

HARM DONE BY ALCOHOL TO CHILDREN

Children bear the brunt of alcohol related harm.

❖ **More than 7 million children in the EU (9%) live in families adversely affected by alcohol.**

- Parental drinking can affect the environment in which a child grows up through financial strain, poor parenting, marital conflicts and negative role modelsⁱ.
- A large number of studies have reported a variety of childhood mental and behavioural disorders to be more prevalent among children of heavy drinkers than othersⁱⁱ.
- Besides, the risk of child abuse is higher in families with heavy drinking parentsⁱⁱⁱ

❖ **Alcohol is a cause of child abuse in 16% of cases^{iv}** (i.e. one in every six cases of child abuse is due to alcohol)

❖ **Harm to the unborn child:** Alcohol is a toxic substance that harms the baby: drinking during pregnancy is a major cause of birth defects with life long consequences.

- Alcohol is responsible for 60,000 underweight births^v each year in the EU, of which nearly half are in the EU10^{vi}.
- FAS (fetal alcohol syndrome) and FASD (foetal alcohol spectrum disorders): Prenatal exposure to alcohol can be associated with a distinctive pattern of intellectual deficits that become apparent later in childhood, including reductions in general intellectual functioning and academic skills, as well as deficits in verbal learning, spatial memory and reasoning, reaction time, balance, and other cognitive and motor skills^{vii}. Some deficits, ^{viii} like problems with social functioning, appear to worsen as these individuals reach adolescence and adulthood, possibly leading to an increased rate of mental health disorders^{ix}. Although these deficits are most severe and have been documented most extensively in children with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), children pre-natally exposed to lower levels of alcohol can exhibit similar problems^x in a dose dependent manner^{xi}, exacerbated by episodic heavy drinking^{xii}.
- According to a recent study carried out in Italy, FAS prevalence among Italian first-graders ranged from 3.7 to 7.4 per 1,000 -- higher than previous estimates of the disorder in Western Europe. The FASD rate was also high -- 20.3 to 40.5 per 1,000 children.^{xiii} According to this, alcohol would be the leading cause of birth defects and the most common cause of mental disabilities, more common than Down Syndrom (1 per 600 live births) and spina bifida (1 per 700 live births).
- Even at low average volumes of consumption, and particularly during the first trimester of pregnancy, alcohol can increase the risk of spontaneous abortion, low birth weight, prematurity and intra-uterine growth retardation^{xiv}
- There is also some evidence that alcohol may reduce milk production in breastfeeding mothers^{xv}

❖ **23% of all deaths from motor vehicles accidents in children aged 0-15 are due to alcohol^{xvi}**

❖ **19% of all child Homicides are due to alcohol^{xvii}**

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ii Miller, B.A.; Maguin, E.; And Downs, W.R. (1997) Alcohol, drugs, and violence in children's lives. In: Galanter, M., ed. *Recent Developments in Alcoholism: Volume 13. Alcoholism and Violence*. New York: Plenum Press, pp. 357-385.

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iii Rossow I. (2000) Suicide, violence and child abuse: review of the impact of alcohol consumption on social problems. *Contemporary Drug Problems* 27, 397-434.

iv English, D. R., Holman, C. D. J., Milne, E., Winter, M. J., Hulse, G. K., and colleagues (1995). The quantification of drug-caused morbidity and mortality in Australia 1995. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health.

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Reports from Denmark, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK support a figure of this magnitude, with alcohol related in various ways to 10%-50% of cases (McNeill 1998; Sundhedsministeriet [Ministry of Health] 1999; WHO 2004).

v Low birth weight is defined as under 2500g

vi ICD-10 P00-P96; Data on low birth weight (defined as under 2500g in the GBD) and total numbers of births from the WHO's HFA database

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x Gunzerath, L., Faden, V., Zakhari, S and Warren, K. (2004) National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism report on moderate drinking. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* 28 829-847.

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xvi WHO. Comparative Quantification of Health Risks Global and Regional Burden of Disease Attributable to Selected Major Risk Factors. edited by Majid Ezzati et al.

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xvii WHO. Comparative Quantification of Health Risks Global and Regional Burden of Disease Attributable to Selected Major Risk Factors. edited by Majid Ezzati et al.

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