

OSOT RESEARCH FUND • STRATEGIC PRIORITIES GRANT
SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

TITLE: Ethical Tensions in Transitioning to Tiered Models of School-Based Occupational Therapy Practice in Ontario

THANK YOU to OSOT for the opportunity to conduct this research titled *Ethical Tensions in Transitioning to Tiered Models of School-Based Occupational Therapy (SBOT) Practice in Ontario*. The objectives of this research project were to: (a) advance knowledge and understanding regarding ethical tensions experienced by school-based occupational therapists (OT) in transitioning to tiered models of SBOT, and (b) identify priority areas for resource development to support ethical decision-making. The research question was *What are the perceived ethical tensions and practice support needs of occupational therapists in transitioning to tiered models of service delivery in SBOT?* A qualitative research study was conducted that included 11 self-nominated OTs who volunteered to participate. All OTs were registered in Ontario and working in a SBOT context that is currently transitioning or has transitioned to a tiered model. Each participant completed one in-depth interview. Participants were also invited to attend a focus group where preliminary results were shared for input. Nine participants attended the focus group.

Findings indicated that OTs experienced many ethical tensions. Ethical tensions were grouped into five inter-related areas. First, there was a general sense that occupational therapists were not actually able to deliver the tiered model for many reasons including resource limitations, limited capacity in systems, and knowledge gaps, which created ethical tensions (fidelity). This issue led to a related ethical tension where occupational therapist felt that they were not being completely transparent about service delivery (i.e., saying they were implementing tiered models but not doing so completely) (veracity). Another ethical tension related to OTs not being able to independently manage their own caseload (professional autonomy). Instead, OTs noted that schedules and treatment expectations were being mandated, which is not entirely consistent with a tiered model approach. There were ethical tensions noted related to communication in schools because school staff can share information more freely than occupational therapists (confidentiality). Finally, there were concerns related to how resources were being allocated to students and schools because some students were still being offered services under the traditional one-on-one pull-out model of SBOT (justice). Findings indicate that OTs would like additional resources and supports to implement tiered models of SBOT, including mentoring opportunities, resources (especially related to tier #1 services), and implementation guidance for managers and school staff.

The research team has conducted several presentations at conferences etc. to share research findings. In addition, a manuscript is currently being finalized for publication, which will provide a more detailed overview of the research. Finally, there is a subsequent research project in partnership with OSOT that has been informed by the findings outlined in this report, aimed at cultivating skills and resources for OTs in SBOT, and other planned activities aimed at supporting the delivery of tiered models in SBOT.