'Nobody taught her how to be a mother'; The Lived Experience of Mothering Without a Mother

Dr Amy Walsh
Dr Bridget Tiernan
Janine Dougan ABC PiP
Prof Pauline Adair
Dr Brent Thompson







Methods



Themes



Things to consider



### Background

- Transition to motherhood is seen as a developmental crisis<sup>1</sup>
- Typically maternal grandmother plays a significant role in transition<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- Women's identification with their own mum is revived at this time<sup>1,4</sup>
- Psychic triad- child, mother, mothers mother<sup>3</sup>
- Learning to mother from ones own experience of being mothered <sup>5</sup>
- Imprint of mothering<sup>6</sup>

### Maternal Deprivation

- Disruption of maternal bond can cause serious consequences<sup>7</sup>
- Bowlby suggested intergenerational impact
- Research carried out on maternal bereaved moms <sup>8,9</sup>
- Bowlby suggested maternal deprivation occurs in other circumstances<sup>7,12</sup>
- Mothers in care
  - corrective experience <sup>10,11</sup>

### **Current Study**

Lived experience of new mothers who lack psychological presence of their mothers

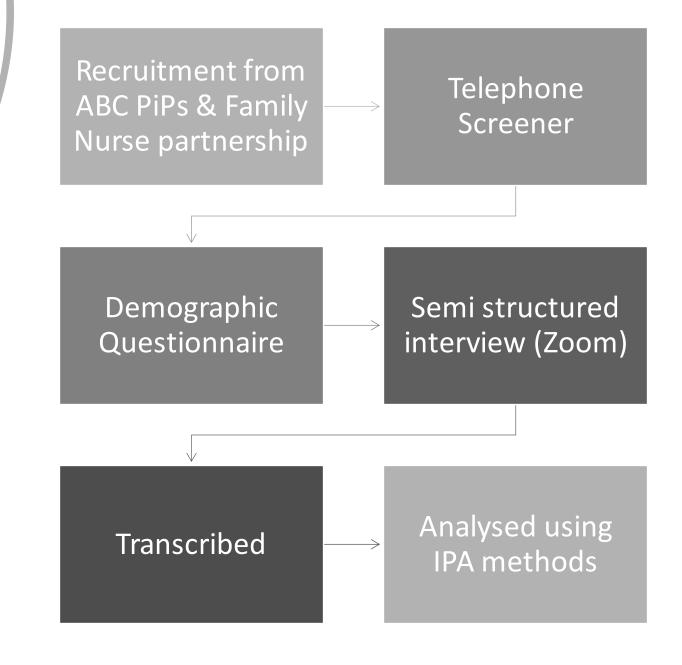
Self identified as lacking meaningful relationshipemotional and psychological support

IPA

What is the experience of motherhood like for women who lack the presence of their mother?



### Methods





### Participants

- 10 Mothers with children under 2
- Age range 18-35
- Lacked meaningful relationship 3 yearslifetime
- Co-parenting
- Excluded; single parents, parents of multiple births, premature babies and those whose mum had passed away

#### Results

The Birth of a Mother

Loss and Mourning

Ghosts in the Nursey



The Birth of a Mother

The Transformative nature of Motherhood

"Changed who I am as a person completely big time"

'I didn't appreciate how difficult it must have been for her as a single mum'

'to re-examine everything you have ever known and feeling in absolute dismay that what you have known is no longer...you know that I thought my parents were great people, greatparents. You know I will never get that back'

# The Reality of the Struggle of Motherhood

'Well, I think it was amplified by Covid because there was nothing I could do. There was no help. My husband couldn't come [..]to any appointments'

'I thought that won't happen to me because I am going to love my baby, and naively I just thought it was if you love your baby then that is everything'

'I was terrified. [..] I couldn't sleep, I used to dread the night-time, and I would sit, no matter how exhausted I was I would sit, and I would watch him and then sometimes I would manage to close my eyes and then constantly, up checking his breathing [..] It was just sheer terror

## Protecting the Myth of Motherhood

'It's a roller-coaster, you know, especially at the start in the new-born phase, it's so hard, and you are so tired and trying to recover from the birth, and you feel like your whole world has just been turned up on its head. But no, it's been lovely'

'so it's been a struggle, but my health visitor and stuff has been really good, and I feel like I am coming out the other side, but it's a struggle.. (laugh). But ehm, its...I do enjoy it'

'A lot of people say to you, oh, you have this instant bond...and love and I like obviously when I had T I loved.. I do love him so much. But I didn't get that..instant oh my goodness I love I love.. my goodness... I was more like I don't know what the hell I am doing and why won't he stop crying, and I am sore, and I am so tired and ehm, but yeah it kind of got easier'

Loss and Mourning



### A Mother-Shaped Hole

'I genuinely think it will be forever one of the hardest things in the sense of, just like I said, you just have so many pictures in your head that things are going to be this way for you and when you have to rely on your partners mum instead of your own mum, it's very difficult to accept that fact?'

'I felt like we..like mum was not in the same boat as me..like she was the storm you know and we had no life jacket or nothing.. I was just there'

'I think it was [during the] birth I asked for my mom.. but I know it was I wanted someone another female there and someone who acted maternally as much as afterwards... my ex said to me you do know you asked for your mum.. yeah it was just in the moment I wanted someone else there who showed me that love and affection as much as he did... but it is different going through all that'

'it's really vastly complicated... all I did was want my mom. I was trying to feed my son in the middle of the night, and he was wailing [...] I was going through that whole emotional journey all I wanted was my mom.... I was like.. 'I just want my mom to be here'

'I don't really know... it makes me feel a bit bad because I think well my mum should be there...like it should be... should would could... but she is my mum she should be there.. She should be interested in them'

# Negotiating the World with The Burden of Loss

'I feel this is the place I feel safe [..], and I don't need negative energy to come into it

'I'll let her be a grandmother to my son...ehm, but I mean that's just a grandmother its never..going be anything... like 'nanny' she is never going to be like out and about with him'

'I have my mother-in-law as a support, sometimes I think of her as a surrogate mum..because she has all the warmth, empathy and support that you know that my own mother doesn't have'

'if I were relying on say my [husband] mum, I would worry that she would be like what about your mum and why aren't you asking her and I wouldn't want her thinking mum was a bad mum. I am still very aware of that [..], I don't know why. I think maybe I don't want her to be judged'

'I seen him with his mum and dad and they were very much involved and still are very helpful, but for that first while and even still sometimes now I see that, and I almost feel a wee bit of jealousy because it's like 'why can't I have that?'

# Negotiating the Fantasy of the Ordinary

'I feel like such a horrible person when I say this about my mum and stuff because obviously, she is always there for me whatever I need, she gets me, but the thing she struggles with, and the thing I need the most is her to be there for me and for her to be that person I ring if I am struggling and I just can't because she just doesn't want to help'

I think it's just hope almost.. it's like that. Kind of feeling of 'oh maybe.. you know maybe this is what she needs'... it's her first grandchild, she will see the wee baby, and she will be so happy. I think it was more hope that maybe she would potentially stop taking drugs was a [.]part of it in my brain. I was like once I give birth will this change our lives you know for the better'

"no matter what she is, she is my mother, and you know (long pause) I just couldn't do it to her"

## Grieving for the Childhood Self

'It makes me want to go back to 15-year-old Lucy and just give her a big hug. Because 15...15 is a baby.. [..] if I were to think of not even myself either of my two girls either of my girls in that situation..unthinkable..completely unthinkable.. like I am disgusted.'

'I think back if she had of just got the help if she had just gone and taken the medication would everything...would my teenage years be completely different, would everything now be completely different'



Ghosts in the nursery

## "One Cycle of Abuse After Another"

'she said to both me and my sister that nobody taught her how to be a mother, she didn't have a role model, you know she didn't have anyone to look up to, and I suppose in a way me and my sister are sort of the same'

'She suffers with depression and anxiety. So I think that is where I have gotten it from because she got that off her mother and then my granny got that from her mum'

'I actually overdosed when I was three months pregnant with [child's name] because I think with the whole shock of it, and I suppose at that stage as well, I was like oh well, I am going to turn out like my mum, and I suppose that was a big thing as well the hospital always pushed on me'

'As I got older, I have been able to have more empathy with her, you know, she had such a horrible, horrible childhood and a pretty chaotic adult life as well. I mean, it is no wonder that she wasn't able to be mum of the year'

'can't someone have done it before me[..]Ok things make you stronger, but I would sooner be weaker and not go through that because those are horrible, horrible ways of learning life lessons that can be totally preventable'

### Parentification

'from the age of like 6 and 7, I was making my brother dinner'

'because I was my mother's sounding board at 4 and 5 years old'

'When I was 11, I came home twice from school that year to find her overdosed on heroin'

'I was aware of lots of things I shouldn't have been aware of like[..] our finances and times when we were low on money like how much was in our bank account I remember one time [..]her telling me we had a fiver in the account or something and she was like crying, and then I started crying and I was maybe god...I was either P7 or very early years secondary school or whatever. Like, I shouldn't have known that sort of stuff... I mean, but then she obviously felt like she couldn't turn to anyone else, but I never went to her...that is the difference.. like I didn't see her as a support.. and that is still the way it is'

## Righting the Wrongs of the Past

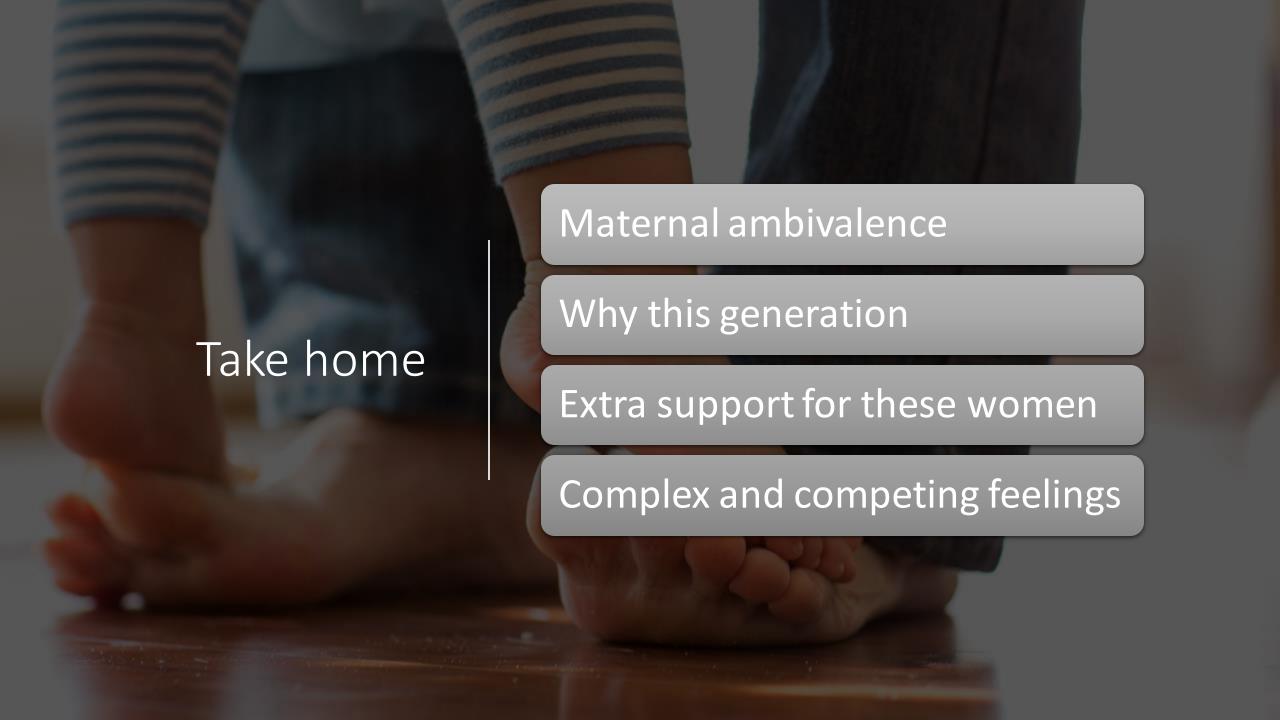
I was..so scared of them feeling the way I felt, and I still am.. I just don't want them ever feeling that ...they are on their own. That they don't have me..[..] I don't want them to ever feel like that...(crying)'

'I try to be supermom, [..]. So that has really affected me because I don't want my kids missing out, so I nearly try to over parent them nearly and be a perfect mum which realistically doesn't happen

'It will never undo how I feel, but I am certainly making sure that [he] will never feel the way she made me feel'

'I am nearly trying to give my kids two childhoods..mine and theirs'

'I don't want to be the mother to my child [...] that my mum was to us. I want so much better...and my child deserves better'



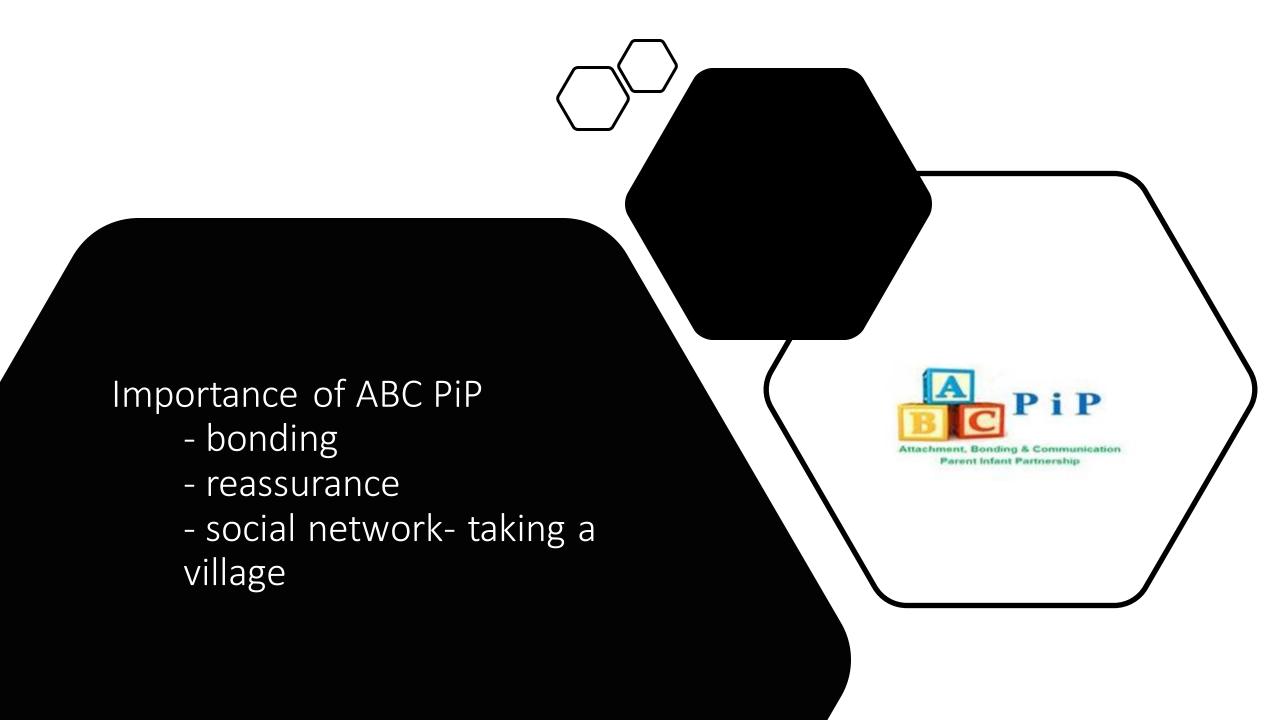
### Recommendations from the women





PEER SUPPORT

ASSUMPTIONS OF SOCIETY AND SERVICES





Thank you and any questions?

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