

Leisure and Coronavirus Disease 2019: Evaluating the Role of Leisure Pursuits Among Doctor of Occupational Therapy Students and Practitioners

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Leisure participation defends against the effects of stress. The traumatic event of the COVID-19 pandemic demanded abrupt changes to the world, the likes of which the present population never experienced, causing considerable stress. Following were many barriers to leisure participation threatening the health and wellbeing of individuals. This study examined the lived experience of COVID-19 on leisure stress coping among current and former OTD students, and its impact on perspectives of trauma-informed care. Current and former OTD students from a Midwest university (n = 32) were recruited through convenience sampling to participate in this descriptive, pretest-posttest, mixed-methods survey study. The survey was emailed to participants. Upon acknowledgment of informed consent, participants responded to demographic questions, the Leisure Coping Belief Scale (LCBS) and Leisure Coping Strategy Scale (LCSS) to gather quantitative data regarding their disposition and strategies of leisure stress coping both three months prior to and during COVID-19, and nine open-ended questions which gathered qualitative data assessing leisure pursuits, barriers to leisure, and perspectives on trauma-informed care since COVID-19. Paired Samples *t*-tests, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, a one-way ANOVA, and subsequent Post Hoc analysis calculations revealed no statistically significant findings in support of the first two stated hypotheses. Key quantitative results from mean subscale scores of LCBS and LCSS demonstrated significant decreases between time statuses for some (Self-Determination, Emotional Support, Tangible Aid, Leisure Companionship, and Leisure Mood Enhancement) while other subscales did not differ (Empowerment, Esteem Support, Informational Support, and Leisure Palliative Coping), demonstrating resilience. Quantitative results depicted grim findings as to beliefs in and strategies for leisure stress coping through the pandemic, but qualitative findings contrasted these results. Through qualitative open-ended questions, participants shared relatively positive lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic with barrier negotiation, continued leisure participation, and enhanced perspectives of trauma-informed care. Barriers to leisure were mostly structural in nature such as social distancing and stay-at-home orders, though intrapersonal barriers were also highly reported. Participants shared new perspectives on leisure, the importance of arts and crafts, the connection between leisure participation and health and wellness, and the impact of trauma on mental health. COVID-19 proved to have a substantial impact on the lives of the studied population, as the data revealed that participants struggled to maintain beliefs in and strategies for leisure stress coping, only some proved to be statistically significant differences, while others demonstrated resilience. Despite the scores, participants shared relatively positive experiences in leisure pursuits during COVID-19. The lived experience of COVID-19 reinforced the importance of addressing leisure participation in practice as participants acquired a newfound appreciation for leisure participation, leisure stress coping, barriers to leisure, and trauma. Obstacles to leisure are commonly faced by OT clientele, though may not be fully appreciated by OTs. COVID-19 provided the opportunity for OTs to endure the same traumatic event as their clientele, enhancing their perspective on the importance of OT. This study impacts OT practice by providing substantial evidence towards the importance of leisure participation through a traumatic event to aid in leisure stress coping, as well as outlining the direction of OT practice in the value of leisure participation and trauma-informed care since the pandemic.

References

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