Cultural Arts Access for Children with Disabilities via Sensory Friendly Theater

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Study Aims

To investigate experiences and perspectives of: 1) families with children with disabilities represented autism spectrum disorder, epilepsy, cortical visual impairment, families with typically developing children and children with disabilities participating less frequently in community activities than those with typically developing children.

Methods

- Qualitative case study approach
- Parents recruited from sensory-friendly show audience
- Staff recruited from theater managers/administrators involved in sensory-friendly program
- Data collected via semi-structured interviews with seven parents and four staff
- Data analyzed via inductive, thematic approach
- Families with typically developing children and children with autism spectrum disorder, epilepsy, cortical visual impairment, anxiety, and developmental disabilities represented

Discussion

- Findings align with literature linking sensory friendly program participation to family well-being and illustrate organization-level consultation as a promising OT service model to support population health
- Sensory friendly theater’s success may be optimized by prioritizing a safe and welcoming social environment
- Findings indicate families with children with disabilities’ desire for more community participation opportunities that are inclusive but safe

Conclusion

- Sensory friendly theater is a promising access strategy with potential to promote community participation and health of diverse populations
- Future research needed to investigate relative value of sensory friendly program components, strategies to build inclusive and safe environments, perspectives of people with disabilities and actors, and best practices for organization-level OT consultation

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References