

**Table 2.** Characteristics of Included studies.

First author	Country	Design	Aim/purpose	Sample	Substance	Results
Arcidiacono et al. (2009)	Italy	Semi-structured interviews	The impact on Italian family members of living with a relative who had an alcohol or drug problem the development of coping strategies in the context of family and socio-cultural support	<i>n</i> = 113 Parents 53 Partners 37 Siblings 14 Child 8 Other 1	Alcohol and drugs	Strong impact of substance use problems on the family members, like shame, guilt, discouragement, mistrust. Changes to family routines and experiences of violence and aggression. Experienced lack of support.
Church et al. (2018)	India	In-depth interviews	The aim of this article was to assess the current coping strategies used by AFMs and to examine the nature of support they already have to deal with their drinking relative.	<i>n</i> = 30 Mothers 3 Wives 19 Sisters 2 Brothers 1 Daughters 1 Sons 1 Sister-in-laws 2 Brother-in-laws 1	Alcohol	The complexity of coping strategies in families. The importance of the family in the Italian social environment.
Fereidouni et al. (2015)	Iran	Semi-structured interviews	The aim was to examine the impact of substance misuse on spouses in Iran.	<i>n</i> = 24 24 spouses	Drugs	Spouses tried to hide the problem and to solve the problem alone, feeling for a long time as if they were 'walking in the dark' without any social support, and exposure to stigma. The substance misuse in the family can have devastating effects for spouses, on children and on all aspects of family life.
Fotopoulos and Parkes <sup>1</sup> (2017)	Greece	Semi-structured in-depth interviews	The aim was to explore the ways families respond to, and cope with, a relative's drug problem by examining the perceptions of both Greek drug users and drug-affected families.	<i>n</i> = 48 23 men and 17 women with substance use problems	Drugs	After discovery of the drug problem, all families reported high engagement and low withdrawal coping. This is connected with the Greek cultural milieu and the notion of familism.
Hodges and Copello (2015)	UK	Semi-structured interviews	To explore experiences of an adult with children who is providing care or support for their parent who has an alcohol problem	8 parents <i>n</i> = 6 Adult daughters 6	Alcohol	Identified three conflicts/cilemmas. Normative expectations or notions of the family/experience. Emotional detachment/strong emotions. Functional or practical contact/emotional or relational contact.
McCann et al. (2019)	Australia	Semi-structured interviews	To explore the experience of AFMs who support a close relative with AOD misuse	<i>n</i> = 31 Intimate partner 13 Parent 13 Sibling 4 Child 1	Alcohol and drugs	Affected family members experienced wide-ranging harms, which affected their emotional, social and financial well-being, safety and family dynamics, and instilled a persistent sense of fearfulness and hopelessness about the future.
Moriarty et al. (2011) <sup>2</sup>	New Zealand	Semi-structured interviews	To explore experiences of NZ families living with addiction, identify impacts on non-addicted family members, their coping strategies and barriers to help seeking	<i>n</i> = 19 Adults aged 18 years or older Daughters 4 Wives 2 Ex-wives 2 Mothers 4 Sons 3 Brothers 1 Husbands 2	Alcohol and drugs	Addiction has broad effects on NZ families. The coping strategies for families described by the participants in this project lacked the positive connotations of resilience, namely positive adaptation under significant adversity.

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First author	Country	Design	Aim/purpose	Sample	Substance	Results
Näsmann and Alexandersson (2017) <sup>3</sup>	Sweden	Interviews	The aim was to get in-depth knowledge of how perspectives of children and their parents relate to one another	Extended family 1 6 persons with double or triple role as daughter-wife-sister <i>n</i> = 21 9 families with substance using adult parent	Drugs	Children describe more deviant behavior of their parent during intoxication and more serious consequences such as overdoses, suicide attempts, abandonment, violence and threats, which affected family life.
Ólafsdóttir et al. (2020)	Iceland	Semi-structured interviews	The aim was to explore the experiences of family members when one or more family member is afflicted with SUD and to find out how one individual's SUD affects the psychosocial, behavioral, and physical states of other family members.	5 mothers 4 fathers 12 children under 16-year-old <i>n</i> = 16 4 spouses 4 adult children 4 parents 4 siblings	Alcohol and drugs	All participants except for siblings expressed that SUD had negatively affected their mental health by inducing depression, anxiety and stress-related physical illness. All had experienced physical violence, mental abuse and financial loss in their families. Patients indicated that the SUD of the family member had isolating psychosocial impacts on their children and caused a loss of connection among their family members.
dos Reis et al. (2017)	Brazil	A case study	The aim was to understand the repercussions of drug use on the coexistence of a family, based on the daughter's narrative of a woman who is a multiple drug user.	<i>n</i> = 1 Adult daughter	Drugs	The daughter's memories emphasized repercussions in the family context: long-term living with drug abuse; absence or transience of the motherly figure, with rupture processes for homeless situation; cycle of parental disruption/forgetfulness and continued presence and fatherly support in the family.
Tamutienė and Jogaityė (2019)	Lithuania	Semi-structured interviews	(1) to learn to whom children disclose experiences of harm caused by their parents' or carers' substance abuse; (2) to show whether professionals enable children to disclose this harm, and (3) to highlight what kind of assistance they provide after disclosure of harm.	<i>n</i> = 23 children under 16-year-old Female 18 Male 5	Alcohol and drugs	Children suffer not only from the maltreatment itself, but also from the associative stigma of the caregiver's drinking to their families. They and their families prefer to disclose their troubles in informal settings because professionals often do not help children disclose harm and may even ignore it.
Tamutienė and Laslett (2017)	Lithuania	Semi-structured interviews	The aim of this study was to identify and contextualize the harms Lithuanian families experience when they include a heavy drinker.	<i>n</i> = 24 partners and ex-partners 20 women 4 men	Alcohol	Interviewees experienced an array of harms. These were categorized as: direct harms caused by the drinker; drinker-centred coping strategies that did not take children's and families needs into account and affected families indirectly; abdication of or redirection of the drinker's responsibilities to other family members; associative (reflected) stigma and isolation.
Tinnfält et al (2018)	Sweden	Interviews	The aim of this study was to explore the consequences for a child of having an alcoholic parent, from the point of view of 7–9-year-old COA	<i>n</i> = 18 18 children under 16-year-old 8 girls 10 boys	Alcohol and drugs	The children at this young age had much experience and took a great responsibility for their alcoholic parent and the family. The most significant feeling expressed by the children was a feeling of sadness. They tried to control the situation in families in different ways. They wished for a change in the future, but despite problems in the family they described things they did together with a loving parent.

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First author	Country	Design	Aim/purpose	Sample	Substance	Results
Weimand et al. (2020)	Norway	Semi-structured interviews	The purpose of this study was to explore these partners' everyday life experiences, including their parental roles.	n = 10 10 partners or ex-partners 6 women 4 men.	Alcohol and drugs	The findings demonstrated that sharing their lives, including parenthood, with a partner with substance use problems affected every aspect of the participants' lives, and entailed being influenced by their partner's ups and downs in families.
Werner and Malterud (2016)	Norway	Interviews	The aim of the study was to explore childhood experiences in families with problem-drinking parents.	n = 9 adult children daughters 6 sons 3	Alcohol	The social interaction in the family was disrupted during childhood because of the parent's drinking problems. An everyday drama in families characterized by tension and threats, blame and manipulation, was the backstage for their everyday life. Dealing with the drama, the children experienced limited parental support. The children struggled to restore social order within the family and to act as normally as possible outside the family. It was a dilemma for the children to disclose the difficulties of the family.

<sup>1</sup>This study has included family members with PSU.<sup>2</sup>This study has participants with double or triple role. This affects the total number of family members in this meta-ethnography.<sup>3</sup>This study has included participants with PSU.

distinguishes meta-ethnography from other review methods. The synthesis should accurately portray both the shared and unique findings of the included studies.

We proceeded from the reciprocal translation, i.e. the findings are directly comparable or analogous, to lines of argument synthesis, where the findings were tied to one another (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Guided by Noblit and Hare (1988), as well as the new guidelines by France et al. (2019a), we checked the reciprocal translation for possible refutations if the accounts could be set against each other. No such pattern was discerned. The first author presented the metaphors and thematic clustering to all the team members for discussion, and all authors agreed on the final result (Figure 2).

### Expressing the synthesis

The synthesis may be expressed not only by writing a scientific article and presenting a new line of argument synthesis, as we did. It is important to communicate the meta-ethnography to both professional and lay caregivers, as well as to families that encounter PSU. Zhao (1991) describes this as a movement from descriptions of 'what is' to 'what should be'. We recognized this need, and from our theoretical perspective, 'what should be' includes both disciplinary development and new interventions for enhancing family-relational practices.

## Results

An *unknown invisible intrusion* was adopted as an overarching metaphor based on the findings in the 15 studies (Figure 2). All the included studies described that PSU had an overwhelmingly high cost to families. Both the persons using substances and their family members were pulled into a demanding life situation, with challenges that permeated all aspects of their lives over a long period. By choosing the strong and rough overarching metaphor, we wanted to express the colossal range and severity of the consequences PSU had for all family members and the extent to which these consequences impacted their family dynamics and relations, their everyday life and holidays, and their dreams for the future and stories from the past. The impact was mainly invisible to those on the outside, thus becoming something resembling a family secret. The metaphor *An unknown invisible intrusion* is accompanied by three main themes: *Taking over the family life*, *Family survival*, and *An invisible family*. To retain the readability of this article, we have chosen to present the occurrence of the themes in the included articles in Appendix VI. The appendix shows that most themes are presented in all included articles.

### *Taking over the family life*

The theme *Taking over the family life* reflects how overwhelming the problems facing the families were experienced and how exhausted they left them. PSU affected the family structures, and the families experienced messy lives and broken relationships. Three subthemes reflect the families'