

An Interdisciplinary Journal

Honoring the Voices, Perspectives and Knowledges of First Peoples through Research, Critical Analyses, Stories, Standpoints and Media Reviews

Editorial

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This special edition of *The First Peoples Child & Family Review* explores the social issue of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) from the perspectives, experiences and needs of Aboriginal peoples. It recognizes that the context of FASD in Aboriginal communities is unique, and cannot be properly acknowledged or addressed through generalized studies and services. As the articles in this edition illustrate, the issue and experience of Aboriginal peoples and FASD must be understood within the context of colonization and its intergenerational impacts. Without this critical lens, research findings and service recommendations may be inappropriate to Aboriginal families or communities. Mainstream programs developed from a Euro-Western perspective may conflict with Aboriginal worldviews. The articles in this edition portray the human experience of struggles with alcohol, the role of history and trauma in adverse life outcomes as well as the existence of socioeconomic disparities. Experiences with child welfare and legal systems are chronicled, disruptions, difficulties and repercussive impacts of secondary disabilities. Along with the adversities, however, are powerful themes of hope, healing, promising practices, capabilities, and strength found through caring relationships.

The edition begins with a contextual overview. Steven Koptie refers to alcohol as “the great destroyer”, identifying the historical legacy of alcohol and the challenges faced by men, women and children living with FASD. He emphasizes the power of Indigenous Nations to stop the damage and revitalize the “good minds” of people into the future. Christine Werk, Xinjie Cui and Suzanne Tough examine FASD prevalence for children under the age of six living off reserve from the 2006 Aboriginal Children Survey. They identify the concern that one in four children in care have a diagnosis of FASD, and indicate that adverse life experiences and poverty are critical factors in FASD outcomes. Andrew Wilson, in a historical review of FASD highlights its’ positioning within a medical paradigm, and highlights the need for a shift to a social justice paradigm that is culturally sensitive. He further identifies the need for education on FASD to be embedded in social work curriculum and for human service workers be trained in intervention.

The issue then turns to explore specific issues and concerns faced by Aboriginal children, youth and families living with FASD. Authors explore topics related to the child welfare and justice systems, parenting and gender. Linda Burnside and Don Fuchs, presents the voices of 20 youth rarely heard, who face “dual challenges of being in child welfare care and coping with their disability”. Transition planning for youth “bound by the clock” is a particular struggle because of the developmental dismaturity and neurobehavioral problems experienced by youth, who continue to need support into adulthood and over their lifespan. The need to support placement stability and maintaining strong relationships with caregivers were identified as important foundations for youth in care with FASD.

Billy Joe Rogers, Kaitlyn McLachan and Ronald Roesch present research results suggesting that the inclusion of cultural and spiritual supports in the justice system hold value in promoting resilience and positive outcomes and for youth with FASD. The importance of the relationships between youth and caregivers are identified as a critical resource, as these relationships can positively impact psychological wellbeing and influence a decrease in offending behaviors for youth.

Peter Choate offers a critical examination of the role of Parenting Capacity Assessments for parents who themselves have FASD, and challenges the dominant perception that individuals with disabilities are not capable of parenting. The critical point is that FASD is not generally well understood as a spectrum disorder with a range of capacities. Tasnim Nathoo and colleagues profile four programs for pregnant and early parenting women who use alcohol and substances. These programs operate from an Indigenous knowledge framework, appreciating that FASD is a complex health problem and intervention strategies must consider harm reduction, cultural safety, violence and offering trauma informed care.

Deborah Rutman offers insight to promising practices and highlights the voices of 13 women living with FASD, sharing the results of a qualitative research project that included the voices of women participants, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Rutman presents a wholistic, wheel-based framework that situates women’s experiences in the context of their lives and looks positively at ‘what works’ for women. Erin Atkinson and colleagues describe the process of creating a quilt through research involving the Parent Child Assistance Program (PCAP), a home visitation program for women with a history of alcohol and drug abuse. The authors explore how the experience impacted both the participants and the researchers, and discuss how the study might inform future community-based research projects involving front-line workers in FASD prevention and support programs.

The final three articles take us to the Northwest Territories and profile the Brightening Our Home Fires Project that took place between 2010 -2012 using Photovoice, a form of participatory action research. This trio of articles begins with an examination of the literature on FASD and child welfare engagement and provides a model that considers three key factors: alcohol, trauma and child welfare as contributing to the challenges associated with responding to FASD. The second article highlights this exploratory research and the value of Photovoice as an approach to meaningful engagement and shares the photos of women who experience homelessness in Yellowknife. The third article, “Healing through Photography”, is a creative piece offered by community leader Annie Goose from Ulukhaktok, an Inuit community. The photos represented speak volumes about values such as community, family, tradition, culture and healing.