

SA has 14 times global average of foetal alcohol disorders

South Africa has the highest prevalence of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) in the world - more than 14 times the global average. This is according to research published in the American Medical Association journal, JAMA Paediatrics.



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South Africa has an incidence of 111.1 per 1,000 children, followed by Croatia at 53.3 per 1,000 and Ireland at 47.5 per 1,000.

The global average is 7.7 per 1,000.

FASD is an umbrella term that includes effects and symptoms caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy. It includes foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), which is caused when a woman drinks during pregnancy. Alcohol can disrupt foetal development.

Researchers did a meta-analysis of FASD studies from 1 November 1973 to 30 June 2015. FAS was first described in a study on 1 November 1973.

In the 24 studies reviewed, 1,416 children up to 16 years old took part. The studies included six from South Africa, six from the United States, two from Australia, one from Canada, two from Croatia, four from France, two from Italy and one from Norway. Researchers said the studies they included were peer-reviewed, had adequate sample sizes and detailed

descriptions of participants and settings.

Three of the South African studies were conducted in the Western Cape and three in the Northern Cape.

Effects of prenatal alcohol exposure

According to researchers, animals had shown that even low levels of prenatal alcohol exposure could lead to brain dysfunction, which could lead to behavioural abnormalities.

"The effects of prenatal alcohol exposure have lifelong implications, and thus FASD is costly for society."

The study found one in 13 women who consumed alcohol during pregnancy delivered a child with FASD. Research showed few children were diagnosed at a young age.

"As a result, the focus of their care will often be on a co-morbid condition [such as attention deficit or hyperactivity disorder]." - TimesLIVE

Source: Herald

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