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Help Seeking Behaviour of Depressive Mothers in the Context of a Weak Primary Health Care System. a Qualitative Study.

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Background:

The need for integration of maternal mental health into primary health care (PHC) is well documented. However, research evidence suggest that maternal depression still remains underrecognized and untreated. The help seeking behaviour of mothers with depression remains an insufficiently investigated issue.

Objectives:

The present qualitative study's objective has been to investigate, identify and interpret the help seeking behavior of mothers of young children experiencing depressive symptoms.

Aim:

Our aim was to inform policies and practices so as to improve the detection and management of maternal depression within the primary health care, in particular in countries of weak PHC systems and limited resources.

Methods:

Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted to a purposeful sample of thirty mothers living in Athens. The selection of participants' was based on socioeconomic status and depression severity. Qualitative content analysis was conducted independently by two researchers.

Results:

Two broad themes influencing mothers' help seeking behavior were identified. Barriers and enablers related to PHC system aspects and psychosocial factors emerged. Barriers were associated to several aspects of the weak PHC system, such as the fragmentation of services, the lack of team based care, but also the perceived low quality and availability of community mental health services. The main psychosocial factors identified were stigma related issues, unfavorable attitudes toward mental health, and perceived social expectations regarding the mothering role.

Conclusion:

Apart from the psychosocial factors, several aspects of the weak primary health care system could mediate the help seeking behavior of mothers experiencing depressive symptoms.