



The Role of Canadian Occupational Therapists in Climate Change

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Introduction



Photo Source: <https://nationaltoday.com/international-mother-earth-day/>

Gap

- Crucial role of the environment in OT
- No specific guideline for climate action with the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
- Currently, there is a gap in literature regarding Canadian occupational therapists' role in addressing climate change (Chan et al., 2020).

Objectives

- To explore OTs' perceptions of climate change.
- To uncover actions OTs are currently taking to respond to climate change.
- To identify further actions that OTs and the profession can implement for climate change.

Research Question

- For occupational therapists, especially in Canada, what are their perspectives on climate change and climate action?

Methods



Interpretive Description

- What is interpretive description?
 - It's a qualitative research methodology (Thorne, 2016)
- Researchers and participants co-construct understandings (Thorne et al., 2004)
- Expert clinical knowledge is embraced

Participants (n=12)

Variables	Mean \pm SD or N (%)
Age (years)	34 \pm 5
Female	10 (83%)
Years of Practice	9.9 \pm 7
Researcher vs. OT (ratio)	4:8
Participant Location	Canada: 8 (67%) United States: 3 (25%) United Kingdom: 1 (8.3%)

SD: Standard Deviation

Data Collection

- Conducted 12 semi-structured zoom interviews
- Interview guide was developed focusing on participants' views on climate change in relation to occupational therapy
- Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes

Data Analysis

- Early stage of coding: broad-based codes used instead of specific thematic analysis
- Mid-stage: adopted constant comparative analysis (Thorne et al., 2004)
- Late stage: developed coding guide and organized them into themes
- Each stage of analysis involved at least two researchers

Results

Themes

- "Climate change is real": Negotiating climate change personally
- "There's no occupational being without the planet": Struggling with climate change clinically
- "We need to use our voice": Confronting climate change professionally

"Climate change is real": Negotiating climate change personally

- Believing and caring about climate change

“It's a really big issue [...] one that's been like present in my life, for a long as I can remember.”

- Chloe, occupational therapist from West Coast of Canada

"Climate change is real": Negotiating climate change personally

- Experiencing climate effects and feeling challenged

“It's awful that I always find [climate change] in the back of my head on any given day [...] sometimes the climate anxiety is higher than at other times[...] during really severe heat wave seasons, [my climate anxiety] was worse”

- Max, occupational therapist worked with rural communities, northern region of Canada

"Climate change is real": Negotiating climate change personally

- Current individual actions and future goals
 - “I try to cope with climate anxiety [...] by going for walks, trying to stay physically active.” -Max
 - “I want my community connections to continue to grow.”
 - Amelia, occupational therapist working with rural and Indigenous communities, northern Canada

"There's no occupational being without the planet": Struggling with climate change clinically

- Tight connection between ecological environment and occupation

“There's no occupational being without the planet, right? So every single area of practice will have to somehow find their contribution.”

- Charlotte, occupational therapist from eastern Canada

"There's no occupational being without the planet": Struggling with climate change clinically

- Witnessing rising climate effects on clients

“People go through the ice all the time and now get lost because of the flow water from climate change. Their entire community can be impacted significantly as they cannot find the Caribou.” - Amelia

"There's no occupational being without the planet": Struggling with climate change clinically

- Cooperating climate change into occupational therapy practice
 - “Disaster management is a big thing, but [...] figuring out how to adapt in the first place” -Emily, occupational therapy researcher, eastern US
 - “Making sure that [all equipment] is from a proper source, that we're sourcing them from ethical companies where that we know the products come from” - Isabella, occupational therapy researcher, UK

"We need to use our voice": Confronting climate change professionally

- Currently feeling unequipped with rising climate challenges
 - “Being on a professional level, I haven't exactly figured out what to do” - Chloe
 - “We're behind with anything that centers like justice. And I think that climate change goes alongside with that.”
 - Olivia, occupational therapy researcher from southern US

"We need to use our voice": Confronting climate change professionally

- Call for changes in the education curriculum
 - “If [climate change] doesn't enter the curriculum, I don't think a lot of our new practitioners will have that mindset”
 - Sophia, researcher from eastern US with environmental science background

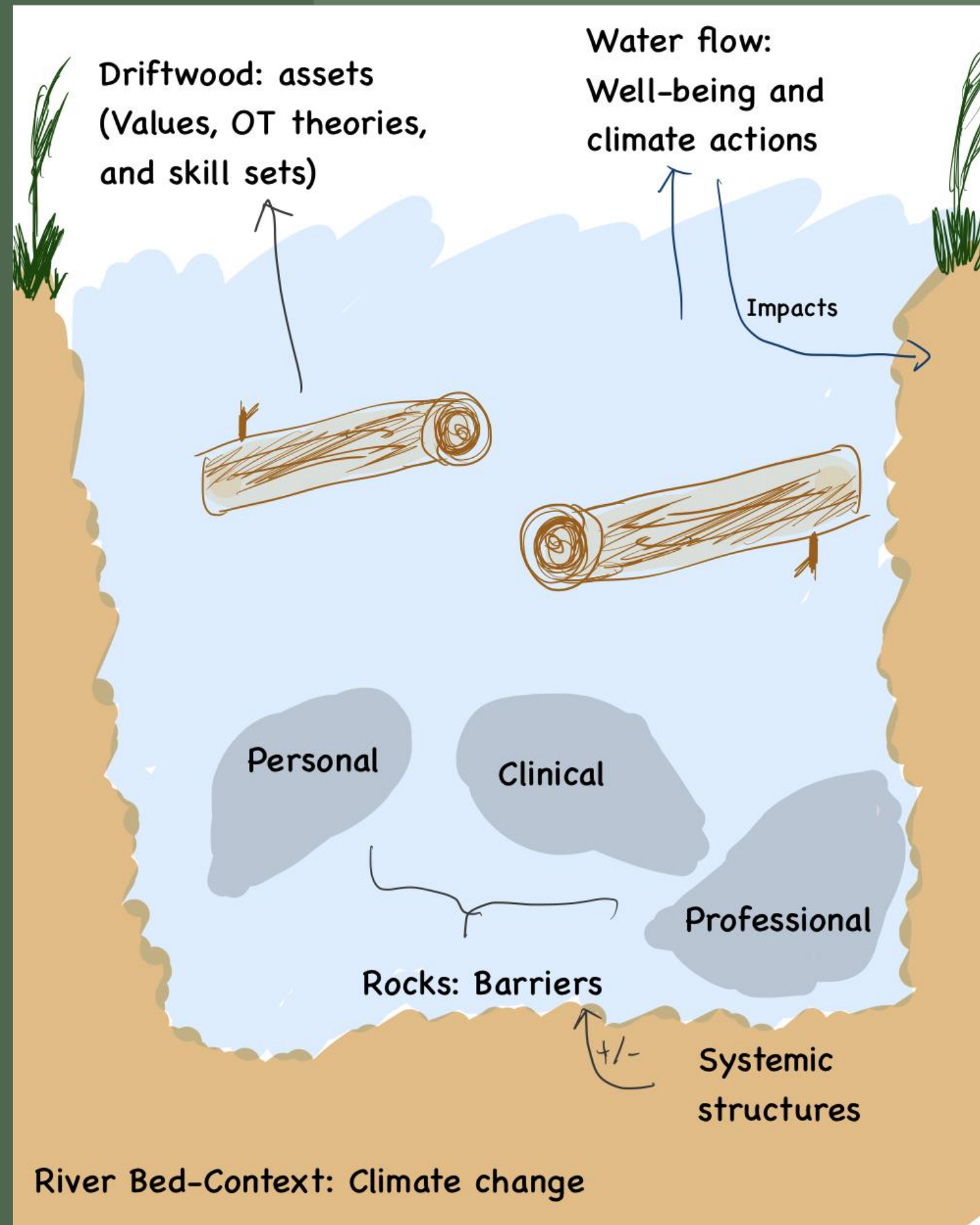
"We need to use our voice": Confronting climate change professionally

- The power of community and conversations
 - “I think in Canada it would be key to collaborate with Indigenous peoples because they know this land the best.”
- Evelyn, occupational therapist, islands
- Call for more climate guidance, policies, and advocacy
 - “Prioritize developing practice standards to be responsive to the effects of climate change.” - Max

Summary

This research illustrates the interaction between climate change and occupational therapists on individual, clinical practice, and professional level.

Discussion



Limitations

- Limited geographic and political representation
 - Strategy: including occupational therapy researchers as key informants
- Convenience sampling was utilized to recruit Canadian occupational therapists
 - Strategy: Purposive sampling was used to recruit research experts, which allowed for abundant information collection as a result
- Limited to capture climate change deniers
 - Strategy: Similar interests in climate change among participants, abundant suggestions for climate actions

Call for Action & Future Steps

• Individual level

- ✦ Deindividualize climate burden (Hyman, 2020)
- ✦ Investigate and provide more support to individual occupational therapists

• Clinical level

- ✦ Adopt Indigenous perspective (Redvers et al, 2022)
- ✦ Involvement of occupational therapists in disaster management (Jeong et al., 2015)
- ✦ Explore and develop more climate focused occupational therapy models and interventions (Drolet et al., 2020)

• Professional level

- ✦ Incorporating climate change education in OT curricula (Benevides et al, 2015)
- ✦ Developing guidelines and policies at the association and college levels (Lafond & Drolet, 2023)
- ✦ Advocating for higher-level changes in government policies and resource allocation (Benevides et al, 2015)

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Thank you!

“We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it.” — Barack Obama.