Assessment and Intervention of Pre-Vocational Skills for Women Living in a Homeless Shelter

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Abstract/Literature Background
Approximately 3.5 million people are likely to experience homelessness in a given year (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2008). Females are the head of household in 65% of homeless families (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). The occupational concerns faced by homeless individuals include employment and parenting (VanLeit et al., 2006). Poor social supports and the stigma of homelessness may contribute to low self-esteem (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005) while high self-esteem is correlated with goal accomplishment (Christian & Clapham, 2010). This quantitative study explored the effectiveness of an occupational therapy intervention for work readiness in increasing self-esteem in women with children living in a homeless shelter. Additionally, researchers examined the effect of intervention on progress towards personally developed work-related goals.

Methodology
A quantitative design was used to measure changes produced by an occupational therapy work readiness intervention with mothers living in a homeless shelter. Each participant was expected to complete the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment (Nollan et al., 2002) prior to beginning treatment. Quantitative data was to be collected by using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965) and a Goal Attainment Scale (GAS) (Bovend’Eerdt et al., 2009) form as pre- and post-tests. At the end of intervention, the RSES and GAS were re-administered. Subjective data from regular progress notes was used to support the quantitative data. Participants were recruited on an ongoing basis. Case managers referred English-speaking women ages 18 years and older who were residing at the shelter. Data was collected during group and individual occupational therapy sessions at the San Jose Family Shelter. The 8-week program taught the skills necessary for successful interviewing and searching for appropriate jobs, including developing a job action plan, job searching techniques, resume workshops, interview role play and preparation, stress reduction, and time management. The intervention included both group and individual sessions each week. Because the number of participants was low, data was analyzed using visual analysis.

Results
Thirteen participants in total attended at least one group or individual session. However, none of the participants were able to attend for an expected six weeks. The mean pre-test RSES score was 19.2. The mean post-test score was 23. Four out of six participants for whom data was available demonstrated an increase in score from pre-test to post-test. The mean pre-test GAS score was 1 (no progress). The mean post-test score was 3.8. All of the mothers who re-evaluated their personal work-related goals scored at least a 4 out of 5 on one or both of those goals. Ten out of the 20 initial goals were related to resumes. Three goals were created in regard to applying for jobs and developing confidence in job interviews. One goal each was
created for securing housing, finding childcare, becoming more comfortable in the workplace, and developing computer skills.

Discussion

One purpose of our study was to investigate if occupational therapy intervention for work readiness increases self-esteem in women with children living in a homeless shelter. RSES scores suggested that the intervention did increase self-esteem. GAS scores demonstrated that participants progressed toward their work-related goals. This pilot study illustrates the potential efficacy of occupational therapy-based intervention in regard to increasing the work readiness skills and self-esteem that are essential to escaping homelessness. Although our study had definite limitations, including high attrition, irregular attendance, small sample size, lack of a control group, and restriction to a single site, it is our hope that it will act as a catalyst and foundation for further research in this area.

References


