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"In Her Shoes"
The Experience Of Mothers
Living With Mental Illness

**A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of**

**Master
of
Social Work**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a study of the views and experiences of a small group of New Zealand mothers living with mental illness. It is a qualitative study, the purpose of which is to explore the interface between parenting and mental illness through in-depth interviews and to draw suggestions from these experiences for service development. Utilising a perspective which is influenced by a combination of recovery, feminist and Kaupapa Maori research philosophies, the intent of the study is to hear and reflect upon these stories through a collaborative process.

The findings reveal similar themes to those from international studies. The participants emphasize the value of motherhood, seeing parenting as a tool for recovery and a way to increase self-esteem. Stigma and discrimination, especially self stigma, the internalised sets of beliefs about people experiencing mental illness, still affect women's lives, leading most of the participants to experience a pervasive fear around the loss of their children on account of their mental illness. Finally, mothers spoke of the stresses brought about by living in an environment often characterised by poverty and isolation.

The main recommendations are for family-focused, community-based services which utilise early intervention approaches. The need for more extensive, flexible, practical support services and support for family/whanau are also highlighted. The role of trauma in the lives of the mothers interviewed and the need for access to appropriate treatment is emphasized. Finally, the lack of concrete data related to the numbers of parents living with mental illness is underlined and it is suggested that the latest mental health information system incorporate details about parenting arrangements.

The findings of the research raise issues about the ability of present-day mental health services to fully meet the needs of families living with mental illness. Furthermore, it is argued that the compartmentalisation of mental health and child welfare services leads to a lack of a cohesive approach to the complexity of the lives of both parents and children in families with mental illness.

In spite of less than optimum services, the strength and resilience of the mothers interviewed is a demonstration of the success of the recovery philosophy.

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To my family, especially my mother, and my friends for being there when I needed you.

In memory of my father, Baden Watkins (1929 – 1998)

GLOSSARY

A number of terms are used interchangeably in this document to describe people with experience of mental illness. Among people with experience of mental illness there is no consensus on a preferred term. Here are some which are used in this study: consumer, service user, tangata whaiora (a Maori term which translates as “people seeking well-being”), people living with mental illness, people experiencing mental illness, client and patient.

A.C.C.	Accident Compensation Corporation of New Zealand
Aotearoa New Zealand	Bicultural term for New Zealand
Aroha	Love
CAMHS	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services
COPMI/COPMIA	Children of Parents with Mental Illness/Children of Parents with Mental Illness & Addiction.
CYFS	Child, Youth & Family Service
D.E.S.N.O.S.	Disorder of extreme stress not otherwise specified
Hapu	Sub tribe
Hauora	Health
Hinengaro	Mind
Hui	Meeting
Iwi	Tribe, people
Kai	Food
Kaiwhakahaere	Manager, leader
Karakia	Prayer
Karanga	Call
Kaumatua/kuia	Elders
Kaupapa	Policy
Kaupapa Maori	Policy/procedure from Maori perspective/Maori philosophy
Kawa	Protocols, process
Koha	Gift

Mana	Authority, power, respect
Mauri Ora	Essence of life
Marae	The meeting place of the whanau/hapu, where decision-making and other family and community events occur
Matauranga Maori	Traditional knowledge
Mental Health Services	Organisations whose primary function is the provision of care, treatment, support and education for recovery to people with mental illness or mental health problems.
Mood disorder	Includes illnesses where there is a major disturbance in feeling states. Such feeling states can include, despair, depression, elation or anxiety. Often these feeling states are accompanied by an over or under-abundance of energy. Major depressive disorder and bipolar affective disorder are examples of mood disorders. Anxiety states can also be present alongside the conditions detailed above or be disabling conditions in their own right.
NGO	Non-government organisation.
Pakeha	New Zealand people of European ethnicity.
PTSD	Post traumatic stress disorder
Rangitiratanga	Authority of, control (of)
Tangata Whenua	The indigenous people of Aotearoa
Tapu/Noa	Sacred, prohibited
Te Reo	The Maori language
Te Tiriti (O Waitangi)	The founding document of Aotearoa/New Zealand that defines the terms of relationships between Iwi Maori and the Crown
The Treaty of Waitangi	
Tikanga	Correct procedure, method, practice
Tinana	Body
Tino Rangitiratanga	Self determination

Treatment	Specific physical or psychological assistance provided by a health professional to reduce (mental) illness and assist recovery.
Waiata	Song, traditional chant
Wai	Water
Whaikorero	Speech
Whakatuia	Integration
Whanau	(extended) family
Whanaungatanga	the process of establishing and maintaining connection between people
Whare	house, specifically at times, the wharenuī (meeting house on the marae)
Wairua	spirit
WINZ	Work & Income New Zealand

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