

Parenting, Attachment and Support Network Experiences of Mothers Diagnosed with HIV and Psychosis

People living with HIV are 7 times more likely to develop psychosis; a serious mental illness with distressing symptoms that has an impact on all aspects of the person's life (De Ronchi et al., 2006; Helleberg et al. 2015). The most important aspects that this study focused on were the mothers' relationships with their children and support figures when the mother has a diagnosis of HIV and psychosis. Interviews were conducted with the mothers and family members and the attachment relationships were measured with their children. Results of 45 mothers with HIV related psychosis was compared with those of 41 mothers with HIV only. Mothers experienced intense emotional pain and behaved in a manner that frightened their children. These experiences made it difficult to fulfill their roles as mothers such as caring for the children's needs. Attachment relationships looked similar between mothers with HIV and those with additional psychosis, but the whole sample had raised disorganized attachment which has the potential for negative consequences for the children's psychological development. Mothers heavily relied on their support figures especially their own mothers. Mothers with psychosis were less likely to receive spousal support and when they also had paranoid thoughts, their support networks were smaller. In the psychosis group emotional support predicted more secure attachment relationships which promoted healthy development in the children. Supporters confirmed the supporting role that they play but also reported challenges in supporting the mothers and children.