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The Parliament
of the
Commonwealth of Australia

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on
Family and Human Services

The Impact of Illicit Drug Use on Families

HOLYOAKE

Tasmania Inc.

Background to Holyoake

Holyoake Tasmania Inc. exists to provide high quality, therapy-based programs for family members affected by their own or another's addiction/substance use issues. Holyoake Australia has specialised in this family-focused model since its inception in 1975.

Holyoake Tasmania commenced services in 1989 in response to a strongly identified need for support for families affected by addiction. The service has developed, grown and kept pace with best practice models of service delivery, currently delivering an accredited service model. The highly distinctive approach produces sustained improvement in family functioning, as is borne out by a 2003 'Review'¹ of Holyoake Tasmania undertaken by the Department of Psychology, University of Tasmania.

Holyoake delivers its services by way of specifically targeted programs, which comprise a therapy program group as well as individual counselling. The programs present participants with information relating to the prevalent forms of addictions, their effects on the individual and the family. The programs offer alternative ways of coping with the very high stress families experience when affected by addiction. Other critical issues are addressed including communication skills, boundaries and grief etc. Holyoake's services are made readily accessible for participants, as they are provided both during the day and in the evening. Most participants attend twice weekly.

Holyoake's unique services are designed to be able to respond to whichever family member presents, whether it is one person or a couple, one parent with children or a whole family. In all its work Holyoake acts from the philosophy of acceptance, empowerment and validation of the individual. Assisting participants to be self-responsible is the cornerstone of Holyoake's approach.

Holyoake provides a number of associated programs. These range from support for adults who have been raised in families where addictive behaviour is present, to a service for young people who have offended, or are 'at risk' of offending in cases where the use of drugs or alcohol, or both, may be a contributing factor.

¹ In October 2003, the State Government of Tasmania through the Department of Health and Human Services requested a 'Review' of Holyoake be undertaken as a result of a request from Holyoake for additional funding for their 'Relationships in Focus'² (RIF) program. The review was carried out by Dr Iain Montgomery, Dr Clive Skilbeck and Ms Amanda Burley from the School of Psychology at the University of Tasmania.

The review findings were completed in February 2004 which led to Holyoake receiving a substantial increase to its core funding for the 'Relationships in Focus' (RIF) program. This increase in funding has guaranteed the continued viability of the 'Relationships in Focus' (RIF) program.

² 'Relationships in Focus' (RIF) program. The RIF program aims to help the family member understand how addictive behaviour affects the individual and the people around them, and to assist the family member to effectively deal with these problems.

The financial, social and personal cost to families who have a number(s) using illicit drugs, including the impact of drug induced psychoses or other mental disorders.

There exists a significant amount of research that provides ample evidence of the negative impact alcohol and/or drug use can have on a family. A few examples are -

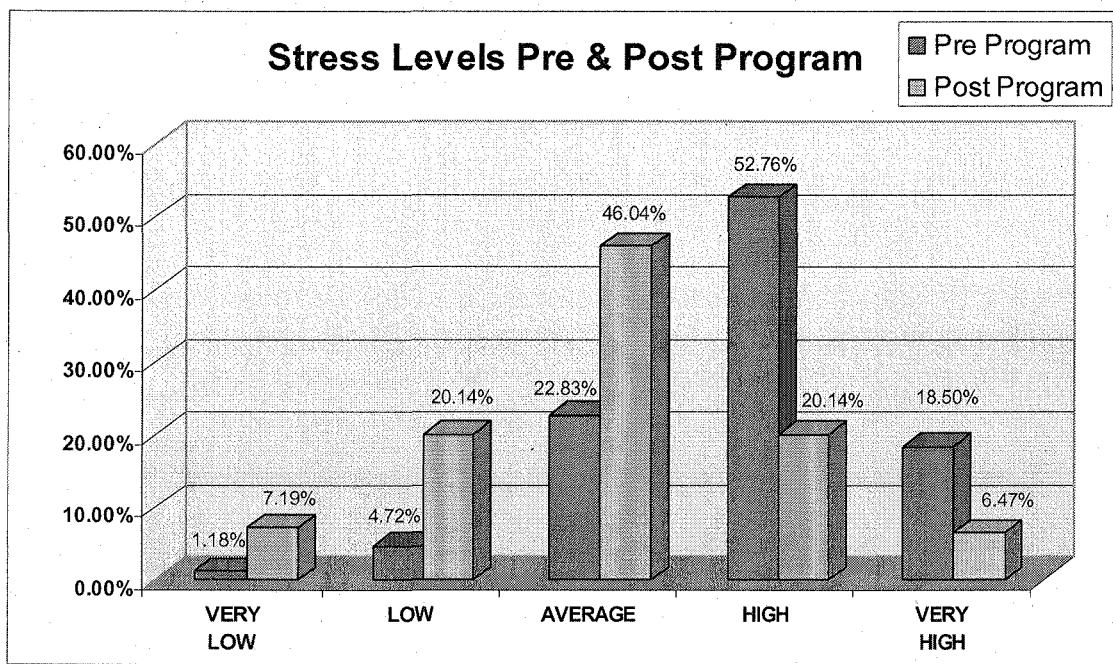
- "For every excessive drinker there are likely to be at least 5 others who suffer deleterious effects". *Paolino & McCoady (1977)*.
- "It is not only *ethically* important to treat relatives in their own right; it also makes good sense from a harm minimisation perspective". *Mattick et al (1993)*.
- Relatives/family members are much more motivated to create change than the person with the addictive behaviour. *Mattick et al (1993)*.

Holyoake sees highly significant negative impacts on families who have a member using illicit drugs. These impacts include financial bankruptcy, family break-down, marriage break-down, significant physical impacts such as domestic violence and stress related disorders such as anxiety and depression, at times to the degree of hospitalisation for mental health disorders relating to the stress that family members are under.

Issues include -

- Poor quality of life and family function for those families affected by a member's addiction
- Impaired parenting skills for drug dependant parents
- Impaired social outcomes for children affected by their parents' substance use or addictive behaviour
- Impaired educational outcomes for children affected by parental substance use
- Increased family stress resulting from criminal activity
- High level of domestic violence
- Increased neglect and abuse of children
- Increased drug related accidents within the community impacting on the family
- Increased burden on grandparents as custodial carers of grandchildren due to children's illicit drug use
- Increased marital discord
- Increased family breakdown

Holyoake's pre and post data on stress rates experienced by the non using family member indicate high stress rates family members are experiencing.



External research gathered for the 'Review' from J Fairbairn BA (Hons) Dip Teach – Thesis (2001) highlighted the lack of scientific studies devoted to the issue of helping the relatives of those exhibiting addictive behaviours. Fairbairn focussed upon the area of excessive alcohol intake, pointing out the potential economic benefits to the State, as well as to the relatives and friends themselves, in providing relevant services.

Fairbairn's review concluded that relatives, including children, are at high risk for developing mental health problems as a consequence of the addiction behaviours of others. The research of Binns (1989) was specifically targeted upon the service provided by Holyoake in Western Australia and demonstrated not only that relatives could benefit from therapeutic intervention, but that the gains in psychological functioning were sustained over time.

In her own research, Fairbairn (2001) examined the Holyoake approach in detail with the relatives of those showing an excessive alcohol intake. Her quantitative data, obtained at six-months after completion of the group program (n=43), indicated the intervention delivered:

“significant, sustained reduction in participants’ pre-treatment levels of anxiety and depression. Thus, the intervention seemed to produce significant improvements in participants’ mental health status which was sustained through 6 months post-treatment.

..... In addition to the significant reduction in marital discord, the Holyoake intervention seemed to produce significant, sustained improvements in relationships between participants and their drinkers”.

The impact of harm minimisation programs on families

It is Holyoake's belief that generally the harm minimisation framework has a positive impact on family relationships.

When working with people who have substance use issues within a harm minimisation framework it is important to meet the person where they are at and sometimes, at that point, their priority may not be abstinence. Utilising the harm minimisation perspective means that often the person with substance use difficulties may be able to implement less harmful patterns of use or reduced use.

Over the long term this often results in the person changing their goals, from reduced use, to cessation of use.

This has a positive impact on family relations in that, if a person reduces use or is using in a less harmful manner, the family stress may be lessened and as the person gains a greater awareness of their own use, they may be able to put in place strategies that improve their own circumstances and relationships within the family network.

However, there are some problematic areas within the harm minimisation framework which include:

- Family members may be under the impression that harm minimisation means condoning substance use
- Some organisations interpret the goals of harm minimisation differently and this can also have an adverse impact on families and communities understanding of the goals of harm minimisation
- Some young people may misinterpret or form their own interpretation of harm minimisation which has a flow on effect of families experiencing a skewed understanding of the harm minimisation framework.

We at Holyoake believe that it is of paramount importance that organisations implementing a harm minimisation strategy are aware of the underlying principles of harm minimisation and that there is some accountability to responsibly implement a harm minimisation framework adhering to those principles.

Ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member(s) using illicit drugs

Holyoake believes that by strengthening family coping strategies, reducing isolation and the stigma of drug use, would have a significant impact on reducing stress levels experienced by family members.

Support of family members also reduces the uptake of using illicit drugs, thus producing a two-pronged approach to the issue.

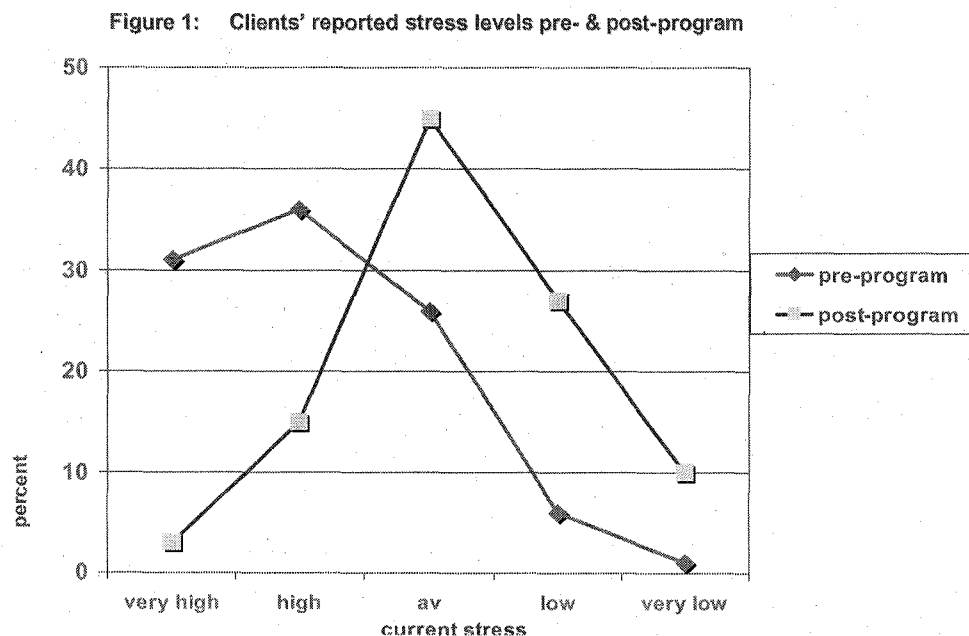
Results from the 'Review' findings showed that, using the analysis, clients rated their stress level as significantly lower after attending the RIF program and similarly, clients experienced a large reduction in the number of problems they experienced resulting from someone else's alcohol and drug use.

The following are excerpts from the 2003 Holyoake Review -

Client Evaluation of 'Relationships in Focus' Program for Partners and Parents

Before clients begin the 'RIF' Program, and at the end of the program, they are asked to complete a questionnaire relating to their situation and how they are coping at present. For this report we have conducted Chi² analyses to examine whether significant changes occurred during the program (the data tables indicate that some clients dropped out of the program, which may have introduced bias into the results).

In Figure 1 below, a Chi² value of 107.94, which is highly significant ($p < .001$ df: 2), indicates that clients rate their stress level as significantly lower after attending the program.



Current Stress Levels

Figure 1 (above) points to a significant reduction in clients' (relatives/friends) reported stress levels and the number of their problems (figure 2 below) over the time period of a 'RIF' program, with corresponding reported improvements in physical health (figure 3 below). Importantly, these clients also reported an improved relationship with the person showing addiction problems (figure 4 below).

Figure 2: Clients' reported problems pre- & post-program

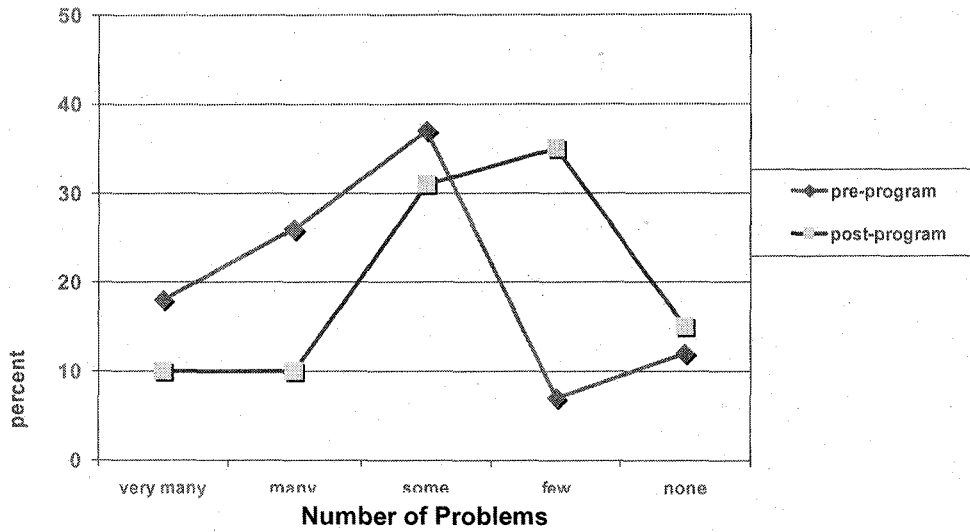


Figure 3: Clients' reported physical health pre- & post-program

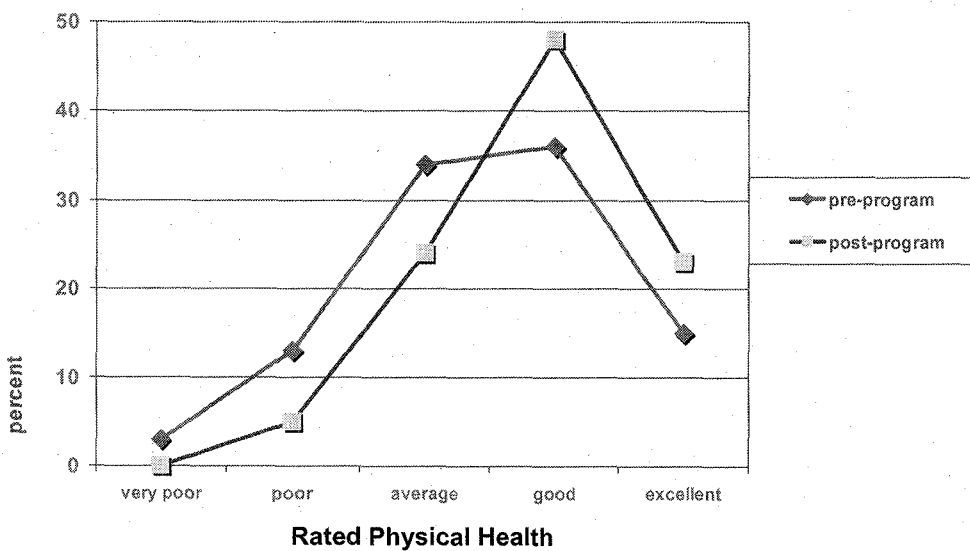
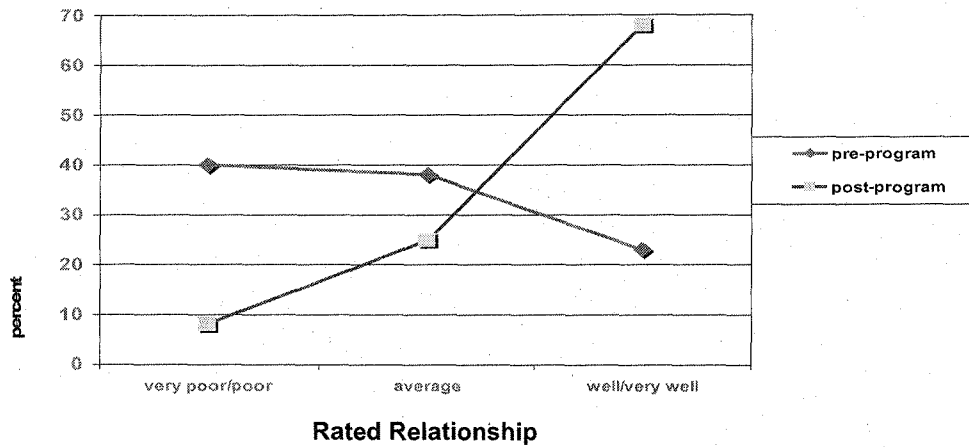


Figure 4: Clients' reported quality of relating to person with addictive problem pre- & post-program



These reported improvements in psychological and physical functioning are supported by the information obtained for this report (Section 6.4 of the Review) via interviews with clients who have completed the program. The interviewees rated highly the help they had received from Holyoake, particularly with regard to the group work in the Relationships in Focus program. Consistently these ex-clients referred to the program providing them with generic skills and tools to deal with personal relationship issues in an on-going way, rather than (just) providing problem-specific help. We see this as a key aspect of the service offered by Holyoake.

Excerpt from Discussion & Recommendations of the Review

Holyoake's distinctiveness is probably based primarily upon its provision of groups for relatives and friends. This service distinctiveness employ mechanisms which can be seen as delivering enduring effects: the program provides the immediate client with a greater range of skills to manage personal and interpersonal difficulties, whilst at the same time the processes employed lead to improvements for that individual in the future. This enables them to avoid later mental health or interpersonal problems, and also impacts upon the 'significant others' of these clients. Therefore, the model used by Holyoake has a ripple effect and offers preventative aspects in relation to subsequent drug-related mental health problems.

A full copy of the 'Review' is available on request.

Post Evaluation Results

The following selection of comments are gathered from family member's post evaluation forms, which show improvements to client's lives since undertaking the Holyoake 'Relationships in Focus' program –

- I feel more confident to do what's right for me and for my own mental health – realising how important it is and realising I have the resources and ability to make changes that will benefit my son as well as myself.*
- Better understanding of alcohol and drug abuse and its impact on people.*
- I have learned so many things about relationships and about the ways I relate to my family – now I have the tools to move forward in my life.*
- I have developed more of an ability to step back.*
- I am still not out of the woods, but can see the sun on the horizon.*
- I feel more in control of my life and confident of my ability to make choices regarding whatever it is that is affecting me.*