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Sexual Orientation and Gender Identification in Occupational Therapy Curricula

Objective: Occupational therapists interact with a diverse set of clients from various cultural backgrounds. Although some Occupational Therapy (OT) curricula in the United States (U.S.) address cultural competency, limited evidence exists on how programs are incorporating topics regarding sexual orientation and gender identity into their curricula. This research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the different methods U.S. OT programs use to integrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer (LGBTQ+) content into their curricula.

Methods: A focus group with four interprofessional practitioners and educators, and one OT student and LGBTQ+ advocate took place to identify the priorities and relevance of LGBTQ+ issues that must be addressed in OT education. The focus group discussion was transcribed and analyzed using Google Sheets software. The data obtained guided the development of a survey.

Results: Five major themes emerged from the focus group: sensitivity and awareness towards LGBTQ+ topics, language and clarity, validity of sources, relevance to the scope of OT practice, and overall structure of a survey. The survey was developed based on these themes and will be distributed by a future research team to entry-level master's and entry-level doctoral OT degree chairpersons and program directors throughout the U.S.

Conclusion: The survey developed addresses important elements that must be explored in OT curricula regarding LGBTQ+ content such as topics covered, educational methods utilized, and preparation of course instructors. Future phases of this project will disseminate this survey and can utilize the data gathered to make adjustments to the OT curriculum at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University. The obtained data can also provide references for other OT and health care educational programs to incorporate this content into their own curricula, which will aid in bridging the gap in health care disparities impacting LGBTQ+ people.

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