

EXPLORING GENDER DISPARITIES IN THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PROFESSION IN MAURITIUS

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STUDY AIMS

The study set out to evaluate the implications of gender on practice and service delivery.

It aimed to explore the gender imbalance in OT profession in Mauritius and the way gender, gendered assumptions and expectations construct OT as a ‘gendered’ profession.



METHODOLOGY

Qualitative study - Phenomenological perspective

15 OTs

Semi-structured interview

Data transcribed, analysed and themes derived.



THEMES EMERGING

Women
Power

Rights and
Opportunities

Strength and
Empathy

Males get the
job

I work best
with same
gender clients



WOMEN POWER

A higher female to male ratio within the Occupational Therapy profession

- Contrasted with the Physiotherapy profession where male to female ratio was perceived to be more balanced.

Empathetic and holistic approach to Occupational Therapy practice → a female forte.

- Most emphasized the human nature of the profession held a lot of appeal for females.



RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Equality of rights and opportunities was unclear as regards Gender.

Majority of Occupational Therapists in Mauritius = Women yet under-representation within executive committee board of local Association

I don't have the statistics but I think there are more women than men. I even made a comment that in our association, we have only one woman on the executive committee board. When I was president, there was none. Last year there was one but she was not active. But in the profession there are more women.

Attributed to expectations arising from other roles of female Occupational Therapists



STRENGTH AND EMPATHY

Stereotypes concerning physical strength and the humane approach common

- Males – better suited for physical settings (lifts and transfers)
- *I have observed that many female therapists need help to handle physical cases. As males, we are stronger to lifts clients and handle clients in physical settings.*
- Females – better at handling clients with psychosocial issues/counselling/group therapy

However skills can be learnt by either gender despite stereotypical thinking concerning the same.



MALES GET THE JOB

Employers preferred to recruit male therapists especially in NGOs.

- Perceived as being more apt to do many tasks in the organisations ranging from lifting to transfers of clients but also moving furniture and equipment around
- Participant: *The majority of NGOs when they recruit, they look for males because we can do a bit of everything. We can do sports, we can lift clients. We can also move furniture and equipment.*

Misconception that male therapists performed better in physical areas of practice → difficulty in finding a job for female therapists.

- *Males may be considered to perform better in the physical fields due to their more prominent physique than females. It is also observed that when it comes to handling a physical case or a heavy client, male therapists are the first choice no matter whether the female therapists seem physically capable enough to do it.*

Leadership roles went mostly to Male Therapists - Female therapists also highlighted the fact that as women, they had more responsibilities (in relation to household and children) and thus could not take a more active role in matters of the Association.



I WORK BEST WITH SAME GENDER CLIENTS

Sessions more productive when we have same gender clients and therapists.

- Element of comfort and better information sharing.
- *...some female patients feel uncomfortable with Male OT staff. Particularly in hospital setting, it would be better if female OT staff attend female patients in some cases as the patients would be more comfortable then.*

Not uncommon for therapists to ask for assistance in cases of opposing gender

- *...especially when I do toilet training for girls and boys; If it is a boy, I can do it but there needs to be male assistance.*



CONCLUSION

The researchers were not expecting to generalise the findings of this study to other countries though there might be some similarities and there is possibility of transferability to other healthcare professions within local and international contexts.

The outcomes of this study are unique to the participants and the researchers' interpretations of their experiences within the context of OT in Mauritius.



FINALLY

NEED FOR BALANCE – THOUGHTS, NUMBERS

**STEREOTYPING MEANS WE AREN'T TRUE TO THE VERY
NATURE OF OUR ROLE AS OT**

MERCI! THANK YOU!

