Shame: Its impacts on the relationship between mothers with substance abuse disorders and child welfare social workers

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2011
It is estimated that between one third and two thirds of all child maltreatment cases nowadays involve substance use (Child Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2009).

Annually in the United States almost $5.3 billion are allocated toward child welfare costs related to substance abuse disorder.

The research shows that social workers’ understanding of substance abuse disorder is limited.
Literature Review

- **Social Constructionism**
  - Postmodernist school of thought
  - Knowledge is created by the privileged, dominant group in society
  - The power of language
  - Constructionism and social work

- **Stigma**
  - Moral failing and abnormality of a person
  - Negative perceptions and social rejection
  - Stigma exists only within a social context
  - What something is called by the society determines its value
Literature Review

- **Addiction**
  - “a chronic relapsing brain disease” \(\text{(NIDA, 2007)}\)
  - Stigmatizing treatment of individuals with substance abuse disorders
  - Mothers with substance abuse disorders

The Meth Project (2011)
Literature Review

- **Shame**: the master emotion
  - Differences between shame and guilt
  - Gender orientation of shame
  - Chronic shame and mental illness
  - Causal and maintenance part of addiction cycle
  - Consequence of abuse
  - Interactive occurrence
Methodology

- Participants were women in recovery who had prior involvement with child welfare system and who currently work as staff in a substance abuse program.
- Participants had a unique insider/outsider perspective.
- In-person recorded interviews.

Interview Questions:
1. How has shame affected your life during the times of your active drug use?
2. In what ways have social workers contributed to or helped you with your feelings of shame?
3. How do you perceive interactions between your clients and their social workers during staffings?
4. How do you experience shame now that you are in recovery?
Methodology

- Grounded theory method was used to analyze the data.
- Analysis were based on inductive process.
- Process of open coding was used, where the individual interviews were examined and compared to each other in order to capture dominant phenomena.
- Process of axial coding was used in order to connect the phenomena and organize them into categories or themes.
- This process was repeated until the researcher felt that all recurring themes were exhausted.
- After the data was analyzed the researcher met with each of the participants and discussed the findings.
The Past
- Not bringing up the past; Acknowledging current efforts.
- Acknowledging women's parental rights; honoring motherhood
- Returning phone calls. Visiting at the program.
- Encouraging, motivating, coaching, advocating

Family
- Not taking seriously motherly concern, stressing parental faults.
- Being dismissive; Not returning phone calls.

Self-Worth
- Not advocating, showing bias, being confrontational

Hope
- Increase (+)

Shame
- Decrease (-)

Cooperation, Motivation, Participation

Anger, Hostility, Withdrawal, Surrender
Findings

- The Past
  - Women constantly relive the past and are reminded of it
  - Bringing up the past is perceived as confrontational and it results in increase in shame
  - Need to be acknowledged for present progress

- Family
  - Women define themselves through the familial relationships
  - Shame about the perceived failed family roles and removal of children
  - Anxiety over foster care
Findings

- Self-Worth
  - Mothers with substance abuse disorders lack self-worth
  - Blaming is counter-productive as it only reassures mothers in their lack of worth
  - The smallest of willing or unwilling actions can speak volumes
  - Anger and hostility

- Hope
  - Hope is essential for recovery and progression of the child welfare case
  - Broken promises
  - Parentified social workers
  - Compassionate social workers encourage hope
Limitations and Future Research

- The limitation of the study is in the small number of participants.
- All the interviewees work at the same agency in California’s Central Valley, which may limit range of applicability to the general field of social work.
- Future research needs to further explore the shame of social workers and how it affects their interaction with individuals they serve.
- Further research needed about women with the substance abuse disorders and the role of shame in the addiction cycle.
Practice/Policy Implications

- Providing comprehensive training about substance abuse disorder, its roots, causes and effects
- Informing child welfare social workers about the concept of shame, Child welfare agencies could create aggressive anti-stigmatizing campaign
- A different hiring procedure for child welfare social workers
- Search input from women with substance abuse disorder when creating programs and services geared towards them.