



# Parental alcohol use and resilience in young people:

A study of family, peer and school processes

**BYDS**  
THE BELFAST YOUTH  
DEVELOPMENT STUDY

**ICCR**  
INSTITUTE OF CHILD CARE RESEARCH

**HSC** Public Health  
Agency  
Research and Development



# ‘Hidden harm’ and prevalence

## ‘Hidden Harm’ –

‘children living in households where there is alcohol and drug misuse, including the misuse of over-the-counter and prescribed medication’  
(DHSSPSNI, 2008)

## Prevalence

- **EU** - 9 million youth live with a parent addicted to alcohol (Eurocare, 2012)
- **USA** - 7.5 million children <18 years = 10.5% (SAMHSA, 2012)
- **UK** -30% <16 years (3.3-3.5 million), binge drinker;  
-22% (2.6 million), hazardous drinker,  
- 6% (705k), dependent drinker (Manning, 2009)
- **NI** - 40,000 children (DHSSPS, 2008)

## Policy context

# Impact on children

## Impact on child wellbeing

- feelings of insecurity, shame and loneliness;
- unstable and chaotic home environments;
- exposure to crime or toxic substances;
- verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse;
- low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence;
- becoming homeless or socially marginalised and;
- taking on caring roles and responsibilities for siblings and parents.

## Outcomes in adolescence/adulthood

- alcohol and drug problems;
- emotional and mental health problems including depression and anxiety disorders;
- conduct and behavioural problems;
- issues of trust and reliance on others; relationship difficulties;
- reduced academic attainment and employment opportunities.

# Extant literature

- Lack of research on direct effects of caregiver substance use on child outcomes (Stanton-Tindall et al., 2013)
- Resilience theory (Rutter, 1979, 1987) & PYD framework
- Family – effects of mothers and fathers drinking; disruption to family functioning
- Peers- strong peer relationships or introspection/social isolation?
- Schools- academic performance and other stabilising activities

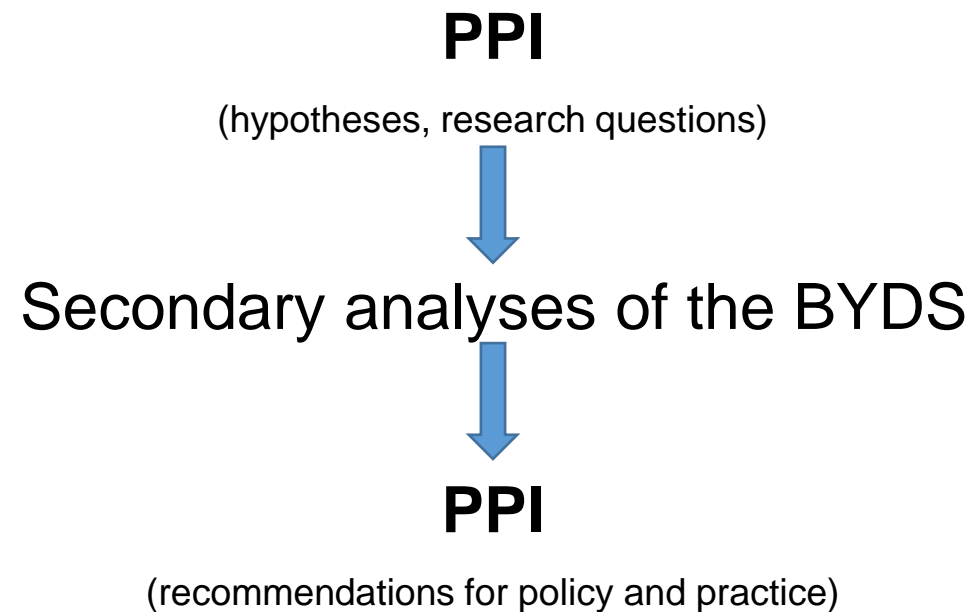
# Why carry out this study?

**..what impact does problem drinking by parents have on their children's outcomes in adolescence and adulthood?**

- Clinical studies of 'alcoholic' parents do not accurately reflect the *'hidden'* nature of the problem;
- Little evidence on 'hidden harm' using community samples (such as BYDS);
- Broad range of alcohol use;
- Relatively few longitudinal studies;
- Outcomes in adolescence & young adulthood;
- Self-report data from parent and child.

# Personal and Public Involvement (PPI)

- 23 children (aged 7-14) who attended the group work programme at Barnardo's Pharos service.



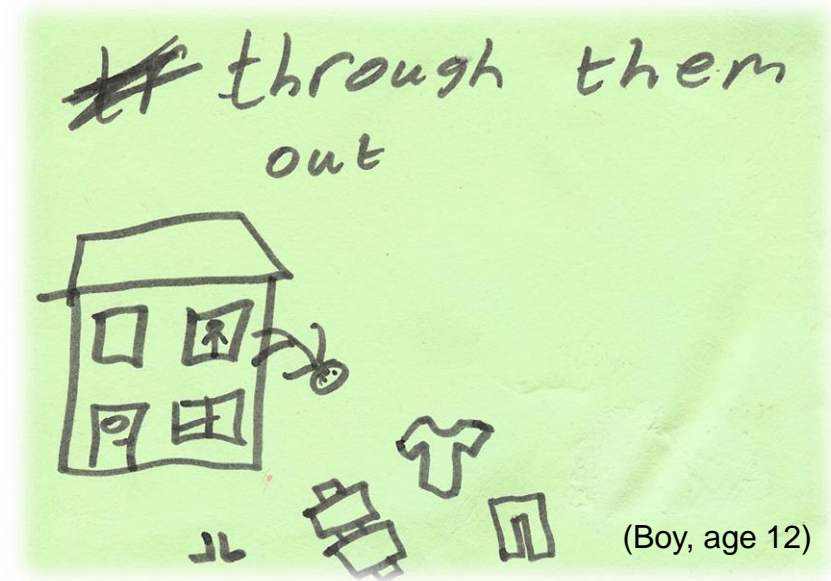
# Personal and Public Involvement (PPI)

**Resilience-** 'who or what can help children to be strong or cope or be happy.....?'

- Experiences of living with parental alcohol misuse
- Sources of social support
- Strategies for coping with a parent/carers drinking

# Living with parental alcohol misuse

- 'You have to be hard on them. They won't listen if you're soft' (girl, age 10)
- 'parents need to give themselves support' (girl, age 10)
- they 'should go to the doctor and ask for help' (boy, age 12)





# Sources of social support

- ‘When you talk to someone, then it feels good’ (girl, aged 10)
- Initial sources-school counsellors, teachers/principals, other family members
- Once problem identified- social workers, practitioners
- Hidden nature of the problem- ‘family members need to find out what’s happening’

# Sources of social support

- Siblings- 'an older brother or sibling might be able to help you but not younger ones. They wouldn't understand' (girl, aged 12)
- Neighbours- *My neighbour lets me go to their house to do my research/homework.'*
- *'can help you to take your mind off things'*
- Friends -*'friends can't always be trusted. They tell other people your problems. You can only tell best friends.'* (girl, aged 12)

# Support at school

- *'there's teachers in school that are trained especially to help'* (boy, age 12)
- *'a teacher that you can talk to can really help'* (boy, age 12)
- *'some teachers don't really listen. You tell them but then the next time they're like what? They don't really listen to what you say.'* (girl, age 10)
- *I went to see a counsellor in my old school (primary school). I used to go for six weeks at a time and it was really helpful and I could go back for more anytime I wanted to. The counsellor gave me loads of advice. She told me, when I'm angry, I should sit on my hands. I used to fill out a form every week with faces on it. When I started I picked a sad face but it changed every week. By the time I was finished, I didn't have a smiley face but it was further up than a sad face. I don't see a counsellor anymore 'cause I'm at my new school now* (girl, age 12).

# Coping with a parents drinking

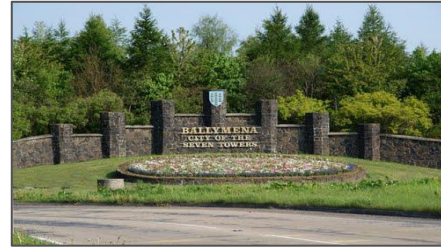
- *'anger is like a volcano building up inside you. You just erupt!'* (boy, age 10)
- *'I was really angry one day and ran upstairs and put a size five hole in the wall at the top of the stairs. It's still there today'* (boy, age 12)
- *'laughing out loud'* (boy, age 12)
- *'not good having too much time thinking about things'* (girl, age 12)
- *'PE at school, especially shot put. It helps you to let everything out, all the anger and stress and everything'* (boy, age 12)
- *'art in school helps. It helps you to forget about social services and Barnardo's and everything'* (boy, age 12).



# The Belfast Youth Development Study (BYDS)



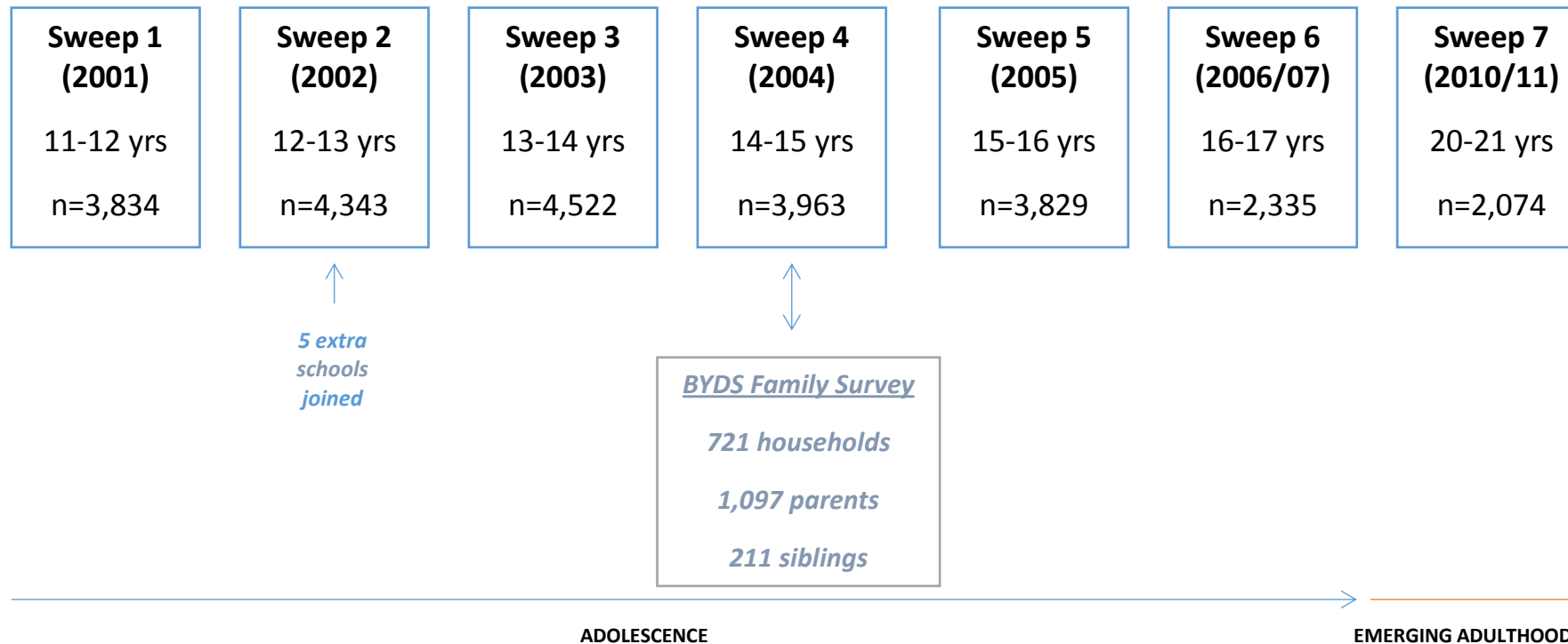
**Belfast = 32**



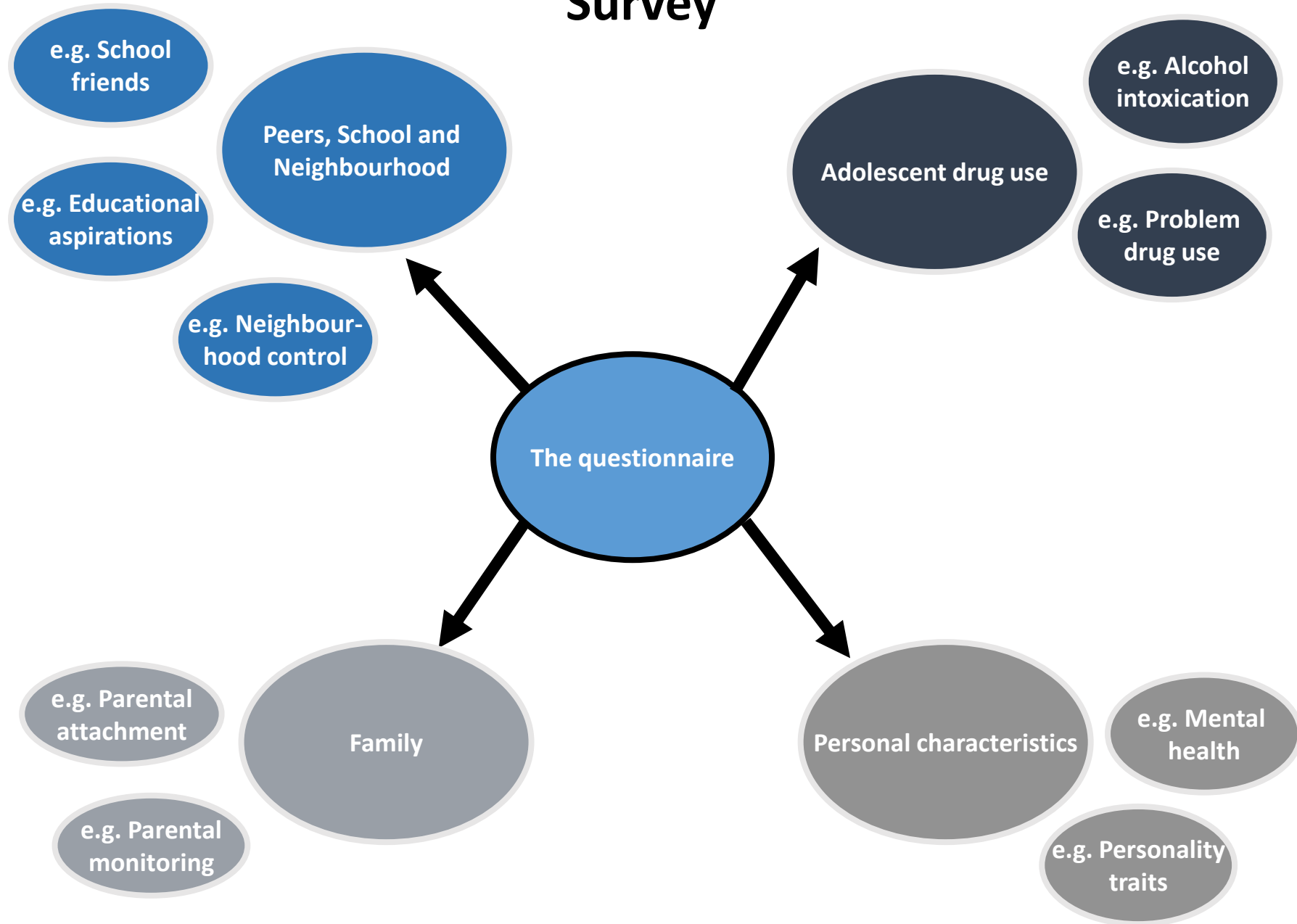
**Ballymena = 6**



**Downpatrick = 6**

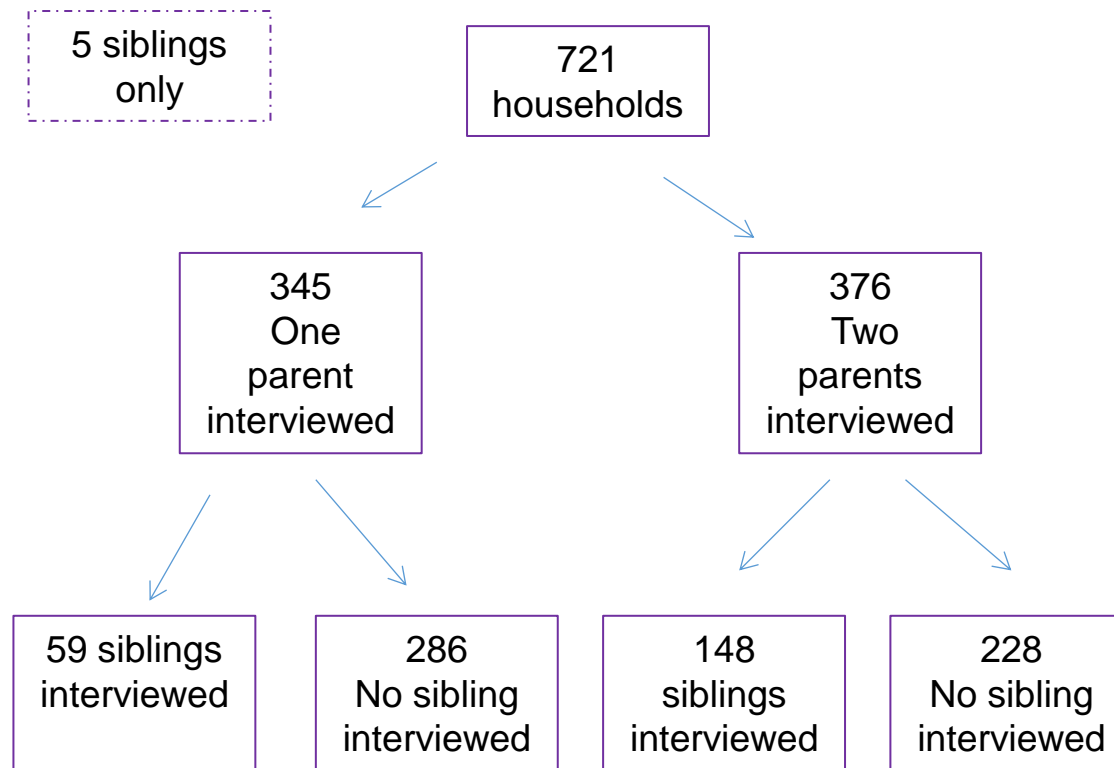


# Survey



# The Family Survey

- 2004 (sweep 4 of BYDS dataset)
- 1,097 parental interviews; 212 (older) sibling interviews (1,309 family members)
- 721 households
- Single parent/caregivers=345 households
- Both parents/caregivers=376 households (752 individual interviews)
- Main caregiver= 727
- Other caregiver= 370



Caregivers (n=1,097) – majority were female carers (n=679; 62%)  
97% of sample-birth fathers (36%) or mothers (61%).

# Parent, child & sibling measures

## Measurement of alcohol use

- Alcohol use (AUDIT, Babor et al., 2001)- 10 item scale (0-40)
- Broad definition of '*problem drinking*' to include hazardous, harmful, alcohol dependence and abuse (8-15=medium levels of alcohol problems; 16+ = high levels)

## Parent & sibling measures

- Parental monitoring (Stattin & Kerr, 200)
- Family conflict
- Marital satisfaction (Blum & Mehrabian, 1999)

## Child measures

- Parent-child attachment (IPPA, Armsden & Greenberg, 1987)
- Leisure activities,
- Peer problems (SDQ, Goodman, 1997)
- Disposable income
- School commitment, attachment, educational aspirations, school problem behaviour, teacher-pupil relationship; further education & employment
- Support seeking
- Depression- MFQ (Angold & Costello, 1987) & PHQ (Kroenke et al., 2001)
- Attachment related anxiety & avoidance (ECR-R, Fraley et al., 2000)
- Romantic relationships & sexual activity

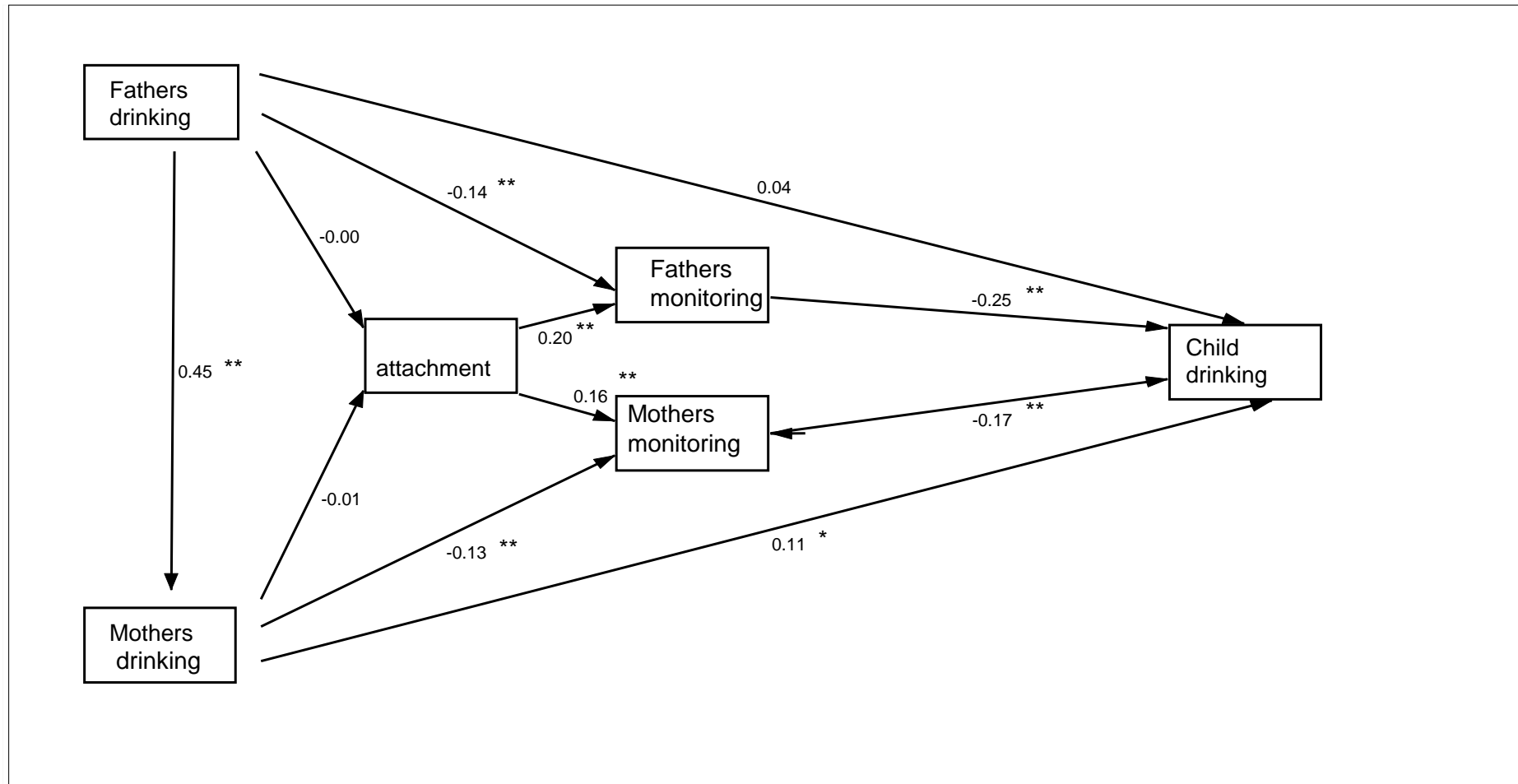


# Characteristics of problem drinking parents



- Among the 1,097 parents in our study, 84% of parents had consumed alcohol in previous 12 months (176 were abstainers);
- One fifth (n=164) were problem drinkers (mostly male);
- ***Problem drinkers***- more separations/divorces, two or more serious relationships & child had lived with previous partners;
- Past financial difficulties, tended to be middle class, the chief income earner and in full-time employment.
- Child alcohol use across all age points (15, 16/17 & 20/21 years) was directly associated with exposure to parental drinking, aged 14.

# Parental drinking, family processes & child drinking



Path model showing paths from male carer, female carer drinking to child's drinking at 15 years old (via parent-child attachment and male and female carers monitoring) (n=721)

# Alcohol use and family processes

- *Path models*- while the influence of a father's drinking on the child's drinking gradually increased over time, the impact of a mother's drinking peaked when the child was 16/17 years old.
- Parental drinking reduced the likelihood of knowing a child's whereabouts, who they spent time with and their activities. Where parents monitored their child's activities, their children drank less at 15 and 16/17 years.
- Children who reported good relationships with their parents drank less from 15-21 years. They also reported less symptoms of depression at 15 and 20/21 years.
- Children with older male siblings who drank, had higher AUDIT scores at 15 and 20/21 years old

# Resilience- friends, relationships & leisure

- Children of problem drinkers- engagement in activities & relationships outside the home

- 14 years: AUDIT → more evenings spent outside the home (fathers)

- 15 years: evenings spent at friends house & mothers drinking (boys)

- No association with peer problems

- AUDIT → hanging around on streets, going to cafes/shopping with friends, going to discos/parties and babysitting for family

- Less likely to attend youth clubs, afterschool/homework clubs or places of worship

- More likely to have a boy/girlfriend who used cannabis or cocaine (particularly girls, age 16/17)

- No association between parental drinking and anxiety/avoidance in relationships (age 16/17)



# School and further education

- Parental drinking influenced children's attachment and commitment to school at age 14.
- Children of problem drinkers were much less dedicated to their studies; had reduced educational aspirations and; they were less likely to engage in helpful behaviour at school (especially boys).
- A mother's problem drinking appeared to negatively affect boys' behaviour, feelings of safety, attachment and commitment to school more so than for girls'.
- Children of non-problem drinkers evidenced higher academic success however they were also more likely to drop out of a university course.

# Policy and practice recommendations

- Young people affected by varying levels of parental alcohol abuse (including hazardous, binge drinking) should be supported;
- Development and evaluation of interventions is crucial-*feasibility study of Pharos group work programme*;
- Services need to target young people as they navigate transitions from dependent child to adolescent and young adult.

# Policy and practice recommendations

- Parenting programmes-positive parent-child attachments, parental monitoring, involve older siblings;
- Schools- at least one trained professional;
- Teachers- track and encourage young people's engagement in after school activities, contact with positive role models;
- Generic school based interventions to build resilience may be useful in targeting those exposed to lower levels of problem drinking.

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