Responding to FASD in Youth Justice Settings: Staff Knowledge, Confidence, and Training Needs in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Introduction: *Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is a developmental disability, caused by prenatal alcohol exposure, that can cause difficulties with communication, emotional regulation, and executive function. FASD may make people more vulnerable to adverse involvement and outcomes with the criminal justice system. In New Zealand, young people (> 18 years) waiting to be sentenced or sentenced can be placed in youth justice residences, where staff play a significant role in recognising and supporting young people with FASD. We aimed to understand the knowledge, attitudes, and practices about FASD among staff working in youth justice residences in New Zealand.*

Method: *We conducted a survey of staff employed in a youth justice residence or those who had contact with individuals in youth justice residences in their work, to assess awareness of, knowledge of and beliefs about FASD, experience and professional practice.*

Results: *In total, 56 people participated. Two thirds (67%) were youth workers. Most (59%) self-reported a basic understanding of FASD but only 7% reported a good understanding. Only 9% of participants felt very prepared to support someone with FASD. Almost all (92%) believed FASD was relevant to their work and endorsed training opportunities.*

Discussions and Conclusions: *Given the likely high number of individuals with FASD in youth justice residences, and the importance of staff having a very good understanding about FASD, we found a large gap between need and having a good understanding of FASD. A similar gap has been found in studies in the same settings in other countries*

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: *There is a pressing need to strengthen workplace knowledge, training, and management strategies in New Zealand' s youth justice residences to support young people with FASD.*

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *This project is funded by a Health Delivery Project Grant from the Health Research Council of New Zealand [22/682].*