

## **Introduction**

Barnardos welcomes the opportunity to input into the development of the National Substance Misuse Strategy 2009 -2016. This strategy represents a significant opportunity to tackle the combined issues of drug and alcohol misuse and Barnardos is particularly concerned that concrete early intervention and prevention measures make up a significant part of the strategy. We believe that this is vital to ensuring the protection and support of children who are affected by parental substance misuse and children at risk of harm as a result of their own substance misuse. Barnardos strongly welcomes the development of this combined strategy and believes that while the issues are complex, addressing alcohol and drug misuse in tandem is essential both in prevention and treatment of problem substance use.

Children and young people are among those most at risk in relation to both alcohol and drug misuse and the National Substance Misuse Strategy 2009-2016 must be underpinned by a commitment to putting in place measures that focus on better outcomes for children and families and a holistic approach to meeting the needs of children at risk through their own alcohol or drug abuse and those affected by parental substance abuse<sup>1</sup>.

## **Affects of Parental Substance Misuse on Children and Young People**

Through our work with children and families, Barnardos sees first hand the serious consequences that parental substance misuse can have for children. While all family circumstances and experiences differ based on the individuals and the specific situation involved, a number of common consequences of parental substance misuse have been identified. The affects on children living in households with either alcohol or drug misuse are largely similar and can include<sup>2</sup>:

- Inconsistency in parenting styles with routines becoming irregular.
- Parents becoming emotionally and physically detached from their children and as a result having a poorer awareness of their children's needs.
- Family may experience material deprivation such as lack of food or clothing.
- Parents have reduced sensitivity to risk of danger and may leave children unsupervised.
- Children have to assume parenting responsibility prematurely as parents are unable to conduct domestic and childcare duties effectively.
- Children feeling confused, rejected, burdened and unable to trust parents.

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<sup>1</sup> In line with principles outlined in the *Agenda for Children's Services* (2007)

<sup>2</sup> Kroll, B and Taylor, A. (2004) *Parental Substance Misuse and Child Welfare*, London, UK

The impact of substance misuse on children's development and health can also be severe. Prolonged heavy alcohol use during pregnancy can lead to a range of serious developmental problems for the child including delayed neurological development, growth development and foetal alcohol spectrum<sup>3</sup> and children's health can be severely affected by parents' inability to keep medical appointments, delaying assessment and timely identification of potential developmental difficulties.

Substance misuse can also greatly increase the risk of domestic abuse within the family; substance misuse has been found to be a factor in the frequency and severity of domestic abuse with a link between substance misuse and the seriousness of injuries inflicted. In studies of men in treatment for their substance misuse, around 50% admitted perpetrating domestic abuse within the previous 6-12 months<sup>4</sup>.

From our experience working with families affected by substance misuse, children living in these families often present with numerous difficulties including significant emotional and behavioural problems. These difficulties can be far reaching and have long-term implications for a child's life both in childhood and adulthood. Importantly, such difficulties can severely impact on a child's education which can lead to difficulties concentrating in class and doing homework, truancy and early school leaving. Without adequate intervention and support this can leave children in a vicious cycle and at risk of moving into substance misuse themselves.

### **Substance Misuse among Children and Young People**

In 2007, 7.4% of those in or entering treatment for problem drug use were under 18, as were 3.1% of those in treatment for alcohol misuse. One in five of those treated for problem alcohol use also reported using at least one other substance. The most common drugs used in conjunction with alcohol for treated alcohol cases were cannabis, followed by cocaine, ecstasy and benzodiazepines<sup>5</sup>.

While poly drug misuse is still relatively low, it does mark a concerning trend in the correlation between different types of substance misuse. The National Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Report<sup>6</sup> (2006) found that two in every five cases used more than one problem drug - the most common additional drug being alcohol. In relation to substance misuse this report found that:

- 7% of boys reported using cannabis in the previous year, this fell from 11% in 1998.
- Girls reported usage of cannabis in the previous year rose from 3% in 1998 to 5% in 2006.

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Sarah Buckley (2009) Presentation: *Impact on Children of Parental Alcohol Misuse*, Alcohol Action Ireland Seminar, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2009

<sup>4</sup> Velleman, R and Reuber, D. (2007) *Domestic Violence and Abuse experienced by Children and Young People living in Families with Alcohol Problems: Results from a Cross-European Study*, Bath/London.

<sup>5</sup> Alcohol and Drug Research Unit of the Health Research Board (2009) Treated problem drug use in Ireland: Figures for 2007 from the National Drug Treatment Reporting System; Alcohol and Drug Research Unit of the Health Research Board (2009) Treated problem alcohol use in Ireland: Figures for 2007 from the National Drug Treatment Reporting System.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Health and Children, et al (2006) *National Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children*, Dublin

- Around half the children aged 15-17 years old surveyed reported they were current drinkers and just over a third reported they had been 'really drunk' in the last 30 days.

In the most recent survey of drinking among European 15 and 16-year-olds 44% of Irish girls and 42% of boys reported binge-drinking in the last month<sup>7</sup>.

### **Affects of Substance Misuse on Children and Young People**

There is a substantial body of research to show that substance misuse in childhood or adolescence poses significant risks to children. The American Medical Association (2002) reported that an adolescent need drink only half as much as an adult to experience the same negative effects, and even occasional binge drinking can damage the young brain<sup>8</sup>.

These risks include impaired brain function in relation to learning and memory; in research carried out in the US adolescent drinkers scored worse than non-users in vocabulary, visual-spatial and memory tests and were more likely to perform poorly in school, and to experience social problems<sup>9</sup>.

The 2007 European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD) report compared alcohol and drug use among 15–16-year-old students in 35 European countries. It found that 12% of Irish boys and 14% of girls surveyed reported that they had performed poorly at school or work in the previous 12 months as a result of their own alcohol use<sup>10</sup>.

In addition to the impact on young people's academic performance other areas of concern include the correlation between substance misuse and issues such as suicide, mental illness, visits to A & E, road accidents, domestic violence and an increase in risky sexual behaviour:

- Alcohol-related offences for Irish 15-17-year-olds increased by 135% between 2000 and 2005<sup>11</sup>.
- 60% of binge drinkers admitted involvement in criminal and/or disorderly behaviour during or after drinking, compared with 25% of regular drinkers. Young males were most likely to report such behaviour (69%)<sup>12</sup>.
- Young people who commence drinking at 15 years old are four times more likely to have alcohol related problems in adulthood<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Hibell, B. (et al) ESPAD Report (2007) *Substance Use Among Students in 35 European Countries*, Sweden

<sup>8</sup> Mongan D, Reynolds S, Fanagan S and Long J (2007) Health-related consequences of problem alcohol use. *Overview 6*. Dublin: Health Research Board.

<sup>9</sup> Health Research Board (2009) *Social Consequences of Harmful Use of Alcohol in Ireland*, Dublin.

<sup>10</sup> Hibell, B (et al)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> Institute of Alcohol Studies (2007) *Alcohol and Crime*, UK

<sup>13</sup> Department of Health and Children (2007) *Irish health behaviour in school age children*, Dublin

- Binge drinking has been linked to depression, anxiety, suicide and attempted suicide. 93% of men under 30 who committed suicide had alcohol in their blood stream<sup>14</sup>.

Clearly the risks for children and young people involved in substance misuse are far reaching. Barnardos believes that the new National Substance Misuse Strategy must provide for the establishment and resourcing of early intervention and prevention services to both prevent children and young people's engagement in substance misuse and to provide speedy access to holistic, multi-dimensional services that meet the needs of children when problem substance use arises.

## Recommendations

### National Office of the Minister for Substance Misuse

Between 2004 and 2006 the number of cases receiving treatment for problem use of both alcohol and cocaine increased by 40%<sup>15</sup> indicating a rising trend of poly drug use. The remit of this strategy is far reaching and as indicated by the National Drugs Strategy (interim) 2009-2016 focuses heavily on inter-agency cooperation in the achievement of its aims. **Barnardos believes therefore that the establishment of a government department should reflect the revised strategy and that the Office of the Minister for Drugs should be re-envisioned as the Office of the Minister for Substance Misuse.**

### Accessibility of Alcohol

Children and adolescents in Ireland clearly have easy access to alcohol. The 2007 ESPAD report showed that 75% of the young people surveyed said it was easy for them to obtain alcohol<sup>16</sup>. This, combined with cultural attitudes that accept high levels of alcohol consumption as acceptable and a lack of adequate alternative leisure facilities for teenagers, has led to the normalisation of binge drinking among Irish adolescents. The most effective policies for reducing alcohol-related harms and costs are those that increase price and reduce availability and there is extensive and robust evidence to support these policy actions. Therefore Barnardos believes the normalisation and availability of alcohol consumption must be tackled across a number of areas:

#### *Cost*

There is indisputable evidence that the price of alcohol matters. If the price of alcohol goes up, alcohol-related harm goes down. There are a number of ways to address pricing in licensed premises, supermarkets, petrol stations and off-licences including excise duty, minimum pricing legislation, and the abolition of promotional tactics such as 'buy 2 bottles, get the 3<sup>rd</sup> one free' and 'up to 50% off'.

Barnardos was deeply concerned by Government's decision to decrease the excise duty on alcohol in Budget 2010. In the same budget, cuts were made to funding for youth work initiatives across the country. In Barnardos view these moves demonstrate a distinct lack of commitment to the decrease in adolescent drinking and improvement of life outcomes for children and teenagers in need of support. Barnardos recommends that Government reverse these measures at the earliest opportunity. **Excise on alcohol**

<sup>14</sup> Irish Medical Journal (2006) Blood Alcohol Levels in Persons who Died from Accidents and Suicide, March 2006, Volume 99, Number 3.

<sup>15</sup> Health Research Board (2008) Trends in treated problem alcohol use in Ireland 2004-2006, Dublin

<sup>16</sup> Hibell, B (et al) (2007) ESPAD Report

**should be increased along with the introduction of minimum pricing legislation and funding generated from these measures should be earmarked for the promotion and support of community based initiatives aimed at reducing underage drinking including provision of alcohol free venues and activities, for example teenage cafes, sports facilities etc.**

#### *Licensing*

Off licence holders pay a flat rate excise duty per licence type held per year compared with the sliding scale rate applicable to on-licence holders. This means that off licence holders pay the same rate of excise regardless of their turnover, whereas on licence holders pay excise based on their turnover, paying higher rates for greater turnover. **Barnardos believes the legislation should be amended to ensure that off license holders rate of excise duty reflects the amount of alcohol they sell.**

At present, unlike other alcohol licences, no Court certificate is required when requesting a wine licence. This means that it is not possible to object to the issue of a wine licence and subsequently its availability is widespread, particularly in the majority of grocery stores and petrol stations. **Barnardos calls for the same processes to apply to the granting of wine licences, primarily the requirement to obtain a Court certificate.**

At present theatres are not subject to alcohol laws governing licensed premises including the serving of intoxicated persons. These licences are issued on foot of acquiring a public music and singing licence. This discrepancy means there are fewer requirements to satisfy when serving alcohol. **Barnardos recommends that theatre licences should be subject to the same liquor licensing procedures as other venues.**

#### *Availability*

Barnardos believes that the minimum age of 18 years be more stringently enforced especially in off-licences and supermarkets. This could be done in conjunction with employees of the trade and the Gardai. **A national ID card system similar to that in operation in Scotland should be considered.** Their system works in conjunction with youth organisations and enables the card holder to avail of discounts in shops and other amenities targeted at young people and is viewed positively.

The availability of alcohol in a variety of locations has significantly increased. Such widespread availability can lead to greater incidences of drinking in public places and subsequent anti-social behaviour. **Barnardos recommends more regulation in the granting of new licences and in the interest of road safety, the restriction of the sale of alcohol in garages.**

#### *Marketing*

Alcohol marketing and advertising work increase the likelihood that adolescents will either start to use alcohol or increase their consumption if already drinking<sup>17</sup>. Such advertising often evokes strong positive images of drinking portraying it as being an important part of sociability, physical attractiveness, masculinity, romance, relaxation and adventure and uses devices such as humour, rock music and animation, to increase their popularity with underage television viewers:

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<sup>17</sup> Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum (2009) *Does marketing communication impact on the volume and patterns of consumption of alcoholic beverages, especially by young people?*

*As a result alcohol commercials are among the most likely to be remembered by teenagers and most frequently mentioned as their favourites.<sup>18</sup>*

At present, only a voluntary code of advertising applies to the drink and advertising industries. **Barnardos calls for the introduction of legislation to reduce the exposure of children to alcohol advertising and sponsorship.** This would include a watershed of 9pm before any alcohol related advertising could appear on TV, radio or cinema. This recommendation is supported by parents, 70% of whom want alcohol advertising to be banned before the 9pm watershed<sup>19</sup>. **Barnardos also recommends that Ireland introduce legislation to ensure warning labels are placed on all alcoholic drinks,** particularly focusing on the risks associated with drinking while pregnant.

#### Substance Misuse among Parents

While addressing the accessibility of alcohol to children and young people is fundamentally important, substance misuse will remain a devastating problem for many children who live with the consequences of parental substance misuse. Through our work with families affected by substance misuse, Barnardos has a clear insight and understanding of the multiple layers of support needed to support children and families dealing with addiction.

#### *Early Intervention and Prevention*

Engaging with families from an early stage is crucial for many reasons. Primarily it tries to ensure positive parent / child relationships in the interests of reducing the possible negative impacts of parental substance misuse on the child's development and can also support improved outcomes for parents. The role and needs of both parents are different and require specific supports. In Barnardos work with children and families the role of fathers in the support and parenting of their children has emerged as a significant need requiring specific supports which are currently not available.

In particular the fact that fathers who are not married have no legal rights in relation to the care and level of involvement with their children can pose difficulties when working with the whole family or when the parental relationship has broken down.

Barnardos supports action twenty nine in the National Drugs Strategy which outlines family support programmes for families affected by substance misuse. However, for any such programme to be effective in successfully intervening and supporting families, the allocation of resources and commitment to inter-agency work are fundamental. **Families affected by addiction experience high levels of social exclusion and agency responses must be backed up with increased capacity for services to meet the needs of families through proper resourcing, training and networking.**

#### *Child Protection*

Increased awareness of child protection concerns among adult service providers should also be included in the strategy. Such concerns can be overlooked by providers dealing with adult cases who do not necessarily make the link between a client's substance misuse and their role as a parent or the inherent risks to their children. **Proposals by the Office of the Minister for Children to put the Children First guidelines on a statutory footing for all those working in statutory or government funded agencies**

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<sup>18</sup> European Alcohol Policy Alliance *Alcohol Marketing and Young People*

<sup>19</sup> Barnardos (2007) Childhood Poll

**should be noted in the drafting of the strategy and training and awareness on responsibilities under the guidelines for those working with adult substance misuse where children are involved should be included in its actions.**

#### *Day and Residential Treatment Services*

Some of Barnardos services work directly with parents attending day treatment centres and have found that mothers frequently feel the centres are not able to adequately meet their needs, particularly childcare needs. For instance, the premises are not equipped with a play space for children and while the staff is trained in treating drug users they are not necessarily trained in meeting the needs of children. To fill this gap, Barnardos Dun Laoghaire set up a Children's Room based in an addiction treatment centre based on Patrick St, Dun Laoghaire which has now become a first point of contact with many families. As a result of this initiative, Barnardos Dun Laoghaire has a strong focus on working with children and families affected by addiction as the majority of these families attending the treatment clinic are subsequently referred up to our Centre for further supports demonstrating a high demand for child centred, family supports in relation to parental substance misuse. **Barnardos recommends that the new strategy include measures to ensure that day treatment centres provide appropriate facilities for children of clients attending.**

Availability and flexibility of residential services for mothers is needed to ensure that adequate childcare provision is delivered either through foster care or mother and child units. **Barnardos would welcome innovative and family friendly detox practices to be examined such as interagency community day-based facilities meaning parents could attend without having to stay over and as a result minimize the disruption on their children.**

#### Substance Misuse among Children and Young People

Barnardos welcomes measures outlined in the National Drugs Strategy to prevent substance misuse among children and young people through awareness raising in educational settings and youth services, particularly for at risk groups. However, budget cuts to the youth sector in Budget 2010 is not encouraging in the commitment demonstrated to resourcing such measures. Barnardos believes that a number of approaches should be invested in to support those children at risk of or experiencing substance misuse.

#### *Targeted intervention*

Barnardos believes that targeted interventions for those children and young people most at risk is valuable. Early school leavers are identified as one such group and Barnardos would welcome the inclusion of increased capacity for agencies such as the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) to target children and young people identified as at particular risk. Barnardos welcomed the increased funding for additional psychologists to be provided for the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS) in Budget 2010 and believes that further development of the efficacy and reach of the service would serve well in the early identification of and intervention with vulnerable, at risk children.

**Barnardos recommends that the National Substance Misuse Strategy incorporates measures to tackle substance misuse aimed at all statutory agencies working with vulnerable groups i.e. NEWB, youth programmes etc.**

#### *Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health Teams*

Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health Teams are ideally placed to play a vital role in the early intervention and treatment of child and adolescent substance misuse in the community and supporting children within their family setting. Such teams must be

established on a consistent basis throughout Ireland as a matter of urgency and **Barnardos recommends the inclusion of Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health Teams in the National Substance Misuse Strategy as they relate to supporting children and young people experiencing problem substance use.**

#### *Residential Treatment Services*

Residential services are inconsistent around Ireland; some counties do not have access to such beds and some beds are only available to addicts in general hospitals or psychiatric hospitals. The HSE Working Group on Residential Treatment and Rehabilitation (Substance Users) (2008) recommended increasing the number of:

- dedicated hospital detox and stabilisation beds from 23 to 127
- residential rehabilitation beds from 634 to 887
- step down / halfway house beds from 155 to 296

From the perspective of a young person experiencing substance misuse, the day and residential treatment services should be designed in such a way that young people would be encouraged into and retained in order to benefit from treatment and rehabilitation services. In some cases these services could be established within existing services such as general adolescent services, youth cafes and health centres. At present there are very few places for under 18 year old drug users. Family involvement in the treatment of a child or adolescent drug addict leads to better outcomes for the child or adolescent.

**Barnardos supports actions in the National Drugs Strategy to increase the availability and access to under 18's services and support families with substance misuse related difficulties. Barnardos urges the Steering Committee to make the implementation of this measure a priority on completion of the National Substance Misuse Strategy.**

#### **Conclusion**

There are multiple issues that arise for children and young people in relation to substance misuse depending on the situation they are in and Barnardos urges the Steering Committee to ensure that the National Substance Misuse Strategy adequately tackles the range of these issues in the best interests of children. While Barnardos very much welcomes the Steering Committee's endeavours to establish a comprehensive strategy, we believe that this is an ambitious undertaking and must be backed with political will and inter-agency commitment and cooperation. Children and young people living in families affected by substance misuse and those at risk of or already experiencing substance misuse themselves must be provided with early intervention and prevention services that can support them before difficulties reach crisis levels. Substance misuse can have devastating affects on young lives; Ireland needs a robust strategy that places a strong focus on child welfare, protection and well-being and supports families and young people in overcoming substance misuse as early as possible to ensure better long-term outcomes for children.