# **Stress Factors and Life Satisfaction in OT Graduate Students**

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# Introduction

- From 2007 to 2014, there were 31% more occupational therapy master's students in school and 17% more OTs employed in the U.S. (AOTA, 2014; United States Department of Labor, 2008; United States Department of Labor, 2014)
- As of 2007, entry-level OT's must earn a master's degree to begin practice (AOTA, 2009).
- Graduate students experience many unique stressors (Kacerguis & Adams, 1980; Deater-Deckard, 2004; Dr. Jerald Kay (as cited in Tartakovsky, 2008)).
- OT student populations are not well studied though there is much research studying medical school and nursing school students.
- This study focused on exploring stress factors and life satisfaction in OT students to improve understanding of this population

# **Research Questions**

- 1. How stressed are OT students?
- 2. How satisfied with life are these students?
- 3. How does their stress correlate with life satisfaction?

# Literature Review

- · Higher stress can lead to higher anxiety, depression, and suicide rates (Silverman & Meyer, 1997; The Graduate Assembly of the University of California, 2014).
- Medical school students were found to have lower life satisfaction (Paro, et al., 2010; Kieldstadli et al 2006)
- Stress factors for graduate students include: age, workload, relationships, children, money, & living situation. (Kacerguis & Adams, 1980; Deater-Deckard, 2004; Dr. Jerald Kay (as cited in Tartakovsky, 2008)).
- Age, sexual orientation, and ethnicity were found to be correlated with lower well-being in California graduate students (The Graduate Assembly of the University of California, 2014)
- A wellness program at Case Western Reserve University improved subjective well-being among students (Lee & Graham, 2001; Case Western Reserve University, 2016).

# Methodology

- Cross-sectional convenience sample survey study of OT master's students at SJSU.
- Participant Demographics:
- · 72 participants, 88% female, mean age of 29 years old
- 53% White, 33% Asian, 7% Hispanic
- 29% 1<sup>st</sup> vear students, 69% 2<sup>nd</sup> vear students
- Each participant completed:
- Demographic questionnaire
- Stress Profile<sup>™</sup>: 123 items, Likert scale (1 Never to 5 Always), results are clustered in 15 areas related to stress and health risk (Nowak, 1999)
- Satisfaction with Life Scale: 5 items, Likert scale (1 Strongly Disagree to 7 Strongly Agree), results in single score of Life Satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985)
- Data analysis using SPSS, JMP, and Excel:
- · Summary of demographic data
- Mean scores on Stress Profile and Satisfaction with Life Scale
- · Correlational analysis of Stress Profile, Satisfaction with Life Scale, and demographic data

## Results Stress Profile™

Mean t-scores on 14 of 15 stress scales were in the average range. Social Support Network was above average (t-score=63).

Satisfaction with Life Scale Mean Score was 27.8 (SD = 5.3), showing that majority of students were mostly satisfied with their lives.

#### **Correlations Between Stress Factors and Life Satisfaction**



# Interesting Findings Related To Demographic Data

#### Men had lower Stress scores

Men: n=9. mean T-Score=40.7. SD=5.89 Women: n=63, mean T-Score=50.0, SD=7.39. t(70)=3.65, p=.001

### Participants living with their parents

#### had lower Stress scores

Stress Profile:

ARC Item

Type A Behavio

Living with parents: n=20, mean T-Score=48.9, SD = 8.77

logical equanimity, and overall hap

ive, encouraging self-tall moyances and front -----

Coping style avoiding or using humor when faced with problems Coping style focusing on and developing a plan of action to manage problem

Yields 15 T-Scores (Mean=50, SD=10, Average range=40-60)

ncy of exercise

DESCRIPTION

Level and fre

Habitual behavior related Frequency of eating well-b

2

Living with parents

## Measurements

Satisfaction with Life Scale:

Score	Description
30-35 Very High Score	Highly satisfied with life
25-29 High Score	Mostly good but not perfect
20-24 Average Score	Generally satisfied but room for im
15-19 Slightly Below Average	Small but significant problems
10-14 Dissatisfied	Several domains are going badly
5-9 Extremely Dissatisfied	Extremely unhappy

# **Discussion / Clinical Implications**

- 1. To improve life satisfaction in OT students, advisors and/or student organizations may arrange activities to address significantly correlated stress factors, such as Cognitive Hardiness, Health Habits, and Negative Appraisal.
- 2. The strong Social Support Networks found among OT students can be utilized to help them succeed.
- 3. This study discovered that OT students tend to have higher life satisfaction than typical college students (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Larger sample size is needed to examine statistical differences



# Limitations and Future Research

- The small sample size, convenience sampling, and demographic makeup of our participants may limit the generalizability of the results.
- The two instruments used in this study are both subjective measures of a person's feelings and beliefs related to stress and life satisfaction. Including objective measures of stress (e.g. arousal levels, blood pressure, cortisol levels) may provide additional information
- The study suggested that some stress factors are related to life satisfaction. Those factors could be used as screening tools to understand students' wellness. Those factors should also be considered when developing programs for stress coping strategies in students.

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70 65 60 55 50



# Not living with parents: n=52, mean ARC T-Score=54.2, SD = 8.35), t(70) = 2.39, p = .019