



International  
Surf Therapy  
Organization

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Academic Journal releases First-Ever Special Issue Dedicated to Surf Therapy Research Around the World



South Bay, Los Angeles, California, April 22, 2020 -- Peer-reviewed social science journals are among the most direct way to communicate with scientists, academics, and media about new research. This Special Issue on Surf Therapy Around the Globe appearing in the Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice is devoted to advancing the science and practice of surf therapy for diverse populations. The collection of research in this Special Issue represents the most comprehensive collection of research on surf therapy to date. Featured editors include Gregor V. Sarkisian, Ph.D., Kristen H. Walter, Ph.D., Giovanni Martinez, Ph.D., and Philip B. Ward, Ph.D.

The Special Issue features eight peer-reviewed articles on emerging theory, program evaluation, and empirical research on programs delivered in six countries: Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The issue highlights an article focused on the global coalition-building efforts of the International Surf Therapy Organization (ISTO). ISTO, a U.S.-based nonprofit, is a collective of surf therapy programs collaborating to support research, best practices, and public awareness of how surf therapy promotes mental and physical wellbeing.

The introduction to the Special Issue is a carefully considered piece demonstrating how Community Psychology practices and competencies are utilized in surf therapy programs, including a thorough summary of all twelve featured articles. The issue opens with a scoping review of the academic literature focused on surf therapy, which yielded 29 studies. The report provides an overview of the current scientific evidence linked to

surf therapy. The study supports surf therapy, which is defined as "a method of intervention that is combining surfing with structured activities promoting psychological, physical, and psychosocial wellbeing," and includes recommendations for improving surf therapy research and practice. Our guest editors conclude the Special Issue with a paper outlining current developments and future directions for surf therapy practice, research, and coalition building.

This first of its kind Special Issue highlights a wealth of perspectives from around the world, using videos and a community tool to enhance our understanding of the dynamic process of surf therapy. "One of the most interesting and valuable parts of this special issue," relates Nicole Freund, Ph.D., editor of the *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, "is the diversity of content curated by the guest editors."

The Special Issue features 39-authors, researchers, scholars, students, practitioners, clinicians, and ISTO contributing members, many whom connected through ISTO conferences. By bringing the research together from all around the world, ISTO is embodying the motto, "Go Far, Go Together!"

Achieving therapeutic benefits while catching waves may not be new, but documenting the emotional, physical, and psychological effects of surfing has only just begun. Navigating the advancing science of surf therapy is complicated, as researchers must consider all relevant factors. Traditionally, programs prioritize underserved populations and marginalized communities, which includes vulnerable youth, Veterans, individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and active duty military service members. Along with the diverse populations served by surf therapy, the dosage (i.e. session frequency and program length) and supplemental activities (i.e. music, yoga, art) vary by program.

ISTO envisions a society where surf therapy is universally accessible through prescription and supported financially by healthcare organizations. Prescribing evidence-based programming requires sound economic and factual arguments. In clinical research, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are the most effective method to study the safety and efficacy of new treatments. There are currently very few RCTs that have been conducted in the surf therapy sector, thus making it difficult to evaluate its full impact. The Special Issue highlights advancements in research methodologies and recommends practical steps to advance the efforts towards future RCTs.

Sarkisian, Walter, Martinez, and Ward, the guest editors of the Special Issue, agree that the articles presented in the journal uniquely assist in furthering the knowledge base of surf therapy. To encourage the continued scientific evolution of the sector, the editors present "recommendations and considerations for future surf therapy studies." Lastly, the editors comment on the role of ISTO, stating that "this compilation of articles reflects the mission and values of the International Surf Therapy Organization. The initiatives of ISTO and how they are informed by the current state of science and practice are presented to pave the way for the future of the surf therapy sector."

By demonstrating the benefits surf therapy has on its participants and comparing this water-centered experience to existing mental health treatments, the surf therapy field can build an unshakable case for spending more time in the ocean.

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Tags: surf, therapy, ocean, mental health, physical health, intervention, methodology

Please see **Special Focus Issue on Surf Therapy Around the Globe in the Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice** here: <https://www.gjcpp.org/en/> for additional information, including authors, author contributions and affiliations.