

The Role of Family Support Services in Drug Prevention (2004)

Research conducted by:

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Aim:

To examine the role of Family Support Services (FSS) in responding to and preventing drug problems. FSS generally aim to support families and provide a range of services including counselling, guidance, parenting support, advice, youth work and community development. In particular, this study was concerned with family support services in their role of strengthening families to act as a buffer to drug problems.

Method:

A literature review and a survey among a sample of FSS in Dublin West, Limerick City and Sligo (part of Western and North Western Health Board) using self-completion questionnaires was undertaken. The response rate was 26% (n=461), (81% of the services that responded were located in disadvantaged areas with 50% located in a catchment area of a local drugs task force). In addition, in-depth interviews (17) and focus groups with services and their clients (14) were carried out.

Key Findings:

- Services offered to clients varied according to whether they had a major, minor or no focus on drugs in their work.
- FSS have the potential to play a greater role in drug prevention.
- Only one fifth of FSS find that drug problems are a focus of their work.
- Over half (57%) of the respondents agree that their services make a positive contribution to drug prevention, yet the majority (93%) of FSS referred people who presented with drug problems on to another service.
- Alcohol misuse was most commonly reported by services, whilst in larger urban areas prescribed drug misuse and illegal drug misuse was more commonly reported.
- Family relationships felt the impact of problem drug use which the research showed contributed to problems between parents (61%), with parents (61%) and to parenting difficulties (59%).
- Drug use is both a cause and effect of family difficulties.
- All services experience some degree of insecurity in dealing with families with drug problems. This insecurity arises from their lack of clarity of their role, lack of skills to work successfully with families with drug issues and additionally lack of support within the organisation to deliver a service to families with drug problems.

NACD Recommendations to Government:

- The capacity of services to respond should be increased through the provision of an appropriate level of resources/funding together with appropriate training, skills and knowledge in responding to drug problems and prevention.
- Interagency links and networks should be strengthened by building knowledge of local community issues and attitudes, improving communications and increasing awareness of services and activities.
- Relevant monitoring and evaluation tools to track the impact of service activities on families with regard to drug prevention should be developed.