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Exploring occupational therapists' perspectives regarding rapport development for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the states of Kerala and Karnataka: a phenomenological study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Occupational therapists working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder require to develop a strong rapport with the child with Autism Spectrum Disorder considering the difficulty in developing relationships in these children. However, the concept of rapport and its development as a construct in occupational therapy practice, given importance placed on it by occupational therapists, has been understudied.

Aim: This study was conducted to explore occupational therapists' perspectives regarding rapport development with children with ASD.

Methods: Online focus group discussions with occupational therapists from the Indian states of Kerala and Karnataka were conducted and the interview transcripts were analyzed through an inductive thematic analysis method.

Results/ practice implications: The results of thematic analysis emerged with three themes including occupational therapists' views about rapport, methods used to develop rapport and various influencers of rapport. The findings of the study highlight the unique views regarding rapport as an integral component of therapy and the result of fit among multiple factors embedded within and beyond the therapist-child dyad. Rapport with parents was also emphasized parallel to rapport with child.

Conclusion: Occupational therapists consider rapport development important yet inherent within therapy process. Findings of this study provide preliminary data regarding the perspectives regarding rapport development, suggesting the need for a closer emphasis on rapport development in education and practice.

Keywords: Therapeutic relationship, ASD, interactional fit, assess and develop rapport