

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Taking Back our Narrative

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Introduction / Issues: Narratives hold cultural significance and wield profound power to assert dominance or empowerment, depending on the author. Aboriginal Australians lead the way in FASD research and knowledge translation not because FASD is an 'Aboriginal problem' but rather because Aboriginal ways of knowing being and doing are intrinsically strengths-based, holistic and grounded in healing, sociocultural practices.

Method / Approach: Underpinned by Indigenous methodology, 180 Aboriginal people completed a culturally appropriate survey to explore awareness of FASD within the Aboriginal community in WA. Qualitative interviews were employed to gather narratives that recorded the experiences of families caring for Aboriginal children with FASD in WA resulting in 6 case studies.

Key Findings: When the narrative lacks Aboriginal voice and ownership, deficit discourses that focus on Aboriginal blame and shame emerge. For example, when statements such as "FASD is entirely preventable" are used, the assumption of blame is implicit alongside the assumptions of self-determination and choice. However, when research embeds Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing and honours family, kinship and culture, community are engaged and share rich stories that inform health promotion and service delivery.

Discussions and Conclusions: Central to effective Aboriginal community-led initiatives to prevent and manage FASD is Aboriginal voice, partnership and self-determination. It is no surprise that narratives that are strengths-based, healing-informed, trauma aware, collaborative and grounded in Aboriginal ownership and understandings of health and wellbeing experience the most success and offer critical insights in breaking cycles of intergenerational trauma and FASD.