral vascular disease.

San Francisco’s 2017 Homeless Survey:
- 31% of the homeless population had chronic health problems.
- 25% physical disability.
- 12% traumatic brain injury.

A Call for Political Action
- Funding for research
- Healthcare benefits w/integrated primary care
- More referrals to employment agencies
- Information on preventative resources
- Additional advocacy for physically accessible facilities
- Inclusive public spaces where housing status is irrelevant to access
- More universal designs

A Call for Reform in Practice
- Practices apply to needs, desires, and rights of clients
- Practices consider socioeconomic/political factors beyond the control of the client
- New processes:
  - Finding employment, increased follow-up, evaluation of occupational performance once a person becomes housed
- Address knowledge gaps in practice
- Create treatment goals specific to population
- Potential of participatory partnerships
- Understand effective & efficient practices
- Discover new assessment tools & processes

A Call for More Research
- Inclusive public spaces where housing status is irrelevant to access