

Exercise and Coping Mechanisms Among Graduate OT Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic & Period of Civil Unrest: A Descriptive Study

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PURPOSE: College students commonly report stress and anxiety due to the compound nature of the student role (Govender et al., 2015). Given the public health crisis in the United States due to COVID-19, civil unrest due to police brutality, and the Black Lives Matter Movement; this study explores the well-being and stress of graduate healthcare students. Research has explored exercise as an intervention to alleviate stress or prevent burnout among students (Haaren et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2017), but it was never explored in occupational therapy students after 2020. Design this is a descriptive study that explored the stress level in graduate occupational therapy students, the role of exercise in reducing stress, and common coping mechanisms applied to manage academic and sociopolitical stress.

METHOD: A survey was created and distributed to graduate occupational therapy students in the U.S.

RESULTS: Most participants reported moderate to high levels of academic-related stress ($n = 73$, 97.33%), and more than half reported moderate levels of anger and frustration because of academic-related stress ($n = 43$, 57.33%). Half of the participants reported that they engage in physical exercise as a coping mechanism for academic stress ($n = 38$, 50.67%), and most participants thought that kickboxing would help reduce stress ($n = 48$, 64.00%) and reduce anger and frustration ($n=56$, 74.67%).

CONCLUSION: The well-being of graduate students over the past two years has increased after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the sociopolitical tension in the U.S. Future research is needed to determine how this stress may affect graduation and employment outcomes and recommendations for burnout and suicide prevention.

References

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