

Destigmatizing Substance Use: Through an Occupational Therapy Lens

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Introduction

Stigma toward substance use significantly limits individuals' access to healthcare and meaningful occupational engagement. Cultural misunderstandings of traditional and ritual substance use often lead to misinterpretation, while personal bias among healthcare providers can influence clinical judgment and contribute often unknowingly to occupational injustice. As a result, stigma is associated with decreased service utilization, poorer health outcomes, and occupational deprivation. In alignment with these concerns, the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) emphasizes the protection of occupational rights across diverse cultural contexts.

Project Description

This project involved the development of educational materials designed to examine cultural substance use practices, increase awareness of personal and systemic bias, and promote occupational justice. The intervention included the creation of learning modules, guided discussion prompts, and experiential activities to build cultural competency and reduce stigma.

Alignment Of Curricular Threads:

Aloha: Respect for diverse cultural practices and lived experiences.

Kuleana: Responsibility to address stigma and personal bias in practice.

Pono: Ethical duty to promote occupational justice.

Kokua: Supporting clients through compassionate, nonjudgmental care.

Laulima: Collaborative reflection and peer learning in classroom/community activities.

Purpose/Aims

Primary purpose:

The purpose of this capstone project is to improve students' understanding of cultural substance use practices and to reduce bias and stigma within clinical practice settings.

Primary Project Aims

- Promote culturally competent care and occupational justice.
- Increase awareness of personal positive and negative biases.
- Improve recognition of stigma and its impact on occupational engagement



References



Methods

Planning

Literature research was conducted on cultural substance use, stigma and occupational justice.

Review of Willard & Spackman and WFOT position statements.

needs assessment topics and how materials could be incorporated into courses.

Needs assessment based off of professor feedback for future courses.

Development

- Creation of learning objectives.
- Development of assignments based off of the standards needed to be met.
- Selection of videos to watch for increased engagement and learning experience.

Results/Outcomes

Intended outcomes for this project is to improve students abilities to discuss stigma and occupational justice.

Preparation for Fieldwork

Improved confidence when working with diverse client backgrounds.

Increased understanding of occupational injustice.

Better understanding of occupational rights and justice.

Standards Addressed (ACOTE 2023 standards) For Course Material:

B.1.3 Determinants of Health: Understand how social determinants affect occupational performance.

B.4.2 Advocacy : Advocate for occupational justice and reduction of stigma to support equitable access to services

Discussion

Interpretation of Outcomes

Bias identification activities increased self-awareness. Students should be able to apply occupational justices principles more effectively.

Significance

When occupational therapists apply cultural awareness and humility, they are better equipped to honor clients' cultural practices (including traditional substance use), foster trust, and promote occupational justice.

Limitations

Limited time to explore all global cultures.

Future direction

More case studies from Indigenous and global communities.

Examine student responses to enhance materials.

Expanded modules to equip students with practical strategies they can implement into clinical settings.