

Pregnancy, Alcohol, and Trauma-informed Practice

Information for Service Providers

Current or past experiences of violence and trauma are one of the major reasons why a woman may continue to drink throughout her pregnancy. Being a “trauma-informed” service provider means learning to see every aspect of your service or program from the perspective of a woman who has experienced or is experiencing violence or trauma.

What is trauma?

Trauma can result from early experiences in life such as child abuse, neglect, and witnessing violence as well as later experiences such as violence, accidents, natural disaster, war and sudden unexpected loss. Trauma results from experiences that overwhelm an individual’s capacity to cope.

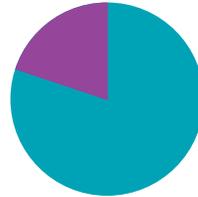
- ▶ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a diagnosis used to describe one type of mental health response that can result from trauma.
- ▶ Using substances to cope is very common amongst women with current or past experiences of trauma.

A strong relationship: violence, trauma and FASD

In a study of 80 mothers who had given birth to a child with FASD:



▶ 95% had been seriously sexually, physically, or emotionally abused as a child or adult



▶ 80% had a major mental illness, with the most prevalent (77%) being Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



▶ 72% felt unable to reduce their alcohol use because they were in an abusive relationship

Changing the conversation

Working from a trauma-informed perspective means changing how we think and talk about alcohol use during pregnancy.

“Why is this woman continuing to drink alcohol and placing her child at risk of FASD?”



“Even though she knows the facts, there’s a reason she’s still drinking. I wonder....”

“She doesn’t care about her baby.”



“She’s making decisions to keep herself and her baby safe.”

“I just need to show her how bad drinking during pregnancy is.”



“I need to show her that it’s safe for her to share what’s happening in her life and that I am able to support her.”

“Her drinking is a problem.”



“Her drinking is an attempt to cope with problems.”

“What is wrong with this woman?”



“What happened to this woman?”

Adapted with permission from the BC Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health. For more information on their work visit: Coalescing on Women and Substance Use • www.coalescing-vc.org

To read a short information package on this topic which includes information on what you can do to help as a service provider, where to make a referral in Manitoba, and much more, visit manitoba.ca/healthychild/fasd/resources.html

