A Thematic Analysis of Adults’ Reflection on Childhood Experiences Being Parented by an Adult with Mental Health Issues

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A thematic analysis of adults’ reflection on childhood experiences being parented by an adult with mental health issues

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Introduction

• Literature suggests the impacts of parental mental health can lead to involvement with Child Protective Services, Juvenile Corrections/law enforcement and residential mental health treatment (Notle & Wren, 2016, Coates, 2017, Karpetis, 2017).
• Researchers observed a gap in research surrounding those involved in both mental health services and the child welfare system, with more information needed to “tailor interventions that can develop resilience factors for families facing mental health problems” (Rouf, Karkin & Lowe, 2012).

Research Question

What is the experience of children under the care of an individual with mental health issues?

Methods

• Five participants were recruited via snowball sampling
• Interviews were conducted using a 26 item questionnaire with semi-structured questions about lived experiences soliciting personal narratives
• Researchers recorded and transcribed the interviews then analyzed interviews using thematic analysis

Findings

Participants identified the following themes:

● Feeling a sense of secrecy regarding disclosing their parents mental illness and/or substance use
● As a child, being required to take on additional responsibilities due to a parent being unavailable or unable
● Feeling worried and anxious about their caregiver’s safety
● Difficulty understanding their parents needs
● Feeling more resilient as a result of being parented by a caregiver with mental health issues
● Differing perspectives in comparison to their siblings’ experience

Participants also identified being impacted by:

● Substance misuse
● Domestic violence
● Financial and resource insecurity
● Educational difficulties
● Isolation
● Lack of education about mental health as a child
● Inconsistent involvement of providers or social workers

Recommendations

● Flexible scheduling of service to include night and/or weekend hours to accommodate children
● Low barrier attendance requirements of services to accommodate inconsistency in participation
● Education for families and children regarding the impact and challenges of mental health symptoms
● Providers that collaborate regarding multiple psychosocial issues instead of single-focused treatment models

Acknowledgements & Gratitude

Special thank you to the brave, vulnerable and courageous participants of this study who trusted researchers to share their experience with.

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References


“My mom is a great mom despite her mental health issues, I know she loved me and she did her best.”
-Research participant, female, 29

“For kids with parents with severe and persistent mental health issues, education is everything, offering resources and definitely giving kids one on one time.”
-Research participant, female, 36