

The Activity Participation Outcomes Measure for mental health settings.

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Measuring outcomes in occupational therapy practices for mental health settings has not been done in South Africa. The measurement of outcomes is important to produce evidence of competent clinical practice and thus professional survival and fiscal accountability.

The many challenges to come up with evidence of the effect of occupational therapy services complicate the development of an outcome measure in mental health settings. The slow rate of improvement in patients' mental health problems, or no change after rehabilitation, could easily be misinterpreted as delivering a poor service or rehabilitation not having an effect on the mental health of patients. This could be disheartening to therapists and they might feel that measuring outcomes would be to no avail or might even show ineffectiveness. Yet measuring outcomes is no longer an option but a necessity.

This paper will present the process that the author followed to develop an outcomes measure for mental health practices in South Africa. A mixed method approach and specifically the exploratory instrument development model as described by Creswell was used. The development of the outcomes measure happened in three phases. Phase 1 determined the domains for the outcomes measure. Focus groups with occupational therapy clinicians were done. The domains that emerged from the focus groups were then confirmed by mental health care users by means of individual interviews.

Phase 2 consisted of the development of a rating scale for the domains. In this outcomes measure the theory of Creative Ability was used as it explains activity participation. The theory further describes a person's activity participation and occupational performance in consecutive levels. These detailed description of the characteristics expected from a person on each level was investigated to be used as the consistent rating scale across the different domains of the outcomes measure.

Phase 3 included the piloting of the outcomes measure to determine clinical utility and investigate psychometric properties like inter-rater reliability, internal consistency, content and construct validity. Results from the pilot and psychometric investigation will be presented. Challenges in the implementation of the outcomes measure in day-to-day practice has been experienced and will also be presented.