

SPOTLIGHT ON OCCUPATION

ISSUE 25, MAY 2019

AUT



Editors (L-R) – Clare Hocking, Margaret Jones & Valerie Wright-St Clair

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Poverty & children's occupations
- Working mothers
- The "switch-on" effect
- Strategies after brain injury
- Occupational Science

WELCOME TO THE 25TH ISSUE OF SPOTLIGHT ON OCCUPATION

This Spotlight on Occupation issue showcases four research projects, undertaken by postgraduate students at the Auckland University of Technology, that add to local theoretical, socio-cultural and practice knowledge. The profiled studies add richness and diversity to occupational science knowledge. Taken together, the results of these New Zealand-based, occupation-focused studies help bring an occupational science lens to understanding the complexities of human engagement in occupations. In return, existing, universal understandings of the substrates, forms, functions and meanings of what people do allow the reader to interpret the detail in the results of these studies. We hope you enjoy reading about these studies as much as the students enjoyed doing them.

Feel free to hand SPOTLIGHT on to anyone who might be interested in it or contact Deb to be added to the distribution list deb.webster@aut.ac.nz. Previous issues are available at <http://www.aut.ac.nz/study-at-aut/study-areas/health-sciences/occupational-science-and-therapy/spotlight-on-occupation-newsletter>

Case study research exploring the impact of material poverty on a child's patterns of occupation

Author: Simon Leadley



Summary: The consequences of growing up in poverty on children's health are well described, but a coherent description of how it affects participation in occupation is lacking. Based on evidence that patterns of occupation underpin well-being and carry through to adult life, this study investigated the habits, roles, and family routines of one child living below the official poverty line in Aotearoa New Zealand. The child and her family, who were recruited through an organisation providing support services, subsequently recruited other adults who supported the child's occupations. Data were collected through interviews,

observations in the family home and community, photo elicitation, a weekly diary, and charting the child's regular occupations on a map of the city. The main finding was that the family's limited and insecure income, lack of material resources to support occupational choices, cramped housing, the father's shift work, and reliance on school breakfasts disrupted and impoverished participation in free play, school trips, clubs, competitive sports teams, shopping and organised entertainment, time spent together as a family, and access to digital technology. It supported a sedentary lifestyle and poor study habits.

Comment: Understanding poverty from an occupational perspective may help to explain its long-term health and socio-economic implications. While this is a small-scale study, it revealed how opportunities to do, be and become were shut down by material poverty and safety concerns in the neighbourhood, despite the child demonstrating considerable interest and talent in various sports. The findings suggest an association between childhood poverty and occupational deprivation, with consequences for the development of capabilities that will play out in children's opportunities and choices in the future.

Reference: (2019). Unpublished Master's thesis. Available from <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/12215>

An occupational perspective on working mothers' stress, anxiety and depression: An interpretive description study

Author: Kim Frenchman



Summary: This interpretive descriptive master's study aimed to apply an occupational perspective to working mothers' mental health, to inform the development of prevention focused primary health interventions. The findings suggest that multiple, complex and interacting personal and environmental challenges increased working mothers' stress, anxiety and depression. Data analysis revealed that the struggle to find the right balance was the key factor that contributed to stress, anxiety and depression. Mirroring these challenges were equally complex strategies and supports working mothers found useful: reprioritising occupations, getting

help from others, and supportive activities such as flexible work arrangements or doing something enjoyable. Inversely, the findings highlight the lack of comprehensive and relevant supports to address their mental health needs.

SPOTLIGHT ON OCCUPATION

ISSUE 25, MAY 2019

AUT

Comment: The author offers a unique perspective, an occupational one, on the challenges faced by working mothers, which seemed to be absent from the literature. The thesis crafts a compelling and meaningful account of women's experiences, framed within a gender inequality perspective. It coherently brings together the often unpredictable realities of working mothers' lives, and how those significantly impact on mental health. The findings reveal new possibilities for interventions and collaboration across multiple sectors. Importantly, the author advocates a potential advocacy/change agent role to challenge (or eliminate) environmental constraints and barriers that are often outside of individual women's control. Such actions potentially contribute to mental health promotion for this population.

Reference: (2018). Unpublished Master's thesis. Available from <http://aut.researchgateway.ac.nz/handle/10292/11806>

Describing and measuring the "Switch-on" effect in people who participate in Cognitive Stimulation Therapy

Author: Qi Liu



Summary: Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) is an evidence-based intervention for people with mild to moderate dementia. Although research suggests some patients experience a "switch-on" effect after CST, involving increased motivation and engagement, there has been limited exploration of the way CST influences people's occupations. This mixed methods study aimed to describe the nature and timing of the "switch-on" effect as experienced

by four patients and their whānau/family, and to explore whether the "switch-on" effect could be measured using the Volitional Questionnaire (VQ; de las Heras et al., 2007). Thematic analysis of interview data indicated the "switch-on" effect involved increased participation in occupation for all patients, with improvements in Doing, Feeling, Relating, and Thinking and Reflecting. The changes occurred within the first 3 weeks of CST and consolidated during the programme. Descriptive analysis of the VQ data showed improvement on the Achievement sub-scale for three patients, but little change for the remaining patient due to a ceiling effect.

Comment: Patient and whānau/family descriptions and changes in the VQ data provide some promising evidence that CST is associated with increased participation in social occupations and a shift in volition, an element of occupation. Whilst the VQ did not fully capture the improvements noted in the qualitative data, the nature of the changes suggests that occupational therapists' involvement in CST programmes is justified, and is a means of supporting satisfying and positive changes in health and wellbeing for people with dementia.

Reference: (2018). Unpublished Master's thesis. Available from <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/12398>

Strategies people use to participate in everyday occupations when experiencing persistent symptoms following a mild traumatic brain injury: A qualitative descriptive study

Author: Maree Paterson

Summary: People generally recover from mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBI), but for those who do not, the ongoing impact on everyday occupations can be profound. This exploratory study investigated the strategies eight New Zealanders with persisting symptoms used to participate in things they need or want to do. The goal was to generate useful information that might benefit others. Data were gathered in semi-structured interviews and analysed using conventional content analysis. Strategies in the early and later phases differed. Early on, participants found ways to reduce the cognitive load and simplify their routines. Later on, they "recalibrated" the motor and cognitive components of problematic occupations and deployed compensation strategies, making their daily performance more reliable. Over time, they came to accept changes in how they performed occupations and stopped struggling to get better.

Comment: This is an important study because none of the therapeutic approaches trialled so far have really made a difference. The findings reinforce how complex it is to learn to manage altered energy levels, information processing capacity and emotional dysregulation, all at the same time. Bringing an occupational perspective to the research shows how previously routine occupations can be reconfigured and a satisfying balance of occupations can be re-established. It also captured everyday strategies that the participants found effective, which might be useful for others to try.

Reference: (2017). Unpublished Master's thesis. Available from <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/10311>

STUDY OCCUPATION

Study options for those wishing to explore participation and its relationship with health with AUT include the Specialist Readings and Special Topic papers, where students work with an academic advisor to pursue an individual learning pathway. Contact Margaret Jones for details.

Entry requirements: All health professionals can enrol. Those with a Bachelor's degree can enrol direct into the Masters. Holders of a Diploma or Health Department Certificate initially enrol into the Postgrad Certificate or Diploma.

Qualification: Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma of Health Science (Occupational Practice), or a Master's degree.

Contact: margjone@aut.ac.nz

PREVIOUS ISSUES ARE AVAILABLE AT:

<http://www.aut.ac.nz/study-at-aut/study-areas/health-sciences/occupational-science-and-therapy/spotlight-on-occupation-newsletter>