



Research at a glance

Institutional Adjustment of Offenders Living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in a Canadian Federal Penitentiary

KEY WORDS: *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, institutional adjustment*

What it means

Findings that offenders with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) exhibited more difficulty with institutional adjustment than those without FASD were consistent with previous research showing that FASD is associated with poor social adjustment across a variety of contexts.

Knowledge of offenders with FASD's institutional adjustment could have operational impacts. For instance, a greater understanding of the behavioural patterns associated with FASD may facilitate informal resolution when institutional incidents arise. In addition, though Correctional Service Canada (CSC) provides resources and training to program facilitators to adapt correctional programs according to offender needs, including FASD, increased identification of impacted offenders may assist in ensuring these offenders are offered adapted interventions.

What we found

Offenders with FASD had more problematic institutional adjustment than did those without FASD. They were more likely to become involved in institutional incidents, particularly violent incidents, both as instigators and as victims. They were also more likely to incur institutional charges and, in keeping with these behavioural patterns, less likely to be granted parole.

Though offenders with FASD were involved in correctional programs, employment, and education at rates similar to those of other offenders, there was a non-significant trend toward lower rates of correctional program completion.

Why we did this study

FASD encompasses a range of conditions caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol which can result in changes to brain structure and function. The deficits associated with FASD can affect an individual's ability to function within societal rules and norms, including increasing the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system.

Those with FASD have been shown to exhibit deficits that could impact their ability to adjust to an institutional environment, such as impulsivity, difficulty sorting cause and effect, and trouble understanding the consequences of their actions. To date, however, the institutional adjustment of offenders with FASD has not been examined.

What we did

A total of 91 offenders, who comprised part of a larger research study aiming to pilot a FASD screening tool,¹ were included in the current analyses. Of these offenders, 9 were diagnosed with FASD, 41 had central nervous system deficits unrelated to prenatal alcohol exposure, 27 had no identified neuropsychological deficits, and 14 lacked sufficient information to make a diagnosis. Offenders in each of the four groups were compared on their institutional adjustment, including involvement in institutional incidents, incurring of institutional charges, program participation, and release types.

For more information

Mullins, P., MacPherson, P., Moser, A.E. & Matheson, F.I. (2014). *Institutional adjustment of offenders living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in a Canadian federal penitentiary* (Research Report, R-284). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

To obtain a PDF version of the full report, or for other inquiries, please e-mail the [Research Branch](#) or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

You can also visit the website for a full list of research publications.

¹ MacPherson, P. H., Chudley, A. E. & Grant, B. A. (2011). *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in a correctional population: Prevalence, screening and characteristics* (Research Report R-247). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.