Establishing Therapeutic Relationships with Immigrant Families of Disabled Children: A Scoping Review

Authors

Ms.Sarah Ninan Fenn
Dr. Daniel Castro de Jong
Dr. Claire Pearce
Dr. Stephen Isbel

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Introduction

Cultural Approach	Description
Cultural Competence	This approach centres on developing awareness, knowledge and skills of one's own cultural values and those of the culturally diverse "other." This approach positions the practitioner in a position of power and privilege while positioning the "other" as the subordinate. It ignores tackling the power relations and social structures(Beagan, 2015; Grenier, 2020).
Cultural Sensitivity	Cultural sensitivity is being aware of self and others and employing one's knowledge and understanding to respect and tailor practice when encountering a diverse group or individual (Foronda, 2008). Cultural sensitivity is often used as a related term with cultural competence (Beagan, 2015)
Cultural Relevance	The focus is on acknowledging cultural differences in the occupational therapy profession. It maintains that the profession is not culturally neutral and recognizes its cultural biases and assumptions (Beagan, 2015). This approach is not focused on the relationship between the individuals but rather that of the entire profession.
Cultural Humility	This approach focuses on being humble and open to learning from the "expert" client. Critical reflection is an essential tool to this approach, which enables to examine individual practices in relation to social structures and power relations (Anderson, 2022; Beagan, 2015)

Need for the study

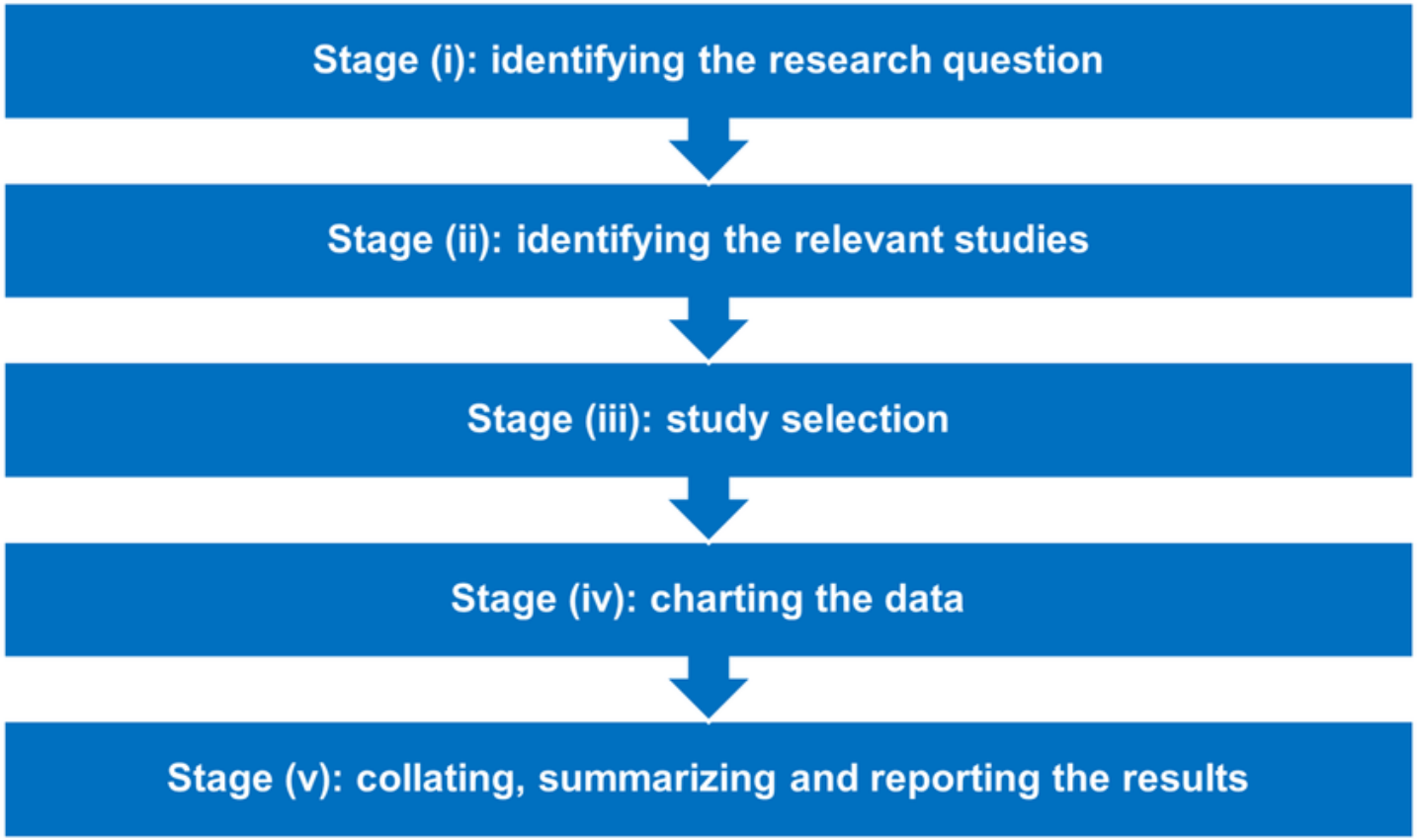
- Although, literature reveals the purpose and the use of cultural approaches with culturally diverse populations in occupational therapy (Beagan, 2015), a better understanding is needed of how these cultural approaches are used to build and sustain the therapeutic relationship with immigrant families of disabled children.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine whether cultural approaches are used to build the therapeutic relationship between immigrant families of disabled children and their occupational therapists,
2. To determine how the cultural approaches build and sustain the therapeutic relationship between the immigrant families of disabled children and their occupational therapists.

Methods: Scoping Review

- The Joanna Brigg's Institute methodology (Peters et al., 2020) for scoping reviews was used to conduct this review, which is based on the 5-step methodological framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005).



Inclusion Criteria

Studies conducted with immigrant families with children with disability (0-18 years) as the participants.

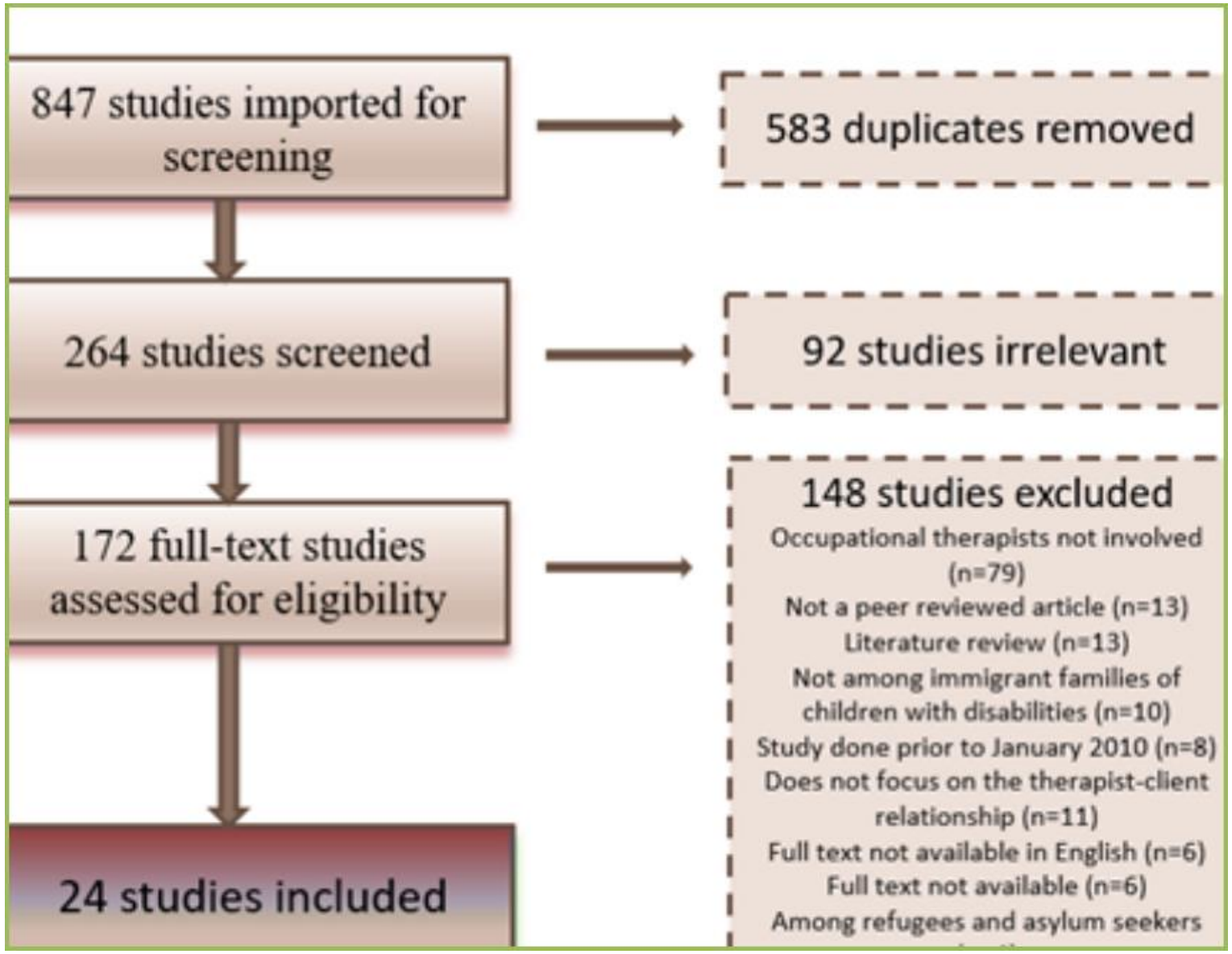
Involved occupational therapy in isolation or as part of a multidisciplinary rehabilitation team.

Peer-reviewed journal articles published or early online from January 2010 to February 2025.

Exclusion Criteria

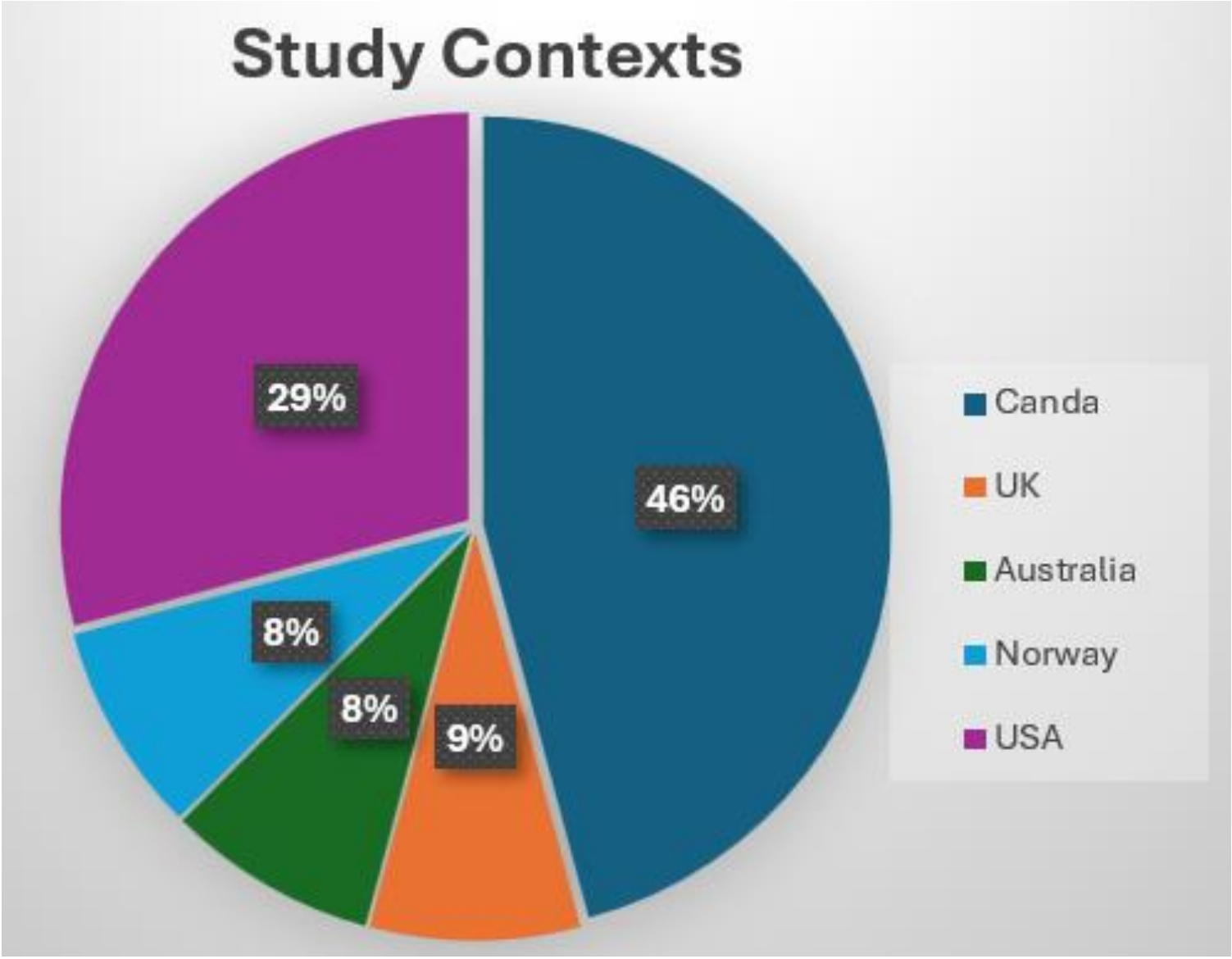
- Studies done with adults (individuals over 18 years)
- Studies done including refugees and asylum seekers as participants.
- Studies not involving therapist-client relationship.
- Studies focusing solely on outcome measures and tools used in occupational therapy.
- Studies published outside the identified time frame between January 2010 and February 2025.
- Any other scientific publications including chapters, thesis, books, etc.,
- Studies that were published in another language than English.
- Studies that were not freely available from the University database.

Prisma Diagram

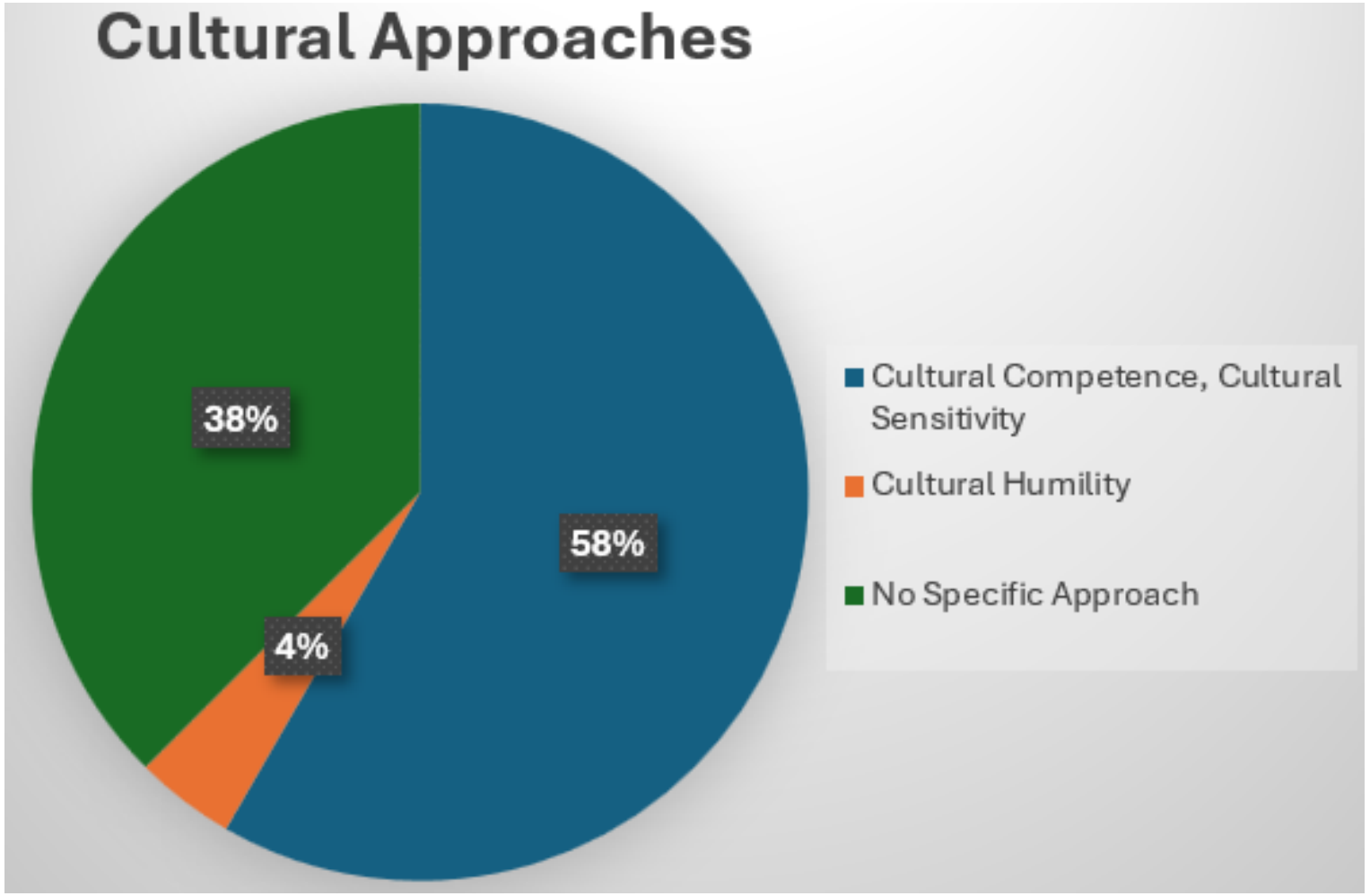


Collating, Summarizing and Reporting the Results

Description of Included Studies

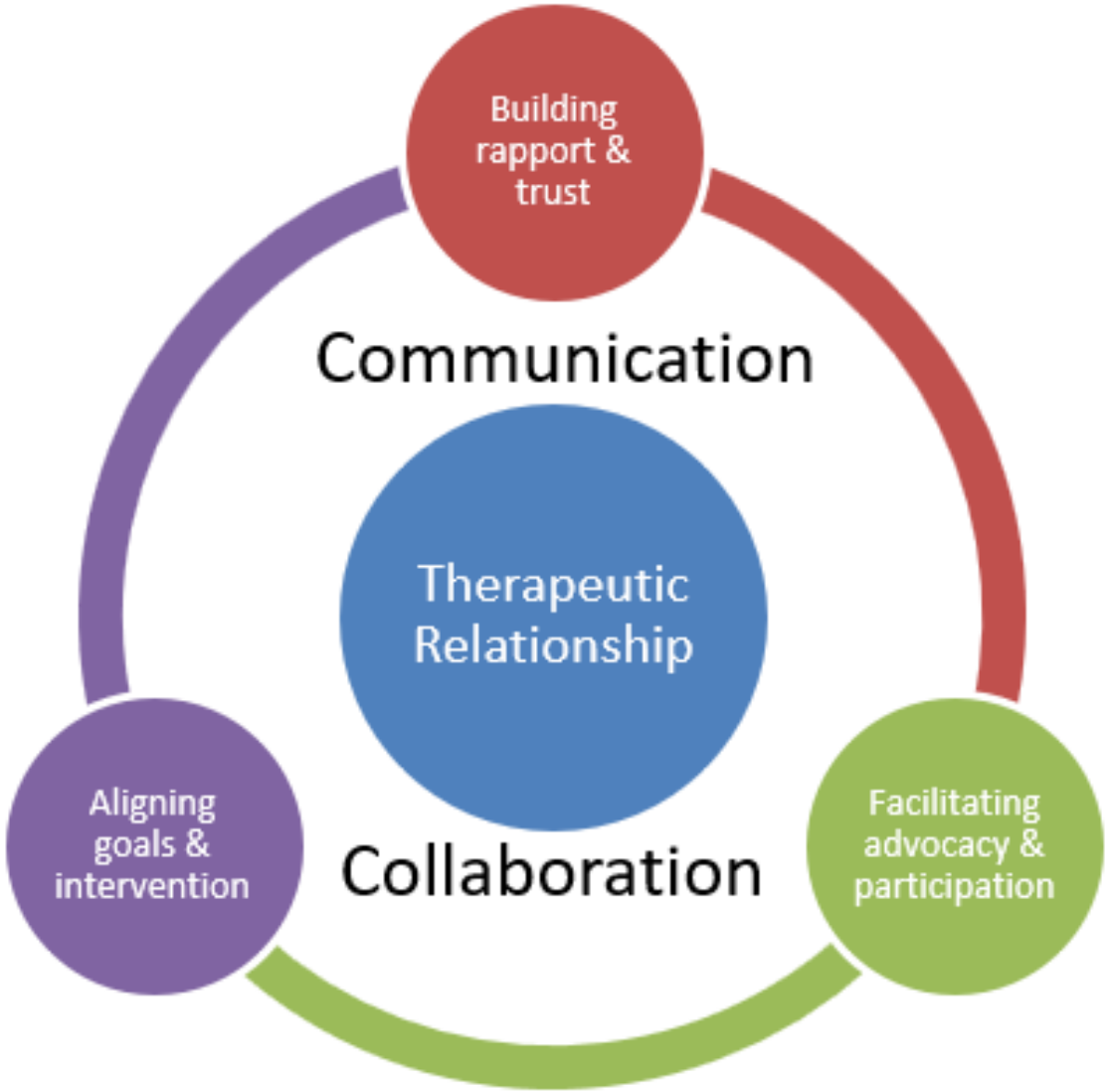


Utilisation of cultural approaches in facilitating the therapeutic relationship.



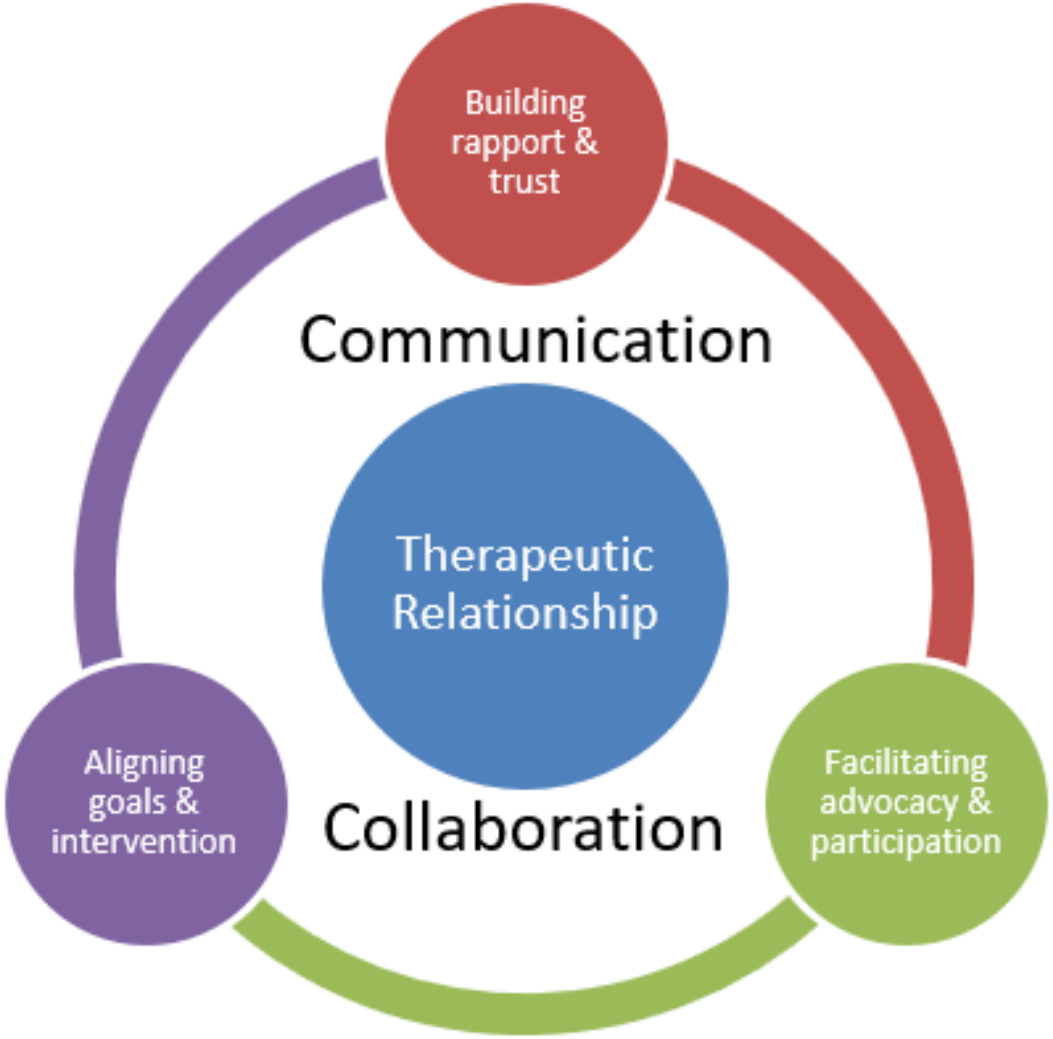
Overarching Theme

- Using communicative and collaborative strategies was identified to facilitate the therapeutic relationship.



Sub-themes

- Build rapport and trust between immigrant families, their child with disability child and their occupational therapist.
- Align goals and interventions to the values and resources of the immigrant families, and
- Facilitate advocacy and participation of immigrant families and their child with disability, in their community.



Build rapport and trust between immigrant families, their child with disability child and their occupational therapist.

1

Overcoming language barriers

2

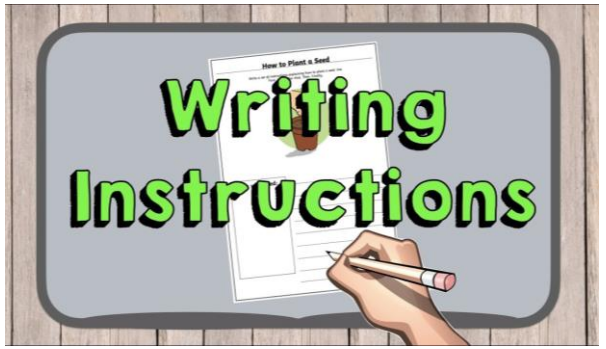
Understanding family's context

3

Using and being cultural brokers

Align goals and interventions to the values and resources of the immigrant families, and

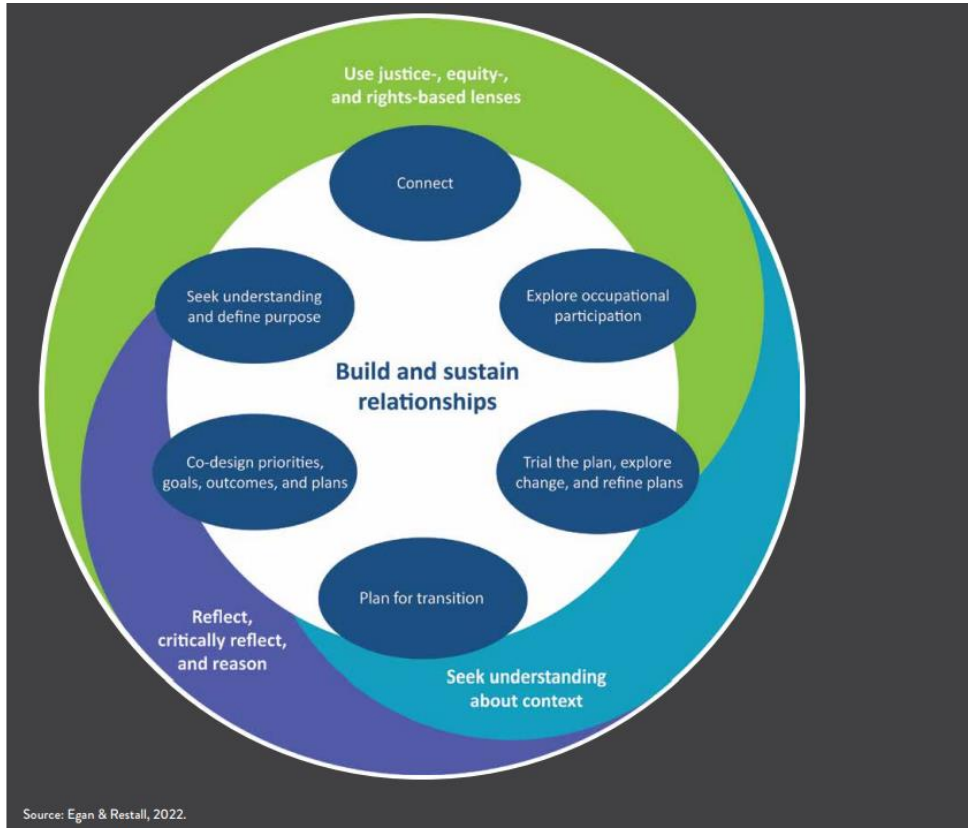
- Doing home visits
- Matching practitioners with similar backgrounds or formed teams with more ethinically diverse staff.
- Using tools to facilitate communication such as writing down instructions to take home, using emails rather than telephone calls to schedule appointments, using visual strategies such as pictures, photos, and drawings and using translation software (Brassart et al., 2017) enabled the implementation of the identified goals.

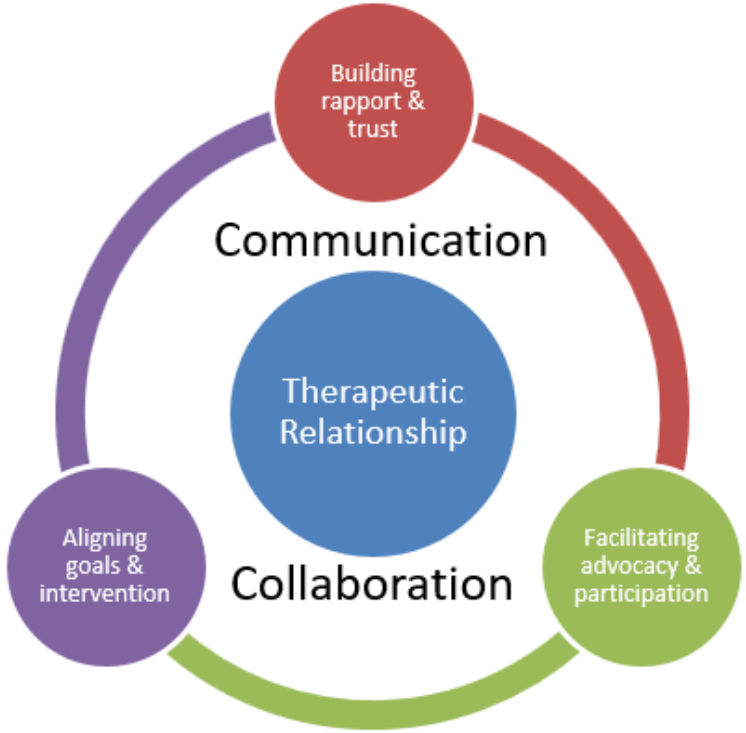


Facilitate advocacy and participation of immigrant families and their child with disability, in their community.

Facilitating	Developing	Involving	Linking
Facilitating constructive peer support among families.	Developing a directory of local community services and adapted services.	Involving local disability support worker to support children in participating in their preferred activities.	Linking health care services to community services

What does all this information mean ?





It is about the therapeutic relationship

- In practice, the practitioners and the families did not rely on any specific cultural approach but rather focused on how the therapeutic relationship could be built and sustained.

It is an extension of family centred care

- It facilitates the families’ and their children's ongoing occupational participation even when direct therapeutic support ends.

Illustrates the power imbalance in the therapeutic relationship

Gaps Identified for Future Research

- How social positioning impacts the therapeutic relationship between immigrant families of disabled children and occupational therapists.

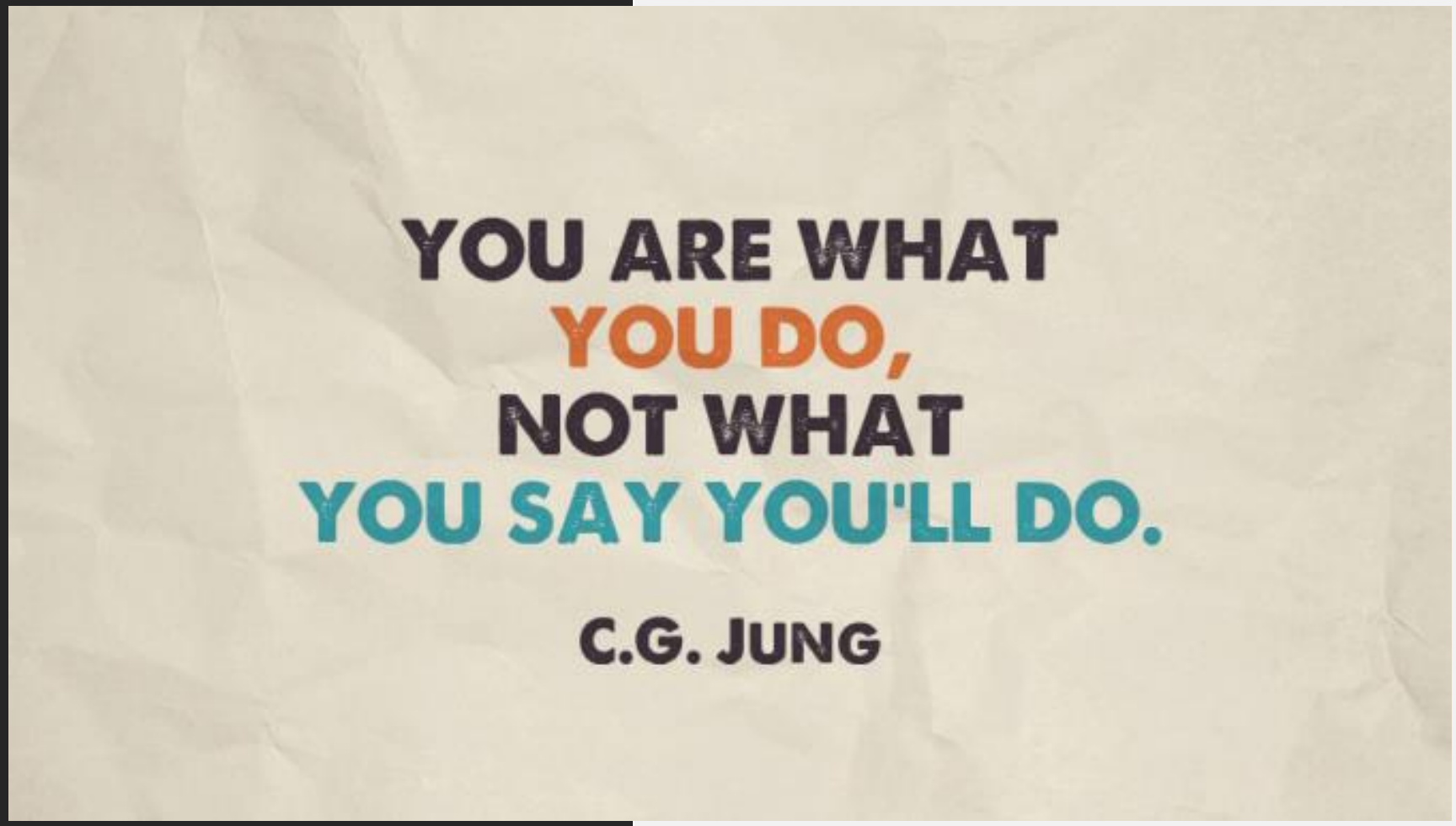
- Exploring the roles and responsibilities assumed by immigrant families of disabled children and occupational therapists while aligning goals and exploring the process of goal-setting is necessary.

Strengths of the study

- The study protocol was registered with the OSF registries
- Developed using the PRISMA checklist and the methodological framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005),
- Research team, which comprised experts from the field of occupational therapy, including two immigrant researchers.

Limitations

- Limitations of this review included eliminating studies not published in English potentially excluding articles published in the Global South.
- Also, the scoping review methodology did not require critically appraising the rigour of the included studies.



Conclusion

The therapeutic relationship is facilitated through strategies adopted by occupational therapists and immigrant families of disabled children. Often these strategies do not align specifically with any of the cultural approaches, thereby making it difficult to define the use of cultural approaches in facilitating therapeutic relationships.

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Abstract

Background. Cultural approaches are used to acknowledge the diversity and the social positioning individuals bring into the therapeutic relationship. **Purpose.** This scoping review describes the utilization of cultural approaches to build and sustain therapeutic relationships between immigrant families of disabled children and occupational therapists. **Method.** This scoping review was based on the methodological framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley. Six databases were searched, and 24 articles published between 2010 and 2025 were included. **Results.** Cultural competence, cultural sensitivity and cultural humility were the cultural approaches mentioned in 15 studies, with nine not mentioning a specific cultural approach to facilitate the therapeutic relationship. All the studies outlined strategies to facilitate the relationship. Various culturally appropriate communicative and collaborative strategies were used to (i) establish rapport and trust (ii) align goals and intervention and (iii) facilitate advocacy and participation. These strategies were independently described and were not specific to any approach. **Conclusion.** Facilitating the therapeutic relationship with immigrant families of disabled children does not align specifically with any of the cultural approaches within occupational therapy. This reinforces the need to focus not on the cultural approaches, but on refining the strategies required to facilitate the therapeutic relationship.

Keywords: Cultural diversity; Disabled persons; Immigrants; Immigré/-ée; Occupational therapist; Thérapie occupationnelle; diversité; personnes handicapées.

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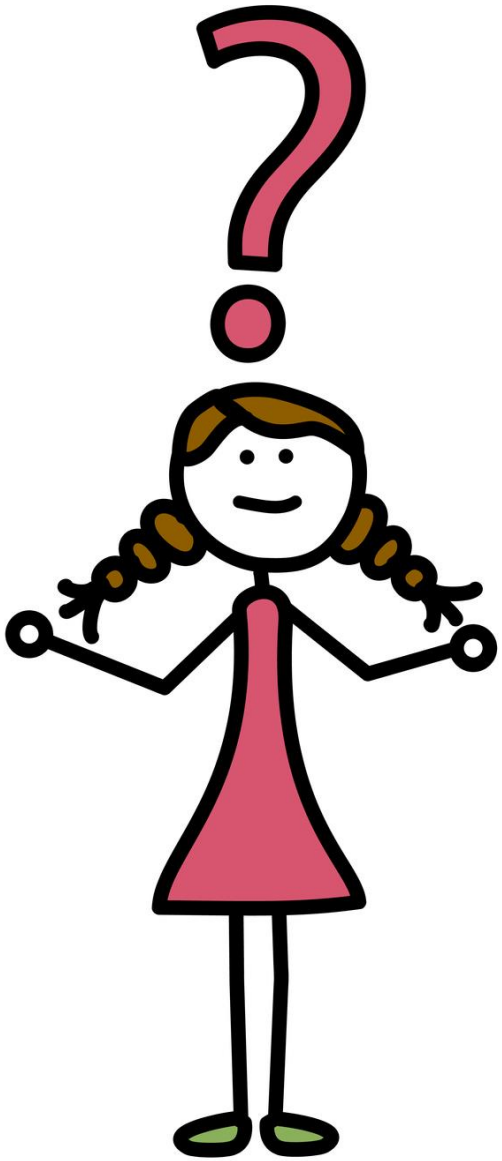

thank you