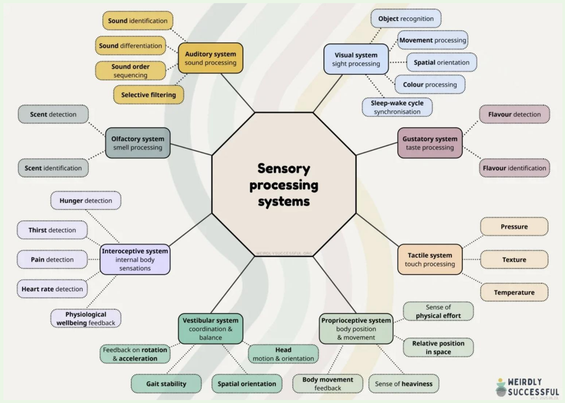
Parent-Perceived Barriers and Facilitators to Accessing Public Libraries for Children with Sensory Processing Differences

Amelia Morrison OTS, Hailee McCoy OTS, Haylee Salter OTS & Lauren Fysh OTD, MS, OTR/L

Husson University School of Occupational Therapy

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine parent-perceived barriers to accessing public libraries for children with sensory processing differences, as well as to identify factors that facilitate participation and supports that may promote more inclusive engagement. Specifically, this study explored parent perceptions of (1) barriers to accessing public libraries, (2) factors that support or facilitate participation in these settings, and (3) supports that could increase participation in library environments and programs.



Background Information

Sensory processing differences can significantly impact children's ability to regulate, attend, and participate in daily activities. These challenges may present across multiple sensory domains and influence emotional regulation, behavior, and social participation. Current literature supports the use of targeted, evidence-based sensory interventions to promote regulation and engagement. Community settings play an important role in promoting inclusion. Libraries, in particular, have been identified as valuable environments for supporting both participation and literacy development.

Methodology

This IRB-approved study utilized a qualitative descriptive design to explore parent-perceived barriers to accessing public libraries for children with sensory processing differences. A non-probability convenience sample of eight caregivers was recruited through social media and community-based networks. Participants completed an anonymous online survey consisting of nine open-ended questions, which took approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. Questions addressed experiences in public spaces, current strategies and supports, barriers and facilitators, and future needs. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to participation barriers.

Survey Themes

Theme	Subtheme
Sensory Overwhelm Limits Participation	• Noise and crowding • Visual overstimulation (lighting, movement) • Difficulty regulating sensory input
Participation Depends on Environmental Supports	• Need for quiet or low-stimulation spaces • Access to movement or sensory tools • Flexible expectations and routines
Unpredictable Environments Create Barriers to Engagement	• Lack of structure or routine • Busy or chaotic layouts • Difficulty navigating spaces
Safety Concerns Shape Participation Decisions	• Elopement or wandering • Difficulty remaining seated or with caregiver • Safety awareness challenges
Inclusive Supports Increase Community Access	• Increased willingness to attend • Positive prior experiences with supports • Desire for inclusive programming

Representative Quotes

"He needs quiet spaces to remain calm."

"We would go more if there were special programs."

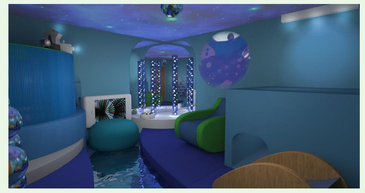
"He needs movement and space to regulate."

"He appears to be disrupting the quiet nature of the library."

"Libraries with smaller spaces are easier to manage."

"It would be nice if staff were familiar with neurodivergent children."





Clinical Bottom Line

Children with sensory processing differences may experience barriers to participation in library settings due to overstimulation, unpredictability, and safety concerns. Participation improves when environments include sensory-friendly supports, predictable structure, and opportunities for regulation. Libraries can enhance accessibility through simple environmental adaptations and inclusive programming, with occupational therapy supporting these efforts.

Contact

Lauren Fysh, OTD, MS, OTR/L
School of Occupational Therapy
On College Circle, Bangor, ME 04401
1 (207) 941-7045

References