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The occupational difficulties and perceptions regarding support and intervention of adolescents with learning difficulties (LD) and their parents in South Africa

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Introduction: Occupational therapy intervention programs for adolescents with learning difficulties (LD) should focus on their specific occupational difficulties to be occupation-based. Adolescents' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of support and various current intervention addressing occupational difficulties are also valuable in designing intervention programs that are acceptable and meet their occupational needs.

Objectives: To describe the perceptions of adolescents with LD and their parents regarding the adolescents' difficulties with current occupations as well as the support and intervention that have been effective in improving occupational performance thus far.

Method: A descriptive, explorative, qualitative study design was utilised as part of a broader study. 18 Adolescents aged 13 – 21 years with LD and 9 parents were interviewed or included in a focus group. A card sort of relevant occupations was utilised as part of the interview or focus group process. Data was inductively coded and analysed.

Results: Three categories of occupational difficulties as well as three categories of support and intervention were identified. Occupational difficulties included developmental difficulties, occupational difficulties and intervention-related difficulties. Reported effective support and intervention entailed support and mentoring, direct interventions and the promotion of self-determination.

Conclusion: Adolescents with LD and their parents identified specific occupational difficulties and held a variety of perceptions regarding support and intervention that need to be taken into consideration when planning occupational therapy intervention for this population. Such perceptions included views on the effectiveness of medication and skills-based interventions as well as the importance of social and contextual support for adolescents with LD.