

Background

- The CASEY (Child Abuse, Stress, and the Early Years) Collaboration developed and piloted a psychoeducation intervention with pregnant women who experienced childhood abuse in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia
- The intervention is titled “The Survivor Mom's Companion”
- Pilot studies showed positive outcomes including improved PTSD symptom management, labor experience, and perception of maternity care
- Feedback from recruiters and diminished enrollment suggested the title did not resonate with women outside the US

Methods

- Telephone and Skype interviews were conducted with midwives, mental health providers, and women's advocates in Australia (n=12) and the UK (n=7)
- We asked participants about language used to describe 1) women who experienced childhood abuse and 2) the process of recovery from such trauma

“Parents want to engage in something that’s not focused on their history of abuse, but more on the future...women don’t necessarily [want to be] ‘survivors.’ This can be a stigmatizing term; women want to do more than just survive.”

“Growing Forward” The Roles of Place and Language in a Maternal Health Intervention

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Credit: Robert Kerton, ECOS Magazine

Results

- Participants hesitated to use labels of “survivor” or “victim” to describe their clients due to perceived stigma
- Participants reported:
 - Some women feel they have not yet “survived” childhood abuse
 - Other women express desire for programs focused on their futures rather than histories of abuse
- Participants framed trauma recovery as a life-long process
- Participants discussed “tools” needed to support new mothers

“In Australia, we experience wild bush fires. Eucalyptus trees are burned down and often appear dead. But then the spring rains come, and you can see new shoots starting to grow. There is life after this; there is growth and beauty after the fire- because of the fire.”

Discussion

- Both “victim” and “survivor” discourses of childhood abuse have been criticized as potentially stigmatizing and essentializing
- Our qualitative investigation unveiled discourses of childhood abuse and trauma recovery in Australia and the UK that mirror the “narrative of transcendence”
- We recommended the intervention title be changed to “Growing Forward: Tools for Mothering after Childhood Abuse”
- The CASEY Collaboration is continuing to pilot the intervention with promising results. Conversations about officially changing the intervention name are ongoing

References

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