



SUBSTANCE ABUSE

How your church can love and care for caregivers who use substances during the First Thousand Days

LUNCHTIME CONVERSATION REFLECTION

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a range of Lunchtime Conversations hosted by Sikunye, aimed at equipping churches to become FTD-Friendly.

Listen to audio recording [here](#)

Watch the video recording [here](#)

Judges 13: 7

"But he said to me, 'You will become pregnant and have a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from the womb until the day of his death.'"

SUBSTANCE ABUSE DURING PREGNANCY^{i,ii}

Alcohol consumption, the use of illicit drugs and tobacco are a critical public health concern which result in irreversible and permanent damage to the developing child including miscarriage, stillbirth, low birth weight, prematurity, physical malformations, and brain damage. It is important to note that it is not confined to any country, race or socio-economic group. The consequences are tragic and any efforts to address the issue must adopt a non-judgemental attitude.

ALCOHOL^{iii,iv,v}

Alcohol exposure to the baby in the womb (and while breastfeeding) is the leading cause of permanent intellectual impairment in the world known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) being the most severe condition. **Alcohol affects the overall size and functioning of the brain** resulting in low intelligence, behavioural impairments, poor social judgement, and general difficulty performing everyday tasks.

South Africa has the highest rates of FASD in the world, with the Western Cape recording rates of over 70 per 1000 babies born with FAS, this one of the worst affected areas globally. This has largely been explained due to weekend binge drinking. What is needed is to raise

awareness about the dangers of prenatal alcohol exposure and the devastating effect of FASD on the lives of children, families, and communities.

- Watch this interview with the CEO of the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR)^v on [Dangers of drinking while pregnant](#)
- Watch this documentary on [The effects of alcohol during pregnancy.](#)

TOBACCOⁱ

Smoking while pregnant is the most common form of use of a dangerous substance during pregnancy - Nicotine (the addictive substance in cigarettes), carbon monoxide and numerous other poisons inhaled from a cigarette are carried through the bloodstream and go directly to developing baby. This lowers the amount of oxygen available to both mom and baby, which may in turn increase the baby's heart rate and increase the chances of miscarriage. Increases the risks for premature birth and low-birth weight, and increases the likelihood of respiratory problems and the risk of birth defects.

Some women do choose to stop smoking while pregnant but start smoking again after the birth of the baby. This means that if baby is being breastfed then he/she can be exposed to the harmful effects of smoke. This includes secondhand smoke – which is smoking in the space that baby and mom are in. *Therefore, mom and dad, as well as family members should be encouraged not to smoke during the First Thousand Days near baby.*

- Watch this video on [what smoking does to an unborn baby](#)

DRUG ADDICTIONⁱ

The drug of choice for expecting mothers is 'tik'. Babies are born with severe withdrawal symptoms after birth, often making them tremble, cry constantly, and have difficulty with breathing, sucking, and swallowing. Breastfeeding is not possible in these tragic circumstances.

Cocaine and heroin are more 'up-market' addictive substances. Heroin is highly addictive and if used while pregnant there is an increased risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, low birth weight or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) known as cot death. As with 'tik', the baby will go through heroin withdrawal and need treatment after birth.

HOW CAN WE TACKLE SUBSTANCE ABUSE BY BEING A FTD-FRIENDLY CHURCH

- **Speak up:** in your fraternals, networks, sermons raising awareness about the effects of alcohol and drugs in FTD
 - **Pray:** into these areas of our communities that are negatively impacting our children's development
 - **Surround families:** Often substance abuse is used as a negative coping mechanism therefore it is important to provide positive supportive relationships that can heal trauma. Loving unconditionally, not judging and supporting mom/dad who are using drugs or alcohol during FTD whilst encouraging healthy lifestyle choices by giving her all the information to make an informed decision.
 - **Equip and prepare:** Antenatal classes are a good way to equip mom (and dad) with the development of their baby and the impacts of alcohol and drugs on the baby during pregnancy – and even post birth. Link with a Flourish host in your area, know where the antenatal and postnatal classes are happening in your community, use your mom groups or home groups to discuss healthy lifestyle choices
 - **Collaborate and refer:** Link with other organisations in your community that are supporting families who have children with FAS and other birth defects from the use of drugs and alcohol to refer families to. Link with experts in the field, or the local clinic to come and talk to moms in your church or community about the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol
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- **FARRSA:** <https://farrsa.org.za/>
 - **FAS FACTS:** <https://fasfacts.org.za/>
 - **SADAG.ORG – The South African Depression and Anxiety Group**
 - [Substance abuse information & brochures](#)

HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- Sikunye's [Home-visiting training](#)
- [A list of useful contacts for mom and dad](#)
- [Healthy habits during pregnancy](#)
- [Pregnancy facts](#)
- [How to care for families in pregnancy](#)

ⁱ <http://www.cplo.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/BP-451-The-First-Thousand-Days-and-the-Failure-to-Thrive.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://ijmhs.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13033-016-0070-x>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/11009/7444>

^{iv} <https://fasfacts.org.za/research-history/>

^v <https://farrsa.org.za/>