

Spring 4-10-2024

## Occupational Therapists' Perception of Children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders & Sleep in Pediatric Outpatient Settings

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### Recommended Citation

Jimenez, C., MacDermott, S., & Orozco Arteaga, J. (2024, April 10). Occupational Therapists' Perception of Children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders & Sleep in Pediatric Outpatient Settings. Poster presented at the Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium, University of St Augustine for Health Sciences. Retrieved from <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonesspring2024/55>

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# Occupational Therapists' Perception of Children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders & Sleep in Pediatric Outpatient Settings

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## BACKGROUND

- Neurodevelopmental disorders affect 1 in 6 children in the US, often accompanied by sleep disturbances (CDC, 2021).
- Children with neurodevelopmental disorders have a significantly higher risk of sleep disorders (Holsey et al., 2021).
- Occupational therapists play a crucial role in addressing pediatric sleep issues. (Piller et al., 2021)
- Despite qualifications, OTs face barriers limiting their ability to help families with sleep. (Bolin & Sweetman, 2022; Hartman, 2022; Holsey et al., 2021).
- There's a recognized need to improve OTs' preparation for evaluating and treating sleep issues (Ludwig et al., 2021).
- A gap exists between evidence-based practices and clinical implementation in pediatric OTs addressing sleep disorders (Holsey et al., 2021).

## PROBLEM

- Children with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD) experience significant sleep disturbances, impacting family occupations.
- Healthcare professionals, including occupational therapists (OTs), need more support in addressing treatment and intervention for this population (Bolin & Sweetman, 2022; Hartman, 2022; Holsey et al., 2021).
- Bridging the gap between evidence-based practice and clinical implementation is crucial for OTs to effectively assist families in overcoming sleep disturbances.

## PURPOSE

**This mixed-methods research project aimed to identify strengths and barriers in addressing the sleep needs of children with NDD in outpatient settings while gaining perspectives from pediatric occupational therapists.**

## METHODS

### Research Questions

- What are the perceptions of occupational therapists working in outpatient pediatric settings regarding the needs related to sleep and the utilization of sleep-related interventions?
- What information would occupational therapists in outpatient pediatric settings find helpful in enhancing preparation to evaluate and treat sleep?

### Data Collection

- Mixed-methods survey on Microsoft Forms
- Inclusion Criteria: Currently work as an OT in a pediatric outpatient setting
- 22 participants participated in the survey
- 9 participants answered the open-ended question

**Acknowledgments:** Special thanks to Janice McCullough, M.Sc. OT, for her expertise and support throughout this project!

This research project involved human subjects; it has been reviewed by the IRB and deemed exempt from IRB approval.

## RESULTS

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Type of Education	Within the Context of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "More focus on sleep as an occupation in pediatric courses. How it is impacted by development, coregulation, sensory processing, etc."</li><li>• "Sleep needs to be more addressed in graduate schooling for OTs. Specifically, intervention strategies. I only know what I know from my first job, otherwise, I don't think sleep interventions were addressed at all."</li><li>• I think that sleep hygiene has finally made it into pediatric texts but therapists who have been practicing for some time did not have the education and training that is now provided. Specific CEU's provided by well-regarded sources would support therapists greatly in both evaluation and treatment!</li></ul>

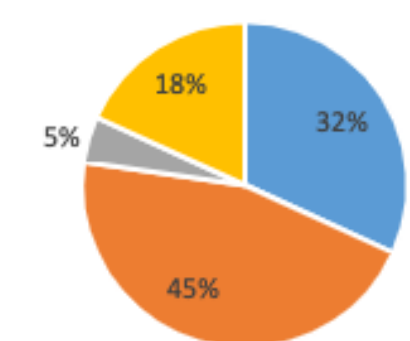
## DELIVERABLE

- Conducted needs assessment interviews with OTs at a local outpatient pediatric clinic
- Utilized the Ecology Human Performance (EHP) framework to develop a comprehensive sleep guide, which considers the relationship between individuals, their environment, tasks, and performance in the context of sleep (Dunn et al., 1994).
- Created resources, including a parent guide and staff resource, aiming to provide insights into sleep contexts, assessments, and interventions for promoting better sleep.

## References



Do you think occupational therapists are prepared to evaluate and treat sleep preparation and sleep participation problems in pediatric clinic settings?



■ No, we face challenges due to a lack of both proper resources and education.  
■ Somewhat prepared, with proper education and lack of resources  
■ Yes, we are adequately equipped with the necessary education and resources.  
■ Yes, we have all the education but lack additional resources.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

- Clinical observation and data analysis display the necessity for additional resources and education to address sleep challenges in practice.
- This project aims to fill gaps in research on pediatric sleep disturbances within occupational therapy, emphasizing the importance of addressing therapists' concerns and enhancing OTs' role in pediatric sleep management for improved family well-being.