

CHILD PROTECTION AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE

A growing body of national and local research indicates the extent of issues arising in families in which there is parental drug or /and alcohol misuse. Research acknowledges that in many families this will be a hidden problem, although the arising issues will manifest in ways that will be recognisable to all partner agencies. In reference to children in need and child protection, substance misuse is recognised in a significant proportion of families as outlined below.

Hidden Harm estimated that 350,000 children were victims of parents with drug problems in the UK. (Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, 2003). Other research estimates a further 920,000 living with parental alcohol misuse

Kent statistics indicate that substance misuse is a parental characteristic for over half of children (56.1%) on the child protection register

Figure 6: Parental characteristics of registered children



Parental drug use has also been shown to be a highly prevalent reason for children being Looked After for repeated and very lengthy times (Terling 1999; Semidei et al 2001), with one study finding it to be the most likely reason for children being taken permanently into care (Murphy et al 1991). However, there is evidence that support networks and family cohesion are key protective factors for children of SMPs (Velleman 2001), which suggests that efforts to keep families together may increase resilience in the children.

This has been recognised by Kent Child Protection Committee and its member agencies. As a result, the Kent Child Protection Committee has established close links with the Kent Drug & Alcohol Action Team (KDAAT). KDAAT is a partnership of key agencies with responsibility to reduce substance abuse in Kent.

In February 2002 a joint meeting was organised between KCPC and Kent Drug and Alcohol Action Team (KDAAT), to discuss the links between child protection and substance misuse. Research was presented, indicating the extent of the problem, and key issues about the structure and culture of those services with specific responsibility to respond. A number of recommendations were made and this paper provides detail of significant progress in Kent.

Progress Report against Recommendations to KCPC and KDAAT in February 2002

Since February 2002, there has been significant progress made against three recommendations.

The first is a project piloted in response to the recommendation to "investigate a family approach to substance misuse with access to appropriate services, and high priority to treatment for substance misusers with children".

1. The Substance Misusing Parents Project (Thanet and Dover 2003-4)

The Substance Misusing Parents' Service is a joint initiative between Social Services and the local drug and alcohol services in Thanet and Dover (KCA). The aim is to work with families where there are substance misuse issues putting the children at risk of harm, in order that risk can be reduced and families can be kept together. Parents identified as having drug or alcohol problems, with children on the child protection register are fast tracked into treatment services. Interventions are jointly planned and joint records are held by Social Services and the drug service to work together with the whole family.

The project was piloted in response to registration on the CPR for neglect being strongly correlated with parental drug use. In February 2003, 41.5% of registered children had identified substance misusing parents in East Kent (Kent County Council 2003)

The project in Thanet was independently evaluated by the University of Kent at Canterbury. The evaluation indicated that the project had been successful against the key outcomes that it had set out to achieve. There had been a number of operational problems which had highlighted the problems which may occur when joining two agencies for the first time. However a positive indication was some of the cultural shift that occurred, for example the drug service carrying out home visits, thereby making their service more accessible. (see below)

Key outcomes of the project are:

- Ten children ceased to be *Looked After* during their families' involvement with the SMP Service (one adopted) and twenty-three children came off the Child Protection Register.
- The cost benefit of these facts comes to at least £15,940 per month (minimum).
- It was found that 11 of the 54 families (20.4%) had their cases closed at Social Services during the time they were involved in the SMP Service, for reasons other than a change of address into another district.
- There were limitations on the collection of information from which to evaluate this Service: To address this KCA and Social Services will write an Operational manual which will ensure that further development of this project are not vulnerable to these operational issues

A point of evaluation from the project was that joint working by Social Services and KCA was not working well initially. However, there seem to be a number of indicators in the evaluation that some of the cultural shift that needed to take place within the organizations was starting. For example: from the clients, there did seem to be a feeling that intervention was

happening faster... and a large reduction in the waiting times for first assessments when general services are compared with the SMP Service. (p. 15)

Home visiting and successful keyworker/client relationships went some way to create a flexibility of service and lead to the good outcomes. (p.37)

And there is evidence that the agencies are benefiting from each other's experience:

For KCA there has been an understanding of the benefits that home visiting clients can bring: "the first thing we noticed was what a difference going into people's homes made" whilst Children and Families Social Services have gained knowledge of substance misuse issues: "in my experience [Social Services] been very grateful for that extra impetus" and another positive aspect of the joint working that has already been felt is the breaking down of stereotypes:"another huge strength as far as the clients are concerned, is that it's dispelling some of that myth that Social Services are just there to get the children...all Social Services want to do is pluck the children out of your hands...and this is designed absolutely for the opposite...a huge strength!" (p.29)

The demographics of those on the substance misusing project include the following. The project had 54 clients between February – December (2003).

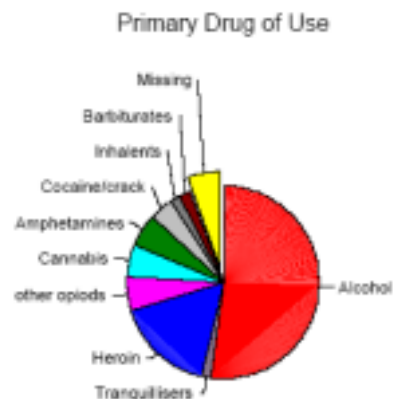
Children's Profile

The mean number of children each parent had was 2.4, ranging from 1 to 8. The mean age of the dependent children was 7.8 ranging from 0 to 17. Eight of the parents are known to have had adult children who had left home. 51% of the children were female.

Substance Misuse Profile

Table 11: Primary Drug of Use

	Frequency	Percent
Alcohol	28	51.9
Tranquillisers	1	1.9
Heroin	9	16.7
other opioids	3	5.6
Cannabis	3	5.6
Amphetamines	3	5.6
Cocaine/crack	2	3.7
Inhalants	1	1.9
Barbiturates	1	1.9
Total	51	94.4
Missing	3	5.6



In summary, the evaluation indicated clear positive outcomes in terms of children coming off the child protection register, clear cost benefits and a sense that the culture and working practice of the key agencies began to shift to collaborative working and learning from another organizational perspective. The evaluation was critical in many elements of operational procedures and an operational manual has been commissioned to resolve much of this.

2. KCPC Substance Misuse Multi- agency Training programme

In February 2002 it was recommended that joint training was organised for substance misuse service staff and Social Services staff with both as facilitators and participants.

In response to this recommendation a course was established by KCPC training unit. Initially a one day course was piloted with the following aims & Objectives:

To facilitate the development of knowledge and skills regarding the impact of substance misuse on all family members, including users, carers, and children

To explore the issues of assessing parenting capacity in relation to substance misuse

To begin work with families using motivational interviewing with substance misusing parents

To raise awareness of and practice with KCPC policies and procedures (including the use of the Drug Use Screening Tool)

To provide information on local substance misuse services

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the day, participants should:

- Understand the variable impact of substance misuse on a family
- Have knowledge of the latest research on substance misusing parents/carers and the impact on children
- Understand how the Assessment Framework can be used where substance misuse is a significant concern
- Have considered how to engage 'difficult' – resistant, reluctant and/or aggressive – substance misusing carers
- Developed some knowledge of the use and application of motivational interviewing

Agency breakdown of participants on KCPC training courses

Substance misuse and Families training

Health (including health visitors and school nurses) 38, Social Workers 21, Education 17
Probation 6, Police 1,

Drug and Alcohol awareness training

probation (9), health (34), Social Workers (32), Private & Voluntary sector (3), Education (2)

KDAAT DUST training

In 2004 -5 DUST has been provided for or booked to be provided for

KCC Foster carers=93 staff trained
Housing Associations = 56 staff trained
Childrens & Families = 40 staff trained
Youth Organisations = 95 staff trained
Sure Start =10 staff trained
Housing Services = 40 staff trained
Community Development=11 staff trained
Looked after Childrens Teams=20 staff trained
Volunteering Bureaus =20 staff trained
teachers refered by Drug Advisory team= 20 staff trained
Children's Homes= 20 staff trained
18 schools = 291 staff trained

We still have 15 full day sessions outstanding to book which will provide another 300 staff the opportunity to receive training and 1 half day session for a further 20 staff.

The anticipated number of staff trained within Kent this year will be approximately 1000

3. Develop a Framework of Common Policies and Protocols

In February 2002 the recommendation was made that Kent Drug Action Teams works with Kent Child Protection Committee to develop a framework of common policies and protocols.

Two documents were produced in response to this recommendation by Sandra Power . These are

When Parents are Misusing Drugs: Working Together with Parents and Children
When Parents are Misusing Alcohol: Working Together with Parents and Children

Both are available online from Kent Child Protection Committee website.

Future Work

Developing interventions specifically for children of substance misusing parents
Roll out of the Thanet Substance Misusing Parents project
Continued development of the KCPC training programme
Further research ? eg audit of consultation/referral
Young persons service policies KCPC approval
Operational manual developed for substance misusing parents project