

## **Occupational therapy and eating disorders: When occupational needs support recovery**

Genevieve Pepin

*Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria, Australia*

**Introduction:** The severity of eating disorders and their significant physical and psycho-social impacts have been widely documented in the literature. The most recent international guidelines about the treatment of eating disorders identified multidisciplinary interventions as a necessary part of high quality eating disorder programs. Occupational therapists are playing an increasingly important role in these programs.

**Objectives:** This paper will present the results of 3 studies highlighting the role and contribution of occupational therapy to the field of eating disorders.

**Method:** First, a cross-sectional study was conducted with 26 clinicians working in eating disorders services in Canada, Australia and the UK. Statistical analyses described and compared practice across countries. Second, two phenomenological studies explored the lived experience of: 1) people who recovered from an eating disorder (n=10), and 2) carers whose child had recovered from an eating disorder (n=10). In-depth interviews were analysed thematically for qualitative each study.

**Results:** Clinicians mostly used occupational therapy specific assessments and a range of interventions. Re-evaluation and discharge procedures were similar across countries. Recovered people highlighted the importance of being an active participant in their own life and choosing to engage in meaningful occupations. Carers discussed the need to re-engage in their role as a parent and strengthen their occupational identity beyond being a carer for their child.

**Conclusion:** Occupation-based assessments specifically identify occupational needs, facilitate engagement in meaningful occupations, and support recovery by addressing clients and carers occupational needs rather than focussing on weight gain and physical outcomes.