

Causes and effects of fetal alcohol syndrome essay example

[Health & Medicine](#), [Alcoholism](#)



Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is a collective name given to physical and mental birth defects that are as a result of alcohol intake during pregnancy (Pytkowicz 32). Pregnancy is taken as an immensely precarious time for both the mother and the child. Although not harmful when taken in reasonable amounts, alcohol consumption is not advised during pregnancy. This depressant is taken for various beneficial reasons including relaxation and more importantly digestion. Nonetheless, alcohol has very damaging effects if abused, and these effects are exacerbated during pregnancy.

The main cause of Fetal alcohol syndrome is alcohol consumption.

Apparently, alcohol travels to the foetus through the placenta. An adult's body is able to metabolise and get rid of alcohol in a fairly short time (West117). However, the foetus takes a longer time to metabolise and get rid of alcohol. Research done on this subject over the years suggests that a foetus takes triple the time to metabolise the same amount of alcohol as an adult. The risk is proportional to the amount taken.

The toxicity of alcohol is thus more inherent in a foetus than it is in an adult. Research also suggests that alcohol affects the delivery of oxygen and nutrients to the foetus. The chemistry behind this is based on alcohol binding with the free molecules of oxygen, and destruction of nutrients such as proteins. It should be noted that these are imperative requirements for proper development of the foetus.

Optimal nutrition is necessary for Fetal growth, cell division, and development of the nervous system (Abel 121). Oxygen contributes to metabolic activities and respiration which also contributes to general body development. Alcohol interferes with this proper progress, leading to a

myriad of symptoms designated as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. As a depressant, alcohol affects the psychological and brain cell development of the foetus.

Effects of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

The main and most dangerous effect of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is brought about by the fact that alcohol is a depressant. This suppresses the activity of the central nervous system which controls all other activities in the foetus.

One of the resultant factors is the slow development of the brain cells (Pytkowicz 193). This in turn affects all the processes in the foetus such as; memory, attention, behaviour and reasoning. Mental disability is inevitable in this case. Secondary disabilities are then created as a result of the above.

It should be noted that cessation of brain activity leads to negative development in the pregnancy. This implies that there is no pregnancy as the foetus is metabolically dead. Alcohol is thus one of the main causes of still births (Abel 220). In case the brain activity slows down due to brain cell damage, then the foetus will develop much slower. As such, the baby is born prematurely and has a lower rate of survival. The survivors exhibit both the mental and physical characteristics of infants suffering from this syndrome.

Destruction of the central nervous system affects the development of neurones throughout the body. This is especially so during the first trimester where the pregnancy is developing at a great speed. Apparently, the neurones migrate abnormally and later fail to function. This effect is what is seen in the peripheral nervous system. As such, the infants suffer from neurological problems like epilepsy and seizures. They lack motor skills, gait, coordination and neuro- sensory capabilities such as hearing, talking and seeing.

The cognitive and psychological abilities are part of the effects of brain damage. These are largely as a result of first trimester damage resulting from alcohol intake. Communication, learning, social perception and impulse control become impossible. In other words, children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome cannot socialise or be with normal people. They do not perform normally. They need help to be able to perform their daily life activities. A very evident secondary effect of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is the physical malformations. First, there is the stunted Fetal growth. Infants suffering from this syndrome are usually shorter and of less weight than their healthy counterparts. Another physical manifestation is designated as craniofacial features. Apparently, this is a better term for the description of gross deformed features caused by skull damage as a result of improper development. These include; flattened nose groove, thinning of upper lip and a decrease in eye width. The head becomes significantly smaller otherwise known as a micro- cephally. This is associated with mental retardation because the brain does not get enough oxygen due to the minimised space (West 265). This also affects the self esteem of that child.

Alcohol being one of the legal drugs, it is ever present in our lives. It is readily available and thus easily acquired. However, it seems to play a nefarious role in an unborn foetus. It is thus imperative that every expectant woman should stay away from alcohol during pregnancy. This will lead to proper development of the foetus and thus a healthy baby.

Works Cited

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