

Advocating for Inclusive Sexual and Relationship Education: A Workshop on OT's Role in Increasing Access for Neurodiverse Youth

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INTRODUCTION

- Sexual and relationship education (SRE) can come in many different forms and may not always be comprehensive¹
- While sexual activity and expression is recognized as an occupation and a human right, occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) seldom address it in their practice²
- Neurodiverse individuals are often inaccurately perceived as asexual, sexually inactive, or sexually deviant, which can result in both mental and physical harm³
- Access to inclusive SRE is often limited due to parental fear, state and local laws, implicit biases, and accessible content¹

An Inclusive SRE Curriculum Includes (non-exhaustive list):

Sexuality and Gender Identity

Consent & Intimacy

LGBTQIA+ Relationships

Contraceptive Use

Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence

STD/STI Education

PURPOSE

- The purpose of this study is to:
- Understand OTPs perceptions** about their role and the current state of SRE for neurodivergent individuals
 - Identify perceived barriers and supports** to OTPs addressing sexual health education with this population
 - Create, implement, and evaluate** the efficacy of a workshop for EL-OTD students to assess their change in knowledge and confidence in supporting access to quality SRE for this population

METHODS

Create & Distribute Survey

Analyze Outcome Measures

Analyze Survey Findings

Design & Implement Workshop

SURVEY DEVELOPMENT & ANALYSIS

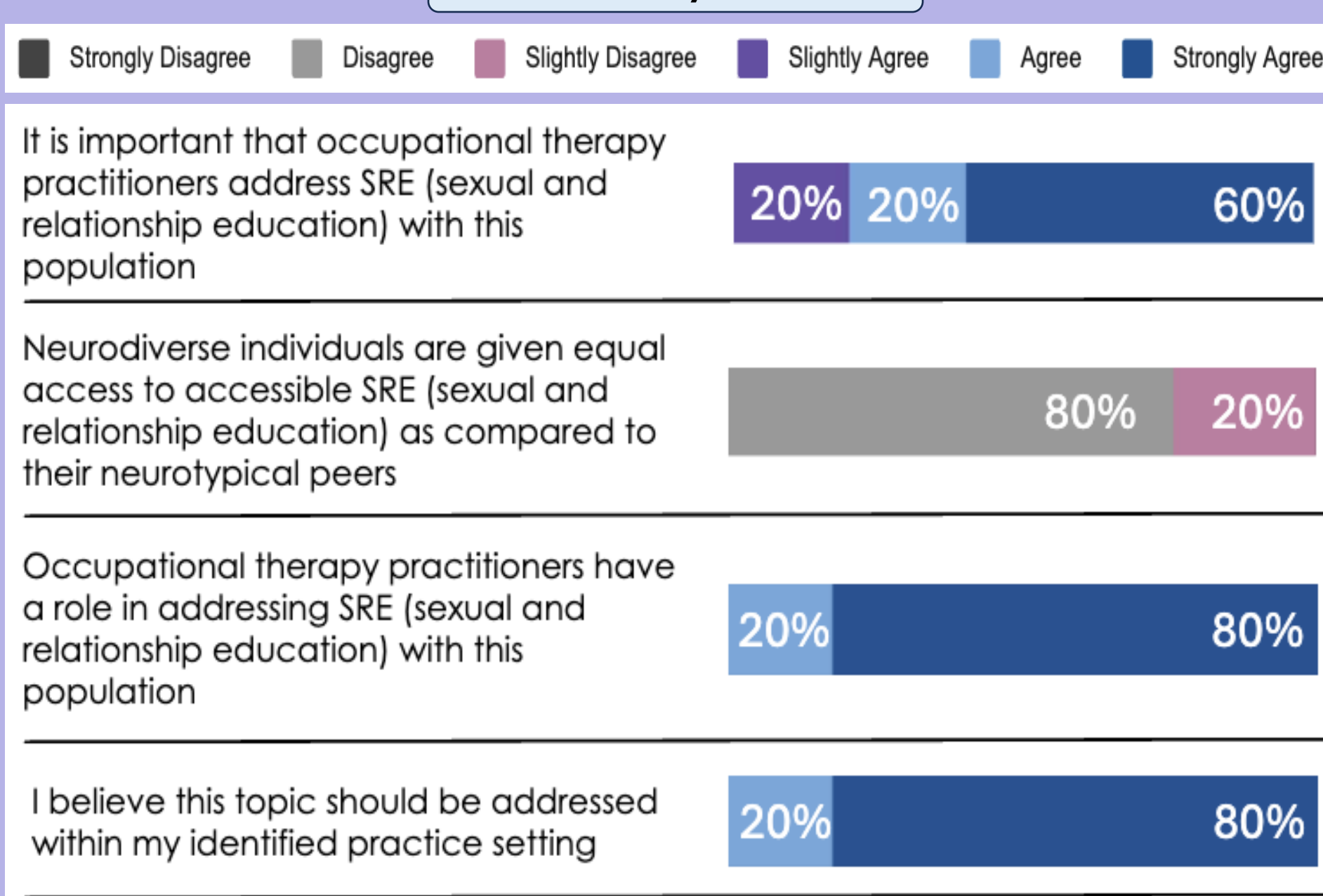
Create and Distribute Survey:

- A mixed-methods survey was developed to explore OTPs knowledge and comfort levels in addressing SRE topics, identify the barriers and supports they encounter, and gain insight into occupational therapy's potential role in SRE. These findings were used in creating a workshop for EL-OTD students
- Inclusion criteria consist of OTR- or COTA-certified professionals who have worked with clients aged 14-22 in the New England area within the past five years

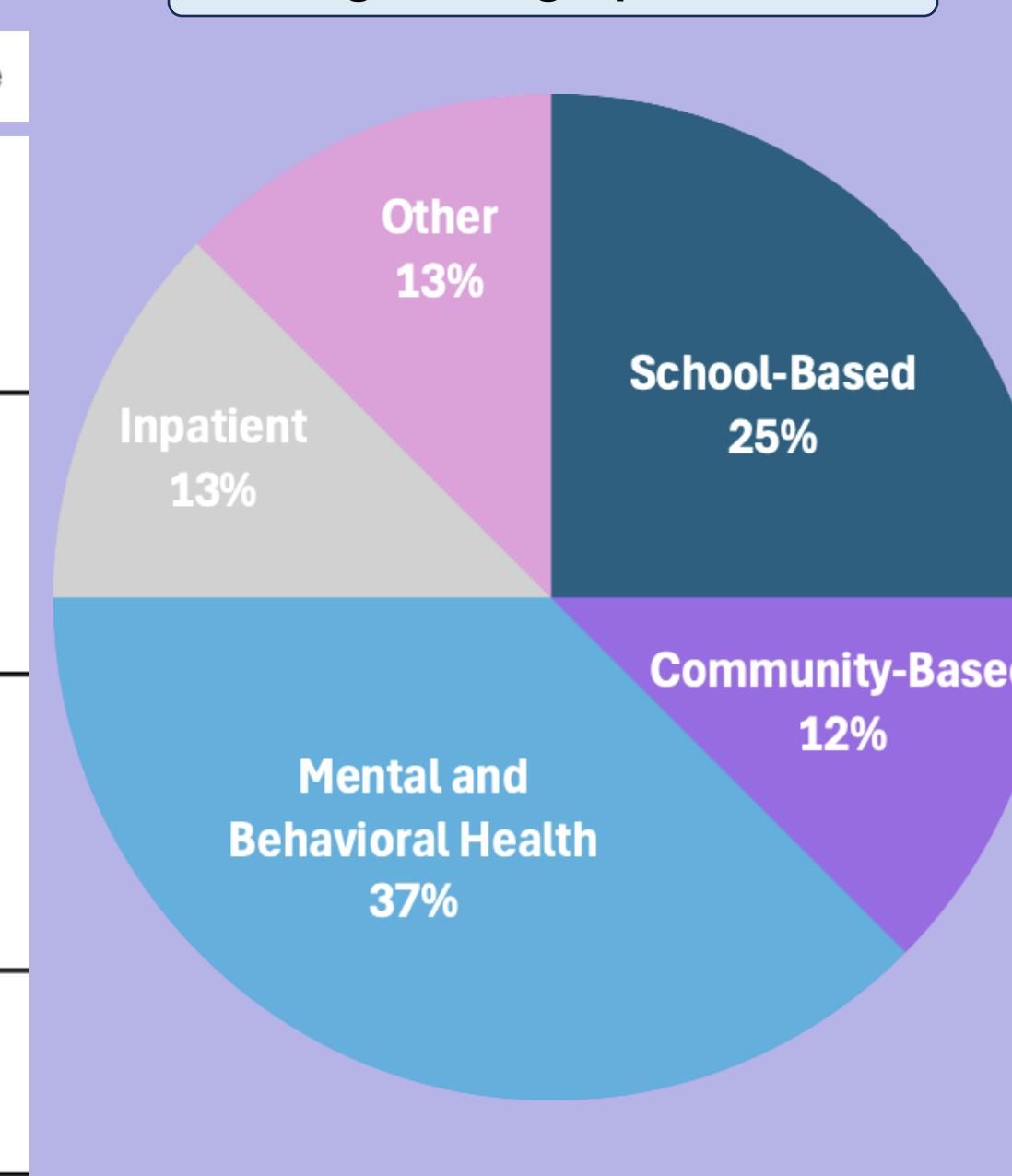
Survey Data Analysis & Findings:

- 8 survey responses met inclusion criteria, analyzed with descriptive statistics and content analysis
- Top 3 barriers to addressing SRE with this population included accessible **learning modalities**, **parental concerns**, and **lack of SRE content taught in OT programs**
- Top support to addressing SRE with this population is working alongside interdisciplinary teams
- Key quote: "So many neurodivergent folks are LGBT+ and it's a part of cultural humility to do your best to learn about different types of sex"

OTP Survey Results



Setting Demographic Results



WORKSHOP OUTCOMES ANALYSIS

Analyze Outcome Measures:

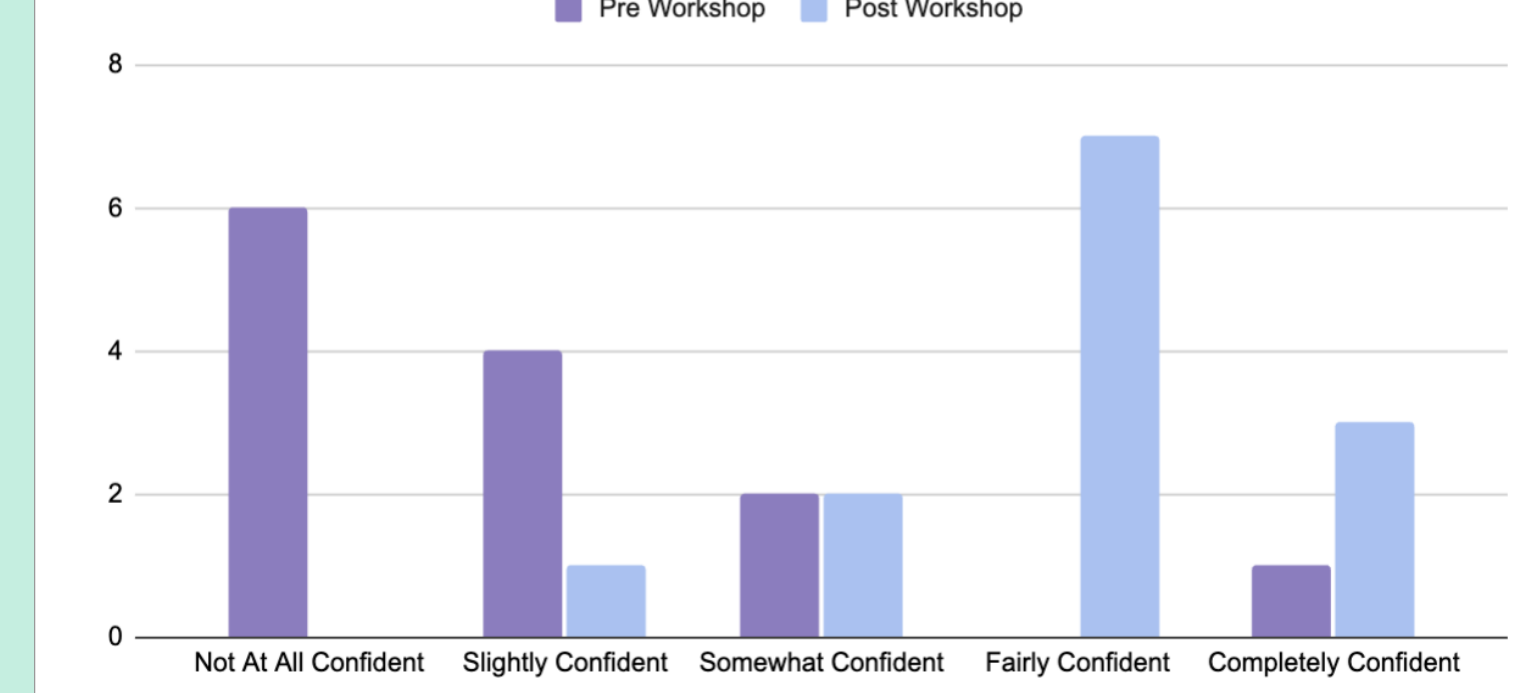
- 14 EL-OTD students participated in the workshop held at Tufts University and completed outcome measures

- All 5 quantitative items had a medium to large effect size (Hedges g from .78-.89) and were all statistically significant (p-values <0.05)

How confident do you feel in advocating for neurodiverse adolescents to have access to an inclusive sexual and relationship education (SRE) curriculum?



How confident are you that you have the knowledge and skills to address sexual and relationship education (SRE) with neurodiverse adolescents?



Key quotes from EL-OTD participants:

"It is our job to educate ourselves so we can better support these individuals and give them the best possible client centered care they deserve"

"Proper sex ed leads to a better understanding of oneself and others, and a decreased likelihood of experiencing/perpetrating sexual abuse"

DISCUSSION/FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Literature review and OTP survey responses strongly suggest:**
 - Neurodiverse individuals do not have equal access to SRE as compared to their neurotypical peers
 - OTPs have the knowledge and skills to address sexual and relationship education with their clients
- Workshop outcome measures show:**
 - Participants had an increase in confidence and comfortability with SRE topics, discussing SRE, and advocating for neurodiverse individuals
 - Preliminary results are promising, suggesting that dedicating time to these discussions can be beneficial for student development which may translate to improved advocacy and intervention in future practice
- Additional studies with larger sample sizes are needed to validate initial findings
- Further exploration of OTP's barriers and supports to addressing inclusive SRE with a range of clients is needed to inform future OT curriculum and professional development

WORKSHOP DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

Design & Implement Workshop for EL-OTD Students:

Workshop Objectives:

- Describe the underlying effects** of stigma surrounding SRE in connection to the neurodiverse population
- Analyze the components and the benefits** of an inclusive SRE curriculum
- Justify the need for SRE as well as OT's role** in addressing this topic with neurodiverse individuals

Workshop Outline:

- Introduction
 - Inclusive SRE
 - Sexual activity and expression as an occupation
- Neurodiverse population
 - Harmful misconceptions
 - Barriers to accessing SRE
- OT role in SRE within ADLs, health management, and social participation
- Learning Activity (scenario-based discussion)
- Inclusive SRE curriculum and its benefits

- The 75-minute workshop** given to current EL-OTD students at Tufts University consisted of a mixed methods pre- and post-survey to help determine if the workshop objectives were met

REFERENCES & CONTACT INFO



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