

Spring 2019

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

Jennifer Luja
University of Southern Maine

Meg O'Malley
University of Southern Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking_matters



Part of the [Mental and Social Health Commons](#), [Social Work Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Luja, Jennifer and O'Malley, Meg, "A Thematic Analysis of Adults' Reflection on Childhood Experiences Being Parented by an Adult with Mental Health Issues" (2019). *Thinking Matters Symposium*. 205.
https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking_matters/205

This Poster Session is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Thinking Matters Symposium by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.

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

Jennifer Luja & Meg O'Malley, School of Social Work, University of Southern Maine. Mentor: Dr. Rachel Casey, PhD, MSW University of Southern Maine

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

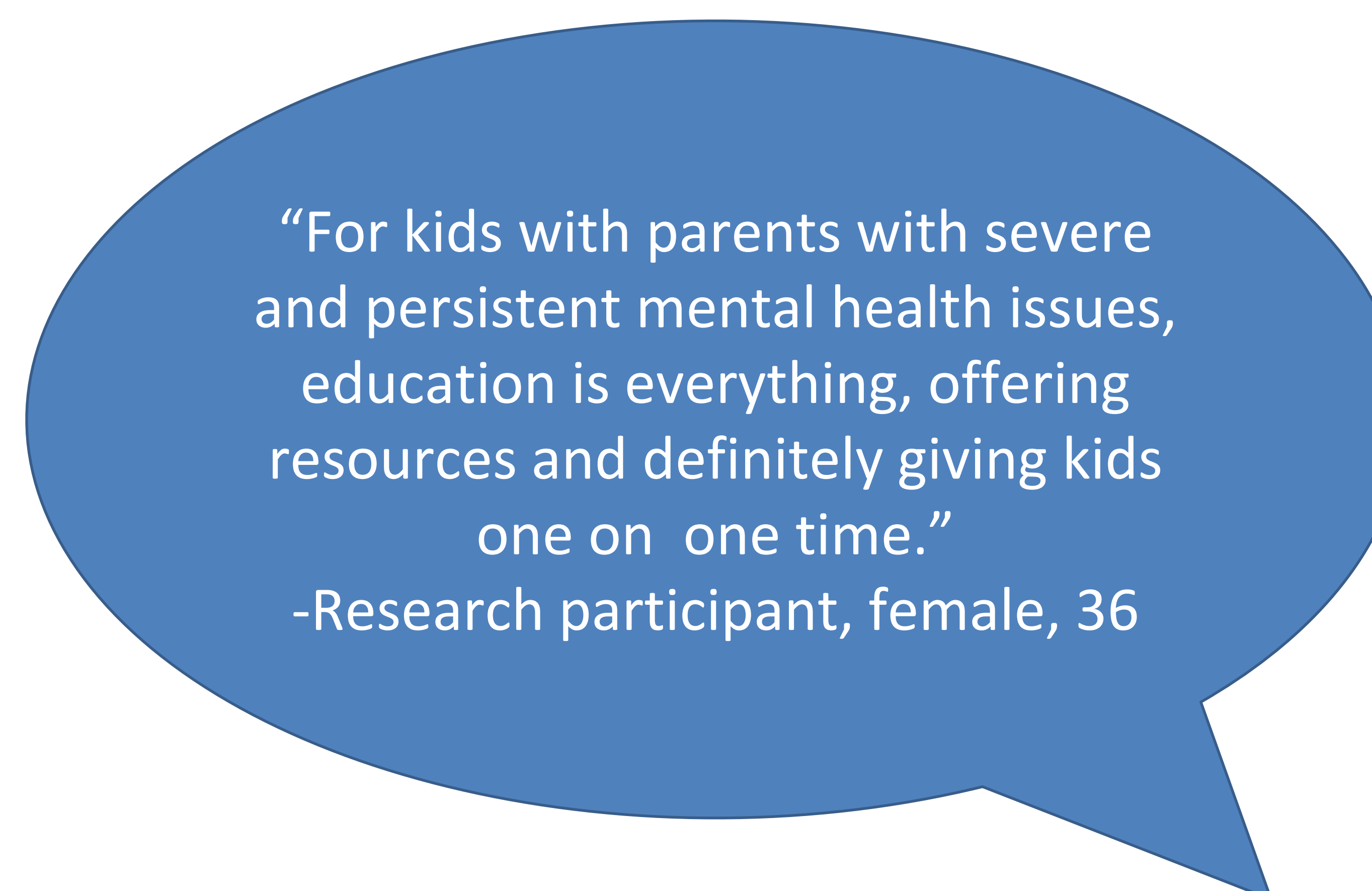
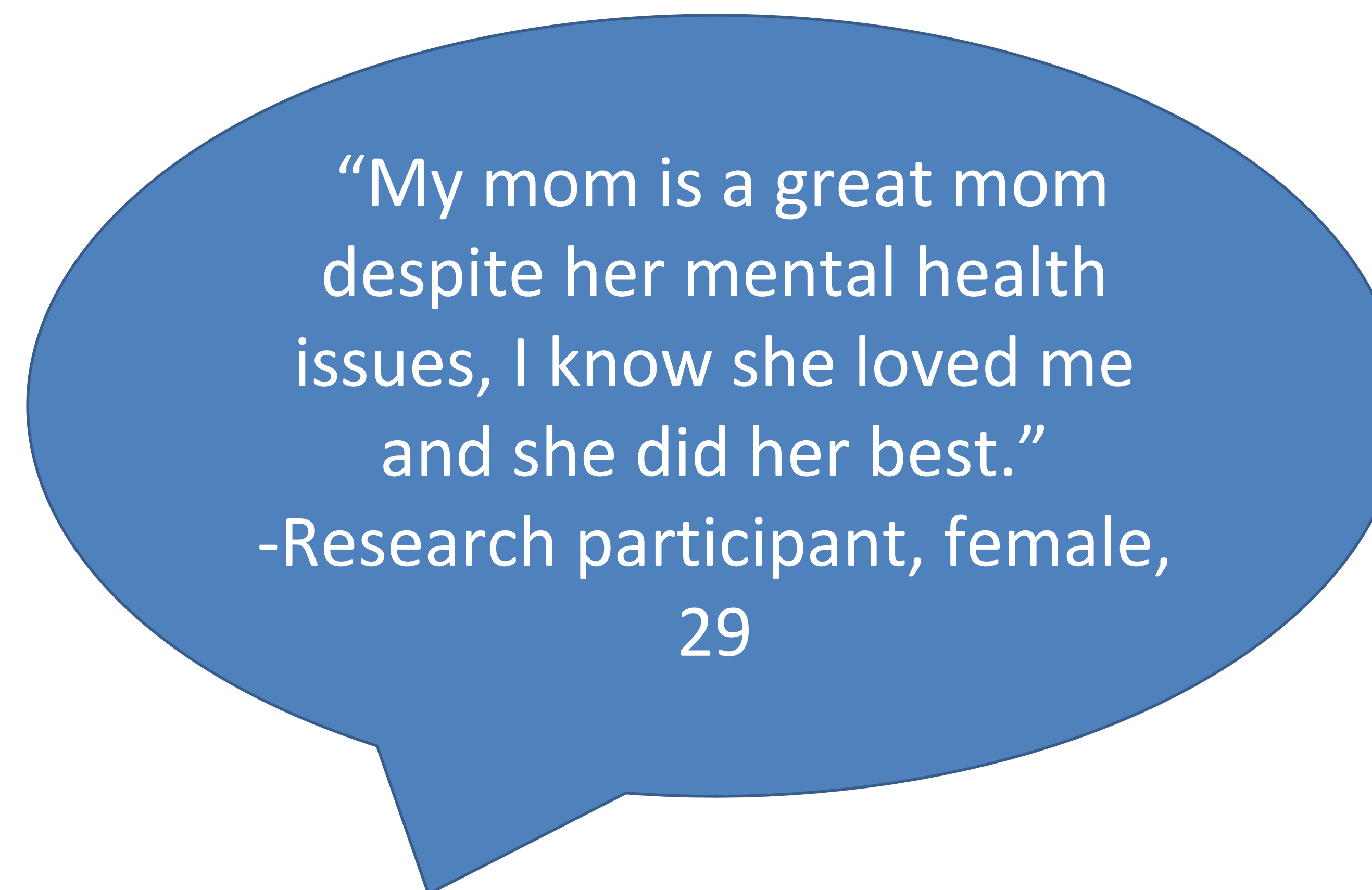
What is the experience of children under the care of an individual with mental health issues?

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

References

- Coates, D. (2017). Working with families with parental mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues where there are child protection concerns: Inter-agency collaboration. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(S4), 1-10. doi:10.1111/cfs.12238
- Karpetis, G. (2017). Mental health knowledge gaps in the child protection work with parents: A narrative review of the social work literature. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 31(3), 353-368. doi:10.1080/02650533.2016.1274965
- Nolte, L., & Wren, B. (2016). Talking or keeping silent about parental mental health Problems—A grounded theory of parents' decision making and experiences with their children. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 42(4), 731-744. doi:10.1111/jmft.12177
- Rouf, K., Larkin, M., & Lowe, G. (2012). Making decisions about parental mental health: An exploratory study of community mental health team staff: Making decisions about parental mental health. *Child Abuse Review*, 21(3), 173-189. doi:10.1002/car.1172



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.

Special thank you to Dr. Casey for her support, guidance and encouragement during this research class, project and all related endeavors.