



INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY AS A DOMAIN OF PRACTICE IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN INDIA: INDIAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS' PERSPECTIVES.

Occupational Therapy

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Spirituality has risen as of considerable recent interest in occupational therapy. Spirituality and occupational therapy is associated with the holistic, person centred approach to care in order to restore a sense of well-being and recognise individual coping strategies. Despite current global economic challenges and healthcare reconfigurations, there appears to be a professional drive not to return to a reductionist model of care delivery. The purpose of the study is to understand views of Occupational therapist on integrating spirituality in Occupational Therapy practice in India.

OBJECTIVE: This qualitative pilot study endeavoured to understand views of Occupational Therapist on integrating spirituality as a domain of practice in Occupational Therapy in India.

STUDY DESIGN: The study design of this study is a cross-sectional, qualitative narrative study design.

METHOD: The qualitative descriptive study included twenty participants (n=20) who are expert in the field of Occupational Therapy (Age mean $\pm$ SD 44 ± 9.88 , in Years) with major inclusion criteria of minimal ten years' experience, were recruited for this study by using non-probability convenient and snow ball sampling method. The study was conducted with Occupational Therapist working in private and public sectors in India. The in-depth semi-structured interviews with senior Occupational Therapists were conducted to explore themes which covered views of Occupational Therapist on Spirituality as a domain of practice in Occupational Therapy in India

RESULT: The themes which are generated as result of this study highlight the views of Occupational Therapists on integration of spirituality as domain of practice in occupational therapy in India.

CONCLUSION: This study explored the current practices of spirituality as domain in occupational therapy in India.

KEYWORDS

Spirituality, Spirituality and religion, Occupational therapy practice

INTRODUCTION:

Spirituality has risen as of considerable recent interest in occupational therapy. Spirituality and occupational therapy is associated with the holistic, person centred approach to care in order to restore a sense of well-being and recognise individual coping strategies. Addressing spirituality through occupational therapy interventions means addressing these areas with the aim of improving the individual's wellbeing (Unruh et al., 2002). Despite current global economic challenges and healthcare reconfigurations, there appears to be a professional drive not to return to a reductionist model of care delivery.

Although most therapy practitioners recognize spirituality as an important aspect of life, integrating a client's personal beliefs, values and spirituality into occupational therapy practice proves problematic because of ambiguity and the large diversity of practitioners' understanding of the notions. Other challenge was spirituality has not been given much importance since a) the lack of a clear definition of spirituality b) the unclear relationship between religion and spirituality.³

The purpose of the study is to understand views of Occupational therapist on integrating spirituality in Occupational Therapy practice in India.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Setting:

The present study was conducted with senior Occupational Therapy practitioners working in India.

Study Design:

The study design of this study is a cross-sectional, qualitative narrative study design.

Participants And Recruitment:

Twenty participants (n=20) who are expert in the field of Occupational Therapy (Age mean $\pm$ SD 44 ± 9.88 , in Years) with major inclusion criteria of minimal ten years' experience (Table 1), were recruited for this study by using non-probability convenient and snow ball sampling method. The study was conducted with Occupational Therapist working in private and public sectors in

India.

Data Collection:

The in-depth semi-structured interviews with senior Occupational Therapists were conducted to explore themes which covered The questions were open ended, and researchers explored the Occupational Therapists' experience to get rich details of the lived experience. Each interview was conducted telephonically on a one-to-one basis and everything was noted in detail which was simultaneously recorded in a single sitting lasting for 35 mins to 1 hour with additional follow-up via telephone as needed. The English language was used to conduct the interview.

Data Analysis:

The analytic process is shown in figure 1. The interviews were taken in English, and were transcribed by author. The interview themes were developed iteratively, starting with the set of research questions by the authors. Codes from the data were identified and defined in an iterative manner. Analysis aimed at describing therapists' current practices in spirituality as domain in Occupational therapy and also their views on integrating spirituality in occupational therapy practice. This resulted in a refinement of the coding framework. The remaining transcripts were coded using this framework

Ethical Issues:

Participation was voluntary and informed written consents were obtained from the participants. Ethical approval was obtained from Institutional Ethics Committee-Goa Medical College, Goa. All results are presented in an anonymous fashion with the least possible identifying information

RESULTS

This paper describes current practices in spirituality as domain in Occupational therapy and also their views on integrating spirituality in occupational therapy practice.

The Findings Described In Following Themes:

It must be acknowledged that this chapter has so far presented a positive view of occupational Therapists embedding spirituality in their daily practice.

Spirituality As A Domain Of Practice In Occupational Therapy

When we asked therapists whether they use spirituality as a domain of practice, they responded that either they brought it up directly or indirectly, while few therapists informed that they were never brought up spirituality in their practice due to various reasons. Other therapists reported that they brought spirituality up directly or indirectly by giving permission to the clients by raising spiritual issues; creating an environment that was conducive to spiritual discussions.

Few therapists reported that how they are assessing spirituality domains into their practice and related challenges.

"At present we are not using any formal assessment tool and also not aware of any assessment tool, which assess spirituality aspect of the person. We use COPM (Canadian Occupational Therapy Performance Measure) which has some components on spirituality. She also said that what she uses is more of a quality of life assessment."

While some spoke about the importance of meditation, time for reflection, and daily personal rituals, therapeutic use of self, playfulness as a medium of intervention in their routine Occupational Therapy practice.

"We use meditation, yoga, relaxation techniques which are helpful in mental health conditions. We need to consider hobbies of patient wherein they forget themselves and feel peaceful."

"At our centre we do counselling wherein we sit with parents and talk to them. We are also introducing practices such as playfulness, mindfulness and reflective practices."

Several participants expressed their views that therapists need to be sensitive to beliefs and values different from their own, as the following examples illustrate

"Sometimes if patients don't believe in themselves, there are times when people don't find that life is meaningful and they feel they are of no help to anyone and that might be their spiritual calling, so we tend to along with their value system and their thought, and try to incorporate where we see that this may help the person"

While one occupational therapist doesn't consider spirituality as a domain of practice in occupational therapy.

"I would say that spirituality is not within our domain because we should know on which path we want to take the people. Especially in case of spirituality a "guru" (master) who can do this....generally in order to achieve spirituality, you should have a master. So it's definitely out of focus (as a domain of practice)"

However, most of them agreed that practitioners should try to incorporate activities into their programs that allow clients to express spiritual needs and concerns. This finding seemed consistent and considers incorporating spirituality into the professional scope of occupational therapy practice. Perhaps it was on a more formal level that the respondents wished that they could devote more attention to issues of spirituality in treatment programs.

We also found that there were few therapists who were never brought up spirituality due to various reasons such as they don't know how to talk about it; don't have language for it other than religious language and aren't comfortable with that; or they don't know information enough about other faiths besides their own to feel or they feel that spirituality is too personal to talk to clients about or they feel that their therapeutic relationships are not of sufficiently long duration to build the trust necessary for these discussions.

One therapist cautiously reported that *"Yes, definitely that is needed but I didn't make any effort to use spirituality in my practice. We don't provide direct intervention for spirituality. So that should not be a domain of practice."*

"I would think it would depend on each patient because this (Spirituality) is very personal. So, unless you have built

therapeutic relationship with the patient, you can't go on to the level of Spirituality."

Few of the respondents were confused, undecided, or disagreed that spirituality holds a viable position in the scope of occupational therapy practice, even though majority agreed that spirituality was an important part of their daily job responsibilities.

One therapist interestingly shared that little is known about spiritual practices amongst practicing therapists and need to include in academic programs.

"Occupational therapist has to guide patient in spirituality and if we (therapists) do not know what it is, then how can we guide them? We have to include "spirituality" at the undergraduate level itself as a part of curriculum and we have to conduct professional development programs."

Occupational Therapists Views On Integrating Spirituality In Practice

According to most of the participants spirituality has been considered essential to holistic patient centred occupational therapy practice, as the ideals of holism are recognised. However, in acute care holism has been considered a challenge owing to the time constraints of practice. Holism was understood to refer to the treatment of individuals a "complex whole beings", and not to isolate individual components of holistic practice.

"Occupational therapy has more holistic approach but historically as a profession we are closely linked to medical or rehabilitation model which believes in reductionism which leads to objective practices rather than subjective holistic practice. And also in Indian context our medical counterpart accepts this objectivity as holistic approaches are not being much used."

"Occupational therapy does not see one aspect of patient we should be more holistic,"

Many of the participants mentioned that occupational therapists should be committed to provide person-centred interventions and also should recognise the importance of therapeutic relationships while addressing patients.

"We can use meditation, Yoga, Therapeutic use of self-etc. activities but at the same time it should come under philosophy of OT."

"As a therapist should be mindful about our own spirituality and may also spirituality while practicing therapeutic use of self but in a covert way."

Occupational Therapy assessment should include discussion on spiritual and religious issues and consider questions assists in acknowledging their uniqueness and exploration of their dreams, values and desires.

"It should be something that is context specific, which would relate to people in our culture in our context. And it might be a little difficult to differentiate between religion and spirituality....So, if you can really capture the spirituality part and not just the religious part, then it might be helpful."

As per most of the Occupational therapist trust is essential to build rapport and person-centred care. Trust can be fostered through active listening and effective communication, essential features of person-centred occupational therapy practice, when undertaking an assessment of a patient's needs. Embedding spirituality in practice can be expressed through listening to patients, giving them time to talk about what is important to them, addressing uncomfortable or deeply personal questions, supporting them in expressing their feelings and concerns and acknowledging diversity. A non-judgemental appreciation and keeping confidentiality of the patient's diverse life experiences can support developing an effective therapeutic relationship, and embedding their beliefs, religious traditions and values in occupational therapy interventions.

They also mentioned about importance of developing a meaningful therapeutic relationship and harnessing the therapeutic use of self is

an essential component of embedding spirituality in occupational therapy practice. Reflection is a key skill for occupational therapists to develop to establish a personal awareness of responses to spiritual issues manifested by patients.

They also added that Occupational therapy interventions can include enabling a person to engage in self-healing activities, for example worship, relaxation, stress management, improving social and life skills, promote autonomy, independence. One therapist cautiously reported that activities such as crochet, gardening, painting in which patients get involved and achieves peace.

"Group therapy, mindfulness reflective practices, support groups are the themes which can be used."

"We need to create a comfortable physical environment may be a relaxed chair or a yoga mat so that the patient feels comfortable. We should be confident and calm when we are discussing this topic with patient but at the same time our religious, spiritual beliefs and goals should not interfere in the practice. We can use meditation, Yoga, Therapeutic use of self-etc. activities but at the same time it should come under philosophy of OT."

"Basically, I think spirituality informs the matrix of the Indian culture. And I also believe that faith is the most driving force or maybe a prognostic factor in any of the disease, maybe medicine or maybe surgery, I think if the person has a faith in a particular soul or a person who is in the process of treating and recovering, I think that drives a lot of recovery process. The rapport building what we do is I think spirituality forms one of the major areas to be addressed."

The Code of Ethics and Standards of Proficiency support person-centred spiritually competent practice by specifically articulating the importance of the occupational therapist, acknowledging the spiritual, religious, faith and beliefs of a patient.

"When we talk about practice or a professional practice, we need to be very cautious about drawing the line between religion and spirituality. But in general, if you talk about existence or spirituality as a human race of human kind, it does prevail with some connotation of religion."

Several participants expressed their views that personal life experiences are important when embedding spirituality in occupational therapy practice; and also understanding and being comfortable with their own expression of spirituality is essential if occupational therapists are to be effective in delivering holistic occupational therapy practice.

In addition to acknowledging the diverse spiritual needs of a patient, occupational therapists are expected to consider the impact of their own spiritual and religious citation of the diverse cultural backgrounds which impact on a patient's needs and the occupational therapist's practice.

"When the therapists are keen on using spirituality, they should be aware of their own knowledge, their beliefs and be able to accept the difference of opinion. I would magnificent somebody who's really spiritual supposed to be a very broad minded person, somebody who can listen and accept that you know, there are different points, different ways of thinking or looking at a situation and they will not be that narrow minded. We as a therapist working in this area needs a lot of self-awareness and reflection. I think these a little more abstract concepts not something which can be defined and kept in a very structured boundary."

"Well, since I'm aware that, you know, I wouldn't push my spiritual thought on somebody else. Yes, I would like to believe that I'm aware of this."

Few therapist spoke about Occupational therapists should not lose sight of the core values and philosophy of their profession that embeds the constructs of spirituality as authentic occupational therapy practice. Some of the therapist mentioned that spirituality is embedded throughout the curriculum, occupational therapy students feel supported in their developing understanding of how spirituality is relevant to their practice.

"There should some questionnaires and self-assessment tools should be available to understand our own (occupational Therapists) spirituality is needed. In occupational therapy profession we should have guidelines to practice spirituality at the student level or can be incorporated as part of the syllabus."

Finally, few therapists also mentioned that embedding spirituality in practice was influenced by organisational and contextual factors.

"I believes that its not only about the OT professional but also the institution where I work other professionals should also be aware of this spirituality domain so this should be used as multidisciplinary approach."

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore Indian Occupational therapists' view on ways to integrating spirituality, as a domain of practice in Occupational therapy in India. This study represents the one of the few qualitative studies on spirituality in occupational therapy practices in India. Hence the entire discussion is being done majority in accordance with western studies.

The major finding of this study is the current practices used by Occupational therapist in the Spirituality domain in India. Most of the participants had positive attitudes in addressing spirituality in occupational therapy practice¹. At the same it also shows that construct of religiosity, attending and supporting religious beliefs, appears to be intrinsically associated with the concept of spirituality. Consequently, therapeutic interventions also emphasise the increased secularisation which may result in a clear differentiation between religiosity and spirituality. This study was found that Occupational Therapists in their practice includes understanding of their own attitudes, beliefs and values towards spirituality; developing effective therapeutic relationship, sensitive to an individual's beliefs, values, connecting experiences; and valuing unique person-centred engagement that give meaning to Purposeful occupations and life situations. They believe in importance of patient-professional engagement and developing effective therapeutic relationships which has been identified as a means of addressing patient's spiritual needs. These findings are supported with previous study on Spirituality as experienced by Occupational Therapists in Practice⁴.

Second major finding of the study was how therapists use spirituality as a domain of practice in Occupational Therapy in India. We found that there were some therapists who brought it up directly. Other therapists reported that they brought spirituality up indirectly by giving permission for clients to raise spiritual issues; creating an environment that was conducive to spiritual discussions. In the middle of the continuum are those circumstances when no one discusses spirituality^{2, 4, and 5}. Some interviewees reported drawing on their religious faith to orient, ground, and give meaning to their work. While some of them spoke about meditation, time for reflection, and daily personal rituals, therapeutic use of self, playfulness, mindfulness, yoga, reiki, pursues hobbies and being peaceful^{2,3,6}.

Third major finding of the study was views of Occupational Therapists on how to incorporate spirituality as a domain of practice in Occupational Therapy in India. We found that most of the therapist suggested spirituality should be considered essential to holistic patient-centred occupational therapy practice, as the ideals of holism are recognized. However, in acute care holism has been considered a challenge owing to the time constraints of practice. They also mentioned about importance of developing a meaningful therapeutic relationship and harnessing the therapeutic use of self is an essential component of embedding spirituality in occupational therapy practice. Reflection is a key skill for occupational therapists to develop to establish a personal awareness of responses to spiritual issues manifested by patients. They also added that Occupational therapy interventions can include enabling a person to engage in self-healing activities, for example worship, relaxation, stress management, improving social and life skills, promote autonomy, independence. One therapist cautiously reported that activities such as crochet, gardening, painting in which patients get involved and achieves peace. These findings are supported with previous study of Jones J concept analysis of spirituality in occupational therapy practice².

I acknowledge the limitations of this study. The relatively small numbers in sample and purposive and snow ball sampling method was aimed at acquiring rich descriptive data, as a result the group of participating occupational therapists is not representative of the general population and, therefore, generalisation of the study findings should be considered with caution. However, it is noted that the findings are consistent with other studies from India and other countries. Thus even though the sample represented a relatively 'informed' group of therapists and this findings of this study indicated the likely large gaps in practicing Spirituality as a domain of practice in India.

The current interest in how and whether spirituality should be considered within occupational therapy highlights the need for an understanding of how therapists are presently incorporating spirituality into practice. This study is a first step in understanding the complexity of spiritual consider

rations in day-to-day practice. We hope that it will generate further discussion and study.

Conclusion

This study explored the current practices of spirituality as domain in occupational therapy in India. This qualitative study also illuminates the views of Occupational therapist on integrating spirituality as domain in occupational therapy in India.

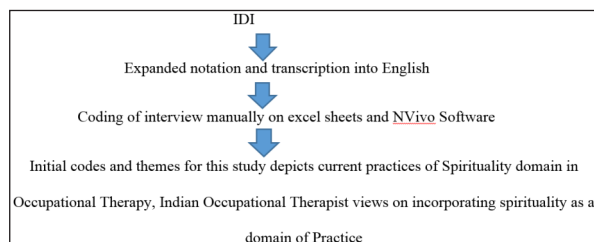
However, having theoretical understanding and desire to practice holistically and incorporate spirituality into care, there is a need for practice guidelines to support implementing theory into practice.

Occupational therapists need to embrace the context, cultural demands and their own philosophy of the profession in order to practice with spiritual competency. This thesis has presented the study exploring how occupational therapists embed spirituality in their daily practice in the context of 21st century healthcare. This study offers a conceptual frameworks and a dynamic model, derived from the study to guide practice, education and research.

ILLUSTRATIONS (Figure and Table)

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics Of Participants In The Study

In-depth interview with Indian Occupational Therapists	Participants	
Total no. of participants		n=20
Gender		n (%)
	Male	n=05 (33%)
	Female	n=10 (67%)
Age	Age range	35-65 (Years)
	Age mean $\pm$ SD	44 $\pm$ 9.88 (Years)
Areas of practice		n (%)
	Academicians	7 (47%)
	Clinicians	8 (53%)
Nationality		Indian



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