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A Relational Approach to FASD Prevention

NEAFAN

Northeast Alberta FASD Network

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FASD PREVENTION A Relational Approach

Pregnancy provides a vital opportunity for healthcare providers to assist women in enhancing their health and reducing substance use. However, marginalized women face numerous barriers, such as trauma, poverty, mental health issues, polydrug use, malnutrition, housing problems, and physical health concerns. Addressing these complex challenges is essential for preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

Successful programs emphasize a strong therapeutic relationship between women and their service providers, allowing for early engagement and intervention. Women benefit from supportive, respectful, and non-judgmental service settings that address their immediate needs, fostering engagement and encouraging return visits. Providing essential resources like food, safe housing, transportation, and childcare helps initiate engagement and build relationships.

Building trust with service providers is crucial and often takes 9-12 months. This trust is vital for sustained engagement and successful treatment. Developing new relationships with peers in similar situations can reduce isolation and support long-term recovery. Women are more likely to seek and complete therapy programs that focus on strengthening the mother-child link and enhancing parenting abilities.

Investing in women's health before pregnancy highlights their worthiness of care and discussing birth control options can reduce unintended pregnancies. During pregnancy, supporting overall health and using harm reduction approaches can improve outcomes.
Continued support after childbirth is critical for maintaining positive changes and preventing relapse, with ongoing engagement for at least three years postpartum being essential.

Collaboration among various service providers enhances client retention, outcomes, and program effectiveness. Comprehensive support minimizes the risk of child apprehension and helps women build trust with service providers.

Relational approaches that prioritize respect, empowerment, and equality must be implemented. Providing flexible, individualized program timelines and offering comprehensive services that address women's complex lives and basic needs are crucial. Employing strengths-based approaches that involve women in planning and decision-making fosters supportive relationships with service providers to strengthen mother-infant bonds.

Creating peer support opportunities reduces isolation and encourages positive transitions. Focusing on early engagement and intervention during preconception, prenatal, and postpartum periods is necessary. Developing robust aftercare programs helps prevent relapse and encouraging early and regular contact with services for children with prenatal alcohol exposure ensures long-term stability.

Overall, a relational approach to FASD prevention emphasizes supportive, trust-based relationships between women and service providers, peers, and their children. This approach, combined with comprehensive and flexible services, addresses the complex challenges faced by marginalized women and improves outcomes for both women and their children.
Read Issue Paper here.

"Building trust with service providers is crucial."

The Unique Complexity OF FASD

The Unique Complexity of FASD

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a preventable disorder caused by maternal alcohol intake during pregnancy. Despite the preventability, some pregnant women's alcohol use is influenced by various factors such as early life trauma, traumatic events, intimate partner violence, and mental health issues.

These factors contribute to the intergenerational impact of FASD, highlighting the necessity of finding holistic solutions that address systemic injustices affecting multiple generations.

FASD encompasses a range of effects, including developmental delays, learning disabilities, and behavioral problems. The disorder is associated with several forms of stigma, including cultural and maternal stigmas, which make it harder for people with FASD to receive treatment and often worsen their symptoms. These stigmas contribute to the marginalization of affected individuals and their families, further complicating their access to necessary support and resources.

Addressing the high rates of adversity, such as perinatal and neonatal trauma, adverse childhood experiences, and co-occurring mental health disorders, requires a comprehensive approach. This approach should be prompt, thorough, family-centered, and ongoing. Caregivers of individuals with FASD often experience significant challenges, including high levels of stress, isolation, and a lack of social support. These challenges underscore the need for targeted interventions to support caregivers and reduce the overall burden on families.

To mitigate the impact of FASD, several strategies can be implemented. Increasing awareness of FASD and its prevention is crucial. Public health campaigns and education programs can inform the public and healthcare providers about the risks of alcohol consumption during pregnancy and the importance of proper maternal nutrition. Providing support to caregivers through community programs, support groups, and mental health services is essential in alleviating their stress and improving the quality of care for individuals with FASD.

Educating professionals, including healthcare workers, educators, and social workers, about FASD and its implications can improve the diagnosis, treatment, and support for affected individuals. Creating services that consider the influence of FASD and are tailored to meet the unique needs of individuals with the disorder is vital for effective intervention.

Reducing stigma and increasing resilience require recognizing the abilities and potential of individuals with FASD and their families. By promoting their strengths and providing inclusive opportunities, we can foster a supportive environment that enhances their quality of life. Comprehensive strategies that address prevention, support, education, and stigma reduction are essential in reducing the prevalence of FASD and improving outcomes for affected individuals and their families.

Read Research Paper here

> "Increasing awareness of and its prevention is crucial"

Nutritional Supplements and FASD

The Impact of Alcohol and Nutrition on Fetal Development: The Role of Omega-3 and Choline

Alcohol consumption during pregnancy is known to produce significant cognitive and physical impairments in children, collectively referred to as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). FASD encompasses a range of effects, including developmental delays, learning disabilities, and behavioral problems. One of the critical aspects often overlooked is how alcohol consumption lowers maternal nutrition, thereby intensifying the adverse consequences on fetal development. Proper pre- and post-natal nourishment has been shown to boost mental functions, including learning and memory, benefiting both the mother and the child.

Research indicates that cognitive function and memory may significantly improve with the supplementation of omega-3 fatty acids and regular exercise. Omega-3 fatty acids, commonly found in fish oil, play a crucial role in brain development and function. These essential fats contribute to the formation of cell membranes in the brain, influencing the ability of brain cells to communicate effectively.

FASD is recognized as the most common avoidable neurodevelopmental disorder with long-term effects. The disorder underscores the importance of abstaining from alcohol during pregnancy to prevent its occurrence. Moreover, inadequate nutrition during pregnancy can negatively impact brain circuitry, further exacerbating developmental issues.

Preclinical studies suggest promising interventions to mitigate brain damage resulting from prenatal alcohol exposure. For instance, postnatal supplementation with omega-3 and choline has shown potential in enhancing learning, memory, and behavior in affected individuals. Choline, a nutrient found in eggs and meat, is vital for brain development and neurotransmitter function. These studies provide hope for improving outcomes in children exposed to alcohol in utero.

Healthcare workers play a pivotal role in addressing this issue by being adequately trained in prenatal nutrition. Public health campaigns focusing on nutrition and brain development are essential to raise awareness and promote healthy practices among pregnant women. Additionally, ensuring that high-risk populations have access to sufficient food is crucial for preventing FASD and other related disorders.

Effective dietary supplements for pregnant women can provide substantial benefits, not only for the developing fetus but also for the mother. These supplements, when combined with a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle choices, can significantly improve pregnancy outcomes and long-term health for both mother and child.

In conclusion, the prevention of FASD hinges on comprehensive strategies that include abstaining from alcohol during pregnancy, promoting optimal nutrition, and considering supplementation with essential nutrients like omega-3 and choline. By addressing these factors, we can work towards reducing the prevalence of FASD and enhancing the health and well-being of future generations.

Read Research Paper

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Let's Talk The Prevention Conversation

It's time to talk about alcohol and pregnancy

Amy Tobin, B.Ed, is the FASD Prevention Conversation Facilitator with NEAFAN (Northeast Alberta FASD Network) and an adoptive mother of two. Prior to motherhood, she was an elementary school teacher with the Fort McMurray Public School District for six years. Her passion for FASD, and its prevention, began nine years ago when she became a mother through adoption and was introduced, personally, to the beauty and perplexity of parenting those with prenatal alcohol exposure. Since then, she has dedicated much of her time to learning about, and educating others, on the effects of alcohol during pregnancy and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Her approach is one that takes into consideration the complexities that adoption, generational, and cultural trauma can play within FASD.

Prevention Conversation

The Prevention Conversation program aims to raise awareness of FASD and Prevention among target populations including Healthcare and Social Service Providers, Women of Childbearing Age(18-45), Partners, Families and Friends.

The Project is geared towards highlighting the importance of screening all women in child bearing age for alcohol use and risks associated with FASD, improve supports for these women and promote involvement of community members and primary care providers.

The Prevention Conversation is aimed at encouraging a community wide awareness of FASD and prevention, developing the skills within the community to engage in non-judgmental, empathetic conversations about alcohol use during pregnancy. The Prevention Conversation is centered around increasing our knowledge of FASD, training service providers on the use of screening tools to engage women in the Prevention Conversation.

To book a Prevention Conversation presentation, please contact:

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