

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY and MENTAL IMAGERY for SUICIDE PREVENTION

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A feasibility study proposal exploring the impact of mental imagery as a therapeutic intervention on the quality of life in young adults who have tried to commit suicide.

Background Research:

Suicide is recognised as a major public-health concern affecting all genders, nationalities and cultures, with over 700,000 suicides recorded globally each year.¹

Poor mental health can negatively impact participation in daily occupations, feeding into a continuous cycle of low self-esteem and deprivation of opportunity, ultimately leading to poor perceived Quality of Life (QoL).

Occupational Therapy plays a critical role within mental health recovery, helping individuals realise their potential and encouraging them to re-establish occupations that can give their life meaning. Since 2019, suicide attempts from both genders aged 18-25, have increased.² This age presents a promising group to engage within occupations, work and society; offering opportunity to establish a better QoL at a prominent life stage.

Study Aim:

Mental imagery focuses on creating an emotional sensory response through the manipulation and exposure to a personally emotion-evoking stimulus. This study's intervention encourages mental imagery as a protective factor to build resilience and strength against negative, intrusive thoughts; therefore reducing psychological pain and hopelessness and allowing an improved QoL with greater engagement in meaningful occupations.

Conclusion and Practice Implications:

Results are expected to show improved perceived QoL using the Qual-OT V.2 assessment tool, pre and post intervention. The study investigates the effect of mental imagery as an intervention within a public health setting; and an additional alternative to non-pharmaceutical interventions, helping to prevent mental health deterioration and suicide attempts. It focuses on improving QoL through a person-centred approach, with a taught behavioural application that is transferable across an individual's lifespan.

Study Design:

- 1 45 young adults aged 18-25 who have previously attempted suicide and are receiving ongoing mental health support from NHS services.
- 2 Participant suitability checks and risk assessment. Introduction and explanation of 10-week intervention. Self-administered Qual-OT V.2 assessment tool.
- 3 10 weeks of 1-hour mental imagery based intervention, administered 1:1 by an Occupational Therapist. Person-centred approach addressing Person, Environment, Occupation factors and goal setting
- 4 Repeated Qual-OT V.2 assessment tool. Comparison of results pre and post-intervention to investigate improved QoL. Debrief to participants.



¹ WHO (2021) Suicide Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide> [Accessed on: 09/01/2023]
² ONS (2021) Suicides in England and Wales: 2021 registrations. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2021registrations#suicides-in-england-and-wales-data> [Accessed on: 10/03/2023]