

Attitudes & Utilization of Alternative Therapeutic Practices for Children With Disabilities: Parent & Practitioner Surveys

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BACKGROUND

It is critical that speech-language pathologists engage in evidence-based practice (EBP). According to ASHA (2005), EBP integrates: 1. clinical expertise/expert opinion, 2. external scientific evidence, and 3. the perspectives of clients/families to provide high-quality services that reflect their needs, values, interests, and choices.

Resonating with this third aim of EBP, Black and Wells (2007) define cultural competence as an attitude and practice in which the treating professional is knowledgeable about and sensitive to their clients' beliefs and values and works with them to develop appropriate and meaningful treatment plans.

Many individuals do not share information about their utilization of alternative practices and remedies with their health care professionals (Wong & Smith, 2006), potentially due to concerns with professionals' lack of acceptance and cultural mismatches.

SLPs may sense a dilemma. It is critical that SLPs provide treatments that are evidence-based and avoid promoting practices that are not, yet they must also display cultural competence and sensitivity to the values and choices of their clients and families.

METHODS

Participants: Parents/guardian participants were recruited via email and online community and parent groups. SLPs were recruited via email, ASHA Special Interest Groups, Multicultural Constituency groups, and online professional networks throughout the United States. Respondents included 105 parents/guardians of children with special needs in 24 U.S. states and 115 SLPs who serve children ages 0-18 in 29 states.



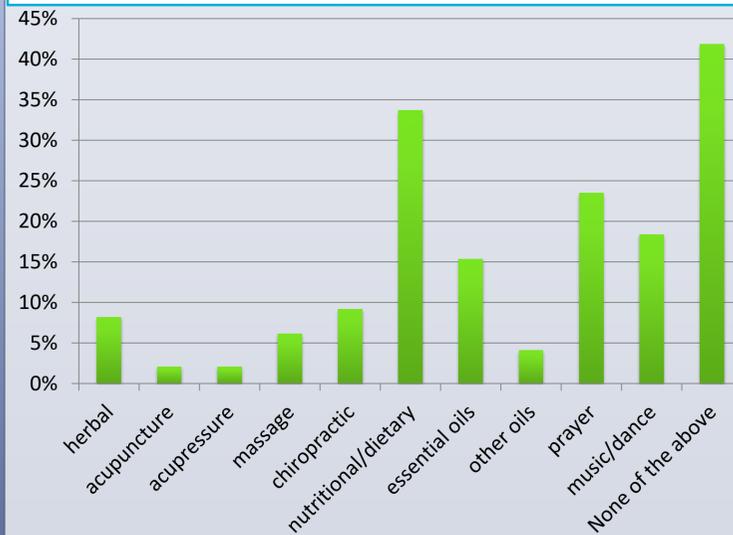
Methods: Surveys were broadly distributed to encourage participation from demographically representative and culturally diverse samples. Participants completed online surveys that included both closed- and open-ended questions. The survey for parents/guardians included 26 specific questions about their views, use and experiences with alternative practices for their children with special needs and how comfortable they feel sharing such information with their SLPs. The survey for SLPs included 28 questions about their clients' utilization of and their own experiences, education, and opinions on alternative therapeutic practices, also known as Complimentary Alternative medicine (CAM).

RESULTS

Parent Responses

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A, Not used
I am comfortable discussing our use of any methods indicated above with SLP.	1.15%	2.30%	12.64%	25.29%	34.48%	24.14%
The SLP demonstrates acceptance of our use of any methods indicated above to treat my child.	3.53%	1.18%	24.71%	21.18%	21.18%	28.24%
I believe there are benefits of using the methods indicated above to treat my child's speech, language, hearing needs.	3.49%	3.49%	19.77%	31.40%	20.93%	20.93%

Please indicate which of the following methods you have used to help treat your child's diagnosis. Check "None of the above" if you have not used any.



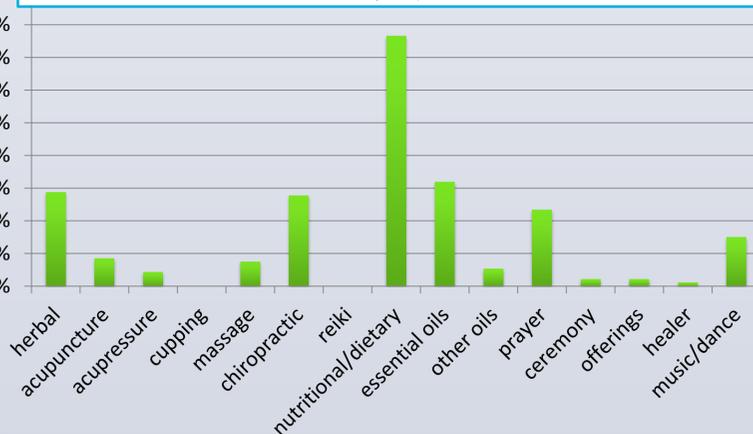
What would you like professionals to know about your family's culture, including your values, beliefs and practices, that would help them more effectively serve you and your child?

"I think it's important for western professionals to be aware of alternative therapies and familiarize themselves with how they are used. Many people like to feel like they have options and control over their care & the care of their loved ones."
 "Just know that a parent of a child with a speech disorder is willing to try most things because it's heartbreaking not being able to communicate with their child."
 "I would like SLPs to communicate more information instead of assuming that parents don't understand or giving vague answers. I would like SLPs to provide explicit explanations of what they are doing."
 "I prefer to go at my family's needs from a holistic approach. Treating the body and mind together is essential."

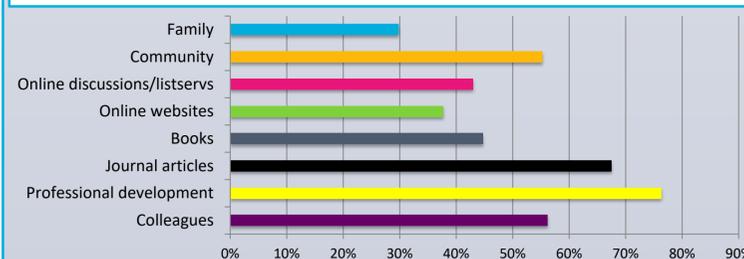
SLP Responses

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel that I have sufficient knowledge about the use of complementary/alternative medicine and practices across cultures.	16.19%	39.05%	27.62%	15.24%	1.90%
Most clients/families that I serve who use CAM have disclosed this information with me.	5.71%	20.00%	30.48%	37.14%	6.67%
I believe that most clients/families that I serve who use CAM have felt comfortable disclosing this information with me.	0.98%	10.78%	33.33%	44.12%	10.78%
I believe that I am/would be comfortable discussing this topic with clients/families.	5.83%	19.42%	16.50%	45.63%	12.62%
I demonstrate acceptance of clients'/families' use of CAM to treat illness and disabilities.	0.95%	3.81%	27.62%	48.57%	19.05%
The use of CAM has negatively impacted clients'/families' implementation of my clinical recommendations.	20.95%	42.86%	28.57%	7.62%	0.00%
I believe there are benefits of using CAM along with speech-language therapy to treat speech/language/hearing needs.	1.90%	7.62%	32.38%	45.71%	12.38%

Which is/are the most commonly used by your clients/families to treat these special needs? (Select up to 5)



Where have you received information/training about how culture influences clients' beliefs, values, and practices for treating illness and disabilities? (Check all that apply)



SLP Responses (cont.)

Please provide any additional comments or recommendations for SLP training/education about this topic.

"If an SLP does not believe or practice these methods, it is still very important to understand that some families pursue these-whether they are culturally based or because they are looking for something more to help their loved one."
 "I do not recommend alternative methods but rather inform them about what is out there, what others have used and what I have used."
 "Some alternative practitioners convince people that their treatments alone work to resolve communication problems despite studies to the contrary. In these cases, delaying treatment could be harmful. Also, some practices aren't medically safe."
 "I think mindfulness and mindfulness training is beginning to gain acceptance as far as the benefits for everyone. This is an area that can really help our clients/students and their families."
 "It would be nice to have a continuing education opportunity that explains different methods and what evidence there is to support their use alongside SLP treatment."
 "I think traditional medicine/therapy mixes well with other therapies but is not enough in and of itself. The longer I work, the more frustrated I am with the limitations of doing only what insurance will pay for. Eventually, to feel like I can truly help people I am being forced into private practice where I can administer more treatments."
 "We have to be aware of research that is outside of our comfort zone, and we have to avoid any biases in our clinical decision making."

DISCUSSION

More than half (58%) of parents reported using complementary and alternative methods to treat their child's disorder; in addition, 11% reported that physicians, 15% reported that SLPs, and 7% reported that other professionals have recommended CAM methods. Of SLP respondents, approximately one-third reported that their clients/families use CAM to address their child's special needs prior to pursuing SLP services; additionally, 21% reported having recommended CAM to families, and 75% reported having used CAM personally. The majority of SLP respondents reported rarely or never discussing the use of alternative methods with parents/guardians. Overall, these research findings highlight the importance of continued investigation of the effectiveness of these methods, sensitivity to clients' and families' values and choices, increased education, and open communication between SLPs and the clients/families they serve.

REFERENCES

Black, R., & Wells, S. (2007). Culture and occupation: A model of empowerment in occupational therapy. Bethesda, MD: AOTA Press.
 Wong, H. H. L., & Smith, R. G. (2006). Patterns of complementary and alternative medical therapy use in children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 36, 901-909.