

“My addiction doesn’t define me”: Healing from the stigma of addiction for mothers with opioid use disorder

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ABSTRACT

Background: About 1 in 8 children under age 17 live with a parent who has a substance use disorder. Research on treatment access identifies stigma as a significant barrier to treatment, particularly among mothers with young children. Well-meaning but punitive state policies further perpetuate stigma, which harms families and children.

Purpose/hypothesis: Explore the experiences of the stigma of addiction on mothers before, during and after treatment for substance use disorder.

Procedures/data/observations: Descriptive Phenomenology was used to describe the experiences of stigma of mothers with opioid use disorder (OUD) through all stages of treatment and recovery. Mothers (n=20) participating in an outpatient treatment program interviewed. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to guide the interviews and thematic analysis was used identify themes related to stigma.

Conclusions/applications: Our analysis identified several main themes and subthemes related to internal and external sigma, including stigma against medication for opioid use disorder, stigma from the public and healthcare professionals, internalized shame, and how mothers learned to recover and heal from stigma.

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