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Change in activity participation of the mental health care users' attending occupational therapy programme in rural acute mental health unit in South Africa

Olindah Silaule, Daleen Casteleijn
University of Witwatersrand, Gauteng, South Africa

Introduction: Lack of evidence for effect of interventions is one of the several ongoing challenges facing healthcare services in South Africa. The increasing emphasis on routine outcome measurement has urged occupational therapists to demonstrate the impact of their intervention in mental health. Therefore, the aim of this study was to implement routine outcomes measurement in the occupational therapy department in order to describe and document changes in activity participation in MHCUs at Tintswalo Hospital situated within a rural site of Mpumalanga province.

Objectives: To describe the level of activity participation of MHCUs at Tintswalo Hospital before and after occupational therapy intervention at 5 data collection points. To explore the relationship between independent variables namely age, gender, adherence to medication, participation in occupational therapy programme and the dependent variable, activity participation.

Methodology: Quantitative methods were employed in this study with a sample size of 64 MHCUs. One group pre/post- test design was used in order to collect data using an Activity Participation Outcome Measure (APOM).

Results: The key findings demonstrated that the majority of participants improved significantly across all of the APOM domains during hospitalisation. A decline in the APOM domains was noted in the follow-up stages yielding insignificant results as demonstrated by the value of the effect sizes.

Conclusion: Results of this study demonstrate the relevance of routinely measuring outcomes in mental health. The study generated evidence of change in activity participation during hospitalisation and follow-up and emphasised the need for future research in this regard.