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# Practice

August 2023

## Women's Health

Occupational Therapy's  
Unique Role in Maternal  
Health and Well-Being

**OTA**  
American  
Occupational Therapy  
Association

# Combating Health Inequities

## The Vital Role of Diversity in Occupational Therapy Research

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### The Problem with Homogeneity in Research

In a profession that hopes to “maximize health, well-being, and quality of life for all people, populations, and communities,” a lack of representation of diverse perspectives in research is particularly detrimental to our ability to provide equitable care (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2017). Because questions and solutions are often tailored toward those included in research rather than the actual population, disproportionate representation limits the generalizability and applicability of research questions and outcomes to specific populations. When the individuals with the power to select scientific questions and lines of research fail to represent diverse experiences and cultures, we risk having bias in

the interventions, research approaches, and outcomes. Thus, disproportionate representation perpetuates health inequities.

### The Value of Diversity in Research

Inclusion of diverse perspectives in research allows for broader understanding and generalizability across different groups, which in turn improves the quality and reliability of evidence-based practices (Taff & Blash, 2017). Increasing representation in occupational therapy can help combat health inequities by ensuring that diverse perspectives are included in every step of the research process, including developing questions, determining methodology (e.g., recruitment approaches), and drawing conclusions from the data.

### The First Step Toward Change is Reflection

As students, practitioners, and educators, we can critically evaluate the research and evidence we consume and encourage others to do the same. As we immerse ourselves in current literature, we must consider the limitations and gaps that exist, particularly in terms of who is and is not included in the research. Are the needs of marginalized communities being considered? Are the assessments and interventions shown to be valid and effective across diverse demographic groups? Whose needs and experiences are excluded and/or overlooked in the literature?

Similarly, those of us who are scientists can, and should, consider the impact of our personal experiences and biases on every stage of the research. To accomplish this, we should ask ourselves critical questions, similar to those listed above, and ensure that we are honest and reflective in our responses.



## Action Steps

Before becoming occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs), students can play a role in diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility (DEIJA) efforts by critically evaluating literature, connecting with scientists who are doing work in areas of interest, and observing or contributing on a research team. Clinicians and educators can take initiative to learn more about research by completing continuing education on translational research, taking courses on evidence-based practice, or learning about opportunities to be part of a research team as a recruiter or clinician. Scientists must apply frameworks to guide studies and ensure the findings from their work are accessible, are implementable, and address inequities (Peterson et al., 2021). 📄

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## Resources



Consider these resources to learn more about research careers:

**Pathways to Research and Doctoral Careers**

(<https://predoc.org/>)

**Demystifying Research Podcast and Webinars** (<https://bit.ly/3pcNeUm>)

**Training in Diversity Education (TiDE)** (<https://www.tide.pitt.edu/>)

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