



Invisible Children's Project

About Families with a Parental Mental Health Diagnosis

Parental Mental Illness

- Adults with mental illness are just as likely to be parents as those without mental illness
- Parents with mental illness face unique challenges
- Parental mental illness can significantly negatively impact family life

Challenges Parents with Mental Illness May Face

- Family stress or instability
- Poverty, homelessness
- Diminished parenting capacity
- Lack of needed services
- Attachment to child
- Stigma
- Legal and/or custody issues

Custody Issues for Parents with Mental Illness

- Parents with mental illness are vulnerable to losing custody
- As many as 70% lose custody of their children
- Stigma is the main reason
- Parents scared to seek needed services and supports, fearing custody loss – worsens mental illness
- Loss of custody can be traumatic for parent and can worsen mental illness
- With supports, many families can stay together

Impact of Parental Mental Illness on Children

- Varied, unpredictable
- Impact depends on many factors
- Children are at-risk of social, emotional and behavioral problems, including mental illness
- May feel angry, guilty, anxious, sad
- May have trouble with school, substance abuse, peer relationships
- Many children are resilient

Results of Survey of Texas Parents Struggling with a Mental Health Diagnosis
(36 surveys completed and returned to the Mental Health Association in Texas, 7/05)

Parents

94% female, 28% married, 56% White, 39 Average Age
44% employed
68% depression; 35% bipolar
33% hospitalized in the last year
29% said they currently need mental health services but do not receive it
14% had a child removed from the home by Protective Services

Children

11 – average age of child
36% of children diagnosed with mental illness, primarily depression, bipolar and ADHD
11% of children hospitalized in last year for mental disorder
28% dissatisfied with ability to get services and information for child and family
47% have been a victim of a bully
44% have witnessed family violence
31% do not do well in school
47% do not receive love and support from 3 other adults beside parent
42% have attendance problems in school
29% have behavior problems at school
47% have behavior problems at home
25% of children currently need counseling but do not receive it
19% of children currently need case management services but do not receive it
64% of children have received an award
56% participate in school activities.