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FAMILY NEEDS, CHILDREN AND PARENTHOOD IN PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

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Objective: Given that parental mental diseases affect the whole family system, a family centered support and help system seems appropriate for families with a mentally ill mother/father. However, the majority of mental health services do not integrate interventions for the family system into psychiatric treatment programs.

Aims: To introduce a counselling and support service for families with a mentally ill parent (FIPS) that has been established at a psychiatric hospital serving a large catchments area. Preliminary results of a qualitative study that focused on the clients' family background as well as on their reasons for utilising the service and service satisfaction will be presented.

Methods: Factors that impact the family system are considered and brought to a concept for counselling and support service for families with a mentally ill parent. Problem-focused interviews with 14 clients (mentally ill parents and relatives) of the counselling service for families were subjected to content analysis.

Results: Most clients came to the counselling centre because of worries that the parent's mental illness might negatively affect children's well-being. Mentally ill mothers described their daily lives as utterly burdensome and also reported strong feelings of guilt towards their children. The concept of FIPS includes psychoeducation, social therapy, case management and family therapy. Clients assessed the counselling service as helpful and reported some significant changes.