

RECOMMENDATIONS

Foetal alcohol syndrome, or FAS, is an important health issue in Canada, and in Western nations generally where alcohol is widely consumed by adults of both sexes. Although the evidence for Canada is that fewer women than men consume beverage alcohol, drink less often, and consume smaller amounts, many women of child-bearing age are "social drinkers" and a small but significant number may be described as "problem" or "abusive" drinkers.

It is tempting for some to suggest that FAS is a threat only to the latter group, a small minority of women of child-bearing age, and it is certain that problem drinkers or alcoholics who are pregnant will place their unborn children at greater risk for FAS than occasional or social drinkers. The fact remains, however, that there is no known safe level of alcohol for a pregnant woman. There is a suggestion that some individuals may be more susceptible to foetal alcohol problems than are others.

The Sub-Committee has learned that foetal alcohol effects, or FAE, is much more prevalent than FAS, and is caused by a lower level of alcohol consumption by the mother. Individuals with FAE often encounter immense problems throughout their lives as a consequence of alcohol-induced brain damage. As the testimony presented to us shows, many have learning disabilities and severe behavioural problems and often run afoul of the criminal-justice system.

We believe that the problem of maternal drinking and impacts on the foetus is probably much more serious than many Canadians suspect. We feel it is important for Canadians, women and men, to understand that even moderate alcohol consumption during pregnancy places the child at risk. The principal conclusion we have reached on the basis of the evidence that we have seen and heard is that complete abstinence is the appropriate course for pregnant women.

The Sub-Committee has formulated twenty-one recommendations.

(A) NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ALCOHOL AND THE FOETUS

All witnesses before the Sub-Committee stated emphatically that alcohol consumption during pregnancy is a very serious issue and that the potential risks to the foetus merit a high profile. Several witnesses, including the Brewers Association of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations, and the Association of Canadian Distillers, believed that a National Action Committee on FAS and FAE should be formed. Such a committee could give a high profile to this issue, and could focus diverse energies and activities more effectively than is currently the case.

The Sub-Committee believes that a National Advisory Committee on Alcohol and the Foetus should be formed. Representation should be decided after consultation with the provinces and territories and with non-government organizations. We believe it is appropriate to have a national committee to concentrate on alcohol problems separate from drugs and other substances of abuse, because beverage alcohol is a legal product, its use deeply ingrained in our society and culture, and one whose use is widely advertised in the media. Because alcohol presents special problems, its use and abuse requires a special approach.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 1

The Sub-Committee recommends that the Minister of Health and Welfare Canada initiate discussions with the Provinces and Territories to create a National Advisory Committee on Alcohol and the Foetus. The Advisory Committee shall have a broad