

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Associated Stressors in Young People with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Across the Justice and Child Protection Settings in Western Australia

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Introduction/Aims: Individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) are at risk of having adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), especially those with child protection (CP) and justice system (JS) involvement. This study explored the ACEs and associated stressors in individuals with FASD and compared the ACEs profiles of those who had been involved with the CP system only, JS only, both or neither.

Methods: Data on ACEs were obtained from retrospective file review and were coded against a standardised ACEs questionnaire. 211 participants (71.6% males) with FASD with a mean age of 11.12 (range=2-21) were included.

Results: Exposure to drinking/substance misuse at home (70.1%) and domestic violence (51.7%) were the two most common ACEs in the total sample. 83 (39%) reported four or more ACEs. Common associated stressors were CP involvement (69.7%), school disengagement (43.1%) and JS involvement (40.3%). Those who were involved with both the CP and JS were four to eleven times more likely than those without any involvement to report parental drinking/substance misuse at home, parental incarceration, exposure to domestic violence, emotional neglect and physical neglect.

Discussions and Conclusions: Young people with FASD experience high rates of life adversity. Those with dual involvement with the CP and JS were more vulnerable to ACEs than those without any. These findings highlight that prevention, intervention and early diagnosis of FASD are important to reduce the negative effects of ACEs. It is also crucial for clinicians/educators/CP/justice workers to routinely screen for and provide psychoeducation around ACEs to promote better outcome in these children.

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