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Occupational Therapy Services in Pediatric Mental Health

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BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Background: Roughly 16.5 million youth and children meet the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM-5 TR) criteria for a mental health condition (National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 2019; Polanczyk et al., 2015; Cahill et al., 2020). Children who experience mental health concerns at an early age are more likely to experience negative health outcomes such as poor occupational engagement, social participation, academic achievement, and many others impacting their developing bodies and minds (Maurizi et al., 2013; Watling & Nielsen, 2010; Cahill et al., 2020). Engaging in meaningful occupations provides opportunities for children to develop motor, social, cognitive, and professional skills. Occupational therapy practitioners can play a vital role in addressing the mental health needs of these children (American Occupation Therapy Association (AOTA), 2016).

Purpose: My capstone project aimed to administer occupation-based interventions in a pediatric mental health program while I advanced my skills working with an interdisciplinary team.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The Model of Human Occupation (MOHO)

- Focus: Effect of volition on performance Cole & Tufano, 2020)
- Aim: To understand the occupational performance issues due to maladaptive volition, habituation, performance capacity, and the environmental components of the human system (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980; Cole & Tufano, 2020).
- Principles were used to help children and youth identify problems in their occupational life (Taylor, 2017).
- Principles guided intervention planning to address participation and performance issues in meaningful occupations, organize and incorporate occupations into daily routines, and better understand the influence of the environment on occupations (Kramer et al., 2014).
- Successful performance and engagement helped children and youth to develop a more positive occupational identity.

The Person Environment Occupation Model (PEO)

- Focus: Dynamic interactions among the person, environment, and occupation (Law et al., 1996).
- Aim: To guide intervention planning to expand meaningful occupational performance for children and youth experiencing mental health concerns (Law et al., 1996).
- Effective participation in daily occupations is critical to developing self-identity and values for children, and it is an important indicator of future quality of life (AOTA, 2014; Laverdure & Beisbier, 2021).

METHODS

Participants: Participants included children and youth at the Utah State Hospital. The mean number of individuals in the pediatric program was 45, consisting of three units to which they were assigned by age and biological gender.

- Children's unit= 8–12-year-old boys and girls with a mean age of 10.77.
- Teen boy's unit= 13–17-year-old boys with a mean age of 15.46.
- Teen girl's unit= 13–17-year-old girls with a mean age of 15.79.

Seven individuals completed the outcome assessments based on criteria that I had developed and clinical reasoning skills.

Assessment Instruments:

Child Occupational Self-Assessment (COSA)

- Consists of 25 items
- Individuals rated perceived competence in everyday occupations from a scale from 1= a “big problem” to 4= I am “really good at it,” and how important valued everyday occupations are from a scale from 1= “not important” to 4= “most important” (Kramer et al., 2014).
- The ratings are added together to yield competence and importance scores, each ranging from 25 to 100.

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

- Consists of 25 items assessing 5 variables: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behaviors.
- Used to assess the emotional and behavioral health of children and youth (Goodman, 2002).

Procedures & Activities

Goal 1: Develop in-depth clinical practice skills in the treatment of pediatric mental health conditions.

Deliverables: Site specific competency checklist, mental health first-aid certificate, interprofessional interview guide, documentation of activities and materials developed

Goal 2: Integrate occupation and activity-based interventions into occupational therapy sessions for children suffering from mental health conditions using evidence-based practice.

Deliverables: Intervention log, community outing list/group focus, summary of research findings, outcome log

Goal 3: Create educational materials to increase client/caregiver carryover of care for pediatric mental health conditions.

Deliverables: Support group topics, resource list, educational handouts

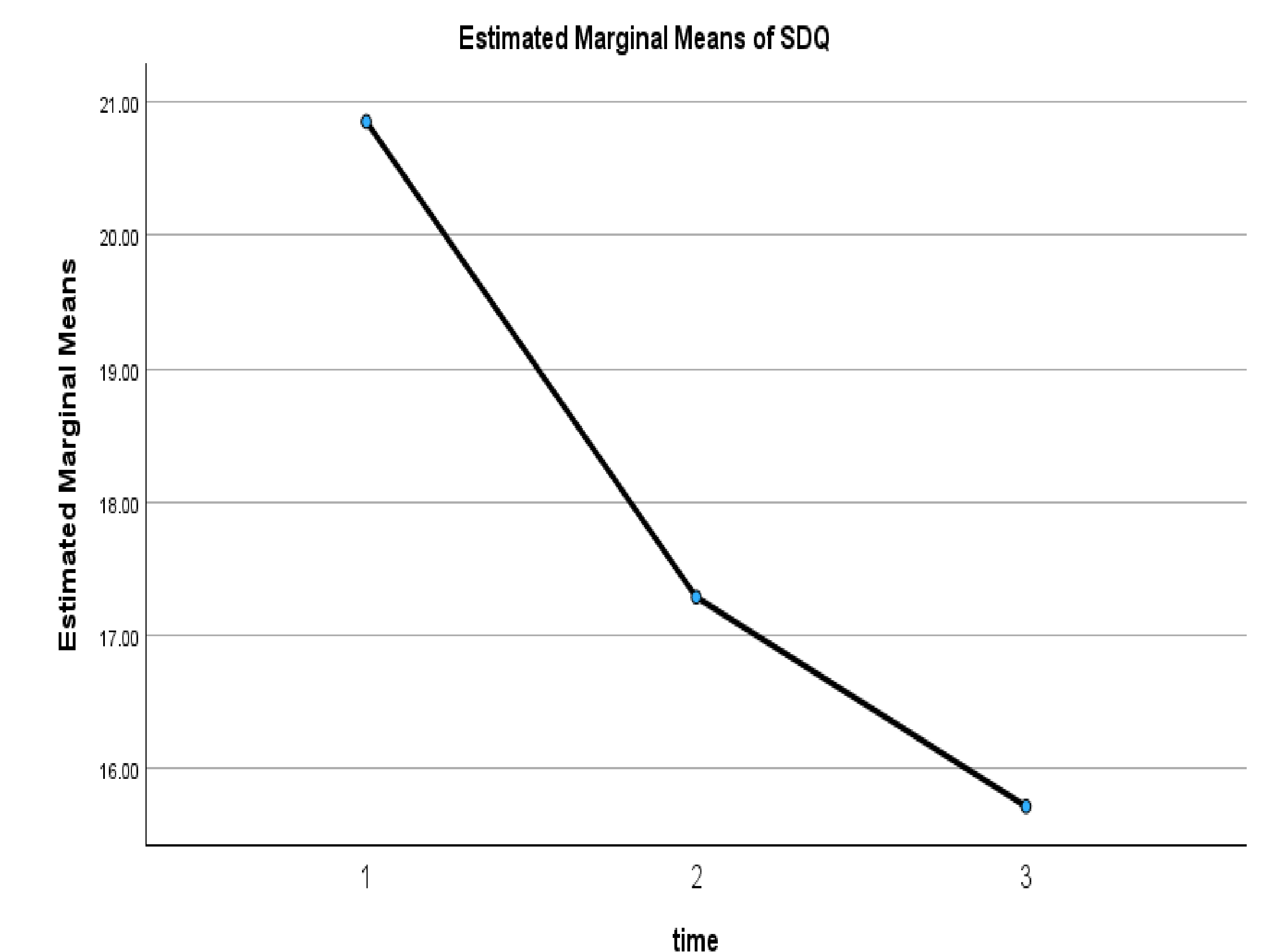
RESULTS

- There was an improvement in perceived competence and value scores following intervention, although the changes were not statistically significant. More specifically:
 - There was no statistically significant change in competence scores following intervention, $\chi^2(df=2, N=7) = 4.52, p=.10$. The median scores increased marginally from 1.64 at the initial evaluation to 2.64 at the final evaluation.
 - There was no statistically significant change in value scores following intervention, $\chi^2(df=2, N=7) = 2.77, p=.25$. The median scores increased from 1.57 at the initial evaluation to 2.43 at the final evaluation.
- There was a statistically significant decrease in perceived emotional and behavioral difficulties following intervention as seen in Figure 1. Specifically:
 - There was a main effect of intervention on emotional and behavioral difficulties as measured on SDQ, $F(2, 12)=5.91, p=.02$, partial $\eta^2=.50$, observed power 77.60%. There was a linear effect, $F(1, 6)=13.09, p=.01$.
 - Three orthogonal pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment indicated that there was a statistically significant change in SDQ scores from initial to final evaluation ($p=.03$). The mean score at the initial evaluation was 20.86 (SD=6.77) and at the final evaluation it was 15.71 (SD=4.72).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

- The findings of my capstone experience along with the evidence-based information available on this topic suggest that occupational therapy has a significant role in providing services to children and youth suffering from mental health concerns.
- Occupational therapists offer a unique approach to interventions to support the whole child to ensure skill development, promotion of well-being, and enhancement of occupational performance and participation (AOTA, 2016; Cahill & Beisbier, 2020).
- Mental health concerns can be addressed through occupation-based interventions to improve children's and youth's overall health and well-being (AOTA, 2016; Cahill & Beisbier, 2020).
- Occupational therapists should continue to advocate for their role in providing mental health services to individuals in need of services.
- Occupational therapy programs should be required to advocate and educate students on occupational therapy practice in pediatric mental health.
- Continued research should be conducted on occupational therapy's important role in addressing and treating pediatric mental health conditions.

Figure 1.



REFERENCES

