

The Effects of Cerebral Palsy on Early Attachment: Perceptions of Rural South African Mothers

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ABSTRACT The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of mothers about the effect of cerebral palsy on early attachment behaviours of their children in a rural area of the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The study explored the mother-child attachment relationship. Semi-structured interviews were used to assess mothers' perception of cerebral palsy and its effect on attachment behaviour of children. The interviews were recorded and then analysed using thematic content analysis. The study identified three recurrent themes that emerged in thematic content analysis. These were factors that facilitated bonding, hindered bonding and maternal response to the needs of the child. The findings of this study showed that children with cerebral palsy were reported to experience early attachment difficulties. The mothers reported that the emotional bond between mothers and children was affected by the severity of cerebral palsy. The results indicated that mothers of children with cerebral palsy needed both psychological and material support in order to strengthen early attachment behaviours of children and mothering practices. Directions for future studies could focus on educational interventions that assist mothers accept cerebral palsy diagnosis and the development of positive attitudes towards cerebral palsy in mothers who live in rural areas in South Africa.