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## Occupational Therapy in the Criminal Justice System: Assessing Social and Occupational Engagement within the Correctional Facility Context

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# Occupational Therapy in the Criminal Justice System: Assessing Social and Occupational Engagement within the Correctional Facility Context

Erika Tucker OTD/S, Dr. Megan Mericle PsyD, and Dr. Karen Keptner OTR/L

## Background and proposal process

When an individual is prevented from the right to engage in meaningful occupation, they experience occupational injustice (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004). Living in institutionalized settings, such as correctional facilities, may cause individuals to experience occupational injustices, specifically occupational alienation and occupational deprivation (DeHart & Iachini, 2019; Whiteford, 2003). Long term effects of occupational deprivation and alienation are social isolation and exclusion, difficulty structuring time in a meaningful way, and difficulty reintegrating into society with the necessary skills for successful community living (Whiteford et al., 2019). Therefore, utilizing an occupational justice lens, I chose to work with the female incarcerated population to run an observational research study to assess how the environment supports or limits pro-social behaviors and engagement in productive activities among this understudied population and create a list of evidence based environmental recommendations to combat occupational injustices seen in this context.

## Brief bio

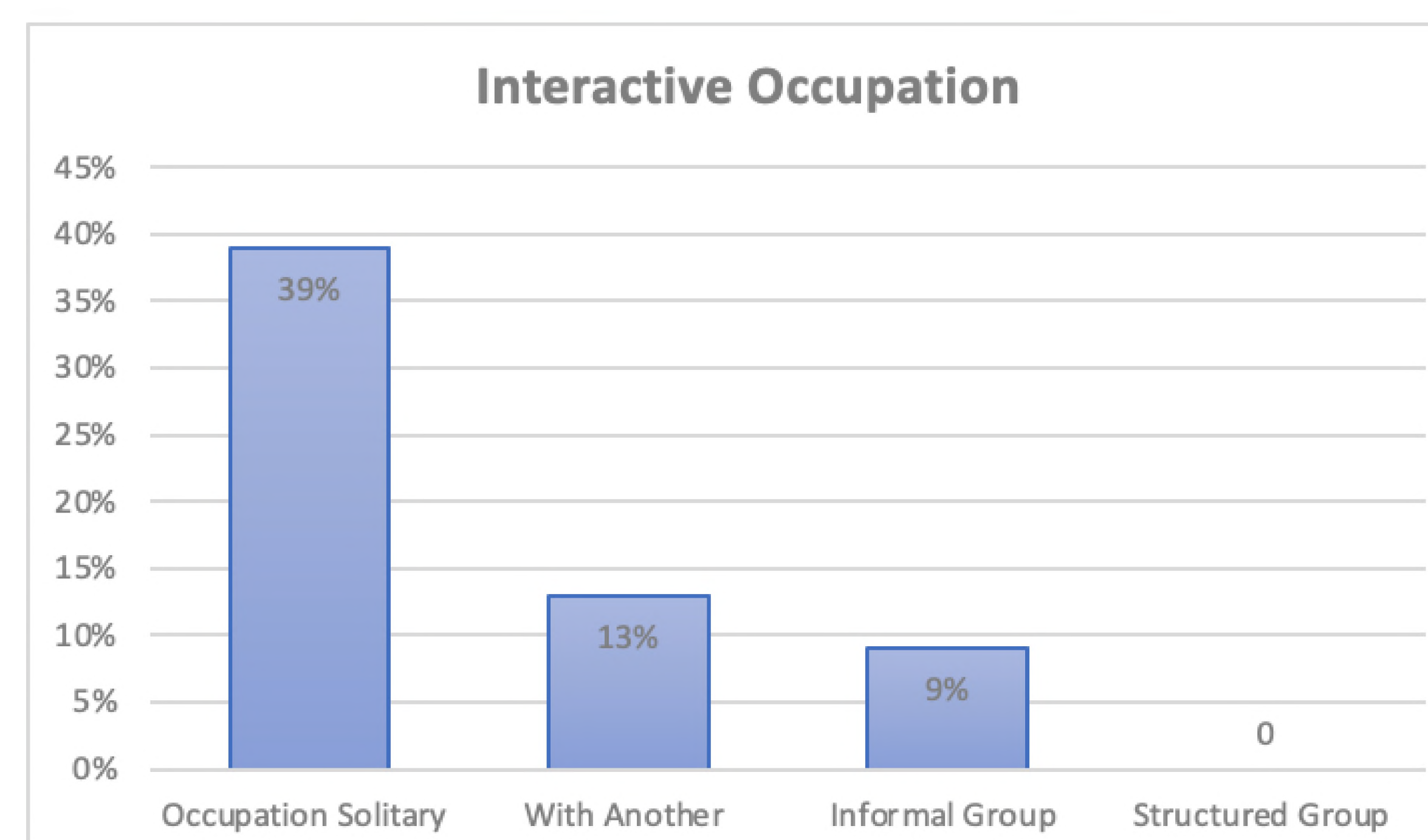
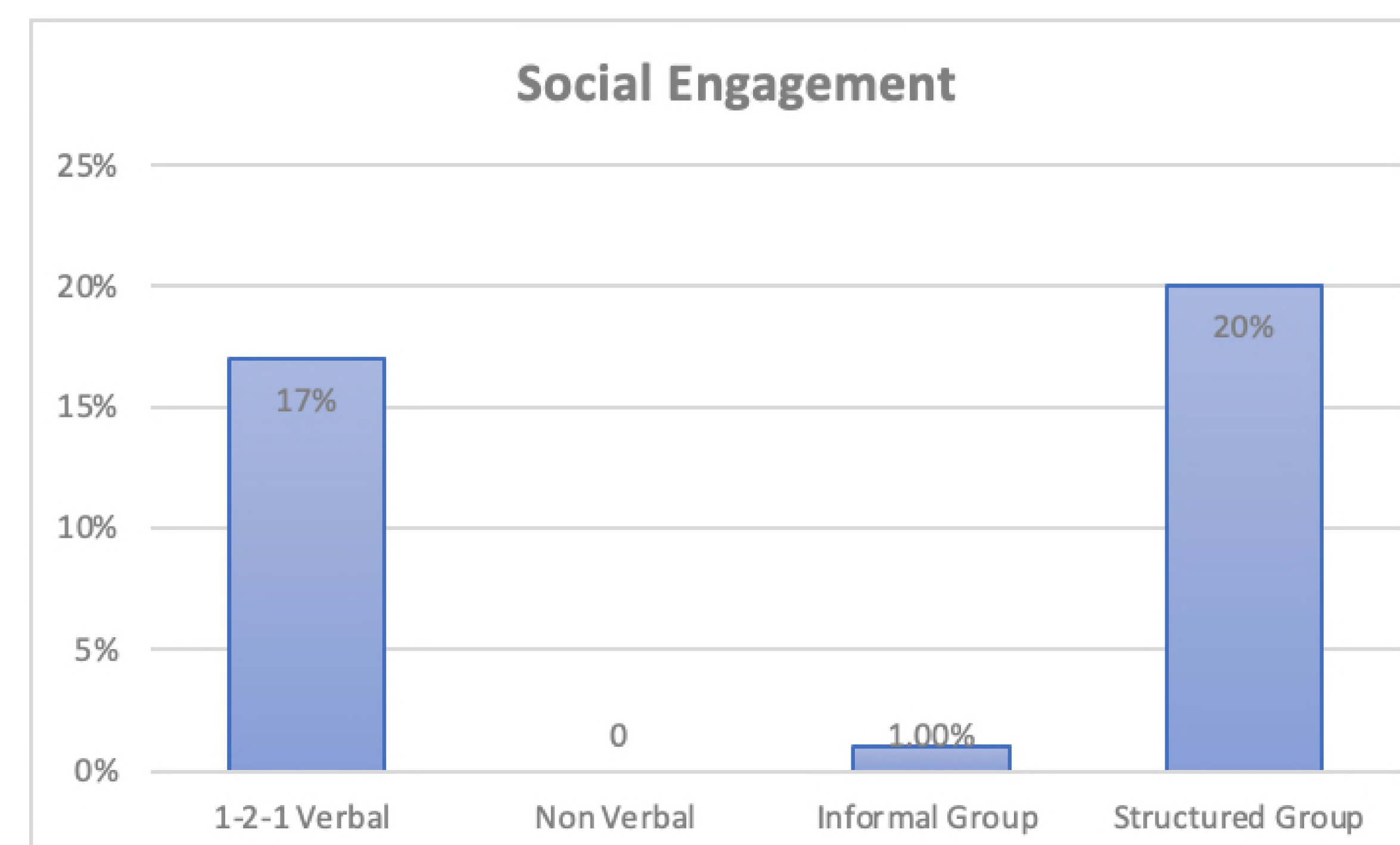
My name is Erika Tucker. When I graduate with my OTD, I would like to work with an underserved population. I am undecided on my population of choice, as I have a love for both pediatrics and geriatrics. When an opportunity arises, as the field of OT grows, I would also love to expand my knowledge and skill sets of working with the incarcerated population.



## Capstone activities

This 14-week capstone experience was completed at **Northeast Reintegration Center (NERC)** located in Cleveland, OH. During this time, I successfully completed the list of achievements below.

- Completed an IRB review process to gain consent to conduct observational research at the desired correctional facility site
- Ran a townhall meeting to invite participants to engage in this study
- Successfully completed and ran 9 total rounds of observations (54 hours) utilizing the Assessment Tool for Social and Occupation Engagement - Correctional Facilities
- Gathered and computed statistical data results to analyze and understand the forms of pro-social and occupational engagement that are occurring at a correctional facility; see results below



## Additional Accomplishments

- Successfully worked under the mental health department and was able to gain firsthand experience working with the staff to see the supports they provide for individuals who are incarcerated.
- Completed an extracurricular criminology course at CSU to enrich my knowledge of working with this population.
- Provided the list seen below of environmental recommendations to improve pro-social behaviors and occupational engagement at the NERC correctional facility.

### Environmental Recommendations for Housing Units

1. Paint walls neutral and warm colors; i.e., tans, greys, browns, pastels to increase warmth
2. Change light fixtures to have warm yellow iridescence
3. Interchange plastic chairs for telephones and computers to chairs with cushions for increased comfort
4. Provide rocking chairs for all units
5. Provide a couch/improved lounge chairs for TV watching station
6. Have speakers on TV so inmates can hear channels rather than speakers behind CO desk
7. Increase communal sitting tables to more aesthetically pleasing options; i.e., high top tables and chairs
8. Incorporate rugs around day room to combat sterile and concrete flooring
9. Have speakers or a radio for soft music to be played
10. Incorporate leisure cabinet with updated games, activities, magazines, etc. for inmates to engage with
11. Provide padding on doors to decreasing loud slamming noises
12. Increase plants and greenery

## Key references

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