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## Sri Lankan speech therapists during COVID-19: Knowledge on safety practices, service delivery and difficulties

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COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted the speech and language therapy services in Sri Lanka. With the rapid spread of the virus, the responsibilities of the speech and language therapists' (SLTs) included to reduce the risk of the virus transmission while continuing the services. The aim of the study was to describe knowledge on the safety practices and service delivery during COVID-19 among SLTs in Sri Lanka. A cross-sectional descriptive study was followed inviting SLTs who are registered in the Government Speech & Language Pathologists' Union, Sri Lankan Association of Speech & Language Pathologists, and recent graduates from the Speech and Hearing Sciences programme specializing in speech therapy. An online questionnaire was distributed among participants. All the data were analysed with descriptive statistics using Microsoft Excel 2013. A total of 90 SLTs participated with a response rate of 69%. Majority of participants were female (86%), below 30 years of age (58%), and were having work experience below 10 years (88%). The study indicated that 79% of speech therapists had awareness and adequate knowledge on safety practices. Over 85% of participants were following published guidelines by local and international associations. Reduction in routine caseload, closure of usual place of work (e.g. school, clinic), and immediate change to use remote method of service delivery (e.g. remote delivery, telepractice) were the reported difficulties faced by the SLTs during service delivery. However, 70% of SLTs have started implementing telepractice to their practice during the pandemic. While smartphone was commonly used device for telepractice (37%), voice-over Internet-Protocol apps such as WhatsApp, and Viber were most convenient mode (34%). Lack of cooperation of patients toward the telepractice, lack of patients' knowledge to access devices, and network coverage issues were the most prominent reasons for not implementing telepractice. Nevertheless, 41% of participants indicated that telepractice is an effective method to deliver speech therapy.

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