

Evidence in Action: A Requirement to Develop Insight for Impactful Occupational Therapy in Pakistan

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Globally Occupational therapy as a profession was established in the early nineties whereas in Pakistan it has been four decades but the profession is still struggling to become an integrated profession of health care system at national level. One of the major reasons is lack of evidence and institutes both academic and clinical, providing Occupational therapy education and services. Occupational therapy is the only health care profession that can address occupational needs in daily contexts; it is regularly excluded from tables that involve collaboration in decision-making related to health or social policy and programs.

This absence at policy tables inhibits the role that the profession can play to work towards long-term population outcomes. The inclusion of expanded OT perspective in national health plans, educational policy directions, and urban planning, for example, could dramatically influence the health and well-being of marginalized populations in a number of contexts - age-friendly cities, accessible schools, or trauma-informed services and disaster management has to be an integral part rather than accessory. At the same time, occupational therapy is being increasingly positioned in primary health care highlighting that occupational therapy practitioners' roles are gaining greater recognition in family medicine, pediatrics, and geriatric considerations within primary health care teams. Since occupational therapists are able to assess functional needs while co-creating client-centered meaningful goals and

collaboratively designing or recommending strategies to modify context, they uniquely position the client between diagnosis and their daily life context. In populations where access to medical practitioners is prohibitive or where the medical practitioners do not have time or capacity to provide first level preventive care, OT practitioners' capacity to provide this support is increasingly important.

The future of occupational therapy's impact hinges on integrating meaningful, client-centered intervention, with scalable and evidence-based approaches grounded in rigorous research. Effective evidence to action mechanisms - especially in low- and mid-income countries - depend on strong infrastructure, organizational capacity, and public policy support, such as the work of Evidence Action which scales proven interventions through well-planned partnerships and capacity-building approaches. Co-production in program design creates programs that are culturally specific, garner trust, and enhance equity and empowerment, providing cohesion with OT values and pushing back against harmful paternalistic healthcare models. Inter-professional working, including health and social care, digital technology (e.g. telehealth, AI-based assessments) and sustained engagement with policy and practice will be fundamental in addressing equity, building capacity and reach, improving care quality, and sustainability of the profession in a changing healthcare context.

In summary, the future of occupational therapy in Pakistan is situated at the convergence of clinical excellence, policy engagement, and evidence-informed innovation. Practitioners, educators, and researchers must rise to the challenge of embracing a future vision of occupational therapy as a vehicle for systemic change, an active contributor to public health discussions as it pertains to occupational therapy, and a driver for inclusion in a diverse and ever-changing society. Achieving this future vision requires us to: strengthen policy engagement related to occupational therapy by enabling occupational therapists with health policy literacy and advocacy skills; enhance research culture in occupational therapy through publications, funding and mentorship; increase equitable access by expanding occupational therapy services in rural and underserved areas; honoring co-production by involving clients and the community at all stages of program development; and building capacity for responsible use of integrated digital tools into the practice of therapy. In summation, this is both an acknowledgement of the path taken and a call to action - it encourages researchers, clinicians, and policymakers in Pakistan to continue the next steps in occupational therapy through justice, collaboration, and evidence based practices to render meaningful occupation a right for all, not a privilege for few.