

## The Effect of Occupational Therapy on Volitional and Vocational Skills in the Thai Juvenile Justice System

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### Abstract

Even though many Occupational Therapy (OT) programs contribute to social well-being and life skills enhancement during a person's lifespan, there are only a few OT programs especially created for the Juvenile Justice System. Collaborative programming was needed between OT staff and staff at the Ban Mutita Juvenile Vocational Training Center for Boys. This study aimed to compare baseline and post-intervention of the volitional and vocational skills in the participants who had been selected for the OT program. Selective sampling was conducted in order to obtain participants with low volitional and vocational skills ( $n = 31$  out of 105 boys). Two standard assessments were repeated to compare the baseline and post-intervention which included group dynamics of cooking, sport, and recreational activities for 4 weeks, four hours per session a week. A Paired-T test was finally analyzed. Volitional and vocational skills were significantly improved after the participants engaged in the OT supplement program, in combination with programs provided by vocational teachers. OT has demonstrated a positive effect on volitional and vocational skills in the Thai Juvenile Justice System. This pilot study has provided useful evidence about young offenders who need productive leisure engagement in order to gain self-achievement, leading to the supportive environments of education and employment in the future.

**Keywords :** Leisure, Occupation, Self-efficacy, Programming

### Introduction

The UN has been supporting the development of specialized systems for rehabilitating those young people in different countries. The rise in criminal youth gangs occurs because of inadequate economics, negative parenting, inaccessible education, illegal immigration, and stressful living factors. Therefore, child and adolescent forensic services are individually needed for effective interventions of mental health recovery (Young, Greer & Church, 2017). According to the Thai Family Court Act and the Juvenile Court Procedure (November, 22 BE 2553; 127 (72)), juvenile offenders need to be rehabilitated whenever they have been punished because of doing harm to others. Judges recommend rehabilitation to change their behavior, support their abilities, and reintegrate them into their communities. A multidisciplinary team should be formed including medical doctors (general practitioner and psychiatrist), a psychologist, social worker, vocational teacher, probation officer, occupational therapist, and others appointed by the Director of the Juvenile Justice Center. However, lack of a specialist workforce in the Juvenile Justice System challenges individualized therapeutic programs and activities including supportive peer-role models, optimistic relationships between staff and adolescents, and clear pathways of supportive education leading to employment

(Young, Greer & Church, 2017).

Although previous evidence pointed out that Occupational Therapy (OT) provides psychosocial assessments and behavioral trainings through diversional activities leading to meaningful life engagement (Molineux & Whiteford, 1999), positive emotional expression and motivation (Mee & Sumsion, 2001), increased self-confidence of learning new skills (Mee, Sumsion, & Craik, 2004), and appropriate self-development of work skills (Eggers & others, 2006), there is no precise OT service within the Juvenile Justice System because of limited sampling survey methods (Muñoz, Moreton, & Sitterly, 2016). Only a phenomenological study (Bradbury, 2015) reported explicit OT services based on the Model of Human Occupation (MoHo) within criminal populations including: 1) modification of the physical and social environment with safety and security, 2) improvement of self-worth with dynamic emotions and person-to-person approach of kindness across lifespan, and 3) advocacy of clients and therapists in community supports.

Known psychosocial OT often used a humanistic frame of the MoHo focusing on natural expression of having an inner life purpose related to performance of meaningful better life activities (Kielhofner, 2002). Three subsystems of the opened life system within the MoHo include volition, habituation, and performance capacity. Flowing from those subsystems, there needs to be a valuing of personal causation or accepted abilities, toward a combination of positive motivation, habitual changes, societal transformation at work and educational skills (Kielhofner, 2002). Therefore, this pilot study has positively intended to demonstrate an evidence-based therapeutic intervention of OT (MoHo used) to make an important contribution to Thai welfare and justice needs (Khemthong, 2012). This study aimed to understand whether the OT program positively changes the juvenile

participants' volitional and vocational skills, or not.

## Methods

### Study Design

#### *Participants*

One group pretest-posttest design was used in this study. A targeted population of 105 juvenile offenders who were living at the Ban Mutita Juvenile Vocational Training Center for Boys, Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection, Ministry of Justice. This center was selected because the director requested OT to share knowledge with the vocational teachers.

Samples (n = 31) were recruited into the OT program using selective sampling under a cut-off score of volitional and speed vocational assessment (poor skills). This sample size was statistically calculated. It was also intended that participation in this study be on a voluntary basis after the experimental objectives and instructions were discussed. Consent forms were signed for each participant, according to ethical approval. All samples had the right to withdraw from the study with no negative impact on any benefits prior to their participation. With acknowledgment of psychologists and teachers' screenings at the center, the exclusion criterion included having behavioral, communicative, physical, and psychosocial problems. The withdrawal criterion consisted of anyone who had been discharged by his legal timeframe as a conditionally expired case control.

#### *Instrumentation*

Two independent variables, volitional scores and vocational speeds, were collected by using sound standardized tools. The Volitional Group Assessment (Khemthong, 2012) consisted of three semi-structured activities in a group of 5 participants, one group per therapist. Those productive activities included making their friends' name tags, drawing a picture of the future, and

threading their own bead patterns. While the participants were doing those three activities, they were scored on the ten items of volitional skills from 0 (none), 1 (lowest ability) to 5 (highest ability) in each item, and then averaged for the total scores of 5. The participants were able to engage in the OT program if they had scores of less than or equal to 3 out of 5 (Pre-intervention/baseline).

The Pre-Vocational Assessment (Pre-Voc Kit, 2008) consisted of ten sets of structured work activities. Five of the 10 sets were randomly assigned to all participants to perform consecutively, with no more than 3 minutes a set. The participants were able to join the OT program if they achieved scores of less than or equal to 2 out of 5 sets (Pre-intervention/baseline) in those work activities. Time, in seconds, of all completed 0-5 sets were averaged per person, with 15 minutes as a maximum.

#### *Program Evaluation*

There were four sessions; 4 hours per session (once a week) for a total of 4 weeks. Cooking, sport, and recreational activities were creatively designed by using weekly program evaluation as follows: Firstly, talking about productive time use and self-efficacy of achievement leisure occupations (Passmore, 2003; Farnworth, 2000) was conducted in the first session of ego-centric group dynamics. Secondly, humanist challenging and choices of meaningful occupations (Good, Rivero, Zitcer, Umemoto, Lake & Baum, et al., 2017; Zemke, 2004). were introduced in the second session of cooperative group dynamics. Finally, reflective questionings based on the MoHo (Kielhofner, 2002) were assigned at the end of the third and fourth sessions. Examples of the reflection include: Why were you motivated to choose this activity; how have you learned to change your habits; or why have your life roles been transformed after doing leisure participation.

During the weeks, participants studied their free-elective subjects with all vocational teachers i.e. gardening, electrical repairs, cement construction, sport, playing music, and domestic housework. A Paired-T test was analyzed using the SPSS 14.0 for Windows at the 95% confidence interval.

## **Results**

Participants ( $n = 31$ ) were aged  $13.30 + 0.06$  years. Their volitional scores were significantly improved after they had engaged in the 4-week OT program in combination with the existing study programs ( $1.58 + 0.84$  Baseline:  $2.59 + 0.51$  Post-intervention;  $p < 0.001$ ). Their vocational times were also significantly improved ( $0.74 + 0.46$  min. Baseline:  $2.42 + 1.18$  min. Post-intervention;  $p < 0.001$ ).

## **Discussions**

Participants who were included in the OT program for low skills special training in this juvenile justice center (29.52%;  $n = 31$  samples to  $N = 105$  populations). This statement indicates an improvement of young offenders with low volitional and vocational skills by using the program evaluation (Khemthong, 2015; Khemthong, 2012), which focused on the opened system of making choices (Kielhofner, 2002), developing motivation (Mee & Sumsion, 2001), learning new skills (Mee, Sumsion, & Craik, 2004), breaking routine and building rapport (Khemthong, 2016). This study has contributed to the meaningful roles of OT, which improved volitional and vocational skills in combination with the vocational teachers. This statement agreed with previous studies of positive behavioral adaptation, leading to social well-being performance (Molineux & Whiteford, 1999; Eggers, Muñoz, Sciuilli & Crist, 2006).

The advantages of this study include the integration of the MoHo (Bradbury, 2015; Kielhofner, 2002), reflective questionings, and

experiential learning toward the productive program of achievement leisure (Passmore, 2003; Farnworth, 2000). Pragmatic solidarity of compassion with the challenges of OT, were also enjoyed by the participants who needed choices of occupational adaptation (meaningful time-place-persons-life experiences) (Good, Rivero, Zitcer, Umemoto, Lake & Baum, et al., 2017; Zemke, 2004). However, a supportive education and employment system should be clarified in relation to the OT program, in order to make it an effective program, capable of

rehabilitating those young people as members of society. Qualitative observation is also suggested for understanding behavioral changes before, during, and after intervention, such as asking the where and when of occupational patterns (Zemke, 2004). Also, a larger group of participants should be further interviewed by comparing self-efficacy, self-worth, and self-competency (Passmore, 2003) in between passive and active leisure occupations such as personal care (eating, sleeping, resting, household activities, etc.) versus educational and social leisure (Farnworth, 2000).

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