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A qualitative study on feeding experiences among caregivers of children with cerebral palsy requiring food texture modification

By

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Abstract Background and purpose: Children with cerebral palsy often experience feeding difficulties that require food texture modification and are highly dependent on their caregivers, which commonly leads to malnutrition. This study aimed to explore caregivers' current practices, perceptions, challenges, and ways to overcome the challenges through the provision of food texture modification. Methods: The inductive qualitative study design was employed. An open-ended semi-structured interview was conducted among ten mothers, and the interviews were recorded. Data were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically. Results: Six themes were constructed, namely; current practices (caregivers knowledge level influences readiness to practice food-texture modification which prioritized more on home-cooked food and involving healthcare professionals in the feeding provision); perceptions (child condition and nutritional status influence the practice of food texture modification); challenges (time taken and convenience to prepare food texture modification, access to healthcare services, knowledge and exposure, emotional and child's food preferences); ways to overcome the challenges (caregivers took the initiative in finding information/tools/feeding techniques in practicing food texture modification, tried and trained children with different types of food texture modification as tolerated); personal development (empowered with healthcare professionals and society involvement, resilience and eager to learn more about food texture modification); and wishes and expectations (inclusivity from society and healthcare professionals, and improvement of child's nutrition status). Conclusion: Caregivers of children with cerebral palsy requiring food texture modifications may need assistance from family, healthcare professionals and society as they navigate these difficult situations and deal with a range of emotions when

preparing food and feeding their children. Healthcare professionals play an important role to assess the child's risk of swallowing, construct tailored feeding plans, instruct caregivers the way to prepare food textures safely, monitor growth, and ensure the child gets the nutrition they require as well making sure caregivers receive the emotional and social support they need. These findings can help develop beneficial intervention models that incorporate ongoing healthcare professional follow-up, caregiver-led practice, standardized training, and advancements in the field of novel food technologies. In the end, this provides an evidence-based framework that is specifically designed for policymakers to inform social protection programs, subsidized educational settings, inclusive food supply standards, and national guidelines.

Keywords

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