Retrospective Analysis of Graduates’ Experiences in a Post-Professional Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program

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Background
There are limited studies within occupational therapy literature assessing the benefits of advanced degrees. Specifically, there is a paucity of literature about the benefits of completing a post-professional occupational therapy doctorate (POTD) program. Due to the lack of research about POTD educational outcomes, more evidence is needed to justify the benefits of occupational therapists attaining the degree. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to retrospectively examine graduates’ perceptions of personal and professional growth at a midwestern university with an established POTD program.

Research Questions
1. Does completing an occupational therapy post-professional doctorate degree impact graduates’ personal and professional growth?
2. What are the areas of personal and professional growth impacted by completing a post-professional occupational therapy doctorate program?

Method
Survey Questions Analyzed from POTD Exit Surveys
- Please comment on the overall influence the post-professional OTD program has had on your personal and professional growth.
- How has the post-professional OTD program at this university advanced your career?
- What has been the most significant impact on you professionally as a result of your experiences in this program?

Results
Qualitative Data Categories
- Greater Sense of Self-Empowerment and Confidence
  - “I am changed forever. I am a better woman, wife, mother, friend, sibling, community member, and occupational therapist.”
  - “I can say that I am smarter; more confident, and even more excited about being an occupational therapist.”
  - “Overall, the program has facilitated a level of confidence within myself that I am no longer scared to seek or try new opportunities.”

- Expanded Career Opportunities
  - “My preparation at the university has allowed me to achieve my professional goal of teaching and practicing.”
  - “I have been made acting supervisor.”
  - “[I am] more competitive with other health care professional[s] for management, and advanced positions.”

- Increased Professional Knowledge and Skills
  - “I am better prepared to advocate for our profession.”
  - “I have published in a peer-reviewed journal...”
  - “It [POTD] has increased my ability as an instructor...”
  - “I feel strong as a leader...”

Discussion
Evidence from this study supports a positive impact on occupational therapists’ personal and professional growth as a result of completing a POTD program. By analyzing data from occupational therapists who completed a doctoral program, the researchers divulged information from the point of view of occupational therapists with first-hand experience of a doctoral program. Intriguing to the authors, survey data expressed growth in confidence and renewed passion for occupational therapy. Health professionals, such as occupational therapists, work in high stress jobs (Skovholt, & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Receiving post-professional education, such as earning a POTD, may be one strategy that could help reduce burnout.

References
Provided upon request.

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