San Jose State University
OCTH 295B- Master’s Project
Effectiveness of an Occupational Therapy Imaginative Playgroup Intervention on Increasing Playfulness in Preschool Aged Children Who Are Homeless
Lauren Granadino, Kirsten Howard, Colleen Norlander, Vanessa Rabatin, and Amy Schulkin

Abstract/Literature Review
In early childhood, active engagement in play is a child’s primary occupation, and sets the foundation for cognitive, motor, emotional and social development (Parham, 2008). Research indicates that children who are homeless often exhibit delayed play skills (Grant 1991), and often face seemingly insurmountable obstacles including developmental delays, behavioral problems, anxiety, and depression (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991). Current literature evidences imaginative play as an effective intervention for promoting social development, playfulness, and cognitive development (Bergen, 2002; Bundy, Luckett, Naughton, Ragen, Singleton, & Spies, 2008; Lindsey & Colwell, 2003; Uren & Stagnatti, 2009), however, limited research exists for the impact of play interventions specifically for children who are homeless. This quantitative study examined the effectiveness of an occupational therapy (OT) imaginative playgroup intervention on increasing the playfulness of preschool aged children experiencing homelessness. Eight preschool aged children were recruited from Family Supportive Housing (FSH) in San Jose, CA between February 2013 through April 2013. Three of these participants completed all eight play sessions. The Test of Playfulness (ToP) was administered pre- and post-intervention to detect changes in playfulness. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed that no statistical significance was found between the pre- and post-intervention scores for total playfulness, as well as for the components of extent, intensity, and skill. However, individual examination of each participant’s performance indicate improvements. Although not statistically significant, this data still provides preliminary support for the effectiveness of an OT-based imaginative playgroup intervention to facilitate quick, initial changes in levels of playfulness for preschool aged children experiencing homelessness.

Methods
A quantitative quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was implemented for this study. Four graduate occupational therapy students from San Jose State University led 45-minute imaginative playgroup interventions, twice a week over the course of three months at FSH. A total of eight children attended at least one playgroup, however post data was only obtained on three participants due to attrition. Each child’s playfulness was measured by a fifth researcher, who was independent of the interventions, via the ToP. Pre- and post-intervention scores were obtained for the components of extent, intensity, skill and overall playfulness (Bundy, 2010).

Results
The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, the nonparametric equivalent of a t-test, was used to determine if a statistically significant difference existed between the pre- and post-intervention scores. The statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software at a 95% confidence interval (0.05 level of significance). No statistically significant difference was found between the pre- and post-intervention scores for total playfulness, as well as for the components of extent, intensity, and skill. Although the statistical analysis supports the null hypothesis, individual examination of each participant’s performance pre- and post-intervention indicate some improvements. Specifically, all three participants improved in all component areas with the exception of one component, intensity, for one participant.
Discussion

While the statistical analysis supports the null hypothesis, individual examination of each participant’s performance prior to and after the intervention reveal some improvements. While these results are only anecdotal, they indicate that playfulness is improving for these children over the course of the intervention.

A major limitation of the study was the inability to control for participant attrition. This led to a small sample size, thus making the study prone to a type II error. Another limitation was the inability to account for interactive effects. For example, increased structure and security provided by the shelter may have impacted the participants’ level of playfulness. Participants were also simultaneously enrolled at the Voyager Daycare within FSH, which provided services that may have influenced the children's playfulness over the intervention period. Due to the lack of a control group, it was also difficult to ascertain if the observed changes in pre- and post-intervention scores were due to the efficacy of the imaginative playgroups.

Effective imaginative playgroup interventions can be used to increase playfulness in children who are homeless, which may in turn facilitate greater development of social, emotional, cognitive, and motor skills (Cordier, Bundy, Hocking, & Einfeld, 2010; Parham, 2008). This may deter developmental delays and maladaptive behaviors in preschool aged children experiencing homelessness, and may ultimately reduce the need for services later on. These reasons provide preliminary support for the effectiveness of OT-based intervention services to the homeless preschool population.

References


