



When is it serious enough? The protection of children of parents with a mental health problem, tough decisions and avoiding a 'martyred' child

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Abstract

This paper outlines some of the very real emotional challenges and decisions faced by mental health workers with clients who, through no fault of their own, are failing to meet the needs of their children. In particular, it focuses on the effects of long term emotional abuse and neglect due to parental mental health issues and includes discussion of some difficult concepts such as 'good enough' parenting, and what constitutes harm. The paper proposes that it is very difficult for adult mental health workers to hold in tension the needs of the adult client and the needs of their children, when sometimes these are at odds with each other. It ultimately argues for a change in service culture where the ethical and moral nature of these decisions is discussed and debated, rather than what could be seen to be an emerging culture of fear, based on recent critical incidents and unwanted media attention.

Keywords

parenting, children, child protection, family intervention

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