

Evidence Briefing – Pre-Birth, Infancy and Early Years

Need to Know

- Parental alcohol and drug use can have a negative effect on children. If this is the case, it could be considered to be an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) dependent on levels of use etc, alongside other harmful experiences such as physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. An accumulation of ACEs can increase the risk of a child being affected by problem alcohol and drug use in later life.
- Children who grow up in homes where alcohol or drug use is problematic are statistically more likely to develop alcohol and drug issues themselves and face significantly higher risks of medical, psychosocial and behavioural issues.
- Children who are exposed to alcohol prenatally can have specific and lifelong neurodevelopmental problems collectively referred to as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

Key Findings

- Improving parenting skills and bonding between children and their parents is an effective preventative approach
- A focus on developing protective skills, values and attitudes in early years education is effective
- For children whose mother or father has issues with alcohol and/or drug use, effective prevention begins before the child is born to lower their risk of problem alcohol or drug use later in life and positively influence their development
- The individuals delivering an approach – teachers, psychologists, mentors, peers – need on-going, high quality training and support. This includes training to ensure their practice is trauma-informed
- One approach might not fit all. The age, developmental stage, circumstances and needs of each child and family within a targeted group need to be considered when designing and delivering a prevention programme.

Good Practice

- Triple P Positive Parenting Programme
- Children Harmed by Alcohol Toolkit C.H.A.T.
- Oh Lila resource pack for pre-school.

Potential Stakeholders

- Early years education (including childcare services)
- Prenatal and postnatal care (including health visitors)
- Families and children
- Third sector

- Police Scotland
- Social workers.

Introduction

This evidence briefing focuses on what works with regards to alcohol and drug prevention in pre-birth, infancy and early years. It relates to parents during pregnancy and infants and children up to five years old. However, it is important to note that there is a large cross-over of what works with the evidence briefing on children and young people.

Context

Factors influencing a person's alcohol and drug use over the life course can emerge very early in life and parental alcohol and/or drug use has a range of potentially serious consequences for children. Therefore, effective prevention work can begin before a child is even born and practitioners should consider potential factors that may influence a child's alcohol and drug use later in life, as well as the effects of parental substance use on their development.

Parental alcohol and/or drug use can have negative effects on children. If this is the case, it could be considered to be an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), dependent on levels of use, alongside physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect¹ and other recognised stressful events experienced in childhood. An accumulation of ACEs can increase the risk for a range of negative outcomes. Thus, children who grow up in homes where alcohol or drug use is problematic are statistically more likely to develop problem use themselves and face significantly higher risks of medical, psychosocial and behavioral issues.²

Children who are exposed to alcohol prenatally can be affected by a range of lifelong physical, emotional and developmental issues due to the effect of alcohol on their developing brain in the womb. These alcohol-related mental and physical problems are referred to as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is a specific diagnosis within this spectrum identified by the presence of specific facial and physical features which must all be present for a diagnosis of FAS to be made. It is difficult to estimate the number of children born with FASD because the condition is often misdiagnosed. However, given the levels of awareness and alcohol consumption during pregnancy in Scotland and the UK more generally, FASD is likely to be a significant public health concern³.

SIGN 156 estimates prevalence to be around 3% in the UK.

Almost one third of people in the UK do not know that official UK guidelines recommend it is safest not to drink at all during pregnancy⁴.

The Paediatric Childcare Clinic in Dundee receives referrals from health visiting, school health and social work where there are concerns about neglect impacting on a child's physical or emotional development. In 2017 the service undertook an audit of 29 patients which showed that 65% of these children had 4 or more ACES, putting them at high risk of long-term harm. The audit also showed that of 30 children who had a child protection medical as part of a multiagency investigation, 23% had 4 ACES or more.

A further audit in 2019 showed that that 65% of children had emotional or behavioural problems. Many of the emotional and behavioral difficulties of looked after children are multi factorial-

exposure to drugs and alcohol, exposure to domestic violence, attachment. This can lead to a complex presentation and significant impairment at home and at school.

The writers would like to note that these are highly selected groups presenting to the child protection medical service, so it is not surprising in the circumstances that they have lots of ACES. It should not be extrapolated further to the general population

- In 2020/21 there were a total of 40 unborn babies added to the Child Protection Register, 20 of these were due to (among other factors) parental drug misuse. There were 6 unborn babies registered due to parental Alcohol use.
- In 2021/22 there were a total of 38 unborn babies added to the Child Protection Register, 18 of these were due to (among other factors) parental drug misuse ²².

Over a 6-month period from May to October 2021, high risk cases of domestic abuse referred to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC) 80% had substance use a risk factor²⁴.

Over half of respondents (54%) to the 2017 Scottish maternal and infancy nutrition survey reported that they did not stop drinking alcohol before pregnancy, although 25% did say that they had "cut down" the amount they were drinking⁵.

More than one in ten respondents (11%) to the 2017 Scottish maternal and infancy nutrition survey indicated that they had continued to drink alcohol after they realised they were pregnant⁶.

The relationship between deprivation and the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy appears to be complex. A recent study comparing high and low deprivation areas in Scotland found that even though heavy episodic and frequent drinking was more common in more deprived areas, women with the highest deprivation scores in each area drank on average less than women with the lowest deprivation scores ⁷.

- 24% of pregnancies in Scotland required 'extra care' were in SIMD quintile 1 & 2 (most deprived)
- 11% of all births in Tayside, (2018/19) required 'extra care'
- 10.6% (152) of all births in Dundee City, required 'extra care'
- 20% of pregnant people were current smokers at booking appointment (2019)²³

Effective approaches to lower the risk of problem alcohol and/or drug use later in life, and to minimise alcohol related harm for children pre-birth up to five years old, focus on treating problem alcohol use in pregnant women, improving parenting skills and family relationships, and supporting pre-school children in developing a range of protective and resilience factors, including a range of personal and social skills (see table below).

3 Detailed analysis of what works

Key to evidence briefing

- High quality and multiple source evidence to support this approach (1)
- Some evidence or emerging evidence to support this approach (2)
- Limited evidence for this approach or potential development area for further investigation (3)

Early Years Education	Community Based	Family Based
Personal & social skills (1)	Parenting programmes (1)	Parenting programmes (1)
Cognitive, social & language skills (1)	Prenatal and infancy visitations (2)	Prenatal and infancy visitations (2)
	Identification of alcohol and drug harm and support for pregnant women (2)	Identification of alcohol and drug harm and support for pregnant women (2)

Intervention Type	Description	Relevant groups / Settings	Effectiveness	Factors that help (✓) or hinder (x) effectiveness	Good Practice
Parenting Programmes	Teaching core parenting skills and improving bonding between children and parents. It includes supporting parents as to how to take a more active role in their children's lives and providing positive and developmentally appropriate discipline.	Community Based All children including families affected by alcohol and drug harm	Effective • Alcohol • Drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enhances attachment between parent and child ✓ Made easy and appealing for parents to participate (child care, out of office hours, choice between different formats etc) ✓ Series of around 10 sessions, more for at-risk groups ✓ Includes activities for the parents, the children and the whole family ✓ Delivered through trained individuals 	<p>Strengthening Families - programme to improve parenting and family relationships, course of 10-14 group sessions depending on family risk factors⁹</p> <p>Children Harmed by Alcohol Toolkit C.H.A.T. - contains a range of interactive materials to be used with children, young people and families harmed by problem alcohol use¹⁰</p> <p>Parents Under Pressure - 20 weeks programme of home visits to support parents who are on a alcohol or drug treatment programme¹¹</p> <p>Getting our priorities right - Scottish Government good practice guidance for all agencies and practitioners working with children, young people and families affected by problematic alcohol or drug use¹²</p>
		Family Based All children including families affected by alcohol and drug harm	<p>Sustained impact</p> <p>Transferable</p> <p>Targeting mother and daughter particularly effective⁸</p>		
Personal & Social Skills	This involves a series of structured, interactive sessions to teach children a	Early Years Education	Effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Series of structured sessions with booster sessions over 	Oh Lila - flexible resource pack based on a storybook to help build protective and resilience

Intervention Type	Description	Relevant groups / Settings	Effectiveness	Factors that help (✓) or hinder (×) effectiveness	Good Practice
	range of personal and social skills, including how to cope with difficult situations in a safe and healthy way.	All children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol • Drugs <p>Transferable¹⁴</p>	<p>several years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sessions are primarily interactive ✓ Delivered by a trained nursery teacher, teacher or facilitator <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Provides information on specific alcohol or drugs, including fear arousal × Focuses only on self-esteem¹⁶ 	factors in pre-schoolers ¹⁵
Cognitive, social & language skills	Education programmes to improve cognitive, social and language skills of pre-schoolers from deprived communities.	<p>Early Years Education</p> <p>Children from deprived communities</p>	<p>Effective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marijuana • Other drugs <p>Sustained impact</p> <p>Transferable¹⁷</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Daily sessions ✓ Delivered by trained teachers ✓ Provides support to families on socio-economic issues¹⁸ 	

Intervention Type	Description	Relevant groups / Settings	Effectiveness	Factors that help (✓) or hinder (x) effectiveness	Good Practice
<p>Prenatal and infancy visitations</p>	<p>This involves pre-birth and infancy visitations to provide support with socio-economic issues to mothers and teach them basic parenting skills</p>	<p>Community Based Children of mothers living in difficult circumstances</p> <p>Family Based Children of mothers living in difficult circumstances</p>	<p>Effective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol and drug use of (unborn) child later in life <p>Sustained impact</p> <p>Transferable</p> <p>Innovative¹⁹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Delivered by trained health workers ✓ Regular visits pre-birth and until the baby is two years old. At first every two weeks, then every month, then less towards the end²⁰ 	

Intervention Type	Description	Relevant groups / Settings	Effectiveness	Factors that help (✓) or hinder (x) effectiveness	Good Practice
<p>Identification of alcohol and drug harm and support for pregnant women</p>	<p>Providing adequate treatment and support to pregnant women</p>	<p>Community Based</p> <p>Children of mothers who have issues with alcohol and drug use</p> <p>Family Based</p> <p>Children of mothers who have issues with alcohol and drug use</p>	<p>Effective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve emotional and behavioural functioning and development of unborn child <p>Sustained impact</p> <p>Transferable</p> <p>Innovative²¹</p>	<p>✓ Delivered by trained health workers</p>	

References

- 1 More information on Adverse Childhood Experiences is available at <http://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces/overview-of-aces>
- 2 Families Affected by Parental Substance Use, Smith, Wilson, 2016. Available at: <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2016/07/14/peds.2016-1575.full.pdf>
- 3 Screening prevalence of foetal alcohol spectrum disorders in a region of the United Kingdom: A population-based birth-cohort study, McQuire C. et al. 2019. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743518303323> Silent Voices. Supporting children and young people affected by parental alcohol misuse, Adamson, Templeton, 2012. Available at: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/15497/1/FINAL_OCC_Report_Silent_Voices_Parental_Alcohol_Misuse_FULL_REPORT_11_Sept_2012%5b1%5d.pdf The Public Health Burden of Alcohol and the Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness of Alcohol Control Policies: An evidence review, Public Health England, 2016. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733108/alcohol_public_health_burden_evidence_review_update_2018.pdf Parental substance misuse and social worker intervention, Smith, 2017. Available at: <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/parental-substance-misuse-and-social-worker-intervention>
- 4 How we drink, what we think, Alcohol Health Alliance UK, 2018. Available at: <http://ahauk.org/what-we-think-2018/>
- 5 Scottish maternal and infant nutrition survey 2017, Scottish Government, 2017. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-maternal-infant-nutrition-survey-2017>
- 6 Ibid
- 7 Peri-Conceptual and Mid-Pregnancy Alcohol Consumption: A Comparison between Areas of High and Low Deprivation in Scotland, Symon et al, 2016. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/birt.12252>
- 8 More information available at <https://glasgowcity.hscp.scot/news/supporting-parents-and-their-teenagers>
- 9 More information available at <https://www.chatresource.org.uk/>
- 10 More information available at <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/services-children-families/parents-under-pressure/>
- 11 Available at <https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0042/00420685.pdf>
- 12 International Standards on Drug Use Prevention, Second Updated Edition, World Health Organisation/United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018. Available at:

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/prevention-standards.html> - where is this referenced in the text?

13 Ibid

14 More information available at <http://www.ohlila.org.uk/>

15 International Standards on Drug Use Prevention, Second Updated Edition, World Health Organisation/United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018. Available at: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/prevention-standards.html> as reference

16 Ibid

17 Ibid

18 Ibid

19 Ibid

20 Ibid

21 Ibid

22 Dundee City Council (2019) Audit – Planning, Health Improvement Commissioning

23 <https://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Maternity-and-Births/Births/>

24 Dundee MARAC (2021) Current Figures Data Report