

## **Abstract**

This qualitative study explored how adults retrospectively make meaning of growing up with siblings who have complex needs using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Semi-structured interviews with six female psychotherapists, ages 40-60, revealed six superordinate themes: Disrupted Self-Development, Emotional Burden, Parentification and Responsibility, Isolation and Belonging, Finding Meaning and Adaptation, and Complex Emotional Relationship with Sibling. The findings suggested that growing up with a sibling with complex needs creates a distinctive developmental trajectory influencing identity formation, emotional regulation, and relationship patterns well into adulthood. The "glass children" phenomenon—feeling "invisible" to parents focused on the sibling with needs—emerged as a critical experience. This research extended theoretical understanding of sibling relationships by integrating family systems theory, Mitchell's concept of "lateral relations," and attachment theory perspectives. Implications for therapeutic practice include the relevance of relational frameworks, normalizing complex emotions, addressing parentification, utilizing attachment-focused interventions, supporting identity reconstruction and facilitating affect regulation and grief work. By giving voice to these often-overlooked experiences, this study advanced understanding of the "glass children" phenomenon while illuminating pathways toward integrating these formative experiences into coherent adult identities.