San Jose State University
OCTH 295B Master’s Project

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ADULTS WITH CEREBRAL PALSY PRACTICING YOGA

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Abstract
Research indicates that adults aging with cerebral palsy experience an aging process that is more complex than the general population yet they encounter barriers to receiving health care services to address their needs. This study sought to examine the lived experience of adults with cerebral palsy regarding the perceived physical, psychosocial, and spiritual benefits of practicing Iyengar yoga. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four adults with cerebral palsy. The participants in this investigation attributed both physical and psychosocial benefits to their yoga practice including increased self-efficacy and functional performance. Findings suggest that occupational therapy services focused on promoting physical health and social supports may provide services lacking for adults aging with cerebral palsy.

Methodology
Using purposeful and snowball sampling, four adults with CP who practice yoga were recruited. The participants were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Codes were created as the data were read. These codes were comparatively analyzed and led to the emergence of several themes.

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Type of CP</th>
<th>Mobility</th>
<th>Housing Status (Household Members)</th>
<th>Assistance (Duration)</th>
<th>Years Practicing Yoga</th>
<th>Method of Communication</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M. 98</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate Q CP with spasticity</td>
<td>Power W/C, crawls</td>
<td>APT (SD)</td>
<td>PA (12hrs/wk) Independent in most self-care activities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Verbal with</td>
<td>Unemployed, volunteer at local non-profit service organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. 37</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mild Q CP</td>
<td>Ambulacess</td>
<td>APT (SD)</td>
<td>No PA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Employed, Software Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. 72</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Severe Q CP with high tone</td>
<td>Manual W/C propelled by PA</td>
<td>ICF (OP)</td>
<td>PA (24hrs/day)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Electronic communicator, online seller of books, CDs, and audiobooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. 36</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate Q CP</td>
<td>Power W/C, crawls</td>
<td>H (FM)</td>
<td>No PA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Verbal with speech impairment</td>
<td>Employed intermittently as a consultant to a transportation company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Q = quadriplegia; W/C = wheelchair; APT = apartment; H = house; SD = significant other; OP = other patients; F = family members; ICF = Intermediate Care Facility; PA = personal attendant
Results

Discussion
The participants express that as they have aged, they have noticed changes in their joints, muscles, and mobility. Physiological changes affect mobility which in turn affects functional performance in occupations for adults aging with CP.

The experience of the participants with traditional medical services which emphasizes fixing a problem or dysfunction, leads to feelings of failure or disability. However, yoga is based on the idea that every individual’s body is different which supports the idea of ability (Kibele, 1989). Iyengar yoga uses a variety of props to achieve alignment therefore, there is no expectation that everyone is able to do every pose. This promotes acceptance of one’s body, which has been identified as a prerequisite to an adult with CP’s motivation to improve the quality of his or her life (Horsman et al., 2010). There is a sense that the participants practice yoga to be good to their bodies, as an opportunity to be active in health maintenance, and to be involved in an active relationship with their body.

The participants express physical and psychosocial benefits from practicing yoga, which the literature describes as a possible useful practice in exercise for adults with CP (Allen et al., 2004). Two of the participants shared that learning how to use their breath during yoga has helped them recognize that breathing plays a critical part in performing tasks highlighting the influence that yoga has on functional performance. Yoga practice also promotes self-efficacy by giving participants an opportunity to engage in an activity and achieve body positions that they never thought they were capable of achieving.

Clinical Implications
Occupational Therapists can:
- Collaborate with adults with CP to assist them in creating a health maintenance routine by: helping clients cultivate awareness of their own physical and mental states and the connection between these two states, so that they can identify practices that are beneficial to them, seek alternative therapies and learn how to be good to their mind and their body.
- Assist the client in identifying accessible routes to activities and programs in the community, creating a schedule to insure consistent attendance to activities, and building new routines and habits involving activities at home.
- Create client-centered interventions in accordance with the client’s motivation and abilities, that can be easily incorporated into his or her daily routine.
- Develop group programs or classes in accessible community facilities which will give adults with CP opportunities to engage in new activities to improve their personal causation, build new relationships, and develop sustainable practices that can combat aging.
- Develop materials to educate peers, other health professionals and the general public about effective communication strategies with adults with CP.

References


