

Abstract: There is no difference between the mental health of primary caregivers of children with cerebral palsy with differing levels of motor function: a systematic review.

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OBJECTIVE: The primary caregiver of a child with cerebral palsy (CP) plays a key role in the child's life. The well-being of a caregiver can impact a child's quality of life, skill development, behaviour and therapy outcomes. This systematic review aimed to identify whether there is a relationship between the mental health of the primary caregiver and the severity of motor impairment of their child with CP.

DESIGN: Systematic review.

METHODS: The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement was used in undertaking this review. Electronic database searches were undertaken in Ebsco host (Cinahl, Medline and Psych Info), Web of Science and Scopus.

RESULTS: Of an initial search response of 477 records, thirteen articles were found to meet the inclusion criteria. Thirteen descriptive cross sectional surveys and one qualitative grounded theory design were included for synthesis. Severity of motor impairment was classified by the Gross Motor Function Classification System (GMFCS) in all but one study. The majority (11 out of 14) studies found that there was no difference between the mental health of primary caregivers of children with CP with different GMFCS levels. The three which did find a positive relationship between the GMFCS level of the child and the mental health of the primary caregiver should be interpreted with caution owing to bias.

CONCLUSION: While a relationship therefore was not clearly identified for severity of motor impairment, differences were found between the primary caregiver's mental health and the: communication ability of the child; number of co-morbidities; social support available; care giving demands and income. Severity of motor impairment of a child with CP is not a useful predictor of primary caregiver mental well-being. However, other factors have been identified which appear to influence caregiver mental health which services should be open to exploring and addressing with these children and their families.