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Exploring factors which motivate occupational therapy students to consider practicing in a rural or remote area of Australia.

Purpose of study

Australians living in rural and remote areas require a consistent workforce to address health inequities¹⁻². Occupational therapy students find it challenging to decide where to work, despite recruitment initiatives that target graduates³⁻⁴.

This research aims to investigate the motivating factors for occupational therapy students considering work in rural and remote Australia.

Ethics approval granted from Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee: 45975.

Tool validation

Validation of the Health Practitioner Motivations Scale⁵ was completed prior to data analysis to ensure the tool was valid for use with the sample.

Factor analysis using principal component analysis⁶ was conducted, with varimax rotation and an eigenvalue of 0.499.

This resulted in a factor structure of 54 variables across 13 components⁷.

Methods

Design

Cross-sectional research design using survey and focus groups

Participants

Australian undergraduate occupational therapy students

Recruitment

Face-to-face and online forum announcements

Data collection tools

Survey included researcher-developed questions and questions from the Health Practitioner Motivations Scale⁵

Tool validation

Validation of the Health Practitioner Motivations Scale for use with occupational therapy student population across all rural and remote areas^{5,7}

Data analysis: Survey

Descriptive statistics
Frequency data
Mann-Whitney U test of difference

Data analysis: Focus groups

Data analysis is ongoing with planned use of reflexive thematic analysis. Results are not yet available for this data.

Results

Participants were grouped based on experience level within their course:

- 1st and 2nd year - Foundational students⁸, and
- 3rd and 4th year - Pre-professional students⁹.

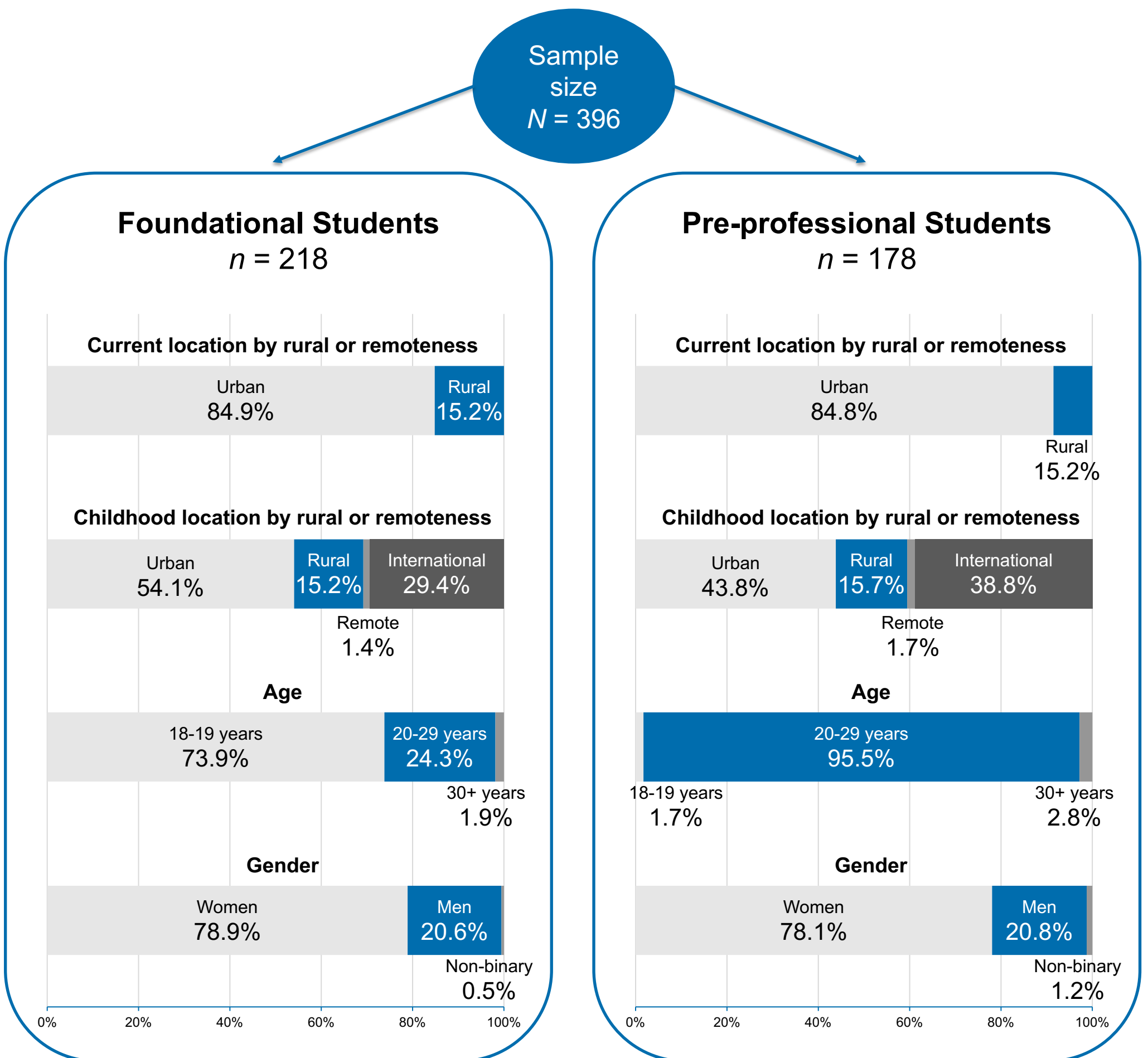


Figure 1: Demographic data

Selecting factors that students feel positively impact recruitment

The same top 5 factors were chosen by both foundational and pre-professional student groups as **positively affecting the recruitment and retention** of occupational therapists in rural and remote areas:

1. Financial incentives
2. Accommodation or rental assistance
3. Salary
4. Flexible working arrangements
5. Lifestyle options in the rural area



Test of difference for items on the Health Practitioner Motivations Scale

Mann-Whitney U statistics were conducted on each validated subscale of the Health Practitioner Motivations Scale, comparing foundational students and pre-professional students.

A statistically significant difference was found between foundational and pre-professional students, for seven of the 13 subscales.

Subscales with significant differences between groups included:

- *financial incentives* ($U=23586.00$, $p<.001$),
- *spiritual beliefs* ($U=15,838$, $p=.002$),
- *supervision* ($U=14,058.00$, $p<.001$),
- *living location preferences* ($U=17,152.50$, $p=.046$),
- *time demands* ($U=14,163.00$, $p<.001$),
- *management* ($U=17,059.00$, $p=.037$), and
- *leadership* ($U=16,673.00$, $p=.015$).

Conclusions

This research presents an understanding of some factors which motivate undergraduate occupational therapy students to consider working in rural or remote areas upon graduation. It considers differences between students of varying experience levels as they progress through their education.

Analysis and interpretation of results is ongoing and aims to further clarify the factors that occupational therapy students are motivated by when considering their future practice in rural or remote areas of Australia.

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