“Well, my kids always come first”: A preliminary examination of the role of children in the lives of women who misuse opioids
Antoinette Spector, PT, DPT • Julia Dickson-Gomez, PhD
Institute for Health & Equity, Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI

OVERVIEW
• ~40% of adults with an opioid use disorder (OUD) live with children
• Women with OUD are more likely to be living with children, and to be their caretaker, relative to men with OUD
• Yet, there is a paucity of research exploring the role of children in the lives of adults who misuse opioids, particularly women

PURPOSE
• To highlight the role of children in the experiences of women who misuse opioids

METHODS
• Research team members completed in-person, semi-structured interviews
• *Inclusion criteria:* participants had to be 18 years or older, identify as a woman, and had to have misused any opioid within the previous six months
• The interview guide included questions related to a participant’s social network: it asked about the people who were most important and to describe their relationships with them
• All interviews were transcribed verbatim
• Open and axial coding were used to identify preliminary themes.
• Constant comparative methods were used to explore the role of children in the women’s experiences

RESULTS

Figure 1. Preliminary themes and representative quotes

**The centrality of children in women’s lives and decisions**

I surrendered my daughter...I didn’t want her to live with the life that we were living in you know...To make a choice to miss her...she has a better life, a good life.  
~Non-Hispanic White, 40 years old

I split with the father of my two boys...I was homeless...He had the kids...And then in 2016 he lost the kids...and they [child welfare] gave them to me...and I was still using on and off. So, I had to get clean in order to get my kids.  
~Hispanic, 33 years old

**Maintaining relationships with their children**

[If] I make sure I see my kids everyday. If I don’t see them everyday, I talk to them...My kids are my world. And though I’m not here doing this stuff [heroin], that’s the only thing I got that I feel like...Is something  
~Non-Hispanic Black, 39 years old

I have no other family besides my daughter and she was...adopted out at birth. I see her still. And then my son that I just gave birth to...I’m currently trying to work on getting him back.  
~Unknown race, ethnicity, or age

**Caretaking responsibilities**

[My son’s] glad he’s still alive...But he’s also 23 years old...He’s grown...And I don’t want to watch my baby — I call him a baby — dead when I could prevent it [with Noreen]...So that’s why most of us stick together and use.  
~Non-Hispanic White, 40 years old

I was still taking pills. My kid was stealing from me...and then also my daughter got pregnant and she had a little boy. And by that time, my daughter was a drug addict...so I had to start taking care of my grandson.  
~Non-Hispanic White, 53 years old

Table 1. Sample characteristics (n=26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Count (Percentage)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age, mean (range)</strong></td>
<td>41 years (22 – 58)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>15 (58%) Non-Hispanic White</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Geographic area</strong></td>
<td>16 (62%) Urban</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education level</strong></td>
<td>16 (62%) High school diploma or GED</td>
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DISCUSSION

• Many women who misuse opioids have children and describe them as important to their lives
• Our findings indicate that children — and related caretaking responsibilities — are central to women’s opioid misuse and recovery experiences
• Interventions that seek to maintain or regain child custody should be prioritized
• Family-based treatment options may also be especially relevant for women who misuse opioids, particularly approaches that can engage adult children with substance use disorders