

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

Definition of FASD

There are many terms used to describe birth defects brought about by a woman's consumption of alcohol during pregnancy. An April 2004 agreement between experts in the field settled on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) as the official term. The agreement is as follows:

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications. The term FASD is not intended for use as a clinical diagnosis.

Types (subtypes) of FASD

There are 3 subtypes of FASD:

- **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)**—Symptoms include facial deformities (see *Fact Sheet #25* for more information on FAS).
- **Partial Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (pFAS)**—Symptoms include partial facial deformities
- **Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE)**—Facial features are normal.

FAE is interchangeable with *Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND)* And *Alcohol-Related Birth Defects (ARBD)*.

Effects of FAE

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) has historically been the major term used to describe these effects, but includes only people with facial deformities from pre-birth alcohol exposure. Since people with FAE exhibit *no* facial deformities, they are harder to diagnose, and therefore endure more severe symptoms from lack of treatment. They are sometimes referred to as *the hidden population*.

Of every 100 babies born with FASD, 80 have FAE, and only 20 have FAS.

Effects of FAE (Individuals with FAE Between Ages 12 and 51):

- 95% have mental health problems
- 68% report disrupted school experiences
- 68% have had trouble with the law
- 55% have been confined to prison, drug & alcohol treatment centers, or mental institutions
- 52% exhibit inappropriate sexual behaviors

It is estimated that 50% of all adult and juvenile offenders have undiagnosed FAE.

Since FAE is so often misdiagnosed, these individuals are usually seen as simply being deliberately defiant or disruptive. In actuality, they have mild to severe

brain damage, which causes learning disabilities, short attention spans, hyperactivity and irritability, and developmental delays.

For more information, go to the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Center For Excellence, operated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (<http://www.fascenter.samhsa.gov/index.cfm>).

Compass Mark Drug & Alcohol Information Center

*630 Janet Avenue
Lancaster, PA 17601
(717) 299-2831*