Evaluating the risk factors associated with social care referral for babies of women who misuse alcohol or drugs

Jessica Roy
ACMD (2003) estimates that 16% of all children under the age of 16 live with someone who misuses drugs while 1.3 million children live with a parent who misuses alcohol.

Research suggests that children who have parents who misuse substances are over represented in the Child Protection and care system (Cleaver 1999, Kearney 2003, ADMD 2003)

Referring unborn children to Children’s Social Care

Chronic neglect of substance misuse in the social work curriculum (Galvani & Hughes 2010, Kroll & Taylor 2004)

Continuing academic and practice debates as to the unique risk of parental substance misuse vis a vis social depravation.
Definitions

- **Children’s Social Care referral:** If an unborn child or child are referred to social care by a professional it demonstrates that there is concern that they are suffering, or likely to be suffering from significant harm.

- **Substance misuse:** The use of alcohol or illicit substances in a way that results in social, psychological, physiological and legal problems for the individual and those around them.

Methodology

- Sample
  - Convenience sample of 85
  - Pregnant women who engaged in antenatal period with specialist drug and alcohol agency between Jan 2008-Jan 2010.
  - All consented to have information used in research

- Employed statistical analysis to demonstrate significant associations and predictive factors to Children’s Social Care referral
Variables collected

basic demographics – employment - housing - previous children - placement of previous children – partner - partner using substances or not - domestic violence - criminal justice - family support - substances use - prescription. illicit use during pregnancy - illicit use at 32 weeks of pregnancy - social care referral - social care outcomes - FAS/NAS – birth weight - gestational age at presentation to services - Hepatitis C - mental health - physical health
• 95% of cohort were White British
• 60% of cohort lived in rented accommodation
• 68% of cohort were unemployed
• 63% had previous children
• 55% referred to Children’s Social Care
• 14 babies removed from birth mother/parents in the first three months of life
Substance misuse and social care referral

- Substance use
  - Primary substance of use in the cohort was heroin

- Substance misuse during pregnancy
  - 61% misused substances during pregnancy of whom 73% were referred to social care.
  - 73% of those who misused during pregnancy on prescription

- Logistic regression demonstrated that use of substances during pregnancy increased chances of being referred to social care by over 5 times than if there was no illicit use during pregnancy. \( P = 0.015 \)
Role of intervening variables

- Cocaine use reported in 26% of the cohort and 66% of these used illicitly during pregnancy.
- 73% of those who reported cocaine use were referred to social care
- High rate of poly substance use: 20% reported as using 3 or 4 substances and 60% of the cohort used 2 or more.
Poly substance use
• Family support was reported by 67% of the cohort

• The logistic regression demonstrated that in the observed data, not having family support increased the chances of being referred to social care by over three and a half times than if there was family support. ($p = 0.028$)

• Of cohort who reported family support, 46% were referred to Children’s Social Care.
The role of the partner

- 82% of the cohort had a partner
- 60% who did not have a partner were referred to social care
- 62% of partners also misusing alcohol or drugs
- 87% of the cohort who illicitly used during pregnancy had partners who misused drugs or alcohol.
- 23% (n=16) of the cohort were documented as being in violent relationships. Only 10 of these were referred to social care
Mean birthweight was 2797g with a Standard Deviation of 524g. This fell within the average range set by the city of 2700g.

Gestational age at presentation was, on average, late at 16 weeks however this did not associate with poor foetal outcomes or referral to social care.

35% of the cohort’s baby’s had FAS/NAS however this did not correlate with social care referral.

Hepatitis C was documented in 17% of cohort and depression in 42%.
Social Care Outcomes.

- High end social care outcomes characterised by following risk factors
  - 71% had criminal justice involvement
  - 67% reported domestic violence
  - 93% were poly substance users
  - 100% used illicitly during pregnancy
Key findings

- Predictive effect and association of illicit use in pregnancy over social care referral
  - Types and method of substance misuse
- Impact of socio-economic factors
  - Family support
  - Partner
  - Foetal outcomes
Concluding Remarks


