

Dr. Christine Loock of Sunny Hill Hospital in Vancouver, an expert on FAS and FAE, gave the following testimony, describing three of her young patients to illustrate the special difficulties of FAE victims:

"What is most concerning are these three children, who have foetal alcohol effects. Even to me they are not recognizable by their physical features. They are not small in size. They do not have any recognizable birth defects that are consistent enough to call it foetal alcohol syndrome. But they have severe learning disabilities. These are the children who, paradoxically, will likely do worse. They are all children of alcoholic birth mothers. If they are not recognized, then these are the children who end up as victims within our criminal justice system. They'll be victims within our school system for not receiving proper learning assistance related to their learning disability. They end up with very poor self-esteem, affective disorders and the loss of productivity."¹¹

INCIDENCE OF FOETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME AND FOETAL ALCOHOL EFFECTS

The incidence of FAS and FAE in Canada is not known with precision, principally because of the diagnostic difficulties. Testimony from Health and Welfare Canada stated that average FAS incidence rates "estimated from U.S. and European studies are from less than one to over three cases per thousand live births", with much higher levels in certain "sub-populations of heavy drinkers and certain disadvantaged social groups, including aboriginal and African American populations." Canada has no national data on FAS and FAE; the incidence rate of FAS in the general population is estimated by Health and Welfare Canada to be between one and two per thousand live births.¹²

The Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse (CCSA) cited an estimate from a review of 19 epidemiological studies from around the world which indicated that the overall rate of FAS was 1.9 per 1,000 live births. A large-scale study in the United States by the Centers for Disease Control reported a rate of 1 per 1,000 live births. The CCSA testimony went on to state that:

"If this estimate was applied to Canada, it would indicate that between 400 and 500 children are born each year in Canada with FAS. This is, however, a very conservative estimate as it is based on the lowest estimated incidence rate and does not take into account the exceptionally high rate of FAS among aboriginal Canadians and possibly other socially disadvantaged groups."¹³

In some communities, notably in remote, rural communities, and in some aboriginal communities, the incidence rates for FAS are several orders of magnitude higher than the rate for Canada as a whole. There is evidence also that the incidence rates in some poor, inner city communities are also very high. Dr. Richard Jock of the Assembly of First Nations quoted incidence rates from British Columbia and the Yukon: "Dr. Asante did a study several years ago, I believe in 1983 and 1984, which described the incidence in Yukon for aboriginal groups of 46 per 1,000 and 26 per 1,000 for aboriginal people in northern British Columbia."¹⁴ Dr. Jock stated that the level of FAS and FAE among First Nations children represents a "crisis situation".¹⁵

Ms. Betty MacPhee, Manager of the YWCA's "Crabtree Corner", an emergency day-care and family drop-in centre in Vancouver's downtown east side, presented testimony to the Sub-Committee on the incidence of FAS and FAE among the inner city population that forms the

¹¹ Proceedings, Issue 10, p. 20.

¹² Proceedings, Issue 6, p. 5.

¹³ Proceedings, Issue 9, p. 5.

¹⁴ Proceedings, Issue 10, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.