

## Parents turn to drink to cope with childcare

### Nearly one in five claim that regular alcohol intake has a positive effect on their families

The Royles captivated viewers for three series with their unapologetic thirst for TV, tea and copious amounts of booze. Now it seems the fictitious family's boozy lifestyle lives on, with almost one in five British parents claiming their drinking helps them to look after the kids, according to a new survey.

More than half of the parents surveyed for the families' charity 4Children said they drank alcohol every week, with 7 per cent admitting they tumbled every day. But far from being ashamed of their habits, more than six out of 10 parents said using drugs or alcohol had no effect on their family, and nearly a fifth said their level of drinking impacted "positively" on their parenting abilities. Only 9 per cent thought there was any negative effect on the family at all. Mark Bennett, director of policy at 4Children, said the findings show Britons see "habitual drinking as a normal part of life, as normal as drinking tea". Far from the working-class Royles, it is the richest households that are four times more likely to drink every day than the poorest, the charity found. It was older parents and women who were most likely to dismiss the idea that alcohol or drug use would have a negative effect on the family. Some parents said having children actually encouraged them to drink more – with 17 per cent admitting that they increased the amount they consumed after the birth of their first child, including 5 per cent of mothers. Fathers are more than three times as likely to drink every day than mothers, the ComRes survey found, and more than twice as likely as their partners to have tried illegal drugs. But almost one-third of mothers drink more alcohol every week than the Government's recommended amount, according to a survey by parenting website Netmums. The findings will be published tomorrow in a report, *Over the Limit*, which claims to have discovered a "silent epidemic" of families suffering with problems behind closed doors. Mr Bennett added: "Part of the problem is people don't realise that they are causing problems by drinking to excess habitually. It could first be one glass, which leads to another. If parents have had a bottle of wine or more, their ability to react to their child, especially a small child, will be impaired." The charity is calling for a "major public information campaign", including additional "danger warnings" for pregnant women on alcohol packing, "beer goggles" sessions to be taught in schools to alert young people to the dangers of drinking, as well as prevention strategies to be put in place, before alcohol and drugs "take a grip on families". About 62 per cent of children who were subject to care proceedings are from families with parental alcohol misuse and more than one-third of all domestic violence cases include alcohol, according to the report. More than one in five children are estimated to live with a parent who drinks hazardously, and 6 per cent are thought to live with a dependent drinker. But Sally Russell, the founder of Netmums, said that "while it's always the priority that children are kept safe", it's also "vital that parents feel supported in order to begin to change their behaviour, rather than feeling preached at". She added: "No parent wants to be an addict harming their own children, so services must work together to provide the best environment for change."