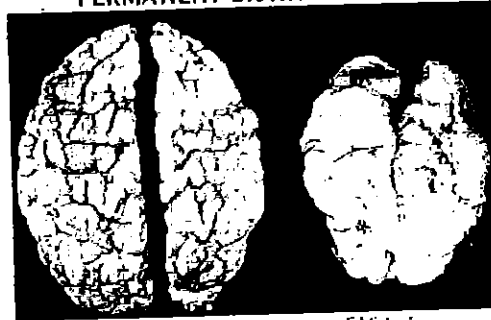


PERMANENT BRAIN DAMAGE



Normal brain

FAS-brain

Both babies 6 weeks old

PAYING THE PRICE: Scan of the brains of two six-year-old children show the damage done by foetal alcohol syndrome. The brain on the left is normal, that on the right is permanently damaged.

Alcohol is a bane to your unborn kids

FOETAL Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) was recognised globally this week.

The Saartjie Baartman Centre for Abused Women and Children in Athlone highlighted the link between substance abuse violence against partners.

"Some mothers are unaware of the negative impact of alcohol, while others drink because of addiction, or as a consequence of intimate partner abuse," said Dorothea Gertse, head social worker at the centre.

"We see many cases in which alcohol has been consumed during pregnancy. A large percentage of the women who come to us to seek shelter for themselves and their children have substance abuse problems."

On the extreme end of the spectrum, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is one of the main causes of severe mental disabilities and stunted growth in babies, though FASD covers milder manifestations as well.

It is estimated that over six million South Africans are living with the

consequences of alcohol consumption during conception, pregnancy and breastfeeding.

"Research has shown that alcohol can give rise to abusive behaviour, but also that many women who are abused turn to alcohol and drugs as a result," said Gertse.

She also notes that women who are in abusive relationships are very susceptible to forced sex, which can heighten the chances of unplanned pregnancies.

"Even the smallest amount of alcohol can have an effect on the child. Women should stop drinking when they start trying for a baby, and immediately if they are already pregnant," says Gertse.

Established 18 years ago, the Saartjie Baartman Centre has assisted more than 190 000 victims of crime and violence.

Over and above offering long and short-term safe shelter, the Centre offers a number of programmes that address gender based violence in society, the economic disenfranchisement of women and child exposure to violence. - Staff Report

No free IVF in pioneering county

FASD

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Co-ordinated by: Brent Cole, brent.cole@nil.co.za, Studio Independent, Independent Newspapers, Cape

International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Day

FARR SPOKESPERSON

The Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR) is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Since the first Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevalence study in 1997, FARR has done 12 community prevalence studies in Gauteng, Northern, Eastern and Western Cape Provinces, reporting rates ranging from 27/1000 (2,7%) to 282/1000 (28%). South Africa has the highest reported FASD rates in the world.

On 9 September 2017, International FASD Day will be commemorated world wide.

The first International FASD Day took place on 9 September 1999. Across the globe groups of people get together at 09h00 on 9 September to share a FASD prevention message. At 09h08 one minute silence is observed, with the participants reflecting on people who are living with FASD and their caregivers. At 09h09 a bell is rung to ceremonially break the silence, thereby encouraging community members, family and friends to share the FASD prevention message and to support pregnant women to abstain from alcohol use during pregnancy. The number 9 is a reminder of the importance of 9 alcohol-free pregnancy months. The message for this year's International FASD Day is therefore: "No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy."

This year FARR will have a variety of International FASD Day events on all our project sites in the Free State, Western, Eastern and Northern Cape Provinces. Continuing to emphasize the number 9, sponsors, service providers, community members and clients are going to participate in awareness walks, ranging from 900 meters (to accommodate pregnant women) to 9 km in the various project areas. FASD awareness knots will be distributed to be worn as a reminder of our joint responsibility to protect the unborn children in the community from the harmful effects of alcohol.

FASD is caused when an unborn baby (fetus) is exposed to alcohol. The teratogenic (toxic) effect of alcohol causes permanent,

irreversible damage to the developing cells of the unborn baby. Since the baby's brain starts developing soon after conception, the brain of the fetus is especially vulnerable to the damaging effects of alcohol.

78% of pregnancies are unplanned

For this reason, children with FASD, are born with permanent brain damage. It is however important to note that any other organ of the unborn baby can also be affected. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the most severe form of FASD, but there are a variety of other conditions as well.

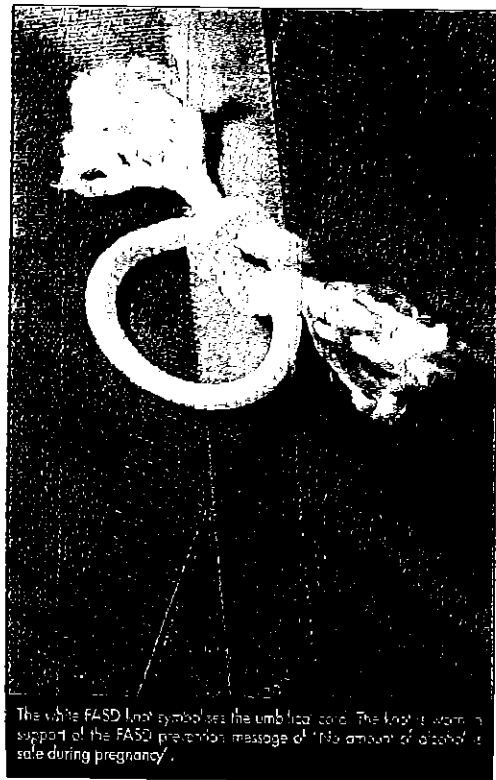
In South Africa approximately 78% of pregnancies are unplanned. As a result of this, women often do not realise that they are pregnant and therefore continue to use alcohol, especially during the first trimester (3 months of pregnancy). This is a very vulnerable time for the fetus as most of the organs develop during this period. Due to a variety of reasons, such as unplanned pregnancies, limited resources, attitudinal challenges and lack of knowledge, women often visit antenatal services very late during their pregnancies and therefore further delay the possibility of getting information about FASD and the necessary support.

It is essential to raise awareness in the general public

Due to the very high prevalence rates in South Africa, FASD is a public health concern in many communities, but unfortunately very little, if any, education is given to students in the health, education and social work sectors. To successfully prevent this condition, it is essential to raise awareness in the general public, but professionals should receive the necessary training and skills to do diagnose and manage FASD and to implement awareness and prevention strategies.

During the past year there has been an increase in international concern regarding the stigmatization of women of childbearing age and mothers of children with FASD.

It is important to note that women often experience pressure from their partners, family and friends



The white FASD knot symbolises the umbilical cord. The knot is worn in support of the FASD prevention message of "No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy."

to use alcohol during pregnancy. Incorrect and misleading messages from health staff regarding the effect of prenatal alcohol use, cause confusion and often contradicts the important message that no amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy. In FARR's studies in South Africa this was repeatedly found. Women also report that they often used alcohol as a form of self-medication to alleviate stress and to escape from daily hardships. In the areas where FARR is operational, pregnant women are invited to enrol in Healthy Mother Healthy Baby Programmes. These programmes are available to all pregnant women, irrespective whether they use alcohol or not. The aim of the programme is to provide pregnant women with information and the necessary skills to make informed decisions

regarding their own health and the health of their unborn babies. The ultimate goal is to support them to have healthier pregnancies and healthier babies. Women who are using alcohol receive the necessary guidance and support in this regard. The programme is implemented with the support of the local Health Departments and is a huge success.

FARR also implements a variety of awareness programmes and offer training to educators, social workers, health professionals and students.

For more information about FASD, FARR's research, projects and/or the International FASD Day events in the above-mentioned provinces, please contact the FARR CEO at 021-6862646 or on 083 275 0202. Please visit the FARR web page www.farrsa.org.za or FARR's facebook.

ALCOHOL AND PREGNANCY

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is caused when a pregnant woman drinks alcohol. The alcohol may damage the baby's brain, nervous system and other organs, which can lead to physical, behavioural and intellectual disabilities that last a lifetime. Any woman can have a baby with FASD if she drinks alcohol while pregnant. As most pregnancies (75%) in South Africa are unplanned, many women only find out about their pregnancy when they are already between 12 and 20 weeks pregnant. This means a woman might be putting her baby at risk of FASD without knowing it.

Someone with FASD can experience a number of problems in their lifetime.

Physical problems:

- Delayed growth (before and after birth)
- Organ damage (heart, kidneys, eyes, ears)
- Characteristic facial features, in some cases
- Brain damage

Behavioural & intellectual problems:

- Learning disabilities
- Interpersonal relationships problems
- Hyperactivity
- Attention difficulty
- Poor judgement and difficult communicating
- Poor cause-effect reasoning

Ongoing problems with:

- Establishing healthy boundaries
- Substance abuse
- Social skills
- Pleasing (easily taken advantage of)
- Living independently

WHAT IS FASD?

FASD refers to a spectrum of disorders that occur in a child when exposed to alcohol during pregnancy.

- **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)**
Severest form of FASD. Individuals have physical, behavioural and intellectual symptoms and problems.
- **Partial FAS (pFAS)**
Individuals have similar symptoms, problems and features as FAS, but to a lesser degree.
- **Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARNND)**
Affected individuals have behavioural and intellectual problems but not the physical features.
- **Alcohol Related Birth Defects (ARBD)**
Affected individuals are born without the physical features, but with damaged organs (i.e. heart defects, eye problems, etc)

If you are a woman drinking alcohol, you should:

- Immediately stop using alcohol if you are trying to fall pregnant, or if there is a chance that you could fall pregnant
- Ask your family, friends and partner to support you in your decision not to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

WHY TAKE THE RISK?

RISKS OF DRINKING DURING PREGNANCY

Mismanage | Stillborn
Prenatally & low
birth weight | FASD |
Stillborn

- If you are sexually active, but not using contraceptives, you could fall pregnant.
- Any amount of alcohol you use while you are pregnant could harm your unborn baby.
- All types of alcohol can harm your baby, including beer, wine and cider.
- Alcohol travels directly from the mother's blood through the placenta to the baby. It does not get diluted. This means that the baby drinks the same amount of alcohol that the mother drinks.
- The baby's brain, body and organs develop throughout the pregnancy and can be damaged by alcohol at any time.



DISTELL

