

## COVID-19 and Role of Occupational Therapy

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### Abstract

In the mid March of year 2020, Indians too became the victims of the outbreak of SARS COVID 19 Pandemic. The entire country was under lockdown of around two and half months. This emergency situation lead to a serious environmental dislocation, disruption of routine, loss of Human life due to Novel Corona virus outbreak.

A community can prepare for disasters by creating emergency plans that enable an effective disaster response. Occupational therapy practitioners can participate in this planning by lending their expertise in areas such as designing special needs shelters and training staff and volunteers on assisting persons with disabilities during a crisis. Occupational therapists can use an innovative person environment occupational (PEO) approach for rehabilitation of COVID survivors facing concerns with respect to their physical, mental and social health and wellbeing.

When disaster occurs, society becomes disabled, limiting its members' ability to perform normal activities. Occupational therapy practitioners have the opportunity to become a part of the solution to a disaster's disabling effects by playing a role in its management.

Disaster management cycle passes through three important phases namely response, recovery and preparedness. Owing to the impact of ongoing pandemic of SARS COVID-19, we wish to bring attention of readers towards an important role of Occupational Therapy.

**Keywords:** COVID 19; Occupational Therapy; Person Environment Occupation Model; Disaster Management

### Introduction

In the mid March of year 2020, Indians too became the victims of the outbreak of SARS COVID 19 Pandemic. The entire country was under lockdown of around two and half months. This emergency situation lead to a serious environmental dislocation, disruption of routine, loss of Human life due to Novel Corona virus outbreak [2,3].

Reaction of community to this disaster in the form of pandemic; depends on its awareness & preparedness. A community can prepare for disasters by creating emergency plans that enable an effective disaster response. Occupational therapy practitioners can participate in this planning by lending their expertise in areas such as designing special needs shelters and training staff and volunteers on assisting persons with disabilities during a crisis & Rehabilitation of victims as well as survivors [1].

As occupational therapists' role is to re-establish these broken segments of the society, we would like to emphasize the use of an innovative occupational therapy practice framework such as person environment occupation (PEO) model.

**What is person environment occupation (PEO) model?**

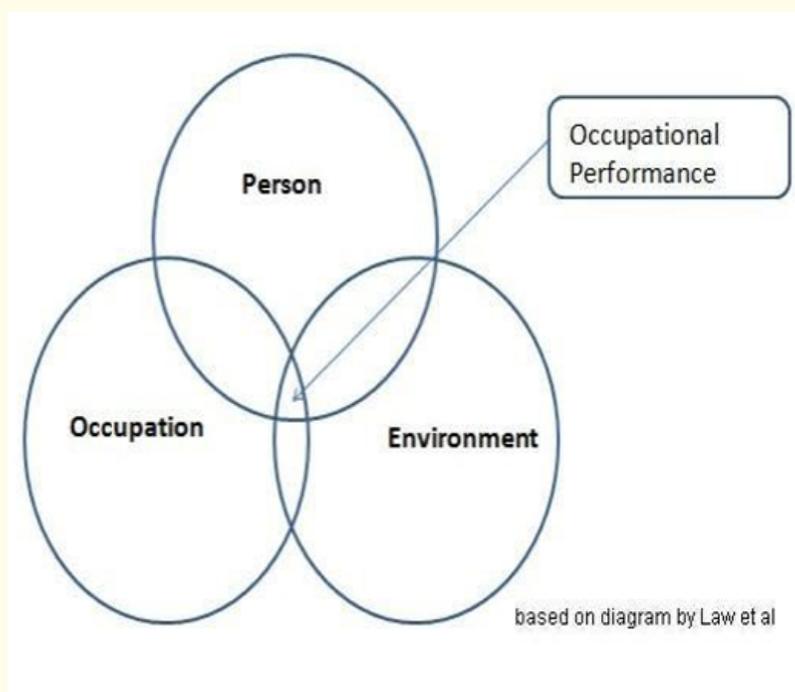
The person-environment-occupation (PEO) model is a treatment approach that emphasizes on occupational performance shaped by the interaction between person, environment and occupation [4].

The person domain includes role, self-concept, cultural background, personality, health, cognition, physical performance, and sensory capabilities.

The environmental domain includes physical, cultural, institutional, social and socioeconomic environment.

The occupation refers to the groups of tasks that a person engages in and meets his/her self-maintenance, expression and fulfilment.

The three domains are dependent and affected by each other. In this model, the overlapping area of the three domains shapes occupational performance dynamically and also represents the level of congruence of the interaction between the person, environment and occupation. With the higher level of congruence, the quality of occupational performance is increased and vice versa. In addition, the PEO model takes a lifespan perspective and so all three domains and occupational performance would change over life. Therefore, this model can be viewed as an assessment tool to understand and analyze problematic areas that affect clients [5].



(Image Source: Willard & Spackman’s occupational therapy, 11th edition)

Occupational performance or, as an intervention tool, to improve clients’ occupational performance by enhancing the congruence of the three domains.

Correlating the two concepts, COVID 19 pandemic has caused serious disruption in occupational performance of people as there have been a drastic change in person environment and occupational interaction.

Under the person factors, Individual health and community health is facing a serious challenge during this pandemic. Social distancing and social isolation has stained human relations due to lack of social contact. This seems to build undue stress amongst the COVID victims as well as the COVID survivors.

Considering the Environment, Physical social and temporal aspects have faced disruption in their dynamicity. The impact of lockdown, unavailability of resources, burden on the fiscal management has posed a challenge on Person Environment interaction and in turn adaptation.

The occupational factors like loss of job during the pandemic, change in the nature of work (for e.g. work from home, online schooling etc.) have introduced a need to cope with changing trends.

Occupational therapists use preventive approaches to intervention by engaging victims of disaster in occupations to regain a routine and sense of normalcy. According to researchers, this reduces the effects of stressors on the body. Stressors affect an individual's immune system, so this helps keep an individual's immune system strong, increasing their health and wellness during a disaster [6].

### Occupational therapy treatment approaches in pandemic [7]

Occupational therapy perspective includes its role in preparedness, response and recovery along with rehabilitation of victims and survivors.

Occupational therapists can aid in the preparation process by helping to design special needs shelters and by training others to aid those with special needs during a disaster. Consult records of previous disaster situations to learn from problems that occurred before. For example: Addressing issues of wheelchair accessibility and mobility within the shelter. Having proper food for those on special diets for diabetes and other conditions.

Occupational Therapist's participation in the response to disasters can take many forms: facilitating a special needs shelter; leading support groups to help individuals cope with anxiety and other disorders, providing mental health support services for victims of the disaster; first responders, and people in community. The main response role is helping individuals regain a sense of normalcy and meaning in the midst of chaos [1].

Occupational Therapist's aid victims in the recovery process by helping them rebuild their routines and activities which were disrupted by the disaster. They help victims develop healthy and effective coping skills through participation in client-centered, meaningful occupations.

### Conclusion

To conclude, the occupational therapists working in various health facilities in India have contributed in efficient management of this pandemic by rehabilitation of individuals and that of community. Occupational therapy professionals have contributed in triage as well as in acute care rehabilitation of COVID patients by planning an individualized therapy plan addressing their physical, mental and social concerns.

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