

Review of projects and initiatives that support children and families affected by alcohol misuse

INTRODUCTION

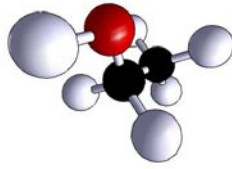
The aim of this review of projects and initiatives that support children and families affected by alcohol misuse was to produce three outputs. These were:

- A database of initiatives; services and projects that currently exist in the UK to support children and families affected by alcohol misuse.
- An analysis of the range of services.
- A summary of the evidence of effectiveness where available.

The outputs are intended to improve the knowledge base of service planners, researchers and policy makers as to the possible initiatives to reduce the harmful impact of alcohol on children and families in the UK. The study is important, as there are hundreds of thousands of children affected by these problems (Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England, 2004), yet there is little in the way of an overall picture of what is being done and what is effective.

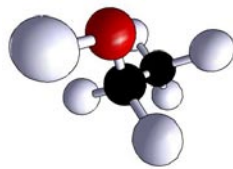
The study aims to influence future research into the effectiveness of interventions, as well as help service planners and service providers decide what kinds of service would be appropriate in their area. The study builds upon the work of Alcohol Concern's Children & Families National Alcohol Forum, a network of services and professionals interested in this area of work. For example, it builds on the Forum's localised qualitative study of the services for children and families in a city in the South West of England (Alcohol Concern, 2004). The study was coordinated by Bethany Williams

Questionnaires were sent to over 1,000 professionals. We were interested in hearing about specific services for children and families affected by parental substance misuse, and also about agencies that have this as part of their work, perhaps as one of a range of options, with one or more specific workers supporting children and families affected by alcohol misuse. We also requested annual reports and evaluations from all those who completed a questionnaire as part of the review. We hoped to gain a broad overall picture of the type of support available to all those affected by substance misuse from both within and beyond the sphere of alcohol services.



FINDINGS

- Although there is still much to be done, service provision in this area has vastly increased and some excellent work is being carried out despite barriers, such as non-specific funding and lack of training, space or capacity.
- However, 78% of respondents feel they are not meeting the needs of this group.
- Respondents wanted discussion, rather than categorising answers. They were unable to ‘pigeonhole’ provision into neat categories due to current commissioning and funding of their work with this group.
- However, we have grouped responses into six broad categories to give an overview of how support is currently being provided. Only 10% are services set up specifically to work with children and/or families, but encouragingly 27% do specific child and family work within their services.
- We were not able to find out whether any support for this group exists outside the sphere of drug and alcohol services.
- We experienced considerable enthusiasm for the research - wanting to highlight what is and is not currently being provided, how, and why.
- Respondents wrote in depth about impact and barriers to access and provision. Four respondents said help is sought only in crisis situations and another out of desperation, highlighting need and the importance of early intervention approaches.
- Overall, the work that this review as a whole has undertaken provides the strongest evidence yet that work with children and families of those affected by alcohol misuse is increasing and being much more widely recognised. This is a very positive finding. However, there is far less evidence from the supplementary evidence (annual reports and evaluations), provided by a limited number of organisations, of the numbers that are seen and the type of work that is being done.



IMPLICATIONS

Top 4 recommendations:

1. The government and their commissioners need to make children and families *affected by alcohol misuse* a priority when planning and commissioning services according to their new legislation and policy around children and families.
2. Other sectors working with children and families need alcohol awareness and training to support those affected by another's drinking.
3. Funding needs to be stable, long-term and inclusive of all aspects of delivery such as evaluation, user involvement and development, in order for work to succeed and progress.
4. Based on the data available to us, organisations need better systems to record data that relates to children and families. If services are to continue their efforts to extend services then the data that they routinely collect will have to be increased and its quality improved. This can have a knock-on impact in terms of securing resources for the future.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT:

The research provides evidence for what professionals in this field have always described: that provision is not meeting the needs of this vulnerable group, yet so much could be done at all levels of intervention. Every individual, whether adult or child, drinker or affected other, has the right to help and support. All professionals working with children and families, including the majority of adult drug and alcohol services, need to be able to address the impact of problem drinking on children and families in order to reduce the sociological, psychological and physical harms caused. Clear guidance, protocols, support, training and long-term funding are needed from the government, commissioners and service planners. Many substance misuse services recognise the need but are unable to meet it.

FURTHER INFORMATION

This review and database was produced as part of work to make a difference to the lives of children and families affected by alcohol misuse. For more information about Alcohol Concern's Children & Families National Alcohol Forum, professionals involved and their other projects contact Alcohol Concern on 020 7922 8652.

COPIES OF THE REPORT

The report can be downloaded from www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

ALCOHOL INSIGHTS

Alcohol Insights are brief summaries of the findings made from research or development grants.

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Further information about *Alcohol Insights* can be found at www.aerc.org.uk or email: info@aerc.org.uk

