WORK-RELATED INJURIES IN CANADIAN HEALTHCARE – LESSONS FROM OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PRACTICE  
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Rationale

A review of the literature revealed that there are no studies of work-related injuries in occupational therapy practice across practice contexts.

Objectives

This groundbreaking Canadian study identified the nature and prevalence of work-related injuries, the impact of practice context, cultural and structural factors that influence how OTs respond to work-related injuries, and the strategies used to manage their return to work after an injury.

Method

All English-speaking OTs who worked in Canada, with accessible email addresses registered with the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) received an electronic survey (n=2363) in June, 2009.

Results

Demographically, the 610 completed questionnaires were highly representative of Canadian OTs when compared to CAOT membership statistics. 55.7% reported at least one episode of injury, with 11.8% reporting multiple injuries. Musculoskeletal injuries accounted for the largest proportion of injuries (56.2%). Unexpectedly, over 30% of OTs reported being threatened or experiencing workplace violence.

Conclusion

Previously, assumptions were made about the nature of OT work-related injuries based upon the literature of other disciplines from other countries, suggesting the vast majority are attributable to patient-handling activities. However, it was inadequate to attribute the majority of OT musculoskeletal injuries to patient-handling activities alone. While OTs also experienced a high rate of musculoskeletal injuries, the majority were directly attributable to the unique practice settings and challenges of providing occupational therapy in the Canadian context. However, the findings of this study are very applicable to all other healthcare providers in Canada, as the injury risks faced by OTs are not unique to their discipline alone. The recommendations made by OTs participating in this study have the potential to impact the practice of other Canadian practitioners and those working in the healthcare sector.