Occupational Performance Goals of Mothers of Adolescents with and Mothers of Adolescents without Disabilities

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Background

- Mothering is a fundamental occupation for women that involves juggling various roles and responsibilities (Dunbar & Roberts, 2006; Larson, 2000), which can influence a mother’s occupational choices, goals, and well-being (Chasteen & Kissman, 2000; Crowe & Michael, 2011).
- The time demands associated with child care typically decrease as children enter adolescence and become more independent, often granting mothers more opportunities to participate in occupations of their own choice (Crowe & Florez, 2006; Crowe & Michael, 2011; Phares, Fields, & Kamboulos, 2009).
- Raising an adolescent with a disability is associated with greater temporal maternal demands in direct child care activities that may endure longer, and become increasingly more difficult as the child grows physically (Crowe & Michael, 2011; Crowe & Florez, 2006; Schneider et al., 2006).
- This increase in child care demands can limit mothers’ participation in occupations outside of caregiving, such as self-care, socialization, work, and education (Donovan, VanLeit, Crowe, & Keefe, 2005; Peters & Jackson, 2008; Todd & Jones, 2005; Bourke-Taylor, Howie, & Law, 2010), and may affect overall well-being.

Objectives

To describe the occupational performance goals of mothers of adolescents with disabilities and of mothers of adolescents without disabilities. The research questions used to guide this study are:

1. What are the main themes of occupational performance goals of mothers of adolescents with disabilities in comparison to mothers of adolescents without disabilities?
2. Is there a difference in the occupational performance goals expressed by mothers of adolescents with disabilities in comparison to mothers of adolescents without disabilities?

Methods

Research Design: Qualitative

Participants:
- Forty mothers of adolescents (between 13 and 19 years of age)
- Twenty mothers of adolescents with a disability
- Twenty mothers of adolescents without disabilities

A total of 293 data units were transcribed from the 40 COPM interviews, 167 data units for the mothers of adolescents with disabilities and 126 data units for the mothers of adolescents without disabilities.

Six themes that describe the occupational performance goals of mothers of adolescents were then developed from the data, five of which were shared between both groups with only minor differences in content and the number of goals identified. The last theme was identified only by the mothers of adolescents with disabilities. Within each theme, subtopics were also identified. The six major themes were:

- Taking care of myself
- Making time for own occupations
- Life organization
- Quality time with others
- Sharing the load
- Implications for professional practice

Results

The major findings of the study indicate that mothers of adolescents with disabilities and mothers of adolescents without disabilities share many similar occupational performance goals. While many of the goals were shared among both groups, there were several notable differences. Those differences include:

- Mothers of adolescents with disabilities discussed more occupational goals overall, and more specifically in the theme/subthemes “Making time for own occupations” and “Education.” Examples of goals that mothers of adolescents with disabilities identified within this theme included:
  - Find more time to read books
  - Volunteer for 10 hours a month
  - Get my associates degree

- Mothers of adolescents with disabilities discussed spending time alone with their husbands seven times, while there was no mention of this in the group of mothers of typically developing adolescents. Examples of goals that were centered around spending time with their husbands included:
  - Go on a date with husband

The theme “Supporting/Encouraging Adolescent Development” was only evident in the responses from the mothers of adolescents with disabilities. Examples of goals in this theme included:

- Spend individualized time with son with disabilities
- Find reliable post-high school day program
- Learn how to transfer daughter without pain

Discussion

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Implications for Professional Practice

Professional practitioners can use this information to:
- Understand and better support all mothers in participating in activities that they need to do, want to do, and are expected to do
- Understand and better support mothers of adolescents with disabilities in participating in activities that they need to do, want to do, and are expected to do
- Assist mothers of adolescents with disabilities in supporting/encouraging their adolescents’ development

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the mothers who generously donated their time to participate in the initial study and the focus groups. Their voices gave meaning and depth to this study. We also thank all the individuals who assisted in conducting and carrying out the study.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Disability Group</th>
<th>Typically Developing Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Age*</td>
<td>43.9 years (3.5)</td>
<td>48.3 years (6.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Education*</td>
<td>16.6 years (3.8)</td>
<td>16.7 years (3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Work (No. of women)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working (0-5 hours/week)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time (0-34 hours/week)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time (35-50 hours/week)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Ethnicity (No. of women)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo/White</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Mexican American</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean values (standard deviation)