

## FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS (FASD) Part II

There are approximately 40,000 new FASD cases in the United States each year which is alarming after realizing that new Autism cases number about 23,000. Dan Dubovsky, at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reported that many existing autism cases may be mis-diagnosed FASD cases. Comparative research from Europe and the Midwest United States shows 1 in 25 births may be FASD cases, equating to 4% of all births which quadruples previous estimates of 1 in 100 births or 1% total. Research is needed to correctly gauge the current prevalence of FASD births.

The National Institute of Health (NIH) reports as many as 1 in 20 first graders may be affected and cites this alarming trend: FAS may be at least twice as common as Autism. One study out of Toronto indicates that many FASD children are often mis-diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder (ADHD). Although ADHD and FASD share many attributes, the research shows that FASD children have a harder time understanding social information and are at higher risk for psychiatric problems. The research acknowledges similarities in behavioral problems, limited attention span and severe impulsivity in both FASD and ADHD cases; however the FASD children had greater difficulty interpreting the emotions and mental state of others. These factors can lead to more serious behavioral issues according to researchers.

A 2004 study in the Journal of Medical Genetics reports costs to the nation for FAS alone may be \$6 Billion per year while for one individual the lifetime costs exceeds \$2 million.

A SAMHSA study of women in the identified child bearing years (15-44) found: 1 in 2 reports some alcohol use in the past month, 1 in 4 reports binge drinking and 1 in 2 reports heavy drinking. Studies of pregnant women show that 1 in 30 reports high risk drinking; 1 in 9 binge drinks in the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester and more than 1 in 5 women reports alcohol use in the same trimester. Consumption of any alcohol at all can be harmful.

The University of Washington reports people with FASD can have a host of difficulties: 94 % had mental health problems, 83% of adults needed dependent living 50% had inpatient treatment for substance use, mental health or spent time in prison 79% of adults had employment problems, 60% >12 years old had trouble with the law These 4 Protective factors can help minimize the effects of FASD

(1) A diagnosis prior to age 6 (2) A loving, nurturing stable living environment during the school years, (3) Absence of violence (4) Use of special education and social services.

FASD are 100% preventable. We now know it is best and safest to stop drinking entirely as soon as a decision is made to try to conceive not after finding out about a pregnancy.

For help and additional resources: National Office on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS) [www.nofas.org](http://www.nofas.org) or (202) 785-4585

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