

**Written Submission: Adfam
Foundation years and Government's life chances strategy
February 2016**

About Adfam

Adfam is the national charity working to improve the lives of families affected by drug and alcohol use.

We want anyone affected by someone else's drug or alcohol use to have the chance to benefit from healthy relationships, be part of a loving and supportive family and enjoy mental and physical wellbeing.

Drug and alcohol use can threaten and ultimately destroy family relationships and wellbeing. We empower family members and carers, support frontline workers and influence decision-makers to stop this happening.

Executive summary

1. Drug and alcohol use can exert a powerful effect on the life chances of children
2. The links between substance use, poverty and life chances are complex
3. Parents with substance use issues want
4. Families affected by substance use can face considerable stigma in their lives and the any attempts to look for support

How many children are affected by substance use?

1. It is estimated that 4% of all children under 16 years old in the UK live with a dependent drinker (over 700,000 children)¹. A further 22% (over 2.5 million children under 16) live with a hazardous drinker ('hazardous drinking: a pattern that increases the risk of harm of harmful consequences to the user or others')². Unfortunately, there is currently no data on how many children are affected by FASD (foetal alcohol spectrum disorder) but 31,000 babies under one in the UK live with a dependent drinker³.
2. It is estimated that there are between 250,000 and 350,000 children with a problematic drug user as a parent⁴. Just over 50% of everybody in drug treatment is either a parent or lives with children and around 104,000 under 18s in England are currently living with people in drug treatment.⁵

1 Manning V, Best D, Faulkner N & Titherington E (2009), New estimates of the number of children living with substance misusing parents: results from UK national household surveys. BMC Public Health 9: 377.

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (2003), Hidden Harm: responding to the needs of children or problem drug users

5 National Treatment Agency (2012), Parents with drug problems: How Treatment Helps Families

2,300,000 children are currently living in poverty according to the relative measure in the 2010 Act: the problem of child poverty is of a totally different scale.

What is the effect of drug and alcohol use of families?

3. We welcome the Prime Minister's statement that 'Families are the best anti-poverty measure ever invented.'⁶ Families can be a source of resilience, stability and love for children. Children living with parental alcoholism and drug use, though, face a range of increased risks in their lives including the likelihood of being in trouble with the police and experiencing difficulties in school⁷. They are more likely to miss out on family effectiveness and parenting needed for full and healthy development⁸ and as a group they are far more likely to develop alcohol issues themselves⁹. The majority of parents with drug or alcohol issues remain dedicated in wanting the best for their children, including in cases where parenting capacity is inhibited.
4. The relationship between life chances, substance use and poverty is far from clear. Poor parental health, including drug use, and alcohol use disorders and dependence, can increase the risks of poverty but certainly does not necessarily precipitate it. We cannot assume a linear relationship where substance use leads to child poverty, or vice versa. Not all vulnerable or marginalised families will exhibit harmful drug or alcohol use. The extent to which alcohol misuse impacts on parental capacity to provide financially is unclear.

What kind of families are affected by these issues?

5. We welcome the Prime Minister's statement "Alcoholism and drug addiction can happen to anyone. People with wonderful families, great careers, a million good reasons to stop." Families and carers Adfam employees talk to come from many walks of life and socio-economic backgrounds and assumptions should be avoided on factors which have led them to need support.
6. Alcohol misuse cuts right across the socio-economic strata of society and contrary to popular perception, alcohol use is higher and more frequent amongst higher earners - 30% more high earners than low earners consumed alcohol in the previous week¹⁰. The difference is most pronounced amongst women, seven in 10 women earning £1000/week or more had an alcoholic drink in the past week, compared with four in 10 women earning up to £200/week¹¹. In 2009, half of those in the lowest income quintile report abstaining over the last week compared with only a fifth in the highest quintile¹². Increased alcohol consumption is reflected not only in earnings but in educational attainment and employment hierarchy. Women educated to degree level are three and a half times more likely than women with no qualifications to consume alcohol on most

6 From his speech on Jan 11th, available at www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-on-life-chances

7 Sher, K.J. (1997), Psychological characteristics of children of alcoholics, Alcohol Health and Research World, Vol. 21. No.3

8 Moos, R.H & Billings, A.G. (1982), Children of alcoholics during the recovery process: alcoholic and matched control families. Addictive Behaviours, 7:155-163

9 Fawzy, F.I., Coombs, R.H, & Gerber, B. (1983), Generational continuity in the use of substances: the impact of parental substance use on adolescent substance use. Addictive Behaviours, 8, 109-114

10 Office for National Statistics (2012), General Lifestyle Survey Overview; A Report on the 2010 General Lifestyle Survey, Newport, Office for National Statistics

11 Ibid

12 NHS Information Centre (2010), Health Survey for England, 2009. Volume 1: Health and Lifestyles, London, NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care

days¹³. On average in 2010, higher ranking employed men and women consumed three units more of alcohol per week than their lower ranking employed counterparts¹⁴.

7. Evidence clearly indicates that a socio-economically unequal society leads to a wide range in the health outcomes of its citizens, with the least privileged, including families living in poverty, experiencing disproportionate negative effects and worsened outcomes across all measures, including regarding alcohol and drug use. It was noted in Health Statistics Quarterly that Office for National Statistics figures reveal a worrying trend regarding alcohol - 'the mortality rate of men in the Routine class [least advantaged] was 3.5 times those of men in Higher and Managerial occupations [most advantaged], while for women the corresponding figure was 5.7 times'¹⁵. This could be explained if those in the least advantaged classes routinely drank substantially more than those in the most advantaged classes. This possibility is considered, and discounted, by the paper, which states 'repeated population-based sampling surveys have suggested an inverse relationship between alcohol consumption and socio-economic class'¹⁶, meaning those in the Routine class drank no more, and probably less, than those in the Higher and Managerial occupations.

Support for families

8. "Seeking help is strength" the Prime Minister said in his speech – a statement Adfam concurs with. However there is only any point in encouraging parents with drug or alcohol issues in looking for help if that help is available. Valuable support can of course be delivered by friends and family – an empathetic and human response goes a long way. Sometimes, though, people need support from trained staff at an expert service and, whilst there is much great work being done in many community groups, carers centres and treatment services, widespread disinvestment and cuts may threaten the provision of this kind of support. It is essential that services for families and parents affected by substance use are safeguarded and protected.

13 OECD Directorate for Education (2010), Education, Alcohol Use and Abuse among Young Adults in Britain. Education Working Paper No. 50, Paris, OECD Publishing

14 Office for National Statistics (2012), General Lifestyle Survey Overview. A Report on the 2010 General Lifestyle Survey

15 Social inequalities in alcohol-related adult mortality by National Statistics Socio-economic Classification, England and Wales, 2001–03

16 Ibid