

Moral Distress in the Time of COVID-19: OT Practitioners' Experiences

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DOI: 10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-PO236

Date presented: April 22, 2023

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BACKGROUND: COVID-19 has impacted the healthcare system, including the occupational therapy profession. OT practitioners have had to adapt to these unknown times to best treat their clients. The conditions of COVID-19 have caused moral distress in OT practitioners. Purpose. The purpose of this study was to explore moral distress within the lived experiences of OT practitioners during the time of COVID-19.

DESIGN AND METHOD: In this qualitative phenomenological study, investigators utilized a stratified-purposive sample to recruit OT practitioners in a variety of settings and conducted semi-structured interviews to explore their experience with moral distress during the time of COVID-19. The data were analyzed to generate themes regarding the experience of moral distress.

RESULTS: Investigators identified commonalities across settings regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on OT practitioners and the subsequent moral distress. Themes included: Experiences of moral distress, stressors, OT practitioner role impact, uncharted waters, personal protective equipment (PPE) impact, effects of experiencing moral distress, COVID impact on life roles, vaccine impact on work role, employment complications from COVID, therapeutic relationship challenges, managing moral distress, encouragement from others, and managing mental health.

CONCLUSION: This study's findings provide an opportunity to reflect on the experience of OT practitioners during the pandemic. COVID-19 exacerbated the usual ethical problems and moral distress that OT practitioners experience. Interventions for managing moral distress and addressing the trauma that OT practitioners experienced during COVID are necessary. Presenters will review implications to mitigate moral distress. Further research is needed to explore interventions for preparing OT practitioners for future occurrences of moral distress, including use of moral distress models, ethics rounds, and shared decision making.

References

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