

Novice occupational therapists' perceptions and experiences of professional socialization in the first year of practice in South Africa

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Introduction: Professional socialization involves a process of induction into the culture of the profession and practice context. If the process is not experienced constructively it may lead to attrition. It is therefore important to understand how novice occupational therapists perceive and experience professional socialization.

Objectives: This paper will report on a study conducted in the Western Cape South Africa that explored professional socialization from the perspectives of occupational therapists that completed their first year of practice in the public health care system in South Africa during 2016. The objectives of this study were to explore and describe their perceptions and experiences of professional development; of professional identity formation; of becoming socialised into the culture of the profession, and of barriers and facilitators of professional socialization.

Method: A qualitative research approach and exploratory descriptive research design was utilised, while data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion. Data was analysed through thematic data analysis.

Results: It emerged from the study that participants perceived professional socialization to be highly influenced by the culture of the profession in respect of their various settings, transition from student to professional, formation of identity development and professional role models.

Conclusion: While novice therapists enter the profession with a positive professional identity, this identity may become compromised as they encounter the realities of practice during their first year. Failure to become well socialized may limit effectiveness in professional roles and, therefore, it is important that professional associations implement strategies to support novice therapists.