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CHILDREN OF PSYCHIATRIC IN-PATIENTS - PREVALENCE, PSYCHIATRIC SYMPTOMS AND OBSTACLES FOR PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

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Aims: Children of mentally ill parents are at high risk to develop psychiatric disorders. Psychiatric disorders often limit parenting skills and there are obstacles to accept professional help for the children. The study aimed to explore the prevalence of mentally ill parents in inpatient treatment, emotional and behavioural problems of their children, access to support for their children and obstacles for receiving support.

Method: Inpatients of psychiatric hospitals of a county were examined by questionnaires (amongst other scales the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)).

Results: 104 patients with children were detected, 81 patients with 165 children were enrolled. Most of the patients had more than one child and most of them had more than 3 prior inpatient treatments. Results in the SDQ indicated an up to five fold increased number of children with emotional/behavioural problems compared to non-psychiatric samples. Even if 40% of the patients were dissatisfied with the care of their children during treatment, they seek seldom professional help. 51% have strong resentments against the youth welfare custodies. 55% quote that they cancelled or missed former inpatient treatments because of the inadequate nurturance of their children.

Conclusion: Identification of children with need for professional support can be improved by using standardized questionnaires. Study results imply that psychiatrist should focus on parenthood of their patients and specialised offers of support are needed.