Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

MN ORG
MOFAS
FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME

MOFAS Mission

Our mission is to eliminate disability caused by alcohol consumption during pregnancy and to improve the quality of life for those living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders throughout Minnesota.

Our vision is a world in which women do not drink alcohol during pregnancy and people living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders are identified, supported, and valued

What is FASD?

- FASD is a brain-based disorder with a variety of symptoms and affects individuals to varying degrees.
- FASD impacts individuals across all races, ethnicities, and socio-economic statuses.
- A 2014 prevalence study estimates FASD affect 1 in 50 children in the Midwest (NIAAA, May et.al).

Which Substance does the most severe damage to a developing fetus

A. Cocaine

B. Alcohol

C. Methamphetamines

D. Heroin

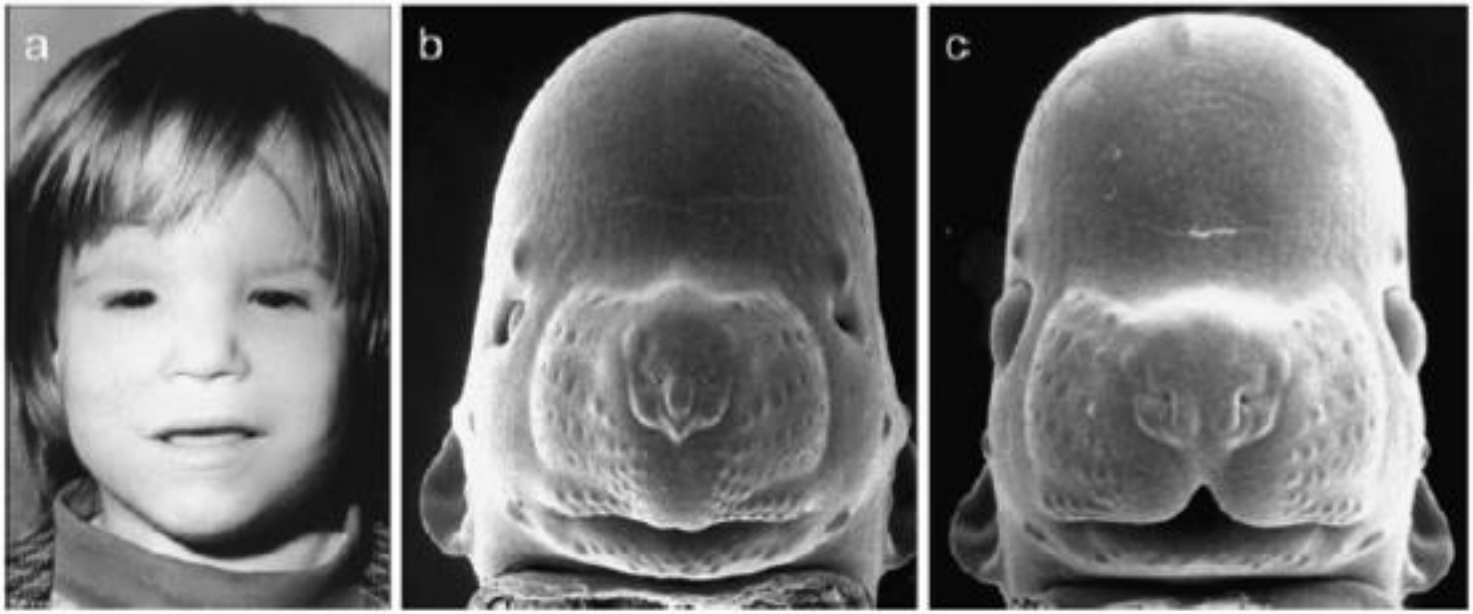
	Alcohol	Tobacco	Opioids	Meth	Cocaine	Marijuana	PCP
Growth deficiency	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Behavioral problems	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cognitive problems	X	X	X	X		X	X
Motor deficits	X	X		X			X
Developmental delays	X	X			X		
Facial anomalies	X	X					X
Physical defects	X	X		X	X		X

MN ORG
MOFAS
FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME

FASD & victimization

Facial Features of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Facial Features of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome



Sulik, K.K. et al, 1981, Science 214: 936-938

Changes in Facial Features

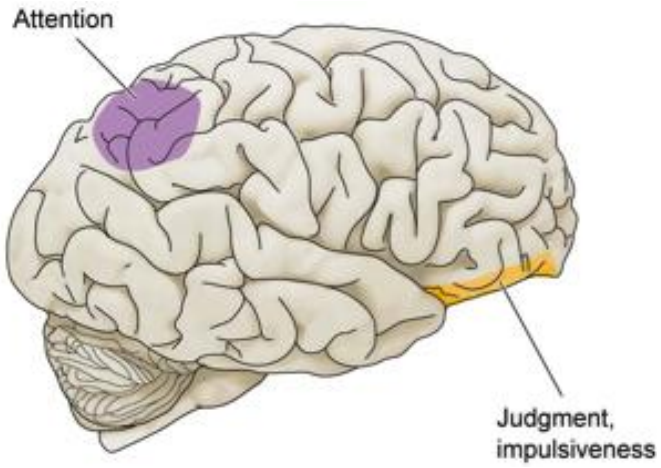
Courtesy of Dr. Natalie Novick Brown

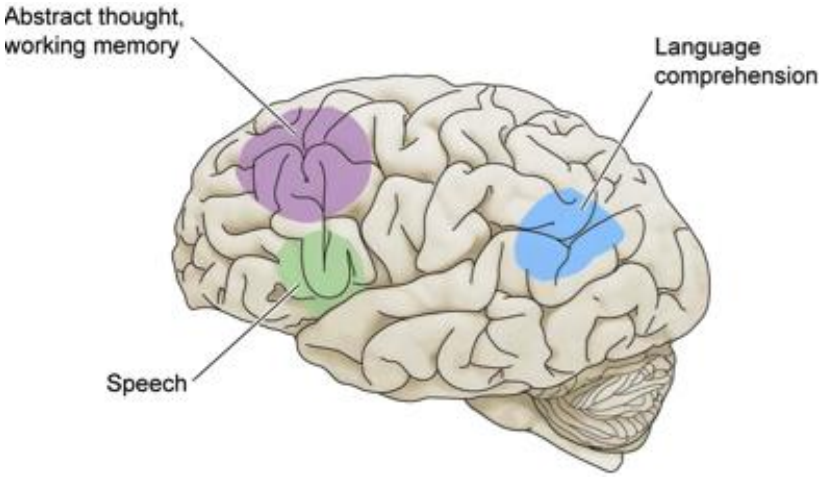
FASD & the Brain

Autopsy Study

Brain Domains Most Affected by FASD

- **Frontal lobes:** executive functions, impulse control, judgment
- **Cerebellum:** coordination, movement, behavior and memory
- **Basal Ganglia:** process memory, time perception, setting goals, predicting outcomes
- **Hippocampus:** learning and memory





Developmental Skills Timeline

Skill	Expected Developmental Age Equivalent
Expressive language ----------→	20 years.
Comprehension -----→	6 years.
Money, Time Concepts -------→	8 years
Emotional Maturity -----→	6 years
Physical Maturity ----------→	**18 years**
Reading Ability ----------→	16 years
Social Skills ------→	7 years
Living Skills ----------→	11 years
D. Malbin (1994)	

What else may FASD look like?

It depends on what lens you use…

- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Autism
- Reactive Attachment Disorder
- Sensory Processing Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder
- Depression
- Trauma
- Poverty
- And more…

From Vulnerable Children to Vulnerable Adults

- Difficulty picking up on social cues
- Impairment in short-term memory and processing speed
- Difficulty understanding and remembering stranger-safety warnings
- Poor insight and judgment
- Attention deficits
- Difficulty with abstract concepts (including concepts of time and space)
- Difficulty identifying dangerous people and/or situations
- Easily influenced by others
- Difficulty generalizing knowledge
- Difficulty understanding cause-and-effect relationships

Additional Risk Factors for Victimization

- Limited friendships and social isolation
- Reduced expectations of privacy
- Lack of teaching regarding healthy sexuality and decision-making
- Rewards provided for obedience and passivity
- Tend to want to please others

Challenges for Crime Victims on the Spectrum

- Stories that don’t make sense
- Prone to confabulation
- Vague details
- “Not viewed as a credible witness”

FASD by the Numbers

- 90% Mental health problems
- 60% Disruptive school experience
- 80% Dependent living
- 80% Employment problems

Streissguth, et. al 2004

Common Strengths of Persons with FASD

- **Friendly, likable**: May be outgoing and sociable and have little anxiety about strangers.
- **Verbal, chatty**: May be very socially interested (but not necessarily socially-skilled).
- **Helpful, hard-working**: If you ask, they will do it. They can be very good workers with the right job and training
- **Determined, resilient**: They don't hold grudges and will come back if rejected. Every day is a new day!
- **Want to be liked**: They will do whatever they can to have friends.
- However, these strengths also may get them into difficulty.

Facts about FASD and Victimization

A 1999 research study suggests that crimes against individuals on the spectrum may be under-reported at a rate of 25%-50%.

Baladerian (1999)

Reasons People Don’t Report

- Not educated about rights
- Concerns about not being believed
- Fear of more abuse or blame
- Fear of losing services, home, job, family, friends

Facts about FASD and Victimization

SAVING BOBBI: A TEEN'S SEX TRAFFICKING ORDEAL
Star Tribune Series

Research suggests that approximately 55% of those with FASD have been sexually victimized.

Streissguth, et. al (1996)

High Risk Settings?

Sobsey and Doe (1991) found that 44% of all offenders against individuals with disabilities made initial contact with their victims as they participated in social services provided for those with disabilities.
(specialized job services/transportation)

Assisting Crime Victims on the Spectrum

- For those unfamiliar with FASD, challenges in providing support and services can be overcome with training.
- Recognition of “Neurodiversity” is critical. Characteristics often seen in FASD must be recognized, understood, and accommodated.
- A first step is always to ask the person about communication preferences and what they need to make the interview feel safe.

Investigation Strategies to Consider

- Take steps to ensure understanding, ask specific questions that require understanding.
- If requested, can a guardian, caregiver, or support person be present to assist in understanding?
- Be prepared for the possibility that the person being interviewed may not be able to tell you what happened in a logical order.

Strategies (cont…)

- Inform City/County Attorneys that a victim or witness may have FASD.
- Ensure physical environment during interviews is free from visual and auditory distractions.
- Video taping statements
- Avoid suggesting possible scenarios of what may have happened.
- Allow plenty of time for processing and response.

An Environment for Systems Change

- Increase awareness of the challenges in service delivery
- Create paths for a reduction of victimization and abuse
- Show a marked increase in the number of prosecutions

be the change

Contact Information

www.mofas.org

email: ruth@mofas.org

Phone: 651.917.2370