

Fall 12-9-2021

Occupational Therapy's Role in Emergency and Disaster Preparation for the Population of Physically Disabled Individuals

Aldin Cerillo

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, A.Cerillo@usa.edu

Susan MacDermott

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, skmacdermott@gmail.com

Karen Park

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, kpark@usa.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonesfall2021>



Part of the [Occupational Therapy Commons](#), and the [Public Health Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cerillo, A., MacDermott, S., & Park, K. (2021, December 9). Occupational Therapy's Role in Emergency and Disaster Preparation for the Population of Physically Disabled Individuals. Poster presented at the Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium, University of St Augustine for Health Sciences. Retrieved from <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonesfall2021/17>

This Poster/presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the OTD Capstone Symposia at SOAR @ USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium, Fall 2021 by an authorized administrator of SOAR @ USA. For more information, please contact soar@usa.edu, erobinson@usa.edu.

Occupational Therapy's Role in Emergency and Disaster Preparation for the Population of Physically Disabled Individuals

Aldin Cerillo, OTS; Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L; Becki Cohill, OTD, OTR/L

BACKGROUND

Emergency situations or disasters occur unexpectedly all over in the world with no population immune to its devastating affects. Vulnerable populations, including persons with a physical disability, lose the capacity to maintain crucial occupations and are more at risk due to issues such as loss of mobility or ability to communicate (Rutkow et al., 2015). Currently occupational therapy has a strong presence after an emergency situation has occurred, in a recovery capacity, to help survivors reestablish balance in their life (Scaffa et al., 2011).

PROBLEM

Despite *Safety and Emergency Maintenance* being an Instrumental Activity of Daily Living, a gap exists in the literature regarding what OTs may do when engaging in emergency and disaster preparation with individuals who have a physical disability.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to expand the literature regarding OT's role with emergency and disaster preparation for those with a physical disability. Completion of this project will produce educational materials and guidelines that OT practitioners may use to enhance their role in emergency preparation for individuals with a physical disability.

Acknowledgement:
Special thanks to Mary Schmitz, OTD, OT/L

METHODS

Phase 1: Needs Assessment

Observations and interviews with individuals who have a physical disability

- Site: Sharp Rees-Stealy
- Setting: Outpatient clinic
- 19 participants

Informal interviews with local Emergency Organizations

- Red Cross of San Diego
- Emergency Operations Coordinator of the City of Carlsbad

Phase 2: IRB Approved Research Study

Mixed-method survey created only for occupational therapists to respond

- Recruitment completed via posting on social media platforms
- Additional recruitment through snowball sampling via email to personal contacts
- 23 responses from OTs across America

Two research questions:

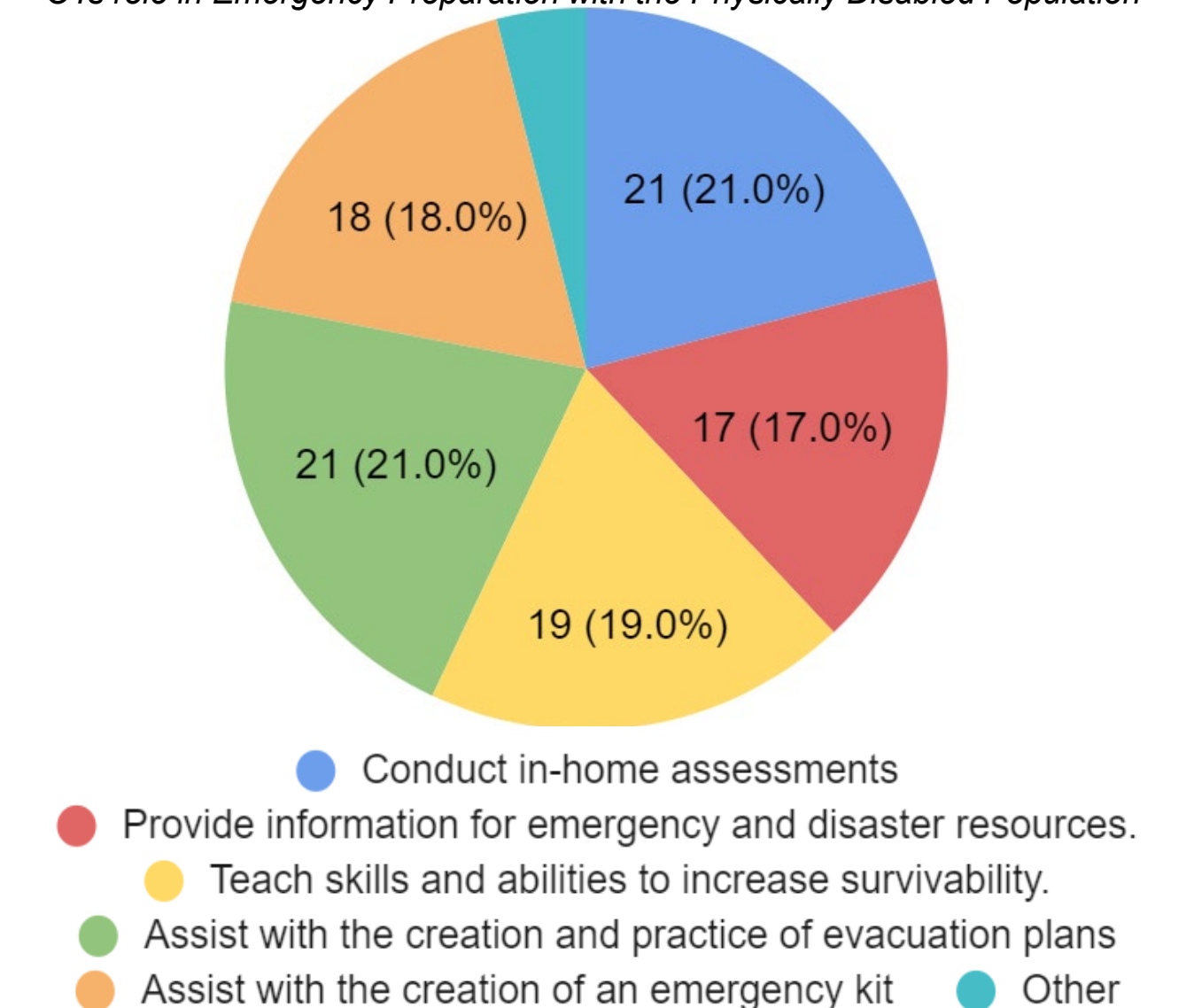
- What are the identified priority areas of need for populations with physical limitations during the event of an emergency or disaster?
- What areas can OT address to maximize occupational participation during the event of an emergency or disaster?

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

THEMES	SUBTHEMES	
Client Factors Influence Capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body Functions limit activities such as functional mobility which allow an individual to safely navigate obstacles or evacuate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentality affects a client's motivation to participate in emergency preparation and is also negatively impacted during an emergency situation.
Interaction Improves Circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependence on Others is common for individuals with a physical disability as they require increased support from family or caregivers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and Social Networks allow individuals to receive vital information, avoid isolation, and maintain social participation.
External Factors Affect Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding Limitations occur due to living in poverty or having a lack of financial security. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Resources may be limited due to living in a rural location or ability to access support services.
OT Services May Be Applied Effectively in Various Ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate clients on benefits of emergency preparation and utilize opportunities for discussion with OT. • Establish and Maintain Plans and Resources that will help in situations such as evacuations or the need to shelter in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Assessments to help identify safety concerns, home hazards, and extent of client's physical abilities. • Enhance Client Capabilities with activities such as practicing evacuation drills and making home or equipment modifications.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OT

Figure 1.
OTs role in Emergency Preparation with the Physically Disabled Population



CONCLUSION

- Occupational therapists have the skillset to contribute worthwhile interventions during emergency preparation for individuals with a physical disability.
 - Lack of understanding within the profession of OT may be a barrier.
- Emergency services provide free, specialized services to those who qualify.
 - Implementation is limited due to communication barriers and lack of awareness among those who need it.
- Overall, individuals with a physical disability positively perceive emergency preparation.
 - Multiple barriers were identified that prevent their participation.

References

- Rutkow, L., Taylor, H. A., & Gable, L. (2015). Emergency preparedness and response for disabled individuals: implications of recent litigation. *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 43, 91-94. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jlme.12226>
- Scaffa, M. E., Reitz, S. M., Smith, T. M., & DeLany, J. V. (2011). The role of occupational therapy in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. *AJOT: American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 6, 11.