

best mother that I can be. And if I'm in active addiction, I'm not gonna be able to do that.

As suggested in the presentation of individual women's narratives, virtually all of the participants in the women and children's treatment program developed strong commitments to recovery that were uniquely connected to their goals of providing stable and responsible care for their children. The tremendous value of this connection was evident over time, as none of the participants in the women and children's treatment program declined in their commitment to recovery. The findings of this research suggest that women's connections to their children in the specialized treatment program reinforced recovery as meaningful in tangible, concrete ways. In particular, recovery became personally meaningful as it supported a desired path to motherhood.

Discussion

Taken together, these findings clearly demonstrate that substance-abusing women are a highly marginalized and vulnerable population. Frequently situated in a complex of adverse and chaotic social environments, their lives are marked by both intimate partner and community-level violence, poverty, homelessness, disease, and mental illness (Baseman, Ross, and Williams 1999; Davis 2000; Falck et al. 2001; Gilbert et al. 2001; Kettinger, Nair, and Schuler 2000). Chronic drug-using women often inhabit a world of economic deprivation and indigence, where the shifting and precarious nature of their financial resources, health, safety, and fragile social ties often engenders criminal involvement and perpetuates drug-using careers (Boyd 1999; Inciardi 1995). Many of these concerns are magnified even further for women from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds or minority communities. These factors had a substantial impact on the participants in the present study, as many experienced periods of homelessness and very few had histories of stable employment. As such, drug abuse is rarely a woman's sole life problem, but is likely one of a myriad of adverse life events that profoundly affect the lives of women—and for those who are mothers, their children as well.

Nevertheless, research on women drug users has traditionally focused on their lack of parenting abilities and failure to be responsible or responsive caregivers (Blume 1991; Hans 1995; Kumpfer and Bayes 1995; Tarter et al. 1993). In spite of these portrayals, women drug users express high levels of commitment to their children and value motherhood as a personally meaningful role (Kearney, Murphy, and Rosenbaum 1994; Sterk 1999). For many women, becoming a "good mother" is a motivator for abstinence and recovery, and this was the case in this study as well. The women were overwhelmingly concerned not only with avoiding the removal of their children from their care, but also with making positive contributions to their development.

Cultural expectations for mothering emphasize unconditional love, nurturing, and self-sacrifice for one's children (Boyd 1999). While these idealized notions of motherhood may obscure the realities of daily life for many mothers, drug-using mothers are stigmatized by visible shortfalls in these expectations, and they often express guilt for failure to meet personal expectations as well (Baker and Carson 1999; Carter 2002; Lewis, Klee, and Jackson 1995; Murphy and Rosenbaum 1999; Sharpe 2005). Specialized treatment programs for pregnant and parenting women are designed in part to build women's parenting skills and to support women's confidence in their ability to mother, and thus have demonstrated increased retention in treatment and improved outcomes (Clark 2001; Connors et al. 2001; Grella 1999; Kissin et al. 2004; Surratt 2005). The qualitative research described above extends our understanding of family-centered approaches to substance abuse treatment for women by documenting the beneficial synergy between commitments to children and commitments to recovery that support women's meaningful engagement with treatment.

Implications for Future Research

As drug abuse continues to touch the lives of increasing numbers of women, expanded research in formal treatment settings and self-help venues is needed in order to understand women's experiences in these programs and the ways that their