

## **Beliefs of Occupational Therapy career directors about spirituality in undergraduate training in Chile: Influence on academic management and strategies for its integration**

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**Summary:** This study aims to interpret the beliefs of Occupational Therapy program directors about spirituality in undergraduate education. Five semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with program directors who have been in their positions for at least one year. The data will be analyzed using inductive reasoning, under an interpretive and qualitative approach, using the content analysis technique. The beliefs of the program directors will be identified and evaluated for their influence on their academic management with teachers and students, exploring possible strategies to integrate spirituality into the students' formative process. The results will provide valuable information on the importance of spirituality in undergraduate education in Occupational Therapy in Chile and will allow for the exploration of strategies for its integration into the educational curriculum.

**Keywords:** Occupational Therapy, Professional Training, Belief, Spiritual Development, Educational Management.

## **1 Introduction**

Occupational Therapy has been related to spirituality since its inception. Dunton mentioned that “illnesses of the body and soul can be healed through occupation” (as cited in Cofré and Rioseco, 2021). Spirituality is considered a relevant factor in treatment (Aota, 2020). However, it is currently excluded from the training of Occupational Therapists (Avello, 2021). This study seeks to understand how the beliefs about the spirituality of program directors influence undergraduate education in Occupational Therapy.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Occupational Therapy**

Occupational Therapy improves the quality of life through the therapeutic use of occupation (Simó, 2014). Historically, it has adopted a holistic paradigm to understand and address the needs of people. With the arrival of positivism, the use of scientific and objective methods has been privileged (Morrison, 2018). This paradigm shows limitations in understanding the subjectivity of spirituality. Therefore, it is crucial to reflect on the paradigms that guide the training and reconsider holistic perspectives.

### **2.2 Positivist paradigm and training in Occupational Therapy**

Positivism changed the human experience by separating the self from the world (Muñoz and Farías, 2013). This led to a mechanistic view of reality, where phenomena are explained by universal and causal laws. Piedra (2017) argues that:

“The fragmented conception of the human has developed a profound contradiction: material particularities acquire greater relevance compared to immaterial qualities, which implies that the person is conceived and constructed mainly from his biological dimension, disarticulating his spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions.”. (p. 100)

This mechanistic view puts pathology at the center and the individual in the background (Morrison, 2018). Educational institutions reinforce this view by focusing on scientific evidence and clinical competencies (Avello, 2021). Therefore, it is important to question the role of spirituality in the formation and spiritual beliefs of those who participate in it.

### **2.3 Beliefs and Spirituality**

Beliefs are fundamental to understanding the world around us, strongly linked to spirit (Belief, 2020, as cited in Aota 2020). Spirituality, on the other hand, connects us to something bigger than our own existence (Sheldrake, 2018), helps us cultivate our connection to our inner self (Wilber, 2000), and find meaning and purpose in life (López, 2022). In the field of Occupational Therapy, spirituality is an important dimension of human occupation that influences well-being and health (Aota 2020). Therefore, it is crucial that beliefs and spirituality are considered in the training of Occupational Therapists.

### **2.4 Training of Occupational Therapists and Educational Management**

Within the scope of educational management, a common figure in institutions that teach Occupational Therapy programs is the career director, whose responsibility is to manage the fulfillment of study programs, teacher hiring, and project implementation, providing feedback from their management to educational institutions.

## **3 Method**

Five semi-structured in-depth interviews will be conducted with career directors of Occupational Therapy who have been in office for at least 1 year, the answers will be coded and the data will be analyzed through inductive reasoning, under an interpretative and qualitative approach in data analysis, the selected technique is the content analysis based on the criteria raised in the supported theory (Espriella et al. 2020), covering the phases of open coding and axial coding.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 Beliefs about spirituality**

Spiritual practices related to quality of life are diverse and include techniques such as relaxation, yoga, Pilates, and mindfulness. Spirituality is influenced by culture and social norms and is understood as a personal pursuit. It is expressed in relationships based on equality, respect, and collaboration. Although it was not directly present in the undergraduate training of the interviewees, they identified some disciplinary models with a spiritual dimension such as the Kawa, Canadian, and Human Occupation models.

### **4.2 Spiritual Beliefs and Educational Management**

Academic management is interrelated with spirituality through values such as humility and equal treatment. The Service-Learning methodology fosters bonds with others in

their social environment through community service. Spirituality can empower the student in times of uncertainty or difficulty during their educational process. However, undergraduate training in Occupational Therapy does not incorporate spirituality due to a lack of knowledge at the sociocultural level.

#### **4.3 Integration of spirituality in training in Occupational Therapy**

To integrate spirituality, the curriculum could be restructured to a circular approach, eliminating prerequisites from some subjects. This would foster a model focused on the exploration of knowledge and enhance the holistic essence of students. It is suggested to incorporate spiritual characteristics in the assessment, train teachers, and develop in the students a connection with their community and compassion.

### **5 Discussion**

Beliefs about spirituality can influence the performance of people and their occupations, in this case, the educational management of principals (Abente, 2014). Their inclusion would benefit students by enhancing their link with their training and the people who receive their services. Spirituality is an intrinsic human dimension that can contribute to the paradigmatic change in health (Bayés-Cáceres et al., 2020)

### **6 Conclusions**

The spiritual beliefs of the directors are related to their socio-cultural contexts. They reflect a collective identity that influences their spiritual experiences and actions, including their work lives. Educational management is influenced by their attempt to transmit spiritual values in their role. Although these values were not part of their professional training, the directors try to transmit them in their management, considering that spirituality should be more present in Occupational Therapy programs.

### **7 Limitations and Future Research**

The limitations of the study are related to the beliefs of the directors and the interpretations of the researcher. It would be relevant to investigate spirituality in the curricular designs of Occupational Therapy in Chile, integrating the findings of this research.

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