Experience of Homeless Mothers Engaged in Leisure Activities
Rachel Bishop, BA, Kacie Conn, BS, Kaylene de Bord, BS,
Darla Gary, BA, Samantha Santos, BA
Winifred Schultz-Krohn PhD, OTR/L, BCP, SWC, FAOTA

AT A GLANCE
This phenomenological, qualitative, pilot study aims to gain insight into the lived experience of homeless mothers participating in leisure. The data presented, which echoes and supplements current research, points to this population’s susceptibility to occupational deprivation in the realm of leisure and therapeutic benefits related to leisure engagement. This study aims to ignite further research and to use this data to support the creation of evidence-based programs to further this population’s successful engagement in meaningful leisure.

METHODS
Biweekly, creative, leisure groups conducted at a homeless shelter in San Jose, CA. The groups were provided free of cost. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three women who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study. Interviews focused on the lived experience of engagement with crafts and the OT craft group. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded for thematic analysis.

PARTICIPANTS
Participants were homeless mothers residing with at least one child at the shelter. The residents at this facility maintain their own private room and bathroom, and group participation is optional. While the women who participated in the groups ranged in age from 21-54, and had varied educational and ethnic backgrounds, the interviewees were between the ages of 26-34.

ANALYSIS
Data saturation of the following thematic codes was achieved: enjoyment of craft, entertainment, past crafting, future crafting, supports positive mental health, stress coping skills, time away from reality, ability to focus, benefits for children, and role of mother. The participants spoke extensively about the therapeutic impact of the craft group, mainly its alleviation of depressive symptoms and provision of opportunities for relaxation. Results from this study support previous research that identifies benefits from engaging in leisure activities for individuals with mental health challenges (Fisher & Specht, 1999; Lloyd et al., 2007). The act of completing a craft led to a sense of accomplishment and pride (Griffiths & Corr, 2007; Perruzza & Kinsella, 2010). Palliative coping and mood enhancement were also described as benefits of attendance.
Motherhood was frequently referenced in the interview data. And each mother expressed a desire to continue engaging in crafting in some capacity. Emerging themes not previously identified in the literature include role of mother, value of technology-free leisure, and the experience participating in a novel activity.

**BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE**

A review of current literature demonstrates the influence of leisure participation on social interaction, coping with chronic stress, cognitive skill acquisition, and supporting positive mental health (Hutchinson et al., 2008; Fisher & Specht, 1999; Iwasaki et al., 2006). These benefits are needed by homeless mothers, a population that faces many occupational barriers such as living and parenting in a structured shelter environment, dealing with chronic stress, financial hardship, and social exclusion (Klitzing, 2003; Roy et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2010) Occupational therapists must consider the application of occupational justice in clinical practice by prioritizing the occupational experiences of underprivileged individuals, such as homeless mothers.

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