Introduction

Assistive Technology (AT) use by children with disabilities can lead to many benefits, including increased opportunities for participation, more successful communications, and increased independence. Despite the many benefits gained by using AT devices, children with disabilities frequently choose to abandon or underutilize their devices. The abandonment of AT devices by the children with disabilities can have a variety of negative consequences, such as exclusion from activities, greater dependence on others for daily living, deficits in work participation for caregivers or education participation for the child, learned helplessness, and a feeling of incompetence.

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological research design. The phenomenological design was chosen because it focuses on and interprets the lived experiences of the person or group under investigation and provides information that can be shared and used by others.

Method

- Data was collected using focus groups.
- Focus groups were guided by a facilitator using leading questions related to participants’ experiences with AT service delivery system:
  1. What can be done to improve the quality of current assistive technology services to children with special needs and their families?
  2. How does assistive technology impact function and quality of life for children with special health care needs and their families? What is the nature and extent of the influence of environmental factors on outcomes of assistive technology use?
  3. How do you conceptualize quality outcomes for children with special needs in regards to assistive technology acquisition and use?
  4. Are and how are services provided in a family-centered (i.e., does the child and/or family participate in the AT process in child’s natural environment/tasks), accessible, and coordinated manner to meet the needs of the child?
- Participants: 5 Service Providers, 3 Caregivers recruited from Wisconsin sin using local contacts, flyers, and word of mouth.
- Focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim.
- Data analysis was done using a thematic analysis process.

Results

Table 1: Provider Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Area of Influence</th>
<th>Title in Position</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>OT</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>OT</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>Speech and Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Caregiver Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caregiver</th>
<th>Relationship to Child with AT</th>
<th>Age of Child with AT</th>
<th>Number of AT Used by Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THEMES

Abandonment

- Support
- Coordination
- Quality of Device
- Follow-up

Themes uniquely emerging from Service Providers:

- Matching: personal factors (the child), family, team approach, insurance
- Quality of the device: ease of use, completeness, complexity, flexibility, workmanship.
- Support: social (family, peer, professional), technical, physical, education/training, administrative, advocacy.

Implications and Future Research

The findings from this study suggest that further research and improvements are needed in AT service delivery to better serve children with disability to reduce abandonment and increase the benefits gained from use of the technologies. Areas of need identified in this study include providing more comprehensive formal assessment methodology and tools, developing a better delivery system in which loans or trials of equipment can be completed before purchasing the AT device. Lastly, provide more education and training for the families and providers at the pre-professional and professional level and increase client centered involvement in the entire AT process.

Conclusion

Themes influencing AT use that are common to both Caregivers & Providers:

- Matching: personal factors (the child), family, team approach, insurance
- Quality of the device: ease of use, completeness, complexity, flexibility, workmanship.
- Support: social (family, peer, professional), technical, physical, education/training, administrative, advocacy.

References


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