

Is occupation the way to a man's heart?: the importance of self-efficacy, social connectedness and occupation in male's mental health.

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When examining the literature on sexual differences in mental health some statistics clearly differentiate the two sexes. Females develop depression almost twice as often as males. Yet as The Handbook of Depression states males have higher levels of cognitive vulnerability and other research shows that they are almost three times as likely to develop schizophrenia. Males commit suicide between three and four times more often than females in many western countries. In nearly all countries males' life expectancy is less than females. Yet as the postmodernists and feminists have shown some of these variables may be biological and others cultural.

Given the epidemiological differences for males and females it is possible that there are different pathways for mental health in the two groups. From an extensive literature review of over 200 articles the model that emerges places self-efficacy as a significant and proximal determinant of males' mental health. In depression it acts as a buffer between the cognitive vulnerability and depression. In collectivist cultures it has equal weighting to social connectedness; in individualist cultures self-efficacy has greater weighting.

Bandura has shown that self-efficacy increases by achieving success in occupations. Many authors have demonstrated the significant link between high self-efficacy and occupational performance in multiple domains of life extending from mathematics performance, through to weight management and condom use. Taking this together with the model sheds light on the mechanisms of why occupations are important in male's mental health and possibly points to a productive line of intervention.

Several authors have shown that social connectedness also serves as a buffer to mental health. While the effect of this is decreased in individualist cultures, where self-efficacy is increased, it is not negated. In collectivist cultures social connectedness has equal weighting to self-efficacy in preventing mental illness. Therefore both are important.

These significant links between self-efficacy, social connectedness and mental health for males should be a central aspect of occupational therapists' thinking when designing interventions. In this paper we present the pathway model and how occupations can be used to improve or support the systems of mental health for males.