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FASD RESEARCH AND PREVENTION PROJECT IN NELSON MANDELA BAY AREA

By Pumlani Fani (<http://www.eclb.co.za/author/pumlani/>) In Uncategorized (<http://www.eclb.co.za/category/uncategorized/>) On April 14, 2016

MEDIA RELEASE

To all Media

14 April 2016.

FASD RESEARCH AND PREVENTION PROJECT IN NELSON MANDELA BAY AREA

A Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Prevalence Study, by the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR), amongst Grade One Learners in 14 randomly selected schools in 11 wards in Bethelsdorp and Helenvale, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, has found a FASD Prevalence Rate of 130/1000 or 13%.

The FASD Research, Awareness and Prevention Project in Bethelsdorp, commissioned by the Eastern Cape Liquor Board (ECLB) and funded by the South African Breweries (SAB), began in 2013 and is set to continue into 2017. This public-private-civil society initiative includes partnerships with communities, the Departments of Education, Social Development and Health.

FASD, which includes Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) as the most severe form of the condition, is caused by alcohol consumption during pregnancy by the expectant mother. Studies indicate that approximately 75% of pregnancies in South Africa are unplanned, and therefore often confirmed very late. This can result in some women consuming alcohol without knowledge of being pregnant.

FARR and its partners believe that no amount of alcohol consumption is safe during pregnancy and that even light drinking has the potential to cause permanent, irreversible damage to the unborn fetus.

The CEO of FARR, Leana Olivier states: "The FASD prevalence rate revealed in the study, gives an indication of the high level of alcohol abuse in the study area. This has far reaching and serious implications on the educational, psycho-social and economic well-being of the affected children, their families and the community at large. With this project we strive to raise awareness and empower the local service providers and community members to prevent alcohol abuse during pregnancy and ultimately FASD."

South Africa has been at the forefront of FASD research, reporting the highest prevalence rates in the world. The diagram below indicates the SA rates compare to some of the highest reported rates in other countries

"FASD remains a threat to our society and as the Eastern Cape Liquor Board we are extremely committed in alleviating this scourge through rigorous collaborative efforts. We are also fully cognisant of the burden that FASD places on our already strained economy, henceforth we have taken upon ourselves to roll out vigorous strategic intervention initiatives which seek to raise awareness amongst our people on the inherent dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. The development and growth of our Province depends on healthy young people that will drive the economy and development, and therefore, it is important that the risks that FASD poses to our society are eradicated. The availability of data provided by FARR on FASD will certainly promote targeted interventions," says Khanyile Maneli, CEO of the Eastern Cape Liquor Board.

"SAB takes a targeted approach towards building strong South African communities aligned to the business' global sustainable development framework, Prosper. One of the strategy's key imperatives is to encourage responsible consumption and to shape a sociable world where the company's our beers are developed, marketed, sold, and consumed with high regard for individual and community wellbeing.

It makes business sense for SAB for people to drink responsibly because a healthy society enables a thriving business environment. To help us achieve this aim, SAB has over the years initiated several hard hitting programmes to tackle alcohol abuse and our efforts with FARR is one of these interventions. Like our partners, FARR and the ECLB, we strongly advocate that expecting mothers should not consume any alcohol for their own health and safety of their babies," says Bongumusa Makhathini, SAB Head Alcohol Policy.

In 2013, parents and guardians of grade one learners were invited to voluntarily enrol their children to participate in the study. In the initial stages of the study, learners received a full anthropometric (nutritional and growth), as well as a paediatric examination and several were referred for health and psycho-social problems such as eye and ear defects, heart problems, skin conditions, oral health, nutritional intervention, child abuse and neglect and genetic disorders, amongst others.

Three local Psychometrists were recruited and trained to join the FARR team to do Neurodevelopmental (psychological) testing on the learners. Maternal interviews were conducted with the biological mothers and/or guardians.

Parents, whose children participated in the study, were provided with comprehensive feedback. Those whose children were diagnosed with FASD received counselling and in some cases, home visits were made to the families. With the permission of parents, individual reports were provided to trained educators and school principals, who could assist with better managing the future education of these learners.

In 2015, 182 Foundation Phase Educators received the necessary training to manage learners with FASD in their schools.

In addition to this, 70 social workers received FASD awareness and prevention training, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to incorporate into their day-to-day service delivery. Health professionals and community workers are going to receive similar training during 2016.

Since the first year of the project, FARR initiated a variety of awareness initiatives ranging from health promotional talks at clinics in the area; presentations at meetings, Imbizo's, conferences and training of professionals. A series of interactive industrial theatre productions and workshops (Love Child, In partnership with take AWAY theatre group) was offered in the area, raising FASD awareness amongst women of childbearing age, their partners, family and friends. These initiatives, combined with life-skill courses, such as the FAStrap and Sensible Drinking Courses, will continue until the end of the project in June 2017.

In September 2015 FARR's evidence based programme, the Healthy Mother Healthy Baby© Programme (HMHB), was launched. Permission was obtained from the Department of Health in February 2016 to implement this prevention programme in West End Clinic, for the duration of the project.

Pregnant women will be enrolled in the programme and will receive support to have healthier pregnancies and healthier, FASD-free babies. Women, Irrespective of their alcohol consumption behaviour, are invited to participate in the programme, as it provides generic information and support related to pregnancy, birth and early childhood. The programme does not only focus on alcohol abuse and FASD.

As the challenge revealed in the study encompass some of the biggest challenges faced by the communities in the study area, community members and service providers are very supportive of the awareness, prevention and training programmes. This will ultimately enhance the sustainability of this project.

Issued by FARR, ECLB and SAB

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