



Alcohol and Pregnancy & FASD Research Team



PREVENTION



DIAGNOSIS



THERAPY & MANAGEMENT

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Banksia Hill Detention Centre Project

Funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Targeted Call for Research Grant (#1072072)

This project was developed with community and service providers (including, but not limited to, Departments of Corrective Services, and Child Protection & Family Support, and Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia).

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a severe, pervasive neurodevelopmental disorder, occurring from prenatal alcohol exposure.

Project contact:

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What we did

The primary aim of our study was to examine the prevalence of FASD among young people in youth

Our project was conducted at Banksia Hill Detention Centre, the only youth detention centre in WA. Young people aged 10 to 17 years can be held at Banksia Hill on remand, or on a sentencing order.

We worked with approximately 100 young people during 2015 – 2016, who voluntarily participated in comprehensive health and neurocognitive assessments.

The assessments were conducted by a paediatrician, a neuropsychology team, a speech pathologist, and an occupational therapist. A research officer conducted interviews with the young people and their circles of care to obtain rich case-histories, including information on prenatal alcohol exposure.

The clinical team met to discuss the results and to develop an assessment and recommendations report for every young person they saw.

Reports included:

- assessment results
- strengths and difficulties of the young person
- recommendations to support and promote the young person's health and wellbeing, as well as information for referrals to other health specialists where required.

Reports were shared with the young people using simple verbal and written language, as well as with their family/caregivers.

Where consent was given, the reports were also provided to Youth Justice Services to enrich their care and management while in detention, and to inform plans for the young person's transition back to community.

Secondary aims

A workforce development initiative that aims to support staff in caring for young people with neurodevelopmental impairments has also been developed and implemented, and is currently being evaluated.

Qualitative evaluation of this project has occurred. The study found young people who participated in the prevalence study valued the assessments, particularly receiving knowledge of their individual strengths. Data continue to be analysed for other participants and results will be available in the near future.

Development and evaluation of a FASD screening tool. The data collected are being analysed to assess whether a simple and useful screening tool can be identified for use in the justice system.

Who undertook this research?

Chief Investigators

- Professor Carol Bower
- Professor Rhonda Marriott
- Dr Rochelle Watkins
- Associate Professor Raewyn Mutch

Clinical team

- Clinical Associate Professor Raewyn Mutch, Paediatrician
- Associate Professor Carmela Pestell, Neuropsychology Supervisor
- Natalie Kippin, Speech Pathologist
- Bernadette Safe, Occupational Therapist

Project team

- Noni Walker
- Jacinta Freeman
- Hayley Passmore
- Sharynne Hamilton
- Carmen Condon

Consumer and the community participation

A Stakeholder and a Community Reference Group were formed for the project. We also collaborated with Aboriginal community organisations who work with, and support young people at Banksia Hill and their families.

How will this research help?

Our research has received national and international recognition for identifying that 1 in 3 young people in youth detention in WA are living with FASD, the highest known estimate among justice-involved youth world-wide. Our study also revealed that 9 out of 10 young people in detention are living with

at least one severe impairment in a neurodevelopmental domain.

Findings have, and will continue to contribute to the understanding of the broad range of factors which influence contact with the law, youth justice services and incarceration for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth.

Our team are using the research findings to help influence policy and practice of how Youth Justice and related services work with, and support young people in their care. We inform future program and service delivery, which will help to build evidence-based programs and services for young people in youth justice living with FASD or other impairments in a range of neurodevelopmental domains.

Our research project aligns with the WA 2015-2018 Youth Justice Framework, building the evidence base to support transformational change through a greater understanding among the Youth Justice workforce, and in the implementation of person-centred care. It is also building future capacity of Child Protection and Family Support staff in their therapeutic care for young people in WA involved with the Youth Justice Services.

Given the considerable resources expended in the management of youth in WA juvenile detention (around \$1,00 per person per day), improved identification and care of individuals with FASD in the justice system has the potential to be cost-effective and improve wellbeing.

Publications

[Study protocols for screening and diagnosis of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders \(FASD\) among young people sentenced to detention in Western Australia](#)

[Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and youth justice: a prevalence study among young people sentenced to detention in Western Australia](#)

Alcohol and Pregnancy & FASD Research Team at Telethon Kids Institute

We have a comprehensive program of research in partnership with community & stakeholders to achieve our goals of developing prevention strategies; building the capacity of health, justice and other professionals to recognise and diagnose FASD; and implementing and evaluating programs for children and young people with FASD and their families.

For information on alcohol & pregnancy, FASD, our research projects, resources and publications visit our website: www.alcoholpregnancy.telethonkids.org.au

There is no safe time or amount of alcohol to drink while planning a pregnancy, when pregnant and when breastfeeding which is why the Australian Guidelines state 'not drinking alcohol is the safest choice'.

