

June 2012

Research plan

An Agency Caseload Study of Child Protection Committees' interventions for reason of children harmed by their parents' use of alcohol and drugs

The study is carried out at the request of the Ministry of Welfare, Iceland

Ministry of Welfare

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Investigators

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The aim of the project

- 1) To measure how high a proportion of the notifications to the Reykjavík Child Protection Committee involve children that have been harmed because of their parents' use of alcohol, illegal drugs and prescription drugs.
- 2) To study how the Reykjavík Child Protection Committee responds to these families.

Background

In 2010, a report of the Minister of Welfare on measures under the government initiative regarding male violence against women in intimate relationships was published. This report was a result of a relatively large research project on violence in intimate relationships that was carried out in 2008-2010 (Ministry of Welfare (no date)). A survey of violence in intimate relationships showed that 59% of the perpetrators had been intoxicated by alcohol or drugs when the violence took place. Preliminary data from a pilot project between the police and the Child Protection Authorities on domestic violence where children were present indicated that alcohol was involved in 68% of the cases (Ragna Björg Guðbrandsdóttir, personal communication, 23 April 2012).

The total volume of alcohol consumption per inhabitant 15 years and older increased from 6.3 to 7.5 liters between 2001 and 2007. As a consequence of the economic recession the consumption decreased to 6.7 liters in 2011 (Ársskýrsla ÁTVR 2011). In a longer time perspective, women's drinking has been on the increase. Therefore, there is an increased risk that both parents drink or use drugs to the extent that children experience harm.

WHO, in its Global Strategy to reduce harmful use of alcohol called for special attention to be given to reducing harm to people other than the drinker and to populations that are at particular risk, such as children. The research based on alcohol's harm to others has been developing internationally in the last years and in many countries surveys have been completed or are planned. Registry data research has also been carried out in some countries. Of particular relevance for this study are studies of children's exposure to risks

from parental drinking in Ireland and Australia (Hope 2011, Laslett et al. 2010). The findings in these studies highlighted the involvement of alcohol in child care and the extent of parental alcohol abuse as a contributing factor to child welfare and child abuse. Commonly, only one primary reason for child welfare cases is reported in the IT systems used by the child protection agencies and in the case of alcohol and drug involvement this underestimates the extent of the problem. Alcohol involvement increased when more than one primary reason was examined. Therefore, it is not sufficient to use the Icelandic IT system, the SOS system, as a basis for data collection.

Research methods

Data will be gathered from the Child Protection Committee, Reykjavík. The data consists of notifications to the Child Protection Committee, Reykjavík recorded in September, October and November 2010 and February, March and April 2011 where parents' use of alcohol, illegal drugs and prescription drugs are recorded. The total number of notifications is about 2200.

The data set will include information on the following:

Who notifies the Child Protection Committee?

Reasons for notifying.

Demographic information about the child and its parents.

Parents' use of alcohol and drugs.

Family type.

Responses of the Child Protection Committee including, counselling, supervision, fosterhome placements, and other possible measures.

Content and thematic analysis will be carried out and descriptive statistics will be used.

Ethics

Data obtained for the study will be coded according to a checklist developed for the study. The data set will consist of non-identified data. The study has been approved by The Data Protection Authority.

Benefits

Focusing on harms to children by parents' drinking may give an answer to the question: Would families be better served if the harms to the children by parents' drinking were constructed as a special problem (alcohol's harms to others)? Could such a construction lead to more awareness of alcohol's harm to others and more targeted services. Recommendations will be made to improve the Child Protection Committees's services to children who have suffered harm from their parents' drinking.

Time plan

Data collection: Mid-June to end of August 2012

Report writing: September – October 2012

Final report: November-December 2012

References

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