



Experiences of Adults with FASD in Saskatoon Emergency Departments

“Improving Emergency Care for a Vulnerable Population”

Adults living with **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)** often turn to emergency departments (EDs) not only during crises—such as mental health emergencies or injuries—but also when other community supports fall short. Yet the fast-paced, high-pressure nature of EDs can create significant barriers to effective care, with neurocognitive differences sometimes leading to miscommunication, misdiagnosis, and unmet needs.

Led by **Professor Mansfield Mela**, in collaboration with the Departments of Psychiatry, Emergency Medicine, and Social Work at the University of Saskatchewan, this study seeks to document and better understand the care journeys of adults with FASD in Saskatoon’s emergency settings. The research follows patients from the onset of symptoms through triage, assessment, and discharge, capturing where the system supports them—and where it falls short.

Through in-depth interviews with approximately 20 adults with FASD and 10 caregivers, as well as focus groups with ED nurses, physicians, and social workers, the project gathers first-hand accounts from both service users and providers. Using a qualitative, participatory approach, and thematic analysis with NVivo, the study identifies key barriers—such as communication breakdowns, sensory-overload triggers, and gaps in discharge planning—as well as facilitators like effective staff training and community linkages.

The ultimate goal is to co-develop practical, evidence-informed recommendations that improve emergency care experiences for adults with FASD, ensuring these critical services are more accessible, responsive, and supportive.