

Symposium: Children of parents with mental disorders: needs assessment and model interventions

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The needs of children who have parents suffering from severe mental disorders

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Abstract

Objective Mental illness in parents is a biological and environmental risk factor to which young people are exposed. Living with a parent suffering from a mental disorder may have a variety of detrimental consequences, including: (a) the reversal of caregiving (“parentification”); (b) the exposure to an adverse environment, where developmental needs of the child (emotional and practical) might be repeatedly neglected (lack of communication, high expressed emotion, etc.); (c) stigma and discrimination. We will provide a review of needs of these children and of possible interventions.

Methods Systematic searches located studies reporting and assessing met and unmet needs of these children.

Results Young people living in such families often have problems of internalizing and externalizing symptoms, cognitions of shame, guilt, and loneliness, perceptions of lacking social support and social acceptance. Children who have mentally ill parents are up to two and a half times more likely to experience poorer mental health outcomes than their peers. Compared to peers, children of parents with mental disorders are also at risk of poorer intellectual and social outcomes, of affect dysregulation, of behavioral problems, of impaired attention and reduced overall adaptive functioning, of higher rates of substance abuse and multiple diagnosis and finally of low occupational status, health risk behaviour and antisocial behavior.

Conclusions Given the high toll paid by children having parents suffering from severe mental disorders, it is urgent to develop, test and implement structured programmes to help these children cope with stressful circumstances and improve their resilience.

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Identifying and supporting children of mentally ill parents within adult mental health services

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Background Studies have shown that implementing a change of practice in adult mental health care to identify and support children of mentally ill parents is challenging, even though the risk of transgenerational transmission of socioemotional problems and psychopathology has been thoroughly demonstrated the last decade.

Aims The current presentation describes the existing practice of identifying and supporting children of mentally ill parents within adult mental health services. The study was conducted after Norwegian health legislation had been changed to make these tasks

mandatory. The effort included implementation of two interventions; Family Assessment, an intervention for practitioners to increase identification of patients who are also parents and their children, and child talks, an intervention designed to provide support for parents and children within the participating hospital.

Method The sample included mental health professionals in a large university hospital in Northern Norway, who responded to a web-based survey on the routines of the services, attitudes within the workforce capacity, worker’s knowledge on the impact of parental mental illness on children, knowledge on legislation concerning children of patients, and demographic variables. Register data from the Electronic Patient Journals (EPJ) was analyzed to assess whether or not the self-reported routines match the reality in the clinic.

Discussion The prospects of clinical change will be discussed in general, as well as to which extent the two implemented interventions have contributed to changes in the clinical practice, workforce knowledge and attitudes in the participating hospital.

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Dutch intervention programmes for children of mentally ill parents

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This presentation reports on the outcomes of a practice-based and science-based enterprise in the Netherlands to develop a comprehensive national prevention program focused on children of parents with a mental illness. An outline of the multicomponent program is presented which includes a wide set of interventions that address evidence-based risk factors and protective factors in multiple domains, including children in different age groups, parents and families, social networks, professionals and the community as a whole.

The 20-year history of this program illustrates the importance of long-term collaborative investments that are required of practitioners, policymakers and scientists to develop and implement a nationwide, comprehensive approach for addressing the prevalent transmission of psychiatric problems from parent to child. The results of recently undertaken controlled efficacy studies of various preventive interventions are presented, as well as findings from process evaluations. Also, strengths and weaknesses of the current program are discussed and recommendations will be offered for the main challenges ahead in terms of program innovation, implementation and research.

Disclosure of interest The author has not supplied his declaration of competing interest.

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Toward the development of new strategies to assess the needs of children and adolescents with severely mentally ill parents

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Up to 10% of mothers and 5% of fathers in Europe have mental illness. Family, educational and social lives of children and adolescents with parental with mental illness (CAPRI) are disrupted by deprivation & repeated hospitalization. This is an urgent politi-