

## **Novice therapists in a developing context: Extending the reach of hand rehabilitation**

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**Introduction:** The need for hand rehabilitation in some parts of the world extends beyond the impact of specialised hand therapists.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to establish what hand rehabilitation services novice occupational therapists in South Africa were providing; the supports and barriers of such services; and, therapists' perceptions of being equipped for hand rehabilitation.

**Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted and an online questionnaire was sent to all occupational therapists in their first year of practice (n=240). Data were analysed with Stata 12 and IBM SPSS Statistics, version 21.0. Responses to open ended questions were postcoded.

**Results:** A 43.3% response rate was obtained. Participants (n=104) treated an average of 20 clients requiring hand rehabilitation per month often without adequate equipment (73%) and without supervision from an experienced colleague (67%). Central nervous system (91%), bone and joint (73%) and arthritic conditions (73%) were treated most frequently. Treatment modalities used most regularly included home programs (84%), manual therapy (82%), exercise (81%), activity as a means/end (80%) and activities of daily living training (79%). Most participants felt confident (64%) and competent (79%) in hand rehabilitation.

**Conclusion:** Participants were undertaking hand rehabilitation that in other contexts is considered to require specialised skills. To ensure quality rehabilitation, supervision and mentoring of novice therapists and appropriate professional development opportunities are required.