

The Impact of Equine-Assisted Therapy on Occupational Engagement for Children with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities: From the Perspectives of the Children and Their Caregivers

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Abstract : This research investigates the impact of equine-assisted therapy programs on occupational engagement for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. There is a general lack of evidence for equine-based services for this population, so this research aims to decrease gaps in the current literature. To gain comprehensive insight, data will be collected from both the child and their caregiver. This study takes a qualitative approach utilizing online surveys and in-person guided interviews. The participants are individuals ages 4-17 with a diagnosed intellectual or developmental disability who are currently participating in a PATH int. certified equine-assisted therapy program. Also, caregivers of individuals who meet this criterion are included. This study decreases gaps in the literature by providing comprehensive data regarding the impacts of these services on occupational engagement. The addressed domains are physical, behavioral, emotional, and social functioning, as well as overall activity engagement and impacts in everyday life. With a better understanding of how equine-assisted therapy affects relevant outcomes for children with disabilities, an increased number of occupational therapists can implement these uniquely effective services while adhering to standards of evidence-based practice. Ultimately, this research strives to contribute to generalizable data in occupational therapy by supporting the implementation of equine-assisted services for children with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their caregivers/families.

Keywords : occupational therapy, pediatric, rehabilitation, hippotherapy

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