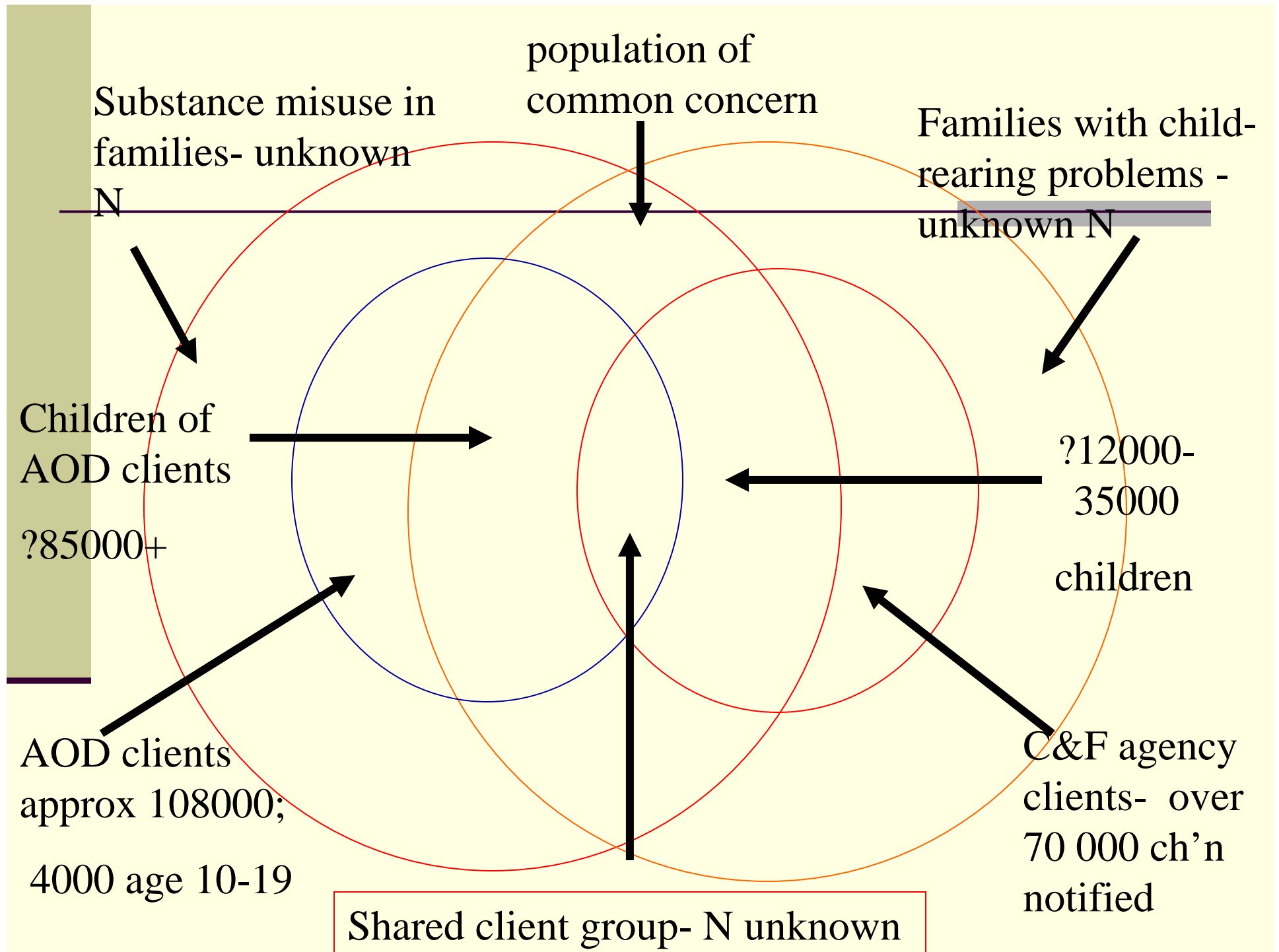

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

CHALLENGES FOR CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

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2005 national Symposium- CAFWAA & Centre for Excellence in
Child and Family Welfare 10 October 2005



The wider Australian picture

- Alcohol & illicit drug consumption stable?
Some special sub-populations at risk
- National Drug Strategy 2004-9:
 - supply reduction
 - demand reduction
 - harm reduction (including abstinence)
- A hidden population of affected children,
by virtue of the secrecies of the
phenomenon

PRESENTATIONS TO CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

- parents struggling with basic obligations while continuous AOD use through pregnancy and parenting
- children's high exposure to substances, volatile lifestyle, trauma, from infancy to adolescence
- complex presentations: substance use + mental illness + domestic violence + maternal histories of sexual assault: trauma and despair

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- early drinking/drug use & dependence among some children in care
 - strains on carers and workers - need for reform to residential and home-based care
 - kith and kin carer/helper burden, whether within or outside statutory caseload

Yet

- Stories of coping, ingenuity, survival, renewal

Developments at the interface: Policy

- Child and family impact principles in AOD agencies
 - Recognition and counting of children and other family members affected by drug use
 - Prevention & early intervention policies
 - Gender awareness
 - Recognition of the link with family violence
- “whole of government” language
 - Cross-sector protocols

Developments at the interface: Program

- ~~NIDS strengthening & supporting families coping with illicit drug use- supporting children's activities or supporting families with a young person with a drug problem (13 new projects 2005)~~
- Women/mother sensitive withdrawal & rehab, centre & home-based, some child-inclusive
- AOD supported accommodation
- ~~Pregnancy & parenting services, including outreach~~
- Specialist children-focussed pilot programs
- Supported playgroups

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- Support to extended family members
 - Selective return to longer-term family support for families with complex needs
 - Specialist youth programs and training initiatives for staff working with youth
 - Partnership models, out-posted AOD workers, rural outreach & consultation
 - Training
 - Cross-field protocols and joint projects
 - Worker alliances

Developments at the interface: Practice

- Some integration of parenting assessment, safety planning and child care into AOD services
- Some integration of drug assessment, harm reduction and relapse prevention and management into child, youth & family services
- Post-traumatic counselling for children

Research themes and issues

- ~~■ Children very aware of substance use issues~~
- Many barriers to women's use of services
 - avoid for fear of losing children
 - domestic violence complications
 - limited access to gender-sensitive services
- Recovery impeded by inherent rewards of substance-using lifestyle, weak options

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- The pregnancy window of opportunity:
 - “spend early, spend often, spend more”_ wrap-around family/aod/mental health services in one location

 - Service system development requires education, participation, collaboration

Issues for attention: C&F practitioners

- The engagement challenge: Tackling secrecy, denial and fear
- More sophisticated models of family & parenting assessment -a wider discourse

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- Proactive work with children and with parents and children together
 - Rigorous safety planning beyond the agency, into the network

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- Knowledge of drugs, models of use, patterns of relapse & recovery, understanding clusters and what works for them
 - Inviting pathways to new lifestyles

Issues for attention: AOD practitioners

- “the client” includes the relational & responsible self
- trauma and recovery: common denominators for drug treatment and family life
- engage with child & family services
- count, see, assist children; identify and manage risk; monitor the impact of treatment on children, partners & the wider family

Issues for attention: Program designers

- True integration of service technologies without losing expertise; jointly badged, interactive mutual education
- Multiple entry paths for clients
- Gender-specific program options: spaces & interventions that are safe and inclusive for children and women
- Long term service capacity
- Incorporation of peers/models; back-up to self-help and recovery movements

Issues for attention: policy & research

Policy:

- Coherent family-sensitive policy framework - impact on children
- Whole family protracted treatment and support funding, widely available as a right to pregnant and parenting substance users.

Research:

- Studying and theorising change and recovery models in relation to complex needs
- R& D models: replicating programs that work

WHERE TO?

Alliances of stakeholders working together to create:

- Sustained & sustainable policy and programs
- embedded AOD knowledge in C&F services
- embedded C&F knowledge in AOD services
- wide consultations with service users (children, young people & parents) re needs
- powerful & well-resourced lifestyle alternatives
- a vibrant discourse of recovery & hope