

Strengths and Challenges of Occupational Therapy Telehealth Services

Ashley Ko, OTS

Baily Zubel, OTD,OTR/L; Aaron Picus, OTD, OTR/L; & Danielle Friberg, OTD, OTR/L

West Coast University – Center for Graduate Studies

Speech, Language, and Educational Associates (SLEA)

Founded in 1983 by Helen Sherman-Wade, MA, CCC-SLP.

Mission: To improve and develop understanding, speaking, writing, and reading skills throughout the age continuum.

- Services include:
- Speech and language therapy
 - Child development
 - Behavioral sciences
 - Occupational therapy
 - Educational therapy
 - Social skills groups
 - Literacy programs
 - Psycho-educational testing
- Services provided to all age groups in:
- Public schools
 - Charter schools
 - Private schools
 - Preschool
 - Teletherapy
 - In-home
 - On-site (five locations in greater Los Angeles

Literature Review

- Effectiveness of telehealth delivery** to children and adolescents with **Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)** and/or sensory processing impairments (Knutsen et al., 2016; Solomon & Soares, 2020).
- Benefits of telehealth for individuals with ASD include:** diagnosis and treatment options to a broader range of families living in rural environments, a cost-effective way to provide educational and therapeutic interventions, shorter wait times to be seen by providers, effectiveness of training families with techniques to be implemented at home, and decreased transportation requirements (Knutsen et al., 2016; Solomon & Soares, 2020).
- Prior to COVID-19, the percentage of clinicians using telehealth was low; however, a **tremendous increase of 70% of telehealth use was reported post-COVID** (Camden & Silva, 2021).
- OTPs appear to be receptive to **telehealth services as a permanent option for treatment** after emergency orders related to COVID-19 are lifted (Dahl-Popolizio et al., 2020).

Needs Assessment

Telehealth Challenges

Transitioned to providing services via telehealth due to COVID-19.

Family/Caregiver Burnout

Many clients require supervision from parents/caregivers during sessions.

Decreased Morale

Overall morale among staff, clients, and families declined over the past year.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the DCE, the doctoral capstone student completed:

- Analyzing evidence-based practice regarding the strengths and challenges of telehealth delivery to children with sensory processing (SP) impairments amongst occupational therapists.
- A research study evaluating the strengths and challenges with telehealth delivery from the perspective of occupational therapists' working with children with SP impairments.
- Demonstrating effective dissemination and communication skills by collaborating with multiple professionals, presenting the research results, and providing an educational presentation relating to the data found from research to occupational therapists at SLEA.

Methods

Primary Focus Area: **Research**

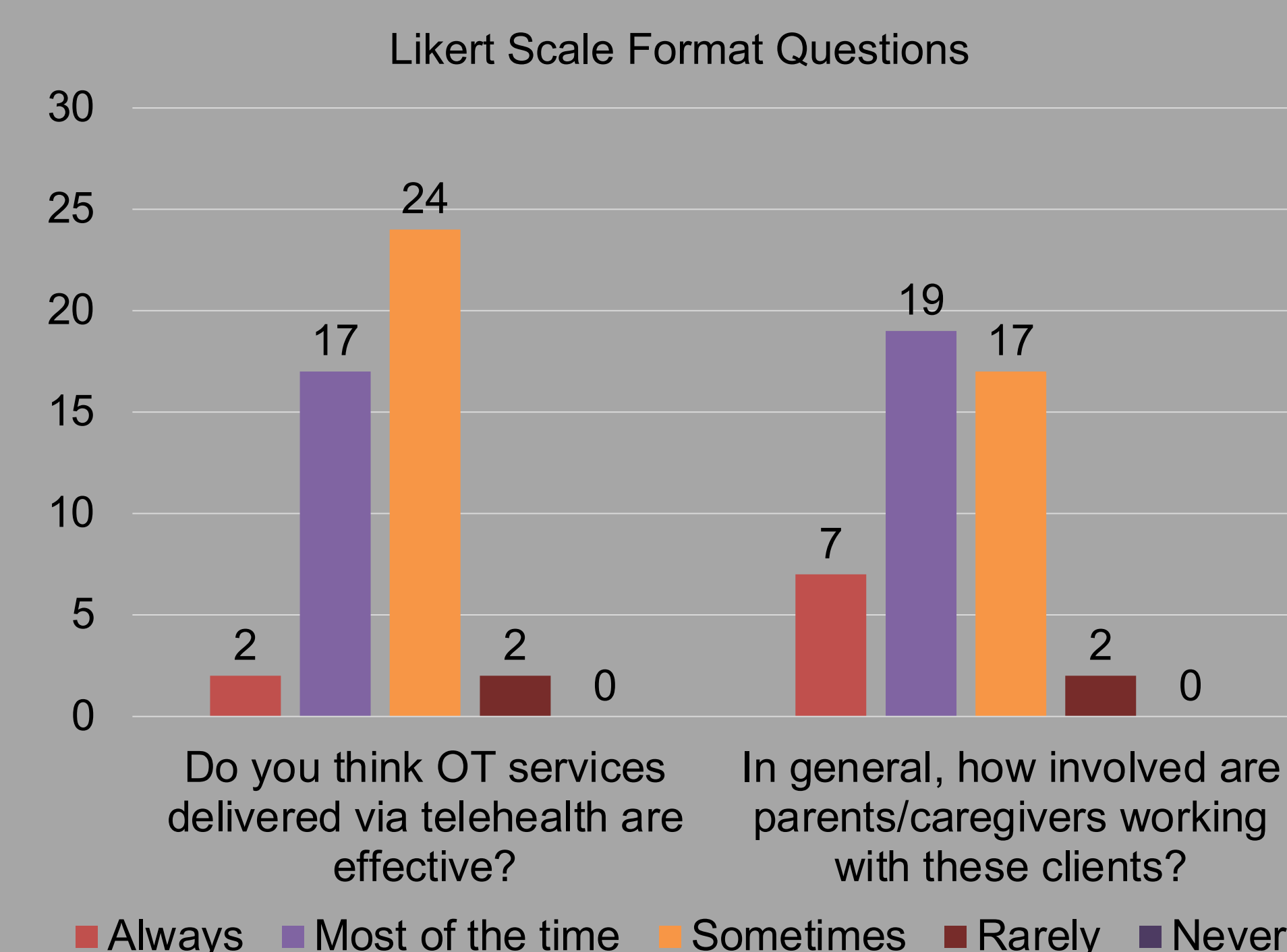
Question: "What are the Strengths & Challenges of Telehealth Service Delivery from the Perspective of Occupational Therapists' Working with Children with Sensory Processing Impairments?"

Design: Mixed-Methodology – Quantitative Data (Online Survey) and Qualitative Data (One-On-One Interviews)

Participants: 45 OTPs in California, USA working with children with SP impairments

Survey Outcomes

46 responses, one respondent did not meet inclusion criteria; therefore, a total of **45 participants** were included in the study



Themes & Frequency of Comments: Benefits

- Parent/caregiver involvement – 23
- Natural environment – 19
- Utilizing household resources – 8

Themes & Frequency of Comments: Challenges

- Limited access to resources – 14
- Decreased attention – 12
- Lack of hands-on physical contact– 11

Themes & Frequency of Comments: Suggestions

- Ensure parent/caregiver involvement – 15
- Home programs/educational information – 8
- Creative solutions– 8

Interview Outcomes

8 OTPs participated in one-on-one interviews

Theme	Top Strengths	Top Challenges
Environment	No travel or transition (F=4) Comfort of home, natural environment (F=4)	Limited engagement/attention (F=7)
Technology	Increased knowledge utilizing various technological tools (F=4)	Limited ability for child to utilize technology independently (F=6)
Family involvement	Increased parent/caregiver involvement during sessions (F=4) Parent/caregiver education & coaching (F=4)	Parent/caregiver dependent during sessions (F=6)
Virtual learning	Creative solutions (F=7)	Lack of hands-on/physical contact (F=5)
Transition to telehealth	Change in practitioners' perspective (F=7)	Additional work/challenges for practitioners (F=4)

Discussion, Implications, & Limitations

The overall response suggests:

- Delivering services to children with SP impairments via telehealth can be beneficial if families are actively involved with their child's plan of care and provided access to various resources
- Educational trainings provided to OTPs and families prior to delivering services regarding telehealth use, coaching practices, and sensory strategies can be beneficial
- Clear expectations should be set between practitioners and families during initial intake
- Technology issues create a significant barrier when delivering services via telehealth
- OTPs should implement interactive and highly motivating tasks/activities to help engage and maintain attention from children during therapy
- OTPs should problem-solve and produce creative solutions to combat the challenges
- Collaboration between practitioners and colleagues via online groups, meetings, social media, etc. to brainstorm and utilize various SP telehealth intervention ideas
- Providing home programs, evidence-based practice, and educational information to families

Limitations:

- Small sample size
- Study was not extended to OTPs outside of California, USA
- Length of research study was short (piloted for eight weeks)

Scholarly Deliverables

- Brief Synopsis of Data Findings
- Educational Handout – PowerPoint Presentation
- Research Article

References available upon request