

Table 2. Characteristics of Included studies.

First author	Country	Design	Aim/purpose	Sample	Substance	Results
Ardiccono et al. (2009)	Italy	Semi-structured interviews	The impact on Italian family members of living with a relative who had an alcohol 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. The complexity of coping strategies in families. The importance of the family in the Italian social environment.
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	Experienced a considerable amount of strain in relation to their relative's drinking. Coping strategies included accommodating to the relative's behavior in family, financially adapting to their means, self-harm, attempting to reason with the drinking relative, covert intervening, and avoiding fights and arguments in family life. There was a general reluctance to seek support, and the type and quality of support that was available was also limited.
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.
Fotopoulou and Parkes ¹ (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/dilemmas. 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) ²	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.

(continued)

Table 2. Continued.

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.

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