

Harm done by alcohol to Children

- **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 models.
- 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 others.
- The risk of child abuse is higher in families with heavy drinking parents.
- Alcohol is a cause of child abuse in 16% of cases (i.e. one in every six cases of child abuse is due to alcohol)
- 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 each year in the EU of which nearly half are in the EU10. Low birth weight is defined as under 2500g.
- *FAS (fetal alcohol syndrome) and FAE (fetal alcohol spectrum disorders) is a leading cause of birth defects and may be the most common cause of mental disabilities, more common than Down Syndrome (1 per 600 live births) and spinal bifida (1 per 700 live births).*
- 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.
- Some deficits, 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. Although these deficits are most severe and have

been documented most extensively in children with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), children prenatally exposed to lower levels of alcohol can exhibit similar problems in a dose dependent manner, exacerbated by episodic heavy drinking.

- 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.
- There is also some evidence that alcohol may reduce milk production in breastfeeding mothers.
- 23% of all deaths from motor vehicles accidents in children aged 0-15 are due to alcohol in the EU.
- 19% of all child homicides are due to alcohol in the EU.¹⁴

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FACTS



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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).

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