

A Survey of Health Care Professionals' Knowledge and Experience of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and Alcohol Use in Pregnancy

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BACKGROUND Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is the leading known cause of preventable learning disability in developed countries. An estimated 41.3% of women in the UK consume alcohol during pregnancy and the predicted prevalence rates of FASD nationally are 3-5%. Screening for alcohol use early in pregnancy can facilitate the identification of women who are in need of support. However, only a small percentage of UK children with FASD are identified. This may be partly attributed to a lack of awareness of the condition by NHS health professionals.

METHODS We developed an online survey to determine healthcare professionals' knowledge and opinions. We approached Midwives, Health Visitors, Obstetricians, Paediatricians and General Practitioners (GPs) with a profession-specific survey link. Questions were predominantly multiple-choice with free text options where appropriate.

RESULTS There were a total of 250 responses to the surveys (78 Midwives, 60 Health Visitors, 55 Obstetricians, 31 Paediatricians and 26 GPs).

Only 19.8% of all respondents knew the estimated UK prevalence rate of FASD and 22.1% of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). 80% of Health Visitor respondents and 77% of Midwives were not confident in their knowledge about the prevalence and presentation of FASD.



74.6% of Obstetricians reported routinely screening for alcohol consumption compared to 64% of GPs. 32% of Midwives and 20% of Obstetricians claimed to have never referred a pregnant woman for specialist alcohol support.



58.1% of paediatricians said they had diagnosed a patient with Fetal Alcohol Disorder (FAS) or FASD, but a significant 36.7% worried about stigmatisation with diagnosis.



Paediatricians reported the highest levels of FASD training (54.8%), compared to only 21.3% of midwives. A resounding 98.2% of Health Visitors, 94.8% of Midwives, 94.6% of Obstetricians, 85.7% of Paediatricians and 66.6% of GPs expressed a need for further training.

CONCLUSION We identified a significant gap in knowledge around FASD and the risks of alcohol related harm in pregnancy in our sample of UK health professionals. Consequently, there is a clear need for training across the professions to improve FASD awareness and recognition. As prevention is the primary objective, there is a prerequisite to establish routine alcohol screening practices in pregnancy. Lack of service provision is a substantial barrier for health care professionals in the UK. Clear referral routes and care pathways are urgently required to optimise patient outcomes.

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