Reviewer's report

Title: New estimates of the number of children living with substance misusing parents: results from UK national household surveys

Version: 1 Date: 9 April 2009

Reviewer: Joy Barlow

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Major Compulsory Revisions
None

Minor Essential Revisions
None

Discretionary Revisions
There is no reason for major compulsory revisions, though I would suggest that the focus in the article takes account of the wider context of protecting children. The data contained within lend themselves to discussion on the importance in policy and practice terms, on the areas of early identification and intervention. As government policy is concerned with the earlier identification of potential problems, data on binge drinking and recreational drug use should be further highlighted. Such data have important implications for the wider dissemination of these epidemiological factors to universal and generic services. These are the key services in early identification and intervention to prevent the potential of significant harm.

It would be useful to note with rather more emphasis the age of the existing data, and its unreliableness when one considers the importance laid upon the scale of the problem in current government strategies. You have just one sentence at the end of one paragraph which asserts this.

In addition I would suggest that this article is of potential significance. Therefore more can be made, by the use of temperate language of why new data are potentially so important. Without an understanding of the significant numbers we are facing, if matters are left until crisis point we shall not be able to assist children and families. If universal, generic services understand their role in identification and intervention, prevention initiatives may finally bear fruit.

In terms of the detail of the data, I would suggest that e.g. the doubling of children living in a household where the only adult is a drug user, is of significance in terms of vulnerability. All of this relates to seeing the wider child protection agenda as that of need as well as risk.

I am also a little concerned about the ambivalence of some comments i.e. a ‘small minority of children as likely to experience clear and identifiable harms,’ I
would suggest that recent significant research would lead one to the conclusion that harm may accrue to children over a wide range of situations and circumstances. This is not meant as an attack on drug and alcohol misusers as parents, but a statement of fact. The authors may wish to consider noting the importance of assessment and make further comment on the use of interagency protocols which provide a comprehensive, proportionate assessment on need, harm and risk.

The whole article could be more bold in its assertions e.g. the finding should be used to inform and design etc. of future research, rather than ‘can’. The findings of this research are of considerable significance, and the article should reflect this in tone and style.

In the conclusion the point is made that children will be at the greatest risk when living in households unsupported by mainstream services. Such services, using the data advised here, should see their role in explicitly supporting such vulnerable families. In the now well known Scottish phrase ‘It’s everybody’s job to make sure I’m alright’

My advise is – be more bold – we need it!

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare I have no competing interests