

Ayres Sensory Integration (ASI) therapy is typically delivered in a clinic-based sensory room; however, children spend most of their time in a natural environment. In effect, there is a scarcity of data implementing ASI-based strategies in various community settings. The study aimed to explore and understand the experiences of occupational therapists (OTs) when recommending ASI-based strategies in community settings for children with sensory processing differences. It also sought to identify implementation barriers and better understand OTs' perspectives on translating clinical practice into a community setting.

A qualitative approach using a phenomenological methodology was employed for this study to explore the participants' experiences. Eight OTs were recruited and semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the participants' experiences. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes and subthemes in the interview data that address the research questions. Four main themes were identified: creating a culture of understanding, implementing sensory strategies by stakeholders, access to resources, and applying ASI principles in a natural environment.

A significant outcome of this study is that stakeholders' knowledge and understanding of sensory processing and sensory integration have grown over time. However, the study also highlighted that simply being aware of the topic is insufficient, emphasising the importance of empowering stakeholders to implement sensory strategies in the community. Additionally, stakeholders require ongoing support to understand and implement ASI-based strategies in a child's natural environment, such as at school and at home, to overcome participation challenges. The findings highlighted the importance of regular education, collaboration, and coaching among stakeholders, particularly parents, to ensure recommendation carryover and implementation. Ongoing support would also relieve additional demands on the entire family, lowering parental stress and improving their quality of life. The study discovered a range of OTs' perspectives on the feasibility of conducting an ASI session in the community, such as in a playground; thus, the findings cannot be conclusive and necessitate additional research. Finally, this study added to the body of knowledge on SI and its practice in Malta, focusing on the implementation of ASI-based strategies in a natural environment. Following this study, it is hoped that other OTs will benefit from this experiential knowledge, shaping their future practice.

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