

Title: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

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The message in this book is blunt: consuming alcohol during pregnancy is very likely to be harmful to the baby. Even moderate drinking carries a risk despite equivocation in UK government guidelines. The safest thing for women to do is to consume no alcohol at all when they know that they are pregnant or are planning to have a baby. This book dispels many myths. Much is now known about the effects of alcohol on the development of the unborn child, although some children may be unaffected for reasons that are complex and not well understood. Alcohol kills brain cells in the vulnerable foetus at any stage in its development. Its effects are more harmful and long lasting than those of smoking and use of hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine, etc.

This book contains much useful information about what have become known as 'fetal alcohol spectrum disorders' (FASDs). Estimates of prevalence vary but there could be as many as 1 in 100 children with FASDs. Diagnosis is not straightforward because there are only subtle physical manifestations and accurate diagnosis depends upon good case histories and investigations. Diagnosis is not helped by the fact that children with FASDs can show cognitive and social-emotional problems which are also associated with mood disorders, autistic spectrum disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. What is unclear from the book is the extent to which consuming alcohol in pregnancy could result in profound learning difficulties, although it is known to be implicated in miscarriages and sensory and physical problems.

A strength of this book is that it contains contributions by 30 authors from a variety of disciplines (health, education, social care, law) and from several different countries. There are also contributions from people who have adopted or cared for children with FASDs. The choice of chapter authors reflects the editors' view that an inter-agency approach to prevention, diagnosis, educational intervention and social care is required and each chapter brings a genuinely interesting perspective and insights. This book is not about blaming mothers who drink in pregnancy – indeed it stresses that many women may not realise they are pregnant during the early stages of the foetus' development and that there has been much misleading advice. This book recognises the support that mothers need from fathers, family and friends to maintain abstinence and from midwives and others for their education, guidance and counselling. Worryingly, this book shows that so many key health and other professionals lack knowledge about the effects of alcohol and appropriate advice and support to give, but it does provide the latest information from research and good models for their training. In the final chapter the editors helpfully provide overviews of each chapter and reiterate key messages for service development.

This is a scholarly book that is invaluable for articulating knowledge about, and initiatives in relation to, FASDs. There is no mention specifically about children and young people with PMLD and there are many causes of disabilities besides, but it would be wrong to assume that this book has no relevance. It provides important information for professionals from all services and organisations who may be engaging, knowingly or unknowingly, with children and young people with FASDs and their families. The editors have also co-authored a book called *Educating Children and Young People with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders* published in 2012 by Routledge.