

Young people who misuse or abuse alcohol or substances

Research briefing for professionals working with young people

One in four (25%) of the young people supported by young people’s violence advisors (YPVAs) or other specialist practitioners disclosed substance misuse. These young people were particularly vulnerable: many had mental health issues and the majority had been exposed to additional risks in the family home. More young women who misused substances reported experiences of child sexual exploitation and gang violence. Nearly half of young people who misused substances had a criminal record, and the majority were not in education, employment or training.

In the year to January 2015, caseholders supported 85 young people who disclosed substance misuse.

Drug misuse was reported by 22% of young people and 12% misused alcohol. Of young people who disclosed substance misuse, around one in three were misusing both drugs and alcohol. Young people who reported substance misuse ranged in age from 14 to 21 years old. More than three-quarters (76%) were experiencing current abuse, most commonly perpetrated by a current or ex-boyfriend. More than half (58%) of cases where the young person misused substances were referred to Marac.

Young people who misuse substances are vulnerable and have many complex needs.

The vast majority (87%) of young people who reported substance misuse also reported mental health issues. This is compared to 61% of those young people who did not disclose substance misuse.

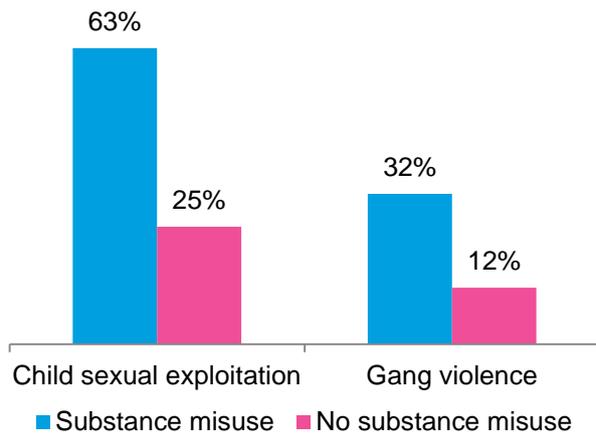
Caseholders recorded concerns about the risk taking behaviour and emotional wellbeing of the majority of young people with mental health issues.

Additional causes of difficulty	n=	85
Depression/ anxiety	74	87%
Self-harm	59	69%
Sleep problems	38	45%
Eating problems	22	26%
Other mental health	18	21%
Planned/attempted suicide	14	17%

Two-out-of-five of young people who misuse substances have been exposed to parental substance misuse.

40% of young people who misused substances were at increased risk because they were exposed to parental substance misuse. More than half (54%) had experienced domestic abuse in the family home, and around a third were at increased risk as a result of parental mental ill health (35%) or parental criminal behaviour (33%). One in three (33%) young people who misused substances had been the subject of neglect in their past and one in five (19%) was currently experiencing neglect. Fewer than half (45%) of young people who misused substances lived with parents or step-parents. More than one in ten (12%) were homeless.

Young women who have difficulties with substance misuse are at increased risk of child sexual exploitation and gang violence.



One in five (22%) young women and half (51%) of the young men supported disclosed substance misuse. Caseholders recorded concerns about child sexual exploitation and gang violence for a high proportion of the young women who disclosed substance misuse. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of young women who misused substances were at risk of child sexual exploitation and one in three (32%) was at risk of gang violence. In comparison, these risks were less prevalent amongst young women who did not misuse substances. Far smaller proportions of young men were identified as vulnerable to these risks.

There were more young people who misused substance who were Neet, were looked after children and who had a criminal record, in comparison to those who did not misuse substance.

More than half (59%) of young people who misused substances were not in education, employment or training (Neet). By comparison, 37% of young people who did not misuse substances were Neet. There were also higher proportions of young people who were looked after children (36% compared to 9% of under-18s) and who had criminal records (46% compared to 9%).

Caseholders provided intensive support to young people who misused substances, which was tailored to their needs.

Young people who misused drugs or alcohol were supported for around 12 weeks, and had an average of 13 contacts with the caseholder. Nearly half (41%) of young people who misused substances were displaying harmful behaviours towards others when they starting working with their caseworker. This is compared to 14% of young people who did not misuse substances. At case closure, 84% of the young people who harmed others had been supported to access interventions to tackle the abusive behaviours. Two-thirds (65%) of young people were supported with their health. Of young people who misused alcohol, one in four (27%) engaged with a specialist alcohol service. One in three (34%) of those who misused drugs engaged with a specialist drugs service.

At case closure, caseholders recorded improvements in the young people’s safety, health and wellbeing.

For three-quarters (73%) of young people, caseholders recorded that the risk of harm had significantly or moderately reduced. The greatest improvements were in the proportion of young people experiencing feelings of blame or responsibility. This reduced from 73% at case engagement to 14% at case closure. The young people themselves reported improvements in their safety and quality of life. Where asked, almost every young person said their quality of life had improved (83%) and all reported that they knew how to get help in future.

