

PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN EXPOSED TO PARENTAL SUBSTANCE MISUSE

A Guide for Addiction Services

CHILDREN EXPOSED TO PARENTAL SUBSTANCE MISUSE FACE ADDITIONAL RISKS AS COMPARED TO OTHER CHILDREN



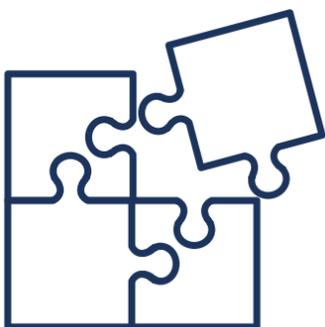
- They are more likely to develop **health, social, physical and psychological problems**
- Parents who misuse alcohol and other drugs may have **difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities** towards their child due to their **situation of social vulnerability** that can directly impact the quality of life of children.

NEED TO ENGAGE ADDICTION SERVICES IN THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



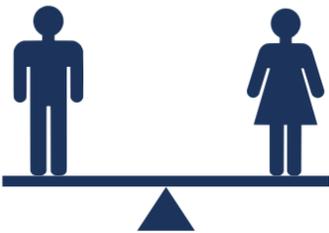
- While drug use can have a negative impact on parenting capabilities, addiction services seldom address this issue directly. Many services have no identified protocol to assess risk situations for children and interventions remain focused on adults (**adult-centred approach**)
- Most parents who misuse alcohol and other drugs have the well-being of their children at heart. They need to be **aided by non-stigmatizing addiction services** that develop effective approaches grounded in a systemic perspective.
- Addictions services should endeavour to **train their staff** in adopting a children's rights approach to intervention

A CHALLENGE FOR PROFESSIONALS: PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM VIOLATIONS OF THEIR RIGHTS AND SUPPORTING THEIR PARENTS IN TREATMENT



- Addiction professionals can be reluctant to inquire about their beneficiaries' children. This can be due to their fear of **damaging their therapeutic relationship** with parents, or of being subject to **potential retaliations** should a situation of child maltreatment be revealed. Also, many addiction professionals **lack training** in this field, or they may believe that they should primarily **focus on drugs**.

MAINSTREAMING THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN ADDICTION SERVICES: A LONG WAY TO GO



- **Prejudices** among addiction professionals **persist** when addressing the parenting skills of their beneficiaries. While men are generally less involved than women in child rearing responsibilities, they tend to be much more praised for doing so. Conversely, women are often blamed for their drug use or dependence, although they usually are the primary caregivers.
- Developing a **gender-based perspective** in addiction services entails that the rights of children can be better protected and promoted.

IT IS NOT ONLY ABOUT IDENTIFYING VIOLATIONS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS BUT ALSO ABOUT RESPONDING QUICKLY AND EFFICIENTLY TO THESE VIOLATIONS



- While many addiction professionals have been trained to assess the risks faced by children, too **few initiatives** are taken to promote the protection of children.
- Faced with a situation a child maltreatment, professionals may be **reluctant to react** due to their fear of the reaction of those involved, their ignorance of circuits, or the lack of institutional support.

THE WAY FORWARD: WE NEED TO:



- Consider the children's rights perspective in adult addiction services in terms of **design and implementation**.
- Improve the **training and supervision of professionals**.
- Establish **parenting support** as a core aspect of the treatment plan.
- Systematically include the children exposed to parental substance misuse and their situation in **data collection**.
- Consider **stigma** as the leading cause of parents' reluctance to talk about their children; find appropriate strategies; and avoid at all costs stigmatizing interventions that only serve to keep child abuse situations secret.
- Base all attempts to improve families' and children's situation on the **empowerment of individuals, families and communities**.

IT IS HIGH TIME TO FOCUS ON THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN EXPOSED TO PARENTAL SUBSTANCE MISUSE!