

Heavy-drinking mothers linked to their child's path toward the justice system

June 26 2017

A study investigated whether children whose mothers had an alcohol-related disorder would be at risk of early-life contact with the justice system, which can lead to many negative outcomes across an individual's life span. Such outcomes can include repeated contact with the justice system, social disadvantages and marginalization, and mental-health and substance-use issues.

The study made use of linked administrative data from Western Australia. It used records of women who had a birth recorded on the Midwives Notification System between 1983 and 2007. The exposed cohort included [mothers](#) with an alcohol-related [diagnosis](#), which served as a proxy for heavy drinking. A comparison group of mothers with no alcohol-related diagnoses was randomly selected, matching on maternal age within race and the year of the child's birth. The study cohort included 10,211 exposed mothers and 47,688 comparison mothers. Child contact with the justice system was identified from Department of Corrective Services data – including those 10 years or older with a justice-system record for juveniles (10 - 17 years) and/or adults (18 years and older) from 1985 to 2011.

Children whose mothers had a maternal alcohol-related diagnosis had almost twice the odds of contact with the justice system as children whose mothers had no alcohol-related diagnosis. Additional risk was associated with being Indigenous and with markers of social disadvantage such as [low socioeconomic status](#). Significant child-level factors associated with greater odds of [justice](#)-system contact included

being male, having a mental-health diagnosis or child-protection contact, and academic failure. The authors suggest that these factors be considered in the development of targeted prevention programs.

More information: Katherine Hafekost et al. Maternal Alcohol Use Disorder and Risk of Child Contact with the Justice System in Western Australia: A Population Cohort Record Linkage Study, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.13426](https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.13426)

Provided by Research Society on Alcoholism

Citation: Heavy-drinking mothers linked to their child's path toward the justice system (2017, June 26) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-06-heavy-drinking-mothers-linked-child-path.html>

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