FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS:
A SOCIAL WORKER’S GUIDE FOR PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

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Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: A Social Worker’s Guide for Prevention and Intervention

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Objectives

• Articulate the range of consequences associated with drinking during pregnancy.
• Learn the statistics/trends surrounding prenatal alcohol use.
• Describe the key reasons women are reluctant to reveal use.
• Become familiar with screening tools to identify women most at-risk.
• Identify resources that are available in working with this population.
• Discuss practice implications.
Drinking during pregnancy can result in a wide range of physical, developmental, emotional, and behavioral consequences. Severity of effects range from mild to severe, depending on numerous factors. All effects are irreversible.

Fetal alcohol syndrome

Most widely known consequence of alcohol consumption during pregnancy is known as fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), which is a combination of:

- Facial anomalies
- Growth deficiencies
- Mental impairments

Consequences: Infant and Child

- Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)
- Weight gain/growth problems
- Maternal-child bonding
- Learning, memory, language problems
- Problems with executive functioning
- Behavioral difficulties – impulsivity, poor socialization
Consequences: Teens and Adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teens</th>
<th>Adults</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Existing difficulties exacerbated with onset of puberty</td>
<td>• Inability to live independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase in risky behaviors such as delinquency and sexual activity</td>
<td>• Increased risk for mental health problems such as depression</td>
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Consequences: Family and Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Economic Costs of FAS</th>
<th>• Child Welfare System</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– $5 billion/year to US</td>
<td>– CPS investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– $4 million – lifetime cost</td>
<td>– Foster and adoptive families needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intact Families</td>
<td>• Intact Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Manage range of difficulties</td>
<td>– Manage range of difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Deal with providers, schools, people</td>
<td>– Deal with providers, schools, people</td>
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Statistics of alcohol use

There is no safe level of alcohol that can be consumed during pregnancy

Women unaware of their pregnancy may unintentionally damage specific areas of the developing brain by consuming alcohol
15% of women in childbearing age are moderate to heavy drinkers.

Half of all pregnancies are unintended.

Prenatal alcohol use affects 1 out of every 100 U.S. births.

The NIAAA estimates that at least 40,000 infants are born each year affected by prenatal alcohol exposure.

Use Rates among Pregnant Women:
Source: NBDUHS/AMHSA
### Issues identifying women at-risk

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Obstacles for some Physicians:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of time and training</td>
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<td>• Stereo-typing alcohol-use to women in poverty/minority</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Have negative attitudes towards women with substance use problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Not feeling secure in diagnosing alcohol-related problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>• SA Treatment ineffective</td>
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### Reluctance to reveal alcohol use

<table>
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<th>Obstacles some women face:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Fear and shame</td>
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<td>• Judgmental attitudes of medical staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Temptation to underreport amount of alcohol consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Delay of seeking prenatal care until third trimester</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Screening Tools for Alcohol Use

**CAGE: Adults**

- (C) Have you ever felt you should **CUT** down on your drinking?
- (A) Have people ever **ANNOYED** you by criticizing your drinking?
- (G) Have you ever felt bad or **GUILTY** about your drinking?
- (E) Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover (**EYE OPENER**)?
Screening Tools for Alcohol Use

T-ACE: Pregnant women

- **(T) TOLERANCE**, how many drinks does it take to make you feel high?
- **(A) Have people ANNOYED you by criticizing your drinking?**
- **(C) Have you ever felt you ought to CUT DOWN on your drinking?**
- **(E) EYE OPENER**, Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?

Screening Tools for Alcohol Use

T-ACE Scoring

- **(T) 2+ drinks = 2 points**
- **(A) YES = 1 point**
- **(C) YES = 1 point**
- **(E) YES = 1 point**

Two points or higher is a positive screen

Screening Tools for Alcohol Use

TWEAK: Pregnant women

- **(T) TOLERANCE**, How many drinks can you hold?
- **(W) WORRY**, Have close friends or relatives worried or complained about your drinking in the past year?
- **(E) EYE OPENER**, Do you sometimes take a drink in the morning when you get up?
- **(A) AMNESIA**, Has a friend or family member ever told you about things you said or did while you were drinking that you could not remember?
- **(K) CUT DOWN**, Do you sometimes feel the need to cut down on your drinking?
Screening Tools for Alcohol Use

TWEAK Scoring

- (T) 3+ drinks = 2 points
- (W) YES = 2 points
- (E) YES = 1 points
- (A) YES = 1 points
- (K) YES = 1 points

Three points or higher is a positive screen

Role of Social Worker

Social workers in healthcare and community settings can:

- Educate/Train
- Aid families and parents
- Display nonjudgmental attitudes
- Facilitate support groups

Role of Social Workers

Social workers in the church can:

- Establish support groups
- Offer support
- Create partnerships with church and substance abuse programs
- Educate congregation
- Advocate for FASD families
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Available resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • FASD Center for Excellence  
  www.fascenter.samhsa.gov |
| • National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information  
  www.ncadi.samhsa.gov |
| • National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome  
  www.nofas.org |