

IHS/BIA/BIE/SAMHSA

**Action Summit
for Suicide Prevention**

“Partnering to Protect the Circle of Life”

August 1-4, 2011

Scottsdale, Arizona

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders and Suicidality

August 3, 2011

- Albert Allick, M.D.
- Morgan Fawcett
- Carolyn Hartness
- Michael Harris
- Kathryn Kelly
- Suzie Kuerschner

Suicide Risk Among Individuals with FASD

- U.S. Surgeon General's Report (1999) identified 16 suicide risk factors
- 8 of the 16 are congruent with characteristics or common life experience of someone with FASD:
 - Mental health disorders
 - Substance abuse disorders
 - Impulsivity and/or aggressive tendencies
 - History of trauma/abuse
 - Job or financial loss
 - Relational or social loss
 - Lack of social support or sense of isolation
 - Barriers to accessing medical and psychiatric care

Suicide Risk Among Individuals with FASD

- The other 8 risk factors could apply depending on the clinical case:
 - Previous suicide attempt
 - Family history of suicide
 - Easy access to lethal means
 - Hopelessness
 - Some major physical illnesses
 - Local clusters of suicide that have a contagious influence or influence of significant people who have died by suicide
 - Stigma associated with help-seeking behavior
 - Certain cultural & religious beliefs

Adult Suicide Attempts: FASD vs. Intellectual Disabilities vs. U.S. population



¹Streissguth, Barr, Kogan, and Bookstein, 1996. Understanding the Occurrence of Secondary Disabilities in Clients with FAS & FAE. Final Report to the CDC, p. 35. ²Attempt rate for adults with an Intellectual Disability in mixed clinical & community samples (Hardan and Sahl, 1999; Lunsy, 2004). ³U.S lifetime rate of suicide attempts (1990-1992 National Comorbidity Study; Kessler, Borges, and Walters, 1999).

Suicide Intervention/Prevention

- Recognize client is at increased risk for suicide
- Refer client for mental health evaluation/treatment
 - Alert provider about possible cognitive issues
- Standard suicide assessment protocols apply
 - Modify to accommodate neuropsychological deficits and communication impairments
 - Instead of: How does the future look to you?
 - Ask: What are you going to do tomorrow? Next week?
 - Check for disconnect between seriousness of the suicidal behavioral and the level of intent to die
 - Obtain family/collateral input

Suicide Intervention/Prevention

- **Intervene to reduce risk**
 - **Address basic needs and increase stability**
 - **Treat depression**
 - **Teach distraction techniques**
 - **Remove lethal means**
 - **Increase social support**
- **Do not use suicide contracts (impulsivity issue)**
- **Monitor risk closely**
- **Reinforce and build reasons for living**
- **Strengthen advocate-client relationship**

Contact Information

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