

# Making the invisible visible: Public health nurses role with children who live with a parent with a mental illness.

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## **Abstract**

People with a mental illness are some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

Children who live with a mentally unwell parent are deemed hidden or invisible with their needs not being recognised. Yet these children are at a greater risk of developing a psychosocial or psychopathological illness themselves, and are at an increased risk of harm and neglect. Public health nurses work with children and families in the community, with mental illness causing greater complexity in their work, yet this aspect of their work is not well recognised and has been described as hidden or invisible. This research used focus group methodology to examine the public health nursing practice with children who live with a mentally ill parent.

Themes were identified from the research data which clarified that mental illness has a burgeoning impact on public health nurses work with their role being identified as assessment and advocacy. Certainly within the research area studied the public health nurses who work with children can identify that those children whose parents have a mental illness can impact on the parent's ability to function as a parent and the consequence for that child is profound. The public health nurses work is increasing in the area of primary mental health and the findings build on the literature on public health nursing practice in primary mental health.