

Knowledge of Occupational Therapists in Child Development Units: Implications for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Diagnosis and Treatment

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This study aimed to evaluate the knowledge and awareness of Occupational Therapists (OTs) in child development units about dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy and the characteristics of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Fetal exposure to alcohol causes brain damage and chronic developmental issues and symptoms that impact daily functioning. Despite being the most common acquired cause of developmental disabilities worldwide (Hoyme et al., 2016), there are low awareness and knowledge gaps among the public, therapists, and policymakers in Israel (Hen-Herbst et al., 2021). Using a quantitative approach, a social media platform distributed an anonymous online survey to OTs. The survey included 29 statements to assess responders' understanding of alcohol-related risks during pregnancy, knowledge of FASD symptoms, and familiarity with relevant tools and guidelines; 74 participants (M = 12.59 years of experience, SD = 9.28) voluntarily completed the questionnaire. Over 90% of the OTs in the study had heard of FASD but less than 30% had encountered or participated in diagnosing a child with the disorder. Due to insufficient knowledge, 81% of the sample expressed a lack of confidence in identifying children with FASD. These research outcomes underscore the lack of awareness, knowledge gaps, and inadequate diagnostic tools among OTs in Israel when identifying children with FASD. Such findings contribute to the underdiagnosis, misdiagnosis, and limited availability of diagnostic criteria and treatment services for these children and their families. The implications for occupational therapy highlight the necessity of increasing practitioners' knowledge and awareness of FASD. **Impact statement:** By enhancing their understanding, OTs can identify children with FASD at early developmental stages and provide comprehensive services to support the affected individuals and their families, potentially preventing the emergence of additional challenges.

References

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