

Seashell

Can tele-practice be used to effectively deliver training to families of children with intellectual disabilities and sensory processing disorders?

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Introduction

- During the covid 19 pandemic tele-practice has offered a mechanism to promote continuity of service delivery whilst maintaining client and Occupational Therapist (OT) health and safety. Evidence suggests that tele-practice has potential to expand therapy-led services supporting those with complex intellectual disabilities. Delivery of services via tele-practice facilitates the incorporation of therapy strategies into daily routines, centered around a child's strengths, preferences needs and interests (Hines et al., 2015). This aligns with the campaign "Improving Lives, Saving Money" (RCOT, 2019).
- AIM: Understand parent perspectives on sensory processing training delivered using tele-practice.**

Method

- A qualitative research design was adopted using semi-structured interviews. Analysis adhered to the six-step thematic analysis procedure (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Three parents of children and young people with Autism Spectrum Conditions and sensory differences consented to participate in the service evaluation. Participants were purposively selected as individuals who received sensory processing training.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the phone and guided by a prepared interview schedule (Choak, 2012). The questions related to participant's experiences of engaging in sensory processing training sessions via video call. Interviews were transcribed verbatim at the time of the interview to preserve anonymity and data protection.
- Thematic analysis began with familiarizing and coding of data leading to the identification of meanings, which emerged into themes and subthemes related to the study aim. Themes were then listed to identify similarities between them and participants' perspectives or experiences. The transcripts were reviewed to ensure that themes complemented participants' actual words. Both reviewers jointly reviewed coding and reorganised codes under the five themes identified.

Results

Key Themes

Emotional Response

Positive Experiences of Tele-practice

Opportunity to Enhance Collaborative Working

Barriers Posed by Technology

The Impact of Tele-practice on Facilitating Engagement

Sub Themes

- Satisfaction with level of support
- Desire to reduce behaviours of concern
- Frustration due to technical issues

- Transferring skills
- Reducing barriers
- Diverse perspectives
- Challenge perceived as a positive factor
- Insight and awareness

- Multi-Disciplinary Team approach
- Involvement of family members
- Resource allocation

- Potential for training

- Supportive environment
- Willingness to learn
- Skill development
- Implementation of strategies in the home environment

Emotional Response

"Nothing could be improved, positive all the way"
"To have someone to identify can use this in a positive way is just lovely to have that feedback and support and be able to work with us has given us hope"
"So useful. Very open to continue to receive services on that basis. Lot easier. Info so good"
"Only thing with video link, computers are fantastic when they work, when they don't it's a nightmare. Kept freezing, was a bit difficult"

Positive Experiences of Tele-practice

"Whilst recognised some of the triggers, we didn't really understand the different sections of sensory. She [the OT] explained those and what to look out for if over or under responsive"
"She [the OT] has helped me put in place more of a routine which has helped my mental health"
"I don't think it (remote or in person) would have made too much difference either way"
"Easier from travelling point of view and getting people together at a certain time"

Opportunity to Enhance Collaborative Working

"It's really good to have a different perspective"
"Found it really useful as could have parents in two different areas but can still access the same thing at same time"
"Know teacher and OT had communicated about therapy ball so we could get one at home"

Barriers Posed by Technology

"She [child] is going to it an awful lot and she is trying to type it herself but can't find it as spelling out phonetically so not picking up. This is leading to anxiety and frustration"
"Only thing with video link, computers are fantastic when they work, when they don't it's a nightmare. Kept freezing, was a bit difficult"
"On last session there was a connection fault so that was difficult"

The Impact of Tele-practice on Facilitating Engagement

"Put us onto another sensory course with another OT. Done all sorts. That was also good. Wouldn't have done that one if the OT hadn't have mentioned it"
"Couldn't believe amount of support"
"For a lot of people the zoom will be good as they don't live on the doorstep"
"Very good to be educated. Educating us on how we should be using it. It is paying off"
"Having that time with R [the OT], been able to put strategies in place"
"She gave us good feedback as to why he does what he does and to help him when he goes back to college"
"He's eager to go back and get formal side of it but at least now R's put things in place for in house and in class when he goes back"
"Feel completely confident that he will be ok to go back"
"Be more patient with him, giving him time, Time to process where he is"
"Have actually enjoyed my time with him although been difficult at times but when had good times been lovely but he's been interacting more"
"Helped me to get to know [my child]"
"Gave him a balance throughout day"
"She made me understand through illustrating from our point of view with lock down"
"Some activities which are more motivating than others. Has taken to like a duck to water"
"Wonder even with dressing - such a routine now does so much more for himself"

Conclusion

- This study supports previous research in that using tele-practice to deliver Occupational Therapy has positive therapeutic effects and offers an alternative service delivery model. Further research is needed with larger sample sizes to determine the effectiveness of tele-practice, its cost efficacy and the diversity of clients and interventions to inform future practice.
- Participants were satisfied and had positive attitudes toward the use of tele-practice in Occupational Therapy services. The findings noted in this review are similar to those in previous studies on clients' perception and acceptance of tele-practice in Occupational Therapy (Gardner et al., 2016) and Speech and Language Therapists (Dunkley et al., 2010). The use of tele-practice in Occupational Therapy to support those with sensory processing difficulties and their families is feasible, and has been found to have positive effects in enabling sensory based strategies to be embedded into the home environment. There is evidence that positive outcomes obtained in traditional therapy can be maintained and even exceeded in a treatment model which incorporates tele-practice (Edwards et al., 2012; Baharav and Reiser, 2010).
- It should be considered that some participants described feelings of frustration and anxiety due to limited IT skills or technical problems. This highlights the need to consider training requirements for both clients and professionals. Use of tele-practice should be driven by the needs, preferences and goals of the child and their family, alongside the availability of resources.

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