

# Supporting Adults with Fibromyalgia:

A Cross-Sectional Survey Study Exploring Occupational Therapy Referrals from Healthcare Providers

Alyssa Linares, OTD/S, Alaa Abou-Arab OTD, OT/L, Mary Shahid, PT, DPT

## Background

- Fibromyalgia is a neurological disorder that causes widespread pain throughout the body and affects 4 million adults in the United States (CDC, 2022).
- Occupational therapy (OT) services can benefit individuals with fibromyalgia through non-pharmaceutical and holistic interventions (Poole & Siegel, 2016). Despite current evidence for the effectiveness of OT interventions for this population, there is a gap in knowledge regarding the frequency of referrals to OT services for fibromyalgia.

## Purpose

- The purpose of this doctoral capstone project is to explore if healthcare providers are making referrals to occupational therapy for individuals diagnosed with fibromyalgia.

## Guiding Frameworks

- The PEOP model guided clinical reasoning by considering individual, social, and environmental factors affecting the target population, while the biopsychosocial model of pain incorporated psychological and social influences alongside biological aspects.



## Participants and Methods

Survey population included 52 adults aged between of individuals aged 18–79.

- Study Design:* Online, cross-sectional survey.
- Survey Development:* 50-item survey incorporating multiple choice and Likert-scale questions.
- Recruitment:* Social media platforms using a flyer and pre-scripted outreach messages.
- Data Analysis:* Descriptive statistics and proportional analysis.
- Referral Categorization:* Differentiated between provider-driven referrals and self-initiated or unclear service use (see table 1).

Figure 1. Fibromyalgia Referral Survey Content

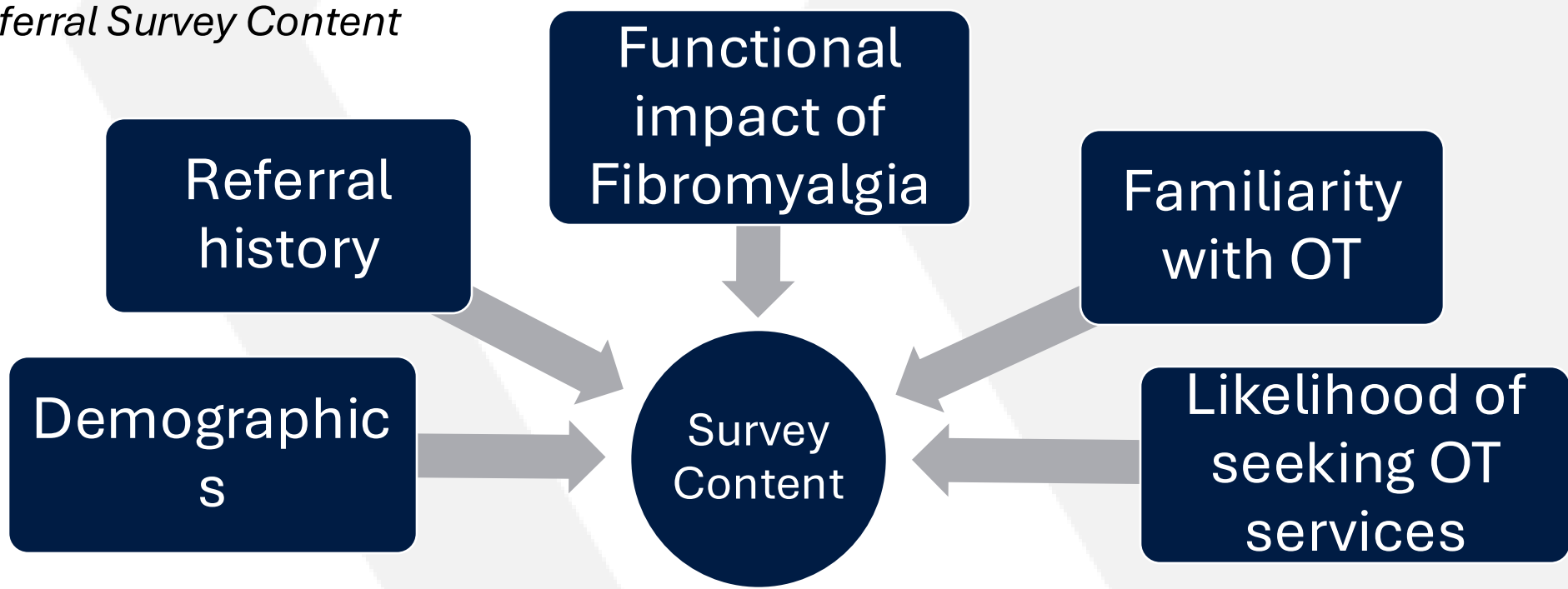


Table 1. Overview of Provider Referrals and Accessed Services Post-Diagnosis (N=52)

| Services/Specialties                              | Provider Referrals Post-Diagnosis |                         | Currently Received Services                   |                  |       |                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|------------------|-------|-------------------|
|   | Provider Referral                 | Total Percentage (N=84) | Provider Referral                             | Unknown Referral | Total | Percentage (N=70) |
| Physical therapy                                  | 23                                | 27.38%                  | 5   | 4                | 9     | 12.90%            |
| Acupuncture                                       | 8                                 | 9.52%                   | 2   | 1                | 3     | 4.30%             |
| Chiropractic                                      | 6                                 | 7.14%                   | 1   | 5                | 6     | 8.60%             |
| Occupational therapy                              | 4                                 | 4.76%                   | 1   | 2                | 3     | 4.30%             |
| Aquatic therapy                                   | 7                                 | 8.33%                   | 0   | 1                | 1     | 1.40%             |
| Massage therapy                                   | 6                                 | 7.14%                   | 2   | 5                | 7     | 10.00%            |
| Cognitive-behavioral therapy                      | 9                                 | 10.71%                  | 2   | 5                | 7     | 10.00%            |
| Acceptance and commitment therapy                 | 2                                 | 2.38%                   | 1   | 2                | 3     | 4.30%             |
| Pain Management Team                              | 2                                 | 2.38%                   | 1   | 1                | 2     | 2.90%             |
| Osteopath   | 0                                 | 0%                      | 0   | 1                | 1     | 1.40%             |
| No Referrals Received Post-Diagnosis: 17 (20.24%) |                                   |                         | Not Currently Receiving Services: 28 (40.00%) |                  |       |                   |

Note: Refer to full capstone report for details regarding data analysis.

## Results

- Occupational therapy represented 4.76% of the total referrals, with a utilization rate of 4.3%.
- When asked about familiarity with OT services, 70.6% indicated they were “not at all familiar”.
- All respondents expressed interest in at least one of the areas of treatments covered in the scope of OT.

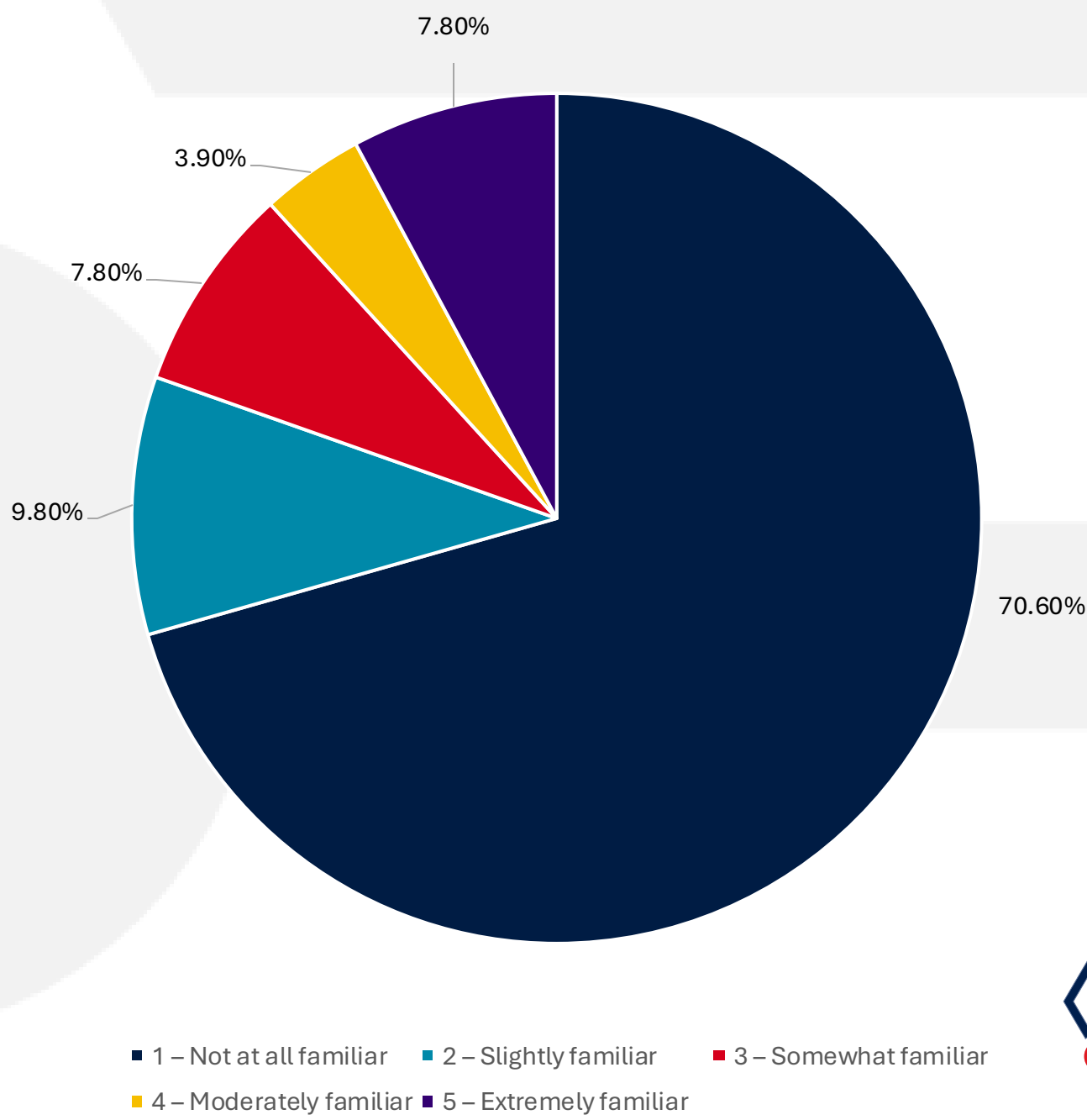
## Conclusion

- These research findings suggest that, among the already low referrals this population receives, occupational therapy (OT) remains one of the least recognized and referred services by healthcare providers for fibromyalgia care.

## Implications

- This research identified a critical need to advocate for improved referral pathways and education on the role of occupational therapy for fibromyalgia treatment to potential clients, healthcare providers, and occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs).

Figure 2. Familiarity with Occupational Therapy as a Treatment for Fibromyalgia (N=51)



References



Capstone Report



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