



10th International Conference on Adolescents and Adults with FASD

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Australian Occupational Therapists' awareness, knowledge and practice of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder

Presented by: Catherine Hilly

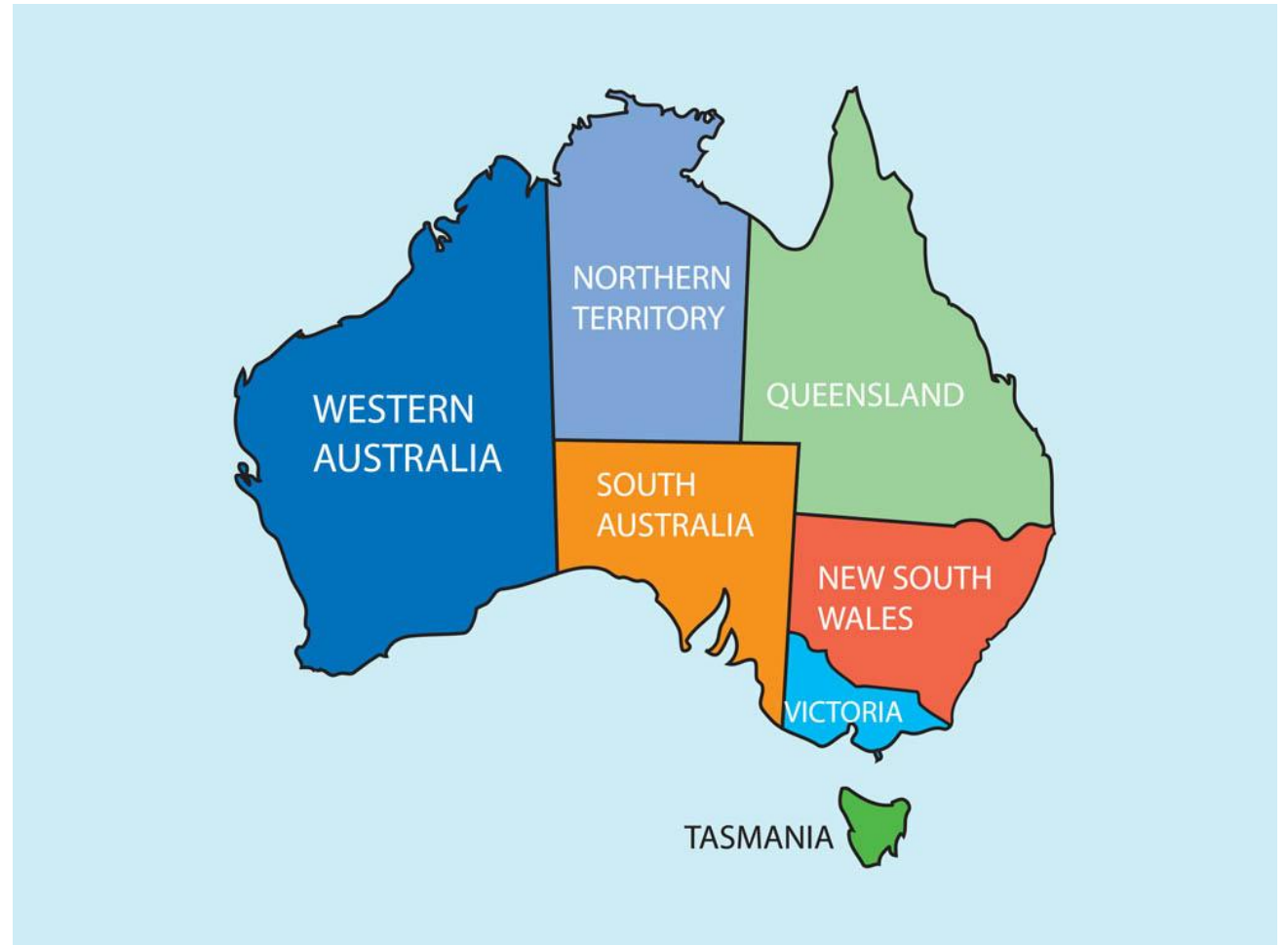
Co-authors: Allyson Houghton, Deneal Williamson, Dr Laine Chilman, Dr Asmita
Mudholkar, Dr Daniel Meloncelli



Occupational therapy promotes health and wellbeing by supporting participation in meaningful occupations that people, need, or are expected to do (WFOT, 2025)

Australian Context

1. FASD prevalence 3.64% (Tsang et al. 2024)
2. National FASD strategic plan (2018-2028)
3. National Disability Insurance Scheme
4. Medicare Complex Neurodevelopmental Conditions



Research Aims

Study 1

Explore Australian occupational therapists' perceived **awareness, knowledge, and practices** used to support individuals with FASD, suspected FASD and their families.

Study 2

- **Understand** Australian occupational therapists' **current practices** when working with children and adolescents with FASD and their families.
- **Identify** knowledge, training and support **gaps** occupational therapists identify in their practice.

Definitions

Awareness

- Self-awareness of the impact of PAE leading to FASD
- The value of FASD knowledge in practice
- The ability and confidence to recognise and support individuals with FASD

Knowledge

- Aetiology of FASD
- Understanding FASD diagnostic criteria
- Recognising challenges associated with FASD
- Knowing how to support individuals with FASD

Practice

Actions occupational therapists take to:

- Support people with FASD and their families.

Methods

Study 1

- Mixed methods **survey**
- Any occupational therapist in practising in Australia
- Statistic analysis

Study 2

- Semi-structured **in-depth interviews** with experienced Australian practising occupational therapists who worked with children and adolescents with FASD
- Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

Results: Study 1

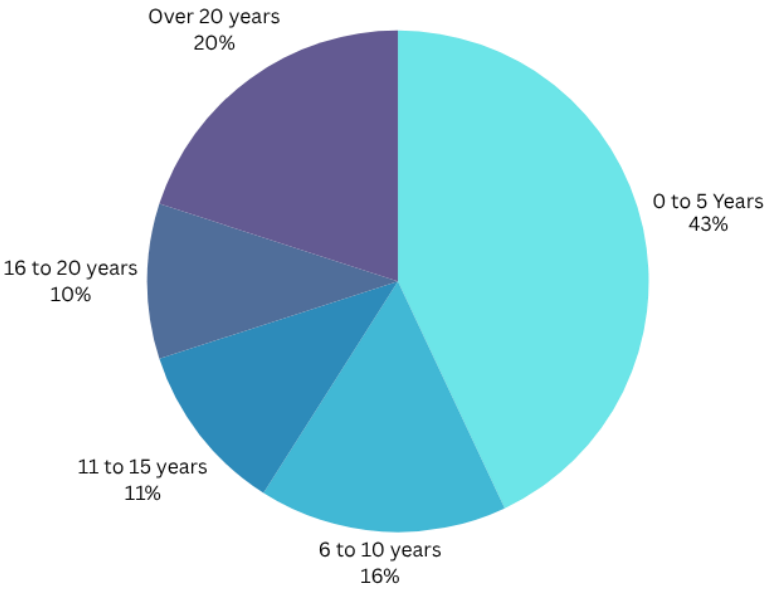


Inclusion criteria: Australian based occupational therapists registered with AHPRA

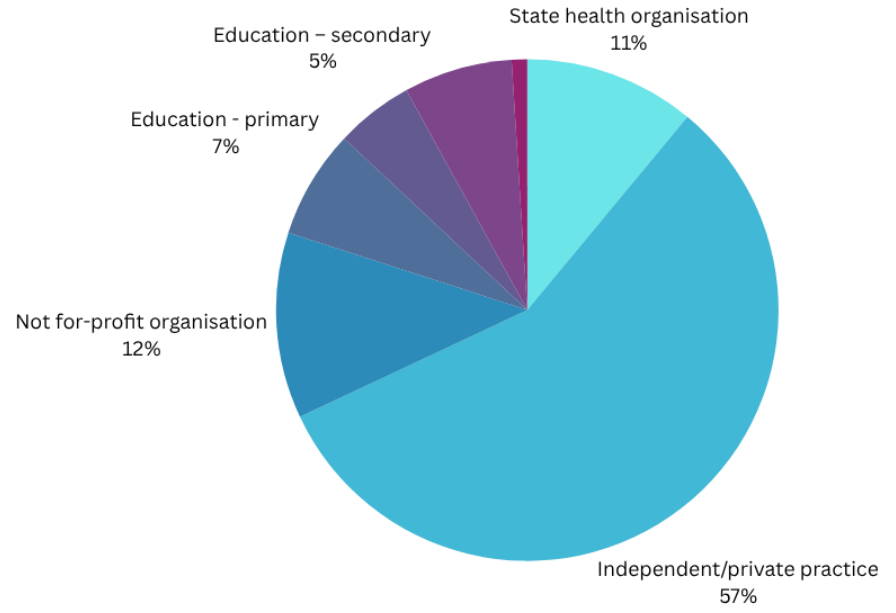
- 105 survey responses, n= 99 final analysis
- Required n= 96 for powered sample

Study 1: Demographics

How long have you been practising occupational therapy?

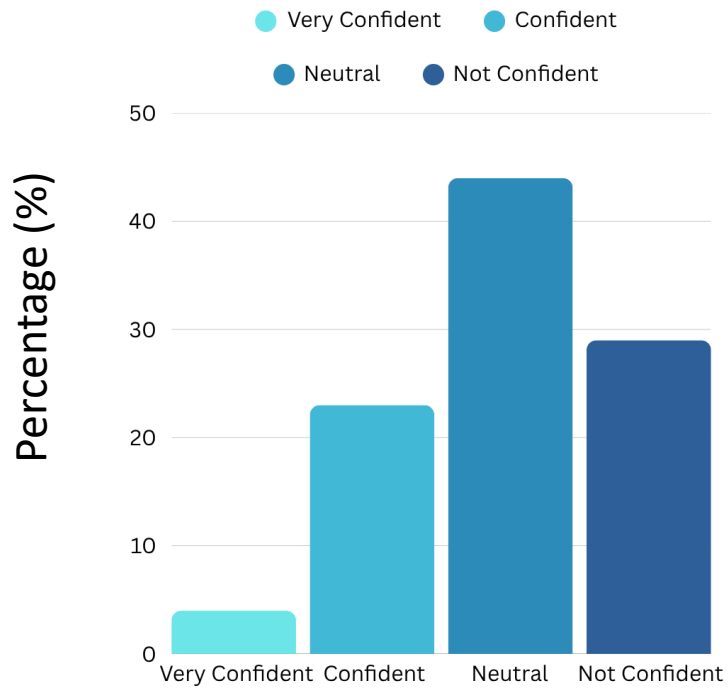


What is your current workplace context?

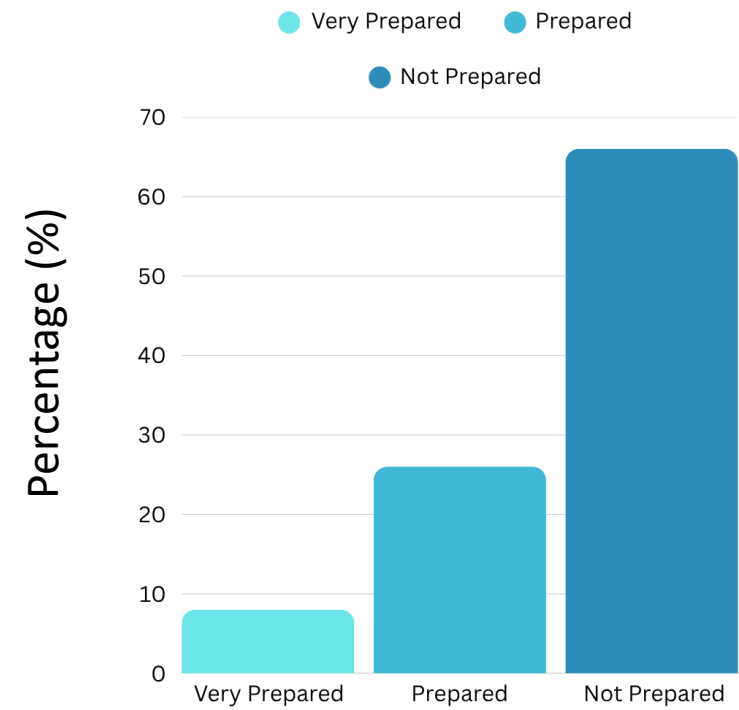


Awareness

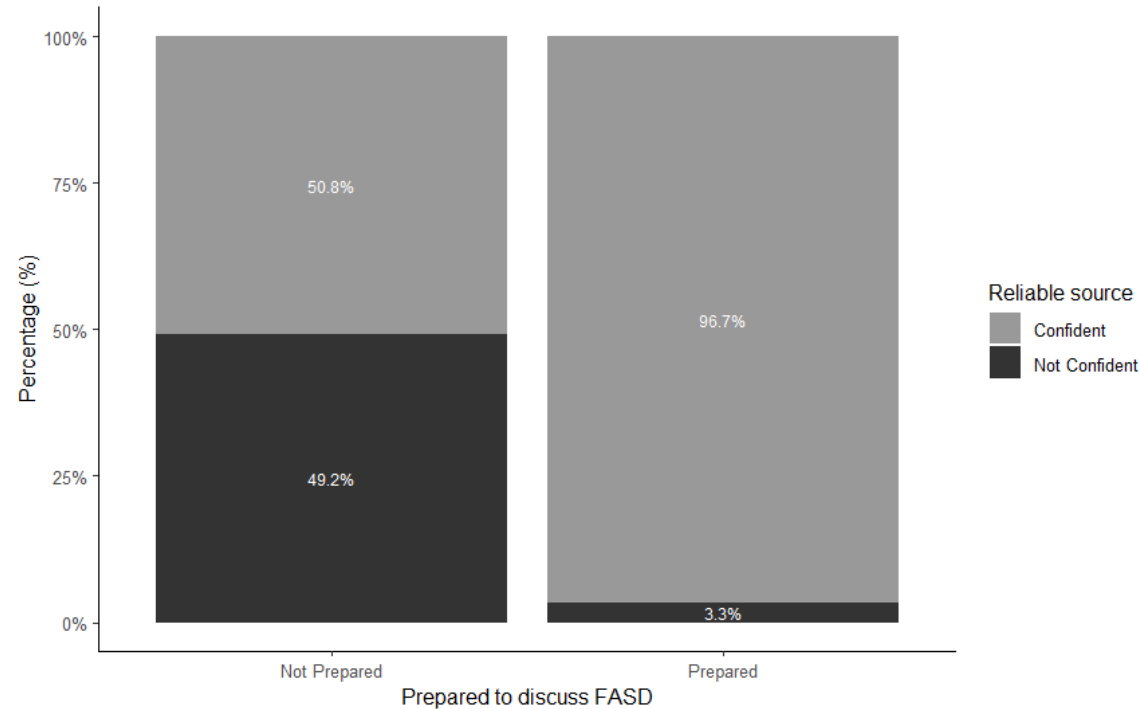
27% felt confident to recognise FASD



66% didn't feel prepared to discuss need for referral



Knowledge

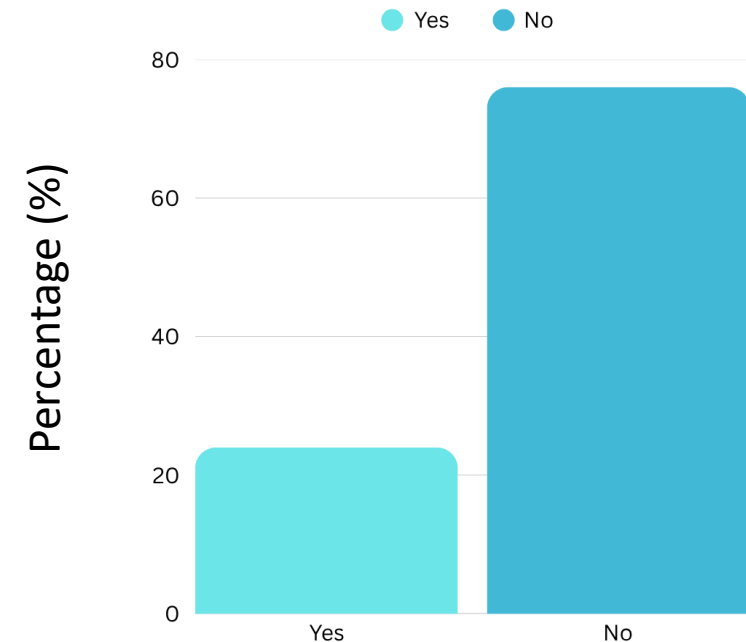
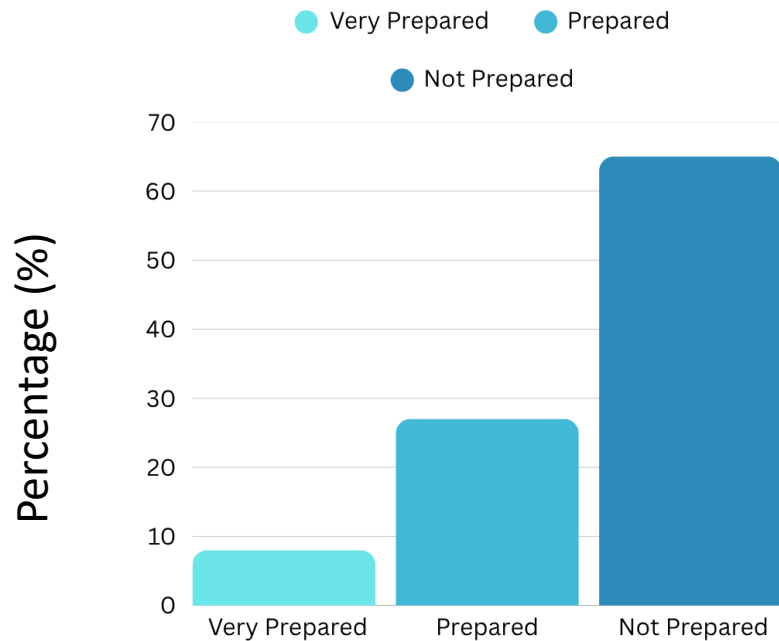


Confidence in reliable evidence based research (EBR) = Preparedness to discuss the need to refer for potential FASD diagnosis ($\chi^2 (1, N = 91) = 18.819, p < .001$)

Practice

35% felt prepared to discuss need for referral

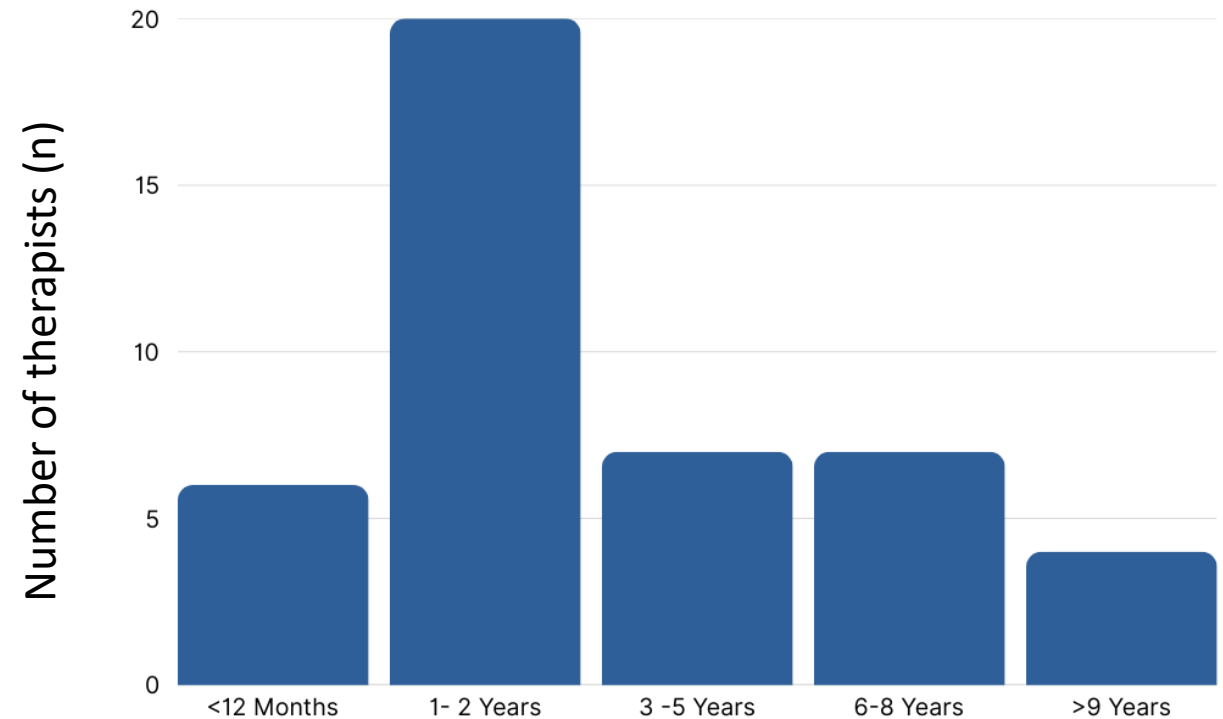
24% have referred to a GP to screening



Accessed the diagnostic guide = More prepared to discuss need for referral
($X^2 (1, N = 85) = 12.883, p < .001$)

Practice

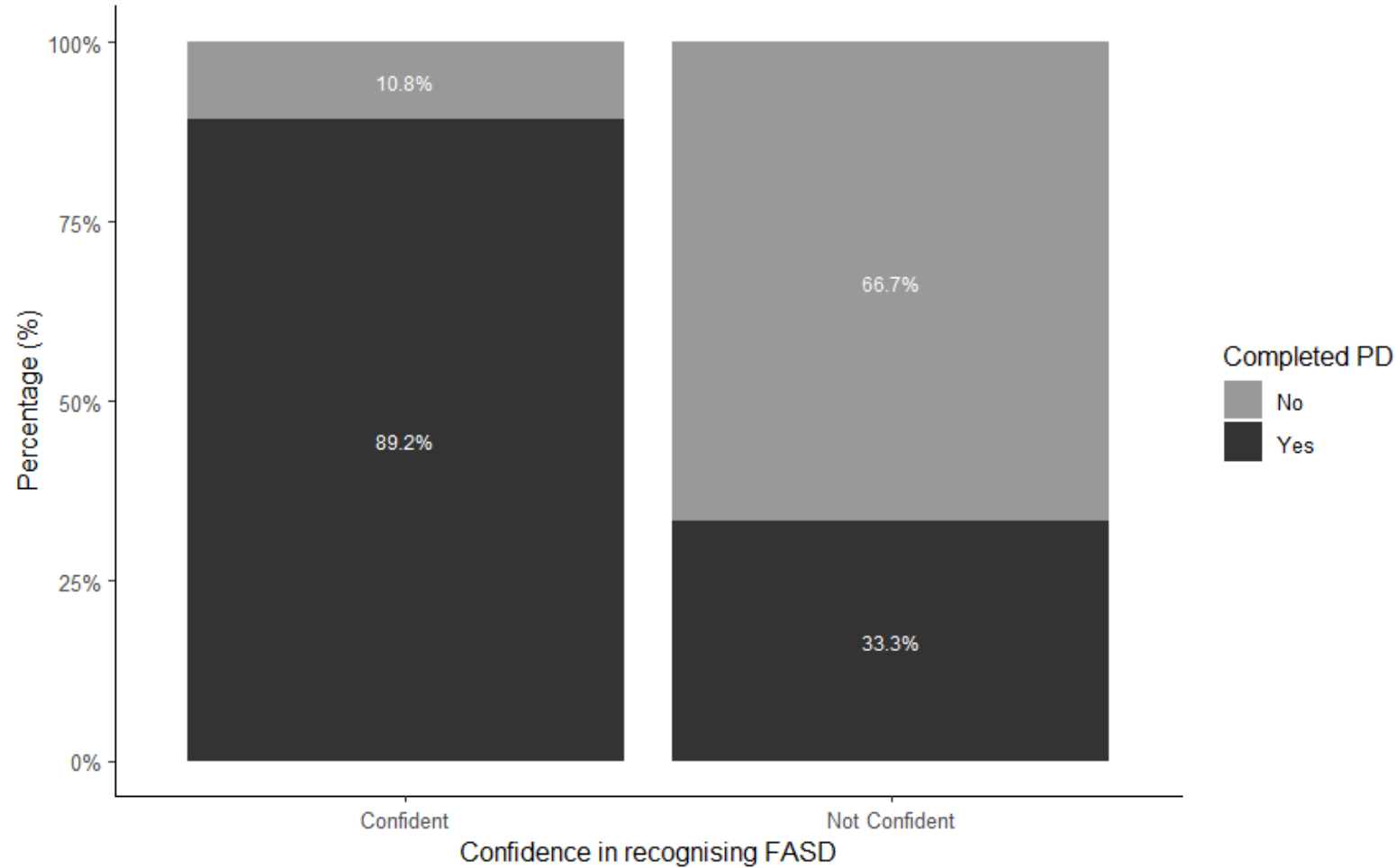
66% of respondents had supported an individual with FASD



FASD had been a part of most respondents' (44%) caseload for 1-2 years

Professional development

Builds FASD Knowledge and Awareness



Completing professional development = Confidence in recognising FASD

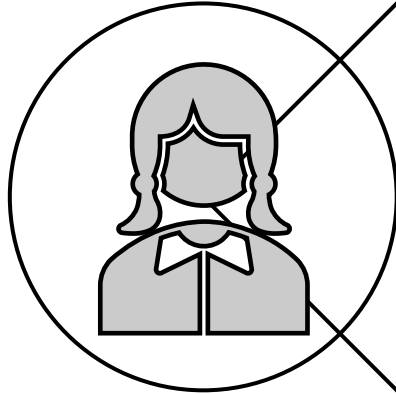
($\chi^2 (1, N = 89) = 28.578, p < .001$)

Results Study 2



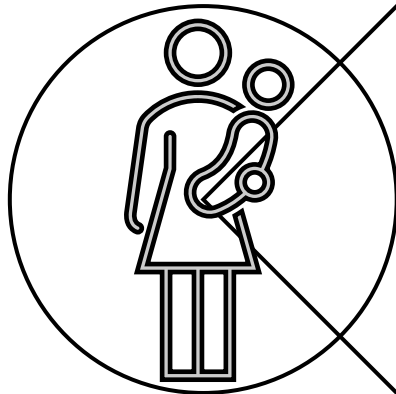
- n=7
- Graduated between 2000 and 2023 (interviews conducted July-Sept 2025)
- From Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia
- All female
- Six themes generated

Theme 3 - “It's part of the picture”; FASD knowledge informing clinical reasoning



“I spend a lot of time... interviewing parents, carers, support workers... I'll read all the reports, I'll use the mapping tool...
FASD is a diffuse brain injury, that has to inform a broader range of supports and interventions and a different approach.”

Sarah

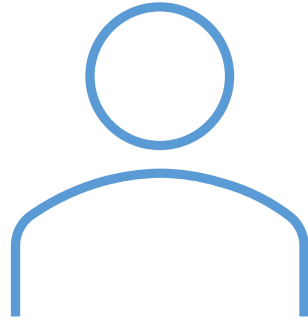


“Having that diagnosis in the back of my mind... **it's part of the picture”**

Daisy

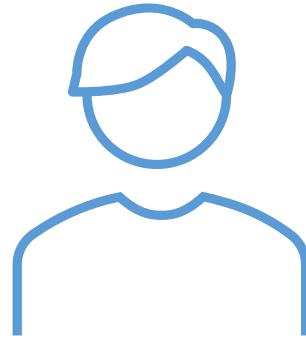
Theme 5 - "I don't have one for FASD"; Advocating for diagnosis specific resources, training and knowledge for occupational therapists

August



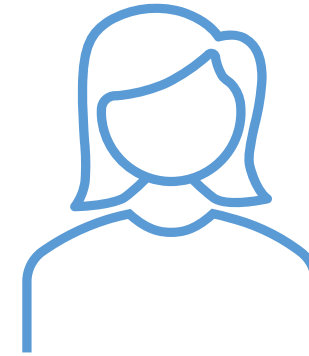
"You shouldn't take on an FASD specific client if you don't have any training."

Emily



"It **needs** to be in the curriculum."

Amanda



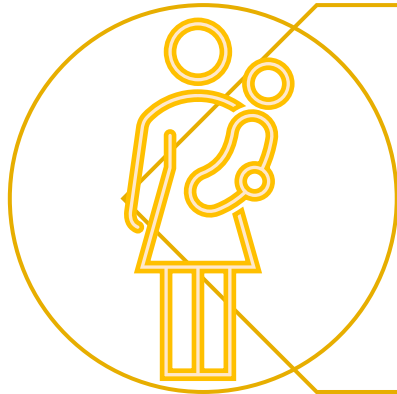
"If there was like a **systematic review of what the best OT interventions are.**"

Theme 6 - “Impostor syndrome is real”; Occupational therapists perceived confidence



“I'd probably put myself at a 7 ½. or a 7, maybe, maybe at 8 sometimes... sometimes it's only a two... because I think **what else is out there that could help me bridge this gap?**”

Sarah



“I think I'm confident in the fact that I know what I'm doing... but still nervous with the work.”

August

Discussion

Limited confidence
recognising FASD

Engaging in PD
supports
confidence and
builds knowledge

Relationships and
collaboration
matters

A blended
approach to
practice

Occupational
therapy FASD
specific training and
research needed

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths:

- First known Australian research surveying and interviewing Occupational Therapists' working with children and adolescents with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and their families

Limitations:

- Survey did not ask about percentage of caseloads involved clients with FASD or about FASD specific knowledge similar in other studies
- Interviews had a gender bias and limited generalisation

Future Research

- **Better understand occupational therapists' confidence** when working with individuals with FASD and their families
- Development of **FASD and occupational therapy specific frameworks**
- **Evidence-based interventions and strategies** when working with individuals with FASD and their families

Thank you for your time
Comments and questions



Contact: Catherine Hilly

catherine.hilly@myacu.edu.au

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3586-2458>

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