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Life Experiences of Women With Cerebral Palsy Who Have Experienced Mistreatment

Donna Freeborn, PhD, FNP, CNM; Kathleen A. Knafl, PhD, FAAN; Catherine Coverston, PhD, RN; Mary Ann Curry, DNSc, RN; Barbara Mandleco, PhD, RN

Purpose
1. Describe the life experiences of women with cerebral palsy who have experienced mistreatment.
2. Describe how these women understand the meaning of their disability and mistreatment experiences relative to gender, culture, social class, and power.

Method: Feminist Biographical
• Focus of method
  - Explore, understand, and interpret the narratives, or stories, people tell about their lives
  - Identify social forces that influence people’s lives

Procedure
• Two in-depth interviews with eight participants
  - Semi-structured; participant led
  - Interview Guide; researcher led

Participant Demographics
- Age range: 22 to 55 years of age
- Average age: 36.25 years of age
- Types of cerebral palsy
  o Spastic
  o Athetoid

Analysis
• Interpretation of biographies
  - Within-case analysis
  - Across-case analysis

Findings
• Participants’ definitions of mistreatment
  - Showing disrespect
  - Making unfounded judgments
  - Devaluing someone’s abilities

• Types of Mistreatment
  - Harassment experiences
    o Physical aggression
    o Emotional antagonism
  - Discounting experiences
    o Being ignored
    o Being excluded from social activities
    o Being denied appropriate accommodations
    o Being denied appropriate educational experiences

• Explanation for Mistreatment
  o Ignorance of others
  o Being viewed as inferior

• Outcomes of Mistreatment
  - Emotional outcomes
    o Depression
    o Self-advocacy
    o Inner strength
  - Social outcomes
    o Mistrust of others
    o Social isolation
  - Physical outcomes
    o Affected CP symptoms

• Living with Cerebral Palsy
  - Typical biography
    o Supportive families
    o Educational attainment
  - Atypical biography
    o Absence of supportive families
    o Less education

Implications for Health Care Providers
• Take time to listen to those with CP
• Provide support and encourage family to provide support
• Address age-specific experiences
• Screen for depression
• Open a dialog about mistreatment including
  - Being ignored
  - Being discriminated against
  - Being teased
• Encourage clients with CP to pursue their education
• Meet the emotional, social and physical needs of women with CP

No high school diploma | 1
Some college | 2
Associate’s degree | 1
Bachelor’s degree | 1
Master’s degree | 3
Total | 8