Prevalence and Impact of Psychological problems on healthcare workers and OTs
Elizabeth Brand, MScOT Student, University of Alberta

Psychological Health and Safety in the Occupational Therapy Workplace
An initiative of the Society of Alberta Occupational Therapists (SAOT) with funding from Alberta Human Services, Occupational Health and Safety Program, Development and Research

The accompanying video is a resource designed to further enhance Occupational Therapist and student knowledge and awareness of the prevalence of psychological health work issues and their impact.

"Psychological health comprises our ability to think, feel and behave in a manner that enables us to perform effectively in our work environments, our personal lives, and in society at large."

Before addressing the prevalence of psychological health work related issues, the presentation first looks at a global scale. This information is intended to help set the stage. For example, one in four people in the world will be affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives. Around 450 million people currently suffer from such conditions, placing mental disorders among the leading causes of ill health and disability worldwide (WHO, 2001).

These statistics suggest individuals will and do come into occupations with pre-existing mental health issues and due to the nature of their occupation, these illness may or may not be drawn out based on job psychological job demands.

The companion video also focuses on prevalence of mental health issues within healthcare practitioners as compared to other occupations. In 2003, it was found that 45% of health care workers reported feelings of high and extreme stress compared to 31% of all other employed people (Wilkins, 2007).

The presentation then highlights the prevalence of psychological health issues specifically within occupational therapy.

The second half of the presentation focused on impact of psychological health problems within the workplace.

Unhealthy psychological work environment→ all employees, including OT→ coworkers, clients→ organizations, the community

Health and safety risks of unaddressed OT workplace psychological health problems are then defined by existing evidence.
- Decreased Engagement
- Increased burn out
- Increased emotional Exhaustion
- Depersonalization
- High absenteeism
- Low employee commitment
- High worker turn over
  (Poulsen et al., 2014)
- Professional Resilience- (Ashby et al., 2012)

The next list was extrapolated from the background evidence and projected some of the current issues stemming from a psychologically unhealthy workplace. Specifically:

- Negative impacts on treatment and outcome of OT as a result of less involvement, enjoyment and commitment to the profession and client
- Sending individuals back into the community when they are not ready nor equipped with proper coping and functioning skills
- Negative relationships with coworkers due to lack of role clarity amongst health care professions
- Impact on home/private life, work stressors carry home for work
- Economic impact of increased $ spent on mental health disability claims and loss of productivity due to time off work
- Substance use and abuse

Fortunately with the rising prevalence of mental health issues globally, the seriousness and effects are becoming more renown and thus being more thoughtfully considered and managed.

RESOURCES

Ashby, S. E., Ryan, S., Gray, M., & James, C. (2013). Factors that influence the professional resilience of occupational therapists in mental health practice. *Australian occupational therapy journal*, *60*(2), 110-119.

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety. (2012, September 21). In *Mental health at work*. Retrieved November 10, 2015, from http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/mentalhealth_work.html

Gupta, S., Paterson, M. L., Lysaght, R. M., & Von Zweck, C. M. (2012). Experiences of burnout and coping strategies utilized by occupational therapists. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *79*(2), 86-95.

Poulsen, A. A., Meredith, P., Khan, A., Henderson, J., Castrisos, V., & Khan, S. R. (2014). Burnout and work engagement in occupational therapists. *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *77*(3), 156-164.

Samra, J., Gilbert, M., Shain, M., & Bilsker, D. (2012). In *Guarding minds @ work: A workplace guide to psychological health and safety*. Retrieved November 9, 2015, from http://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca/info

Wilkins, K. (2007, November 4). Work stress among health care providers. *Health Reports*, *18*(4), 33-36.

World Health Organization. (2001). Mental disorders affect one in four people. In *World Health Report*. Retrieved November 10, 2015, from http://www.who.int/whr/2001/media_centre/press_release/en/