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Perspectives on FASD Prevention

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Northeast Alberta FASD Network

Lived Experience of FASD

The firsthand experiences of individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), reveals that those with FASD have various challenges that affect their daily functioning and caregivers face worry, anxiety, social stigma, and a lack of assistance.In addition, the perspectives of professionals with expertise in working with persons with FASD are crucial as they might influence the availability of early intervention and assistance.

It is beneficial to analyze the current body of research to comprehend the way individuals with FASD perceive their daily lives. The research study, Lived Experience of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, carried out a comprehensive examination of the existing literature on the firsthand encounters of individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), their caregivers, and professionals dealing with them. The aim was to gain insights into their daily experiences to enhance the effectiveness of services provided.

Early identification and assistance are crucial for individuals with FASD, as they face significant challenges. Professionals play an important role in giving direct support to persons afflicted by FASD; nevertheless, many professionals feel unprepared and lack the necessary training, organizational support, and confidence to assist those with FASD.

A recent poll of educators discovered that while most were aware of FASD, they had significant gaps in their understanding and very few felt well prepared to educate someone with FASD. Being unprepared may contribute to the difficulty of obtaining a diagnosis and the lack of support that people with FASD receive, even though early intervention is critical to success.

Four overarching themes emerged from this analysis:

- There are highs and lows to parenting a child with FASD.
- People with FASD face many obstacles in their daily life.
- People with FASD are cognizant of their impairment.
- One of the biggest obstacles is a lack of understanding and assistance.

The perspectives of professionals having expertise in working with persons affected by FASD are crucial as they might influence the availability of early intervention and assistance.

UNDERSTANDING LEVEL 3 FASD PREVENTION

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevention at Level 3 is centered on delivering respectful, comprehensive support to pregnant women grappling with alcohol use and related health, social, and financial issues. This level of prevention aims to provide a holistic approach, addressing the complex needs of women to ensure they receive the necessary care without judgment.

Service Provision and Delivery

In urban areas, support for these women often combines outreach services with accessible "one-stop" drop-in centers, making it easier for them to receive the help they need in one location. In smaller or rural settings, a network of community-based services provides similar support, ensuring that women everywhere can access help regardless of their location.

These services offer support for a variety of factors that influence alcohol use among pregnant women. A critical component of this approach is the removal of barriers that prevent women from seeking care. By employing a culturally sensitive, non-judgmental approach and providing comprehensive services, these programs help to reduce the stigma and logistical obstacles that often deter women from accessing care.

Innovations in Treatment

Services that adhere to a harm reduction model are particularly effective. They acknowledge and accept the pace and nature of the changes that women can realistically make, fostering an environment where women feel supported in their journey towards better health. Additionally, addiction treatments tailored specifically for mothers and pregnant women are crucial. Traditional addiction programs often do not cater to the specific needs of these women, such as allowing time for rest and prenatal care, but more promising, mother-centric programs are being developed to better meet their needs.

The Impact of Level 3 Prevention

The benefits of Level 3 FASD prevention are substantial. Women who engage with these services often experience significant improvements in physical health, nutrition, housing stability, and substance use treatment outcomes. Furthermore, these services enhance women's parenting capabilities and increase the likelihood that they can retain custody of their children. The support provided also positively impacts the birth weights and overall health of their babies, contributing to the prevention of FASD.

Holistic and Supportive Approach

An integral part of this prevention level is ensuring that women do not fear the loss of their children due to their substance use. By fostering a supportive environment where a variety of services are available to both mother and child, these programs help women build a safer, healthier future for themselves and their children. The approach is health-oriented and involves specialists in women's health, prenatal care, addiction treatment, and child welfare, among others.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Canadian health service providers and planners are actively refining and implementing these comprehensive strategies to prevent FASD. The use of a structured framework for prevention allows for tailored support that meets the diverse needs of women at different stages of their lives. The ongoing commitment of more advocates, service providers, and communities to this cause is crucial. It is hoped that continued research and evaluation will further enhance the effectiveness of these preventive measures, providing a robust foundation for future initiatives aimed at supporting women and preventing FASD.

Reducing the Impact.

PCAP is an evidence-based three-year home visitation program aimed at preventing future alcohol- and drug-exposed births.

The Parent-Child Assistance Program (PCAP) offers specialized, holistic support during and after pregnancy for those experiencing difficulties with substance use and other health and social issues. The primary goal of PCAP is to prevent further births of alcohol/drug exposed children. We either motivate individuals to stop drinking/using drugs during pregnancy or help people who cannot stop using to avoid becoming pregnant.

To avoid adverse childhood events that lead to additional FASD, children with FASD need permanent, early, and long-term safe placements. Interdisciplinary, collaborative, systems-based, and multi-level solutions are needed to support FASD adolescents and teens, who often have several workers.

PCAP serves women who are at risk of abusing substances and who are pregnant, at risk of becoming pregnant, and/or up to six months postpartum.

PCAP GOALS

Support participants to reduce or stop alcohol and/or drug use during pregnancy.
Support participants to increase their wellness by creating self-determined goals.
Support healthy pregnancies and lives for the participants and their children.
Support community connections.

Participants may be accepted into the PCAP program if they:

- Are pregnant or up to six-months postpartum,
- Have used alcohol and/or drugs during pregnancy and,
- Have not successfully engaged with other service providers.
- A participant may also meet secondary intake criteria depending on program availability if they:
- Have delivered a child with a diagnosis of FASD.
- Are continuing to use alcohol.
- Are in childbearing years.

PCAP participants are supported in the program even during periods of relapse or continued use of substances.

SHANAKAY FOSTER - PCAP

Parent Child Assistance Program

Shanakay Foster, RSW, is the Parent Child mentor for the PCAP program with (NEAFAN) Northeast Alberta FASD Network. She graduated from the Social Work program at Keyano two years ago and since then has been working with individuals affected by FASD. Shanakay aims to advocate tirelessly for families and continues to foster collaborative relationships with service agencies. Using a trauma-based practice and client-centered approach, Shanakay ensures that vulnerable individuals receive the best care and support they need. Her goal is to uphold the highest ethical standards while delivering exceptional care and contribute to the healing and well-being of families. Shanakay is unwavering in her commitment to delivering exceptional care at the prevention and intervention level.

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