Parental addiction: Two ethical frameworks to assess whether and how intervention is appropriate

Ethical frameworks can support professionals' decision-making. Using a literature review, and interviews with parents and professionals, we identify two ethical frameworks to analyse the best support for families that struggle with parental substance or alcohol abuse. The first framework, which we call 'the framework of conflicting interests', is most prominent in the literature. Here, the interests of parents and children are weighed against each other using the medical ethical principles of respect for autonomy, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence. The second framework is most prominent in a series of interviews we conducted with alcohol-dependent parents and professionals working in addiction care and youth care. This framework aligns more with an ethics of care, and starts with the assumption that the interests of people who are close to each other are often intertwined. This framework does not so much look at conflicting interests, but at relationships and vulnerability. We label this the ethics of care framework. In this presentation, we show the value of both frameworks and how they can support ethical decision-making. We show that the merits of empirical, normative philosophy for mental health care lays in the unravelling of norms that we often take for granted.