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# Missing Pieces and Misconceptions: Public Understanding of Occupational Therapy

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# Missing Pieces and Misconceptions: Public Understanding of Occupational Therapy



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## Background

- Occupational therapy (OT) is now 100-years old but still not well known or understood (Mason & Mathieson, 2018)
- Term "occupation" not clear to the public (Howarth, Morris, & Cox 2018; Royeen, 2002)
- Misconceptions result in role confusion for healthcare team & lack of utilization or funding (Bitner, 2018; Lucas Molitor, & Mayou, 2018; Mason & Mathieson, 2018)
- OT also not highly visible in media (Walsh, 2018)
- Lack of awareness limits youth entering OT
- Multiple problems
  - 1) Shortages of OT professional are expected to increase for all 50 states through 2030 (Lin, Zhang & Dixon, 2015)
  - 2) OT not fully accessed by clients if it is unknown or unavailable
- In order to create appropriate and beneficial public awareness programs first we need to understand the public's perception and misconceptions of OT

### Research Questions

How does the general public define occupational therapy?  
What are the common misconceptions about occupational therapy?

### Sample

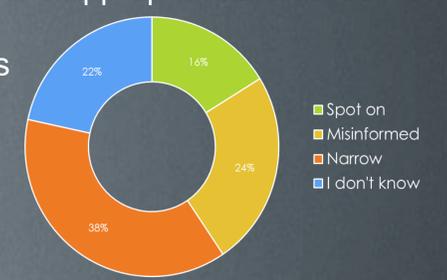
Age 20-29 = 60%  
30-39 = 2%  
40-49 = 5%  
50-59 = 15%  
60-69 = 2%  
70-79 = 2%  
80-89 = 2%

### Common ideas about OT

- OTs 'help' or 'retrain' so people can 'get back to'
- OT compared to PT
- Related to jobs
- Related to self care
- Related to injury
- 'I have no idea'

## Results

- Two major themes were Missing Pieces and Misconceptions
  - Missing pieces = statements about OT that were correct but narrow in scope (narrow) or indicated lack of knowledge (I don't know)
  - Misconceptions = statements that were incorrect (misinformed)
  - Statements that were correct and appropriate are called "spot on"
  - Number of people with quotes categorized in each area
    - Spot on = 6 / 37
    - Misinformed = 9 / 37
    - Narrow = 14 / 37
    - I don't know = 8 / 37
  - "Spot on" answers (5 of 6) were from people who either knew someone who had OT or someone who was an OT
- See handout for specific quotes and codes*



## Methods

### Sample questions

- What is occupational therapy (OT)?
- What does the term occupation mean?
- Where do you think an OT works?
- What type of conditions do OTs work with?
- What is the difference between OT & PT?

### Qualitative project

- Eight MSOT students from the Pi Theta Honor Society completed 37 interviews with individuals considered "the general public" as part of their scholarly project
- Inclusion criteria:
  - An adult at least 18 y.o. who is English speaking
  - Has not had OT services him or herself
  - Is not a family member of an OT or OTS
  - Does not work in the healthcare field or is currently studying a healthcare profession at a college/university.
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim
- Analysis with line by line coding and creation of code list
- Themes extracted and quote counts completed
- Two additional individuals established inter-rater reliability

## Discussion

- Findings suggest that similar to studies of other health professionals or students (Conner-Kerr, Wittman & Muzzarelli, 1998; Lucas Molitor & Mayou, 2018; Pottebaum & Svinarich, 2005), the general public demonstrates confusion and misinformation about OT
  - Need for public awareness campaign "to create accurate and powerful images of the distinct value of the occupational therapy profession" (Walsh, 2018)
  - Plan for the Gamma Nu Chapter of Pi Theta to create an OT YouTube channel highlighting the full scope of occupational therapy as their ongoing scholarly project
- Strengths of the study
- Sample size
  - Multiple interviewers and coders could reduce bias
- Limitations of the study
- Young sample (60% were 20-29 y.o.) of convenience

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