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The relationship between cerebral-palsied children and their siblings: a maternal perception

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Abstract

The current research focused on the relationship between Cerebral-palsied (CP) children and their siblings, from the mother's perspective. Further, the impact of CP on the sibling relationship, and the mother's perceived involvement in her children's sibling relationship, was explored. It is evident that there is a lack of research and literature on this specific topic internationally, as well as in South Africa. In addition, while there is an abundance of research concentrating on the relationship between disabled siblings, few studies focus on this relationship from the mother's perspective. However, by researching maternal perceptions, an alternative view is provided as to how these siblings interact and the relationship they form. A maternal perspective on sibling bonds will be of benefit to mental health practitioners who come into contact, and work with, families raising a child with CP and his or her sibling(s). Consequently, this study will add value to the field of Educational Psychology, as well as Psychology in general, as topics around disability, siblings, attachment and motherhood are often researched. The current qualitative study was conducted through individual interviews with eight mothers who have a child with CP, as well as another child who does not have CP (with the youngest child being at least two years of age). The information collected was analysed through thematic analysis in order to identify any pertinent themes amongst the mothers' reported experiences. The main findings emphasise that mothers perceive their children to have similar sibling relationships to that of non-disabled siblings. Although similar, there are also many aspects that the participants mentioned which were 'typical, but not' as typical to that of other, non-disabled sibling relationships. This highlights a uniqueness to their children's bond. Among numerous positive and negative differences between their children's relationships and those of other siblings, mothers identified feelings of guilt versus jealousy in their children. Additionally, mothers reported on the continuous battle for attention

from their children. Finally, each mother was able to reflect on the role that she plays in her children's sibling relationship. This involved either intervening in the sibling relationship to ensure her children develop a positive relationship or intervening less during conflict situations.

Keywords: Siblings, Sibling relationship, Cerebral Palsy, Disability, Maternal perceptions