

“

Caught between responsibility and well being: How occupational imbalance is linked to higher stress in parents of neurodiverse children ”

▶ Petra Kamber & Andreja Bartolac



*Inspiring Change,  
Innovating Futures*



# Neurodiversity and parenting

Parents of neurodiverse children face unique challenges in juggling multiple roles, including:

- increased time and effort spent on childcare,
- household chores,
- maintaining their careers, and
- participating in social activities.

These demands often leave little time for rest and recovery.

# OCCUPATIONAL BALANCE

- ▶ **Occupation** encompasses all activities that people engage in everyday life, which require their attention, energy, time, and emotions
- ▶ When individuals are unable to meet their physical, social, and psychological needs, or their need for rest, a state of **occupational imbalance** occurs
- ▶ **Occupational deprivation** of parents of ND children

# MENTAL HEALTH

- ▶ **Mental health** is a state of psychological well-being that enables people to cope with life's stresses, recognize their abilities, learn effectively, work, and contribute to their community
- ▶ **Individual, family, community, or structural factors** can influence the preservation or impairment of mental health
- ▶ **Dynamic state of inner balance**

# Objectives

- ▶ This study aims to investigate how parents of neurodiverse children:
  - ▶ spend their leisure time,
  - ▶ perceive their occupational balance,
  - ▶ assess their stress levels, and
  - ▶ evaluate their overall health.

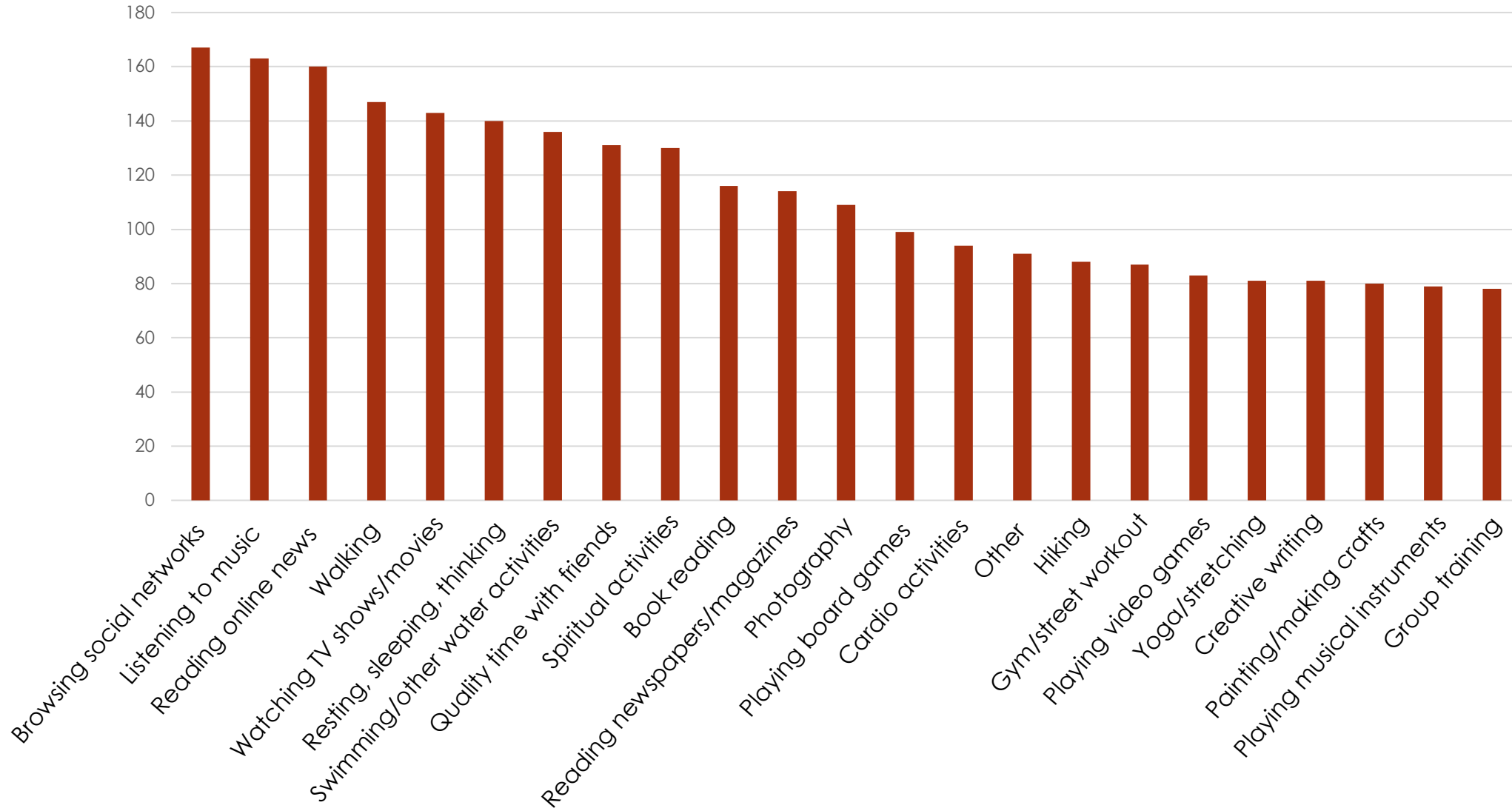
# Methodology

**Participants:** 61 parents, the majority of whom were mothers (75.4%) with a mean age of 44 years ( $M = 44$ )

Participants completed:

1. **Leisure Activities Questionnaire**
2. **Occupational Balance Questionnaire** (OBQ; Wagman & Håkansson, 2014)
3. **Depression Anxiety, and Stress Scale** (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)
4. **Demographic Questionnaire**

# Leisure Activities Questionnaire



# Occupational balance questionnaire (OBQ)

13-item scale

Particles	Completely disagree (%)	Partly disagree (%)	Partly agree (%)	Completely agree (%)
I have enough things to do during a normal week	19.7	34.4	29.5	16.4
The activities I do in my daily life make sense to me	6.6	42.6	23.0	27.9
I have a balance between the things I do for others and the things I do for myself	39.3	21.3	32.8	6.6
I am satisfied with the way I spend my time in my daily life	27.9	29.5	32.8	9.8
I have enough time to do the things I need to do	26.2	31.1	34.4	8.2
I have a balance between the things I have to do and the things I want to do	9.8	37.7	6.6	45.9
If I think about a normal week, I am satisfied with the amount of activities I do	19.7	27.9	41.0	11.5
I have a balance between the different activities of my daily life (work, study, housework, leisure, rest and sleep)	31.1	24.6	36.1	8.2
I have enough variety between activities I do alone and activities I do together with others	18.0	32.8	36.1	13.1
I have a balance between activities that give me energy and activities that take away energy	26.2	32.8	32.8	8.2
I have a balance between physical, social, intellectual and rest activities	27.9	29.5	31.1	11.5
I am satisfied with the time I spend on rest, recovery and sleep	26.2	29.5	37.7	6.6
I have enough time to do the things I really want to do	32.8	18.0	37.7	11.5

# Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21)

21 item scale

3 sub-scales:

1. Depression (d)
2. Anxiety (a)
3. Stress (s)

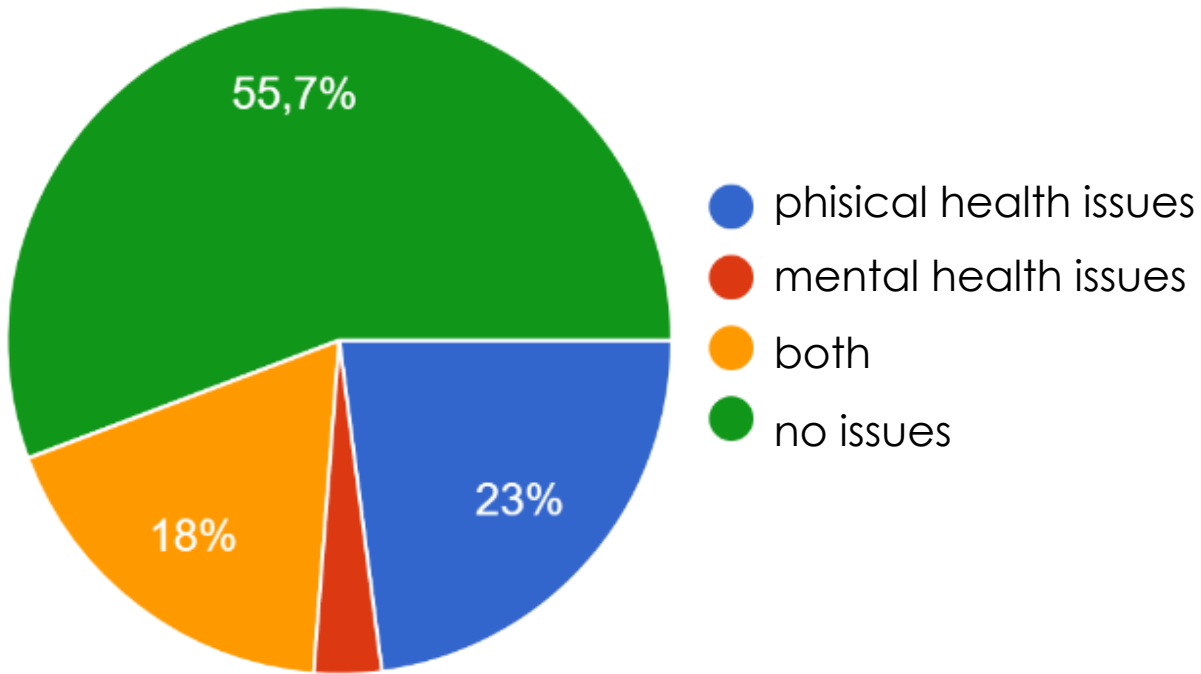
Each scale: 7 items

Particles	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Often (%)	Almost always (%)
I found it hard to wind down (s)	8.2	45.9	39.3	6.6
I was aware of dryness of my mouth (a)	27.9	55.7	14.8	1.6
I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all (d)	16.4	60.7	21.3	1.6
I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion) (a)	34.4	42.6	21.3	1.6
I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things (d)	9.8	37.7	42.6	9.8
I tended to over-react to situations (s)	8.2	31.1	47.5	13.1
I experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands) (a)	45.9	36.1	18.0	0.0
I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy (s)	3.3	29.5	57.4	9.8
I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself (a)	13.1	45.9	32.8	8.2
I felt that I had nothing to look forward to (d)	24.6	52.5	18.0	4.9
I found myself getting agitated (s)	8.2	34.4	52.5	4.9
I found it difficult to relax (s)	9.8	31.1	45.9	13.1
I felt down-hearted and blue (d)	9.8	39.3	39.3	11.5
I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing (s)	6.6	52.5	27.9	13.1
I felt I was close to panic (a)	24.6	42.6	24.6	8.2
I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything (d)	31.1	44.3	19.7	4.9
I felt I wasn't worth much as a person (d)	36.1	36.1	21.3	6.6
I felt that I was rather touchy (s)	13.1	36.1	37.7	13.1
I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat) (a)	24.6	42.6	21.3	11.5
I felt scared without any good reason (a)	26.2	44.3	19.7	9.8
I felt that life was meaningless (d)	47.5	29.5	16.4	6.6

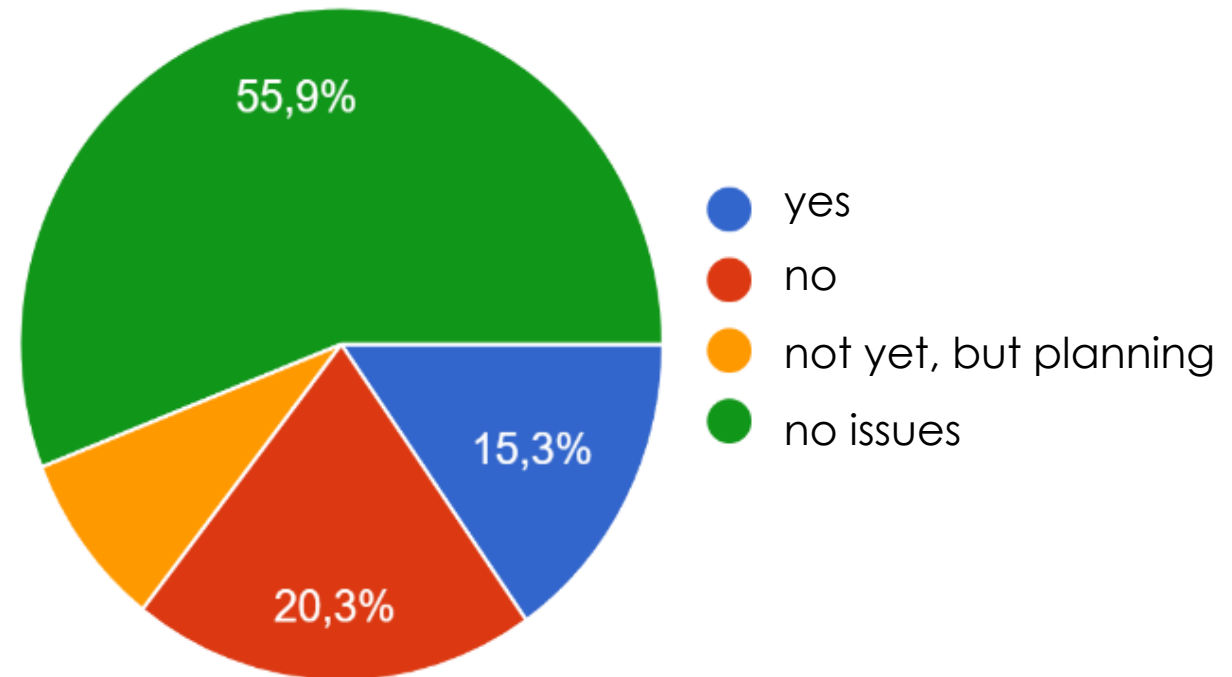
# Health issues of participants

Occupational balance vs. stress (Pearson's  $r = -0.457$ ,  $p < .001$ )

## Participant's health issues



## Seeking support for mental health issues



# Conclusion / Contribution to the Occupational Therapy Profession

- ▶ dominance of passive leisure activities – digital media
- ▶ Parents are overburdened, exhausted, and lacking personal time
- ▶ experiencing concerning mental health difficulties
- ▶ interventions aimed at occupational balance and greater awareness and availability of support aimed at mental health and stress prevention

Thank you for your  
attention!

QUESTIONS?

[PETRAKAMBER14@GMAIL.COM](mailto:PETRAKAMBER14@GMAIL.COM)

[ANDREJA.BARTOLAC@ZVU.HR](mailto:ANDREJA.BARTOLAC@ZVU.HR)

