

Background/Rationale

- Sacred Heart University sends students and faculty to Antigua, Guatemala to provide medical services to local community members through Iglesia Del Camino (IDC), a local church (Iglesia Del Camino, 2025) and Beeline, a wheelchair clinic that provides medical equipment to children with disabilities (BeeLine Wheelchairs, 2025).
- A needs assessment conducted by an OT faculty member while in Antigua, Guatemala in 2024 revealed that parents who have children with disabilities face challenges with their mental health.
- Four PY II OT student reserachers conducted a literature review to gather information about the mental health services offered in Antigua, Guatemala and found minimal services exist.

Stakeholders: Sacred Heart University, Beeline
Wheelchair Clinic, and Iglesia Del Camino

OUR "WHY": We wanted to understand the challenges that caregivers of children with disabilities face and lay the foundation for a program that can be used to improve their mental health.

Methods

- An OT faculty advisor conducted two virtual semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from IDC that we attended.
- Two semi-structured interviews with Iglesia del Camino staff were completed Summer 2025.
- Both interviewers were coded on Word using NVivo and descriptive coding by all four of the group members.
- The themes that emerged from the coding were discussed and analyzed.

Results

- Stakeholder interview content, and student field notes, indicated Antigua Guatemalan parents and caregivers of children living with disabilities do not have many mental health resources to access, other than religion. There are cultural stigmas and resulting shame surrounding children living with disabilities.
- The lack of resources and low socioeconomic status contribute to the distress that caregivers experience, creating challenges for families (Saetermoe, et al., 2004).



Figure 1. The qualitative analysis is a pictorial representation of the themes we found from descriptive and NVivo coding of both interviewers.



Discussion

- Occupational therapy mental health supports, group format and/or support group format, may be provided to caregivers and/or parents who attend Beeline Wheelchair Clinic October 2026.
- Limitations included virtual interviews, spotty Wi-Fi, slight language barrier, and scheduling challenges.
- The program will include therapy groups that will be focused on measuring the impact of caregiver stress, coping mechanisms, and perceived support (Saetermoe, et al., 2004).
- Future mission trips will continue to assess the need for mental health supports for parents and/or caregivers of children living with disabilities, working with Beeline Wheelchair Clinic, and potentially the Brillo del Sol school.



References



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