'Once I’m clean I’m cushty and I can stay clean you know - it’s getting clean.' . Hopes and dreams of abstinence in substance misusing mothers' interview accounts

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Study of women’s experience of maternity services

‘Once I’m clean I’m cushty and I can stay clean you know - it’s getting clean..’

Harriet, 34

Interview based study of 24 pregnant and postpartum substance misusers in three hospital trusts in southern England
“The main objectives are to reduce the number of substance exposed births to zero. .. Project Prevention seeks to reduce the burden of this social problem on taxpayers, trim down social worker caseloads, and alleviate from our clients the burden of having children that will potentially be taken away”
Critique of harm reduction

- Substitute prescribing criticised as ineffective and costly
- Intergenerational poverty, transmission and inheritance disadvantage identifies children as threat
- Parallel discourse of anti social behaviour, focus on *problem families*
Interview data

- Interviews analysed as strategic accounts
- Accounts were organised to manage potentially spoiled identities
- Women with a history of substance misuse were concerned to present themselves as plausible mothers
Pregnancy as a ‘Turning Point’

‘And then when I found out I was pregnant it was like a blessing you know. And then *we just threw everything into getting better*’

Michele, 23
IV:..over my dead body they’re not having my child off me at all. I mean I'd had enough of the drugs before I got pregnant this just given me the kick up the arse to do it, you know, yeah.

I: So just wondering how, because obviously heroin and crack has been your thing.

IV: Yeah. I mean I’ve stopped the crack completely I haven’t done crack now for quite a while, but between four and six weeks I haven’t done it for, which is good for me because since I’ve been out of prison I smoked it every single day since I’ve come out of prison …So I haven’t touched crack again since finding out I’m pregnant which is a big thing for me.

Sylvia, 23
I: And how many milligrams were you on then when you started?

IV: You start on 30 mil and then you go up depending on if it works or not.

I: Yeah. And how did you get on with the methadone?

IV: Yeah it was alright but I went up to 60 mil, I didn’t really need it I don’t think, I don’t know why but when I found out I was pregnant I just wanted to get off of it all.

Diana, 30
Conclusions

- The pre-emptive strike of offering drug users sterilisation needs to be resisted
- The drug user identity can be altered
- Pregnancy is an opportunity for drug users to exercise agency