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THERAPEUTIC
Sciences

Integrating mental health into spinal cord injury rehabilitation

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Why change is needed: Introduction and study objectives

- “**Falls** are fast becoming the **leading cause of TSCI** in high-income regions worldwide with high incidences of tumours and degenerative conditions in those with NTSCI. In **low and middle-income regions**, **transportation-related injuries** remain the leading cause of TSCI while high incidences of infection-related injury remains prominent in those with NTSCI” (Alves et al., 2023)
- Given the complexity of SCIs and how they were attained- clients experience a **mental health strain** – that is often not overtly addressed (Bahgoo & Freeme, 2024)
- Spinal cord injury rehabilitation is **complex** due to the high risk of **secondary impairments** and the urgency to improve client factors to improve occupational performance. The pressure of limited in-patient length of stay in hospitals and resources result in the prioritisation of improving physical impairments at the expense of mental health interventions amongst occupational therapists (Zürcher et al., 2019)
- **Objectives of the study:**
 - To determine which mental health assessments are used by occupational therapists in SCI rehabilitation.
 - To determine in which phase of recovery are mental health concerns addressed by occupational therapists in SCI.
 - To determine which mental health treatments are used by occupational therapists in SCI rehabilitation.

Innovating futures: methodology, findings and conclusion

Methods/Approach:

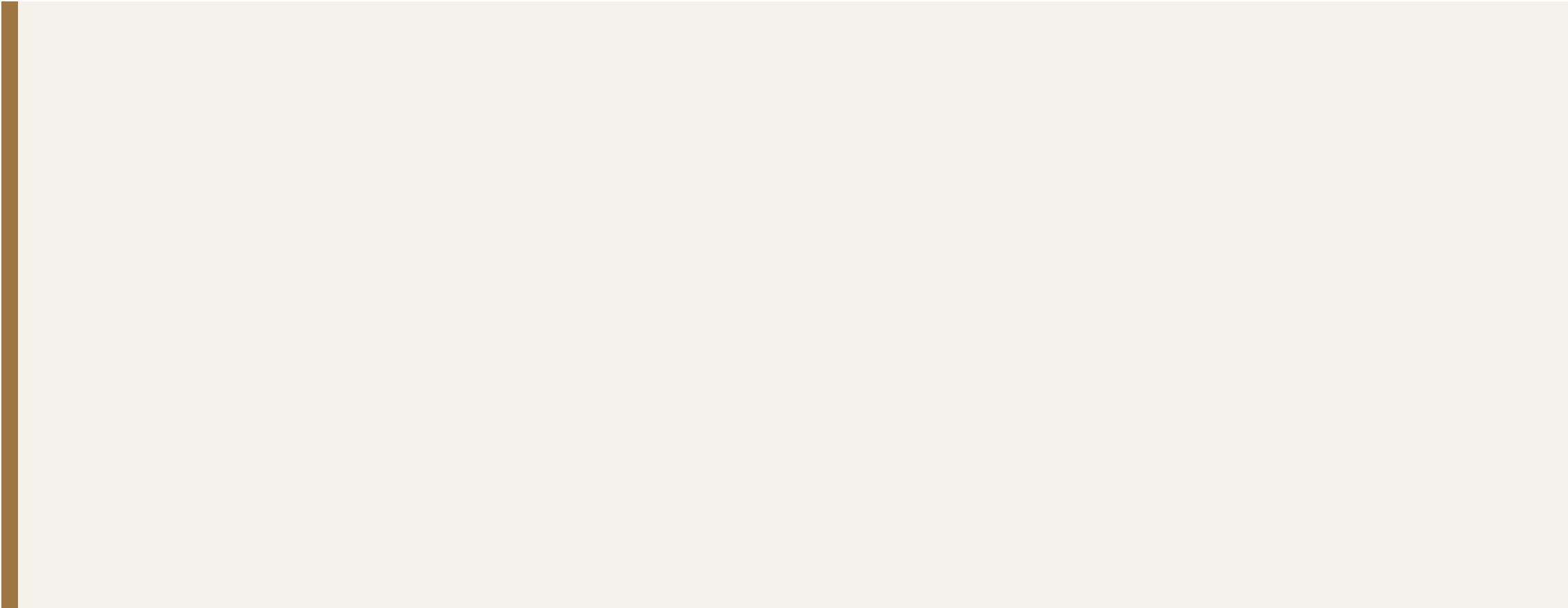
- The study followed a quantitative cross sectional descriptive approach using a questionnaire. Survey links were distributed to occupational therapist through the national occupational therapy association, interest groups and social media pages

Results/Practice implications:

- Most participants reported that they screen for mental health in spinal cord injury survivors only if they observe signs or symptoms. In contrast, the remaining participants indicated that mental health screening is a routine part of their assessment for all clients. Among those who incorporate mental health screening into their initial assessment, most rely on ongoing observations and interactions during treatment, while a smaller percentage use formalised assessment.

Conclusion/significance to Occupational Therapy Profession:

- Integrating mental health into rehabilitation is an important future consideration, as physical and mental health factors are not isolated in nature. Occupational therapists are well-equipped to address this complexity due to their holistic approach. Initiating these conversations creates opportunities to raise awareness and drive change towards a more integrated rehabilitation framework.



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