



Alcohol and Pregnancy & FASD Research Team



PREVENTION



DIAGNOSIS



THERAPY & MANAGEMENT

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Prevalence of FASD in Western Australia

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is characterised by brain damage from prenatal alcohol exposure, the effects are lifelong and may not be seen at birth.

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What was this research about?

This study looked at the prevalence (how common) of children diagnosed with FASD who were born in Western Australia from 1980 to 2010 and the diagnoses reported to the Western Australian Register of Developmental Anomalies (WARDA).

The project was conducted at the [Western Australian Register of Developmental Anomalies \(WARDA\)](#) and the Telethon Kids Institute.

What did we do?

We obtained un-named information on all cases of FASD notified to the WARDA, born in WA from 1980 to 2010. We calculated the birth prevalence of FASD per 1000 births by year of birth.

We examined trends in FASD over time, and described the demographic and clinical characteristics, such as maternal age, place of residence, presence of other birth defects and age of the child when FASD was diagnosed.

Who conducted this research?

Researchers

- Professor Carol Bower Senior Principal Research Fellow, Telethon Kids Institute; Medical Specialist and Head, Western Australian Register of Developmental Anomalies, Women and Newborn Health Service
- Dr Rochelle Watkins, Senior Research Fellow, Telethon Kids Institute
- Associate Professor Raewyn Mutch Paediatrician and Clinical Research Fellow, Telethon Kids Institute

What did we find?

- The overall birth prevalence was 0.26 per 1000 births
- 85% of cases were Aboriginal
- Low birth weight, preterm birth and other birth defects were common
- There was a two-fold increase in prevalence over the study period 1980-2010, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cases.

- This is almost certainly due to:
 - increased awareness of FASD in Western Australia
 - state and national parliamentary enquiries
 - media coverage of FASD
 - response to research, development and distribution of educational resources for health professionals
 - development of a Model of Care for FASD by the WA Department of Health
 - Aboriginal-led alcohol restrictions in a WA community

Nevertheless, FASD is still likely to be underdiagnosed and under-reported.

What are the benefits from this research?

- This study is the largest population-based study of FASD in Australia
- Lead to an improvement in diagnosis of FASD
- Population surveillance data such as these will be valuable in advocating for and monitoring the effectiveness of preventive activities and diagnostic and management services for FASD in Australia

What did we do next?

Project publication in the Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health in 2014

[Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders: Notifications to the Western Australian Register of Developmental Anomalies](#)

We have obtained funding to look at the health and adverse life events of the children reported to WARDA with FASD using linked data. Data linkage is a way of connecting pieces of information about the children from different agencies in Western Australia such as the Departments of Health, Education, Disability Services and Corrective Services. The data used in this project will be in an anonymous form. This project has not yet commenced.

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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'.

