**SIBLING EXPERIENCES IN FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME OR CYSTIC FIBROSIS**

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**Objectives**: Raising a child with a chronic health condition can be stressful for parents and caregivers. Unfortunately, the experiences of the child’s brother or sister are often overlooked (Stoneman, 2007). Siblings are emotionally influenced by each other during childhood, and this reciprocal influence continues into adulthood (Wennström, Isberg, Wirtberg, & Rydén, 2011). The available literature suggests that siblings of individuals with Down syndrome generally describe their experiences as very positive, have lower levels of depressive symptoms compared to siblings of individuals with other developmental disabilities, and perceive themselves as being better people because of their siblings with Down syndrome (Skotko, Levine, & Goldstein, 2011). Siblings of those with cystic fibrosis express positive feelings about their experiences, with the exception of feeling neglected due to their parents’ focus on the child with cystic fibrosis (Havermans et al., 2010). This mixed methods study allows siblings to describe their experiences, including the rewards, hardships, and coping methods employed when having a sibling with Down syndrome or cystic fibrosis.

**Method**: Data is ongoing but will be completed at the time of the presentation. Currently, 7 siblings of individuals with Down syndrome and 4 siblings of those with cystic fibrosis have participated. Participants were recruited through disability support organizations, health organizations, and word of mouth. Participants ranged in age from 8 to 39, and all siblings were biologically related, except for one who was adopted. This study used a mixed methods approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), consisting of a semi-structured interview and two questionnaires, the Sibling Inventory of Behaviour Scale (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1981) and the Sibling Daily Hassles and Uplifts Scale (Giallo & Gavidia-Payne, 2006). Interviews were be analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This presentation will focus on preliminary qualitative results.

**Results**: Preliminary results suggest that siblings of individuals with Down syndrome have predominantly positive experiences. Siblings of those with cystic fibrosis often used the word “normal” to describe their brother or sister, but occasionally feel resentment as their parents’ focus is on their sibling with cystic fibrosis. Siblings from both groups describe taking on a caregiving role throughout the lifespan, including being an advocate for their sibling, or assisting in their daily care such as administering medication. All siblings described personal growth as a result of having a sibling with a chronic health condition, often saying that they are better people because of their brother or sister.

**Discussion/Conclusions:** The results of this study will provide a better understanding of the experiences of individuals who have a sibling with Down syndrome or cystic fibrosis. This study will assist clinicians and health service providers to develop appropriate services and supports for siblings of those with chronic health conditions.

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