

Frailty: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Perceptions of Occupational Therapists in Ireland

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Introduction

Irish data from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) indicates that 22% of adults over 65 are frail (O'Halloran et al., 2018). In consideration of the many **negative outcomes** associated with the condition (Clegg et al., 2013), **Ireland's rapidly ageing population** places frailty management as a major public health priority. However, despite frailty's emergence as a key concept in Irish healthcare, it remains an **under-researched subject** within the field of occupational therapy.

Objective

This study seeks to capture occupational therapists' **perceptions of frailty** and to investigate whether their perceptions **impact upon** their approaches to the **assessment and management of frailty** within an Irish context.

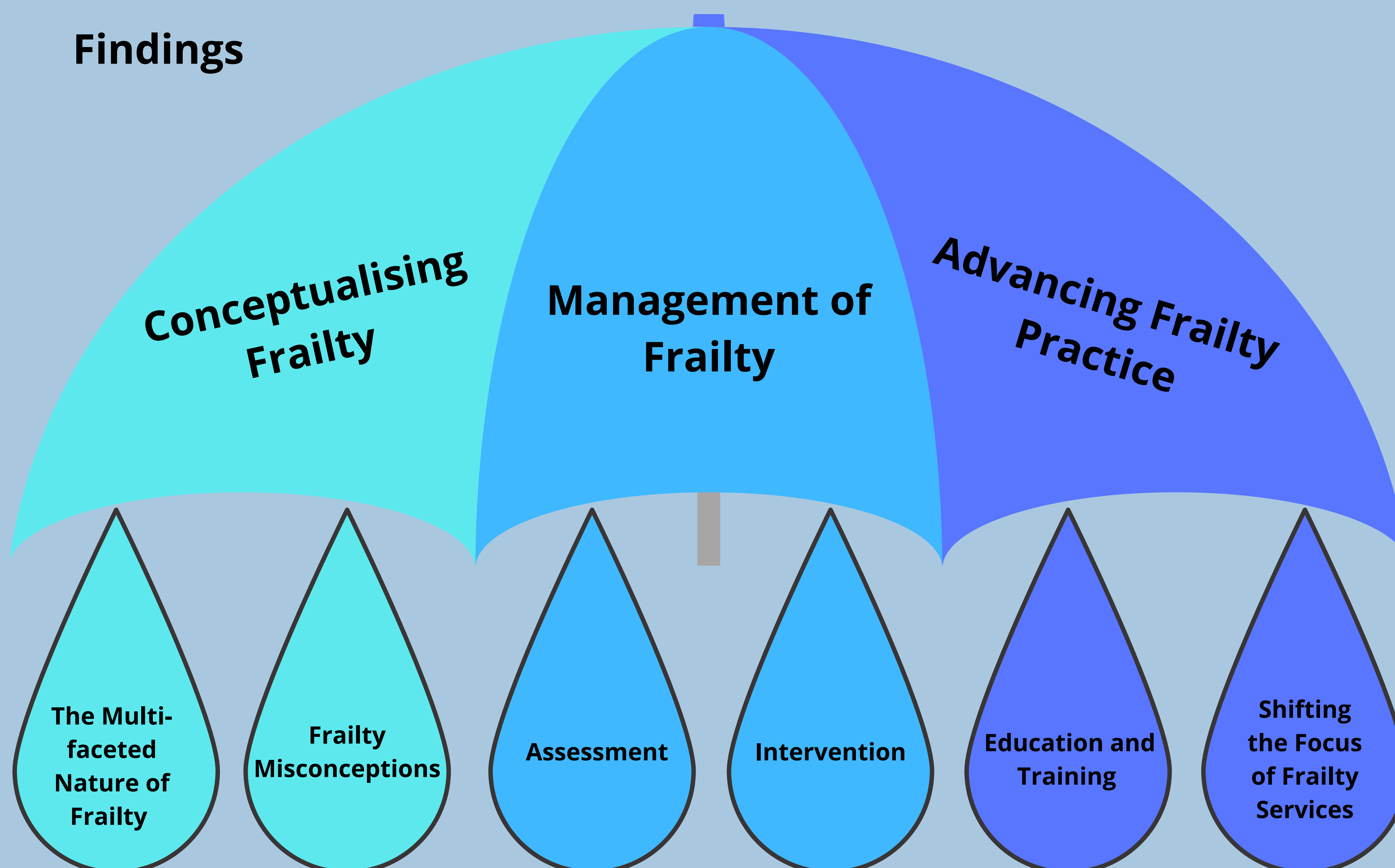
Research Question:

"What are occupational therapists in Ireland perceptions of frailty in older adults and how does this impact on their approaches to the assessment and management of frailty?"

Methods

- **Methodology:** Qualitative descriptive design
- **Recruitment:** Occupational therapists across Ireland, n=19, purposive and snowball sampling.
- **Data collection:** 4 online focus groups via Microsoft Teams
- **Data analysis:** thematic analysis, resulting in 3 themes and 6 subthemes
- **Trustworthiness/Ethics:** pseudonyms, triangulation, audit trail, reflexivity, interrater reliability

Findings



“

I've never met anybody who has described themselves as frail. (FG4P1)

If that frail older adult doesn't have the social supports, it makes them even more vulnerable. (FG1P1)

I had no awareness of frailty when I was in college, and learned all of it when I started working. (FG2P1)

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Discussion

Conceptualising Frailty: Frailty was universally viewed as an **umbrella term** encompassing multiple interacting domains, with significant emphasis placed on the **social domain**.

Utilisation of Frailty Terminology: Although occupational therapists reported frequently utilising the term frailty with other healthcare professionals, they noted that **misconceptions** of frailty **limit** their use of **frailty terminology** with patients and their families.

Training and Education: Occupational therapists largely felt that their **undergraduate education** did not prepare them to address frailty in practice.

Implications for OT

Findings indicate a need for the following to progress the profession of occupational therapy in the context of frailty management:

- Movement towards a shared understanding of frailty between clinicians and patients
- Enhancement of undergraduate frailty education
- Development of community services
- Further contributions to research

References

1. O'Halloran, A., McGarrigle, C., Scarlett, S., Roe, L., O'Shea, M., Romero-Ortuno, R. & Kenny, R. (2018). *Living with Frailty in Ireland 2018*. TILDA. Available at: <<https://tilda.tcd.ie/publications/reports/pdf/w5-key-findings-report/Chapter%203.pdf>> [Accessed 25 April 2022].
2. Clegg, A., Young, J., Iliffe, S., Rikkert, M. O., & Rockwood, K. (2013). Frailty in elderly people. *Lancet (London, England)*, 381(9868), 752–762.

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