



# Red-Flagging Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Among Mental Health Specialists

*“Spotting the Signs, Changing the Outcome”*

Many individuals with **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)** pass through mental health services without ever receiving an accurate diagnosis. Because FASD shares overlapping symptoms with conditions like ADHD, mood disorders, anxiety, and personality disorders, its distinct neurodevelopmental profile is often overlooked—a phenomenon known as diagnostic overshadowing. This can lead to misdiagnosis, inappropriate medication, and missed opportunities for specialized support, leaving long-term needs unmet.

Led by **Professor Mansfield Mela**, this study aims to strengthen the ability of psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health nurses to recognize the *red flags* for undiagnosed FASD during routine psychiatric assessments. Using a mixed-methods approach, the project will identify key behavioral, cognitive, developmental, and psychosocial indicators that should prompt suspicion of FASD. It will also survey mental health professionals to assess their current knowledge, confidence, and clinical behaviors, and map referral pathways to better understand systemic barriers to formal diagnosis.

The research will culminate in the development of a **practical, evidence-informed FASD red-flag checklist** for clinical psychiatry, along with educational interventions and decision aids to support recognition and referral. Potential indicators under investigation include early school failure despite normal IQ, chronic impulse control problems, inconsistent responses to medication, and histories of multiple psychiatric diagnoses coupled with poor life outcomes.

By improving early detection, the study will enable more accurate treatment planning, reduce medication mismanagement, and foster stronger connections between psychiatric services and FASD diagnostic clinics. Ultimately, it aims to bridge a critical gap in mental health practice—ensuring that more individuals with FASD are identified, supported, and connected to the care they need.