

# **Perceived Benefits and Challenges to Undertaking Preceptorship for Ontario Occupational Therapists**

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As workplace demands increase and the role of occupational therapists (OTs) in healthcare continues to expand, experienced therapists may decline extra duties like student preceptorship (Casares et al., 2003). To ensure an adequate supply of strong fieldwork learning opportunities it is important to gain an understanding of the motivations and deterrents for potential preceptors in the field. Although much research has been conducted internationally on preceptorship and recruitment in past years, our recent study that explored the views of Ontario occupational therapists has elucidated current factors that are relevant to this discussion in Ontario. Data for this study were collected via a questionnaire, which was sent out to all practicing occupational therapists in the province. The survey asked questions on four factors to influencing perspectives fieldwork preceptorship opportunities:

1. The perceived benefits to preceptorship
2. The perceived detriments/disadvantages to preceptorship
3. Reasons for offering student placements
4. Reasons why therapists did not offer student placements

Of the approximately 3000 individuals who were sent the survey , 737 individuals participated, for a response rate of 90%. The sample had representation from each LHIN, the majority(19.8%) from the Toronto Central LHIN. The number of years in practice ranged from less than a year to over 25 years. While 49.9% of respondents stated that they had planned on supervising a student over the past 12 months just 44% actually did serve in a preceptor role. Of those who did take students, 47.7% followed a model of 1 OT to 1 student, followed by 36.7% who chose a 2 OTs to 1 student model. The majority of supervisors (84.9%) undertook a traditional supervision strategy, where students would engage with preceptors in a clinical setting and would be with their preceptor almost full-time during their placement session.

Overall, the results demonstrated both positive and negative attitudes towards fieldwork preceptorship. It was evident that respondents spoke from experience and had diverse perspectives on the motivations and deterrents to preceptorship. It became evident that willingness to serve as a preceptor in Ontario is dependent upon a range of factors which both promote and restrict student fieldwork opportunities in this province.

## **Perceived Benefits and Detriments to Preceptorship**

The focus of the survey not only questioned why potential preceptors offered or declined to offer student placement opportunities, but queried perceptions about preceptorship as a whole and whether that impacted offering in fieldwork opportunities. Respondents reported on a number of benefits to participating in fieldwork education including an appreciation for the teaching-learning experience, a sense of recognition and an opportunity to hone clinical practice skills through student participation, consistent with literature on the topic (Jenson & Daniel, 2010; Thomas et al., 2007). When asked about perceived detriments to preceptorship, participants echoed concerns listed in previous studies, including additional stress from increased time and workload, a fear of being paired with a student who fails to meet competency expectations, and a lack of institutional support from their places of employment (Jenson & Daniel, 2010). Many of the perceived benefits and detriments were based on various personal factors as well as practical issues. These perceptions were largely consistent with those reasons for offering and declining to offer placements.

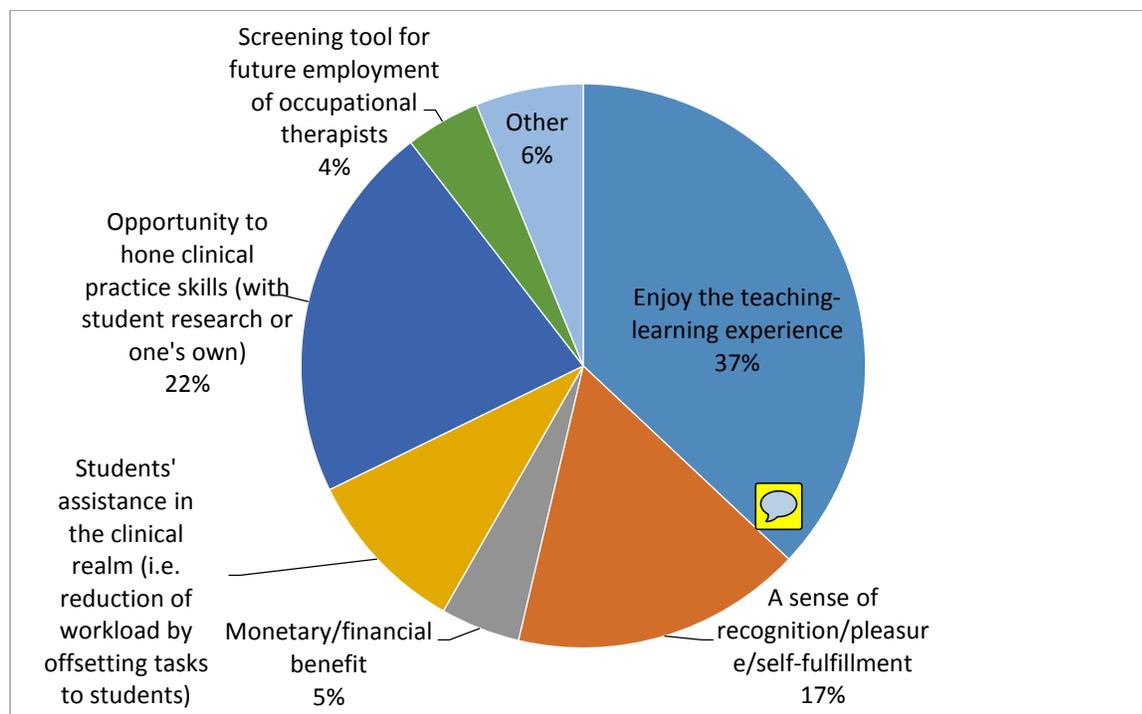


Figure 1. Reported benefits to preceptorship

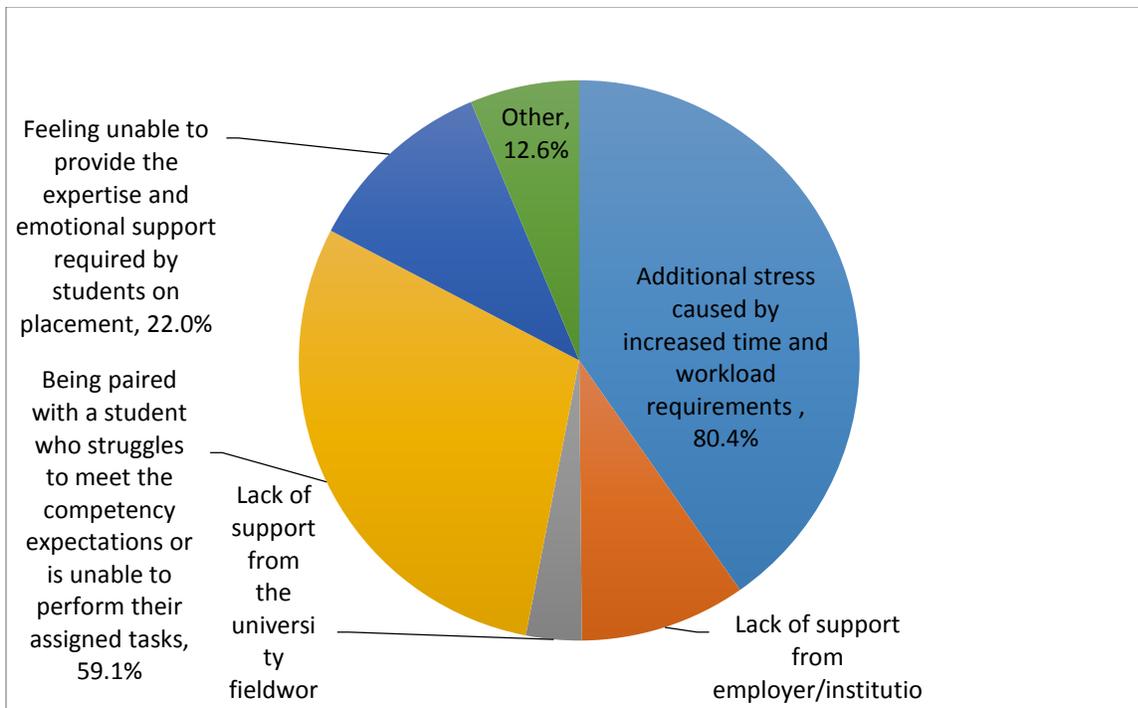


Figure 2. Reported detriments associated with preceptorship.

### Reasons for Offering Student Placements

Of the reasons for offering student placements, respondents were predominantly motivated to accept preceptorship responsibilities as they enjoyed the teaching-learning experience (44.8%). Many felt a sense of obligation to the profession was a motivating factor for offering student placements (34.8%). Results also showed that occupational therapists felt a need to pass on their practice processes to the next generation of occupational therapists, hence why they felt motivated to undertake students for fieldwork opportunities (24.6%). They indicated that they were meeting a sense of professional responsibility to support students and shape the OTs of the future. Other factors that motivated therapists was their personal history of fieldwork and their own past experience. 10% found that preceptorship could offer an opportunity to hone one's clinical practice skills, consistent with previous studies (Potts et al., 1998; Hanson, 2012).

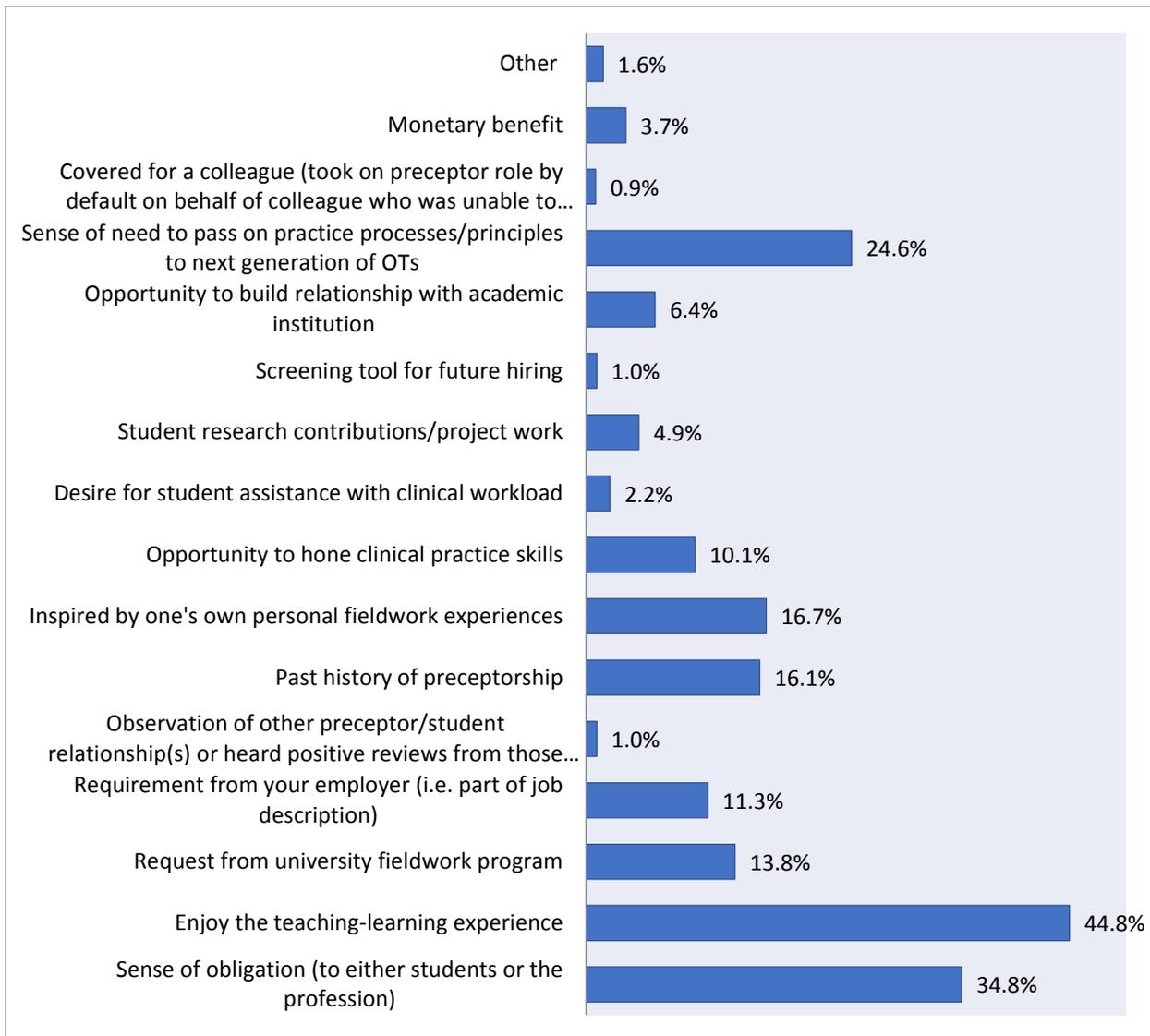


Figure 3. Reasons for offering student placements.

### Reasons for not offering student placements:

Additional stress caused by increased time and workload requirements was one of the most widely cited reasons potential preceptors declined to accept student fieldwork opportunities. Moreover, many participants indicated that not only did accepting fieldwork opportunities place additional time demand and stress on supervisors, but many indicated that they were not afforded adequate compensation, either financially or institutionally, for their added contribution. Many participants voiced that this lack of financial compensation was a primary deterrent for declining preceptorship opportunities.

Many preceptors also found that staffing restrictions and a lack of facility support and/or resources prevented them from accepting the preceptor responsibility. A lack of support from their employer/institution was cited by 6.8% of respondents as a reason for

not providing a fieldwork placement. Moreover, participants found that these limited resources subsequently may limit client interactions and may not provide sufficient time to fully meet students' needs. 22% of respondents identified feeling unable to provide the expertise and emotional support required by students on placement as a detriment to preceptorship with 6.5% providing it as a reason for not offering a student placement.

A prominent theme found in this survey was the fear of failing a student. 6.8% of respondents identified being paired with a student who struggles to meet the competency expectations or is unable to perform their assigned tasks as a reason for not providing a placement. With so few students ever failing a placement, and therefore very few preceptors ever finding themselves in this situation, this fear may be worth exploring when evaluating better recruitment outcomes of Ontario occupational therapists for preceptorship positions in future.

Of those who did not offer a student placement, our study found that 12.8% of respondents were not invited to participate in any fieldwork opportunities and 6.8% had an unfilled offer. This may speak to the culture of preceptorship in Ontario or may demonstrate a gap in preceptor recruitment. Although not explicitly reviewed in this study, this may be an indicator to OT programs across Ontario that they need to ensure they are conducting adequate reviews of their recruitment process in order to optimize the fieldwork opportunities they are able to provide to their students.

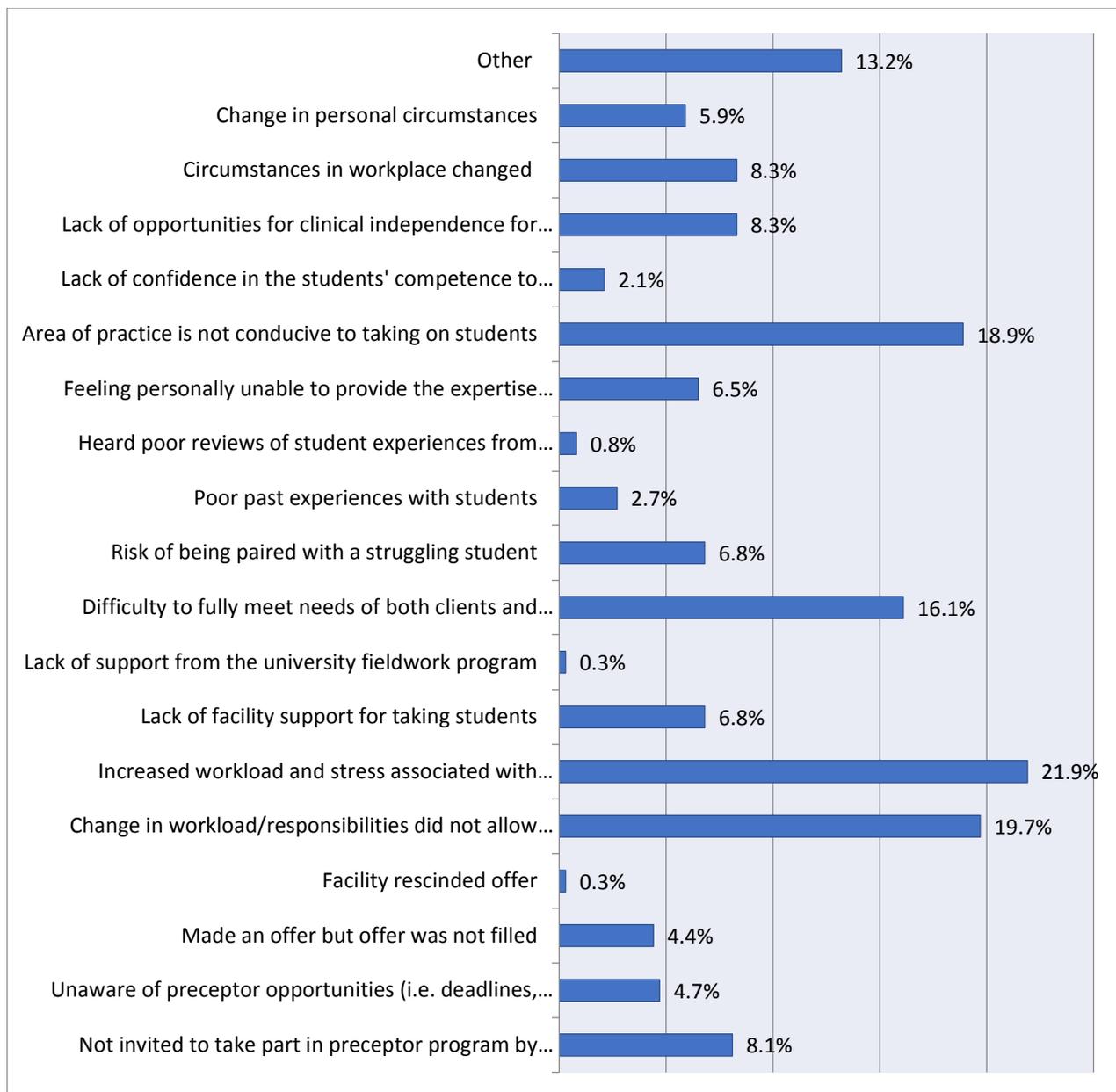


Figure 4. Reasons for not offering student placements.

### Conclusion

Although a majority of therapists felt motivated to actively engage in the teaching and learning experience and pass on practice principles to the next generation of occupational therapists, many also felt obligated either by institutional or professional pressures to accept a fieldwork student. With one third of all preceptors feeling pressure coupled with a lack of support or compensation from employer/institution and the university program, it is clear that some therapists are placed in a difficult position. It is important that employers and educational institutions work together to find ways to

providing therapists with systems and supports to avoid the common deterrent factors associated with fieldwork education.

Ultimately, the future of the profession depends on a robust supply of placement for student occupational therapists. This study highlighted the many factors that influence the number and type of fieldwork supervision opportunities afforded to Ontario-based occupational therapists. The responsibility for increasing the placement pool lies with a combined effort between academic programs, professional practice institutions and individual efforts to ensure that adequate and appropriate fieldwork opportunities are afforded to students of occupational therapy programs across the province.

## References

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