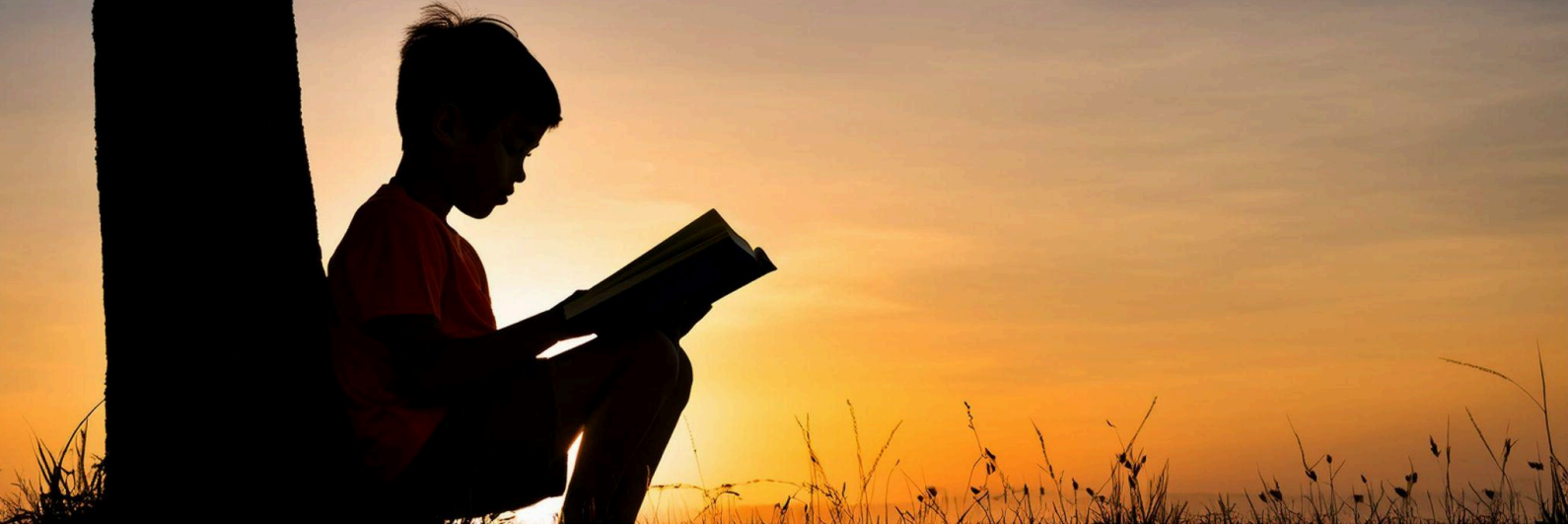

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The Child's Experience of Relatives with Mental Health Problems: How Can Middle Grade Authors Combat Stigma?

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Abstract
The effects of the stigmatisation of people with mental health problems (MHPs) should not be underestimated; stigma becomes a barrier to seeking help and can lead to feelings of shame, fear and isolation for children within the family. Through the examination of three Middle Grade (MG) depictions of relatives with MHPs – *The Rollercoaster Boy* by Lisa Thompson, *The Tiger who Sleeps Under My Chair* by Hannah Foley and *Boy in The Tower* by Polly Ho-Yen – this article will investigate how MG authors can portray characters with MHPs realistically, compassionately and with the aim to combat stigma. I suggest that using metaphors to describe MHPs can both aid understanding for children and provide a clear separation between the person and their symptoms, thus reducing blame. When stories acknowledge the experience of stigma and confront it directly with empathetic characters who hold alternative viewpoints, the negative stereotypes which young readers are likely to encounter in their lives are directly challenged. I discuss why MHPs must be normalised by providing a wide-range of characters across the MG reading experience. MHPs are common, can affect anyone and are often invisible. In truth, they are simply part of being human.

Keywords: *creative writing for young people, mental health problems, stigma, middle grade, family*

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Mental health conditions are characterised by the World Health Organisation as "mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm" (WHO, 2022, para.1). These conditions have carried stigma in the past. Yet, it is a sad truth that stigma, defined by UK mental health charity, Mind (2023, p.6), as "ignorance […] , prejudicial attitudes […] and discrimination", remains a reality for many people. In fact, even though on average, one in four people will experience a mental health problem each year (Mind, 2024, p.14), recent research has recognised that public knowledge about, and attitudes towards mental health have started to decline (Mind, 2024, p.51). In discussions, the terms 'mental health problems', 'mental disorders', 'mental illness' and 'mental health conditions' are often used interchangeably. However, for the purpose of this article, I will use mental health problems (MHPs), the term used by Mind (no date, para.3).

The wide-ranging effects of stigma should not be underestimated. Research has shown that stigma has a serious impact on health outcomes (Dolezal, 2022) and that self-stigma reduces the likelihood of people with MHPs seeking care (Bartels et al 2021). Lambert (2024) examined how Middle Grade (MG) authors might respond to the mental health crisis in children, representing MG characters with MHPs in a way that "gives voice to previously stigmatised emotions and feelings, enabling the young reader […] to feel seen and heard." (p.9, para.3).

However, stigma is not limited to the person with a MHP, it is also experienced by their families. Stigma can be felt by the children of parents with a MHP, who might be bullied, teased and therefore hide their parent's condition, leading to reduced connections with others, fear, worry and internalized stigma which reduces their self-esteem (Dobener et al 2022). Research has shown stigma can also affect the siblings of children with MHPs, who often choose to conceal information from friends or teachers, ultimately leading to isolation (Sin, Moone and Harris, 2008). This article will build on the discussion of Lambert (2024), focussing on how MG authors can depict relatives with MHPs in a way that both supports children living with this experience and combats stigma in the wider population.

Middle Grade Depictions: Balancing Reality and Compassion

If the stigma associated with MHPs is to be combated, first and foremost MHPs must be openly discussed. MacGregor (2022) recognised that when MG authors portray characters experiencing MHPs with both accuracy and compassion, it helps combat stigma, which can lead to earlier intervention, stating "encouraging these conversations and depicting this reality is critical" (para.3). She emphasises that "the stories need to balance the painful realities with hope" (para.14).

Here I must acknowledge my personal circumstances which, although giving me an insight into the realities of these depictions, also mean that I have a particularly critical eye. I am a mother to two children and I have a diagnosis of a MHP. Therefore, when examining portrayals of parents with MHPs, I naturally think 'is this how I would want my children to view me?' However, I am also an author and an educator, who, encountering children experiencing the stigma of having a relative with a MHP, appreciates the necessity of realistic portrayals which support these children and develop insight and empathy among their peers.

The first book I can remember reading which explored a parent with a MHP, was Jacqueline Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum* (1999). In an article celebrating the 25 years of its impact, BookTrust recently described this book as a "sensitive yet unflinching portrayal of a single mum struggling with bipolar disorder" (Book Trust, 2024, para.3). Opening with the line "Marigold started going weird again on her birthday" (Wilson, 1999, p.9), it shows how the main character, Dolphin, and her sister, Star, cope in different ways as their mother's mental health declines. Hailed as "a pioneer in terms of children's books, dealing with the gritty reality of life" (Manji, 2018), Jacqueline Wilson must be applauded for writing such a stark depiction, particularly as MHPs were not discussed as openly or regularly represented in children's books of the time. However, while Wilson's (1999) depiction is certainly compassionate towards Dolphin and Star, detailing a brutal reality that some children do face, I did not find it an entirely compassionate depiction of Marigold, a mother with bipolar disorder and alcohol problems. Marigold is depicted as both neglectful – often leaving her children alone overnight (p.55) – and physically abusive, slapping Dolphin (p.169). She is irresponsible, relying on thirteen-year-old Star to care for Dolphin. It is accurate that parents with MHPs, who aren't adequately supported, may find it difficult to provide safety and care for their children (NSPCC, 2024). However, because Marigold is unwell for the whole story, the reader gets little separation between negative aspects of her personality and the symptoms of her MHP. Furthermore, there is also a part of the story where she is portrayed as being manipulative, and that perhaps she could control her symptoms – "Marigold was on her very best behaviour all week. She didn't drink at all. She didn't shout or swear at anyone, she didn't go on a wild spending spree" (p.182). The problem here is that by portraying Marigold as neglectful, abusive and manipulative, perhaps by some degree of choice, it reinforces the negative stereotypes that already exist about people with MHPs.

I am passionate about openly discussing mental health and combating stigma, but recognise that it can be challenging to portray these characters accurately and compassionately, particularly when writing from the perspective of a child experiencing a relative with MHPs. Twenty-five years ago, as a young teenager, Marigold was the *only* character I had encountered who had bipolar disorder. The effect was that, when I received my diagnosis later in life, I was reminded of the negative stereotypes associated with this MHP that this book had generated for me as a child – something that is even more poignant now I am a mother myself. So, how have

depictions of relatives with MHPs changed in the last 25 years? Thankfully, there is now a much wider selection of children's books portraying the lived experience of families affected by MHPs (BookTrust, 2024). How can modern authors offer realistic portrayals of the difficulties children experience, while remaining compassionate towards their relatives and therefore combating the stigma associated with MHPs, rather than perpetuating it?

To answer this question, I examine three MG depictions of relatives with MHPs: *The Rollercoaster Boy* by Lisa Thompson (2022), *The Tiger who Sleeps Under My Chair* By Hannah Foley (2023a) and *Boy in The Tower* by Polly Ho-Yen (2014), referring also to *Aubrey and the Terrible Yoot* by Horatio Clare (2015) and *Project Fairy* by Jacqueline Wilson (2022) in brief. I investigate how MG authors can depict characters with MHPs realistically, with compassion and with the aim of combating stigma. The key points generated will be used to inform my own writing, both in general and specifically for my unpublished manuscripts – *The Weerie Wilds*, which depicts a father with depression; and *The Bloodstone*, which depicts a sister experiencing psychosis.

Increasing Understanding

To combat stigma, the first thing that must be targeted is ignorance. When someone understands MHPs they are less likely to believe inaccurate stereotypes which lead to prejudice and discrimination. This presents a particular challenge when describing MHPs – complicated, nuanced concepts – to children. Evidence suggests that children of parents with a MHP want to understand their illness and that understanding improves coping mechanisms (Cudjoe and Chiu, 2020). Accurate depictions of people with MHPs will also lead to a greater understanding within peer groups, teachers and the wider public. As concluded by Dam and Hall (2016, p.455): "the best remedy to cope with being ashamed and […] to break the family concealment is openness, information and knowledge."

MG authors therefore have a duty to provide accurate information about MHPs in a way that can be easily understood by the age group. Tehseem and Khan (2015) describe how metaphors can be used in children's literature to embed difficult concepts that children do not yet have the language or experience to understand; this is done by carefully matching the concept to another which is already familiar and well understood. The use of a metaphor to facilitate a deeper understanding of a MHP is particularly effective in *The Tiger Who Sleeps Under My Chair* (Foley, 2023a), which compares the experience of having an episode of psychosis – Rosie's in 2023 and James' in 1884 – to turning into a tiger. "A tiger – an excellent metaphor for the complexity of his affliction" (Foley, 2023a, p.240) is especially powerful because of the varied feelings and emotions a tiger conjures within us. It is an animal to be feared but it is also endangered; it is courageous yet also unpredictable. The tiger reflects the nuances in the characters' feelings towards their MHP in a way that can be understood by children. Despite the difficulties their symptoms cause, both Rosie and James have a great affection for tigers and want to protect them.

The metaphor of "feeling my body change into something else" (p.84) provides a clear separation between the character and their MHP. It shows that it is something they cannot control, and yet when each character is the tiger they remain true to their core beliefs and protect their loved ones from harm. James' tiger trespasses onto land owned by Malcom Greep, an action which ultimately leads to his death: "I can't help it, Emma, it's my nature. I'm protecting you all" (p.237). Rosie's tiger also puts the needs of others first: "food wasn't important. I just had to keep guarding, to keep you all safe" (pp.84-85).

Lambert (2024) found that "anthropomorphism allows […] the freedom to present [MHPs] as having their own separate identity and shape" (p.5). By representing the MHP as an animal it challenges stigma, distancing the person from the symptoms of their MHP. This separation is particularly marked in the depiction of depression in *Aubrey and the Terrible Yoot* (Clare, 2015), where Aubrey's dad is "in the grip of the Terrible Yoot" (p.67), an insect-like monster. The fact that the Yoot is a completely separate entity from his dad allows enough distance to discuss issues that may have been too sensitive for MG children had they been directly raised. For example, a suicide attempt is described as "the Yoot had tried to kill his father" (p.146). No blame is attributed to Aubrey's dad and all Aubrey's anger is directed towards the Yoot: "I know you can hear me, you disgusting bully" (p.150).

As well as the extended metaphor of the tiger, Foley (2023a) compares mental health to physical health in a way that challenges shame. As the main character, Jude, explains to Rosie, feeling ashamed for being mentally ill is "like being embarrassed for getting run over in a car accident, or apologising for having the flu" (p.83). Having dual timelines gives readers an historical context and then shows how far we have come in the treatment of MHPs. In the 1880s, Emma doesn't fully understand James' MHP but knows it must be hidden to prevent an admission to the asylum. In 2023, Jude learns about: psychotic episodes and their triggers (pp.62-63), medications and side effects (p.85), and ultimately that treatment can lead to recovery and living a full life (p.289). Accurate information about MHPs are weaved so skilfully into the storyline that the reader increases their understanding while remaining engaged in the plot; this, in combination with the metaphor of the tiger, builds compassion for James and Rosie. As Foley (2023a), who herself worked as a district nurse, states "stories transform that scary person over there into our friend who needs kindness over here" (p.300).

Metaphor is used in *The Rollercoaster Boy* (Thompson, 2022) by comparing "life with Dad [to] like living on a rollercoaster" (p.1). The book is about how Todd copes when his mum is away for work and his dad, who has bipolar disorder, stops taking his medication and decides to take Todd and little sister Laurie on holiday in the middle of the night. The metaphor of the rollercoaster is effective at reflecting a child's experience as it is accurate – studies have shown that this is exactly how children of parents with MHP describe the ups and downs of their lifeworld (Cudjoe et al 2022). Furthermore, it reflects the unpredictability of Todd's life using a metaphor that is familiar to MG children and is therefore likely to build compassion and understanding

within their peer groups. The metaphor of the rollercoaster also reflects the high and low moods specific to the dad's MHP in a child-friendly way. Another metaphor Todd uses when his dad's mood is high is "the elastic-band dad" (p.7). Although this comparison does not provide as much distance between his dad and his symptoms as the tiger (Foley, 2023a) or the Terrible Yoot (Clare, 2015), it does build compassionate understanding for the instability Todd feels, while reflecting the fact that his dad can't control the way his symptoms affect Todd. "Elastic-band dad" is someone Todd feels protective over: "watching him like that made me want to hold my breath in case he suddenly snapped in two" (Thompson, 2022, p.6).

Throughout the story, Thompson (2022) effectively weaves factual information such as: the symptoms of MHPs can be treated with medication (p.23), symptoms may return if medication is stopped (p.35) and that people with MHPs can be treated by psychiatrists (p.362). There is less use of technical vocabulary related to MHPs than in Foley's (2023a) depiction – bipolar disorder is not referred to specifically – but this may reflect the fact that *The Rollercoaster Boy* is for a slightly younger reading age (specified as 8+ by BookTrust (2025) rather than 9-12). Most importantly, it is a compassionate depiction of the highs and lows associated with this MHP and reflects the experience and emotions of Todd, all wrapped up in an engaging mystery story.

Acknowledging the Experience of Stigmatisation

The process of stigmatisation begins with negative stereotypes, including the assumptions that people with MHPs are weak in character, incompetent, dangerous or unpredictable (Stracke, Dobener and Christiansen, 2024). Therefore, when authors portray characters with MHPs they should confront these harmful stereotypes, while still acknowledging that stigma exists. It is recognised that children who have relatives with MHPs experience and expect 'stigma by association', which leads to "embarrassment, shame, guilt and fear" (Stracke, Dobener and Christiansen, 2024, p.2) and therefore MG authors must aim to acknowledge and normalise these feelings in their portrayals. Wilson (1999) realistically and compassionately portrays the stigma experienced by Marigold and her daughters. Dolphin and Star experience embarrassment, isolation and fear about what could happen if they seek help: "they'll get the social workers in and we'll both end up in care" (p.44). Yet it is only when Dolphin speaks out that Marigold truly gets the help she needs. Their experience of stigma is shown primarily through their neighbour, Mrs Luft, who uses phrases like "carted off to the loony bin" and "a real crazy lady, acting totally demented" (p.159), but also through students and parents at school: "She's a nutter. Just like her mum" (p.50).

Boy in the Tower (Ho-Yen, 2014) effectively represents the range of feelings Ade feels towards his mother, who has MHPs. Her specific MHPs are not named but readers learn that her symptoms – extreme anxiety when she tries to leave their flat, tiredness and withdrawal – were triggered by a traumatic physical attack. Ade's love for his mum shines through Ho-Yen's depiction: "I think she has the loveliest smile I have ever seen" (p.19). Yet she also captures his fear that others may judge her. Ade

reveals aspects of his life, little-by-little, almost as if he wants us to understand what his mum is like as a person first. "The thing with my mum is, she doesn't like going out of the flat much. She doesn't go out at all, actually" (p.19), he eventually admits. Ade explains how her symptoms crept up on them both, starting with not walking him to school, then not shopping and then "before I knew it, I realized I hadn't seen Mum leave the flat for a couple of months" (p.22). This, coupled with the description of the profound effect the attack had on his mum, gives context which cultivates empathy for them both.

Ade's anger is acknowledged in a way that builds compassion for him, without shaming his mum: "Part of me knew she couldn't help it but another voice had whispered into my ear: Is she trying to get better? Why won't she try to get up?" (p.31). As the story unfolds, terrible, tower-eating plants take over the city and Ade is forced to stay behind instead of evacuating because of his mum. In this way the physical isolation of being alone in the last remaining tower block, becomes a metaphor for the real feelings of social isolation that we know children of parents with MHPs can feel (NSPCC, 2024).

Ho-Yen (2014) also challenges negative stereotypes; despite the effects of his mum's symptoms on her ability to care for Ade, she is not portrayed as weak. When Ade asks her to see a doctor, she battles her symptoms for Ade's sake: "We'd made it as far as the lifts when she started doing the funny breathing again" (p.36). Furthermore, it is her strength which saves Ade's life in the end: "She's stronger then me and she pulls me along with her" (p.316). Mum is strong for Ade in the same way that he has been strong for her.

Stigmatisation is acknowledged through the character of Michael, who tells Ade "Just stay away, you hear?" (p.66), and Michael's mum who shouts at Ade's mum "to save her son. To save herself" (p.98), implying that Michael's mum thinks Ade's mum could control her symptoms if she wanted to. This is balanced by the actions of Obi and Dory, characters who respond to Ade's mum's symptoms in an empathetic and non-judgemental way, ultimately leading to her recovery. When Ade's mum finally leaves her flat to visit Dory, Ade is embarrassed when Mum leaves suddenly, but it is Dory who reassures him, "You do understand […] that I think your mum's a brave woman?" (p.280). Dory's kindness leads Ade's mum to confide in her about the attack, which is the turning point in her recovery.

This pattern of acknowledging stigmatisation and then confronting it with a character or characters who are completely non-judgemental was a common theme in all three of the modern depictions here. Foley (2023a) portrays the prejudices of schoolboy Zak, who refers to Rosie as "Loopy Linden" (p.162), and of the public watching her during her psychotic episode: "it's every other day you see a headline of someone getting stabbed by a crazed lunatic" (p.12). These are challenged primarily by the views of Jude himself, but also by friends, Imogen and Amin. In the 1880s timeline, the widely-accepted, historical perception of MHPs as "mental weakness" (p.4) and Malcom Greep's threats to reveal James' MHP, are in contrast to the love and support

offered by Emma, Oliver and housekeeper, Dillis. Thompson (2022) shows how fear of stigmatisation stops Todd from asking for help. In text messages, he lies to his friends, Blake and Joe, for fear of judgement, and lies to his mum, for fear that she will be angry with his dad. In the end, Marianne, the owner of the hotel, shows us how to respond to someone in crisis, getting Todd's dad the help he needs in a way which is both respectful and doesn't blame him for his symptoms: "I have a poorly guest here and I clearly need to help him" (p.306). Despite his embarrassment, Todd's new friends are also non-judgemental and supportive, "I know all about dad issues" says Patrick (p.309) and "We would have understood, or tried to" says Scout (p.310). When MG authors directly confront the stigmatisation of MHPs with an alternative viewpoint it invites their readers to challenge any negative stereotypes they may already hold or are likely to encounter in their lives. When this alternative viewpoint is offered by a strong, likeable child character, such as Ade, Jude or Scout, it builds empathy towards the character with a MHP. When the non-judgemental viewpoint is confirmed by a trusted adult character, such as Dory, Dillis or Marianne, it gives it authority.

Normalisation

When children encounter a range of characters with MHPs across their reading experience it normalises MHPs in a way that challenges stigma, showing that "mental illness is not a character flaw or a moral failing; it's just an illness" (MacGregor, 2022, para.23). For this to be effective, the publishing industry must strive to reflect a range of characters with MHPs in the stories it publishes. In 2011, Potter and Parsons identified that children's literature of the time portrayed more mothers with MHPs than fathers and that these mothers, who were more often than not single mothers, required a father figure or an institution to step in, in order for them to recover and for the safety of their children.

This trope is one I remember from my reading experience as a teenager; it reinforced the idea that mothers with MHPs needed saving, rather than having the agency to seek the help they needed or care for their children. This is a trope I would like to see consigned to history. Here, again, I must acknowledge my own bias; naturally, as a mother with a MHP, I want these characters to be portrayed as having power over their own destiny, rather than being helpless. I also acknowledge that there are times when people with MHPs won't have insight, and that outside intervention is required. The issue comes when *all* characters with MHPs are unempowered mothers, as it can lead children to the false assumption that MHPs only affect certain groups; the fact is that MHPs can affect anyone. This doesn't mean that stories about single mothers with MHPs shouldn't be published, just that balance is needed – both in the range of characters with MHPs portrayed and the extent to which that person determines their own recovery.

Like *The Illustrated Mum* (Wilson, 1999), *Boy in the Tower* (Ho-Yen, 2014) portrays a single mother whose symptoms mean she cannot take adequate care of her son. The difference is that Ade's mum powers her own recovery, she has agency and a

personality outside her MHP. She builds positive relationships with other adults who support her to recover at her own pace. A more recent depiction of a single mother with a MHP by Wilson, *Project Fairy* (2022), shows a mother who has powered her own recovery with support from a hospital admission and from social services. The story is set after-the-fact, but shows her strength to keep well and look after her children in a way that builds compassion but still acknowledges the difficulties and feelings the situation has generated for her family. She is a person who is motivated to succeed at her job, cares deeply for her children and builds positive relationships with other adults, including her boss, Mr Henry.

Stigma is challenged when characters with MHPs are shown to be able to build positive relationships and be successful in their goals. This tells MG readers that anyone can have a MHP, "illustrating that such difficulties are not isolated but are (sadly) all too common to the human condition" (Lambert, 2024, p.7). Todd's dad (Thompson, 2022) is also a single parent and someone who has lost jobs due to the symptoms of his MHP. However, positive relationships are shown between him and his sister, Aunt Lexie, and, by the end, with his ex-wife, Todd's mum, when they go on holiday as a family. Foley's (2023a) character, Rosie, forms close friendships with Jude, Amin and Isobel and goes on to study Zoology at University. James is a good brother to Emma and friend to Oliver – he is successful in bringing the true nature of Greep to light.

Normalisation of MHPs also occurs when secondary characters reveal that they too have a personal experience. Todd (Thompson, 2022) learns this through William: "I felt like he was telling me that he knew exactly how Dad was feeling" (p.311). Ade (Ho-Yen, 2014) learns this through the arrival of Ben, who "had a wife who was a bit like your mum" (p.194). These characters tell MG readers that MHPs are common, can affect anyone and are also invisible. You can't know someone's experience just from looking at them, "Maybe it's not so strange that there was someone like Mum in Gaia's tower" (p.197) concludes Ade.

Conclusion

Lambert (2024) states "stigmatisation occurs when there is a lack of dialogue about a given subject, leading to prejudice and stereotypes" (p.3). MG authors can combat this stigma by portraying a wide range of well-rounded characters with MHPs. Balancing empathy with a realistic depiction of the experience can be particularly difficult when writing from the perspective of children experiencing relatives with MHPs. I have identified key points by which the experience of the child can be presented accurately but in a way which is still compassionate to the relative affected by MHPs, therefore combating stigma rather than perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Firstly, understanding of MHPs must be increased; this benefits both children affected by MHPs and their wider peer group. Depictions of MHPs in MG books must weave accurate information into an engaging plot. Metaphors can be used to help children understand the complexities of MHPs. In my own writing I will take particular

inspiration from Foley (2023a) and Clare (2015) who use anthropomorphism to provide distance between the person and the symptoms of their MHP in a way which combats blame. In *The Weerie Wilds*, I will use the metaphor of a shadow beast to represent the depression of Charlie's dad. *The Bloodstone* will compare the way in which a psychotic episode of Layla's sister is viewed in contrast to a physical illness of another student.

Stigmatisation must be acknowledged by MG authors, as it is part of the experience of having a relative with MHPs that can lead to feelings of isolation, embarrassment and fear. All three key texts balanced depictions of stigmatised views, with a non-judgemental character who challenges them. *The Weerie Wilds* will portray Mr Cravington, an antagonist who tries to use stigma-by-association against Charlie; Jade, a character unaffected by the human world and the prejudices within it, will help Charlie see that he shouldn't feel ashamed. *The Bloodstone* will balance the prejudices of Tilly, a character who tries to steal Layla's friend when she has some time off school to support her sister with a MHP, with Dean, whose mum also has a MHP.

MG authors and publishers can also combat stigma by normalising MHPs as part of being human – they are common, can affect anyone and are often invisible. A wide range of characters with MHPs should be present within the MG reading experience. People with MHPs can be single or have a partner, they can be any gender, age and from any background. Their symptoms may at times affect their abilities to succeed in their life goals, but only in the same way as physical health conditions might. People with MHPs form positive relationships with adults, care for their children, have jobs and are forces for good in their communities. *The Weerie Wilds* will acknowledge the financial, practical and emotional strain Charlie's dad's depression has on his family, but will also depict him as strong. With the support of his wife and child, he will alleviate his depression, getting back to work and ultimately saving Charlie from the shadow monster. In *The Bloodstone*, Layla's new friend Dean, someone from a different background, will support her through her sister's MHP using his own experience.

Hannah Foley states that "we tend to think of stories as a force for good", but that this isn't always the case (2023b, para.1). Sometimes humans learn stigmatised views of MHP "through the stories we tell ourselves" (Foley, 2023b, para.2). As an author, a mother, a teacher of MG children and someone who has a personal experience of MHPs, I am passionate about writing stories for MG children that combat the stigma while remaining accurate to the experience of having a relative with MHPs. Through generating and responding to the key points throughout this discussion, I hope that my stories will become a force for good – showing that, far from being weak in character, people with MHPs can be some of the bravest people we know.

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Hannah Durkan is a children's author from Leeds who enjoys writing fantastical adventures. In 2020 she was awarded the Hachette Children's Novel Award, part of the Northern Writers' Awards. Her debut middle grade, *Zeina Starborn and the Sky Whale*, was published in 2022 by Orion Children's Books, followed by the sequel, *Zeina Starborn and the Emerald King*, in 2023. Hannah graduated from the University of Leeds with a BSc in Anatomy, a medical degree and a PGCE; she is currently studying towards a Master of Arts in Writing for Young People at Bath Spa University. As someone with a mental health problem, she is passionate about combating the associated stigma and promoting creativity as a way to maintain good mental health.