

STUDENT CLINICIAN'S PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE OF FAMILIES IN TELE-THERAPY AND THE FAMILIAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE OUTCOMES IN TELE-PRACTICE

Clinical Research

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ABSTRACT

With the onset of the pandemic, face to face therapies have become difficult, and telepractice is increasingly being offered to individuals with speech and language disorders. Telepractice requires active involvement and support of the family. With young children, parents play a major role in actively carrying out therapy. In institutional set up, student clinician's play an active role in delivering teletherapy. As the student clinicians work closely with the families, there is need to understand their perceptions about these familial factors affecting outcomes in therapy. The objective for this study was to evaluate student clinician's perceptions of role of families in teletherapy and the familial factors affecting the outcomes in tele practice. The methodology was through a questionnaire survey that was conducted among 48 student clinicians who were pursuing their bachelor's degree in audiology and speech language pathology. All the participants had an experience of over 6 months in the telepractice. The participants were asked to rate their perception of familial factors affecting outcomes in teletherapy over a 5 – point rating scale (where, 1= Strongly agree, 2= Agree, 3=Neutral, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly disagree). The familial factors examined were, consistency in attending therapy, presence and active involvement of family during the therapy session, parent's education, home training practice, presence of siblings and grandparents. The results obtained were analysed descriptively. Results showed that all the clinicians strongly agreed that the families play a major role in telepractice, and factors such as consistency in attending therapy, parent's presence, active parental involvement, effective communication between the clinician and the family, and parents following up the activities at home as major contributing factors to positive outcomes in therapy. On the other hand, participants perceived parent's education status to be not a very important contributor to outcome in therapy.

KEYWORDS

Tele-practice, student clinicians, speech and language therapy, parental involvement.

INTRODUCTION

For the past few years, it was devastating for people caught in the eye of a storm- A Global Pandemic. Needless to say, everyone is well aware of that fact now. Lives have been turned around because of what we are going through. But amidst this storm, 'technology' has been the calm in the chaos and a binding force that kept us close together even when we were far apart. This ironic principle is the basis of the 'what's' and 'how's' of a teletherapeutic world.

The necessity of social distancing and closures of schools all around the world has resulted in the use of teletherapy as the primary mode of service delivery model for rehabilitation professionals. As the name suggests, teletherapy is the use of audio or video conferencing to provide rehabilitation services. As speech language pathologists, we rely on such a delivery model to reach out to our clients as well as their parents to provide effective services in our best strengths.

Parents are, without a doubt, the pillars of their children's lives, and without them, their children would lack the necessary support and guidance to develop in life. Parents of children with special needs, put in great efforts to make sure their child receives all that they need. This constant dedication of parents toward their children is what motivates clinicians around the world to put in their finest efforts. The prognosis of clients undergoing therapy, are always determined on how much they have been scaffolded by their parents.

This pandemic has also enlightened student clinicians in the effective use of Tele therapy to provide services along with creating new bonds with the families of their clients. Student clinicians have an active role in teletherapy delivery in an institutional setting. Because student clinicians work directly with families, it's important to understand their perspectives on how familial variables influence therapy outcomes. This in turn may help in designing an effective telepractice program.

AIM

The objective for this study was to evaluate student clinician's perceptions of role of families in teletherapy and the familial factors affecting the outcomes in tele practice.

METHODOLOGY

Institutional ethical clearance was obtained. A questionnaire consisting of 8 closed set questions was developed. These questions were divided into 3 sections namely, Familial characteristics, Client-clinician partnership and Familial Factors. Most questions required the participants to choose on a Likert scale (5-point scale). A questionnaire

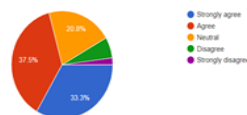
was developed using the template available in Google forms and the link was shared through electronic media. The questionnaire took approximately ten minutes to complete.

The sample design used in the study was purposive sampling. A total of 48 students pursuing bachelors in speech and language pathology at a National institute in Chennai, served as subjects. The inclusion of both male and female participants was assured. Prior to the commencement of the study, a brief description about the study along with its objectives was provided to the participants along with the link to the survey. Participants were also informed that participation in the study was voluntary, that their responses would be kept confidential, and that they might leave the study at any time. They were also informed that the information they provided would be utilized solely for the purpose of research. The results were analysed descriptively.

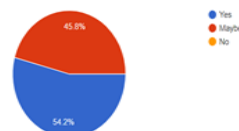
RESULTS

There was a total of 48 students who responded to the survey, with the inclusion of both males and females. The vast majority of the student clinicians reported that parents play a major role in online therapy (87.5%).

When their perceptions regarding the family characteristics were examined, the majority agreed that having a sibling or a grandparent can have a positive impact on therapy. On the other hand, the student clinicians had mixed opinions regarding the effects of literacy levels of parents on children's prognosis.



Graph1: Responses to student clinician's agreement on the positive impact on therapy with the presence of siblings or grandparents.

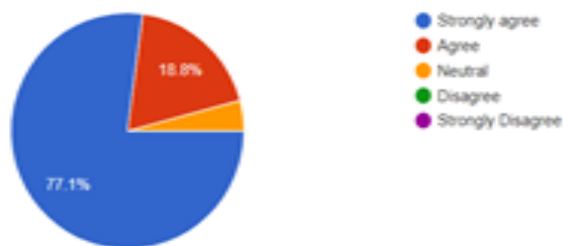


Graph 2: Responses to student clinician's perception in the consideration of parent's literacy level as a major factor in the prognosis of the child.

When the various familial factors were examined, the majority reported presence of the family member (58.3%), active involvement of the family (83.4%), parents following the Home training program (93.8%) and the consistency in attending therapy (87.5%) as significant factors affecting outcomes in therapy (Table 1).

Question	Responses	Number of participants	Percentage
1. Do you think the presence of parents during a therapy session makes a noticeable difference?	Very much	28	58.3%
	To an extent	17	35.4%
	Not really	3	6.3%
2. Involvement of the parent make me more dedicated towards the session	Strongly agree	20	41.7%
	Agree	20	41.7%
	Neutral	6	12.5%
	Disagree	1	2.1%
	Strongly disagree	1	2.1%
3. Parents following the home training activities and instructions given by the therapist, contributes significantly to the child's progress	Strongly agree	33	68.8%
	Agree	12	25%
	Neutral	2	4.2%
	Disagree	1	2.1%
	Strongly disagree	-	-
4. Consistency in attending therapy is a major prognostic factor	Strongly agree	25	52.1%
	Agree	17	35.4%
	Neutral	6	12.5%
	Disagree	-	-
	Strongly disagree	-	-

As for the final category, it is evident that the majority of the participants strongly agreed that good communication between the therapist and the family member is important for success in teletherapy.



Graph 3: Responses to student clinician's concurrence on the importance of good communication and understanding between the therapists and family members.

DISCUSSION

Speech language therapies for young children are moving from therapist centered to family centered practices. Parent-child interaction therapies (PCIT) entails coaching parents on how to change their interaction style in order to improve children's language skills (Roulstone, 2015). It has been found to be very effective because it involves everyday life situations and intervention from people they know, such as parents or caregivers (Gibbard, 1994). Parents play a major role in therapy, and parent based intervention is a need rather than a choice, given the current pandemic situation. Given the role parents and families play in intervention, the present study aimed to understand the student clinicians' perception regarding the family's role in telepractice.

Parent's role

The students clinicians in the present study strongly agreed that the family play a crucial role in telepractice. The role of parents is extremely important, not only in their children's daily lives, but also during their child's therapy sessions. Their concern for their child's well-being only serves as motivation for the student clinicians to put forth their best efforts. In addition, parent led programmes have been found to be as successful as clinician led programmes (Burgoyne et al., 2017).

Family characteristics

The majority of the student clinicians agreed that the presence of sibling and grandparents contributed positively to therapy. This is

because of increased opportunities for language stimulation and communication interactions by the grand parents and siblings, and also the increased opportunities for communication initiation by the child. On the other hand, the participants reported mixed opinions about parental literacy on outcomes. So parental motivation and engagement, rather than their actual literacy levels may be important.

Familial factors

The presence of the parent during the therapy session, active involvement and consistency in attending therapy was reported to significantly contribute to positive outcomes in therapy. Similar findings have also been reported for in-person therapies for children with cleft palate (Pamplona, 1996). Active parental engagement has been related to better language outcomes in therapy (Hibbard and Greene, 2013). In addition parental engagement is mirrored in parental attendance (Gibbard and Smith, 2016).

Parental engagement may vary among parents, depending on various factors, such as family characteristics, child's disability, support available, etc. But it is important for the clinician to identify these factors, and to ensure that they stay engaged in therapy.

Communication between therapist and families -

Communication between the family and the clinician is critical for an effective intervention programme. A positive relationship between the Speech Language Therapist (SLT) and the parent is essential for parental engagement. This is especially true in telepractice.

During the pre-covid period, parents may not have expected to carry out therapy themselves, but instead expected the therapist to fix their children (Goodhue et al., 2010). However, as telepractice becomes more common, it is critical for parents to shift roles and act as a co-intervener and change agent. It is also critical to actively involve the family in shared decision making (SDM), as this will improve the parent's adherence to the goals set for the child as well as their active participation in therapy. From the perspective of the parents, it is critical to develop realistic and relevant goals.

CONCLUSION

As the student clinicians find the familial factors to be important in contributing to overall success of the intervention program, active measures must be taken to improve the same. Parent education programs, hands-on workshop, and parent support groups must be focused especially for parents of younger children and children with multiple disabilities. Families must be provided flexible timings, such that parents would be available for sessions. Therapy materials can also be made available to families through toy rotation to help them carry out intervention more effectively. Parental coaching and actively involving the families in choosing goals for intervention and effective communication with the families is very crucial for the overall success of tele-practice. In the current COVID situation, it is important for the parents and therapist to work together both in decision making and as well in sharing the responsibilities for the child's communication development. The parents must now take on the role of active therapist, and the therapist must shift from dictating to parents to coaching and co-working with them.

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