



# Unheard Voices: non-service using mothers perceptions of their adolescents' social and emotional wellbeing



**Lauren Vaughan, Hunter New England Local Health District**  
[lauren.vaughan@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:lauren.vaughan@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au)

Only a small percentage of young people who experience mental ill-health will access professional help and receive care. Young people tend to turn to their parents for support, advice and information. However we know very little about what this support looks like and how parents identify social and emotional wellbeing in their adolescent children. This research aims to find out what parents observe and consider being of importance relating to their adolescent children's wellbeing and how they respond to their social and emotional needs.

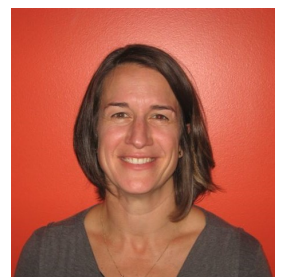
Semi structured interviews were conducted in an inner regional area of Australia, with nine mothers of adolescent children aged 12-17, who were deemed of lay knowledge, having not had contact with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or seen a private psychiatrist or psychologist for their children. This qualitative study used hermeneutic phenomenology to guide thematic description and analysis of the data, to explore the lived experience and identify key themes.

Social and emotional wellbeing was not something that parents described giving much conscious thought to. They spoke of feeling like they knew their children and believed they would be able to see changes to indicate concerns. Participants identified the role of other people, in their adolescents' wellbeing. This centered on the people close to them and the people they felt knew their children well. Interview data indicated two overall thematic areas that described how non-service using parents perceived the social and emotional wellbeing of their adolescent children; 'Mothers perceptions of knowing their children' and 'The influence of others'. Five sub themes were also identified. 'The significance of the parental relationship', 'The presence and absence of contact', 'Making connections', 'Gaining knowledge' and 'Support'.

Mothers understanding of the social and emotional wellbeing of their adolescent children is complex and constantly changing. This research gives voice to the large group of parents who are not currently accessing services, helping to develop a shared understanding of what works for them in promoting and monitoring their child's wellbeing. Inherent in this understanding it the perception that mothers know their children and how they are influenced by people and experiences. By focusing on these core themes, professionals may be better placed to engage and target mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention, to people identified by mothers as being part of their informal support network as well as to one of the key supporters of adolescent social and emotional wellbeing, mothers.

***For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'***

Lauren is an Occupational Therapist with a Master's degree in Adolescent Mental Health. She currently works in youth mental health promotion on the mid north coast of NSW. Lauren was prompted to focus her research on an area of difficulty in her clinical practice, engaging parents of adolescents. Lauren is committed to improving the mental health of adolescents to reduce the impact of mental illness and to ensure mental ill health is treated early



**[www.heti.nsw.gov.au](http://www.heti.nsw.gov.au)**