ABSTRACT

MATERNAL POWER AGAINST A DEAF IRISH STATE
UNEARTHING THE NARRATIVES OF MOTHERS
OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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Mothers of children with learning disabilities belong to a marginalized group of women, not only in our society but also in feminist research where their voices are seldom heard. This is particularly true for Irish mothers who face a greater challenge than many of their peers in other European countries. The Irish Constitution, influenced by a strong Catholic ethos, limits the choices Irish women can make, in particular those women who have children with special needs.

This paper discusses findings from a qualitative study of mothers with children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Down syndrome and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Ireland. Firstly, I will give a brief historical introduction to existing disability policies in Ireland and give examples of the power struggle between mothers and the Irish State. Secondly, I discuss my preliminary research findings of my participants’ lived experience of mothering a child with special needs. Finally, I call upon the feminist movement to help emancipate this group of women in our society who, as active agents for their children, are fighting a lonely battle.