

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF PARENTS OF CEREBRAL PALSY CHILDREN AND COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

Background/Introduction:

- ❑ Cerebral palsy is a disability resulting from damage to the brain affecting ability to control movement and posture. Causes vary from delivery accidents, especially compression of the brain, lack of oxygen not to mention pre-maturity which is a major cause.
- ❑ 1 out of 400 birth are cerebral palsied (Dr Bax, 2003).
- ❑ News about CP generally brings painful life experiences to parents/caregivers.

Purpose of the study

Objective:- To Explore psychological challenges of parents of Cerebral Palsy children ways in which they cope and any counseling implications involved.

Selection Criteria:- was random and stratified which required only specific sample to participate i.e. parents/caregivers of CP children

Research Sample:- 14 parents of CP children were interviewed by use of questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion

Methodology

Research Method:-

The study used qualitative methodology to explore experiences these parents go through. Effort was made to understand how they cope with the challenges faced.

Results

Responses from parents/caregivers when they first learnt of their child's condition:-

- ❖ I felt emotional loss
- ❖ I thought it was witchcraft
- ❖ I did not accept the fact that my child had cerebral palsy
- ❖ I felt a lot of pain
- ❖ I could not believe my first born child had cerebral palsy
- ❖ It was very stressful for me
- ❖ I wanted an operation to fix the problem once and for all
- ❖ I thought of going for prayers, which I did and got some relieve

Psychological Challenges

Stress was identified as the major concern

Other challenges

- Shock
- Denial
- Anger
- Loss
- Grief
- Emotional loss

Positive feelings

- Feelings of acceptance

Coping strategies:-

- Spiritual support - prayers, company of spiritual people. 80% of parents had received spiritual support that helped them cope to some extent.
- Medical support – information on the medical condition of child helped some.
- Social support – support from spouse, family, friends and neighbours was helpful.

Only two parents had attended counseling due to their child's condition with only one benefiting fully from counseling. An indication that most of the parent were not aware of availability of counseling services. Hence the need to bring this services closer to them.

Lessons Learnt

- ❖ CP parents/caregivers face stress as a major psychological challenge.
- ❖ Spiritual support helped some parents to cope.
- ❖ Information on CP is not readily available to parents/caregivers. There is need for dissemination of information on disability especially CP and how to cope with the challenges.
- ❖ Stigma though experienced by some parents was not a major issue of concern to the parents while stress and emotional loss were major concerns.

Conclusion/Recommendations

CP parents need to learn ways of coping with stress experienced from time to time.

All centers dealing with CP children need to have somebody trained in counseling to offer psychological support to the children, family members and caregivers whenever necessary.

Spiritual support blend well with counseling to help these parents cope with psychological challenges.

There is need for further research in this area and dissemination of information on cerebral palsy to general public.

Need for further research

- The impact of CP on fathers and other siblings in the family.



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