

Examining Interventions and Effectiveness of Outpatient Pediatric Feeding Therapy

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Background

- Almost half of all children/infants will experience a feeding difficulty at some point in their life (Howe & Wang, 2013)
- Difficulties range from self-limiting to complete refusal (Estrem et al., 2017)
- Evidence-based interventions include behavioral interventions, relationship-based interventions, parent education and training, oral-motor skill development, and sensory-based interventions (Gosa et al., 2017)
- Although children are frequently referred to occupational or speech therapy for feeding therapy interventions, much of the evidence comes from other disciplines such as psychology or behavioral (Gosa et al., 2017)
- Evidence suggests that a multifaceted approach is important to address the complex nature of feeding difficulties (Overland, 2011)
- Feeding therapy interventions are poorly defined; it is often unclear what interventions therapists are using in practice

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of outpatient pediatric feeding therapists to determine the most common interventions used in the treatment of feeding difficulties and to examine the perceived effectiveness of these interventions in attempt to define the interventions used treating feeding difficulties.

Research Questions

1. What is the experience of outpatient therapists conducting pediatric feeding and eating therapy?
2. What interventions are therapists using? What is their self-perceived proficiency of these interventions and perceived effectiveness of interventions?

Methodology

Participants: 15 occupational or speech therapists who treated at least one child for feeding therapy

Methodology: Narrative survey; phenomenological tradition

Data Collection: Surveys were loaded into Qualtrics survey software; participants were recruited using purposive, convenience sampling via word of mouth and email

Data Analysis:

- Phase 1: Survey data was extracted from Qualtrics for analysis.
- Phase 2: Categories were determined based on research questions and agreed on by two independent researchers to aid in data analysis.
- Phase 3: Responses were analyzed separately by three researchers who were blinded to each other's analysis. Researchers used a line-by-line open-coding approach to identify relevant/significant phrases.
- Phase 4: Data were analyzed a second time and phrases were placed into categories if two or more researchers agreed on the category.
- Phase 5: Data were clustered into common themes by two researchers.

Findings

Results revealed four themes describing the perceived experience of therapists in the treatment of feeding difficulties in children. Those themes included interventions, relationship, progress, and the child's emotional state. Interventions identified by therapists were sensory, oral motor, and behavioral interventions. Relationships encompassed the relationship between the therapist and child and family and child and were key to perceived success of interventions. Progress included how the therapists measured and assessed progress of therapy through intake of foods, tolerance, and perceived success. The child's emotional state was an important component of the treatment process that therapists addressed throughout the intervention.

Conclusion

In summary, the study defines feeding therapy interventions used in addressing a variety of feeding difficulties and provides information as to the considerations of the therapists within feeding therapy that influence their intervention techniques and perceived progress of their clients. Occupational and speech therapists used a variety of evidence-based interventions to address the complex feeding needs of patients. They indicated that a child's emotional state was key in the intervention process and that the importance of a relationship with the child was essential to success. Therapists indicated the importance of parent participation, which was identified as fundamental to success. Overall, the study provides a foundation for further defining feeding therapy interventions, so they can be studied for effectiveness. It also provides evidence to support the importance of considering the holistic approach, frequently taken by occupational therapists, to address psychosocial components of feeding therapy.

References

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