Background

Alaska has the highest incidence rate of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders in the United States with over 120 diagnosed every year.¹ According to the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, each child diagnosed with FAS/D will cost the State of Alaska $850,000 to $4.2 million from age 0-18. Alcohol use during pregnancy is the leading preventable cause of birth defects and developmental disabilities in the United States. Unfortunately, many women do not know they are pregnant when consuming alcohol. Over half of all pregnancies in Alaska are unintended.²

Study Hypothesis and Design

The study hypothesized that linking FAS/D education messages with pregnancy test dispensers in bars/restaurants serving alcohol would promote awareness of FAS/D risks associated with consuming alcohol while pregnant. The study was designed to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the feasibility and utility of this strategy.

- Matched Pairs design [Dispenser + Poster sites were compared to Poster only sites] in seven communities across Alaska (Anchorage/Fairbanks + Juneau; Homer/Dillingham; and Kodiak/Nome).
- Baseline and six-month follow-up survey data documenting FAS/D knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors was collected.

Results

- A significant sample size of 2,147 women participated in the study with a follow-up response rate of 61%.
- Over 10,000 pregnancy tests were distributed throughout the study.
- 576 women reported they may have been pregnant in the last 6 months, 70% reported consuming alcohol.
- 95 women respondents reported they were currently pregnant. 18% reported they still consume alcohol. The national average is 7%.³
- 42 women reported learning they were pregnant as the result of taking a pregnancy test from a dispenser.
- The pregnancy test dispenser group scored significantly higher than the poster only group, indicating a better understanding of the FAS/D risks and harms.
- The pregnancy test dispenser group also significantly decreased their drinking behaviors compared to the poster only group.

Conclusions

Data suggests combining FAS/D education messaging with a pregnancy test dispenser is an effective FAS/D prevention messaging strategy.

Recommendations

1) Expand the use of pregnancy test dispensers as an FAS/D prevention messaging strategy.
2) Promote efforts addressing social norms related to alcohol misuse and FAS/D prevention.
3) Clarify server’s right to refuse service policies related to providing alcohol to pregnant women.
4) Utilize the newly developed Windsor-Van Wyck FAS/D Risk Assessment Tool in other targeted venues.
5) Support follow-up longitudinal studies with the cohort of women participants (2,147).

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¹ Alaska Department of Health & Social Services (2010) FASD Fact Sheet.
² Kost, K. Unintended Pregnancy Rates at the State Level.
³ Center for Disease Control BRFSS Data