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Exploring perceptions of sibling relationships affected by schizophrenia in South Africa.

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2011-04-06
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EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS AFFECTED BY SCHIZOPHRENIA IN SOUTH AFRICA

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Community-based Counselling Psychology.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled 'Exploring perceptions of sibling relationships affected by schizophrenia in South Africa' is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts in Community-based Counselling Psychology, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signed this _____ day of _____, 2010

_____

Lisa Kallmeyer

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to the ‘man on the mountain’. My lighthouse. Thank you for teaching me to appreciate life, to know that nothing is better than a good laugh; and that no matter who you are, you *can* make a difference.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervisor Tanya Swart, thank you for your constant motivation and steady support. You pushed me forward when I needed to be pushed, and you encouraged me when I needed encouragement. Your faith in this study and in me, has aided me in the completion of this work, and I am so grateful to you for your valued insights and advice.

I would also like to extend my deepest appreciation to The Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder Association (SABDA), and particularly to Beryl Allen who assisted me in accessing those individuals who participated in this undertaking.

In this view, this study would not have come to light had it not been for those who participated. Consequently, to the participants, I thank you for volunteering your time and experiences to this endeavour.

On a more personal note, together with the completion of this dissertation, comes the transition to a new stage of life. I would like to acknowledge my family who have experienced this journey with me; however I would specifically like to thank my mother – Tina. Thank you for managing the chaos and for providing such a strong foundation upon which I could thrive.

Lastly I would like to thank my colleagues, the MACC class of 2009. These nine, unique individuals became my family in a short space of time, and their constant support, trust and faith deserves insurmountable gratitude. My sisters, my fellow 'war-veterans', thank you.

ABSTRACT

Mental illnesses are one of the most widespread conditions that affect universal health, and according to a variety of viewpoints, the family plays an important role in the development and continuation of psychopathology. In particular, a family member's perceptions of mental illness are important for understanding and intervening in family systems. The diagnosis of schizophrenia often results in devastation, which is experienced by both the person who is mentally ill, as well as the entire family. Of the family members, the most vulnerable and most affected, have been identified to be siblings, thus sibling relationships are substantially affected by such a diagnosis. However this area has received very little attention in previous research. Thus, this study is aimed to contribute to this area of knowledge by utilising a qualitative approach. Interviews were conducted with individuals who had siblings with schizophrenia. The interviews focused on experiences of the sibling relationship as it is affected by schizophrenia. Thematic content analysis of participants' narratives revealed central themes of factors that impact the relationship, including the redefinition of the family, adjustment, the impact of schizophrenia and interaction with service providers. The theory underlying the understanding of these themes is based upon a developmental and family systemic theoretical framework which was especially beneficial as it focuses on the family as being a transactional system in which individual family members relate reciprocally. The results of this research suggested that various factors affected the sibling relationship. Of these factors, the participant's understanding of the schizophrenia diagnosis proved to be an especially important factor as it seemed to impact upon the other factors. Significantly, the redefinition of roles that occurred within the family was of importance, as this too impacted upon the sibling relationship.

ABBREVIATIONS

SABDA	-	Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder Association
EE	-	Expressed emotion
WHO	-	World Health Organisation
DSM-IV-TR	-	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, text revision
HPCSA	-	Health Professions Council of South Africa

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