

Parents who inject drugs: demographics, care arrangements and correlates for child placement in out-of-home care

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Introduction: Children in families affected by substance use disorders are at high risk of being placed in out-of-home care (OOHC). This study aimed to determine correlates associated with child placement in OOHC among parents who inject drugs in Melbourne, Australia.

Methods: We used baseline data from a prospective, community-based cohort of people who inject drugs (SuperMIX). Recruitment of the cohort was via convenience, respondent-driven and snowball sampling from April 2008 to November 2020, with follow-up until March 2021. To explore correlates associated with child placement to OOHC among participants who were parents, we used multivariable logistic regression models and assessed for potential interactions between gender and a range of covariates using the likelihood ratio test.

Results: Of 1 067 participants, 611 (57%) reported being parents. Fifty-six percent of parents reported child protection involvement, reaching up to 71.9% for female or non-binary parents. Almost half (49%) had children in OOHC. Nearly half of all parents lived in unstable accommodation (44%) and many experienced moderate-severe levels of anxiety (48%) and depression (53%). Female or non-binary gender, identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, experiencing assault and having a greater number of children were associated with child removal to OOHC. Of the 563 participants who reported their own childhood care status, 135 (24%) reported that they had experienced OOHC.

Discussion and Conclusions: We identified high rates of child protection involvement and child placement in out-of-home care among parents who inject drugs.

Implications for Practice or Policy: There is a need for targeted health and social services, that are gender and culturally responsive, in addition to systems-level interventions addressing social inequities to support parents who inject drugs to care for their children.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

L.M. is funded by a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Senior Research Fellowship. Baseline data collection for SuperMIX was funded by the Colonial Foundation Trust and the NHMRC (#545891, #1126090), with ongoing data collection funded by the NHMRC alone. The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the Victorian Operational Infrastructure Fund. The funders had no input into the work. PD is supported by an NHMRC Senior Research Fellowship (1136908). He has received investigator-driven funding from Gilead Sciences and Indivior for work unrelated to this study.