

Can OT Students Be Too Perfect? The Impact of Perfectionism on Academic and Psychosocial Factors

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Rates of perfectionism have been increasing over time, particularly among college students. Perfectionism has been linked to several negative impacts such as increased stress levels, career burnout, reduced physical health, and the development of mental health conditions (Arana et al., 2019; Harrison & Craddock, 2016; Hill & Curran, 2016). Most research regarding perfectionism among college students has been conducted with undergraduate populations; little is known about rates of perfectionism among graduate students, and specifically, among rehabilitation students (Arana et al., 2019; Hill & Curran, 2016). One study explored perfectionism among undergraduate occupational science students who would soon enter a master's program in occupational therapy, and found that 93% of the study sample were categorized as perfectionists and almost half met criteria for maladaptive perfectionism (Wagner & Causey-Upton, 2017). High rates of perfectionism, and in particular maladaptive perfectionism, among students who are future healthcare providers is concerning as this could negatively impact academic performance and health outcomes, as well as possibly later lead to career burnout and poor work performance. The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine rates of perfectionism among graduate occupational therapy, speech language pathology, and physical therapy students as well as to categorize perfectionism in this population. Additionally, this study sought to explore the impact of perfectionism on academic and psychosocial outcomes. Results of this research may help to guide the development of resources to support academic success and mental health for rehabilitation and other students in rigorous academic programs. This study utilized a convenience sample of graduate OT, SLP, and PT students at two universities. A combined 54 students across the three graduate programs participated in the study, with 50 students completing all data collection instruments. An anonymous Qualtrics survey was used for data collection. Surveys were accessed by participants via email distribution. The survey included demographic questions, number of hours spent studying, number of hours spent completing homework, self-reported undergraduate and current graduate GPA, items from the Almost-Perfect Scale Revised (APS-R), Clinically Useful Depression Outcome Scale (CUDOS), and Clinically Useful Anxiety Outcome Scale (CUXOS). Preliminary findings of this study indicate that high levels of participants were classified as perfectionists, with many being categorized as maladaptive perfectionists. Additionally, approximately 20% of participants were identified to have moderate to severe depressive symptoms based on the CUDOS and 40% indicated moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety based on the CUXOS. The findings of this study indicate that graduate OT, SLP, and PT students have high rates of perfectionism that may be impacting psychosocial health outcomes including anxiety and depression. It is necessary for educators to understand the personality characteristic of their students and the potential related health outcomes in order to better support students throughout their educational experience. Perfectionistic characteristics, anxiety, and depression all also have the capacity to impact career success and happiness as a future healthcare provider. Therefore, it is imperative that educators create supportive resources for students in order to guide both academic and career success.

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