

"The other point is that even if it were completely true and we did have a very high level of awareness, I am not sure 92% of the people is the figure we should be shooting for. I am not sure that is enough. It is still leaving quite a large number of people vulnerable. I think it should be 100%."<sup>54</sup>

Most witnesses who appeared before us believed that public awareness of FAS and FAE needs to be increased, particularly the latter. As we noted earlier, FAE typically presents a more subtle panoply of symptoms which are often not diagnosed, or not diagnosed correctly. Children born with FAE are damaged for life and, although some individuals will be able cope with their handicaps and live independent and productive lives, many will not. Dr. Casiro commented on this point:

"When you talk to people, what they seem to be aware of is that drinking excessive amounts of alcohol — heavy drinking — is damaging to the foetus. From my personal experience, people I've talked to don't seem to be aware that there is no known safe amount, that even small amounts of alcohol during pregnancy may be damaging to the foetus. There's a misconception, I believe, that only heavy drinking will affect the baby. That stems from the fact that for full-blown foetal alcohol syndrome to occur you need about two to four drinks a day, but a lesser amount of alcohol causes foetal alcohol effects. That's what people don't know about."<sup>55</sup>

The Angus Reid Group survey appears to provide support to Dr. Casiro's position on public awareness. As noted above, 62% of women responded that any level of alcohol consumption would damage a baby; the corollary is that 38% of Canadian women may believe that some level of alcohol consumption by a pregnant woman is both acceptable and safe. The Reid survey found that 13% of Canadian women believe that "only excessive consumption" will harm the baby, while 23% of those surveyed believe that "moderate consumption" (defined as one or two drinks a day) will not harm the baby.<sup>56</sup>

The Sub-Committee believes that these statistics from the Angus Reid survey are not reassuring about the level of awareness in Canadian society about FAS and FAE. The unanimous opinion expressed by the medical witnesses who appeared before us, including Health and Welfare Canada, is that there is no known safe level of consumption of alcohol for a pregnant woman. Until proof is forthcoming that there is an absolutely safe level of consumption, we hold with the majority view that a pregnant woman should abstain from alcohol for the entire course of her pregnancy.

The Sub-Committee makes two recommendations in this area, expressing our belief that more public awareness and education are required to deal with the risks posed to the foetus by maternal alcohol consumption.

#### **RECOMMENDATION NO. 10**

**The Sub-Committee recommends that Health and Welfare Canada, in cooperation with provincial and territorial health departments and with the National Advisory Committee on Alcohol and the Foetus, regularly review and evaluate current public awareness and education programs on the impacts of alcohol on the foetus. If current programs are judged to be appropriate and effective they should be maintained and expanded. If they are not, new programs should be developed and implemented to raise public awareness and knowledge of this issue.**

<sup>54</sup> Proceedings, Issue 9, p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> Proceedings, Issue 8, p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Angus Reid Group (1991)