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Scottish families of drug users need more help

- Adult relatives of people with drug problems in Scotland are not receiving the help they need
- Adult family members can help their relative recover from addiction, but they are often left out of the treatment process
- Services for adult family members should be assertively promoted to increase awareness and tackle stigma
- Drug recovery services should assess the needs of adult relatives when drug users enter treatment

Adult relatives of people with drug problems in Scotland are not receiving the help they need, according to the UK Drug Policy Commission and Scottish Families Affected by Drugs (SFAD). A new report concludes that the needs of family members are often overlooked, missing opportunities to address their problems and support the recovery of their drug-using relative.

There are estimated to be at least 134,000 adult relatives of people with severe drug problems in Scotland, who are themselves significantly affected by their family member's drug use. Yet, these family members are often isolated and not able to access the help they need.

The Forgotten Carers warns that the lack of help **makes it harder for family members to cope with their relative's problems**, as their own needs are often overlooked.

There are also concerns that the involvement of family members in their relatives' treatment is still limited, despite evidence that such involvement **can improve success rates and help sustain recovery**.

UKDPC and SFAD underline that this is often a hidden problem. Many people providing support for relatives with drug problems do not realise that help may be available. Others are reluctant to expose themselves to the potential stigma attached to having a relative with a drug problem.

The report recommends that there should be much more promotion of help for adult relatives of people with drug problems. This should include **advertising services** at locations like GP surgeries, carer organisations and local community centres.

The Forgotten Carers also calls for changes in the way that drug services work, so that they take more account of the needs of adult family members. The report recommends **routine assessment of adult family members' needs** when drug users enter treatment.

Earlier research for UKDPC estimated that in Scotland, at the very least:

- 134,000 adults were significantly affected by a relative's drug use;
- The cost of the harms they experienced was about £229 million per year; and
- The value of support they provided would cost about £95 million per year (at 2008 prices) if it was to be provided by health and social care providers.

Roger Howard, Chief Executive of UKDPC, said: "The expansion of drug recovery services in Scotland over the last decade has improved and saved many people's lives. But the focus on helping drug users recover has now to be accompanied with help for their family members.

"Not only is this a problem because family members are not getting help to deal with the difficulties they face, but it also limits their ability to help their relative recover from addiction."

Keith Fowler, Chair of the Board at Scottish Families Affected by Drugs, said: "We welcome this research and trust it will help us in our mission to get better family support provision across Scotland. Scottish Families Affected by Drugs promotes and helps facilitate a network of family support groups. Our own research has shown that these groups provide vital support to families.

"The research highlights the need for a wider range of family support to be made available. As the report says, at SFAD we have a key role to play in promoting the evidence for what family support is needed and what works. This is already part of our business plan for the coming year and we look forward to working with service providers, health professionals and Alcohol and Drug Partnerships in taking this forward."

Notes to editors:

For more information and interviews, contact Leo Barasi, lbarasi@ukdpc.org.uk, 020 7812 3792, 07988 054241.

The Forgotten Carers: supporting adult family members of people with drug problems in Scotland is published on Tuesday 27 March 2012, and will be available to download for free from www.ukdpc.org.uk.

The UK Drug Policy Commission is an independent charity that provides objective analysis of the evidence concerning drug policies and practice.

Scottish Families Affected by Drugs provides support to those who have been affected by the drugs misuse of a relative or loved one, and raises awareness of the issues affecting them. SFAD are the hub of a network of family support groups across Scotland and provide information and support through their helpline services.

The research was commissioned by UKDPC and the report was written by Professor Alex Copello and Lorna Templeton.

Professor Alex Copello is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist with Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust and Professor of addiction research at the University of Birmingham. He has researched extensively on the impact of addictions problems upon families and publishes regularly in academic journals.

Lorna Templeton is a Research Consultant, and was previously Research Manager at the Mental Health Research & Development Unit in Bath (Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust and the University of Bath) where she undertook a programme of research focused on addiction and the family.

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