

Familiarity and Use of Sensory-Based Theories by OTs Practicing in Various Settings Across the United States

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PURPOSE: Current research indicates that 30-80% of children with neurodevelopmental and genetic conditions have associated sensory processing difficulties (Miller et al., 2012). Persons with Alzheimer's Disease, schizophrenia, traumatic brain injury, and other mental health conditions can also experience these difficulties. Occupational therapy (OT) practitioners utilize sensory-based approaches to address these sensory challenges (Barton et al., 2015; Metz et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to explore the familiarity with sensory-based theories of OT practitioners across the United States (US). The study question was: Are there differences in the understanding and application of sensory-based theories and models among OT practitioners working in various settings across the US?

DESIGN: This study utilized a cross-sectional survey design. This design was used to allow the researchers to gather information from a variety of participants across geographical regions and examine OT practitioners' use and understanding of sensory-based interventions and theories in practice.

METHOD: Participants included OT practitioners within the US. A survey with content validity was created to collect demographic information and knowledge and use of sensory-based theories. Data analyses were performed using chi-square test of independence and Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient to determine the relationships between familiarity, participant demographics, and geographical regions.

RESULTS: A total of 201 survey responses were included with OT practitioners across region, practice area, and level of education represented. The highest sample was from the Pacific region (30.8%), pediatric practice (79.1%), and with a master's degree (46.8%) with an average practice experience of 18.16 years. Results of analyses identified a significant association with familiarity of theorist Stanley Greenspan in the Pacific region ($\chi^2(1) = 3.887, p = 0.049$); Barry Stein in the South Central region ($\chi^2(1) = .592, p = 0.032$); Multisensory Integration Model in the Mountain region ($\chi^2(1) = 5.318, p = 0.021$); and Sensory Integration Inventory assessment in the Northeast ($\chi^2(1) = 11.773, p = 0.001$). Among OT practitioners, occupational therapists were more likely to be familiar with Anita Bundy ($\chi^2(1) = 5.36, p = 0.021$), Winnie Dunn ($\chi^2(1) = 11.978, p = 0.001$), Shelly Lane ($\chi^2(1) = 4.901, p = 0.027$), Lucy J. Miller ($\chi^2(1) = 4.494, p = 0.034$) and the theory of Sensory Integration Intervention ($\chi^2(1) = 8.825, p = 0.003$). Results also indicated small, positive relationships between years of experience and familiarity with theorists A. Jean Ayres ($r(196) = .151, p = .034$), Anita Bundy ($r(196) = .230, p = .001$), Winnie Dunn ($r(196) = .225, p = .001$), Stanley Greenspan ($r(196) = .197, p = .005$), Bonnie Hanschu ($r(196) = .176, p = .013$), Shelly Lane ($r(196) = .162, p = .023$), and Lucy J. Miller ($r(196) = .264, p < .001$); the theories of Ayres Sensory Integration ($r(196) = .144, p = .042$); and the assessments of Sensory Integration Intervention ($r(196) = .173, p = .015$), Sensory Integration and Praxis Tests ($r(196) = .181, p = .011$), and the Sensory Integration Inventory ($r(196) = .231, p = .001$).

CONCLUSION: The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the familiarity with sensory-based theories. There were associations found among participants who work in different regions, but the greater associations appeared with participants who had a greater reported practice experience and use of sensory-based theories in practice. This study contributes to the understanding of OT practitioners' use and familiarity with sensory-based theories. Further research is needed to gain better understanding of the variability in familiarity of sensory-based theories among OT practitioners.

References

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