
Preface

Motherhood in the context of mental illness is a seldom discussed topic in both research and clinical circles. The assumption by the lay public and even seasoned clinicians is that women with mental illness either don't become mothers or are incapable of parenting their children. This book is intended to dispel the myth that mothers with mental illness do not exist or are not good mothers.

This book grew out of a small study we did to find out how many of the long-term hospitalized patients at the state hospital where we work are mothers. As you will read in Dr. Benders-Hadi's chapter, that number was an eye-opening 40 %. Counting the mothers we hadn't realized were right in front of us, and listening to their stories began a journey for us. The stories these women shared were compelling to us as both psychiatrists and mothers. As clinicians, we were interested in finding others who were studying mothers and how to best treat them in order to respect and maximize their capabilities. As mothers, we were inspired by the courage, strength, and willpower these women demonstrate in their everyday lives. Parenting can be a daunting task for anyone, and parenting in the midst of overcoming symptoms and challenges related to mental illness seemed to us like an awesome challenge. Yet women do it every day, as these chapters will attest.

This book is organized into two main sections. In the first section, we highlight research on mothers with mental illness and innovative programs and approaches being used to treat mothers. As readers move through these chapters, they will find useful information on topics from supporting parenting and providing adequate assessments of parenting capabilities to issues such as substance use, legal concerns for mothers, pregnancy and the perinatal period, and LGBT mothers.

The second section of this book belongs to the real experts on this topic, mothers themselves. While other books have provided personal accounts of dealing with mental illness focused on specific themes or diagnoses (Casey 2002; Taylor 2008; Van Fleteren and Van Fleteren 2008), none have focused on the successes and challenges related to motherhood. These courageous stories demonstrate that mothers with mental illness can and do become loving, amazing, caring, and wonderful parents. From the huge outpouring of interest we received when we solicited these chapters to the persistence of authors in preparing their stories for publication, we were amazed at the bravery and generosity of our mother-authors. There is clearly a great desire for mothers to have a voice so that they can convey their experiences to others. Our hope is to show the range of mothering experiences

for those with mental health challenges, and within these pages you will find diverse and fascinating stories from women across the globe.

Our first goal in putting this book together was to push forward the scholarship on mothers with mental illness and programs to assist them, perhaps motivating a reader to pursue her own work or a family to advocate for better resources in their community. Our second goal was to enlighten and inspire readers with these stories of recovery. Whether you are a clinician hoping to more effectively address the needs of your patients, a mother dealing with your own struggles with mental illness, or a family member or friend who wants to know more on this subject in support of a loved one, we hope you will find something in this book that is useful to you.

We have many people to thank for helping us start and complete this book. Judith Samuels, Ph.D., at the Nathan Kline Institute in New York asked us the simple question, “How many of your patients are mothers?” that started us on this path. Jules Ranz, M.D., and the Columbia Public Psychiatry Fellowship supported us in doing the original study. Mary Jane Alexander, Ph.D., also at Nathan Kline, was our collaborator on the study and always challenged us to ask the right questions and to rethink our assumptions. Laura Miller, M.D., and Jacki McKinney, M.S.W., who were co-presenters with Dr. Benders-Hadi at the American Psychiatric Association meeting helped us to envision that this topic could become a book. Leah Dickstein, M.D., distinguished psychiatrist and all-around wonderful person, has been a terrific friend and mentor to both of us throughout this project. Finally, we want to thank our spouses and children, who provide us with daily motivation, inspiration, support, grounding, and humility that we take with us into the work we do.

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Stories of Hope

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