

PP 06: Oral feeding difficulties among children with cerebral palsy, aged between birth to 5 years: special challenges faced by primary caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected health service delivery, globally. Cerebral Palsy (CP) can be defined as a group of disorders affecting movements of limbs, muscles, hearing, vision and posture. Feeding and swallowing difficulties or oropharyngeal dysphagia commonly occurs in children with cerebral palsy. Use of telecommunication technologies are able to support long distance clinical health care.

Objectives: To describe the perceived positive and negative experiences/ suggestions for getting speech and language therapy support of primary caregivers in managing oral feeding difficulties in children with cerebral palsy aged between birth to 5 years at a clinical setting during the COVID- 19 pandemic in Sri Lanka.

Method: A qualitative study using a phenomenological approach in one clinical setting in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. Using a purposive sampling method, data was collected through semi structured tele- interview sessions by interviewing 12 participants. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results: Several themes emerged from the data as a result of qualitative analysis: challenges in accessing food, challenges in accessing medication, special challenges due to COVID-19 and transition of service delivery model. There are problems in accessing telehealth because of poor connectivity, technical issues and also the lack of awareness about the appointment. The knowledge about technology poorer than the other economically advanced countries.

Conclusion: Parents across the country have different levels of access to technology and telehealth may not be accessible to all. However, the alternative methods of consultation by using a smart phone (Zoom, WhatsApp, Imo) is safer than the face-to-face consultations during the pandemic.

Keywords: Cerebral palsy, telecommunication, feeding difficulty, dysphagia, parents, telehealth