

**DANGER OF HAVING BRAIN DAMAGED KIDS IF THEY INDULGE IN ALCOHOL DURING PREGNANCY**

# Pregnant women cautioned

VINCENT CRUYWAGEN

WOMEN and child bearing youths will have seriously brain damaged children if they indulge in alcohol during pregnancy.

The warning was delivered by Leana Olivier CEO of the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (Farr) in Cape Town yesterday.

"If you are at the child bearing age, sexually active and abusing alcohol, you are at the risk of having a foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) baby", she said.

Olivier sent out the message while presenting the findings of a three-year research into the prevalence of the FASD into the fishing community of the West Coast. The research showed the prevalence of FASD in the West Coast was 64 out of every 1000 children.

Western Cape MEC for social development Albert Fritz and his head of department Dr Robert MacDonald were present when the startling findings were revealed.

Fritz expressed shock at the findings and said the Foetal Alcohol Syndrome could be prevented.

Farr was commissioned by Fritz to conduct the research after earlier investigations by the department of social development found that a staggering number of children in the West Coast were intellectually disabled as a result of the Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

It was the first time research of this nature was conducted in the fishing

community of Saldanha.

With the consent of parents and the assistance of the Western Cape department of education, Grade 1 pupils in 14 schools underwent medical examinations to assess their general health and nutrition status as well as the presence of physical features of FASD. In total, 1452 out of 1535 pupils in the area were interviewed in the first phase of the study.

"This research was concluded at the end of March and our research entailed deep discussion with community members, mothers and children affected and also engaging with teachers. We warned parents and young mothers that when they drink alcohol during pregnancy they will get an FASD baby.

"One of the most effective ways of awareness programmes is to spread the message by word and it's important that the gogos (grandmothers) in rural areas are reached because they are the ones working with children," Fritz said.

He said the West Coast prevalence rate could be compared to findings in the most recent studies conducted in Kimberley (60/1000) and the Witzenberg area (96/1000).

"But the prevalence rate of 122/1000 in De Aar still makes it the highest reported FASD rate worldwide.

"The West Coast's prevalence rate means that there is a serious problem with FASD in the area and the impact of this will be felt throughout the community," Fritz said.

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