

Alcohol and Drugs

Focused on children most at risk, our fundamental purpose is to:

- make effective decisions about a need to refer a child to a Children's Hearing
- enable children and families to participate in Hearings
- provide suitable accommodation for Children's Hearings
- disseminate information and data to inform and influence improved outcomes for children and young people

Children

There are two grounds under which children involved with alcohol or drugs may be referred to the Children's Reporter on welfare grounds and offending grounds.

Welfare

In 2008/09, 1,350 children were referred to the Reporter because of concerns about their welfare caused by drug and/or alcohol misuse – this is out of 39,105 children referred on non-offence grounds.

Children referred on the ground of drug and/or alcohol misuse are recognised to be at risk and require intervention for their own care and protection.

The Children's Hearings (Scotland) Bill which is currently progressing through the Parliamentary process, proposes splitting the grounds into two, to make one referral for alcohol and another for drugs. This will provide more accurate reporting of these concerns in the future.

Offending

Children are also referred to the Reporter because they have been charged by the police for drugs or alcohol offences. Of all offence types recorded by the Reporter, 2% are drug or alcohol offences.

Offence Types	Number of Children Referred in 2008/09
Possession of drugs	540
Drugs (other)	59
Drunk and incapable	60
All offences	11,805

Background

However, for other children, concerns over substance misuse may be present in their backgrounds where the ground for referral relates to other issues. SCRA research showed that 10% of children referred (on any ground) had misused alcohol and 8% had misused drugs. In these cases, the substance misuse is likely to be a factor in Reporter decision-making about whether compulsory measures are needed to protect the child. It is also likely to be addressed by the Hearing even where it does not prima facie form one of the grounds for referral.

SCRA Research

SCRA has carried out detailed research into the backgrounds of children referred to the Reporter for offending, including their substance misuse:

- A study of young people who were identified as presenting a risk of serious harm found that almost half of the children sampled (45%) had a problem with alcohol misuse and the same percentage were using drugs.
- Research looking at young people who had received Movement Restriction Conditions in the first year of the pilot of Intensive Support and Monitoring Services found that 96% had misused alcohol and 82% had used drugs at some point in their lives.
- For children and young people who had offended only once or twice (who are the majority of children referred to the Reporter on offence grounds), 23% of offences were committed when the child was under the influence of alcohol, and 9% had used illegal drugs.

Parents

Parental alcohol and/or drug misuse is often a major factor in the backgrounds of children referred to SCRA.

SCRA research has shown that 39% of children referred had parents who abused alcohol and 35% of children had parents who misused drugs.

Parental drug and/or alcohol misuse is even more prevalent in the lives of very young children referred to SCRA. SCRA research found that two thirds of children under two years old referred to the Reporter have parents with drug and/or alcohol addictions. Alcohol was often the dominating factor in domestic abuse incidents in these children's homes, particularly when their father was intoxicated.

