



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Prevention: Research and Evaluation

Catherine Comiskey BA, MA, MSc, PhD, FIMA, FTCD.

Professor in Healthcare Statistics, Trinity College Dublin, special interest in addiction epidemiology, 1992-present,

Member and Chair of the Scientific Committee of The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction 2013- Present

What have I learned? – Three key learnings to share



Study of parents who use drugs: Grandparents, parents adult children and all services interviewed in the South East



1. Tackle Stigma

John, his mother, father and family tried to survive in a system of shame and stigma from wider society to schooling. A non stigmatising, trauma informed school approach would have helped.

John *' My father he, he passed when I was only a child. it was suicide....He had mental problems, drug problems, cocaine and alcohol...Me mother was an alcoholic and in the mix cocaine but mostly an alcoholic all her life.'*

John *'I started heroin at 13 and I've been on that throughout my whole life. But I have been smoking cannabis from a younger age. I was just getting up seeing me ma drunk so just going smoking weed and making sure me brothers got something to eat and got them to school.... I never had a parent there to tell me no...'*

My eldest brother,.., that's the only father figure I had growing up.'

Results (Dr Karen Galligan)

Adult to child number from a local services audit



Data from this study on the numbers of children among adults attending services, Galligan and Comiskey (2019) found that **for every unique client identified in the local services, there was just under one child**, with an exact ratio of 1 client to 0.88 children.



Use evidence to update policies: 11 years of child substance use data from hospital Emergency Departments plus a study of over 300 young people in a disadvantaged school (Dr Marie Hyland)

- **Survey of young people aged 15-17 years old, living in urban disadvantage**

- Alcohol behaviours

Health-related quality of life

Depression

Leisure time activities

Harmful consequences of alcohol use



Existing policies are not all evidence informed:

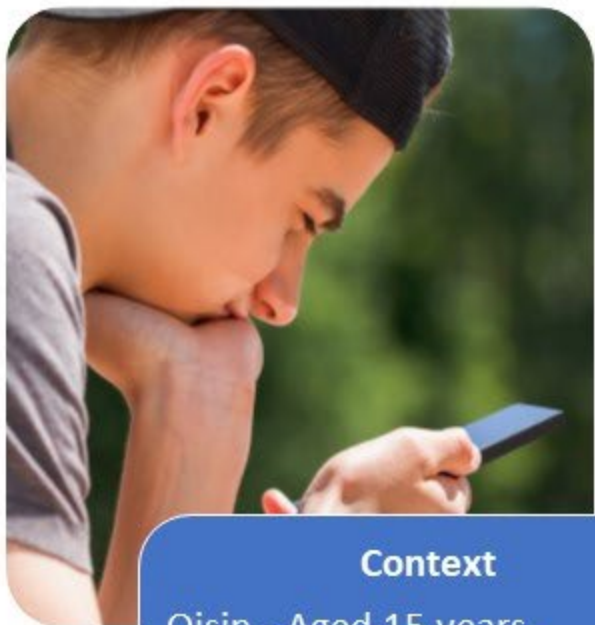
For example, these young people needed to be provided with prevention messaging **earlier** and certainly before transition year.

- **Anonymised secondary data from alcohol-related Emergency Department presentations by children and young people aged 12-18 years old.**

Retrospective analysis of 11 years of data (2009-2019) by Paediatric ED, by Adult ED, by gender and totals.

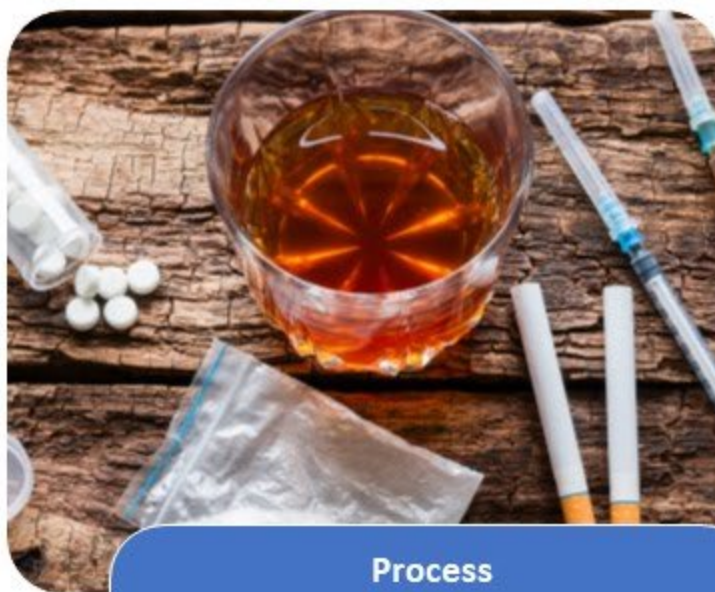
Content analysis and case histories

Alcohol-related harm involving polydrug use.



Context

- Oisin - Aged 15 years,
- Found unresponsive on a green.
- Post ingestion of alcohol, diazepam and cocaine.
- Gardai contacted the ambulance service.



Process

- Brought to the children's ED by ambulance.
- Eyelashes, eyebrows and hair singed.
- Alert on arrival to ED.



Outcome

- Seen very urgently (cat 2)
- Triage: overdose/poisoning
- Doctor diagnosed: Alcoholism
- Oisin was discharged home and referred to a social worker.

Free Text Comment: BIBA, as per amb crew + gardai, found unresponsive on a green, post ingestion of alcohol + ? diazepam + cocaine. On arrival, alert, GCS 14/15, temp 34.6c. Singed hair to lashes, eyebrows and hair. (1207) Age 15 Male

Alcohol-related harm involving alleged “spiking” of their drink



Context

Ciara – Aged 15 years

She was in a field drinking with a number of boys.

- Ciara was dirty in appearance and her clothing was wet.
- Ciara querying if her drink was spiked.
- Ciara first brought into adult ED by the Gardai as she claimed she was 16 years old.



Process

Then brought by the nursing staff to the Children’s ED.

She was distressed and crying.

- Nursing staff noted she was not wearing a top when her coat was removed.
- ? Sexual assault.



Outcome

Seen very urgently (cat 2).

- Triage: overdose/poisoning
- Doctor’s diagnosis: Alcohol intoxication
- ICD 10 Code F10.0 – Alcohol related disorder
- Ciara was admitted to hospital with an estimated discharge date of 2.5 days.

Free Text comment: Received handover from adult ED nursing staff as patient brought to adult ED by Gardai, claiming she was 16 years old. (name) was in a field having consumed alcohol with a number of boys. ? sexual assault, patient querying if her drink was 'spiked'. Adult ED nursing staff noted patient not wearing a top when her coat was removed. Alert, GCS 14/15 due to disorientation, PEARL size 3. Patient dirty in appearance, clothing wet, distressed and crying. (1347) Age 15 Female

Research Findings - Protective Factors



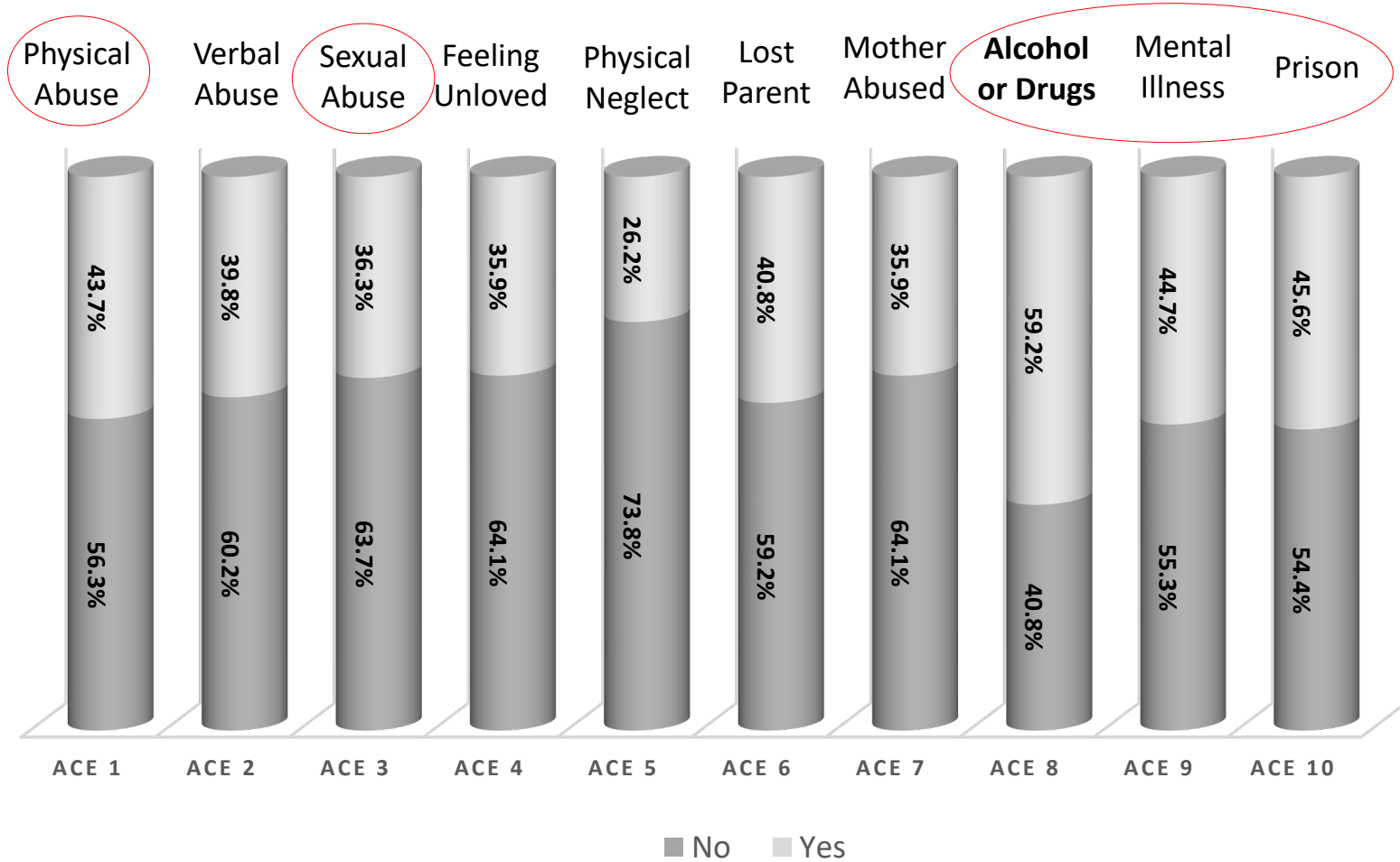
- Associated with positive school environment
- Associated with positive leisure time activities - reading for enjoyment
- Associated with structured evening activities and participation in sport (depression)

Ageing and substance use: Research informing how Adverse Childhood Experiences impact adults (Dr Dave McDonagh)

- Mean age 42 years (Females 39; Males 44)
- Average time in current treatment: 11 years (Range: 3 months to 27 years) (62% ≥ 2nd Treatment)
- 55% of people reported 4 or more ACEs (23% had an ACE score of ≥ 7)
- PTSD mean score was 30 (Female = 37; Male = 26; p= .010). **45% of people had trauma scores ≥ 31**



Findings: Adverse Childhood Experiences



Associations between individual ACEs and PTSD

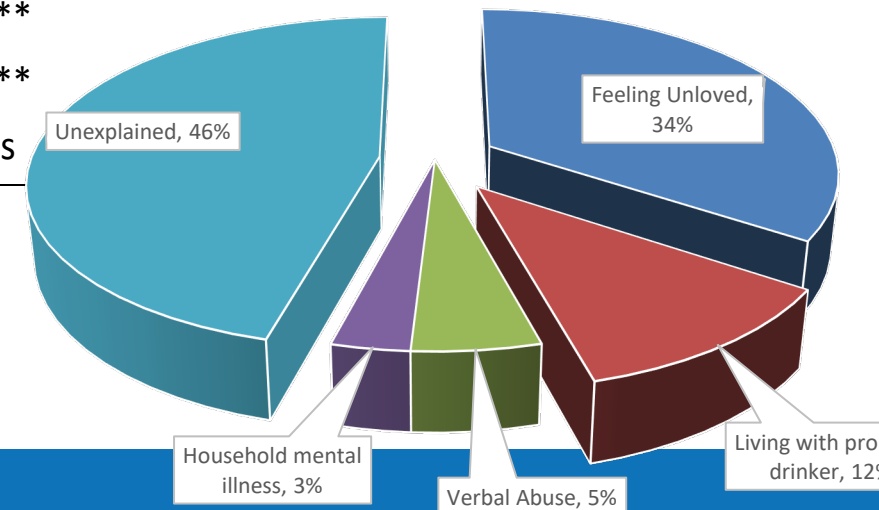
ACE question

	df	n	X ²	p
ACE 1. Push grab of slap or throw something at you #	1	10	18.537	<.001***
ACE 2. Swear at you insult or put down #	1	10	25.308	<.001***
ACE 3. Touch or fondle you or have you touch them in a sexual way	1	10	6.624	.010**
ACE 4. Nobody loved you/ thought you were important #	1	10	29.122	<.001***
ACE 5. Feel that you didn't have enough to eat, wear dirty clothes	1	10	5.176	.023*
ACE 6. Lost a biological parent	1	10	10.321	.001**
ACE 7. Mother ever pushed grabbed slapped or repeatedly hit #	1	10	13.874	<.001***
ACE 8. Lived with a problem drinker or used street drugs #	1	10	20.609	<.001***
ACE 9. Household member depressed or had a mental illness #	1	10	17.066	<.001***
ACE 10. Did household member ever go to prison	1	10	.546	.460 ns

Significance levels: * $p < .05$: ** $p < .01$: *** $p < .001$: ns = not significant
Factors chosen for regression analysis



Childhood emotional neglect was found to be more significant than physical abuse or sexual abuse in predicting PTSD among people in OAT.



To conclude, Patricia's story illustrating the need for the three key learnings

Patricia was born in 1965.

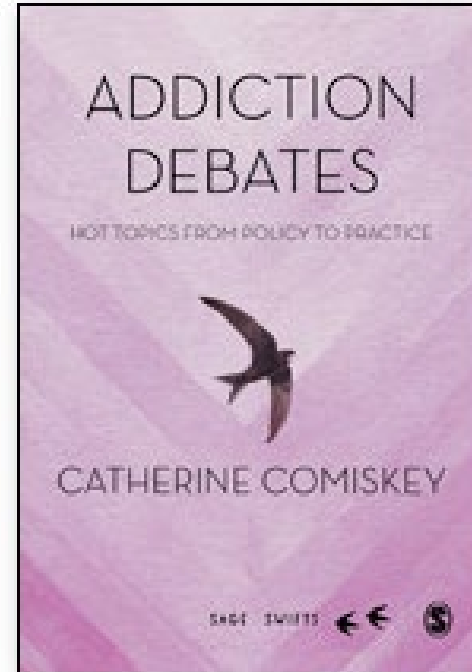
- At the age of 7 when most little girls were preparing for their first holy communion and were excited about their new dress Patricia was sexually abused.
- At the age of 15 in 1980, when most were thinking about school, friends and the pending 'junior cert', Patricia first injected drugs.
- At the age of 20 in 1985, when same sex partnership was a criminal offence and would remain so until 1993, Patricia had her first relationship with another woman.
- At the age of 24 in 1989, when homosexuality was still illegal, when AIDS raged across the globe and after many relationships with men and injecting drug use, Patricia was diagnosed as HIV positive.
- At the age of 45 in 2010, when harm reduction was the prevailing treatment philosophy, Patricia was required to undergo urine screening



References: Research Informing Evidence Based Policy

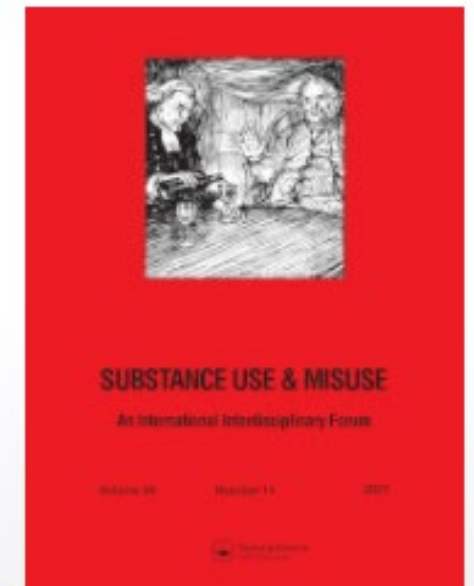
Comiskey C. (2020) *Addiction Debates: Hot Topics from Policy to Practice*. SAGE Swifts Series, SAGE, United Kingdom, ISBN: 9781526495761

Karen Galligan & Catherine M. Comiskey (2019) Hidden Harms and the Number of Children Whose Parents Misuse Substances: A Stepwise Methodological Framework for Estimating Prevalence, *Substance Use & Misuse*, 54, (9), 2019, p1429 – 1437
DOI: [10.1080/10826084.2019.1584224](https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2019.1584224)



 Harm Reduction Journal

ISSN: 1477-7517





Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin



THANK YOU

Twitter @ComiskeyCath

Blog Catherine Comiskey, The Lady Professor

Free MOOC

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/identifying-and-responding-to-drug-and-alcohol-addiction>

Massive Open Online Course MOOC –Sharing our learning



[Online Courses](#) / [Healthcare & Medicine](#)



NEW

Identifying and Responding to Drug and Alcohol Addiction in Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Healthcare Practice

Discover new approaches to addiction treatment and recovery and build your knowledge and leadership skills to respond effectively.

[Join course for free](#)

431 enrolled on this course

