

FASD Study Final Results Questions & Answers

Q: Why was this study needed?

A: Individuals who are exposed to alcohol during pregnancy may experience a range of cognitive, emotional, and physical difficulties and may be diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). Individuals diagnosed with FASD experience a range of problems in their daily functioning and are overrepresented in criminal justice settings. Identifying individuals with FASD in corrections is important for a number of reasons. Persons with FASD often experience brain-based difficulties in areas such as decision-making and problem solving; they also often experience mental health problems or problems with addictions. To better inform how to meet their needs in the future, the Department of Justice sought to learn more about how many offenders have FASD.

Q: Who funded this study?

A: The Government of Yukon committed funding, staffing, and internal resources necessary for the successful completion of the study. The University of British Columbia also contributed in-kind resources necessary to secure the data collected from this research in an ethical manner.

Q: Why was the Yukon chosen for this study?

A: In 2008, the Yukon Department of Justice hosted a conference on FASD and the Justice system entitled *The Path to Justice: Access to Justice for Individuals with FASD*. Recommendations from this conference included a need for more research to understand the prevalence of FASD in the justice system. The Department determined that this was an important project and undertook the necessary steps to carry out this research.

Q: How was the research sensitive to First Nations concerns?

A: As individuals of First Nation heritage are overrepresented in Yukon Corrections population, it was anticipated that persons of Indigenous background would be disproportionately impacted by this research. Importantly, FASD occurs in the context of relevant social determinants of health. In Yukon, First Nations communities continue to recover from the effects of colonialist policies, including residential schools, intergenerational impacts that include a loss of cultural identity, weakening of community and

family integrity, and disproportionate rates of addictions and poverty. Given these factors, a priority of this research involved engaging with First Nations health partners, primarily through regular communication with the Yukon First Nations Health and Social Development Commission, across all stages of this research. The Commission continued to support the research, as data analysis, interpretation, and communication of study findings was undertaken.

Q: How was the study conducted?

A: Data was collected over an 18-month period between May 2014 and September 2015. Participants were recruited from custodial and community settings in Yukon, primarily from Whitehorse, although individuals incarcerated at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre reside across communities throughout the Territory. Participants were eligible to participate in the study if they were between ages 18 and 40 and were supervised on an active legal order through Yukon Corrections. All individuals who met study entry criteria were invited to participate; the study did not focus on individuals considered to be “at risk” of having FASD.

Q: What were the results of the study?

A: Prenatal alcohol exposure was confirmed in 25% of cases, ruled out in 25% of cases and unclear in the remaining 50% of cases. Seventeen point five percent (17.5%) of participants were given a diagnosis of FASD. A diagnosis could not be confirmed or ruled out for a further 13.75% of participants due to insufficient evidence. 68% of participants did not have FASD. Neurocognitive deficits were observed in high rates among the sampled population, along with mental health and substance abuse problems. Those participating were provided with their results; services were also offered for six months after the study’s end to ensure that they could connect with any necessary supports needed.

Q: What is going to happen to the results of this study?

A: The study results add to the body of research on the prevalence of FASD in the prison population across Canada. Results will be used in Yukon to inform future program and policy decisions both within the Department of Justice and in the larger work being undertaken to develop a Yukon FASD Plan. This research may also lead to opportunities to undertake further research related to FASD.

Q: What new programs and services are now available for people with FASD at the Correctional Centre?

A: This study, and the work that led up to it, helped drive the creation of the Interagency Advisory Committee on FASD and the ongoing work to develop an integrated approach to how we address the needs of individuals with FASD more holistically. The study also was a key driver in the development of the Adult FASD Diagnostic Clinic.

In terms of the Correctional Centre, a client-centered, integrated case management model for inmates with cognitive impairment and/or mental illness is in place at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre. All inmates are provided with medical and mental health assessments upon intake. When the assessments are completed by medical staff, appropriate referrals are made to manage the specific needs of the inmate. Any identification of mental health problems is referred to the Manager of Health Services and the physician on contract. Inmates identified with cognitive impairments or FASD are referred to the psychologist for further assessment.

Correctional Officer Basic Training includes modules on FASD and case-management approaches. The Corrections Division has invested in *Collaborative Case Management for FASD Clients* training and certification for case managers at the Correctional Centre as one of the outcomes for the planning and delivery of the study. Corrections delivers a series of cognitive-skills based programs to assist inmates with FASD or cognitive delays.