

Therapy interventions for children with neurodisabilities: a qualitative scoping study

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Families and professionals agree that there needs to be more research on therapy interventions (physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy) for children with neurodisabilities. To aid decisions about what, or whether, to fund research on this topic, the National Institute for Health Research commissioned a small scoping study. The study's purpose was to describe current practices and schools of thought, ascertain views about the impacts that therapy interventions have on children's lives and how we should measure those impacts, and hear about priorities for future research. The study focused on children with a non-progressive neurodisability in which the main impact is on physical functioning or abilities, for example cerebral palsy, hemiplegia, spina bifida, some genetic conditions and acquired brain injury. More than 70 professionals (therapists, service managers, doctors and school staff) and 25 parents took part in this study, either through an individual interview or by joining a focus group discussion.

The study found that all therapies are undergoing many changes to the way they work and how their services are structured and organised. This is partly as result of reduced resources, but changes in beliefs and thinking about therapy interventions also have a large part to play. There was strong agreement that these therapies should be helping children to participate in everyday life as much as possible. Study participants also agreed that therapies could have very positive impacts on children's lives. However, many also believed that more research was needed to understand how, and in what ways, therapies affect children, and how best to capture, or measure, this. In terms of research priorities, evaluations of new and emerging approaches to working with children and families, and models of delivering therapy services, received stronger consistent support than evaluations of specific interventions.

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