

PRESS RELEASE/PERSVERKLARING
INTERNATIONAL FASD DAY: 9 SEPTEMBER 2023
INTERNASIONALE FASA DAG: 9 SEPTEMBER 2023

(FASD = Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders)
(FASA = Fetale Alkohol Spektrumafwykings)

Date/Datum	28 August(us) 2023
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Comment/Opmerking	Since Dr Leana Olivier (spokesperson of FARR) will be travelling abroad for work from 3 – 12 September it would be appreciated if you could contact her before the end of August should you wish to discuss anything with her or interview her. While she is out of the country colleagues will stand in for her. Aangesien Dr Leana Olivier (FARR media persoon) vanaf 3 – 12 September oorsee gaan wees vir werk, sal dit waardeer word indien u haar voor die einde van Augustus vir 'n bespreking of onderhoud kan kontak. Terwyl sy uitstedig is sal ander kollegas u kan te woord staan.

ENGLISH

When one deals with public health concerns such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) on a daily basis, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the scope of the problem in South Africa. One tends to become problem focussed. Since there is no doubt that FASD is a significant and pressing concern globally, but especially in South Africa, it is inevitable to speak about the related problems. It is however essential to take time to also acknowledge and identify the progress made to date.

Compared to the first international FASD Day in 1999, attended by 9 participants in Cape Town, the number of people eager to help, willing to share the message and voicing their support has grown exponentially. In the substance abuse field government, NGO's and civil society have come together over the years bringing about meaningful change in some communities. Whilst doing so, we are however deeply aware of the lack of resources for those living with FASD, their families and the support needed by women and community members in most communities where there are still no support programmes and hardly any resources.

Often focussing only on the numerous challenges linked to FASD, especially the management and prevention thereof, we need to step back to reflect on the impact of what we have achieved in our country since the first community research and intervention was conducted in 1997. At that stage FASD was an unknown condition in our country. Since the inception of the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR) in 1997, and a handful of other NGO's dedicated efforts has led to increased knowledge about FASD and the harmful effects of prenatal alcohol use, in some

communities. The reality is unfortunately that there is still so much more that needs to be done, so many community members still do not have access to information, services and support.

This year we want to encourage individuals and the community at large to go 'beyond all limits' in supporting, caring for and loving those affected.

While celebrating the positive, we cannot ignore the reality that South Africa has by far the highest FASD rate in the world. The World Health Organization estimates the global FASD prevalence rate to less than 1%. In South Africa, research done by the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR) in 5 of the 9 provinces, revealed rates as high as 282/1000 (28%) in some communities in the Northern Cape Province. The Western Cape Province has areas with rates as high as 310/1000 (31%) (FASER-SA report).

FASD can only be caused by alcohol exposure during pregnancy, so if we can prevent any alcohol use in the 9 months of pregnancy, we can prevent FASD. The harm that we can prevent includes organ damage, such as brain damage, leading to life-long learning and behavioural challenges. This often only becomes apparent when the child goes to school and, in South Africa, it is one of the leading causes of early school dropout. Therefore, our message is that "*no alcohol is safe at any time during pregnancy*". Even small amounts of alcohol have the potential to cause harm.

To spread this message and to prevent FASD, FARR has completed 18 FASD Prevalence Studies in the Free State, Gauteng, as well as the Western -, Eastern -, Northern Cape Provinces since its establishment in 1997. FARR currently has 13 community project sites situated in the Free State, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape and our Training Academy operates nationally. To address this serious health condition, FARR follows a whole of society approach to support communities across South Africa. To do so FARR undertakes research through FASD prevalence studies; support pregnant mothers through our Healthy Mother Healthy Baby© Programme; facilitates intervention and support programmes such as a community-based programme for preschool-children and their caregivers, special needs learners, adolescents and senior citizens respectively; and offer training and awareness initiatives to communities and professionals. The main objectives of these interventions are to increase the knowledge about alcohol harm amongst community members and service providers (such as health professionals, social workers, and educators) and to provide them with the necessary skills to address the multitude of problems caused by alcohol abuse in their communities.

We need to share the FASD prevention message early and as often as possible. It is tempting to make alcohol use during pregnancy the pregnant woman's responsibility, but that ignores the reality faced by millions of South Africans. We also turn a blind eye to fact that South Africans are the highest per capita alcohol users in Africa and amongst the highest in the world. If children as young as 8 are using alcohol, and girls younger than 14 are falling pregnant, we must ask ourselves if we are doing enough. "Just say no" is a catchy slogan, but it means little to someone battling with substance abuse, facing gender-based violence, unemployment, poverty and more. It also ignores the lived reality of so many men and women, including pregnant women, trying to self-medicate while living with trauma, untreated mental health issues or who are just trying to cope with toxic stress.

Given the scale of the FASD problem in South Africa and the effects thereof on the lives of individuals, families, and our country we need to take collective action in South Africa to go 'beyond all limits' in raising awareness. We therefore call on all to reflect on this and to share the message of "*no alcohol is safe during pregnancy*" not only on International FASD Day, but to continue to inform and support pregnant women in our immediate circle of friends and family not to use alcohol during pregnancy. This year on the 9th of September, commit yourself to spreading awareness

about the risks of FASD, but also commit yourself to go 'beyond all limits' to love and support mothers-to-be during their pregnancies. Understand their struggles and stand by them, that is how you do harm reduction!

AFRIKAANS

Wanneer 'n mens daaglikse met openbare gesondheidsuitdagings soos Fetale Alkohol Spektrum Afwykings (FASA) te doen het, is dit te verstane dat die omvang van die probleem in Suid-Afrika oorweldigend kan raak. Die voor-die-handliggende reaksie is om probleem-gefokusd te raak. FASA wek ongetwyfeld groot internasionale kommer, maar die probleem in Suid-Afrika is fenomenaal en het 'n reuse impak op gesinne, gemeenskappe en ons land.

Die eerste Internasionale FASA dag is op 9 September 1999 herdenk. In Suid-Afrika het 9 deelnemers in Kaapstad vergader, gretig om te help, gewillig om die voorkomingsboodskap uit te dra en om sodoende FASA te help voorkom. Oor die jare het regeringsdepartemente, NGO's en gemeenskapsorganisasies reeds beduidende veranderinge in sommige gemeenskappe teweeggebring. Ten spyte hiervan is ons intens bewus van die gebrek aan dienste en ondersteuning vir diegene wat met FASA leef, hul families en die ondersteuning wat nodig word.

Die eerste gemeenskapsnavorsing in Suid-Afrika is in 1997 deur die Stigting vir Alkoholverwante Navorsing (FARR/Foundation for Alcohol Related Research) gedoen. Op hierdie stadium was FASA 'n totaal onbekende toestand in ons land. Sedert die stigting van FARR (1997) het die organisasie, en 'n handvol ander NGO's en vrywilligers hulle beywer om die publiek bewus te maak van die gevare van voorgeboortelike alkoholgebruik en FASA. Die werklikheid is egter dat daar steeds soveel is om te doen, menige gemeenskapslede het steeds nie toegang tot inligting, dienste en ondersteuning nie.

Vanjaar, met die 26ste herdenking van Internasionale FASA dag, wil ons die publiek aanmoedig om individue wat reeds aangetas is deur FASA en hul familielede te ondersteun en om terselfdertyd te help om hul eie gesinne, familielede en vriende te beskerm teen die moontlike geboorte van nog kinders met FASA.

Suid-Afrika het by verre die hoogste FASA voorkomssyfer in die wêreld. Die Wêreldgesondheidsorganisasie beraam dat die internasionale FASA koers minder as 1% is. In Suid-Afrika, gebasseer op navorsing gedoen deur FARR, is die voorkomssyfers so hoog soos 28% (282/1000) in sommige Noord-Kaapse gemeenskappe en 31% (310/1000) in sommige Wes-Kaapse gemeenskappe (FASER-SA).

FASA word veroorsaak deur voorgeboortelike alkoholblootstelling. Die alkohol het 'n teratogeniese ('giftige') effek op die ontwikkelende selle van die ongebore baba (fetus) en kan lei tot orgaanskade, soos breinskade, wat presenteer as lewenslange leer- en gedragsprobleme. Hierdie skade word soms eers duidelik wanneer die kind skoolgaande ouderdom bereik. In Suid-Afrika is FASA gevolglik een van die grootste oorsake van vroeë skoolverlating. Die FASA-voorkomingsboodskap is dus *"dit is nie veilig om alkohol enige tyd tydens swangerskap te gebruik nie"*. Selfs klein hoeveelhede alkohol het die potensiaal om skade te veroorsaak.

Om die boodskap uit te dra en FASA te voorkom, het FARR sedert 1997 'n totaal van 18 FASA Voorkomsstudies in die Vrystaat, Gauteng, asook die Wes-, Noord- en Oos-Kaapprovinsies voltooi. FARR het tans 13 gemeenskapsprojeksentra in die Vrystaat, Wes-, Noord- en Oos-Kaapprovinsies en die FARR Opleidingsakademie bied opleiding oor die hele Suid-Afrika aan. Ten einde hierdie ernstige toestand aan te spreek, betrek FARR die hele gemeenskap in so 'n projekarea.

Navorsingsbevindinge word gebruik om uitkomsgebaseerde programme soos die Gesonde Moeder Gesonde Baba© Program aan te bied, waar swanger vroue ondersteun word om gesonder en alkoholvrye swangerskappe en babas te hê. Gemeenskapsbasseerde programme vir voorskoolse kinders en hul moeders, leerders met leeruitdagings, ondersteuningsprogramme vir adolessente en ouer persone, as primêre versorgers van klein kinders, word ook aangebied. Opleiding aan professionele persone, soos gesondheidspersoneel, onderwysers, maatskaplike werkers, ens., werkzaam in die projekareas fasiliteer voortgesette dienslewering. Die hoofdoelwitte van hierdie inisiatiewe is om meer kennis rakende die skade wat alkohol kan aanrig, en die aanleer van vaardighede om die veelvuldige probleme veroorsaak deur alkoholmisbruik, in gemeenskappe te kan aanspreek.

Dit is noodsaaklik om die FASA voorkomingsboodskap gereeld met soveel as moontlik mense te deel. Natuurlik word die blaam van alkoholgebruik op die skouers van swanger vroue geplaas, maar dit misken die verantwoordelikheid van die vader van die ongebore kind, haar familie en vriende wat haar behoort te ondersteun om 'n alkoholvrye swangerskap te hê. Ons moet die besef dat Suid-Afrikaners van die hoogste alkoholgebruikers in Afrika en die res van die wêreld is. Kinders so jonk soos 8 jaar is reeds gereelde alkoholgebruikers en tienerswangerskappe met moeders so jonk as 14-jaar is nie ongewoon nie. Ons moet onself vra of ons werklik genoeg doen om die probleem te help voorkom. “*Sê net nee*” klink dalk na 'n maklike antwoord, maar vir iemand wat middelmisbruik, geslagsgeweld, werkloosheid, armoede en meer, in die gesig staar, is dit beslis nie maklik nie. Dit ignoreer ook die werklikheid van so baie mans en vroue, insluitend swanger vroue, wat probeer om net deur die dag te kom (te “cope”) deur alkohol as 'n vorm van selfmedikasie te gebruik. Sodoende poog hulle om onverwerkte trauma, geestesongesteldheid en toksiese stress te probeer hanteer.

Gegewe die erns van die FASA probleem in Suid-Afrika en die effek daarvan op die lewens van individue, families en ons land, is dit gebiedende noodsaaklik dat ons alles in ons vermoëns doen om meer mense bewus te maak van die toestand. Ons doen dus 'n beroep op almal om die voorkomingsboodskap van “*dit is nie veilig om alkohol enige tyd tydens swangerskap te gebruik nie*” wyd en syd te deel. Hierdie is nie net 'n boodskap vir Internasionale FASA dag nie, maar ons moet deurentyd swanger vroue in ons familie en vriendekringe hieraan herinner en hulle ondesteun om alkoholvrye swangerskappe te hê.

Vanjaar, op 9 September, beywer jouself om hierdie bewusmakingsboodskap uit te dra en om moeders-in-wording die nodige ondersteuning te gee. Toon begrip vir hulle uitdagings, en ondersteun hulle, dit is hoe almal kan bydra om die skade van alkohol te verminder.