

# Ethical Issues in School-Based Occupational Therapy: Strategies from Canadian Practitioners

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# Background



School-based OTs frequently face ethical challenges



These challenges affect students, therapists, and school teams



Limited guidance in existing literature

(Renaud et al., 2024)

# Rationale

Ethical issues occur at micro, meso, and macro levels

Lack of documented solutions

Need for practice-informed strategies

# Objectives

- ❑ Describe the solutions used or considered by Quebec, Canada, school-based occupational therapists to address the ethical issues encountered in their practice.

# Methodology

Individual semi-structured interviews

19 school-based OTs in Quebec

Qualitative, inductive design



Giorgi's phenomenological analysis steps

(<sup>1</sup>Giorgi, 1997)

# Results

31 themes identified

20 distinct solutions (individualistic)

11 potentials solutions (structural)

# Results: Individualistic solutions used to address ethical issues emerging from the micro environment

## Collaboration with school teams

- Building a strong alliance
- Maintaining professional relationships
- Communicating clearly
- Making realistic recommendations
- Partnering with a member of the school team

## Management of restraints and seclusion

- Raising awareness of best practices
- Forming a monitoring committee
- Establishing formal guidelines

## Compliance with professional standards

- Communicating clearly professional obligations and boundaries
- Obtaining free, informed and ongoing parental consent
- Using a consent form

## Accessibility of occupational therapy services

- Implementing alternative service delivery models
- Providing training to school teams
- Establishing clear priority criteria
- Providing services to committed school team members

# Results: Individualistic solutions used to address ethical issues emerging from the meso environment

## Cultural clash between healthcare and education

- Implementing gradual changes

## School inclusion of students with disabilities

- Advocating for the rights and needs of these students

## Lack of understanding and recognition of occupational therapy

- Raising awareness of the occupational therapist's role

# Results: Individualistic solutions used to address ethical issues emerging from the macro environment

## Lack of resources

- Conducting an annual review of occupational therapy services

## Lack of intersectoral collaboration

- Organizing intersectoral meetings

# Results: Potential structural solutions used to address ethical issues

## Micro-environment

- Pursuing continuing education
- Utilizing ethics tools or models
- Consulting professional association

## Meso-environment

- Forming an institutional ethics committee
- Dedicating certain meetings to ethics
- Having an institutional approach to ethics
- Having managers who are occupational therapists
- Training newly hired occupational therapists

## Macro-environment

- Advocating for occupational therapy to be recognized as a mandatory complementary service in schools
- Aligning professional standards with school-based practice
- Introducing occupational therapy to future teachers at the university level

# Discussion

Evidence-based solutions in practice

Need for stronger professional preparation

Call for institutional and systemic support

## Conclusion

- Unique overview of current and emerging solutions
- Need to better document ethical reasoning process to deepen understanding of ethical decision making

# References

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Thanks!

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