

Between Beliefs and Practice: Pediatric Physical Therapists' Approaches to Crawling in Israel

Background: Crawling on hands and knees is considered a major milestone in infants' motor development. However, in the 2022 update of the developmental milestone checklists issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), crawling was removed from the list. This removal was based on several arguments, mainly that independent mobility, regardless of the specific form, is the most significant component for development.

A 2024 study found that most pediatric physical therapists in the United States, view crawling on hands and knees as an important developmental milestone and oppose its removal from the milestone checklists

Objectives: To describe beliefs and clinical approaches regarding crawling among pediatric physical therapists in Israel, to examine their associations with years of professional experience and workplace setting, and to compare the findings with data reported in a study conducted in the United States.

Methods: The questionnaire used in the 2024 United States study was translated and back-translated into Hebrew and completed by 203 pediatric physical therapists in Israel.

The questionnaire examined beliefs and clinical approaches regarding crawling on hands and knees and also included open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analyses. Open-ended responses were analyzed using conventional content analysis.

Results: All respondents (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that independent mobility is important for development. Endorsement of hands-and-knees crawling was more moderate, with 69% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it is important. Only 10% agreed

that skipping crawling or using alternative mobility has lasting developmental effects, and only 6% viewed skipping hands-and-knees crawling as a sign of atypical development. Despite these beliefs, 56% reported practicing hands-and-knees crawling with children who demonstrate alternative mobility patterns, indicating a gap between beliefs and clinical practice. Regarding the 2022 CDC update, 36% agreed with the removal of crawling from the milestone checklists. Compared with U.S. data, Israeli physical therapists showed less opposition to the change, suggesting a lower emphasis on crawling as a developmental milestone in Israel.

Conclusions: The findings indicate that in Israel, crawling is not perceived as necessary for development; however, a gap exists between theoretical perceptions and actual crawling training in clinical practice. This finding underscores the need to re-examine how research evidence, clinical experience, cultural contexts, and systemic factors are integrated into clinical decision making.

References:

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