

# MICAP RECAP

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(A Publication of the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems)

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## **FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME: A STATE AND NATIONAL TRAGEDY**

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### **WHY THIS TOPIC? WHY NOW?**

Last Spring, I read in one of the newspapers that OB/GYN Doctors and Health Officials in Michigan do not expect the Infant Mortality Rate in Michigan to decrease until and unless more women of child-bearing age begin to be responsible about their lives.

One of the major culprits in the high Infant Mortality Rate is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, or FAS. And this issue of the MICAP/RECAP is devoted to provide information on FAS and the resultant birth defects caused by the use of alcohol during pregnancy.

Why MICAP? Why NOW? Because our Mission Statement guides us:

"In obedience to the Commandment of Love, MICAP exists to awaken the Michigan Public and the Michigan Churches to the destructive consequences of the use of alcohol...and offer positive solutions." MICAP has both an opportunity and a responsibility to get the word out!

### **INFANT MORTALITY RATES AND NATIONAL AND STATE COMPARISONS**

For the un-initiated, a word, first, about Infant Mortality Rates (IMRs), and their frequency in the United States (in relation to the rest of the world); and in Michigan (in relation to the other 49 states). The Infant Mortality Rate of a state or nation is defined as "the number of deaths of infants before their first year of age, per 1000 live births."

On the National scene, one news source indicates that while the USA is the richest and most powerful nation on earth, we rank 33<sup>rd</sup> in IMR.<sup>1</sup> It means that 32 nations of the world have a lower IMR than do we. The World Factbook,<sup>2</sup> put out by the CIA indicates a national IMR of 6.43 deaths

per 1000 live births. Kids Count, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation indicates a national IMR of 6.9 in 2003 (the figures are always 3 yrs. in arrears)<sup>3</sup> Could we do better? It would seem so. Sweden, Japan, and Norway have IMRs of 2.8, 3.2, and 3.7, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

On the Michigan Scene, a 2002 Census Bureau Report indicates that the IMR for Michigan is 8.1 per 1000 live births.<sup>5</sup> That agency indicates that one other state (Oklahoma) is tied with Michigan, and 37 states in the U.S. have lower IMRs than Michigan. Kids Count indicates that the IMR in Michigan increased to 8.5 in 2003.<sup>3</sup> Can we do better than this?

The Bureau of Census indicates that Maine's and Vermont's IMR for 2002 was 4.4, and Massachusetts's IMR was only 4.9.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, there is room for improvement in Michigan.

### **FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME: WHAT IS IT? A BRIEF HISTORY!**

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (or FAS) is the name given to a broad spectrum of afflictions caused by the mother's ingestion of beverage alcohol during her pregnancy.

Previous to 1941, these problems were thought to be caused by hereditary factors. But in 1941, a researcher reported convincing evidence that women who had been exposed to German Measles during their pregnancies bore children with congenital malformations.<sup>6</sup> In that case, a virus was the culprit. Then, in the early 1960s, another researcher reported clinical evidence that exposure to the drug Thalidomide during the first trimester of pregnancy could cause limb malformations in the offspring.<sup>6</sup> In that case, a medical drug was the culprit. Those reports provided convincing evidence that neither the placenta nor the umbili-

cal cord were effective barriers to environmental factors.

## TERATOGENIC AGENTS<sup>7</sup>

These studies and conclusions led to a new understanding that Teratogenic (tissue altering) Agents (any agent that can disturb the development of an embryo or fetus, e.g., radiation, drugs, viruses, etc.) can invade the placenta and fetus and may do extra-ordinary damage to the unborn child. One of these agents is the alcohol in beverage alcohol which is ingested when the mother-to-be drinks alcoholic beverages during her pregnancy.

## THE NAME AND PUBLICITY

The name, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, was coined by two researchers at the Medical School in Seattle, Washington in 1973. In their research, they noted that children born to alcoholic mothers were prone to defects of limb, cardiovascular, cranial and facial parts of the body. By 1977, animal studies had confirmed that the alcohol in beverage alcohol was a tissue-altering "teratogen." By 1978, 245 cases of FAS had been reported by various researchers and FAS began to be described (among other things) as the most frequently known cause of mental retardation.<sup>8</sup>

Rome was not built in a day (as they say), and it took another three years (1981) before the Surgeon General of the USA recommended that women not drink while pregnant or while planning a pregnancy.<sup>6</sup> It took Congress 8 years beyond that to pass legislation which requires warning labels be placed on all Alcoholic Beverage Containers.<sup>6</sup>

Still, for the average person, there are no reminders at cocktail or holiday parties or social get-togethers where mixed drinks are served. In the United States, alone, it is estimated that, every year, one in 750 babies born suffers from FAS, and 40,000 suffer from PFAE (Possible Fetal Alcohol Effects). The lifetime medical costs for each child is estimated by some to be as high as US \$5 million; and it costs our nation between US \$5 - 8 billion dollars, annually, to care for FAS affected persons.<sup>9</sup>

## FAS: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

As indicated above, FAS is the malformation of the unborn child in various degrees depending on when the beverage alcohol is ingested by the mother. There are now elaborate charts which map the development of an embryo and fetus. These plot the days and weeks within the gestation period when the limbs, body parts, and organs are developing. Below, I have listed several body parts and days or weeks in the gestation cycle when these are developing. When the mother-to-be ingests beverage alcohol during these times, those body parts are liable to be adversely affected. This information is put out by the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome under the title: "**No Safe Time! No Safe Amount! No Safe Alcohol During Pregnancy! Period!**"<sup>10</sup>

<u>Gestation Period</u>	<u>Developing Body Part</u>
Weeks 3 thru 38	Central Nervous Sys.
Weeks 3 thru 8	The Heart
Weeks 4 thru 8	Arms
Weeks 4 thru 38	Eyes
Weeks 4 thru 10	Legs
Weeks 4 thru 20	Ears
Weeks 6.5 thru 38	Teeth
Weeks 6.5 thru 12	Palate
Weeks 7.5 thru 38	External Genitalia

In other words, an unborn child is at risk at any time in the pregnancy if the mother ingests beverage alcohol. And the child could be affected in one or several areas at once, e.g., cleft palate, ear, nose, or eye malformation, mental retardation, problems with the senses (vision, taste, hearing, smelling, and/or touch).

Other physical effects, as listed in Wikipedia, the web-based encyclopedia, include:

Growth: Pre- and post-natal growth retardation

Performance: The IQ may be in the low or very low range. There may be poor eye-hand coordination. Fine motor dysfunction may be manifested in a weak grip.

Skeletal: Joint abnormalities may be present. There may be altered palm crease patterns. Small fifth fingernails may be showing.

Cardiac: A variety of abnormalities including holes in the heart, valvular problems, and a narrowing of the aorta, all of which may lead to present as well as future cardiac conditions.

Other possible abnormalities include: drooping eyelid, eye sockets too small for the growing eye, cleft lip with or without the cleft palate, webbed or short neck, spina bifida, and hydrocephalus.

Some or all of the above may be present depending upon when and how often the mother-to-be drinks alcoholic beverages during her pregnancy.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

In the above, I have tried to keep the language to that of the average person in the pew. Only a few of our readers are doctors or social workers.

But we can have an impact! Though many pregnant mothers-to-be do not frequent the Churches for worship on Sunday (or Sabbath Day), most of them know people in the churches, and we know many of them. So we can get the word out about the dire consequences of drinking while pregnant and while trying to get pregnant.

**MEN**: If your Significant Other is pregnant, a courtesy to her of your not drinking during her pregnancy will encourage the mother-to-be of your baby to abstain during this special time in your lives.

Are the wives or Significant Others at our workplace pregnant? Pass the word. **“No Safe Time! No Safe Amount! No Safe Alcohol During Pregnancy! Period!”**<sup>10</sup>

Parents and Grand-Parents: Your children and grandchildren need to hear this word. So let's get the word out to our families, and ask them to pass it along to their friends and neighbors as well.

## RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION

The National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is based in Washington, D.C. Their web-site is: It is an excellent website and easily negotiated. In the website, they have an e-store from which you can purchase books, posters, and video materials.

There are also links in their website for Health Care Professionals, for persons living with FASD, for expectant mothers, for educators who work with FAS students, and an advocacy link for those concerned with prevention.

## REFERENCES:

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4. Infant Mortality and Life Expectancy for Selected Countries, 2006.
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6. West, James R., and Blake, Charles A., Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: An Assessment of the Field, found at: [Ebmonline.org/cgi/content/full/230/6/354](http://Ebmonline.org/cgi/content/full/230/6/354)
7. Google: Teratogen definition – Medical Dictionary definitions of popular...
8. Wikipedia, The Free On-Line Encyclopedia, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Naming of the Syndrome.
9. Wikipedia, The Free On-Line Encyclopedia, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
10. The National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, poster, Your Baby in Weeks.

## **MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR**

On behalf of the Board of Directors of AADIF (American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation) and MICAP (Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems), and as part of the Christian Faith Community, this issue comes with my wish to you for the very Merriest of Christmases and a Happy New Year, 2007!

Rev. W. J. (Bill) Amundsen, President  
AADIF/MICAP Board of Directors

### **AADIF/MICAP OFFICE MOVE P. O. Box No. remain the same!**

In an attempt to cut expenses, the AADIF/MICAP Board voted unanimously to move the Office to the Central United Methodist Church Building, 215 N. Capital Avenue, Lansing, Michigan 48933.

Our Phone remains as 517-484-1770.

Our FAX No. is: 517-487-2474.

The Postal address remains as:

MICAP or AADIF

P. O. Box 10212

Lansing, Michigan 48901

### **THE AADIF/MICAP ENDOWMENT FUND**

For over 100 years, AADIF (The American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation), MICAP (Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems), and their predecessor organizations have served the Michigan Churches and public using funds contributed by grass-roots supporters and an occasional grant or bequest. Such an operation has always caused us to live on the edge.

As we survey the landscape of 501(c)(3) organizations today, we see that many of the

stronger ones have created endowment funds, the proceeds of which partially (or fully) fund the their Annual Budgets. Your Board of Directors created such a depository recently, and that is being promoted. In 2006, several thousand dollars have been contributed toward the endowment and placed in a fund which will begin to contribute to our Budgets. Please see the brochure enclosed.

Gifts to the Endowment Fund of \$1,000.00 or more will bear the name of the donor as well as the name(s) of persons honored or memorialized by the gift. Those names will also appear in our website when it is updated.

If you have a desire to honor someone living, or to memorialize a special person in your life who has died, please be in touch with our office (517-484-1770). We can help you make that gift which will continue to support AADIF and MICAP in the years to come. In such a way, the values you hold dear in life will continue ministry long into the future.

### **YOUR GENEROUS BUDGET SUPPORT IS ALSO NEEDED**

Perhaps you cannot give \$1,000.00. That's quite a stretch for some of us. But maybe you still desire to support the Temperance Cause in Michigan. That's where I'm at! In that case, the use of the enclosed envelope with a gift of \$10.00, \$25.00, \$50.00, \$75.00 or more will help our Annual Budget and keep the MICAP/-RECAP going out to churches and legislators in Michigan. That on-going support has been and remains crucial to MICAP for it's day-to-day operations. Thank you, in advance, for your gift, whether large or small.