

# Children and families affected by substance dependence

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# Background

The Council of Europe International Cooperation Group on Drugs and Addiction, founded in 1971, consists of 41 countries and provides knowledge, support and solutions for effective, evidence-based drug policies, which fully respect human rights based.



In 2020 it was invited to provide inputs for the Council of Europe Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2022-2027).

# Project: “Children whose parents use drugs”

- Between 2020 and 2023:
  - 18 countries involved
  - More than 300 people and 14 countries (Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Mexico, North Macedonia, Poland, Rumania, Switzerland and Turkey) actively participating in the project
  - 2 reports
  - 4 ISBN publications
  - Dissemination and awareness raising activities in Austria, Brazil, Czech Republic, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the UK and Uruguay
  - International cooperation, field visits and synergies

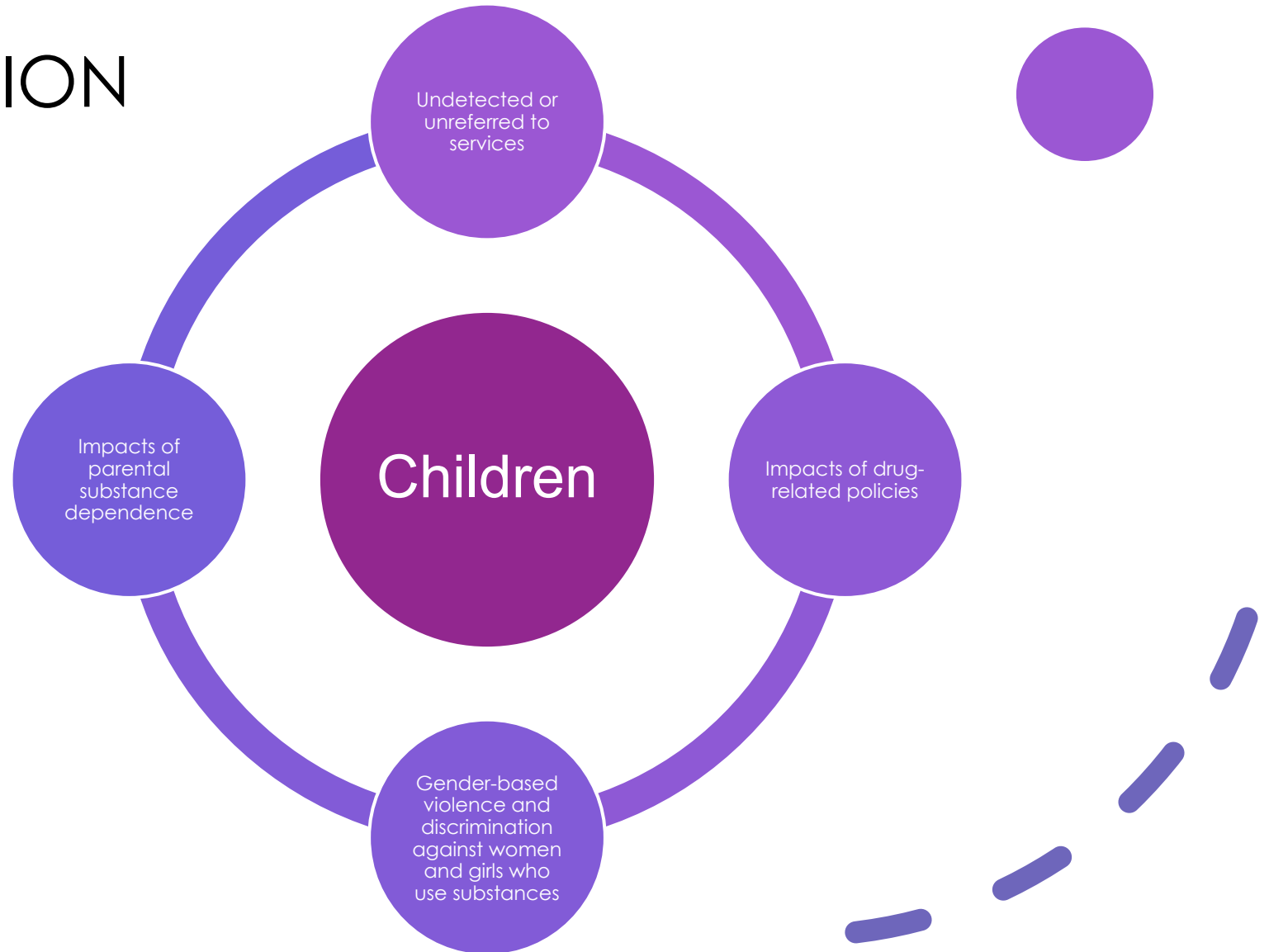
HUGE COMMITMENT AND ENTHUSIASM!



*“Children blame themselves and they wonder “why doesn’t she love me?” but it’s not true: the mother loves her child, but the substance is too strong.”*

- Children impacted by parental drug dependence can experience anxiety, depression, anger, guilt and shame. They often feel isolated and are afraid of speaking out and looking for help. They think that they are somehow responsible for what is happening to them and that they have to save their parents.
- Fathers and mothers who face the dual challenge of drug dependence and being a parent can be overwhelmed by the intersection of i) their personal history and the history with substances; ii) social, cultural, gender and individual challenges in relation to parenthood; iii) a hostile, stigmatizing or not always solidary environment that does not see them fit for parenting because of their substance use.

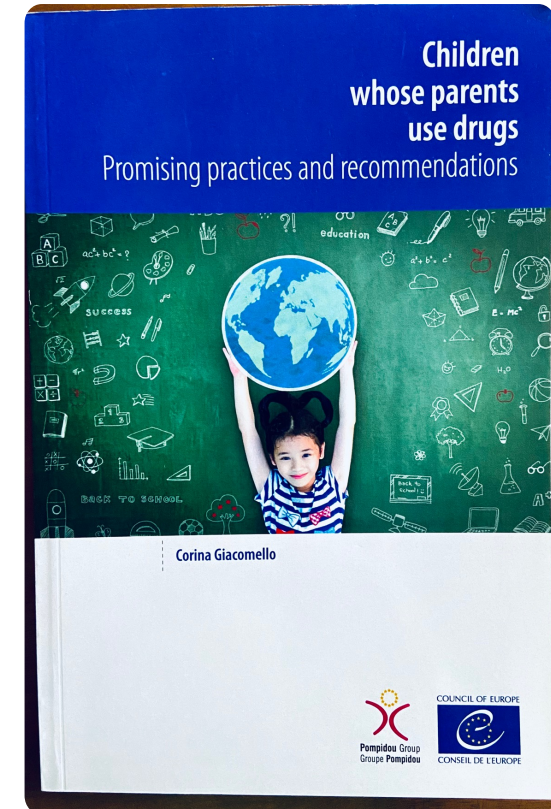
# HIDDEN HARM CONCEPTUALIZATION



29 practices from 11 countries in the fields of:

- a) family and children-oriented services that take drug use into account, including national strategies (Ireland, Italy, Iceland, Cyprus)
- b) programmes and services for people who use substances and their children and families, including data gathering and awareness-raising (Czech Republic, Iceland, Ireland, Mexico, UK)
- c) drug treatment services targeted at pregnant women, mothers and their children (Czech Republic, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland)
- d) services for women who are victims and survivors of violence and use drugs, and their children (Ireland and Cyprus)

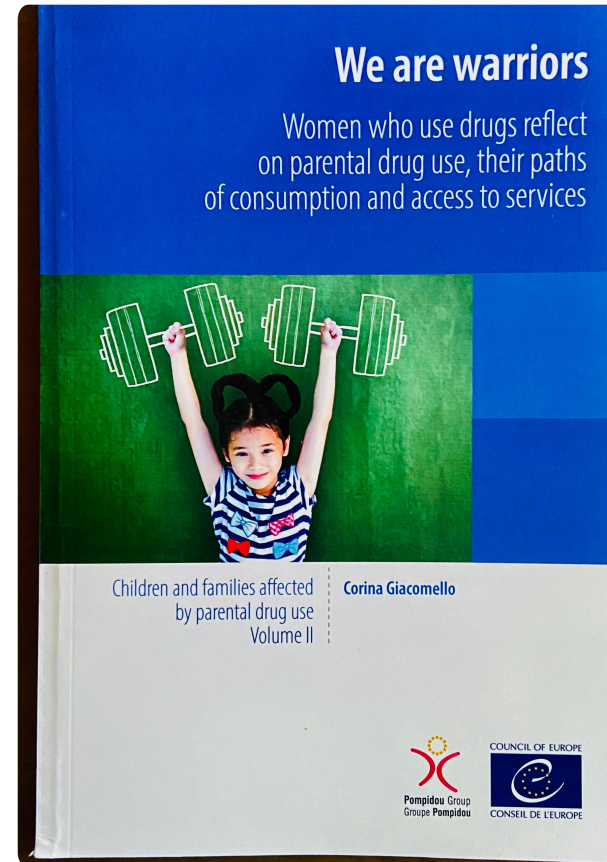
Concrete recommendations on policy-making, data gathering, children's participation, gender perspective, multi-disciplinary work-methods, training, etc.




110 women who use substances from 9 countries , who are or have been in treatment.

It includes their insights as well as recommendations on the effects of parental drug use during childhood on their life and subsequent drug use.

It also explores the barriers and facilitators to accessing services and how to improve services' response both to women who use drugs, and to children with parents who use drugs





*The women I have met in rehabilitation centres... they all come for the same reasons: they all come for abuse, for mistreatment, because their father is on drugs. They come for different stories of connection, but I think we all go through rape.*


(Elisa, Mexico).

*I was very happy to be pregnant, but I didn't want to tell. I was ashamed of being pregnant because I wasn't a person who could be happy about being pregnant: I didn't have a stable life, I didn't have a house, I didn't have a job, I didn't have anything, so I couldn't be happy about being pregnant.*


(Giulia, Italy).

*They tell me I'm a drug addict, but they don't ask me "Why you do it? What do you feel?". Or better still, "Have you eaten, kid?".*

(Nohemí, Mexico).





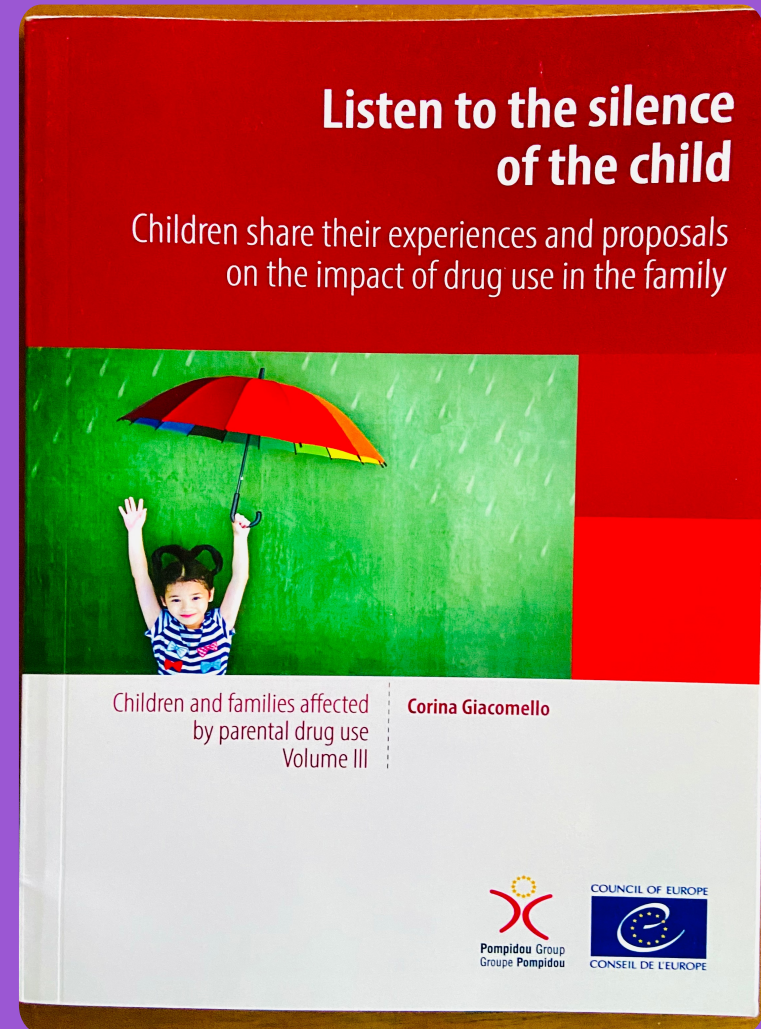



So, why would people come away from the services? The complete unmanageability. You have an appointment time and you wake up and you have an absolute obsession and the only thing that will get rid of that obsession is by putting that substance inside your body. You've lost the power of choice. **I went to services and it had nothing to do with the people that tried to help me, it was the powerlessness over the substances.**

**The first thing I think should be asked to a woman or a mother who was attending the services is "What do you feel you need to help you manage?"** Having realistic expectations of the people who are attending the service. Asking: "Is this manageable for you?". **Leaving the door open and the possibility to say yes or no and if they say no, be able to accommodate.**  
(Shiv, Ireland).

My name is Alexis, I am 14 years old, I would like to have a family with no drug issues, people who take care of me and I would like to not live illegally.

Teachers and services must be patient with children. **They must hear the voice of the child and ... the silence of the child.** It helps to be supported in everything without the danger to lose your house and be in an institution. It helps if the child can have a quiet home, therapist for the parent, a school that understands and a network that supports in food, clean clothes, clean house, quiet sleep, studying, going at school on time. Therapists are helpful but children do not like going to therapy.





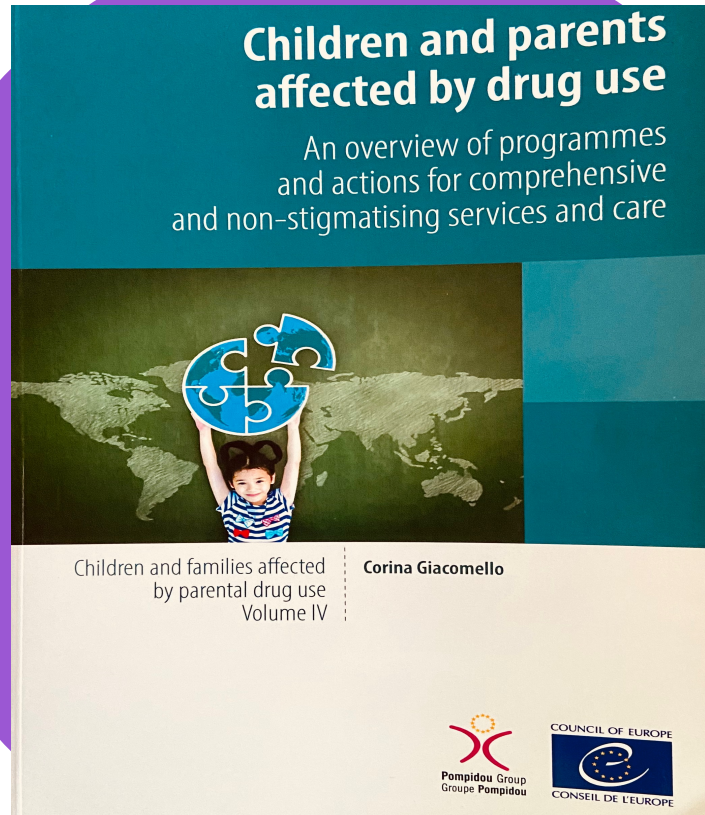
*When he was using, my dad would change and that man of love, of respect, would leave and go into survival mode.*

*I didn't know when it was going to happen again, when I was going to witness a fight. I didn't know when I was going to have to move, when I was going to have my school safe or not, when I was going to have to eat or not.*

*I didn't want to go to school because I was worried about being at school because I didn't know what was going on at home. I didn't know if my mum was ok, if my dad was going to do something to my mum. We got to the point where we had to hide everything of value so that they wouldn't take it away, and in the end my house was destroyed, empty, and that's where my dad committed suicide.*

*These are life experiences that I really don't wish on anyone. However, I know that I am not the only one. There are so many girls and women who say that a close relative could not overcome the struggle. And there are so many of us. And we don't talk about it.*

*(Pachis, Mexico, 23 yo)*



33 programmes from the 11 participating countries, which include:

- a) actions in the field of data gathering;
- b) parenting programmes;
- c) multidisciplinary, holistic approaches to working with families;
- d) services for women victims and survivors of gender-based violence;
- e) protocols of cooperation;
- f) drug treatment services and residential communities for women and their children

2023

- *Guidelines for the development and consolidation of comprehensive services for children and families affected by substance dependence*
- A preliminary approximation to the issue of fathers who use substances, from the perspective of masculinity, parenthood and human rights, in order to lay the basis for 2024's more in depth work on this topic



# PROMISING PRACTICES

## POLICY LEVEL:

- Hidden Harm Strategy and training (Ireland)
- P.I.P.P.I. Programme (Italy)

## DATA GATHERING AND INFORMATION SHARING

- National drug treatment reporting system (Ireland)
- RPMonline (Italy)

## SOCIAL SERVICES, FAMILIES AND DEPENDENCE

- Prevention programmes (Cyprus)
- Preparing for Life (Ireland)
- Identification and referral of children with incarcerated parents (Cyprus)
- P.I.P.P.I. Programme (Italy)



# PROMISING PRACTICES

## DRUG-TREATMENT SERVICES, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES:

- Rialto Community Drug Team (Ireland)
- Ballyfermot Star (Ireland)
- Youth Integration Centres (Mexico)
- Day Care Centre, SANANIM (Czech Republic)
- Addiction Switzerland (Switzerland)
- Parents Under Pressure, Coolmine (Ireland)
- Society of Alcoholism and other Addictions (SÁÁ, Iceland)

## TREATMENT CENTRES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

- San Patrignano, Casa Mimosa, La Rupe Femminile (Open Group), Italy
- Ashleigh House, Coolmine (Ireland)
- Therapeutic Community Karlov, SANANIM (Czech Republic)
- Specialized Unite for Addicted Mothers (Greece)
- Agia Skepi (Cyprus).

## WOMEN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SUBSTANCE USE

- SPAVO (Cyprus)
- Cuan Saor, Saoirse (Ireland)



*We help the mum and dad, help them get used to cooking, driving ... everything. We teach them how to write and read. (Milo, 8, Malta).*

*I wish they had explained to us at school about the problems with drugs and alcohol because I know people my age who already have ugly problems with drugs. I think there's a lack of information, that it's not just like "Taking drugs or drinking is bad" and then "Don't do it". I think that with the background that I have, I would like them to explain things to us like "Drinking can cause this, not only to you, but to your family", things like that. Not only to us, but also to the parents. † feels bad as a child because you don't know what to do and you don't have the tools. (Marisol, 17, Mexico).*

*I would tell them not to be affected, or bothered by what their parents do, and not be like them, such a mess and bad example for their kids. Yes, and that it would be good to have someone to talk to. And not feel embarrassed. There's no need. (Maria, 15, Greece).*