

A cross-sectional survey design to investigate occupational therapy practice in Norwegian community-based health care services - part of an ongoing research study

BACKGROUND

- Increased prevalence of chronic non-communicable diseases in age 65+
- Rising care needs among children and young people with complex needs
- Greater pressure on health and care services
- Increased need for coordination across service sectors
- Stronger demands for resource prioritization and targeted serviced development
- Increased focus on continuing professional development within health and care services
- Limited research on how community-based Occupational Therapists perceive their own competence and sustain professional development over time

This study aims to address the limited research on competency and professional development among occupational therapists in community-based healthcare services.

METHOD

- 2017: an online questionnaire was developed
- 2020: Statutory inclusion of Occupational Therapy in municipal services in Norway
- 2022: The online questionnaire was further refined, with the aim to capture occupational therapy practice, research activity and professional development after 2020
- This study is based on data from the latest online questionnaire

Descriptive analyses were used to summarize and describe the main characteristics of the data.

Logistic regression was conducted to examine associations between the outcome and the selected exposures. Variables were chosen through backward stepwise approach with collinearity and crosstabs

Table 1 Sample characteristics (n=617)

Variables	M (SD)	n (%)
Age/ years	41.2 (11.3)	
Female Gender		575 (93)
Ethnic minority background		26 (4)
Years of experience as OT	14 (9.8)	
Years in current workplace	9.8 (7.4)	
Post-bachelor continuing education		350 (57)
Located with other OTs		443 (72)
Full job (100%)		523 (85)
Interprofessional collaboration		475 (77)

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Research question 1:

How frequently do occupational therapists engage in different professional development activities, and which areas are most frequently identified as needing increased time and attention?

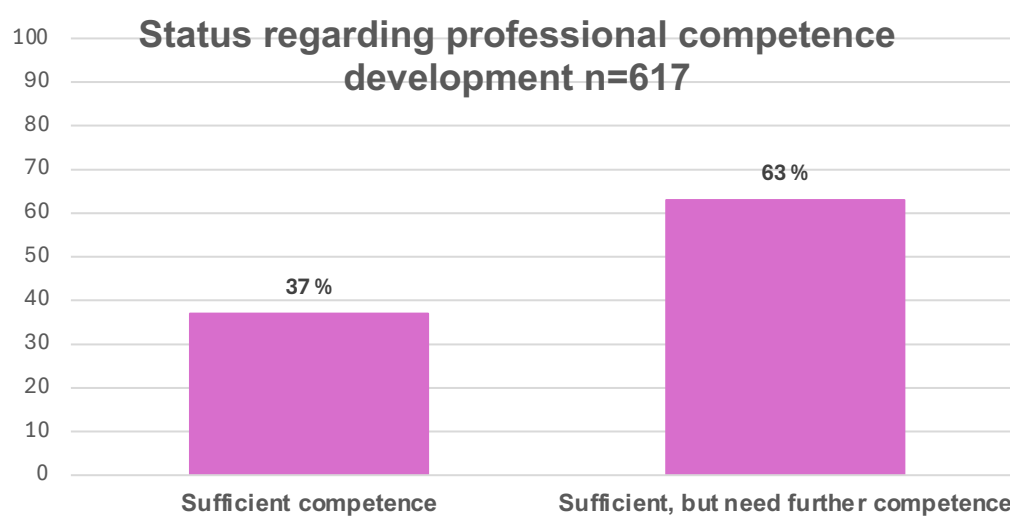
The illustration below presents the areas respondents could select as sources of professional development and the frequency of use, ranging from daily to never. A subsequent assessment captured respondent's preferences regarding areas in which they identified as needing more time and attention.

Professional development activities options	Frequency response options
Professional discussions with colleagues	Daily
Database searches / internet	Weekly
Fact sheets and guidelines	Monthly
Professional literature and books	Quarterly
Scientific journals	Semiannually
Courses and seminars	Annually
Formal education	Less frequently
	Never

- Professional updating was primarily based on databases and internet-based sources, while engagement with scientific journal articles was limited.
- Daily discussions with colleagues were considered important but were not prioritized for increased time investment.
- Despite low current use, many respondents expressed a desire for greater engagement with research-based sources, including scientific journals and professional literature.
- Courses and seminars emerged as the most strongly desired area for increased professional updating.
- Professional updating appeared largely informal and practice-oriented, alongside a clear demand for more structured and research-based learning opportunities

Research question 2:

What proportion of occupational therapists report sufficient professional competence while also expressing a need for further competence development?



Research question 3:

Which factors characterize occupational therapists reporting adequate professional competence while simultaneously expressing a need for further competence development?

- Out of 30 variables, only 3 variables remained statistically relevant
- Expressing a need for further competence development was significantly associated with being female, of younger age, and having an ethnic minority background
- Wide confidence intervals indicate limited precision, likely due to uneven subgroup sizes within the sample
- Community-based occupational therapists appeared largely similar in terms of competence needs, regardless of whether they expressed a desire for further competence development.
- No systematic differences were identified across background variables or work areas, indicating that the need for competence-enhancing initiatives is not confined to specific subgroups.
- The preliminary results suggest a general need for professional development across the group, with no clearly distinct subgroups.

Take home message:

Preliminary results indicate that community-based occupational therapists share similar competence needs, with no systematic differences across demographics or practice settings. This points to a profession-wide need for competence development. Therapists primarily update their knowledge via online sources, while scientific literature is used far less. Although most feel professionally competent, the majority still seek further development, especially through courses, seminars, and research-based resources.

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