

Are we responding to the need of mothers who experience mental distress?

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Overview of presentation

- Motherhood and mental health/distress
- Barriers to women accessing services
- Women's experience of service provision
- Custody and custody loss
- What women say they need



Motherhood and mental health

- Women living with mental health problem
 - Depression/bipolar/psychosis
 - Anxiety/PTSD/OCD
 - Eating disorder
 - Substance misuse
- Emergence of new mental health issues
 - Pre/postnatal depression
 - Anxiety
 - Postnatal psychosis (1 to 2 women per 1,000 births)



Research

- Focus on impact of mothers mental health issue on child (deficit model)
 - Maternal child interaction
 - Impact on emotional/educational development
- Children's experience
 - Taking on roles within family beyond years
 - Confusion/distress/blame
 - Sense of isolation and stigma
 - Fear of being removed from parent
 - Absence of support and information



Barriers to women seeking support



Negative attitudes of public and professionals



Acceptability barriers

- Fear of being
 - Labelled bad mother
 - Surveillance by health and social care
 - Loss custody
 - Impact of stigma on children
 - Loss of friends and social networks
 - Mental distress used in separations/custody
 - Fear of treatment (hospitalisation, medication)



Barriers to women seeking help

- Availability
 - Poor information on how to navigate service
 - Lack of services
- Accessibility
 - Family friendly
- Affordability
 - Cost of psychological focused services
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Women's experience of services

- Acknowledged role as mother (Holistic approach)
- Aware of trauma in women lives and helped to access psychological supports and complementary service
- Reassuring and supportive
- Practical help that built on women strengths
- Helped women to set realistic expectation
- Educated women about distress and medication



NOT THE NORM



Women's experience of services

- Constant balancing act to live to notion of 'ideal mother', maintain own health, respond to children's needs and meet demands of service
- Often prioritise children's needs at cost to own health



Women's experience of services

- Access to specialised maternal mental health services post code lottery
- Falling between the stools of service
- Negative attitudes of professional to pregnancy or desire for pregnancy



Women's experience of services

- Viewed as 'patients' not as mothers
- Lack of support with mothering role or assistance in explaining to children
- Feeling under surveillance
- Over emphasis on medication and compliance with medication despite costs
- Little support to deal with past psychological distress
- Support withdrawn once crisis over



Experience of custody loss

- Multiple losses
 - Loss of child
 - Lost of mother role/ status of the role
 - Loss of wider social connections (school)
 - Loss of finance (child benefit)



Challenges

- Absence presence
 - Maintaining involvement and connection
 - Impact of supervision and surveillance
 - Financing activities and occasions with child
- Fear of subsequent pregnancies
- Challenges of getting child returned
- Impact on other mothers who hear of custody loss



What women say the need

- Acknowledgement of mothering role
- Acknowledgement that they successful mother despite
 - Past traumas
 - Lack of supports
 - Stigma



What women say they need

- Recovery oriented mental health services
 - Seamless services with interdisciplinary working
 - Move away from biomedical explanation and focus on context of their lives
 - Services that focus on strengths and capabilities
 - Services that are not so risk adverse
 - Counselling/therapy to address past traumas



What women say they need

- Family friendly services
 - Appointment times (work, school)
 - Visiting rooms
 - Access
 - Cost of travel/childcare
- Integrated services (mental health and maternity care services)
- Knowledgeable and supportive practitioners
 - (Midwives, social workers, PHN, GP's and mental health workers)



What mothers say they need

- Peer support services and supports
- Practical help (SOS/ time away)
- Advocacy to assist with child custody issues
- Advanced directives
- Culturally sensitive services



What women need

Change in the discourse

- *'It means everything to me';*
- *'It's the most important thing I've done with my life to date...';*
- *'Motherhood is very important ... having my own children meant everything to me, everything to me'*
- *'I love my kids so much and I'd do anything for them'.*



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