



Parental substance abuse has different manifestations throughout all the child's developmental stages: it is important to improve multi-professional cooperation

substance use
multi-profession cooperation
children
Intergenerational impact

In the ALICE RAP sub-study “Vanla - Parents and children” we found that parents’ substance abuse can lead to many kinds of risks in the child’s healthy development. These risks are related to health, psychological and social problems and educational achievements. Professionals in different services meet these children and young people, but do not necessarily see the connection between children’s problems and parental substance abuse. The study is based on register data in three birth cohorts of Finnish children and their biological parents.

The study showed that small children (under 7 years of age) with substance-abusing parents were more often hospitalized because of injuries and infectious diseases than other children. They had also been placed out of home more often. Parents’ abuse of both alcohol and drugs was a bigger risk for the child than solely alcohol or solely drug abuse.

Furthermore, risks of behavioral problems and learning difficulties as well as other psychiatric disorders were significantly higher among those 0-12 year old children whose parents were substance abusers, had psychiatric disorders, or both, than in the comparison group.

Parents’ substance abuse increased the 20 year old children’s risk of psychiatric disorders and heavy substance use as well as their risk of not achieving sufficient education for future professional development. Low levels of education may lead to poverty and social marginalization.

Social and health care professionals and teachers in day care centers and schools have a potentially important role in giving support to the parents and/or their children, as substance-abusing parents and the children have had several contacts with them. Prevention of harm to children of substance-abusing parents should perhaps focus more on the possibilities offered by these contacts in different health, social and educational services. It is likely that multi-professional cooperation in treating and supporting these children would lead to better results than treating the child for each symptom separately.

READ MORE

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