

## **(I) RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS FOR FAS/FAE**

Most witnesses who appeared before the Sub-Committee stated that additional research needs to be done on the many aspects of FAS and FAE in Canada. The need for additional research is, to some extent, a truism in any field of science, medicine included. There are a number of areas which stand out, however.

The first point of concern is that the incidence of FAS and FAE in Canada is not known with any accuracy. Health and Welfare Canada cited statistics generated in other countries to suggest that the incidence of FAS in Canada is between one and two cases per 1,000 live births. A number of studies have shown that the incidence of FAS is much higher among certain sub-populations, notably among some First Nations communities and in certain inner-city groups. The incidence of FAE is generally thought to be much higher than FAS, at least three times as high, according to Dr. Casiro.

Our first recommendation is that Health and Welfare Canada should develop better information on the incidence of both FAS and FAE in Canada, in the population generally and among high-risk populations.

### **RECOMMENDATION NO. 13**

**The Sub-Committee recommends that Health and Welfare Canada, in cooperation with provincial and territorial health departments, design and carry out an epidemiological study to determine the incidence of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and Foetal Alcohol Effects in Canada, among the Canadian population in general and in target sub-populations known, or suspected, to be at higher risk for such conditions.**

The diagnosis of foetal alcohol effects, in particular, is said to be very difficult because the affected children do not show the overt physical symptoms that characterize FAS children. Nonetheless, these children may be seriously affected with learning disabilities and behavioural problems. If the underlying cause of the problems is not identified, treatment will be delayed, to everyone's cost and disadvantage.

Ms. Wendy Kemp, a Clinical Nurse Specialist with the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, told the Sub-Committee that accurate diagnosis of FAE children was necessary in order to be able to give them optimum help.

Assessment tools are necessary for health-care professionals to determine whether a patient is afflicted with FAE, or is suffering from some other illness:

"We have a lot of dual-diagnosed individuals, perhaps depression plus addiction, or substance abuse or sexual abuse — that's what I mean by dual-diagnosed. We need to be able to screen and figure out how we can best help these individuals. Before we can do that, we have to find out what it is we're working with. Are they personality disordered or are they FAE? It makes a big difference in how we treat them." <sup>63</sup>

An assessment tool which health professionals can use to make accurate diagnoses of FAE individuals is essential to the determination of correct treatment and care. Assessment tools are questionnaires used to supply necessary information on which to base treatment programming. A universal screening tool would facilitate accurate diagnoses at different treatment centres.

<sup>63</sup> Proceedings, Issue 9, p. 32.