

RECOVERY-ORIENTATION AND PEER SUPPORT FOR MOTHERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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Context: Recovery is currently the guiding principle for mental health policies in English-speaking countries with growing influence internationally.

Key messages: Recovery is defined not only by symptom reduction but mainly by opportunities for inclusion and success in social roles. Recovery means leading a meaningful life after and despite mental health problems and disabilities. Being a mother is an integral part of what constitutes a meaningful life for many women.

Peer support is an essential ingredient of recovery-oriented services and the evidence on its feasibility and positive impact is growing.

Peer support for mothers during pregnancy and the perinatal period has a long tradition in most societies. Examples of group-based as well as individual peer support programs with direct contact or telephone based interventions have been described and evaluated mainly for breastfeeding and for the prevention of postpartum depression.

Recently, peer support programs especially designed for mothers with mental health problems have been developed. First experiences are encouraging. More research is needed and will include recovery-dimensions as outcome variables as well as qualitative and user-led designs. Areas of special interest in the development of recovery-oriented interventions are the need for ongoing support while children grow up, the prevention of unnecessary custody loss, issues of disclosure and assistance for children as supporting relatives.

Conclusion: Recovery-orientation and peer support offer new insights and new ways of support for mothers with mental health problems and disabilities.