

Review Article

# Human occupation and activity in occupational therapy: scoping review in the national literature

## *A ocupação e a atividade humana em terapia ocupacional: revisão de escopo na literatura nacional*

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### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** Human occupations and activities are central themes in occupational therapy studies and interventions in Brazil, although there is no consensus on the use of these terms in the country. **Objective:** This research aimed to analyze part of the national scientific production of occupational therapy about the use of the terms of occupation and activity. **Method:** A scoping review of the literature was carried out between 1980 and 2017, using SciELO.br and the Brazilian journals of occupational therapy, using the keyword 'occupational therapy' associated with the words 'activity', 'occupation', and 'occupational performance'. The sample consisted of 155 articles, the first one being published in 2002. **Results:** The publications relate to eight fields or areas of occupational therapy and cover 95 different topics. The term “activity” was used in 128 articles, in 22 “occupation and activity” and only 5 used “occupation”. The term “activity” was defined as an instrument of the profession or related to the action of the subjects. The term “occupation” was defined as fundamental for the organization of human life considering that the activities are part of human occupations. Regarding the theoretical perspectives, the studies that used the “activity” present several theories or theoretical and methodological constructions. Those who have adopted “occupation” and “activity and occupation” refer to specific theoretical models. **Conclusion:** With this review, we verified that the terms present theoretical meanings and perspectives that accompany the plurality intrinsic to the profession and are based on historical partner constructions.

**Keywords:** Occupational Therapy, Terminology, Knowledge, Literature Review.

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## Resumo

**Introdução:** As ocupações e as atividades humanas são temas centrais nos estudos e intervenções da terapia ocupacional no Brasil, embora não exista um consenso nos usos desses termos no país. **Objetivo:** Esta pesquisa objetivou analisar parte da produção científica nacional da terapia ocupacional em relação ao uso dos termos *ocupação* e *atividade*. **Método:** Foi realizada uma revisão de escopo da literatura entre 1980 e 2017, na biblioteca SciELO.br e nos periódicos nacionais da área de terapia ocupacional, utilizando a palavra-chave “terapia ocupacional” associada às palavras “atividade”, “ocupação” e “desempenho ocupacional”. A amostra foi composta por 155 artigos, sendo o primeiro publicado em 2002. **Resultados:** As publicações se relacionam a oito campos ou áreas de atuação da terapia ocupacional e abordam 95 temas diferentes. O termo *atividade* foi utilizado em 128 artigos; *ocupação* e *atividade* em 22; e apenas 5 utilizaram *ocupação*. O termo *atividade* foi definido como instrumento da profissão ou relacionado à ação dos sujeitos. Já o termo *ocupação* foi definido como fundamental para a organização da vida humana, considerando que as atividades fazem parte das ocupações humanas. Em relação às perspectivas teóricas, os estudos que utilizaram a “atividade” apresentam várias teorias ou construções teóricas e metodológicas. Já os que adotaram “ocupação” e “atividade e ocupação” referenciam modelos teóricos específicos. **Conclusão:** Com esta revisão, verificou-se que os termos apresentam significados e perspectivas teóricas que acompanham a pluralidade intrínseca à profissão e são pautados em construções socio-históricas.

**Palavras-chave:** Terapia Ocupacional, Terminologia, Conhecimento, Literatura de Revisão.

## 1 Introduction

Several authors (Medeiros, 2003; Poellnitz, 2018; Lima et al., 2013; Quarente et al., 2008; Falcão & Guimarães, 2004; Joaquim et al., 2003; Toyoda & Akashi, 1993; Galheigo, 1988) debated about the terms *occupation* and *activity* and how they are used as synonyms, or they conceptualize or show other meanings, such as action, doing, praxis, among other terminological variations of the Brazilian occupational therapy. Silva (2013) and Salles & Matsukura (2016) point out that in the publications in this area, polysemy and plurality are evident in the construction of a field marked by diverse practices and knowledge.

Benetton (2008) states that there is an indiscriminate use in the terms of *activity*, *occupation*, and *occupational activity* in Brazil, in which the “carelessness” in the adoption of the term *occupation* and its correlates make a conceptual confusion.

Even having many definitions (Magalhães, 2013; Royeen, 2002; Pierce, 2001), the concept of *occupation* has been a usual term used for both the International Society of Occupational Science (2013) and the World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2012, under the consideration that the “occupation” provides meaning and sense for life and in the “occupation” there are different activities that people carry out in their daily lives, whether they are focused on themselves, the family and communities.

A review of the national literature by Lima et al. (2013, 2011) found that the term *activities* was adopted in 91% of the studies and the term *occupation* was in only 11% of the studies analyzed.

Poellnitz (2018) e Poellnitz et al. (2020) investigates the terms used *activity*, *occupation*, and *daily life* and performed a survey of the studies presented by occupational therapy researchers at the Brazilian Congresses of Occupational Therapy. The study showed that the most present term was *activity*; however, the terms and expressions using the term *activity* varied in 29 different forms, including “human activities”.

Salles & Matsukura (2016) carried out an investigation about the concepts of activity and occupation in national and English literature, verifying in national studies the use of the term activity and in English studies the term occupation. Also, they reported that both terms refer that the human being doing influences on own well-being and health and disease conditions, providing a sense and meaning for his life.

We know that, internationally, since the beginning of the profession, theoretical models have been elaborated based on the concept of occupation, including over the years the use of the terms *occupational performance* and, later, the *engagement* in occupations within different contexts, in addition to a series of other adjectives that are given to occupations (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 1997; Christiansen & Baum, 2005; Kielhofner, 2008).

Currently, there is the development of models based on the consideration of the existence of a variety of cultural perspectives, such as the Kawa model (Japanese term for river), developed by Japanese and Canadian rehabilitation professionals, focusing on “contexts” that shape and influence people's daily realities and challenges. This model is an alternative to contemporary “western” rehabilitation models, which generally focus on the person (Iwama, 2006). Such models and perspectives are focused on occupation and considered that the experience of occupation, in addition to being something personal, is also directly influenced by culture (Kinebanian & Stomph, 1992; McGruder, 2003).

Brazil has publications with the term *occupation*, using the Anglophone literature as a reference to support the studies (Salles & Matsukura, 2016). However, historically, Brazilian occupational therapy uses the term *activity* as a construct of the theoretical and practical foundation of the profession.

For example, Galheigo (1988) states in her master's dissertation that the concept of *human activity* replaced the concept of *work* in Brazilian occupational therapy, and became universal because it puts under its domain “[...] the daily life in the need for self-care and self-maintenance, the capacity for creation and production, leisure, children's games, and the need for instruments for adaptation [...]” (Galheigo, 1988, p. 69).

Medeiros (2003) considers *human activities* as an object of study of the profession, understanding them as a product and means of building the human being. Thus, occupational therapy would be the profession aimed to understand the relationships that this active human being establishes in your own condition of life and health.

Currently, critical perspectives help us in this debate, considering *human activities* necessarily as expressions of a certain person in the world. Therefore, they must be considered as socio-historical, contextualized, collective, community, relational, cultural constructions, plural expressions, and productions of life.

After all, human life is a *continuum* of activities in several dimensions in which the meaning of existence is generated and produced (Quarentei, 2001).

Silva & Poellnitz (2015) highlighted the plural use of the terms in occupational therapy; however, the terms indicate the need to reflect, discuss, name and conceptualize which terms, their meanings and uses in occupational therapy, presenting the arguments, elaboration, and adoption of references that can clearly explain the meanings, consensuses, and limits of different theoretical constructions. The authors also indicated the need for “activities and resources” to be consolidated as a field for the construction of knowledge, as their foundation is intrinsic in occupational therapy practices.

Thus, the debate is on the relationship between the production of conceptual consensus aimed at strengthening the internal identity and providing the dissemination and external recognition of the profession (Magalhães, 2013; Royeen, 2002). On the one hand, some authors suggest that this is one of the problems for the internationalization of the profession, as it undergoes an apparent lack of clarity in the concepts of *occupation* and *activity* (Magalhães, 2013; Benetton, 2008). On the other hand, conceptual plurality has been presented as a possibility for expanding fields and areas, since a conceptual unit has appeared to be insufficient to address the set of practices and knowledge of Brazilian occupational therapy (Silva & Poellnitz, 2015).

The research developed by Poellnitz (2018) shows categories that influence the use and adoption of a term and its conceptual baggage by occupational therapists: personal identity, professional and study trajectory, theoretical and conceptual perspective, and professional experience. The author agreed with this fact, emphasizing that “the use of language is singular, subjective and influenced by several factors inherent to the individual and the context in which he is inserted” (Poellnitz, 2018, p. 91).

In this sense, this article shows data from a research that aimed to analyze the national scientific production of occupational therapy, characterizing the studies that used the terms of *occupation* and *activity* based on the quantification of the appearance of these terms, how they were defined and under which theoretical perspectives.

## 2 Methodology

A scope review was carried out that aims to map the sources and types of evidence available and that support a research area. Together, this type of review focuses on identifying existing concepts and gaps (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005).

Based on the adoption of parameters indicated by Arksey & O’Malley (2005), this review was carried out in the following 5 steps:

- 1) definition of research questions.
- 2) access to different sources to search for studies.
- 3) composition of the sample based on the search and inclusion criteria.
- 4) extraction of information related to research questions.
- 5) presentation of the results obtained and analyzed in a numerical and thematic / conceptual manner with respective discussion.

The research questions that conducted this study were:

Do the studies that used the terms occupation and activity refer to any area or field of occupational therapy?

What is the specific theme of the studies that used the terms occupation and activity?  
 Which populations were the target of studies that used the terms occupation and activity?

What is the definition used in the studies for the terms "occupation" and "activity"?  
 What theoretical perspectives are presented by the studies?

Data collection used the investigation of SciELO.br database and the journals *Cadernos de Terapia Ocupacional* of UFSCar and *Revista de Terapia Ocupacional* of USP, available on virtual access, from 1990 to 2017. We used this period because *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional* of UFSCar have publications available since 1990 on its website, and *Revista de Terapia Ocupacional* of USP since 2002.

The keyword used was “occupational therapy” associated with the words “activity”, “occupation” and “occupational performance”.

The criterion for the composition of the sample we considered publications addressing the topic of occupational therapy and occupation, or occupational therapy and activity. As a result, we excluded articles that despite appearing in the search did not contain the words in the text, or, despite containing the words in the title, abstract, or text, the study did not focus on occupational therapy, occupation and/or activity of the researched themes. Figure 1 shows an explanatory flowchart of the search and sample composition process.

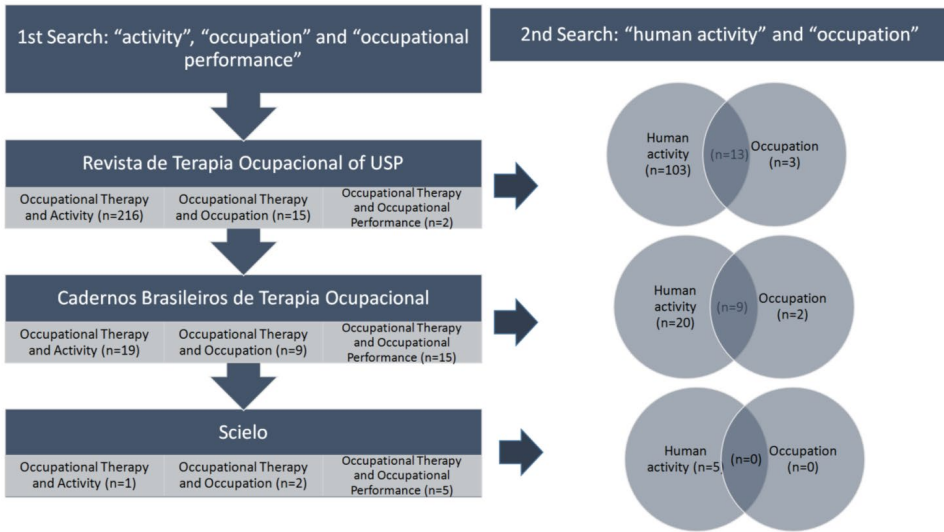


Figure 1. Sample composition flowchart.

The instrument for data collection was a Registration Form that organized the information of the studies found and composed the sample.

The Registration Form had the following information: type of methodological design of the study, year of publication, area or field of occupational therapy that the study was inserted, the specific theme of the studies, considering the identified area or field, study participants, the definition of the terms in the studies and the theoretical perspectives presented by the studies.

The quanti-qualitative approach (Turato, 2005) analyzed the scientific production found. The quantitative data were expressed in numbers, graphs, and tables, and the qualitative data showed the definitions for the terms and the respective theoretical perspectives adopted were computed by thematic similarity and described and illustrated with excerpts extracted from the studies with mention of the authorship and, later, they were discussed according to interpretation and inference.

### **3 Results**

We found 155 articles, of which 116 were published in the *Revista de Terapia Ocupacional* of USP, 33 in the *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional* and 6 in the SciELO.br database in non-specific journals in the occupational therapy area.

Regarding the type of methodological design, 72 studies were descriptive, 23 literature reviews, 27 qualitative research, 26 analytical/reflective tests, 4 quasi-experimental studies, and two experimental studies<sup>1</sup>. In one publication, there was no description of the methodological design used.

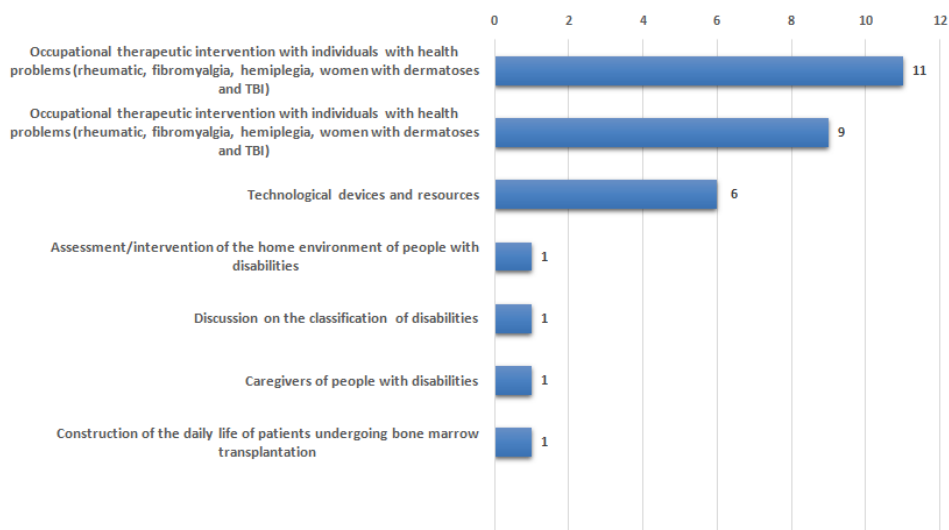
Regarding the year of publication, productions on the themes found were only from 2002 (n = 6), and, despite a drop in the two subsequent years, there was an increase in studies from 2005, and the greater number of publications was in 2011 (n = 20).

Eight occupational therapy fields and/or areas were found in which the studies were inserted: adult physical, cognitive and/or sensory dysfunction (n = 34), theoretical and methodological foundations and perspectives in occupational therapy (n = 32), physical, cognitive and sensory dysfunction in childhood and adolescence (n = 23), mental health (n = 21), gerontology-geriatrics (n = 15), social (n = 11), hospital contexts (n = 10) and health worker (n = 9).

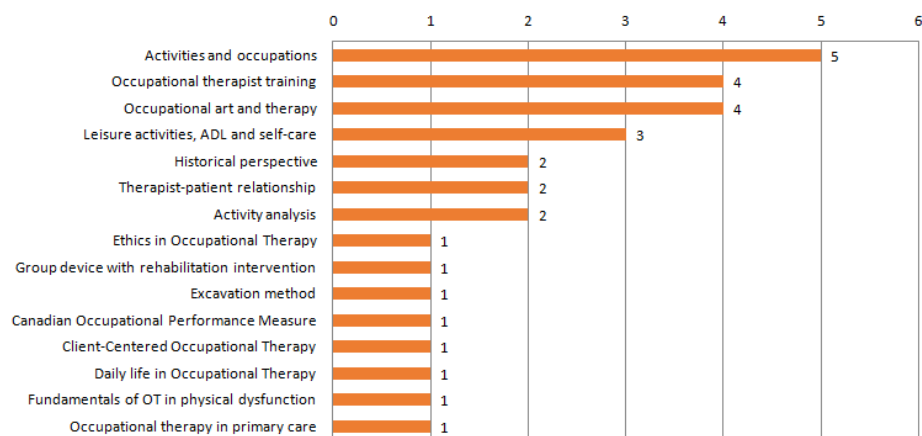
Regarding the specific themes of the studies considering the identified area (s) or field (s), some groupings were possible and some themes appeared alone, regardless of the corresponding field and/or area of the publication, expressed in Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5.

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<sup>1</sup>For the definition of the methodological design, we used Goodwin (1995) and Thomas & Nelson (1996) parameters. In general, the authors define the existence of analytical research, descriptive research, experimental research, quasi-experimental research and qualitative research. Analytical research involves the study and in-depth evaluation of available information in an attempt to explain the context of a phenomenon, categorized into historical, philosophical, review and meta-analysis. Descriptive research, on the other hand, is characterized as studies that seek to determine status, opinions or future projections in the answers obtained, divided into survey, normative, correlational, case study, longitudinal or transversal. Experimental research is the method of investigation that involves the manipulation of treatments in an attempt to establish cause-effect relationships in the investigated variables, through careful and complete control of an outline. In quasi-experimental research, the researcher tries to prepare a design for the environment as close as possible to the real world while trying to control, in the best possible way, some conditions that affect internal validity. Finally, qualitative research involves intensive and long-term observation in a natural environment, the recording of what happens in the environment is precise and detailed and the interpretation and analysis of data uses descriptions and narratives. They can be ethnographic, interpretive, participant, action research, phenomenological, etc.



**Figure 2.** Topics related to the area of adult physical, cognitive and/or sensory dysfunction (n=34).<sup>2</sup>

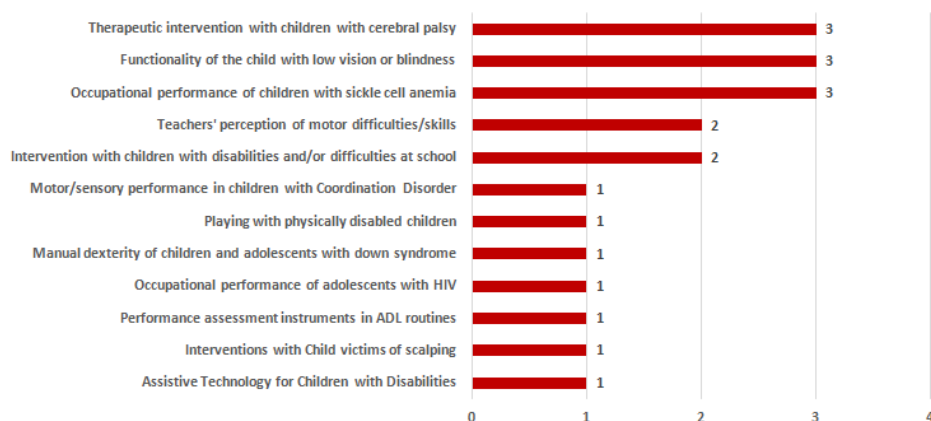


**Figure 3.** Themes related to the field of fundamentals and theoretical-methodological perspectives in occupational therapy (N=32).<sup>3,4</sup>

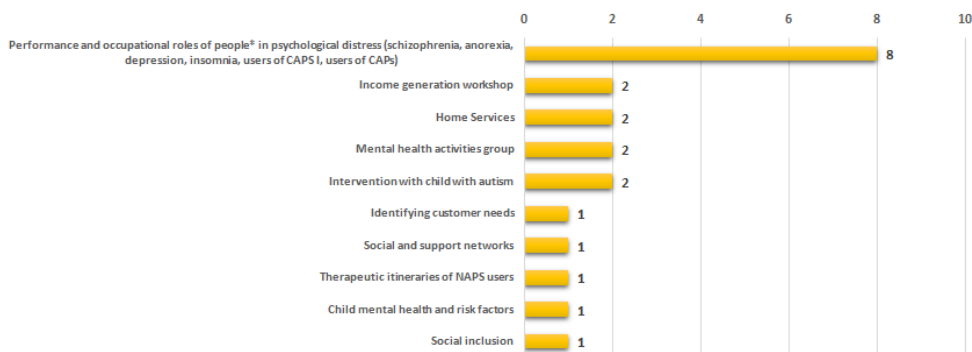
<sup>2</sup>TBI is the acronym for Brain Skull Trauma

<sup>3</sup>ADL is the acronym for Activities of Daily Living

<sup>4</sup>OT is the acronym for Occupational Therapy



**Figure 4.** Topics related to the area of physical, cognitive, and/or sensory dysfunction in childhood and adolescence (n=23)<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 5.** Topics related to the mental health area (n=21).<sup>6,7</sup>

Studies in the area of gerontology-geriatrics (n = 15) had two repeated themes and four appeared only once: Therapeutic intervention with the elderly population (n = 6); Elderly caregivers (n = 4); Growth of the elderly population (n = 1); Public policies for the elderly population (n = 1); Retirement (n = 1); Factors to protect the quality of life of the elderly population (n = 1); Instrument for Assessment of Dementia and Occupational Performance (n = 1).

In the social field (n = 11), we found the following themes: Working with children or adolescents at social risk (n = 5); Occupational performance or profile of adolescents institutionalized/sheltered (n = 4); and Formation of/in social occupational therapy (n = 2).

In studies related to hospital contexts (n = 10), we found the following themes: Performance of occupational therapy with hospitalized elderly people (n = 3);

<sup>5</sup>HIV is the acronym for Human Immunodeficiency Viruses

<sup>6</sup>CAPs is the acronym for Psychosocial Care Center

<sup>7</sup>NAPs is the acronym for Psychosocial Care Center



Occupational therapy practice with hospitalized children and/or adolescents (n = 3); Production of knowledge about occupational therapy practices in hospital contexts (n = 2); Mothers of children with cancer (n = 1); and Occupational performance of a patient with HIV (n = 1).

Finally, in studies in the occupational health area (n = 9), we found studies on factors that generate illness (n = 3); undergraduate teaching in occupational therapy in occupational health (n = 2); postural assessment (n = 1); intervention in workers with hand injuries (n = 1); effectiveness of return to work programs (n = 1); and performance of occupational therapy in the professional rehabilitation service (n = 1).

The target audience or the groups participating in occupational therapy practices were mentioned in 98 studies in different areas and fields. Thus, in the topics of life cycles or courses we found the following: adults (n = 32), children (n = 23), adolescents (n = 14) and the elderly population (n = 5). Also, participants were characterized by occupational roles or positions, such as health and/or education professionals (n = 12), family members (n = 9), or undergraduate students (n = 3).

On the terms *activity* and *occupation* specifically, most articles adopted only the term “activity” (n = 128); few studies used only “occupation” (n = 5) and some used both terms “occupation and activity” (n = 22).

The studies that refer only to the term “activity” (n = 128) showed the definition as constituted by all the actions of the individual and/or as an instrument of the profession.

On the one hand, Castro & Silva (2002) deal with human activities, specifically artistic and corporal ones, as forms of manifestations, aesthetic practices that, in a health context, these actions touch the boundaries of non-institutionalized art and are configured as exercises of culture.

On the other hand, Samea (2008) defines that the planning and execution of activities are instruments of the intervention processes in occupational therapy.

Lima (2004) states that human activity brings together the meaning of an instrument of occupational therapy, and seeks to establish a therapeutic process based on an encounter that takes place with the user through the performance of activities.

Studies that used only the term *occupation* (n = 5) defined it as fundamental to the organization of human beings, indicating that different problems can affect occupations and, consequently, the well-being and health of the affected individuals. In the work by Monteiro et al. (2014), occupations are important means of social participation, in which people engage every day, constituting units of continuous, intentional, and consciously executed action. The study by Costa et al. (2013) corroborates with this argument and includes the senses and meanings of human existence.

In the 22 studies using the two terms, activity was referred to as part of the occupation in 20 studies and only two studies used the terms as synonyms.

The study by Vasconcelos & Cavalcante (2013) based on a North American reference, stated that there are common activities in different times and cultures among the countless possibilities of human occupation, such as activities of daily living (ADL), for example.

The work by Parreira et al. (2013) refers that throughout life, people get involved in activities or occupations that they want and/or need to do. Daily activities or occupations are a reflection of the habits, routines, and roles of the individuals and the

roles insert them in the social structure and clinical diagnosis, which can lead to a change in their performance.

Concerning the theoretical perspectives presented in the studies, we observed that, in those who use the “activity”, several theoretical and methodological theories or constructions are presented that are not necessarily circumscribed in a named or specified model or method.

In studies in which the terms “occupation” and “activity and occupation” were used (only in those in which activity was referred as part of the occupation), we found that some were based on the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) theory, others based on the Occupational Science, and others based on the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance.

#### 4 Discussion

The data from this research corroborated with the work of Salles & Matsukura (2016) and Lima et al. (2013), who found that “activity” is the most evident term in Brazilian literature. In the research by Lima et al. (2013), the term *activity* was found in 73% of the analyzed sample.

Regarding the term *occupation*, this study highlights that its use is still diffuse and present more consistently in studies based on the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) theory and/or in the Occupational Science<sup>8</sup>. Gary Kielhofner in collaboration with other scholars developed studies on MOHO when the “contemporary paradigm” and its emphasis on occupation were emerging, accompanied by an identity crisis of the professional occupational therapist (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980). Based on different areas of knowledge, Kielhofner brought together systems theories, cognitive psychology, humanistic and social development, for the elaboration of the MOHO (Hagedorn, 2003).

The term *occupation* was adopted at the beginning of Brazilian occupational therapy, following the terms and concepts produced in the USA, proper from an Anglo-Saxon perspective. With the development of the profession, the term *occupation* was replaced, and the term *activity* gained more terminological, conceptual, and epistemological notoriety. The expansion of the profession's dialogue with the Human and Social Sciences was among the different factors that influenced this movement by a recognized group of occupational therapists, strongly contributing to the adoption of the term *human activities*, with new concepts, senses, and meanings (Poellnitz, 2018; Cardinalli, 2017; Lima et al., 2013).

Despite the specificities of each field and area of occupational therapy, and the time course that influences the terminologies and conceptualizations of the profession, this study shows that the use of the term *activities* was present in the most diverse fields and areas.

The use of the term *activity* primarily by Brazilian occupational therapists to disseminate their reflections, practices and knowledge in the area brings the reflection

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<sup>8</sup> Occupational Science was created by a group of academic occupational therapists at the University of Southern California, under the leadership of Betty Yerxa, in the late 1980s (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2016). This group dedicated itself to the creation of a basic science, focused on understanding the occupation, so that the discoveries of this science contributed to the practice of occupational therapy (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2016).

on whether it is a national construction to respond to both contemporary issues and the specific historical challenges of the country related to inequality and exclusion processes, political, economic and environmental crises, precarious work and income generation processes, violence and intolerance to human and cultural diversity. Such search by occupational therapists and national researchers for their own construction of concepts and, of some models, would also be related to the expansion of fields, areas, individuals, groups, populations, practices, interventions and contexts, which consequently expanded not only the instrumental, resources and techniques, but above all the way to understand, conceptualize, use, teach, promote and disseminate actions in occupational therapy.

In this sense, this study aimed to contribute to the reflection and debate on the uses and meanings that produce practices, perspectives, and possibilities in the production of knowledge in occupational therapy, which is not restricted only to the academic production of the area.

For Foucault (1999), language is the main instrument for thinking the modern individual as a person of knowledge, historical, dated, bringing the possibility of knowledge, and to know this individual, we need to look at the meshes of his language.

When we name, conceptualize, and transmit a message, it reflects, expresses, and defines what and how we do something. Thus, the choice of terms and their senses and meanings in occupational therapy are important for the very constitution of the theoretical field and its practical application, or also, its practical production with a theoretical outline. In this way, we understand the strict intrinsic complementarity between knowing and doing for the profession.

Foucault (1999) considered all knowledge to be finite, approximate, and, above all, dated. As if the new was born old, doomed to disappear, limited to the instant of its existence; the discourse is also regulated by practices of power.

In this perspective, the constant construction of meaning has produced an incessant movement to create meaning and sense for terms in occupational therapy, not always delimited by classificatory methods, models, and systematizations. On the one hand, it hinders understanding and on the other hand, it enables the creation and expansion of its conceptual bases for different practical propositions.

It was also possible to verify that the term occupation has become more present in the last decade and that some authors believe that what would have favored this use would be the processes of knowledge production through graduate programs in the area, interchange between models and foreign theorizations and the internationalization of academic and scientific productions (Poellnitz, 2018; Cardinalli, 2017; Salles & Matsukura, 2016).

The adoption of the term occupation, therefore, would also constitute an attempt at dialogue by some occupational therapists with international productions in the area, especially in the English language.

Thus, authors have mentioned that the adoption of the word activity as a synonym for occupation brings problems, and it must be carefully redefined (Pierce, 2001; Nelson, 1997). Therefore, the expression activity has been avoided or used secondarily in official documents (Magalhães, 2013), as observed in the recent definition of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (Silva, 2013; World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2012).

Royeen (2002) conditions the strengthening of the profession to the act of differentiating the two terms and the adoption of the term occupation to favor the crystallization of occupational therapy to the world. In this sense, it points to the need for occupational therapy to refer to activity as a result of the occupational process and that occupation is a means for change and, therefore, activity and participation must constitute an observable result for this change. desired (Royeen, 2002).

Fisher (2014) also defends the use of occupation as a primary occupational therapeutic agent but points out that the current problem remains its implementation by professional occupational therapists, scientists, and researchers, related to an inability to use consistent terminology and in a way that clearly defines and describes not only what we do, but also how we do what we do. This terminological inconsistency in international literature would be related to the use of three terms: *occupation-centered*, *occupation-based*, and *occupation-focused* interchangeably as synonyms (Silva, 2013).

Thus, we inferred that, theoretically, the international definitions of occupation are outlined and agreed, but, in practice, each country and region also adapt the use of the term to its reality and there is no unanimous consensus on its uses, concepts, and possibilities, after all, it is the knowledge that is constantly reviewed and updated.

The debate on geographical delimitation and power relations with the regions of the globe where forms of naming and understanding hegemonic occupational therapy have grown, in the same way, as the English language reproduces as a universal language, demanding the need to reflect on the problems of translation, linguistic meanings and semantic polysemy.

Magalhães (2013) highlights the relevance of reflecting on the terminologies that the profession adopts, as well as on the undefinitions that persist. With this reflection, it is possible to rethink the ways of knowing and valuing knowledge and to identify whether thinking and acting in occupational therapy is conditioned by words, that is, by the terms that are used and their creations of meaning.

## 5 Conclusion

This research detected the existence of different meanings for the terms *occupation* and *activity* based on the identification of published articles. In national publications, we observed that the terms *occupation* and *activity* move through the knowledge and practices of the profession. The research corroborates with the understanding that the terms are present in different fields, areas of expertise and construction of knowledge in occupational therapy, and, when correlated with the interventionist practice, the target population, communities and/or people have different characteristics and profiles, as well as all courses of life are present.

We observed that, in most articles, the authors refer only to the term “activity”, either as an instrument of the profession or as the action of the individuals, for example, activities of daily living, work activities, playful activities or leisure, social activities, and expressive activities. When the term “occupation” is used, it precisely discusses the term or theorizes that occupation is fundamental to the organization of human beings, considering activities as part of human occupations. Studies are using the two terms as synonyms and others that do not have explicit meaning, semantic or referential denotation that indicates their conceptualization or understanding.

This research was not intended to generalize the understanding of human occupation and activity in occupational therapy. It is considered that the systematization of terms and their concepts favor the knowledge of the plurality of perspectives and the consolidation of the foundation and the theoretical and methodological references of the profession. This strengthens the recognition of occupational therapy in the diversity in which professional practices are done and leads individuals to autonomy and independence in their daily activities and occupations.

With this research, it was possible to produce theoretical knowledge to contribute to the structuring of the epistemological of occupational therapy, and the establishment of a conceptual consensus in the practices developed by occupational therapists on the themes about *occupations* and *activities*.

Thus, we sought to contribute to the debate in the area of occupational therapy, respecting the socio-historical constructions produced, promoting the plurality intrinsic to the profession, searching for a closer approach to the internationalization of Brazilian occupational therapy, to expand the dialogue and also to promote their established knowledge production. Such consonance is aimed at consolidating the internal identity and providing the dissemination and external recognition of the profession. Thus, research on the topic is necessary, and publications and events that enable this debate to occur and for the performance of an understandable dialogue between occupational therapists, without losing their social, cultural and historical identities.

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### Author's Contributions

Mirela de Oliveira Figueiredo was responsible for guiding the work and the analysis. Laysla Demonari Gomes performed the literature review and part of the

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