

Original Article

Sociodemographic and academic aspects of occupational therapists in Brazil's Midwest region

Aspectos sociodemográficos e acadêmicos de terapeutas ocupacionais da região Centro-Oeste do Brasil

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Abstract

Introduction: The Midwest region of Brazil has the lowest number of undergraduate programs in occupational therapy in the country, and little is known about the sociodemographic and academic profile of these professionals. **Objective:** To describe the profile of occupational therapists working in the Midwest region of Brazil concerning sociodemographic and academic aspects. **Method:** A descriptive and exploratory study with a quantitative approach was conducted with 187 occupational therapists registered with the Regional Councils of the profession headquartered in the Midwest region. The participants completed an online questionnaire between September 2022 and March 2023. Analyses were performed using descriptive statistics. **Results:** Most participants were women (89%, n=167), married (44%, n=83), aged between 20 and 29 years (38%, n=71), and self-identified as white (54%, n=98). Regarding academic aspects, 59% (n=111) graduated from public institutions, 70% (n=131) studied at institutions located in the Midwest region, and 69% (n=129) completed a *lato sensu* specialization in the field of health sciences. **Conclusion:** This study contributes to the understanding of the professional landscape in the region, providing insights into the professional profile, the reach of affirmative action policies, and the planning of strategies that address the demands of Occupational Therapy, aiming at its expansion in the Midwest region of Brazil.

Keywords: Occupational Therapy, Job Description, Professional Training, Teaching.

Resumo

Introdução: A região Centro-Oeste do Brasil concentra o menor número de cursos de graduação em terapia ocupacional do país, e pouco se sabe sobre o perfil

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sociodemográfico e acadêmico dessas profissionais. **Objetivo:** Descrever o perfil de terapeutas ocupacionais que atuam na região Centro-Oeste do Brasil em relação aos aspectos sociodemográficos e acadêmicos. **Método:** Pesquisa descritiva e exploratória, de abordagem quantitativa, realizada com 187 terapeutas ocupacionais inscritas nos Conselhos Regionais da profissão com sede na região Centro-Oeste, que responderam a um formulário online entre setembro de 2022 e março de 2023. As análises foram conduzidas com base na estatística descritiva. **Resultados:** A maioria das participantes era composta por mulheres (89%, n=167), casadas (44%, n=83), na faixa etária de 20 a 29 anos (38%, n=71), que se autodeclararam brancas (54%, n=98). Em relação aos aspectos acadêmicos, verificou-se que 59% (n=111) se formaram em instituições públicas, 70% (n=131) estudaram em instituições localizadas na região Centro-Oeste e 69% (n=129) concluíram especialização *lato sensu* na área de ciências da saúde. **Conclusão:** O estudo contribui para o conhecimento da realidade da profissão na região, fornecendo subsídios sobre o perfil profissional, o alcance das políticas de ações afirmativas e o planejamento de estratégias adequadas às demandas da terapia ocupacional, visando à sua expansão na região Centro-Oeste do Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Terapia Ocupacional, Perfil Profissional, Formação Profissional, Formação Acadêmica.

Introduction

In Brazil, the education of occupational therapists is guided by the National Curriculum Guidelines (*Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais – DCN*) for undergraduate programs in occupational therapy. These guidelines establish generalist, critical, and reflective education that must cover key content areas and provide practical experiences across various professional fields. The curriculum is designed to align with the demands and expectations of the regions where the programs are offered (Brasil, 2002).

In 2001, only 29 undergraduate occupational therapy programs were operating in Brazil (Mariotti et al., 2016). Today, according to the National Registry of Courses and Higher Education Institutions of the Ministry of Education (*Portal e-MEC*), there are 118 in-person undergraduate programs in occupational therapy. The Southeast region has the highest concentration of programs (n=51), while the Midwest region has the fewest (n=7¹) (Cadastro Nacional de Cursos e Instituições de Educação Superior, 2024). Among the programs in the Midwest region, three are based in the Federal District, two in the State of Mato Grosso, one in the State of Goiás, and one in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul. Of these seven programs, three have yet to begin, and two started in 2023.

The Midwest region of Brazil consists of the states of Goiás, Mato Grosso, and Mato Grosso do Sul, along with the Federal District, where the country's capital, Brasília, is located. Currently, the region has four Regional Councils of Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy (*Crefito*), responsible for overseeing the professional practice of 1,614 registered occupational therapists. These professionals are distributed as follows: 182 under *Crefito-9* (Mato Grosso), 320 under *Crefito-13* (Mato Grosso do Sul), and

¹ The data available in the Ministry of Education's course registration system may not correspond to reality due to possible updates in the opening and closing of courses in the offer of classes.

1,112 under *Crefito-11* (Federal District) and *Crefito-19* (Goiás, recently established), according to data provided by the ombudsman offices of *Crefito-9* and *Crefito-13* and the transparency portal of *Crefito-11*.

Previously, *Crefito-11* covered both Goiás and the Federal District. However, with Resolution No. 563 of January 27, 2023, the process of dividing *Crefito-11* began, leading to the creation of *Crefito-19*. As a result, *Crefito-11* now oversees only the Federal District, while *Crefito-19* is responsible for Goiás. The board of the new council was officially ratified in May 2024, as per Resolution No. 728 of May 21, 2024, published in the Official Gazette of the Federal Government (*Diário Oficial da União*).

National studies addressing the sociodemographic profile and academic background of occupational therapists in Brazil indicate that most professionals are women, young, and hold *lato sensu* specializations, primarily in the health field (Mata et al., 2023; Lins & Monteiro, 2023; Bianchi & Rosan, 2023; Graeber et al., 2018; Mariotti et al., 2016; Krug, 2014).

Similar findings have been reported in international studies conducted in South Africa, Spain, and Hong Kong, where most occupational therapists were women, single, and under 40 years old (Escudero-Escudero et al., 2020; Ned et al., 2020; Chai et al., 2017).

Most of the studies mentioned investigate the sociodemographic, professional, and academic aspects of occupational therapists based on specific subgroups, focusing on professionals working in fields such as mental health (Mata et al., 2023; Silva et al., 2015), education (Lins & Monteiro, 2023; Folha et al., 2020), and social assistance (Basso et al., 2024). Additionally, some research has explored specific topics, such as the study by Escudero-Escudero et al. (2020), which examines burnout syndrome among occupational therapists. While these studies have different focuses, they provide insights into the professional profile of occupational therapists regarding their sociodemographic and academic characteristics, revealing patterns that align with broader research despite differences in scale.

Furthermore, little research has focused specifically on analyzing the sociodemographic and academic aspects of occupational therapists from a regional perspective. Notable examples include studies on the educational and professional profiles of occupational therapists in the State of Paraná, the occupational therapy workforce in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, both in Brazil, and demographic changes among occupational therapists in South Africa (Krug, 2014; Mariotti et al., 2016; Ned et al., 2020).

Little is known about the reality of occupational therapists in the Midwest region of Brazil (Lins & Monteiro, 2023). Understanding the profile of these professionals can help identify their main characteristics, distribution, and concentration across different areas. Therefore, considering that mapping these professionals may provide a clearer picture of the profession and guide strategies for its expansion in the region, this study aims to describe the profile of occupational therapists working in the Midwest region of Brazil concerning sociodemographic and academic aspects.

Method

This study is part of a broader research project titled “Characterization of the profile of occupational therapists in the Central-West region”, which was submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee under opinion No. 5.640.714 and CAEE

60398222.8.0000.8093, in accordance with Resolution No. 466, dated 12 December 2012, of the National Health Council (CNS). Additionally, the study is linked to the research group “EducaTO: training, education and occupational therapy”, certified by National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), led by the first author of this article.

This is a cross-sectional, descriptive, quantitative study (Sampieri et al., 2006) conducted with occupational therapists who had active registration with the Regional Councils of Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy in the Midwest region that were operational at the time of data collection (*Crefito* 9, 11, and 13).

Currently, the Midwest region has four councils; however, at the time of data collection for this study, *Crefito-19* had not yet been created. For this reason, there are no references to this council, however it is understood that the participants currently registered in this new council are included in this research among the participants of *Crefito-11*.

A total of 202 responses were collected; however, 15 were excluded for being submitted by professionals registered with councils outside the Midwest region, by individuals who had not yet completed their undergraduate degree, or because of responses in duplicate. Thus, the final sample consisted of 187 participants who met the study's inclusion criteria.

Data were collected through a questionnaire developed by the researchers, comprising sociodemographic variables (gender, age group, marital status, skin color, household income, place of residence and work, field of practice, and affiliated *Crefito*) and academic aspects (region where the undergraduate degree was obtained, type of higher education institution, year of graduation, additional education, and field of additional education).

For data collection, participants were invited to voluntarily complete the survey via social media. Upon agreeing to participate, they received a link directing them to the study's homepage, which provided detailed information about the research and an Informed Consent Form, which had to be signed virtually through a mandatory selection field.

Data were collected online between September 2022 and March 2023, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided by participants.

The collected data were organized, quantified, and tabulated in an Excel[®] spreadsheet, analyzed using simple descriptive statistics, and presented as absolute (n) and relative (%) frequencies.

For the discussion of this study's findings, national and international studies examining the sociodemographic and academic aspects of occupational therapists in different locations and fields of practice were also considered.

Results

The results are organized into two sections: the first addresses participants' sociodemographic aspects (Table 1), and the second focuses on academic aspects (Table 2).

Regarding sociodemographic characteristics, the findings indicate that most participants were women (n=167; 89%), identified as white (n=97; 52%), and, at the time of data collection, were affiliated with *Crefito-11* (66%), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Identification and characterization of the sociodemographic aspects of occupational therapists in Brazil's Midwest region who participated in the study (N=187).

| Variables | N | (%) |
|---|-----|-----|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 167 | 89% |
| Male | 18 | 10% |
| Preferred not to disclose | 2 | 1% |
| Age group (years) | | |
| 20–29 | 71 | 38% |
| 30–39 | 54 | 29% |
| 40–49 | 47 | 25% |
| ≥50 | 15 | 8% |
| Marital status | | |
| Married | 83 | 44% |
| Single | 76 | 41% |
| Domestic partnership | 20 | 11% |
| Divorced | 8 | 4% |
| Skin color | | |
| White | 97 | 52% |
| Brown | 64 | 34% |
| Black | 18 | 10% |
| Yellow | 8 | 4% |
| Household income (minimum wages) | | |
| ≤4 | 54 | 29% |
| 4–10 | 77 | 41% |
| 10–20 | 44 | 24% |
| ≥20 | 12 | 6% |
| Place of residence and work | | |
| Federal District | 85 | 45% |
| Goiás | 38 | 20% |
| Mato Grosso do Sul | 33 | 18% |
| Mato Grosso | 31 | 17% |
| Work location | | |
| Federal District (Brasília) | 41 | 22% |
| Federal District (satellite cities) | 42 | 23% |
| Goiás (capital) | 25 | 13% |
| Goiás (countryside) | 13 | 7% |
| Mato Grosso do Sul (capital) | 19 | 10% |
| Mato Grosso do Sul (countryside) | 17 | 9% |
| Mato Grosso (capital) | 12 | 6% |
| Mato Grosso (countryside) | 16 | 9% |
| Other | 2 | 1% |
| CREFITO affiliation | | |
| <i>Crefito-11</i> | 123 | 66% |
| <i>Crefito-13</i> | 32 | 17% |
| <i>Crefito-9</i> | 32 | 17% |

Source: Prepared by the authors based on study data. Federal District, 2023.

The Federal District is not organized into states and municipalities but rather into administrative regions. Among the 83 professionals working in the Federal District, 23

reported working in more than one administrative region, covering Brasília and/or satellite cities or multiple satellite cities.

Regarding the other states, four participants reported working in more than one location: two in both a capital and a countryside city, and two in multiple countryside cities. However, only the first response provided by these participants was considered in the data count.

Regarding the academic aspects of the occupational therapists in this study, 70% (n=131) graduated from universities in the Midwest region, 59% (n=111) attended public universities, and 69% (n=129) reported *lato sensu* specialization as their highest level of additional education, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Academic profile of occupational therapists in Brazil's Midwest region who participated in the study (N=187).

| Variables | N | (%) |
|---|-----|------|
| Undergraduate education region | | |
| Midwest | 131 | 70% |
| Southeast | 37 | 20% |
| North | 9 | 5% |
| Northeast | 6 | 3% |
| South | 4 | 2% |
| Type of higher education institution (HEI) | | |
| Public | 111 | 59% |
| Private | 76 | 41% |
| Time since graduation | | |
| Up to 5 years | 40 | 21% |
| 6–10 years | 39 | 21% |
| 11–20 years | 60 | 32% |
| More than 21 years | 48 | 26% |
| Additional education (highest degree obtained) | | |
| Undergraduate degree (including short courses) | 26 | 14% |
| Undergraduate degree (including <i>lato sensu</i> specialization, multiprofessional residency, and MBA) | 129 | 69% |
| Master's degree | 16 | 8% |
| Doctorate | 5 | 3% |
| None | 11 | 6% |
| Field of additional education | | |
| Health sciences | 91 | 49% |
| Multidisciplinary | 60 | 32% |
| Human sciences | 12 | 6% |
| Biological sciences | 6 | 3% |
| Applied social sciences | 1 | 0.5% |
| Engineering | 1 | 0.5% |
| Not specified | 16 | 9% |

Source: Prepared by the authors based on study data. Federal District, 2023.

Participants provided information on the university where they earned their undergraduate degree, which was then used to categorize “undergraduate education region” and “type of higher education institution” for organizational purposes. To

ensure accuracy, this information was cross-referenced with data available in the *e-MEC* system or on the respective institution's website.

Regarding additional education, participants could provide multiple responses; however, only the highest level of education reported was considered in the analysis. The findings indicate that most participants had completed a *lato sensu* specialization, multiprofessional residency, or MBA (n=129; 69%).

Additionally, when considering all responses provided, the overall findings remained consistent, except that 131 participants indicated having completed *lato sensu* specialization, multiprofessional residency, or MBA, and 127 reported having taken short courses, which include short-term education, workshops, technical certifications, and similar programs.

Discussion

This study found that 89% (n=167) of participants were women, confirming the predominance of this gender in the Midwest region, as observed in other national contexts. Studies conducted in the Federal District, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Sul, and Paraná indicated that over 90% of participating occupational therapists were women (Lins & Monteiro, 2023; Mata et al., 2023; Graeber et al., 2018; Mariotti et al., 2016; Krug, 2014). This trend has also been reported in international studies, highlighting the predominance of women in occupational therapy worldwide (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2022; Escudero-Escudero et al., 2020; Ned et al., 2020; Chai et al., 2017).

Statistical data on Brazilian higher education indicate that most students enrolling in and completing undergraduate and sequential education programs, whether in-person or online, are women (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2022), reflecting a broader trend that extends to occupational therapy.

Studies on gender distribution in the profession suggest that women's entry into occupational therapy was largely a means of workforce integration, as the profession has historically been associated with caregiving—a role traditionally linked to women. This may have influenced the demographic composition of the field (Figueiredo et al., 2018; Lima & Paula, 2023).

On the other hand, although occupational therapy is a predominantly female profession, male occupational therapists report experiencing gender-based differences in professional practice. They are often selected for leadership positions, regarded as professional references, and feel valued for being men (Ferreira & Almeida, 2022). This scenario underscores the need for progress toward equal opportunities within a profession largely composed of women.

Nevertheless, this composition is undergoing gradual change, and this trend may become more pronounced over time. Future replications of this study may reveal different results, not only for occupational therapy but also for other undergraduate programs offered by higher education institutions.

Regarding marital status, the results showed that nearly half of the participants were married (n=83; 44%) and almost half were single (n=76; 41%). The study also included professionals from various age groups, with the majority under 39 years old (n=125; 67%), suggesting that the profession consists primarily of young practitioners. However,

this result may be linked to the online data collection method or the fact that most participants had recently graduated. Similar findings were observed in Paraná, where 54.8% of occupational therapists were in a domestic partnership, and 82.4% were under 40 years old (Mariotti et al., 2016), as well as among graduates from the Occupational Therapy program at UNIFESP, where most were also under 39 years old (Bianchi & Rosan, 2023). International studies, including those conducted in Spain (Escudero-Escudero et al., 2020) and South Africa (Ned et al., 2020), also reported that most analyzed occupational therapists were younger than 40.

Higher education statistics from Brazil in 2022 indicate that most graduates of undergraduate and sequential education programs, whether in-person or online, from public or private universities, completed their degrees between the ages of 20 and 24 (n=48,302). The number of graduates progressively decreases with age, with only 170 individuals earning degrees at 65 years or older (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2022). These data show that the younger the age, the higher the number of graduates, and conversely, the older the age, the lower the number of graduates.

The predominance of young professionals with higher education may be related to the cultural norm of entering university shortly after completing high school, typically around age 18. However, since 2023, the University of Brasília (UnB) has implemented a selective admission process for older adults, known as “*Vestibular 60+*,” which offers additional spots depending on course availability (Universidade de Brasília, 2024). This initiative aims to encourage and facilitate the entry of older adults into higher education, and if replicated at other institutions, it may influence the age distribution of occupational therapy professionals.

As for skin color, 52% (n=98) of participants identified as white, followed by those who identified as brown and black. This result corroborates the findings by Melo & Cruz (2022), who reported that 57.1% of students enrolled in the undergraduate occupational therapy program at the ABC School of Medicine (*Faculdade de Medicina do ABC – FMABC*) self-identified as white. Additionally, these findings align with national statistics on university graduates in Brazil, where most identify as white, followed by brown and black individuals (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2022). Similarly, Ned et al. (2020) found that in South Africa, most registered occupational therapists were white (66%).

According to Porto & Silva (2023), the predominance of white individuals in occupational therapy reflects the enduring impact of colonialism, which continues to influence unequal access to education and professional opportunities due to the legacy of racial discrimination and socioeconomic disparities. In Brazil, Law No. 12.711, of 29 August 2012, established affirmative action policies to reduce inequalities and expand access to higher education. It is believed that the findings of this study reflect the impact of these policies to date, as both the data presented here and those from INEP (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2022) show a narrowing gap between the number of white and brown self-declared students, for example.

Moreover, higher education institutions in Brazil have developed initiatives to support student permanence, including student assistance programs. These policies provide financial aid for food, housing, and technology, as well as tutoring and

mentoring programs and paid research opportunities to help reduce dropout rates and promote student permanence.

Despite these initiatives, França & Tostes (2021) discuss the challenges faced by black and brown students in remaining in higher education. These authors highlight that although students seek to benefit from university support programs, these measures are not always sufficient, making it necessary to turn to alternative strategies, such as individual efforts and workforce integration. Nonetheless, they emphasize the importance of affirmative action policies in addressing inequalities and suggest expanding these strategies.

In this study, most participants (66%; $n=123$) were affiliated with *Crefito-11*, which, at the time of data collection, covered both the State of Goiás and the Federal District. However, a significant portion resided and worked in the Federal District (45%; $n=85$). This result was expected, as the Federal District has the highest number of registered occupational therapists in the regional council compared to the other states in the Midwest region. In this regard, a review of the *Crefito-11* Transparency Portal conducted on 2 September 2024 indicated that 620 occupational therapists were actively registered in the Federal District (Conselho Regional de Fisioterapia e Terapia Ocupacional 11, 2024).

This finding may be related to the fact that the Federal District is home to the only public university offering an undergraduate occupational therapy program, which could attract prospective students and encourage graduates to remain in the area. A similar pattern was observed in Paraná, where most occupational therapists graduated from public universities and remained in the same region (Mariotti et al., 2016). Additionally, this result may be linked to the greater concentration of services, professional opportunities, and demand for occupational therapists in capital cities.

This study found that 54% ($n=97$) of participants worked in capital cities, while 48% ($n=88$) were based in rural areas or satellite cities in the case of the Federal District. Although the distribution was relatively balanced, there was a tendency for a greater concentration of professionals in capital cities.

National and international research indicates that most occupational therapists are concentrated in central regions (Chai et al., 2017; Mariotti et al., 2016).

In the context of the Midwest region, this is the Brazilian region with the fewest occupational therapy undergraduate programs currently in operation, totaling seven—one public and six private (Cadastro Nacional de Cursos e Instituições de Educação Superior, 2024). It is possible that individuals interested in pursuing occupational therapy are unable to do so because of the lack of available programs and/or spots in their locality. These findings reinforce the need for the establishment of new occupational therapy undergraduate programs in the region, particularly in cities and administrative regions farther from the state capitals, as well as the expansion of public university offerings to improve access for socioeconomically vulnerable individuals.

During this study, searches conducted in the *e-MEC* system indicated an increase in the number of in-person occupational therapy programs active in Brazil: in June 2024, 61 programs were identified, while by December 2024, this number had risen to 118. This growth represents a highly significant advancement for the profession in the country. However, the Midwest region continues to have the lowest number of

programs (n=7), highlighting the need for a greater supply of educational opportunities and a more balanced distribution of professionals in this region.

This study included professionals with varying years of experience and found that 70% (n=131) graduated from higher education institutions located in the Midwest region, and 59% (n=111) earned their occupational therapy degree from a public university. Similar findings have been reported in other national studies, which also indicate that most occupational therapists completed their education at public universities (Lins & Monteiro, 2023; Graeber et al., 2018; Mariotti et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2015).

A recent study by Lins & Monteiro (2023), although focused on the education field, found that most occupational therapists in their sample had graduated from the UnB, currently the only public university in the Midwest region offering an occupational therapy program.

Among the factors that may contribute to the higher number of professionals from public institutions is the fact that these universities are well-established, with a lower risk of program closure, and generally offer two cohorts per year. This underscores the importance of public universities in educating occupational therapists. On the other hand, private university programs play a critical role in educating professionals across various locations in Brazil. Their political-pedagogical structures and flexible formats—often offered in single shifts—can cater to different student profiles, particularly those who face challenges balancing work and education.

Concerning additional education, most participants held an undergraduate degree combined with *lato sensu* specialization, multiprofessional residency, or an MBA (n=129; 69%), while relatively few pursued *stricto sensu* graduate programs (master's or doctoral degrees). This trend has also been observed in other national studies (Lins & Monteiro, 2023; Bianchi & Rosan, 2023; Mariotti et al., 2016; Graeber et al., 2018).

Lato sensu specialization programs, which include multiprofessional residencies, are likely more sought after because of their greater availability, demand for specialization in specific professional fields, compatibility with work schedules, potential for financial compensation, or stronger ties to professional practice—factors that align with the primary interests of most occupational therapy graduates. Conversely, this study found a low number of professionals with master's or doctoral degrees, as these programs are designed primarily for research and teaching careers. This finding reinforces the notion that the Midwest region continues to have the lowest number of professionals with *stricto sensu* graduate education (Folha et al., 2018).

In the Midwest region, both public and private institutions offer master's and doctoral programs with research lines relevant to occupational therapy. In the Federal District, for example, some occupational therapists work as faculty researchers, advising students in these programs. This could serve as a motivating factor for occupational therapists to pursue advanced degrees, even though these programs do not require advisors to be occupational therapists. However, the low number of professionals with these qualifications may be related to a lack of interest in academia or financial concerns, given that scholarships are not always guaranteed, funding may be less attractive than market salaries, or balancing work with graduate studies may be challenging. This scenario could be partially mitigated by recent policies allowing for the accumulation of remuneration, such as those implemented by CAPES.

In this regard, the demand for occupational therapists across various regions of Brazil has been widely discussed, highlighting the need to establish new occupational therapy undergraduate programs. However, the creation of new programs will require qualified occupational therapists to serve as faculty. Therefore, it is crucial to consider strategies to encourage occupational therapists to pursue master's and doctoral degrees.

Participants also provided information on their additional education fields, revealing that most ($n=91$) had education in health sciences. These findings align with those of other national studies, which identified health sciences as the primary field of sequential education, followed by human sciences (Souza & Duque, 2024; Graeber et al., 2018; Folha et al., 2018).

Occupational therapy is recognized as a profession within the health sector, and it is likely that most job opportunities are concentrated in this field, which may explain the predominance of additional education in health sciences.

A recent study on the practice settings and target populations of occupational therapy graduates from the UnB found that of the 83 participants, 71% ($n=58$) worked in clinics, private offices, or hospitals, and 63% provided services to children aged 0 to 12 years (Lins et al., 2024). These results support the premise that occupational therapists are more often employed in healthcare services than in other professional fields, and that they primarily work with children. This trend may be linked to the growing demand for occupational therapy services among neurodivergent populations, including individuals with autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, and other conditions, which are commonly diagnosed in childhood.

Although occupational therapy offers career opportunities beyond the health sector—including in education, social assistance, labor, and culture, for example—these areas are still expanding. The healthcare sector remains the dominant field of practice for occupational therapists, emphasizing the importance of aligning professional education with the realities of current practice demands.

Conclusion

This study described the profile of occupational therapists working in Brazil's Midwest region, considering both sociodemographic and academic aspects.

Among the key findings, the study identified a predominance of young, white women residing and working in the Federal District, who graduated from higher education institutions in the Midwest region, primarily from public universities, and held specializations in the health sciences as their additional education. On the other hand, given the ongoing changes in society and the labor market, it is believed that replicating this study in the future could contribute to understanding the evolving professional landscape of occupational therapists in the Midwest region within a specific socio-historical context.

Although previous studies have examined the profile of occupational therapists within specific professional fields—an advancement in occupational therapy research that deserves recognition—broader investigations are essential. Studies that go beyond specific practice areas and encompass entire states, regions, and the country are fundamental to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the profession. Furthermore, there is a clear need to expand the availability of undergraduate

occupational therapy programs in the Midwest region, particularly in areas farther from urban centers, as well as to encourage the pursuit of master's and doctoral degrees.

The topics addressed and discussed in this study are not exhaustive but should serve as a foundation for further investigations in other regions of Brazil, particularly those focused on strategies to expand *stricto sensu* graduate education among occupational therapists.

Studies of this nature can contribute to understanding the profession's current landscape, assessing the impact of affirmative action policies, analyzing changes in professional profiles, and supporting the planning and development of strategies and policies that address the demands of the occupational therapy field.

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Sarah Raquel Almeida Lins: study design, organization of sources, data analysis, writing, discussion, and review of the manuscript. Maria Clara Rocha Barros and Sara dos Santos Canafistula Oliveira: organization of sources, data analysis, writing of the manuscript. Daniela da Silva Rodrigues: data analysis, writing, discussion, and review of the manuscript. All authors approved the final version of the text.

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