

NAVIGATING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SCHOOL AND FIELDWORK
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A Thesis submitted to the faculty at Stanbridge University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Occupational Therapy

by

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Certification of Approval

I certify that I have read *Navigating Occupational Therapy School and Fieldwork During the Covid-19 Pandemic* by Nicole Adler, Megan Gomez, and Kelly Nguyen, and in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Occupational Therapy at Stanbridge University.

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Abstract

This thesis project aims to gain insight into occupational therapy (OT) graduate students' simulated fieldwork experiences during the COVID- pandemic. As student researchers, we wanted to learn about the potential challenges, benefits, and overall experiences students had when discussing virtual fieldwork. The participants of this study include current or previous occupational therapy graduate students at the researchers' university, Stanbridge University, enrolled in an OT program between 2020-2022, with at least one level of fieldwork conducted online. To answer our research question, we collected qualitative data through both an online survey and individual interviews via Zoom, phone calls, or in-person. Eleven participants completed the survey portion of this study, and eight interviews were conducted. Our results established several comparable themes assembled from data collection, as many participants discussed economic, social, and psychological challenges that accompanied virtual fieldwork, as well as levels of preparedness, satisfaction, and support. Of these themes, social and psychological challenges were found to be the most common amongst the participants in our study. Many reported feeling stressed and anxious due to the heavy workload, lack of immediate feedback, and feeling unprepared to apply their learning in a clinical setting. To address these concerns, future research is needed to explore the recommendations of the participants, such as implementing increased interactions with live clients and increased feedback from instructors. In doing so, we believe there is a potential for successful virtual fieldwork experiences amongst future OT graduate students.

Keywords: simulated fieldwork, virtual fieldwork, occupational therapy, COVID-19

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Navigating Occupational Therapy School and Fieldwork During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As of March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic, resulting in social and economic disparities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Social distancing, self-isolation, and mask mandates were imposed to prevent exposure and minimize the spread of the coronavirus. The shutdown of public places, businesses, and school closures were enforced to reduce transmission. The pandemic forced many individuals to adapt to unfamiliar situations and accommodate the unforeseen future. Due to the lockdowns and stay-at-home orders, many individuals lost their jobs or were forced to work from home. Many students were required to transition from face-to-face learning to virtual environments in order to maintain their course of education. In addition, students faced challenges adjusting to new methods of learning and content delivery.

Statement of the Problem

This thesis project aims to gather and analyze information from students enrolled in the Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (OT) program at Stanbridge University affected by the abrupt transition to virtual learning due to the pandemic. The occupational therapy graduate students enrolled between 2020-2022 had to complete fieldwork education requirements online. Entering a graduate program, students may have had pre-existing expectations of their clinical experience and exposure to the field of occupational therapy. However, abrupt changes in these opportunities required students to adapt quickly. Through this thesis project, we aim to understand the social, psychological, and economic factors that play a role in the overall student learning experience. In order to understand the effect of transitioning from in-person to virtual fieldwork, this research

study utilized a phenomenological approach with questionnaires and interviews to answer this question: What positive experiences or challenges did OT graduate students at Stanbridge University encounter while using virtual platforms to complete fieldwork requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic?

An essential component of the graduate school curriculum includes fieldwork, where students are provided the opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge they have gained in the classroom. For fieldwork, graduate programs place students at clinical and academic facilities such as hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and schools to complete their requirements. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also affected fieldwork, and many students were stripped of the authentic clinical experience and forced to finish their fieldwork requirements via online, simulated platforms. These platforms required students to watch pre-recorded intervention sessions between the therapist and client, replicating a 'real world' situation. In addition, the lack of motivation and deprivation of real-life experiences in client interaction and among supervisors also influenced student learning experiences.

The opportunity to gain experience working with clients during fieldwork is crucial for occupational therapy graduate students as it allows students to apply their knowledge learned in the classroom through hands-on treatment sessions. The transition to using online platforms for completing fieldwork requirements is a reality for many students due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, students experience challenges to their learning, such as relying on technology and the internet to gain access to coursework in addition to their ability to navigate through online platforms. Our study's primary goal is to address occupational therapy students' experiences using online platforms to complete fieldwork requirements.

Using the *Occupational Therapy Practice Framework*, we analyzed student responses and identified the impacts of COVID-19 on the student's occupations such as health management, education, social participation, and how the pandemic has changed the context of learning, including both environmental and personal factors (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020). Due to the pandemic, routines with school, work, and social participation were also affected. For students to succeed in online learning environments, they need to gain skills in navigating online platforms and sustaining performance with online coursework. An additional obstacle is that virtual environments may be new for some students and may not match the student's preferred learning style. Common online learning environments require self-directed or asynchronous learning which is challenging and foreign to many students. Online learning platforms require keen time-management skills and self-motivation. Many students find they are more attentive in a classroom setting. Our study intends to gain insight into the student's mental functions during this time.

The Master of Science in Occupational Therapy program at Stanbridge University implements curricular threads that include elements of the profession in preparing students to become effective, person-centered, and evidence-based occupational therapy practitioners. One of these curricular threads includes utilizing meaningful occupations to foster occupational justice and participation (Stanbridge University, 2022). In fieldwork settings, students learn how to utilize meaningful occupations in order to increase one's participation, while also having equal access and opportunities to engage in occupations. The threads our thesis project aims to analyze include technology and transformative and lifelong learning. Stanbridge University has implemented technology into the curriculum through eBooks, PowerPoint presentations, and online test-taking. In addition, fieldwork

is an element that provides transformative and lifelong learning. The goal for this research study is to gain more insight on whether both threads can emerge effectively to increase student competency in virtual environments and simulated fieldwork.

Under the AOTA research agenda, our thesis can be categorized as basic research because we are trying to find a relationship between the COVID-19 global pandemic and how it limits student learning experiences, course of education, and participation (AOTA & American Occupational Therapy Foundation, 2011). As prospective occupational therapists, students need to work on their clinical skills to provide high-quality care that requires building rapport and relationships with the interprofessional team and, more importantly, the patient. This research aims to understand how students combat unfamiliar situations and analyze their perspectives on their perceived clinical competency through virtual and simulated fieldwork experiences.

Literature Review

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced many academic institutions to pause face-to face learning, leading to a shift in education from in-person to virtual learning. This shift forced many students to quickly adapt to unfamiliar environments, where access to technology, stable internet, and technical support greatly impacted their experiences. The insight provided via student experiences is significant in presenting suggestions for successfully implementing, teaching, and navigating online courses. In this review, we aim to address the social significance of navigating OT graduate school during a pandemic; the adaptations students have made because of the disruption of in-person learning; and how these adaptations impact a student's psychological, social, and academic experience. Addressing this issue is relevant for providing insight into the strategies used with online learning, including those that negatively impact students, and

leave room for academic institutions, faculty, researchers, and students to create systems that will lead to a more effective virtual learning environment.

Social Significance

Learning to navigate through a graduate program during a pandemic can benefit individuals within various health disciplines. For example, graduate students and instructors can benefit from data gathered from student experiences with online learning by providing them with advice and strategies for improving the online learning experience. On an institutional level, adequate accessibility and support are a few resources that are deemed necessary by students when navigating online learning. Additional resources to help students adapt to new learning experiences can be developed from this data: addressing the importance of internet stability, developing good online educational platforms, and increasing access to technology. Hassan et al. (2021) stated adequate technical support during virtual classes plays a role in course satisfaction among students and positive self-perceived competency. Their findings suggest colleges and universities should invest more in adequate technical support if they choose to implement virtual classes (Hassan et al., 2021).

In addition to adequate accessibility, effective teaching practices implemented by instructors are also important for supporting student navigation of online learning. Godoy et al. (2021) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, students experienced an increase in anxiety and functional impairment by the end of their academic year. In addition, many students reported that a quick shift in educational environments and a lack of peer socialization was a significant cause of their anxiety (Godoy et al., 2021). The implementation of remote learning may affect students' mental health and data gathered from student experiences with online learning can benefit instructors and academic

programs by developing effective teaching methods to help students adapt to new learning experiences. A few of these methods include "active teaching methodologies, immediate feedback, and test-taking strategies" that can protect the psychological stability of students (Godoy et al., 2021, p. 11).

The data collected from graduate students are socially significant because they can benefit graduate students and instructors by presenting suggestions for efficient and successful online courses. In doing so, students can benefit from the improvement of online course structure and possibly decrease anxiety levels and functional instability. Further, faculty, academic institutions, departments, and researchers can benefit from understanding the type of online learning environment students are most responsive to. By gaining this understanding, faculty can adjust their online courses to meet students' academic and social needs. For example, to decrease learning anxiety among students, faculty can choose to implement small break-out rooms on Zoom to facilitate more conversation, interaction, and overall socialization. By implementing these learned strategies, a graduate program can improve experiences associated with navigating school during remote learning.

Theme I: Different Adaptations to Learning Due to Disruption of In-Person Learning

There are several themes that have resulted from virtual learning, such as adapting to new learning environments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mattila et al. (2020) studied the adaptation to online learning depicted through the use of a simulated learning environment called Simucase, where students engage in a fieldwork experience similar to the demands of one in person. They found that students improved their clinical

learning skills due to the variety of populations within Simucase. The safe learning environment simulated fieldwork offers was also an advantage for students. Due to the simulated experience, students felt the desire to challenge themselves as this was a great opportunity to learn without significant risk in terms of patient care. However, many students had difficulty with adapting to online learning due to disproportionate access to technology, affecting the learning experience of both students and teachers (Godoy et al., 2021). Digital and financial inequality was a significant adaptation for many undergraduate and graduate students. Many students simply did not have the means necessary to access the internet, or they experienced unstable Wi-Fi. Further, the requirement of online learning alters social relationships between faculty and students and between peers. Undergraduate students reported high anxiety levels due to limited social interactions amongst classmates. In a study performed by Fisher et al. (2022), occupational therapy students reported a decrease in their quality of life due to the pandemic. They reported having anxiety about “changes to academic delivery, the uncertainty of fieldwork resumption, postponed graduation dates, [and] changes in social interactions...” which in turn increased their levels of stress (Fisher et al., 2022, p. 224). Additionally, the study reported that occupational therapy professionals also experienced a decreased quality of life due to the “adverse effects on their mental health, increased burnout, and alterations in social participation, with some noting the financial impact” (Fisher et al., 2022, p. 224). Learning how to navigate virtual school, as well as the lack of socialization and interaction, caused these students and professionals to experience changes to their mental health, such as increased levels of anxiety and depression.

Mattila et al. (2020) primarily focused on how to fulfill program requirements for clinical education and assessed students’ learning experience in a simulated environment.

Both Katz et al. (2021) and Godoy et al. (2021) addressed the economic challenges for students to access course material. Finally, Hassan et al. (2021) and Godoy et al. (2021) examined that faculty and students faced difficulties navigating an unfamiliar learning environment. This contributes to the knowledge about different adaptations of remote learning by identifying the faculty's challenges in delivering consistent educational content on online platforms and how it negatively impacts student engagement.

Theme II: The Psychological, Academic, and Social Impacts from Online Learning

The articles reviewed contribute to the knowledge of another theme, which is the psychological, academic, and social impacts of online learning by examining students' engagement in coursework. Palsule and Khanna (2022) provide more insight into the general concerns of OT students navigating through their master's program during a pandemic, such as stress and anxiety due to challenges in clinical exposure and one's health and, overall, experience moderate to severe stress. Both Katz et al. (2021) and Godoy et al. (2021) found that inconsistent access and lack of adequate resources interfere with the student's abilities to access their work and negatively impact their mental health. In the study by Godoy et al. (2021), they found that "a high proportion of students were under elevated anxiety levels and functionally impaired at the end of the academic year during the COVID-19 pandemic" (p. 8). In addition, the author mentions that college students in Brazil demonstrated increased anxiety, depression, and stress levels. In contrast, Mattila et al. (2020) demonstrated the educational benefits of online learning, in which students can learn through engaging in consistent reflection sessions and exposure to diverse populations. Furthermore, Hassan et al. (2021) summarize the impacts of the student's self-confidence and satisfaction on their success in the course. Finally, Kutlu and Titrek (2021) argued that although distance education was successful

for most students, other factors influenced by the pandemic, such as negative personal situations, technical problems, and limitations in communication play a significant role in student experiences.

Theme III: Interrelationships and Support Between Students and Educators

In three separate qualitative studies by Van and Thi (2020), Peart et al. (2021), and Demuyakor (2021), a frequent theme discovered was the connections amongst the students and educators. Many educators and their students built reciprocal relationships in which they felt a sense of connectedness and support from one another despite the virtual platform, whereas others said they struggled with the lack of in-person interaction. Whether students felt supported in a virtual setting or not, this affected everyone's opinion on course satisfaction, their emotional engagement, participatory engagement, and performance engagement (Demuyakor, 2021; Peart et al., 2021; Van & Thi, 2020). Demuyakor determined that digital technologies and apps can assist students in accessing course content. Peart et al. summarize the physical and social restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic as barriers to student success in artificial learning environments based on interviews of lived student and educator experiences. Van and Thi found that social interaction, along with internet stability and motivation, is a challenge to student success in navigating online learning platforms. Across all three articles on this topic, content delivery and access to online coursework are barriers that may challenge the interrelationship between students and educators. Many factors affect educator's and student's experiences with technology, including ability to access the internet consistently and personal technical skills.

Theme IV: Argument About the Clinical Significance of the Evidence

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students faced many challenges transitioning from on-campus to online learning. Several articles provided strong evidence of how lack of access to educational content and inconsistent communication amongst faculty members are predictors of poor academic performance in students. Mattila et al. (2020) displayed the effectiveness of simulation-based learning and gathered positive feedback from students on their clinical education experiences. Mattila et al. shows strong evidence for navigating OT school, as students can fulfill a meaningful clinical experience. In addition, Fisher et al. (2022) provided tools for occupational therapy educators to support students through interventions based on coping strategies, stress management, time management, and emotional counseling for navigating unfamiliar environments. Occupational therapy educators can assist students in fulfilling their occupations and improve the quality of their educational experience by providing remediation strategies to overcome their challenges. When it comes to navigating OT graduate school during a pandemic, there is strong evidence of improving student engagement when there is more consistent communication and immediate feedback.

Limitations

A limitation found in the article by Mattila et al. (2020) includes the lack of diversity in gender, age, race, religion, socio-economic status, and cultural background. In addition, they gathered the information for their study from one population: students enrolled in a private Catholic institution. Further, the researchers did not measure clinical competence within the outcome assessment and are unaware of whether students fully grasped the simulated format for clinical reasoning and learning. Possibly repeating this study with a broader demographic of students and additional research on clinical competence and skills would be helpful.

Time was the key limitation in Katz et al.'s (2021) study. The students' reported how they felt about their remote learning experience once they could reflect on their term, not during the present moment of distance learning. A big issue was that the results were highly generalized under the convenience sampling method. The questions on the survey neglected to address the possibility of lack of participation from students who experience severe under-connectedness. In addition, another significant knowledge gap was that the researchers presented biased survey questions, as the questions were informed by the researcher's own personal knowledge and exploration of digital inequality. Finally, the researchers noted that this survey was rushed and not as structured as it could have been.

Godoy et al. (2021) neglected to share information in specifics. However, similar to the article discussing digital inequality, this study made broad generalizations. In addition, they chose a small sample size in remote learning. A more controlled experiment without a pandemic would potentially help us better understand the psychological implications of distance learning.

Lastly, the various gaps in knowledge in the study by Hassan et al. (2021) include the cross-sectional research design, the online data collection method (Likert scale), and the convenience sample. The researchers noted in their data collection that the representation was inaccurate due to students' lack of attention and busy schedules. This lack of attention caused a natural bias in the student's responses. Furthermore, this study did not consider additional academic and non-academic factors. It would be helpful for research to look at multiple dimensions of online schooling, possibly during times of a "normal" educational experience. Finally, this study did not examine how personal, social, and environmental challenges could potentially be associated with students'

perspectives on workload in a simulated academic setting across different communities and demographics. This may include poor self-regulation skills, digital inequality, and low social support.

Gaps in Research

While the topic of navigating school during a pandemic has a great deal of literature present, there is not much to be explicitly found relating to OT school. Within the articles presented earlier, some recommendations by the authors include extending the research focus to include the attributions of instructors and courses, in-depth discussions focused on instructor training, and teaching practices for remote learning. These efforts can be made by exploring OT programs at various academic institutions to gain perspectives from diverse genders, ages, and races. The common themes introduced in the articles emphasized the psychological, social, and academic impact on students as they adapted to online learning. Katz et al. (2021) declare that quality of technology and access to resources was the central adaptation students faced when shifting to online learning. Godoy et al. (2021) mention the lack of socialization and interaction as adaptations students face. We believe that technological literacy is an adaptation among students as well.

A significant gap that we acknowledged includes the absence of follow-ups among students who navigated their education through online learning. The studies examined students' perspectives as they adapted to online learning; however, there is an absence in the views of students post-graduation or beyond. We also acknowledged the lack of diversity among students. Many present studies focus on the perspectives of college-level students and fail to address the attitudes of primary and secondary education

students. We believe these gaps are essential in guiding new research, and we think that using these gaps to conduct further research will benefit additional populations.

Theoretical Framework

Our thesis project analyzes human behavior, motivation, and beliefs. The social learning theory was developed by Albert Bandura in 1977 and explained that humans learn as a product of interaction between the person, their behavior, and the environment through observation or imitation (McLeod, 2016). The social learning theory emphasizes four key components: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (McLeod, 2016). The actual theory itself derived from Albert Bandura's "Bobo doll" experiment, which involved studying children's behavior towards a toy doll after observing an interaction between an adult and the toy doll. Each experimental group had one adult model that demonstrated either aggressive or non-aggressive behavior towards the doll and the goal was to closely examine how the children behaved when they received a toy doll (Cherry, 2020). Children who witnessed violent behavior towards the doll imitated that behavior, whereas children who witnessed nonviolent behavior were less aggressive (Cherry, 2020). This idea that children learn through direct observation and reinforcement was further developed by Albert Bandura as he evolved social learning theory into social cognitive theory. This evolution of social cognitive theory still focused on observational learning, however it also emphasized the role of cognitive processes in learning, the possibility of learning through direct experience, and the importance of environmental factors (Nickerson, 2022).

In 2020, the pandemic changed daily life on a global scale forcing students to adapt to new learning experiences. Social learning theory supports the navigation through uncharted territory as the pandemic forced many to observe their immediate surrounding

environment as means of learning. Simulated and virtual learning environments can benefit some students throughout the learning process during clinical fieldwork, but for others, it can be harmful and disruptive. Simulated and virtual learning environments can benefit some students throughout the learning process during clinical fieldwork, but for others, it can be harmful and disruptive.

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura developed the social learning theory to demonstrate that learning goes beyond a person's interaction with their environment (Helfrich, 2019). Instead, Bandura believed that interactions and education also included social and behavioral processes. Each of the five assumptions drawn was essential to the social learning theory. The first assumption is that "people can learn by observing others" (Helfrich, 2019, p. 699). An individual unfamiliar or new to a concept, such as navigating a new online platform, may look to someone with knowledge and experience in using the platform. To learn, the novice individual may search for instructional videos online and observe as the experienced individual demonstrates the basics of using the online platform.

The second assumption is that "learning is an internal process" (Helfrich, 2019, p. 699). According to Helfrich (2019), learning something new until it becomes automatic can take anywhere from hours to days, weeks, months, and so on. As we begin our learning journey, we store the information in our memory to access and repeat until we become proficient. This internal process of storing information in our brain, accessing it from our memory, and applying it to the task until it becomes automatic is an essential process that aids our ability to learn new skills.

The third assumption is that "people are generally motivated to achieve goals for themselves" (Helfrich, 2019, p. 699). The process of learning requires a degree of self-

motivation to progress towards the end goal. When learning a new skill, an individual must determine the force driving them to move forward. Using the example of learning how to navigate a new online platform for school, the individual will need self-motivation to continue learning to complete assignments. The internal drive to obtain excellent grades, graduate, and ultimately get a career can influence the individual's behavior and motivation to continue learning.

The fourth assumption is that “learning occurs as people regulate and adjust their own behavior” (Helfrich, 2019, p. 699). Everyone has different learning styles, and people determine their standards by observing and using self-motivation. After deciding these individual standards, people adjust their behavior and “work to behave according to those standards” (Helfrich, 2019, p. 699). For example, in learning how to navigate a new online platform, the individual sets standards such as completion dates and performance standards. Once set, the individual then adjusts their behavior by organizing time or determining priorities to achieve the end goal.

Lastly, the fifth assumption is that “feedback via reinforcement and punishment affect learning and behavior indirectly” (Helfrich, 2019, p. 699). To indirectly affect learning and behavior, individuals learn and adjust their behavior according to anticipated positive or negative consequences. For example, in Bandura's Bobo doll experiment, the children who may not have any tendency to be aggressive towards the doll observed that an adult model was not reprimanded for their aggressive behavior. In response to their observation, the children adjusted their initial behavior to imitate the adult because they saw that there was no punishment for the aggressive behaviors (Helfrich, 2019).

How Social Learning is Relevant to this Project

We utilized social learning theory for the framework of our thesis project to understand how students can learn through observation of others. Using this theory, the outcomes of our thesis project can provide insight into how social learning can apply in virtual settings through visual and auditory feedback between teachers and students. Before the pandemic, students fulfilled fieldwork requirements on-site, where students could obtain personal interactions between clients and other faculty. However, a transition to simulated fieldwork raised concerns about how students can gain similar experiences. Social learning theory can be applied further to understand occupational therapy graduate students' perceptions and performance when experiencing fieldwork and navigating online platforms. This theory suggests that students can adapt to the transition to online fieldwork by observing online behaviors of others, and still have a meaningful learning experience despite physical limitations.

Feedback is an essential component of students' learning experiences during fieldwork. It requires learning through observing others, individual opportunities for students to practice applying their clinical skills, and a reflection of their performance to prepare for future practice. Simulated fieldwork environments consist of the faculty member providing visual examples of their interactions with the client as well as assignments to practice documentation and gain exposure to various assessments utilized. Learning simulations that mimic interactions with clients were also included in the virtual fieldwork experience. In addition, compared to in-person fieldwork, students gain more opportunities to share and gain insight with other students after each experience through a debrief session facilitated by a faculty member.

Ethical and Legal Considerations

This research study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board and was approved on August 31, 2022. For our study, participants were not paid nor influenced to comply. This study was conducted as a student project and was neither funded nor sponsored by outside sources. Recruitment of participants was based solely on voluntary participation and there were no monetary incentives for participating in the study. To reduce researcher bias, the link to the informed consent document and survey were listed and posted on our flyer. Prior to beginning the survey, the participants were required to read and agree to the informed consent. This consent letter that each participant read included information pertaining to their right to withdraw from the study at any point if needed, as well as their right to disclose information they feel comfortable sharing. The only area of discomfort for participants was possibly feeling anxious when discussing thoughts about their online fieldwork experience.

Methodology

This research study has obtained Institutional Review Board approval from the student researchers' university. This study uses a phenomenological method to include qualitative surveys and optional individual interviews. Throughout the research process, the student researchers adhere to all Institutional Review Board requirements, including confidentiality, informed consent, and protocols for storing data.

Participant Recruitment

To recruit participants, the student researchers posted the recruitment flyer on the Stanbridge Student Occupational Therapy Association's Instagram account. The flyer provided a short description of our study, the inclusion criteria, and a link to the informed consent document and survey questions. The consent letter also included a statement of the active campus involvement of researchers. The student researchers also provided a

link to the informed consent document on the survey itself, which the participants must complete before participating in the survey and interview. The survey portion of the study was conducted via Google Forms. The survey allowed participants to share their personal experiences with online fieldwork. The inclusion criteria for this study required participants to be graduate OT students at Stanbridge University who enrolled between 2020 and 2022 and completed any level of fieldwork using an online, simulation-based platform.

Data Collection

Student researchers collected qualitative data via online survey and optional interview. The team of student researchers informed each participant of our goal which was to examine the similarities amongst graduate students on their views and experiences of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically online fieldwork. When accessing the survey, a link to the informed consent document was presented for the participant to fill out before proceeding to fill out the survey. At the end of the survey, participants then chose to accept or reject participating in the interview portion of the study. Participants that selected “no” were not contacted. Participants who said “yes” to the interview were informed that they would be audio recorded for member checking and theme retrieval purposes. The participants that chose to complete the survey were then contacted within 24-48 hours by the student researchers' shared Gmail account inviting them to partake in part II of the study. Eight out of the eleven participants who completed the survey were then interviewed. No participant declined to be audio recorded. Participants were assigned a number or pseudonym to maintain anonymity and their

information will only be retrieved by the researchers and advisor. Our data collection was completed in three weeks, and data analysis in 3 days.

Online Survey

Student researchers used an online survey platform via Google Forms to gain demographic information about the participants' fieldwork experience before conducting a more in-depth interview. Prior to filling out the online survey, participants were required to access the link to the informed consent form provided on the survey in order to proceed. The survey included 15 questions consisting of 3 questions related to meeting the inclusion criteria, for a total of 4 yes/no questions, 6 open-ended questions, and 5 Likert scale questions. The Likert scales were included in the survey to assess the participant's self-perceived confidence in specific clinical skills and rating their satisfaction in virtual fieldwork experiences. The first three questions of the study ask the participant if they agree to the terms under the informed consent, if they meet the inclusion criteria (occupational therapy graduate student at Stanbridge University enrolled in an OT program between 2020-2022 and participated in at least one level of fieldwork that was conducted online), and personal information such as gender, age, cohort, and method of contact (email or phone) for the interview portion of the study. The participant's responses are protected in a password protected file, which is accessed only by the researchers and thesis advisor. The goal of the survey was to gather data on the participants' experiences before the in-depth interview, where they will have the opportunity to expand on their answers. The student researchers were anticipating to receive between 6-12 participants for the survey, and we successfully received a total of 11 completed surveys. Student researchers closed access to the survey on September 21st in order to complete their data analysis in a timely manner.

Interview Process

If the participants who completed the survey chose to be interviewed, an email was sent to them using the student researchers' shared Gmail account within 24-48 hours of survey completion, inviting them to proceed in the Interview portion of the study. If the participant preferred to do an in-person interview, the student researcher and participant met at the Stanbridge University campus in Irvine, CA to conduct the interview. A physical copy of the consent form was provided once again before conducting the interview for review. Similarly, if the participant preferred the interview to be via Zoom or phone, the student researcher collaborated with the participant to set a time for the interview. Once a date and time was designated, the student researcher sent the informed consent document link via email once again to have the participant review. Student researchers also reminded the participant that we were going to audio record the interview for transcription purposes, however if they preferred it not be recorded, the student researcher acknowledged the participant's decision. If the participant did not wish to be audio recorded or video recorded, the student researcher performing the interview took handwritten notes using a pen or pencil and a notepad. These handwritten notes were then scanned and stored in a password protected folder on the student researcher's private and password protected computer/laptop. After the handwritten notes were scanned and stored, the physical copy was shredded. We also reminded the participant that they do not need to disclose any information they do not wish to and can withdraw from this study at any time. Once the participant agreed, the student researcher began the 12-question interview. Once the interview concluded, the student researcher allowed the participant to ask any questions and provide feedback on the interview if they wished.

The student researcher thanked the participant for their time and information shared. A total of 8 interviews were conducted.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the survey results, student researchers manually compiled a chart, comparing common themes and narratives amongst participants. To record each participant's interview, the student researchers used the Voice Memos iPhone application. For transcribing the audio recorded interviews, student researchers used the website Otter Voice Meeting notes: <https://otter.ai/home>. This software transcribed each audio-recorded interview individually. To ensure the transcriptions were accurate, each student researcher reviewed their recording and corrected any errors if needed. The student researchers reviewed all interview transcriptions and manually organized common or similar responses into themes. Survey and interview responses were compared for recurring themes and significant descriptions that contribute to the knowledge of this study.

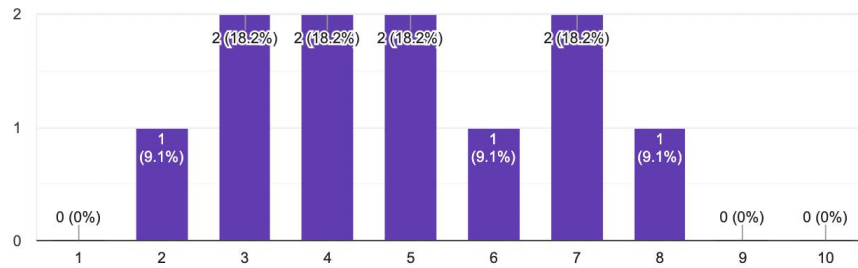
Results

Overall Fieldwork Experiences

On a scale from 1-10 (1 being an unpleasant experience, 5 being neutral, and 10 being the best), the participants were asked to rate their overall fieldwork experience. Based on the results shown in Table 1, four out of 11 participants had a more positive experience, while 2 felt neutral, and 5 had a negative experience with virtual fieldwork.

Table 1

Rating on overall fieldwork experience



Expectations and Actual Experiences of Virtual Fieldwork

Survey Question # 6: “Was the virtual fieldwork experience anything you expected it to be? If yes, please explain. If not, why not?”

Student expectations were divided amongst all participants. Five participants stated virtual fieldwork was what they had expected as “a lot of time management” and “busy” schedule, or “a lot of time on the computer.” Virtual fieldwork did meet the student’s expectations of seeing the use of occupational assessments and treatments. However, the majority of participants stated that they did not expect to experience “confusion,” having to adapt to “difficult” situations due to “lack of support” on certain assignments, or overall feelings of incompetence as a result of navigating through virtual fieldwork. Two participants described their workload and schedules as “hectic.” One participant expressed that they like having the ability to choose from a variety of options and working independently on simulation cases via an online platform called Simucase. Another stated that “online didn’t really help [them] learn anything” and it “did not feel real enough to apply it in an in-person clinic”

Interview Question #1: “In a couple of sentences, can you share your overall thoughts about the virtual fieldwork setting?”

Based on participants’ interviews, most participants thought fieldwork on a virtual platform negatively impacted the quality of their learning experiences. Some participants

reported that having their first fieldwork experience online was “really stressful” and “overwhelming” due to it being “disorganized” and felt that they were “racing against time instead of learning” from completing their assignments. As result, many have felt “lost” and “wasn’t necessarily learning anything.” Conversely, one participant mentioned that after the first two days of experiencing fieldwork online, they began to adapt to the busy schedule and familiarize themselves with navigating through the virtual platforms. Other participants had positive experiences in the virtual fieldwork and “enjoyed the Simucase, because it kinda was like [they were] working with [their] own client.”

Challenges and Adaptations to Virtual Learning

Survey Question #7: “Were there any social, psychological, and/or economic influences that may interfere with your learning experience during fieldwork? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?”

Across all participants’ responses, social, psychological, or economic factors had an impact on each student’s learning experiences. Understandably, social and psychological factors were major influences in student learning. As a result of virtual fieldwork, some participants felt “drained after spending so long on the computer” for the majority of their day and felt “lazy or not energized compared to if [they] were in a clinic setting.” One participant experienced, “technical issues [that] disrupt the flow” of completing their assignments. Other students expressed that they felt that they did not learn as much online as they would have in person. Some students were psychologically impacted by virtual fieldwork, such as feeling “lost” and “not mentally prepared for how draining it would be.” Another participant felt “unsupported” and “had more anxiety which interfered with learning new concepts.” Some “struggled to apply what [they] had learned in class” because it “didn’t seem like the cases were realistic.”

Survey Question #8: “Did you experience virtual challenges? (i.e; Wi-Fi issues, distractions, limited access to the internet) If yes, please explain. If no, why not?”

The majority of participants mentioned they have faced some challenges experiencing fieldwork online. Students that have engaged in virtual fieldwork at home faced “distractions with background noises” inside and outside of their home, pets, and family members. Another student mentioned that it is generally “mentally draining to focus on the computer screen for so long.” Moreover, many students faced virtual challenges such as “poor” internet connection issues which they “missed hearing verbal directions and expectations.” Slow internet connection also made it difficult for students to navigate through the course or follow their schedule by entering different rooms via Zoom links.

Distractions

Interview Question #5: “What were some distractions you faced during virtual fieldwork that you might have not in an on-ground environment?”

Interview Question #6: “Can you please explain some, if any, challenges you faced during virtual fieldwork?”

Interview Question #10: “Can you elaborate on how these influences (social, psychological, and/or economic) impacted your learning experience?”

Based on the participant interviews, the majority expressed their at-home environment to be the most distracting because they live with others such as parents and siblings. Many of the distractions they faced included inside and outside noise such as the television playing, cars driving by, “neighbor’s kids screaming” and playing outside, individuals walking in and out of their space, other’s attempts to converse with them while completing fieldwork, and being interrupted by their pet(s) “want[ing] to come in

and out.” Another distraction that was mentioned by some of the participants was their cell phones and “checking [their] phone every now and then.” Because it was within their reach, they were more tempted to check/use it during fieldwork.

Many expressed challenges with a virtual environment such as downloading many documents which “made everything go slow,” “lagging,” or “glitchy.” Some mentioned that they experienced a power outage and their cellular “hotspot was not enough” to access their coursework. Other challenges were described “not being able to ask a supervisor [their] immediate questions,” but rather, “wait until [they] had time with one of [their] professors.” Some participants experienced difficulty in time management and “didn’t have enough time to submit everything.”

Out of eight participants, two participants expressed they had had no experience of any social, psychological, or economic influence on their learning experiences. Some participants shared that having fieldwork online had negatively impacted their learning experiences due to a “lack of interaction” and “only [seeing] people on a screen for a week.” Moreover, some participants experienced psychological distress from participating in virtual fieldwork by having feelings of “isolation,” “anxiety,” or “depressed” mood while trying to adapt to the heavier workloads. One participant shared with the student researcher: “When I did my in-person fieldwork, for our adult’s rotation, it wasn’t as stressful because I knew where I had to be and where I was, versus jumping around from place to place on zoom”. Student learning experiences were interrupted by economic influences, such as poor internet connection or other technological issues that interferes with their ability to communicate with other peers and follow directions.

Self- Perceived Clinical Competency

The following set of tables, Table 2 through 6, present the participants’ responses to how competent they feel after completing virtual fieldwork. In Table 2, participants rated either “yes” or “no” when asked if they feel prepared to apply their knowledge gained from virtual fieldwork into an in-person clinical setting. Tables 3 through 6 present the participant’s ratings on how confident they feel in clinical skills, such as verbal communication, collaboration, documentation, and critical thinking skills.

Table 2

Responses on Feelings of Preparedness to Apply Learning to In-Person Clinical Settings After Completion of Virtual Fieldwork

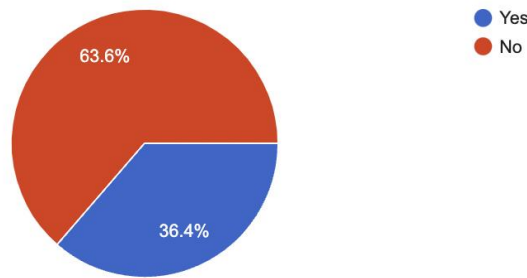


Table 3

Perceived Confidence in Verbal Communication Skills After Virtual Fieldwork

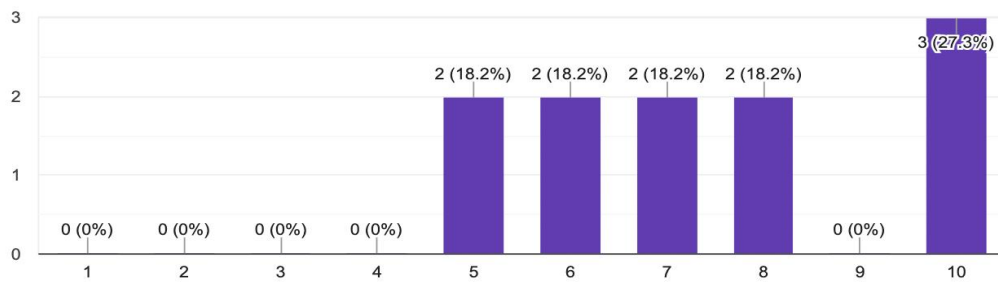


Table 4

Perceived Confidence in Collaboration Skills After Virtual Fieldwork

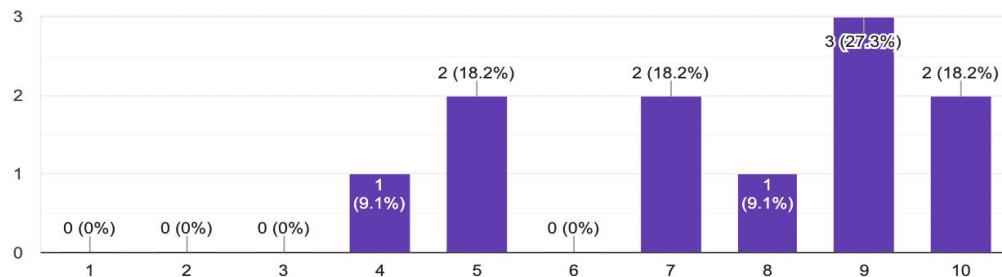


Table 5

Perceived Confidence in Documentation/ Verbal Communication Skills After Virtual Fieldwork

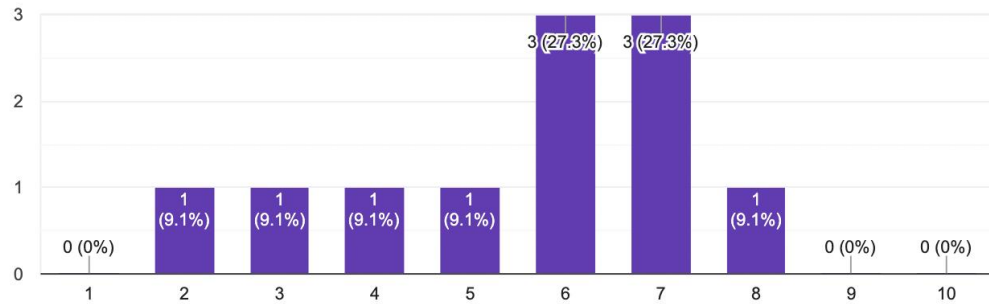
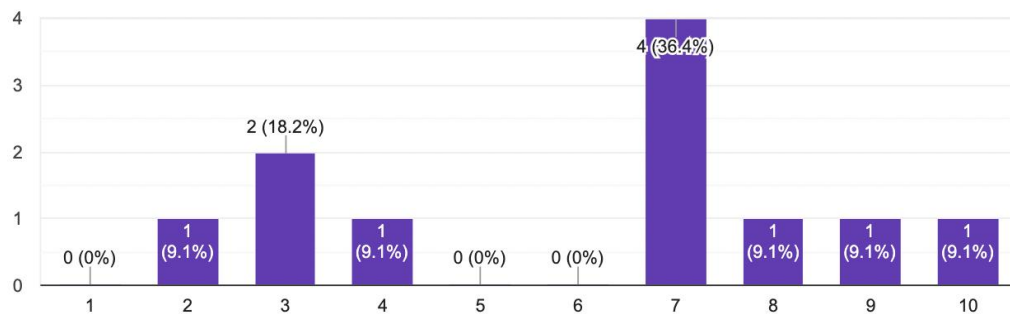


Table 6

Perceived Confidence in Critical Thinking Skills After Virtual Fieldwork



In Table 2, when asked if the participants felt prepared enough to apply what they learned in an in-person clinical setting, 63.6% of participants (n=11) felt prepared, while 36.4% did not feel prepared. For Tables 3-6, participants were asked to rate their confidence in their clinical skills on a scale from 1-10 (1 being not confident, 5 being neutral, and 10 being highly confident). In Table 3, three participants (27.3%) rated 10, as being very confident, in their verbal communication skills after fieldwork. Two

participants (18.2%) rated themselves to be neutral (5) in their self-perceived confidence in verbal communication skills after the completion of virtual fieldwork. None of the participants rated themselves below 5, or neutral about their verbal communication. According to Table 4, a total of 8 participants rated their confidence levels between 7-10, leaning towards being more confident in their collaboration skills. Three participants (27.3%) rated their perceived confidence level in their collaboration skills as 9, being confident. From Table 5, three students rated 6 (27.3%), 7 (27.3%), and 8 (9.1%) confidence in documentation and verbal communication skills. A total of four participants rated their confidence in this skill as neutral (5) or below. Based on scores displayed in Table 6, four participants (36.4%) rated 7 as their perceived confidence in critical thinking skills. A total of 7 participants rated either 7 or above in confidence, whereas 4 participants rated 4 or below. No participants felt neutral in their confidence in their critical thinking skills following their virtual fieldwork experience.

Interview Question #8: “How did virtual fieldwork help to improve your clinical skills? Or what would have helped you to improve your clinical skills?”

Some participants stated that practice with different assessments and completing many documents were “helpful” in developing their documentation skills for other fieldwork. One mentioned that developing “[their] own interventions with each other... was really helpful” in practicing verbal communication skills as well as creating the occupational profile. Other participants expressed that they “would have liked it if [they] did more virtual clients” and they learned more from “watching the actual recording of therapists working with patients.” Others mentioned that their technical skills were improved, that they can “set up a zoom or navigate zoom... for telehealth” and provided them “a slight introduction to try to do virtual sessions.”

Feedback and Support

Survey Question #9: “Were you satisfied with the level of feedback you received on your fieldwork assignments/documentation? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?”

Eight participants stated that they were not satisfied by the amount of feedback received throughout their virtual fieldwork experience. Opportunities for gaining feedback were limited to large group discussions for debrief after case studies. Based on student responses, many participants revealed they received “little feedback” from their graded assignments and “did not know what to improve on, or if [they] met expectations.” Therefore, students felt that they do not know what areas they need to improve for future rotations or whether they completed the assignment correctly. Contrarily, two participants expressed that they liked having “multiple instructors who provided different perspectives on what [was] observed” and “was given sufficient feedback on different case studies.”

Interview Question #7: “What did you appreciate about the feedback you were given in regard to your fieldwork assignments? Or what suggestions do you have about feedback that was/was not adequately given?”

When asked if they received feedback during their virtual students, out of 8 participants, seven reported that they received little feedback regarding the assignments they were required to turn in; therefore, they “didn’t know if [they] were doing it correctly.” One participant stated the faculty “did a pretty good job giving feedback granted how many professors there were to students.” Another appreciated that in a class of 60 people, one professor “tried to hear everybody.” For future suggestions, some

participants “wished there was more one on one individual time” for feedback or prefer to receive feedback “in a small group.”

Interview Question #2: “What types of support or resources did you have to help you navigate through virtual fieldwork?”

Most participants reported receiving support that “came from friends” or “peers,” “bounc[ing] off ideas” from one another, and “keeping each other on top of [their] assignments.” “Daily scheduling” and “having the schedule... on [their] iPad” also helped them to stay organized. Two participants noted that they received “some support from the advisor who was running it” and “some instructors were a little bit more helpful when [they] would meet as a group.”

Student Interest in Practice Area

Survey Question #10: “Did your virtual fieldwork rotation impact your interest in that area of practice? For example, if your pediatrics rotation was virtual, did this impact your interest in pursuing pediatrics as your future area of practice? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?”

Students displayed mixed responses to the impact of virtual fieldwork on their interest in the area of practice. Three students expressed that virtual fieldwork did not influence their lack of interest in the field because they “had no interest prior to the fieldwork experience” and “did not change [their] mind” after experiencing their rotation online. Furthermore, five participants indicated that having their psychosocial fieldwork online has “negatively impacted [their] exposure with a psychosocial setting,” they “feel like the rotation prepared [them]” enough to pursue this area of practice, they “didn’t learn much,” and did influence their “confidence in being competent in that area.” One

participant, however, shared “this experience increases [their] curiosity in mental health,” especially in how telehealth services are delivered.

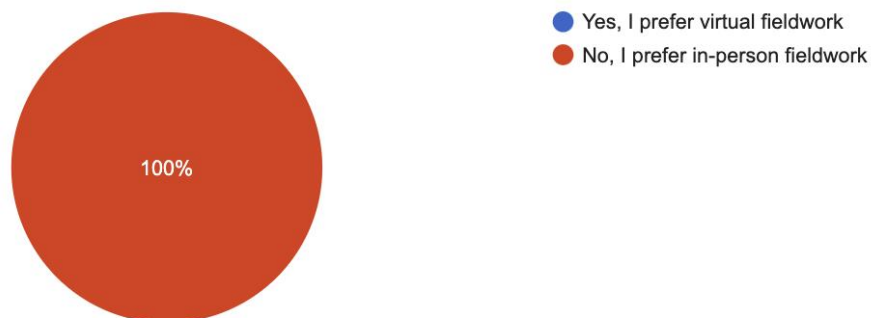
Interview Question #9: “How did the fieldwork experience impact your interest in that area of practice?”

Out of eight participants, six participants expressed having interest in exploring psychosocial as an area of practice. However, each participant revealed experiencing their psychosocial rotation online “turn[ed] them away from wanting to rank it” for their level 2 fieldwork, “discouraged” them, and left them feeling “a little bit nervous to go into the mental health field, because [they] feel like [they] don’t have the proper experience to rely on.” Two participants stated that their experiences in virtual fieldwork did not change their predetermined lack of interest.

Implications for Future Fieldwork

Table 7

Student Preferences between Online vs. In-person Fieldwork



Interview Question #4: “What are some ways you feel you may have benefited more from fieldwork being conducted on a virtual platform?”

Moving forward, all participants (n=11) indicated they would prefer in-person fieldwork over virtual fieldwork, as displayed in Table 7. Multiple benefits and

disadvantages from participating in fieldwork online were displayed in all participant's responses. One participant mentioned that they enjoyed "hear[ing] other students ask questions, compared to in-person when [they] would be the only student with [their] CI, completing all the courses on [their] own." One participant appreciated having a "controlled environment" that is "very structured", especially when experiencing fieldwork for the first time. In addition, another student stated they benefited from watching the instructor's video of conducting a client interview, and being "able to repeat things... and looking at captions." One participant also benefited in "becoming more tech savvy" and managing virtual platforms, being "better with Zoom."

Although a few participants have mentioned that they have benefitted from the technological features of playing back recordings and increased exposure to various clients/ therapeutic perspectives, one participant communicated that "nothing beats in-person" because it is "a little bit more personal than what virtual can allow." One participant noted an on-ground fieldwork experience would be more preferable because it allows them to apply and practice their personal skills when communicating with the staff and clients. Lastly, another participant suggested having "live instead of video recording" and having the opportunity to "ask questions in-between versus asking questions at the end [since they] kind of had to wait for [the video] to be over."

Interview Question #12: "Please share anything else you would like to express in terms of your virtual fieldwork experience."

When participants were asked to express anything concerning their virtual fieldwork experience, many have concluded that it was "okay", "[they] would have learned more" if it were to be in-person, and "not the best; it was rushed and

disorganized.” Many students agreed that they “definitely would have liked in-person better.”

Advice for Future Fieldwork Students

Interview Question #11: “What advice do you have for future students who may have to complete fieldwork virtually?”

In response to Question #11 in the Interview, many have suggested to alter the environment, either by “just walking around.... just so you’re not constantly sitting for eight and a half hours,” “trying to go somewhere else like outside the home to do fieldwork,” or “find an environment that is not distracting.” Another common advice across all participants is “trying to get on top of assignments” or “make sure you’re really well organized on the computer... with folders.” Some suggested to “have a good friend system... to help guide you” or “find a group” to collaborate ideas with assignments. Other participants encourage future fieldwork students to “rest” as much as they can. For the virtual aspect to fieldwork, one participant warned “just prepare yourself for that high level of anxiety and being pushed, pushed, pushed. And then hope for your best with the internet connection, is the best you can do.”

Discussion

Based on the findings of our project, switching from in-person fieldwork to simulated fieldwork due to the COVID-19 pandemic was an adjustment for all OT graduate students at Stanbridge University. This study was developed to gain an understanding of the virtual, social, economic, and psychological challenges faced by OT graduate students as they transitioned from in-person to virtual fieldwork. Based on the results, social and psychological influences were found to be the most impactful on student learning experiences. Many students shared that negative experiences were

associated with lack of sleep, prolonged sitting and computer screen time, and distracting home environments. Virtual challenges were often described as difficulty navigating through virtual platforms to access online documents or entering virtual meetings via Zoom due to unstable Wi-Fi. This finding is consistent with the results produced by Van and Thi (2020), who found that social interaction, along with internet stability and motivation, is a challenge to student success in navigating online learning platforms, which was true of the participants from our study. Additionally, difficulty accessing online documents is consistent with the literature produced by Katz et al. (2021) and Godoy et al. (2021), who found that inconsistent access and lack of adequate resources interfere with the student's abilities to access their work and negatively impact their mental health.

Students felt that having fieldwork online during the pandemic has impacted their learning experiences due to the lack of immediate feedback on their performance and live direct interactions with clients in a natural setting. While navigating through their fieldwork experiences online, students often expressed feeling stressed from heavy workloads and anxious about how clinically prepared they would be moving forward.

After completion of virtual fieldwork, many students felt they were not prepared to apply their learning to an in-person clinical setting. However, they perceive their confidence level in their verbal communication and collaboration skills to be greater compared to other skills as a result of virtual fieldwork. This was due to creating an occupational profile with peers and participating in group discussions. Documentation and critical thinking skills were rated lower compared to verbal communication and collaboration, due to a lack of efficient feedback and opportunities to interact with live clients. Students expressed their wish that if they had constant feedback on their

performance and documentation as they would in-person, they would feel more successful in their learning experiences. The lack of immediate feedback was a common concern amongst participants and is consistent with the literature produced by Godoy et al. (2021), who suggested that implementing “active teaching methodologies, immediate feedback, and test-taking strategies” while navigating the online learning environment would help to protect the psychological stability of students (p. 11).

Recommendations

This study’s findings revealed the various factors that have affected student learning experiences of virtual fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results focus on the common influences of positive or negative experiences, the students’ perceived readiness to practice in a clinical setting following the virtual fieldwork experience, the strategies students used to adapt to new learning experiences while in a pandemic. After careful review, the student researchers concluded that further research is required to understand ways to replicate real-world clinical experiences into virtual modalities. Future research should explore student performances in engaging in treatment planning and implementation of telehealth sessions.

Virtual fieldwork is an opportunity for students to complete their clinical requirements and gain clinical exposure prior to graduation. During the pandemic, graduate schools transitioned to virtual fieldwork and students had to adapt to non-traditional learning environments. In light of student experiences, virtual fieldwork may not be a preferred method to clinical exposure; however, the participants expressed they could have more meaningful experiences when they have more live interactions with clients and more opportunities to receive feedback on their assignments. Concerns

expressed in this study can positively influence students' ratings in their perceived confidence in their clinical skills.

Limitations

There are several limitations we have encountered when conducting our thesis project. First, due to the timeline of our graduate school program, there was a time constraint in our data collection and analysis. We administered this thesis project at the beginning of our fourth term (August 1st, 2022) and anticipated concluding our interviews within five weeks. Another limitation of this study included bias. We acknowledge that we, as student researchers, have experienced a simulated fieldwork rotation due to the pandemic and have our own views, opinions, and attitudes towards the experience. The survey and interview questions may sway participants to answer one way more than another. Additionally, our participants themselves are a limitation. Because our inclusion criteria are specific to Stanbridge University occupational therapy students from the year 2020-2022 who have participated in at least one simulated fieldwork experience, it limits the study to a smaller sample size. Because our inclusion criteria are specific to Stanbridge University occupational therapy students from the year 2020-2022 who have participated in at least one simulated fieldwork experience, it limits the study to a smaller sample size of occupational therapy and occupational therapy students.

Summary

Transitioning from in-person to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic altered how fieldwork was delivered in many OT graduate schools. Fieldwork is an essential component of the OT graduate curriculum because it provides students with the opportunity to develop, refine, and apply their clinical reasoning and skills including communication, collaboration, and documentation. Simultaneously, fieldwork allows OT

students to gain exposure to various clinical settings. Instead of completing fieldwork requirements on-site and in-person, many universities transitioned to using simulated online platforms. As a result, students had to adapt to a new environment and learning styles, which posed a challenge to some. With the development of our thesis project, we gained an understanding of the social, psychological, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on OT graduate school learning. In addition, we learned about the experiences of OT students using online platforms to complete fieldwork requirements and any potential strategies for improving these experiences. Lastly, we learned about OT students' perspectives on opportunities for developing, practicing, and improving their clinical reasoning and skills during simulated fieldwork.

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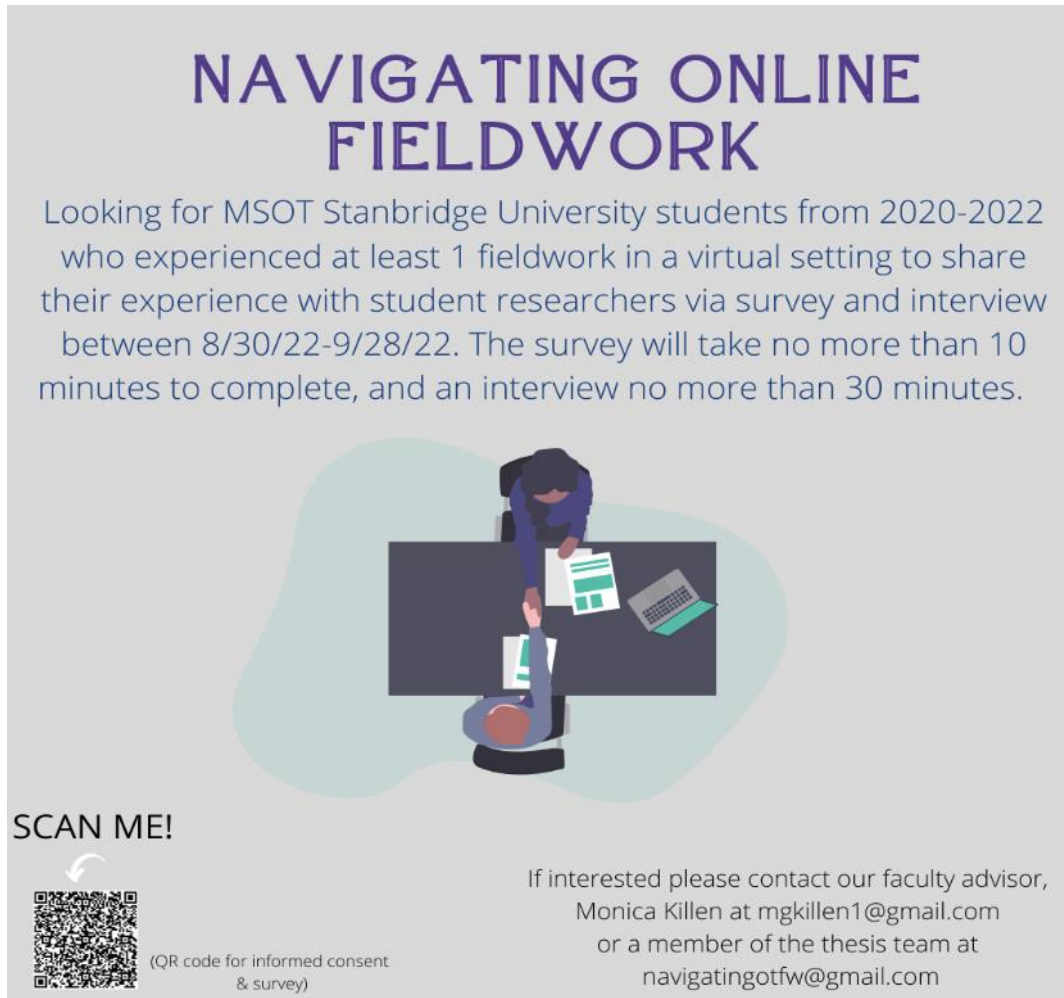
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Appendix A

Figures


Figure A1

Recruitment Flyer




**NAVIGATING ONLINE
FIELDWORK**

Looking for MSOT Stanbridge University students from 2020-2022 who experienced at least 1 fieldwork in a virtual setting to share their experience with student researchers via survey and interview between 8/30/22-9/28/22. The survey will take no more than 10 minutes to complete, and an interview no more than 30 minutes.



SCAN ME!



(QR code for informed consent & survey)

If interested please contact our faculty advisor, Monica Killen at mckillen1@gmail.com or a member of the thesis team at navigatingotfw@gmail.com

Figure A2*Informed Consent***CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Stanbridge University

Navigating OT Graduate School & Virtual Fieldwork During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a **research** project.

Participant's Rights

Your participation is voluntary. At any stage of the research study, you may choose not to participate. You may choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Your identity will be kept confidential. Please feel free to ask questions at any time. The purpose of this research study is to learn about the experiences of occupational therapy graduate students that were affected by the transition to virtual fieldwork due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, we hope to understand the social, psychological, and economic impacts on student learning during this period.

Are there any benefits from participating in this study?

Participants will not receive any financial gains and may discontinue their participation at any time.

What are the risks involved?

We do not foresee any inherent risks. Potential minimal risks of participating in this project may include feelings of discomfort and/or anxiety when sharing about their experience.

What does this study involve?

There are two parts to this study. Part I involves the survey portion of the study where participants will be expected to complete a 15 question survey via Google Forms. The survey consists of 4 yes/no questions, 6 open-ended questions, and 5 Likert scale questions. The first three questions of the study asks the participant if they agree to the terms under the informed consent, if they meet the inclusion criteria, and personal information such as gender, age, cohort, and method of contact (email or phone) for the interview portion of the study. The participant's responses are protected in a password protected file, which is accessed only by the researchers and thesis advisor. The questionnaire should take up to 10 minutes to complete. Following the completion of the survey, participants will either opt in or opt out of being contacted to partake in Part II of this study, which is an interview. The interview is optional, however, participating in the interview will complement and provide context to the survey. If the participant chooses to partake in the interview portion of this study, the consent form will be presented to the participant again to be reviewed. This interview will last no longer than 30 minutes and will expand on the participants answers to the survey questions. Access to Google Forms and an internet connection is a requirement to participate in our research study. Access to Zoom is required for participants who wish to

be interviewed virtually rather than in-person. If participants choose not to be video recorded, audio recording will be performed instead. If the participant does not wish to be audio recorded or video recorded, the student researcher performing the interview will take handwritten notes using a pen or pencil and a notepad.

Interview Process

Once the survey is completed by the participant and the participant chose to be contacted for the follow-up interview, the student researcher will make contact via email within 24-48 hours. The interview is optional, however, participating in the interview will complement and provide context to the survey. If the participant chooses to partake in the interview portion of this study, the consent form will be presented again for review. If the participant prefers to do an in-person interview, we will meet at the Stanbridge University campus in Irvine to conduct the interview. A physical copy of the electronically signed consent form will be provided before conducting the interview. Similarly, if the participant prefers the interview to be via Zoom, the student researcher will coordinate with the participant to set a time and date for the interview. Once a date and time is designated, the student researcher will send the informed consent document link via email once again. The participant will be presented with the consent form to simply review. We will also remind the participant that we will be audio recording the interview for transcription purposes, however if they prefer it not be recorded, the student researcher will honor that. If the participant does not wish to be audio recorded or video recorded, the student researcher performing the interview will take handwritten notes using a pen or pencil and a notepad. These handwritten notes will be scanned and stored in a password protected folder on the student researcher's private and password protected computer/laptop. After the handwritten notes are scanned and stored, the physical copy will be shredded. We will also remind the participant that they do not need to disclose any information they do not wish to and can withdraw from this study at any time. Once the participant has agreed, the student researcher will begin the 12 question interview. Once the interview concludes, the student researcher will allow the participant to ask any questions and provide feedback on the interview if they wish. The student researcher will thank the participant for their time and information shared.

Video and Audio Release

This study may involve the use of audio or video recording devices during the interview for transcription purposes. Neither the participant's name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the video recording, audio recording, or transcript. Instead, a pseudonym will be assigned when discussed in the final thesis document.

All interviews will be audio recorded through a voice recording application, called VoiceMemos, and are transcribed by the conductor of the interview. After transcription has been completed and reviewed for accuracy, the recordings will be deleted. These transcripts may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in the final thesis. Only the student researchers will have access to listening or viewing the recordings. As mentioned previously, neither the participant's name nor any other identifying information (such as the participant's voice) will be used in the final results of the study. Immediately following the interview, the participant will be given the opportunity to choose to have the recording deleted if they wish to withdraw their consent to being recorded or if they wish to withdraw their participation in the study.

Covid-19 Precautions

While we anticipate the majority of interviews to be via Zoom, if an in-person interview is conducted, it will take place at Stanbridge University in Irvine in the courtyard. Both the student researcher and participant will be required to adhere to Covid-19 protocols which includes wearing a mask that covers the mouth and nose, as well as sit at least six feet apart from the student researcher. The recording device will be set approximately in the middle of the student researcher and participant.

What am I being asked to do?

This research study focuses on the experiences of occupational therapy students who were affected by the transition to virtual fieldwork. In Part I of the study, participants will complete a 15 question survey about the experiences of participating in virtual fieldwork. In Part II of the study, we will be conducting an optional interview with participants that will expand on the answers they gave to the survey questions. This interview will last no more than 30 minutes. Both the survey and interview portions of the study combined should take no longer than 40 minutes to complete.

Withdrawal from the study

You may choose to end your participation in this research study at any time without any repercussions.

Compensation for participation

Participants will not receive any compensation or financial gains for participating in the research study.

Confidentiality

Identifiable information of the participants will remain confidential. Instead, participants will be assigned a pseudonym when discussed in the final thesis document. All information provided by participants will be stored in a password protected file and will only be retrievable by the researchers and advisor. The password protected folder will be located on the student researcher's private and password protected computer/laptop. As per federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.115 (Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS]), our participant's data, consent records, and IRB documentation will be retained for at least three years following study completion and will remain with the thesis advisor.

Who should you call with questions or concerns about this study?

Please contact the student investigators (Kelly, Megan, and Nicole) or the principal investigator, Dr. Monica Killen, if you have any questions or concerns about this research study.

Kelly, Megan, and Nicole
navigatingotfw@gmail.com

Dr. Monica Killen
mgkillen1@gmail.com

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Stanbridge University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. Please call the IRB Office at 949-794-9090 or via email at irb@stanbridge.edu.

Does it cost me anything to participate in this study?

In Part I of this study, participants will be asked to complete a 15-question survey about the experiences of participating in virtual fieldwork. In part II of this study, participants are given the option to partake in an interview that will expand on the participant's given answers to the survey questions. This interview is optional and will last no more than 30 minutes. Both the survey and interview portions of the study combined should take no longer than 40 minutes to complete. Access to Google Forms and an internet connection is a requirement to participate in our research study. Access to Zoom is required for participants who wish to be interviewed virtually rather than in-person. There is no other known cost to participate, other than time and internet access to the survey.

Thank you,

Kelly, Megan, and Nicole

1. I have read the above information thoroughly and have received answers to any questions I may have.

I agree.

I disagree.

2. I understand that my participation in this study is **voluntary** and I may withdraw from this study at any point.

Yes, I understand.

No, I do not understand

3. I agree to participate in the research study under the conditions described above.

Yes, I agree to participate.

No, I do not wish to participate.

4. **Electronic Signature.**

Please enter your full name. (This will constitute your electronic signature for agreeing to participate in the survey)

5. If I choose to participate in the interview, I consent to being video recorded during the interview.

Yes, I consent to being video recorded

No, I do not wish to be video recorded

6. If I choose to participate in the interview, I consent to being audio recorded during the interview.

Yes, I consent to being audio recorded

No, I do not wish to be audio recorded

I do not wish to participate in the follow-up interview.

Figure A3*Survey Questions***Survey Questions**

Title: Navigating Online Fieldwork

Description: This survey will be conducted through the google forms platform to gain general information about the participants' fieldwork experience before a more in-depth interview. The link to the survey is attached below. The survey will include a 15-question survey consisting of 3 questions related to meeting the inclusion criteria, for a total of 9 yes/no questions and 5 Likert scale questions. The first three questions of the study ask the participant if they agree to the terms under the informed consent, if they meet the inclusion criteria (occupational therapy graduate student at Stanbridge University enrolled in an OT program between 2020-2022 and participated in at least one level of fieldwork that was conducted online), and personal information such as gender, age, cohort, and method of contact (email or phone) for the interview portion of the study. The participant's responses are protected in a password protected file, which is accessed only by the researchers and thesis advisor. This survey is kept confidential.

This is the beginning of the survey.

The following questions will provide student researchers with valuable information on occupational therapy graduate students' experiences navigating online fieldwork. This survey is kept confidential.

DO NOT TAKE THIS SURVEY IF YOU HAVE NOT COMPLETED ANY FIELDWORK ROTATION ONLINE.

1. I have read the consent form and I agree to continue with the study.
 I agree.

2. Do the following statements apply to you?
 "I am or was an occupational therapy graduate student at Stanbridge University who was enrolled in an OT program between the years of 2020-2022. While enrolled in the OT program, I participated in at least one level of fieldwork that was conducted online."
 Yes
 No

3. **Optional:** Please enter your identified gender, age, and cohort and provide email/phone so we can contact you for a further interview.

4. On a scale from 1-10 (1 being an unpleasant experience, 5 being neutral, and 10 being the best), how would you rate your overall virtual fieldwork experience?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. After the completion of your virtual fieldwork, did you feel prepared enough to apply what you learned in an in-person clinical setting?

- Yes
- No

6. Was the virtual fieldwork experience anything you expected it to be? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?

7. Were there any social, psychological, and/or economic influences that may interfere with your learning experience during fieldwork? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?

8. Did you experience virtual challenges? (i.e; Wifi issues, distractions, limited access to the internet) If yes, please explain. If no, why not?

9. Were you satisfied with the level of feedback you received on your fieldwork assignments/documentation? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?

10. Did your virtual fieldwork rotation impact your interest in that area of practice? For example, if your pediatrics rotation was virtual, did this impact your interest in pursuing pediatrics as your future area of practice? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?

11. On a scale from 1-10 (1 being not confident, 5 being neutral, and 10 being highly confident), how confident are/were you in your **verbal communication skills** after completing fieldwork virtually?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. On a scale from 1-10 (1 being not confident, 5 being neutral, and 10 being highly confident), how confident are/were you in your **collaboration skills** after completing fieldwork virtually?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

13. On a scale from 1-10 (1 being not confident, 5 being neutral, and 10 being highly confident), how confident are/were you in your **documentation/ verbal communication** skills after completing fieldwork virtually?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

14. On a scale from 1-10 (1 being not confident, 5 being neutral, and 10 being highly confident), how confident are/were you in your **critical thinking skills** after completing fieldwork virtually?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

15. Moving forward, would you prefer to complete fieldwork virtually or in-person?

Yes, I prefer virtual fieldwork

No, I prefer in-person

16. May we contact you for a follow-up interview that will last no longer than 30 minutes?

Yes

No

17. If you have selected "yes" for a follow-up interview, please enter your **email**. We will contact you to schedule an interview.

Figure A4*Interview Questions***Interview Questions**

Title: Navigating Online Fieldwork

Description: These interview questions will be administered to students who choose to meet one on one with student researchers. Students will be given the option to opt-out from participation or may choose to skip answering any questions from the interview.

- Attached is the link to the informed consent document and survey questions:
<https://forms.gle/ozAchG7uc8r8SAEp8>
- 1. In a couple of sentences, can you share your overall thoughts about the virtual fieldwork setting?
- 2. What types of support or resources did you have to help you navigate through virtual fieldwork?
- 3. In what ways were you more productive during virtual fieldwork? Were you able to get more documenting/general work completed due to not having to commute?
- 4. What are some ways you feel you may have benefited more from fieldwork being conducted on a virtual platform?
- 5. What were some distractions you faced during virtual fieldwork that you might have not in an on-ground environment?
- 6. Can you please explain some, if any, challenges you faced during virtual fieldwork?
- 7. What did you appreciate about the feedback you were given in regard to your fieldwork assignments? Or what suggestions do you have about feedback that was/was not adequately given?
- 8. How did virtual fieldwork help to improve your clinical skills? Or what would have helped you to improve your clinical skills?
- 9. How did the fieldwork experience impact your interest in that area of practice?
- 10. (If participant responds with “yes” to question #7 on Google Forms survey) Can you elaborate on how these influences (social, psychological, and/or economic) impacted your learning experience?
- 11. What advice do you have for future students who may have to complete fieldwork virtually?
- 12. Please share anything else you would like to express in terms of your virtual fieldwork experience.

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Approval

**Institutional Review Board
(IRB) APPROVED**

Approval Date: **8/31/2022**



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