



Baylor University

ROBBINS COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Occupational Therapy

Analyzing the Psychological Effects of Relocation Stress Syndrome/Transfer Trauma and Determining How It Impacts Quality of Life Amongst the Adult and Geriatric Populations

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Background and Problem

Approximately 70 percent of American adults, 65 and older will develop long-term care (LTC) needs and approximately 28 percent of those individuals will have a nursing home stay of at least 90 days (Teo, 2023). If an individual is no longer able to independently meet their needs, subjection to a supportive living environment may be posed. Those who transition to a supportive living environment may not only lose physical independence but in some cases may be deprived of a sense of autonomy.

- Relocation Stress Syndrome/Transfer Trauma is defined as the emotional and psychological impact of moving older adults to a new living situation, especially when the move is sudden, involuntary or against their will (Aime, 2024).
- The prevalence of depression among older adults residing in nursing homes has risen (Liu et al., 2024), and “The subjective perception of loneliness, as a lack of relationships perceived as meaningful and nourishing, is considered a risk of poor quality of life ...” (Vespa et al., 2023, p. 7).

Assessing holistic health upon admission and ensuring access to necessary resources when needed is a vital component of promoting quality of life.

The Cognitive-Behavioral frame of reference guides this study as it highlights behaviors, emotion/mood, physiological responses, and the environment.

Purpose/Aim/Question

The purpose of this project is to explore the psychological effects of Transfer Trauma/Relocation Stress Syndrome and to analyze its impact on quality of life amongst adult and geriatric individuals with intact cognition. This study explores loneliness, depression, participation in meaningful activities, and overall quality of life.

Method

Setting: Evidence was gathered via a customized survey individually facilitated among residents of a skilled nursing facility (SNF) in Jacksonville, Florida. The questionnaire was administered to explore the transitional experiences of these individuals, explore holistic wellness, and to examine satisfaction with their living environment and overall well-being.

Participants: 8

Instrument Used: Participants selected were required to meet cognitive criteria—a standardized test, Brief Interview for Mental Status (BIMS) was administered prior to the facilitation of the survey. Participants were required to score 13/15 or greater, indicating the individual is cognitively intact per assessment standards. A customized survey was created by the facilitator of this research study to obtain data. The survey explored ideas including loneliness, depression, satisfaction with quality of life, and satisfaction with their level of participation in meaningful activities.

Procedures: Each participant was debriefed on the purpose of this research study. Participants read and signed a participant agreement form prior to engaging in the study. Participants were asked to complete a 12-question survey—a Likert scale was utilized for response to questions 1-10. The final two questions were open-ended for the collection of detailed qualitative information. The survey was printed and distributed individually and confidentially. All completed surveys were collected at the end of the day.

Data Analysis: Data was organized according to responses relating to loneliness and depression then analyzed for the construction of pie graphs. A table was utilized to display individual participant responses to satisfaction with quality of life and participation in meaningful activities.

Results

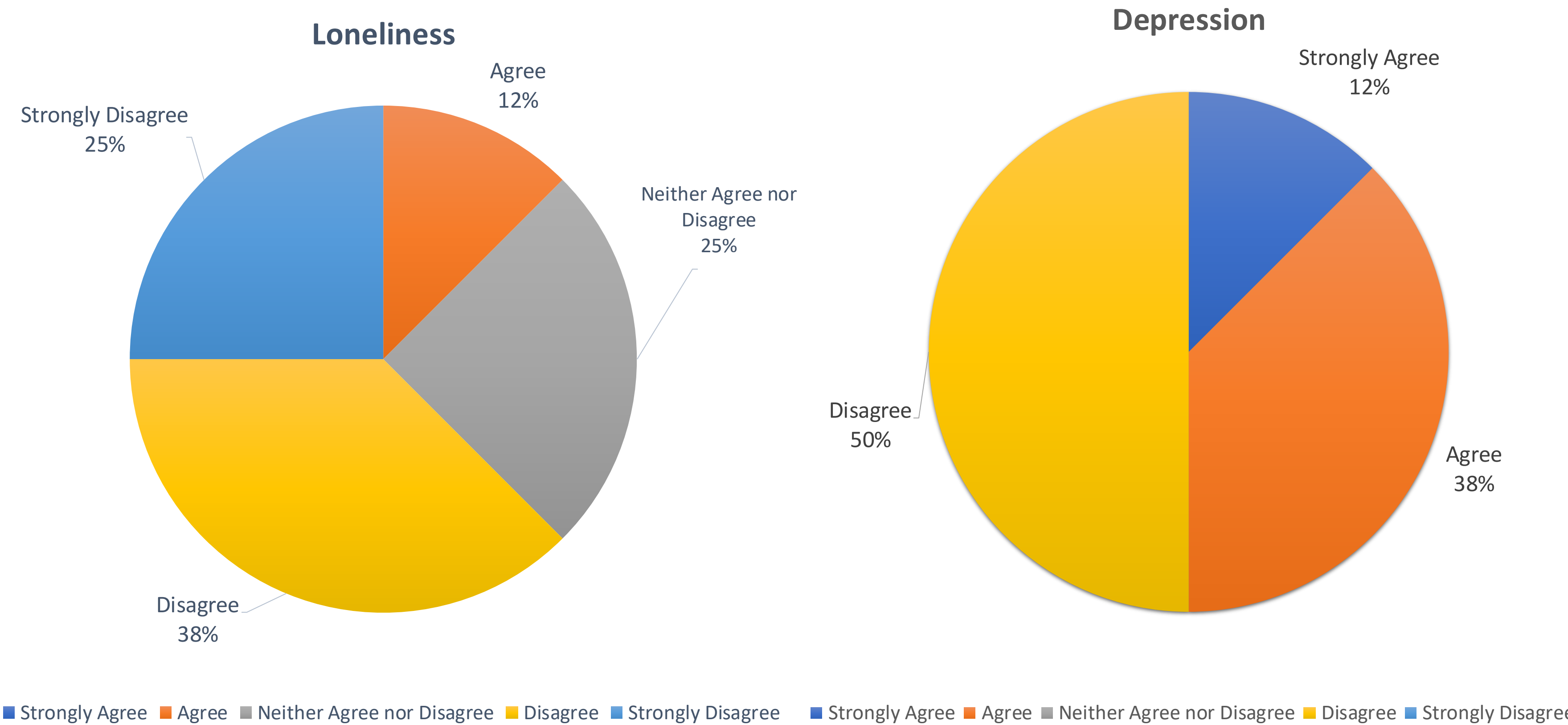


Figure 1. Depression and Loneliness. Participants were asked if they experienced thoughts or feelings of depression and/or loneliness during or following their transitional period.

Participant	Satisfaction with Overall Quality of Life	Satisfaction with Level of Participation in Meaningful Activities
1	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
2	Very Satisfied	Satisfied
3	Satisfied	Satisfied
4	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
5	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
6	Dissatisfied	Very Satisfied
7	Satisfied	Satisfied
8	Very Satisfied	Satisfied

Table 1. Quality of life and Meaningful Activities. Participants were asked to rate their current level of satisfaction with quality of life and participation in meaningful activities.

“In your own words, how would you describe your transition period to River City Nursing and Rehabilitation Center?”

“I’d rather be home.” – Participant 1

“My transition has been challenging but acceptable.” – Participant 6

“It was necessary to keep me safe.” – Participant 8

Table 2. Open-ended responses. Participants were encouraged to share written details regarding their transitional phase.

Conclusions

- Results were distributed across the rating scale; however, recognizing the presence of dissatisfaction is essential. This study has the potential to encourage the study site and similar supportive living facilities to implement more formalized screenings for patients/residents and ensure appropriate resources are readily available.
- Though not an overwhelming percentage, participants did endorse dissatisfaction with their current level of participation in meaningful activities. It is vital to acknowledge its value and to ensure access to participation in those activities. This has the potential to improve satisfaction with their environment and circumstances. With improved distribution and access to aforementioned resources, perhaps overall quality of life will be further improved.
- Limitations of this study include minimal open-ended responses from participants. Perhaps, implementing a focus group would have allowed the opportunity to facilitate more conversational responses to gain in-depth information regarding each participant’s transitional phase.
- Future studies would benefit from gaining further insight regarding participants’ engagement in meaningful activities—exploring activities participants enjoyed participating in prior to transitioning to a supportive living environment vs. the activities the patient currently participates in. Moreover, this study may be furthered by determining if the facility surveyed the residents upon admission to explore what they enjoy and to ultimately determine if those activities were implemented within their daily lives.

Implications for Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy seeks to treat the holistic being. Therefore, it is essential that clinicians continue to recognize the value of meeting patient needs and encouraging the maximization of participating in meaningful activities. In alternative living environments, it is of great benefit to identify activities of interest i.e., music, painting, sewing, etc. Implementing or simulating these activities within the newly adopted home environment has the potential to greatly contribute towards satisfaction with overall quality of life. When referencing existing activities at the Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF), participant 2 stated, “I’m not interested in those things,” also citing dissatisfaction with their current living environment. Though the transition period may pose challenges, it is essential to recognize its difficulty and customize a plan of care that meets individual needs. Though greater benefit may be obtained via an interdisciplinary approach, occupational therapists should seek to advocate for screenings for analysis of depression and/or loneliness. Moreover, occupational therapists have the potential to serve as champions for ensuring the establishment of procedures and the availability of resources to best meet all needs.

References

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