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# GOVERNING FAMILIES AFFECTED BY DRUG USE: POLICY DISCOURSES & PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

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# INTRODUCTION

'Families' more prominent in drug policy

- Child protection

- Prevention

- Social recovery capital (young people & adults)

- Service users in their own right (children & adults)

Focus of today's paper: The adult family member as a service user in their own right

# INFLUENCES SHAPING POLICY

- Focus on family across social policy areas in Europe (Daly 2013)
- Family more responsible for own welfare
- Harm production - expanded conceptualisation of harm (e.g. Room et al. 2010)
- Increasing drug policy focus on rehabilitation/recovery & recovery capital
- Empirical research on impacts: anxiety and depression, financial problems, interpersonal conflict, family disharmony, domestic violence, drug related intimidation, stigma and marginalisation (e.g. Copello et al., 2010; Corrigan et al. 2006, Duggan, 2007; Hourigan 2011, O'Leary 2009, Orford et al., 2010; Velleman, 2010).

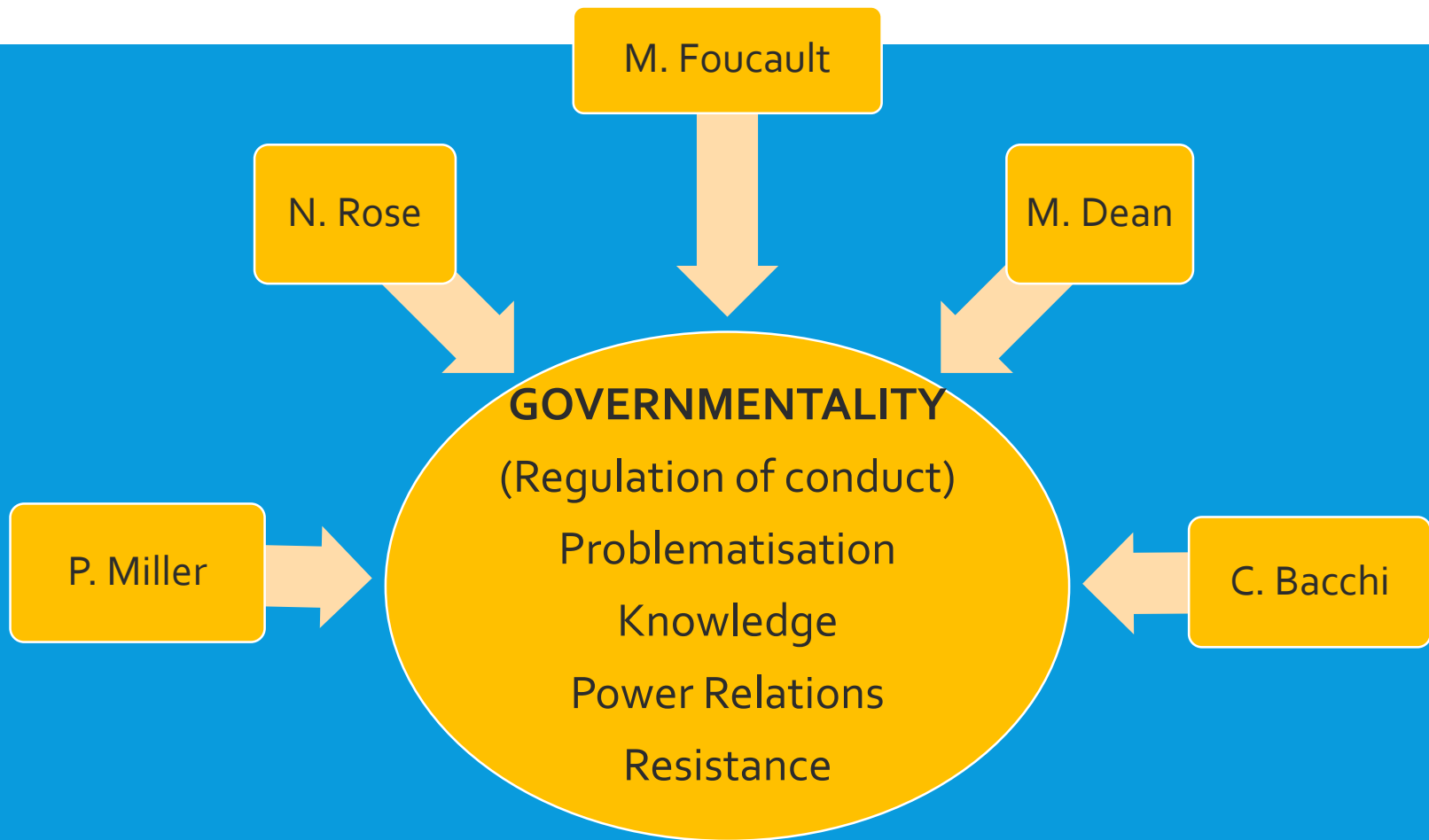
# INFLUENCES SHAPING POLICY

- New theory: stress-strain-coping-support model (Orford et al. 2010)
- New interventions: 5-step method (Copello et al. 2010)
- UK Drug Policy Commission reports (2009 and 2012)
- Experiential knowledge and expertise: advocacy organisations

# AIMS

- To analyse how affected families are represented as a 'problem' in contemporary Irish drug policy
- To understand how professionals understand and negotiate policy
- To examine the implications for how families and professionals are governed

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



# METHODS

## Policy analysis

- Bacchi's (2009) "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" approach to policy analysis
- 'Problems' are seen as produced through policy rather than existing 'out there'
- National Drugs Strategy (2009)
- Relevant documents: official reports, policy progress reviews

## Interviews

- 17 participants:
- (9 policy implementers)
- **7 policy makers & coordinators**
- **1 rep advocacy organisation**

Analytic approach: thematic coding; themes derived from theoretical concepts and from the interview data.

# POLICY: WHAT IS THE 'PROBLEM'?

- “Families of problem drug users have the potential to be key to the rehabilitative effort...[...]...Families should be seen as service users in their own right, given that they often have a direct role in the recovery process” (2007)
- Action 41: “Support families trying to cope with substance – related problems” (2009, p.101).

- Chapter 4: Treatment & Rehab
  - Subheading: ‘The role of families in rehabilitation’
- A coping ‘problem’
- Affected families constructed as service users but this is nested within a second construction of families as social recovery capital



# PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE

- Today's paper will focus on one theme – resistance
  - Foucault (2007): resistance to attempts of governing conduct
- Challenge to the lack of representation of families at policy oversight and coordination structures
- Resistance to efforts of governing peer family support practices

# FAMILIES & POLITICS

- Despite the high visibility in policy, families as service users are not talked about or represented at national policy structures

...what I do find interesting is, in a national context, we are not talking about it. Families...and I sit at that table...families are not being discussed. Individuals are being discussed, young people yes, communities yes, broader societal issues yes, family no (Gary).

# EVIDENCE & EXPERTISE

The issue can become very individualised as well, you know and it can become about numbers and it can become about outcomes and outputs and families get lost in all that...[...]...The decision makers need to hear that qualitative stuff, because they regard it as the fluffy stuff...  
(Gary).

From a a national perspective, and from a funding perspective, they'll go with evidence based, they will go with expertise, but my question is...what is expertise...[...]...and who are the experts...(Gary).

# 'COMMUNITY' CAPTURES 'FAMILIES'

I'm not sure that families are given the same pride of place in...in being involved in the implementation or oversight of policy. I'd say the community sector are...[...]... we have families and I think we need to do more to make sure that those sectors have a proper, a proper voice. At the moment it's...at the moment they are kind of captured by the community sector but that doesn't necessarily mean that they have a voice... (Nicola).

# 'COMMUNITY' CAPTURES 'FAMILIES'

- Legacy - National advocacy organisation was formed under the community sector in 2000 – became independent in 2007
- “from Day 1 we were very...all of us, including meself...we were all very clear that the [advocacy group] didn't belong to the [community group] and it didn't belong to anybody, it belonged to the families” (Niamh).
- Taken-for-granted assumption that the 'community' represents all 'ordinary' citizens and groups and in particular, socially excluded groups (Meade 2012).

# RESISTANCE TO PEER FAMILY SUPPORT

A lot families have become addicted to family support, and they find it difficult to move beyond it, and we have some rather ludicrous situations with some of the families where their drug using child, who maybe started using drugs when he was 18, and is now 35 and hasn't used drugs for ten years, and they are still attending family support...(John).

- Disadvantaged working class community
- Drugs issue emerged '80s
- Long tradition of peer support groups for parents

It's a suspicion about it because it's not run by professionals, and in general people would prefer to give money to services to run things... (John).

# GOVERNING FAMILIES

- Legitimising respite

We try to build in a therapeutic kind of element to it, now it could be something like mindfulness training, stress management...(John).

- Professionalising peer support

- Surveillance

We are looking at a system...[...]...of unique personal identifiers...[...]...we want to know if the same person is coming every week, we want to know if the same person is going to 2 or 3 groups...[...]...we want to know if that person is going on the respite weekends but is not bothering to attend the weekly groups...(John).

# RESISTANCE

- Resistance to professionalisation

There is a lot of resistance. People say that they don't want to become too professionalised...they want to retain its kind of informality, because that's what makes it special and unique and different. Like....[...]...a professional sitting in an office is never going to give you a hug (John).

- Resistance attributed to low educational attainment

They are deeply suspicious and fearful of having to submit themselves to any kind of exam or assessment...(John).

- Surveillance...

That's been treated with huge suspicion...(John).



# POWER RELATIONS & RESISTANCE

- John attributes resistance to individual factors
- Foucauldian perspective: resistance as a struggle against the effects of power & expertise and attempts at governing conduct
- Foucault: “oppositions to the effects of power linked with knowledge, competence and qualification – struggles against the privileges of knowledge...[...]...struggles against the government of individualisation” (1984, p. 330)
- In any relation of power there is always potential for resistance (Foucault 2000, 2007)

# CONCLUSIONS

- Problem representations simplify complex social concerns and make them manageable (Bacchi 2009)
- Policy discourse construct affected family members as service users needing help 'to cope' (nestled within an imagined role as social recovery capital)
  - A process of medicalisation
- Family support is now 'everybody's role
- Silences: gender, stigma, attitudes, access to resources, wider socio-economic factors, capacity of services to re-orient towards family support

# CONCLUSIONS

- Professional discourses reveal a nuanced construction of families – some more deserving than others – contingent on local and historical contexts
- Complexities of 'governing at a distance' – evidenced by resistance
- More attention could be paid to how families are represented at local/regional/national structures
- More attention could be paid to the forms of knowledge and evidence used in policy making
- Further work: cross-cultural comparisons; perspective of service users (families)