



Figure 1 represents the prevalence of substance abuse as the main determinant as to why children were removed from their households. In states such as Texas, Utah, Iowa, Indiana, and Alaska, 60% or more of cases where children had to be removed for their safety were due to substance abuse (NCSACW). The majority of states are in the 41-50% range, which indicates that neglect due to substance abuse is the leading cause of kids being placed into foster care. Parental substance abuse can influence the life of a child in a multitude of ways. More specifically, addiction is shown to have detrimental effects on a child's cognitive function, academic achievement, and behavioral functioning.

### *Cognitive Function in Prenatal and Postnatal Cases*

Pregnant women who abuse substances prenatal and postpartum put the lives of their children in danger. drug-abusing mothers tend to adopt little, inadequate, and delayed prenatal care (Singer et al.) and they show limited knowledge of their child's developmental needs as well as incorrect knowledge of the prenatal and postnatal effects of drug exposure (Strathearn and Mayes). In such cases, the baby's cognitive function is severely impacted. There are several symptoms and side effects that these young kids endure, one of which is neonatal abstinence syndrome. This is a group of conditions caused when a baby withdraws from certain drugs they are exposed to in the womb before birth (NIDA). Short-term symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, fever, poor feeding, rapid breathing, and seizures, while long-term symptoms include slow weight gain, birth defects, small head circumference, and sudden infant death syndrome (NIDA).

Furthermore, newborns of pregnant addicts are typically born with a smaller neuroanatomical volume. Due to the volume of the brain being lesser in size, they are prone to

issues with thinking, memory, and performing everyday tasks (Parolin et al.). This further correlates with a lesser maturation of neural tracts, which means that the pathways in the brain are not fully developed, which can lead to numerous developmental delays. With regard to the postpartum household environment, the parenting style of either parent with an addiction is often inadequate due to a variety of factors. Since parents often deal with unemployment, social isolation, and mental illness, they struggle to attend to their child's health, guarantee financial support and basic needs, and provide monitoring and emotional availability (Barnard and McKeganey). Inattentive parents hinder their child's ability to have discipline and structure, leading to a life of disproportionate, unregulated freedom.

#### *Academic Achievement*

Undoubtedly, it is imperative that a child receives a quality education. In some cases, the ability to receive a good education is disallowed by an unstable home environment. Children whose parents abuse substances are consistently associated with lower academic functioning including lower grade point averages, increased grade retention, and failure to pursue secondary education (Solis et al.). This is largely due to the inability to focus in school and the lack of an authority figure at home to regulate a child's school work. Similarly, on average, children whose parents use illicit substances and abuse alcohol show weaker performance in reading, spelling, and math during early and middle childhood compared to their peers (Puttler et al.). Another reason for this, in some cases, is cognitive impairments from birth due to exposure to illicit substances in the womb, which has lasting effects from infancy to adolescence. Furthermore, children from families in which both parents reported alcoholism or at least one parent reported significant antisocial behavior and alcoholism were deemed to be at high risk for academic

failure. High-risk children performed worse in math in middle childhood and reading achievement in late childhood as compared to children from low-risk families, and high-risk children scored lower than low-risk kids in reading, spelling, and arithmetic (Zucker et al.). High-risk children have high family strain and conflict, while low-risk kids have low family strain and conflict. Consequently, children in households with parents that suffer from addiction struggle more with learning material and performing well in school, putting them at a disadvantage compared to their peers.

### *Behavioral Functioning*

My last key finding is the effects on a child's behavioral functioning. Children of substance-abusing parents show increased rates of anxiety, depression, oppositional behavior, conduct problems, and aggressive behavior as well as lower rates of self-esteem and social competence (Roosa et al.). By young adulthood, mood disorders in children of alcoholics are nearly double those of their peers. This is why it is crucial for teachers in schools to be patient



**Figure 2. Developmental Relationship Between ADHD and Substance Abuse**

with their students when they are acting out, instead of immediately jumping to conclusions and punishing the student. These kids have many internalized symptoms (such as anxiety and depression) and then externalize these feelings into aggressive behaviors and delinquency. Children who typically act out do not have secure and stable home lives, which

leaves them in a constant state of emotional distress as they are not allowed to just be kids. A lot of children who go through this tend to have ADHD, and sometimes they are thrown on

medication without the ability to work through their issues professionally. This medication can negatively change their personality and ability to express emotion which has the potential to become a life-long consequence. Parental drug use predicts variability for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. A child with ADHD who has a parent with alcoholism is more likely to also develop an alcohol abuse problem (Watson and Bhandari). In Figure 2, ADHD and substance abuse disorders (SUDs) are linked, where ADHD can worsen addiction potentiality (Wilens and Morrison). Children with parents who have an illicit drug use disorder have a higher risk for mental and behavioral issues as a whole. As a result, these behaviors present themselves in school environments on a daily basis.

### *Aspects of Addiction*

There is no specific counterclaim that refers to how a child should operate in a home environment with parents who have an SUD. Addiction itself is a larger issue that does not have an easy solution, especially with the ongoing opioid crisis. The opioid crisis was caused by the increased prescription of opioid medications like oxycodone and hydrocodone, which led to widespread misuse of both prescription and non-prescription opioids (HHS). Coupled with an uptick in drug trafficking and synthetic opioids, this crisis is far from being over. Furthermore, alcohol is a legal substance for those over the age of 21, making it extremely easy to retrieve. These factors make it difficult to quit, and a lot of addicts in low-income communities do not have the resources or support to do so. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many individuals lost their jobs and loved ones and turned to anything for relief. Therefore, it is not as simple as telling a parent that they must quit for the sake of their child, but rather providing resources and alternatives to help change their lifestyle.

### *Solutions*

Similar to the *Aspects of Addiction* section, there is not a rapid and straightforward answer to solving the addiction problem in parents, but there are ways to support a child who is struggling in an educational environment. For such staff in schools, the first suggestion would be to “look beyond and ask why.” It is beneficial to understand the reason a child is acting out and to try to work from the root of the problem instead of the front a child may be putting on (AAC). The second suggestion would be to identify any signs of abuse. If a child comes to school reeking of weed or alcohol, or there are any signs of physical abuse, it should be reported immediately for the child’s safety. In an interview with Tori Brinkman, a 14-year-old girl whose mother is a heroin addict, the safest option for her was to be removed from her household and placed in the care of her grandparents (NBC). Although it is not easy to be separated from their parents, sometimes it is the safest alternative for children in households that do not allow them to succeed.

The third suggestion would be to get the child professional help. The majority of children want to be listened to and understood, which may not happen at home. Providing them with a school psychologist or a guidance counselor can help the child process things better and help the school understand what may be occurring at home (AAC). Lastly, the fourth suggestion is to be patient. The biggest problem of a teacher’s day could be that a child is lashing out in class, and the biggest problem of that child’s day could be that they have to go home to a parent who is passed out on the couch and make dinner for themselves and their siblings at a young age. Role reversal continues to be the norm in addiction-related households. Having an open mind is one of the most effective ways to grow as an individual and better understand the world.

### *Conclusion*

Parental substance abuse hinders a child's ability to grow and thrive in any given environment. Children of substance-abusing parents show an increased risk for emotional, behavioral, and social problems. In most cases, these problems may emerge in early childhood and persist through adolescence and beyond. The loss of proper development can cause irreversible damage to a child, which can lead to unresolved trauma in the future. Nelson Mandela once said, "Our children are our greatest treasure. They are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation." The youth of society is the future and should be our biggest priority. They should continuously be enabled for greatness. More should be done to protect their innocence, and in turn, the world.

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