



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

Tindle, Elizabeth, Craft, Heather, & Hayes, Lorian (2002) Alcohol and the foetus. In *Alcohol and the Foetus : Hippocrates and Socrates - Disability Conference, CHERI*, March, 2002, Westmead Children's Hospital, Sydney, NSW. (Unpublished)

This file was downloaded from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/53176/>

© Copyright 2002 The Authors

Notice: *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

ALCOHOL AND THE FOETUS

Elizabeth Tindle, Heather Craft and Lorian Hayes

ABSTRACT

The foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) was first identified as a syndrome in 1973. Since then a large body of research has accumulated. The full syndrome in which heavy alcohol use in pregnancy results in growth retardation, a characteristic facial dysmorphism and brain damage will be described. FAS is the commonest preventable, known cause of intellectual handicap, however, a large proportion of people with partial foetal alcohol syndrome have an intelligence in the normal range. Those with the full syndrome and with identified and diagnosed, intellectual handicap are more likely to receive appropriate services. Those with an intelligence in the normal range, suffer from severe psychosocial disabilities resulting in homelessness, mental illness and frequently criminality. There is a larger number of people with a partial syndrome who also suffer from high rates of secondary disability including learning problems and 70% of FAS people also have ADD or ADHD.

The authors wish to emphasize the importance of making a diagnosis. Making an early diagnosis and getting appropriate treatment, protect children from many secondary disabilities.

Elizabeth Tindle will introduce the topic and present the background to the topic. She will describe the spectrum of abnormalities resulting from maternal alcohol use, the physical and psychological characteristics of the condition, comorbidities and some of the problems with terminology. There is a characteristic pattern of intellectual impairment and resulting academic difficulties. There have been studies in many countries of incidence confirming that this is a world wide problem where alcohol is consumed. For a variety of reasons, cases are often undiagnosed with more severely handicapped cases being more likely to be recognized.

The social cost to individuals, families and the community of this preventable condition are enormous. It is not clear what, if any, is a safe level of alcohol consumption in pregnancy. It is fairly common for more than one child in a family to be affected. These children are sometimes at risk in their natural families and for a variety of reasons are over represented in populations of adopted and fostered children.

Lorian Hayes will speak of her work in specific communities in Cape York region of Queensland where the foetal alcohol syndrome and the problems related to alcohol consumption have been identified.

There are a number of strategies that families, caregivers and schools can adopt that can help them manage the difficult behaviour of FAS children and assist their learning. The children need effective advocates. Good quality skilled foster care and a stable

environment are often central to successful caring for these children. Supporting and educating carers is an important task.

Heather Craft will share her personal experiences of raising a foetal alcohol affected child, highlighting the difficulty of getting a diagnosis and appropriate support and services.