

"While there is still some question about the threshold in quantity and frequency of alcohol intake beyond which damage could occur to the foetus, there is no uncertainty about the dose response in more general terms, namely that risk of damage to the foetus increases as the level of alcohol to which the foetus is exposed increases . . . From a scientific viewpoint, no safe level of foetal alcohol exposure has been identified." ²⁰

Most witnesses agreed with the position that there is "no safe level" of alcohol that a woman can consume during pregnancy. The medical witnesses all recommended total abstinence by a pregnant woman to ensure that her baby would not be affected by either FAS or FAE. There was general agreement that greater amounts of alcohol are necessary to produce full-blown foetal alcohol syndrome than to produce foetal alcohol effects, or FAE.

It seems to be accepted that damage from alcohol can occur throughout the pregnancy, although the foetus is more susceptible during the first trimester. If the mother ceases drinking at any time during the pregnancy, there will be less risk of alcohol damage and the baby will be healthier than if she continued drinking throughout the nine months gestation period.

Dr. Oscar Casiro, representing the Manitoba Medical Association, made the following statement, agreeing that there is no safe amount of alcohol a pregnant woman can consume, suggesting at the same time that there might be a threshold for FAS, although it will not be the same for all women:

" . . . it appears (that) the end of the spectrum (of damage), the full-blown foetal alcohol syndrome, is caused when a woman drinks two to four drinks, or one to two ounces of absolute alcohol, a day during early pregnancy. There is no scientific evidence to show any amount of alcohol is safe for the foetus . . . heavy drinkers will have approximately 50% of their infants with foetal alcohol syndrome. Those mothers who drink two to four drinks a day have a 10% risk of having a child with foetal alcohol syndrome. We do not know why, with the same amount of alcohol, some babies will develop the full syndrome and others won't. That information is not available." ²¹

In contrast to the testimony of medical witnesses, and of Ms. Ferguson from Health and Welfare Canada, the Association of Canadian Distillers (ACD) spoke of FAS in terms of consumption of "abusive amounts of alcohol during . . . pregnancy". ²² The Brewers Association of Canada (BAC) also associated FAS with "abusive levels of consumption of alcohol." ²³ The BAC stated also that questions still exist about moderate consumption of alcohol during pregnancy, citing a 1991 paper by Forrest and co-workers in the *British Medical Journal* suggesting that consumption of about one drink per day is safe for a pregnant woman. ²⁴

The paper by Forrest and co-workers states that "it is recommended that pregnant women should drink no more than eight units of alcohol a week, the equivalent of about one drink a day . . . and only as much as this if abstinence is not feasible." ²⁵ Dr. Casiro testified to the Sub-Committee that he believed the study by Forrest and co-workers had significant methodological flaws. The witness was concerned that 30% of the children were not followed for the full 18-month term of the

²⁰ Proceedings, Issue 6, p. 4.

²¹ Proceedings, Issue 8, pp. 19, 27.

²² Proceedings, Issue 11, p. 4.

²³ Proceedings, Issue 8, p. 4.

²⁴ F. Forrest, *et al*, "Reported social alcohol consumption during pregnancy and infants' development at 18 months", *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 303, 6 July 1991, pp. 22-26.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 26.