The Perspectives of Speech Therapists in Guatemala Regarding AAC

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Intro

- It has been estimated that 1.5% of the billion people in the world with disabilities have complex communication needs. The majority of these individuals live in low- to middle-income (LAMI) countries.
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) services are lacking within LAMI countries for several reasons:
  1. Lack of language therapists (LTs);
  2. Lack of training for those LTs that are available;
  3. LAMI countries often have large rural populations, as well as limited access to health, educational, economical, and technological resources;
  4. Communication services may not be seen as essential rehabilitation services by the government;
  5. Gaps in the research completed on AAC in LAMI countries compared to high-income countries.

- Guatemala is a LAMI country experiencing many of these barriers to AAC, with 31% of households including at least one person with a disability. It is estimated that there is one LT for every 300,000 people in Guatemala.

- The current study aims to collect Guatemalan LTs’ perspectives regarding AAC, with a focus on current knowledge and use, needs, and resources.

Method

- Recruitment: Participants were obtained through a recruitment email. A lister for Guatemalan LTs interested in continued education (a network of LTs built through Blackwell’s work in Guatemala) was used to reach potential participants. Emails were sent to 200 individuals. A total of 26 individuals met the inclusion criteria, of which 23 participants submitted the survey.

- Survey: Qualtrics was used to create a survey made up of nine sections: Demographics, Experience, AAC Education, Assessment, AAC Use, AAC Knowledge, Opinion Questions, Acceptance of AAC in Guatemala, and Resources Available. Some of these quantitative results are presented in the form of descriptive statistics.

- Interviews: Ten of the participants were interviewed to gather qualitative information on the perspectives of the LTs. This type of data provides richer information on the perspectives of the LTs. This type of data provides richer information on the perspectives of the LTs.

Results

- Availability of courses teaching about AAC in university:
  - Numbers in parenthesis note the n for each column.

- Self-perceived amount of AAC knowledge:
  - Numbers in parenthesis note the n for each column.

- Interest in learning more about AAC:
  - Numbers in parenthesis note the n for each column.

The Language Therapists

- Age: LTs ranged between the ages of 24-65 years old.
- Experience: The years of LT experience for each participant ranged from 2-28 years with a mean of 9.4 years.
- Language: All LTs spoke Spanish as their primary language and provided services within Spanish, with one LT reporting to also provide services in basic sign-language.
- Education: Within Guatemala, there are no bachelor’s degrees in language therapy. To become an LT requires a 2-3 year technical program in language therapy. Many then go on to complete a bachelor’s degree in psychology. The majority of participants received both their technical degree in LT and their bachelor’s degree in psychology, with some only completing the technical LT degree and some also completing a master’s degree in psychology or education.
- Work settings: The LTs worked across various therapy settings, with the majority of participants within individual’s homes or for a private agency. On average, the LTs worked within an average of 2.3 settings.

Future Directions

- LTs in Guatemala need more AAC knowledge that is applicable to their cultural, educational, and economic structure, and more available resources. They are ready and interested in gaining this knowledge.
- Next steps include coding and analyzing participant interview data, to further understand of Guatemalan LTs’ perspectives, needs, knowledge and resources.
- The information gathered from both the quantitative and qualitative results will inform future training activities. The aim is to provide LTs in Guatemala with foundational knowledge about AAC and supporting the communication development of those with little to no functional communication.

- It is hoped that increasing foundational knowledge and understanding of AAC principles will help Guatemalan LT’s best serve those in their community with complex communication needs.

Disclosure/References