

NICCO: Assisting professionals to support children of substance misuse-related offenders



“Now he’s in, you know he’s safe; he’s not out doing silly things... he had lots of problems with drugs and alcohol.”¹

15%
of men and women in prison are serving sentences for drug offences²

Find out how to support offenders’ children and their families

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Who are we?

The National Information Centre on Children of Offenders – NICCO (formerly i-HOP) is a service that supports professionals to work effectively with offenders’ children and families. NICCO collates and promotes examples of services, interventions, resources, policy and research around this vulnerable group.

Barnardo’s was originally commissioned by the **Department for Education** in 2013 to develop this service as an online information hub with a focus on England (www.nicco.org.uk). The service is targeted at all professionals who come into contact with offenders’ children and their families, from various sectors including education, health and social care as well as the criminal justice system.

¹ Glover (2009) *Every night you cry, the realities of having a parent in prison*, Barnardo’s

² Ministry of Justice (2016) *Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2015*, Ministry of Justice.

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'I didn't know he was going into prison... I felt sad when I knew he wasn't coming home.'
Seven year old boy³

An estimated **200,000 children a year** experience the imprisonment of a parent in England and Wales⁴. These children and their families can experience – **stigma, isolation, negative school experiences⁵, health and financial difficulties⁶**. However there is currently no routine identification of prisoners' children and no way of ensuring their needs are met.

The impact of substance misuse-related offending on children

'You left me having nightmares. I didn't know if you were safe, and I was really scared.'
13 year old girl

Considering that 66% of women and 38% of men report committing offences to get money to buy drugs in the 12 months before entering prison⁷, 70% of prisoners surveyed said that they had been drinking when they committed their offence⁸ and 54% of prisoners have children⁹ it is likely that a significant number of children experience the imprisonment of a substance misusing parent.

A parent or family member's substance misuse has repercussions for children and families across all stages of the Criminal Justice System. Pre-arrest, there might be safeguarding issues in the home depending on the individual, the drugs they are using, how they store them, who they buy them from and whether there is any risk of gang related violence. Drug and alcohol use can also inhibit a parent's ability to provide care and attention to dependent children.

Where crimes are committed in conjunction with, or as a result of, substance misuse, sentencing may involve mandatory drug treatment either in prison or the community. At this stage, families may be worried about whether their loved one will complete treatment and how this will impact on their sentence. Further, when a prisoner is required to relocate in order to complete a specific drugs programme, families may have to travel further to visit them.

When a family member misuses substances or has done in the past, families may be particularly worried about their ability to manage things in prison; families may worry about them accessing drugs and alcohol or relapsing due to the pressures of being imprisoned. These concerns can be exacerbated by the known availability of substances inside. Families may also find that their loved one develops a problem with drugs which are new to them. New Psychoactive



Substances are becoming increasingly common in prisons and recent media attention about them may heighten families' anxieties.¹⁰ A prisoner's substance misuse may also cause them to get into debt leading the family to worry and feel pressured into helping them financially.

A family member who did not have a dependency before entering prison may develop a problem with illegal drugs while they are inside. Research has found this to be evident amongst 8% of men and 4% of women in prison.¹¹

During a prisoners' resettlement back into the community it is common for families' to be concerned that their loved one might reoffend. These feelings can be intensified with worries about exposure to triggers leading to a relapse into substance misuse.

'I just hope that going to prison...is an eye-opener and you realise that raising your children is more important than taking drugs.' 16 year old boy

When someone is misusing substances the family home can be very chaotic. If this person is imprisoned, life may become more stable. Although some families may feel that they do not need support at this time, others may find it a good opportunity to engage with professionals.

It may help relieve a family's uncertainty if they are made aware of the treatment and care available to a loved one in custody. For example, families may be comforted to know that continuity of care between community and prison as well as between prisons is central to the NHS' secure estate drug treatment system. Prisons have a Substance Misuse Service that provides Psycho-Social and Clinical care. Substance misusing prisoners may undergo a period of detoxification and will have a worker to help them develop a recovery plan which may include one to one as well as group work.¹² If families have specific concerns about their loved one, they can contact the prison's safer custody team directly or via visits centre staff.

The prison estate recognises that family support can help reduce an offender's drug use¹³ and sometimes family are a key part of an offender's recovery plan. Professionals working with these families should consider the emotional and practical impact of this important role and how best to support them. This could involve preparing families for visits while the offender is in custody as well as the process of resettlement and release.

Research shows that 18% of prisoners stated that they had a family member with an alcohol problem, and 14% with a drug problem¹⁴. If an offenders' family themselves has substance misuse issues, this may be exacerbated by the imprisonment of a family member and they may need support.

If the prisoner has agreed that their recovery plan can be shared, professionals in the community can liaise with the offenders' recovery worker, Offender Manager or supervisor about this or any other of a family's concerns about release, rehabilitation, care or treatment.

'It's... shocking- just how prevalent this issue is and how much professionals... can and should be doing.' Statutory children's services worker

How can NICCO support professionals to work with families affected by substance misuse-related offending?

'I wouldn't know where else to go if I hadn't found this service.' NICCO user

NICCO is the national one-stop information service for all professionals working with children and families of offenders. It brings together:

- **resources** for children and families and for professionals to use directly with children
- details of **local and national services** that work specifically with children and families of offenders
- details of local **training for professionals**
- up-to-date, national and local **policy frameworks**,

government guidance and recommendations about this group of children

- **guidelines and toolkits** to support professionals to develop practice with offenders' children
- **research** into the impact of imprisonment on children and families

Visit NICCO

Visit www.nicco.org.uk to discover resources for professionals and the children and families they support. Sign up to become a member to receive free Regular e-news.

Note: Children and young people's quotes are taken from: NICCO 'Message for Professionals' blog (www.nicco.org.uk)

References:

- 3 Glover (2009) *Every night you cry, the realities of having a parent in prison*, Barnardo's
- 4 Williams et al (2012) *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*. Ministry of Justice.
- 5 Clewett, N. & Glover, J. (2009), *Supporting Prisoners' Families*. Barnardo's.
- 6 Smith, R. et al. (2007) *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoner's families*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- 7 Ministry of Justice (2013) *Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners*, Ministry of Justice.
- 8 Alcohol and Crime Commission (2014) *The Alcohol and Crime Commission Report*, Addaction.
- 9 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2015) *Changing patterns of substance misuse in adult prisons and service responses A thematic review*.
- 10 Public Health England (2017) *Evidence review of the outcomes that can be expected of drug misuse treatment in England*
- 11 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2015) *Changing patterns of substance misuse in adult prisons and service responses A thematic review*.
- 12 Crawford, C., Gohel, R., Heneghan, M., Thomson, F. and Wright, C. (2016) *United Kingdom Drug Situation 2016*, UK Focal Point on Drugs
- 13 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2015) *Changing patterns of substance misuse in adult prisons and service responses*, London
- 14 Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth (2012) *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*, Ministry of Justice

Examples of existing practice

Adfam provide an information service for families affected by someone's addiction, including drug factfiles, blogs from family members and support service lists.

The agency, **EDP**, has **family workers in prisons in the South West of England** to support families with a family member inside with substance misuse issues.

M-Pact is a whole family support programme delivered by national organisation, **Action on Addiction**, aimed at reducing family substance misuse and improving outcomes for children.