



MEDIA RELEASE

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HIDDEN HARM: ALCOHOL'S DEVASTATING IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

24 February, 2015: A new Australian study has revealed the full extent of alcohol-related family and domestic violence in Australia.

More than one million children are affected in some way by others drinking, 140,000 are substantially affected and more than 10,000 are in the child protection system because of a carers drinking.

The study will be officially launched at NSW Parliament House this morning by Rosie Batty, family violence campaigner and 2015 Australian of the Year. She will join a panel of experts in the field of family and domestic violence to discuss the report's implications for the development of policy in Australia.

Funded by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and undertaken by the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR) the study, *The hidden harm: Alcohol's impact on children and families*, examined the prevalence and effects of heavy drinking on families and children, and the extent to which they persisted or changed over time.

It found that in 2011 there were almost 30,000 police reported incidents of alcohol-related domestic violence in just the States and Territories where such data is available, with the figure excluding alcohol-related assaults in Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

The new study draws on two national surveys of alcohol's harm to others, service system data from policy and child protection services and information gained from qualitative interviews with families affected by others' drinking, which revealed that children experienced a range of harms.

The harms reported by families varied. Children were verbally abused, left unsupervised, physically hurt or exposed to domestic violence as a result of others' drinking. Most commonly, children witnessed verbal or physical conflict or inappropriate behaviour.

More than one quarter of respondents reported harm from the drinking of family members in at least one of the surveys undertaken in 2008 and 2011. These harms often persisted overtime, with 50 per cent of adult respondents harmed in 2008 also harmed in 2011 and 35 per cent of children harmed in 2008 also harmed in 2011.

The study follows the release of the internationally renowned report *The Range and Magnitude of Alcohol's Harm to Others (2010)*, which was the first to examine the harms from alcohol consumption on people other than the drinker.

With approximately half of reported domestic violence incidents and up to 47 per cent of child protection cases involving alcohol, FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says we need to understand alcohol's role in family and domestic violence and use this information to act to prevent this violence from occurring.

"Alcohol-related family and domestic violence occurs all too frequently in Australia, and as a society, we need to be doing all we can to reduce the incidence and severity of the harms. This research makes very clear that because of the scale of the problem and the large numbers of children and families affected; governments must embrace a broad public health approach with a strong focus on prevention," Mr Thorn said.

Panellist Ms Moo Baulch, Domestic Violence NSW Chief Executive, said she welcomed research that might lead to a greater understanding of the problem and the development of policies that would see a reduction in harms.

"Domestic and family violence has been variously and accurately described as our nation's shame and a national emergency. Domestic and family violence is an abuse of power and control and there is no excuse for it. We need to better understand the links between alcohol and domestic abuse. If there is any comfort at all to be found at present, it is that the issue of domestic and family violence has found itself, not before time, front and centre of the national agenda and public awareness. Governments are now looking to act and I for one welcome robust research findings that provide us with a more complete picture of the problem, and help identify and explore the policies that may address it," Ms Baulch said.

FARE has developed a policy options paper in consultation with public health, domestic violence and family services to propose a framework for action to prevent and reduce alcohol-related family and domestic violence. The policy options paper proposes a range of measures which can be implemented across the community that focus on preventing violence before it happens, intervening early to prevent further harms for victims of violence and ensuring that service responses are appropriate. Mr Thorn says there is no one single solution to reduce alcohol-related family violence.

"If we are serious about reducing alcohol-related family violence, we have to consider a wider range of policy measures. We need national public education campaigns that acknowledge and address the role of alcohol in family violence; we need targeted screening of young people at greater risk of harm; and measures that reduce the availability, target the price, and regulate the promotion of alcohol; together with efforts to improve the way in which the alcohol and other drugs sector collaborates with domestic violence, child protection and mental health services," Mr Thorn said.



Foundation for Alcohol
Research & Education

Event Information

The hidden harm: Alcohol's impact on children and families

Tuesday, 24 February 2015, 10:30AM – 12:00PM

Theatrette, NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Media Doorstop: 10:00AM –10:15AM (or interviews by arrangement)

Mr Thorn (@MichaelTThorn), Professor Room and Ms Baulch are available for interview.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation's greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.

The **Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR)** is a world-class alcohol policy research institute led by Professor Robin Room. CAPR examines alcohol-related harms and the effectiveness of alcohol-related policies and is a joint undertaking of FARE, the Victorian Department of Health, Turning Point and the University of Melbourne.

For further information visit CAPR's website: www.capr.edu.au.