

The Role of Occupational Therapy in Maternal-Infant Mental Health

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Maternal mental health disorders affect 10-20% of new mothers and can negatively impact infant development as well as maternal well-being. Furthermore, MMH disorders can disrupt the mothering role, mother-infant attachment, and co-occupations which can further negatively affect the health and well being of the infant, the family, and the society at large.

In the United States, occupational therapists (OTs) in pediatric settings currently treat the child as their client and fail to fully consider a mother's mental health. Such practice highlights a potential gap in care, which needs to be studied, considering that if left undetected and poorly managed, the lifetime consequences of MMH can be damaging to the infant, mother, and entire family unit.

This proposed presentation is intended to explore barriers and gaps in current MMH practice in the United States from the perspective of pediatric OTs. The participants will also interact in small groups to discuss current approaches to maternal-infant mental health in their respective countries, identify barriers and gaps, and brainstorm possible solutions.

This exploration is designed to identify opportunities for OTs to expand their role in pediatric settings and achieve improved health outcomes for infants, mothers and families. Additionally, this discussion may identify changes to approaches to infant mental health and development, such that MMH is not considered a separate issue but is deemed to be interrelated and interdependent with infant mental health. Furthermore, these discussions may inspire practitioners to pursue maternal-infant mental health as a future area of focus in research and program development.