

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: Implications for Correctional Service (R-71, 1998)

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The study suggests that there is a considerable link between FAS/FAE, (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effect) attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity, conduct disorder and delinquency and crime. The predictors that appear to be common to both individuals with FAS/FAE and individuals who become delinquent are hyperactivity, impulsivity, attention deficit disorder, low intelligence, poor school achievement, antisocial behavior and poor parental child-rearing. The report examines FAS from the pre-postnatal stage through adolescent development.

The present estimate of the world incidence of FAS is 1.9 cases per 1000, and there is currently no national data for Canadian estimates of FAS or FAE. However, it appears that among certain Aboriginal groups in Canada, the incidence of FAS/FAE is much higher.

The authors state we are only now learning about adults with FAS/FAE and know little about how to treat their multiple problems and nothing about their response to treatment efforts. We do know that many will come into contact with the criminal justice system and CSC in particular. A primary requirement is to identify these individuals in order that researchers can identify their treatment need and design, offer and evaluate correctional programs that will consider the particular cognitive and behavioral deficits of these individuals.

The study presents a number of recommendations that are based on a review of the literature on FAS/FAE and how this information might be applied to assessment and programming strategies used by Correctional Service Canada.

FAS/FAE is surely an area where an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Given the prevalence statistics outlined in this paper, especially with Aboriginal populations, we have a long way to go in our prevention efforts. It is also clear that when prevention fails, early intervention is called for. Again, considering the course and consequences of FAS/FAE, including its impact on the criminal justice system, much more needs to be invested in this area. Like health, educational and social services, correctional services have a responsibility to do what they can to ensure that individuals with FAS/FAE who come in contact with their institutions receive the help they require to maximize their chances of living a stable, crime free community life. This will require considerable resources in terms of research and programming in order to accomplish this worthwhile goal. ■