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Strategies for Occupational Therapist in Providing Sexuality Education to Children with Physical Disabilities

Shaniff Esmail, Chelsea Krupa, Heidi Knupp
University Of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

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Introduction

Society has accepted that children are sexual beings; those adults who care for children with disabilities often ignore this concept. This presentation will describe a two year community-university research partnership that aimed to address the need for effective approaches to sexuality education for children with physical disabilities.

Research Question/Objectives:

Empowering youth with knowledge and understanding of various sexual issues that are relevant to their physical abilities will allow them to make safe and appropriate decisions regarding their sexuality. The objective of this project was to develop guidelines for providing sexual health education to children with physical disabilities in order to meet their unique needs.

Design/Methods:

A participatory needs assessment was completed using qualitative method, including one-to-one interviews and focus groups; the groups included six cohorts of adults with various physical disabilities and one of experienced service providers who help children with disabilities. This qualitative project used phenomenological approach in an attempt to understand the participants' experiences with sexuality education and associated issues. This approach was ideal in obtaining the necessary information which can be used in the development of sexual health programs that answer the needs of children with physical disabilities.

Results

Despite similarities between the different cohorts, unique differences between them emerged regarding what each cohort felt would have been effective ways of teaching/learning sexuality education. These differences fall into five categories: content; method of delivery; environment; educator characteristics, and timing of delivery. These results will be summarized.

Conclusion

The goal of this project is to prepare youth with physical disabilities for their transition into adulthood by providing relevant resources. This project will not only benefit individuals with physical disabilities within the cohorts studied, but also become a resource such that parents and service providers can deal with the topic of sexuality across various types of physical disabilities.

Contribution to Occupational Therapy Practice

The final component of the session will relate our findings to the practice of occupational therapy, providing specific strategies that allow therapists to address sexuality with a client-centered approach.