

Evaluating the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Service Providers for Children Between the Ages of 0 to 13 Years with Functional Diversity



Diego D. Lacy Martínez, B.S. & Marianellie Cruz Hernández, B.A.
Carol Salas, PsyD; María N. Reyes, MSW, PhD; Ilia Torres, MS



Collaborators: Avanzando Juntos, Department of Health, Institute on Developmental Disabilities, Medical Sciences Campus, University of Puerto Rico
Leadership Education Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) Program
Westchester Institute for Human Development, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities and New York Medical College

INTRODUCTION

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic started in Puerto Rico on March 2020 when the first Covid-19 case was confirmed on the island. Some of the measures the government has taken to prevent the spread of the virus include the use of face masks, vaccination, physical distancing, total or partial closure of government services, businesses, schools, daycare centers, recreational spaces, among others.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the virtual modality was adopted to provide health and educational services offered to the infant population with functional diversity. For this reason, the services providers had to adjust and modify the way they performed their therapeutic interventions. This action resulted in a change in intervention without a lot of time to plan and adjust to this new health emergency.

We can infer that because the health emergency was so abrupt, it did not allow taking into account the special requirements of service providers needs to be able to procure the assistance that children with functional diversity deserve.

OBJECTIVES

The research objectives are as follows:

- To determine the changes experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic by the service providers of clients between the ages of 0 and 13 years with functional diversity.
- To identify the challenges experienced by the service providers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To establish effective strategies to provide services to the population with functional diversity during and after a health emergency.

RESULTS

- The profile of the sample of service providers is divided as follows: of 51 interviewees, 88% female, and 12% as male, 47% of the participants identify as speech and language therapists.
- The work modality during the pandemic used by service providers, 51% indicated combined services (virtually and in-person), 33% virtually and 16% in-person.

METHODOLOGY

Design: Non-experimental transverse descriptive study

Participants: 51 service providers who serve persons with functional diversity between the ages of 0 and 13 years

Procedure: IRB protocol: MSC-IRB approved (Protocol Number 2210058501).

Sample: Service Providers from the Graduate Certificate on Developmental Disabilities and Early Intervention from the Department of Health Program, Avanzando Juntos (Healthy Start).

Fact sheet and self-administered questionnaires sent through Survey Monkey.

Telephone calls to participants from the Graduate Certificate on Developmental disabilities and Early Intervention from the Institute on Developmental Deficiencies before sending the Survey Monkey questionnaire

Questionnaire sent through the Department of Health to service providers from the Program Avanzando Juntos.

Sample by availability.

Inclusion Criteria:

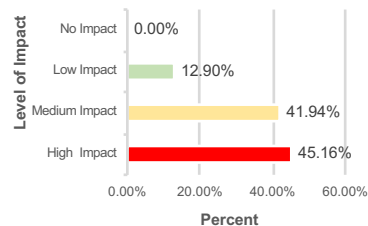
Being a resident of Puerto Rico during the Covid-19 pandemic and at the time when the questionnaire was answered. Providing services to participants between the ages of 0 and 13 years suspected or diagnosed with functional diversity.

Having a university education and license in the area of Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech Therapy, Psychological Therapy, Social Work and Education.

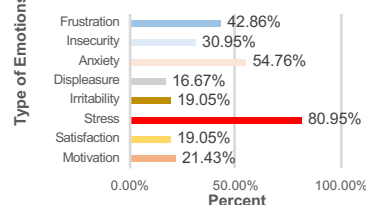
Being a provider of 21 years or more.

RESULTS

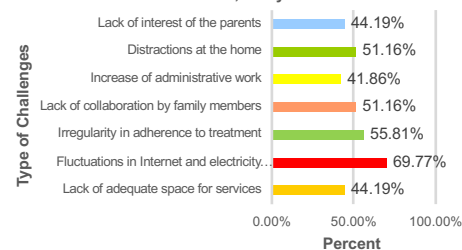
Graph 1. How much do you think the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted the delivery of services?



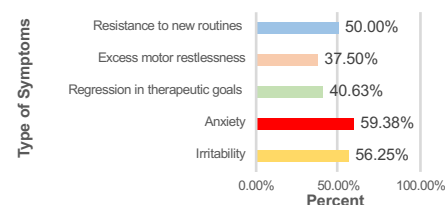
Graph 2. Indicate the emotions you experienced when providing services during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Graph 3. Which challenges did you face, if any?



Graph 4. With the routine change, what symptoms do you observe in the clients during the COVID-19 Lockdown?



DISCUSSION

The frequency and percentage of the variables studied was analyzed, some of the results show that:

Covid-19 impacted the delivery of services to the infant population with functional diversity between the ages of 0 and 13 years.

Service providers expressed a high level of stress, anxiety, irritability, frustration, among others.

Service providers expressed a lack of knowledge and the need for training on the use of the virtual modality.

Also, service participants were observed to regress in their achievements in therapeutic interventions, as well as anxiety and irritability.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study supports the importance of establishing a prevention and education plan targeted to professionals who work with the functional diversity population in order to be adequately prepared in case of a health emergency.

The providers recommended the following topics as a priority:

- Learning to effectively manage the crisis they experience with the family of children with functional diversity during a health emergency.
- How to properly implement therapeutic interventions virtually for participants/ clients with functional diversity.
- How to effectively manage the reintegration and transition of the participants/ clients with functional diversity into the community.