

# Effectiveness study of “Occupational Connections”- a short-term, in-patient intervention for promotion of functioning and participation in daily life of people with mental health conditions



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## Introduction

Mental health conditions (MHC) have been associated with restrictions in daily life participation and functioning affecting health and well-being (Brissos, Molodynski, Dias, & Figueira, 2011; Sadock & Sadock, 2007). The participation in everyday activities of people with MHC is frequently characterized as having little diversity of occupations, passivity and low levels of structure and organization (Eklund, Leufstadius, & Bejerholm, 2009).

Involvement in meaningful occupations contributes to health and well-being and appears to be an important component of recovery from mental illness (Krupa, 2004; O’Connell et al., 2005; WHO, 2001).

Today, hospitals (in-patient settings) still serve a significant number of people with MHC (Exley, Thompson, & Hays, 2011). However, there is little evidence for occupation-oriented interventions (Lloyd & Williams, 2010).

## Aim

The aim was to investigate effectiveness of the “Occupational Connections” (OC) - short-term occupational intervention for the in-patient setting for improvement of functional capacity, cognitive functioning and symptom severity among in-patients diagnosed with schizophrenia.

## Methods and Materials

### Design

This is a quasi-experimental, prospective, pre-post designed study with convenience sampling.

### Participants

Thirty three in-patients diagnosed with schizophrenia (aged 18 to 50 years) were enrolled into the study groups: study (N=16) and control (N=17), matched by gender and age. They were hospitalized in acute care units of Beer Yaakov Mental Health Center, Israel and treated with antipsychotic drugs for at least 2 weeks, had 1 to 27 years of illness and 1 to 18 previous hospitalizations.

### Measurements

- Functional capacity - The Observed Tasks of Daily Living-Revised (OTDL-R);
- Schizophrenia symptoms - The Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS);
- Cognition - Trail Making Test (TMT); The Neurobehavioral Cognitive Status Examination (Cognistat); Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure test (ROCF); Category Fluency Test (CFT).

### Procedure

The study group participants took part in OC sessions for the duration of the program (10 sessions), or as long as they were hospitalized (2-11 weeks). They completed 2-10 intervention sessions. The control group participated in hospital treatment as usual for 2 to 8 weeks.

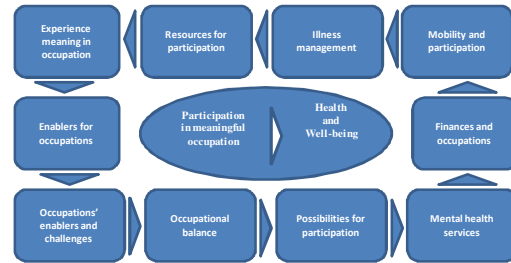
The research was carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki approved by the Israeli Ministry of Health Ethics Committee.

The intervention program was conducted in small groups (up to 5 participants) by occupational therapists blinded to the results of the evaluations.

### Intervention Description:

“Occupational Connections” (OC) aimed to expand positive occupational experiences and engagement in meaningful occupations promoting well-being and recovery using enabling engagement, narrative and cognitive intervention approaches. It is an open, cyclic group, with 10 sessions in each cycle. Each session has a similar structure and is focused on a specific topic which is fully processed in the same session.

## Intervention flow:



## Results

The OC effectiveness was estimated with regard to parameters of functional capacity, schizophrenia symptoms and cognition.

At baseline there were no significant differences between the OC and control groups on any of the investigated measures.

### Functional capacity

- Statistical significant improvement was found in functional capacity following participation in the OC ( $t=-3.44, p<.001$ ). This improvement was not found in the control group.

### Schizophrenia symptoms

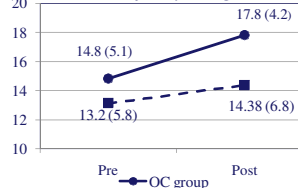
- There was a general tendency toward symptom reduction among the participants.
- The contribution of the intervention on the PANSS scores was statistically significant ( $t=10.7, t=6.5, t=10.5, p<.001$ ), those in comparison to the control group.

### Cognition

- OC group: following the intervention there was an improvement in cognitive functions including language understanding, executive functioning and visual memory ( $1.98<t<4.5, p<.05$ ).
- Control group: there was an improvement in the cognitive element of attention only ( $t=2.9, p<.05$ ), and a decline in visual motor organization ( $t=2.1, p<.05$ ).

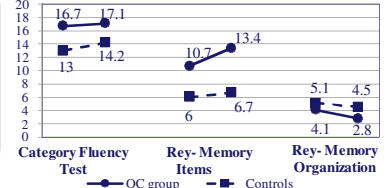
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Observed Tasks of Daily Living - Revised



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Cognitive Tests



## Conclusions

- The initial effectiveness of the OC intervention was established for people with schizophrenia receiving in-patient services.
- The intervention contributed to improvement of functional capacity, cognitive functions and reductions in schizophrenia symptoms.

## Acknowledgements

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## Selected References

- Krupa, T. (2004). Employment, recovery and schizophrenia: integrating health and disorder at work. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 28, 8-15.
- Lipskaya-Velikovsky, L., Kotler, M., Krupa, T. (2016). “Occupational Connections”- An intervention for in-patient psychiatry settings: description and preliminary findings. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 70, 101-105.