

**Critical Review:**  
**Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in Aboriginal children: Does a language profile emerge?**

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This critical review examines the language profile of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) in five studies. A literature search was conducted and the following study designs were included: four quasi-experimental studies (case control) and one qualitative study. Based on the critical review, a specific language profile for this population did not emerge. Overall, evidence revealed that all children with FASD demonstrate a variable language profile, which may fluctuate with age. Additional studies involving more subjects, cognitively matched control group, culturally sensitive assessment approach and a more comprehensive battery of measures is recommended in order to obtain more consistent results.

***Introduction***

In 1973, a group of children born to mothers who consumed excessive amounts of alcohol during pregnancy were described by Jones and Smith (1973). They termed the pattern of deficits observed in these children as

### Selection Criteria

Studies included in this critical review were selected if they were conducted on Aboriginal FASD and/or non-Aboriginal FASD child populations, and if their goal was to evaluate expressive and receptive language.

### Data Collection

Results of the literature search yielded five studies that met the above selection criteria: four quasi-experimental designs (case control study) and one qualitative research design.

## ***Results***

The following studies are organized according to strength of the results in relation to the objective of this critical review.

***Study #1*** Becker, Warr-Leeper, and Leeper (1990) conducted a case control study to describe and compare the speech and language characteristics of six Aboriginal children with FASD (age range: 4 years, 6 months to 9 years, 6 months) to culturally and cognitively matched, non-FASD Aboriginal children. Children were matched based on non-verbal cognitive ability. The authors u



with caution. In addition, clinicians should be cautious of results from this study, since it has not been published and therefore not peer reviewed. With the above considerations, this information can provide direction and cautions for future researchers when evaluating language profiles of Aboriginal children with FASD.

**Study #4** Hamilton (1981) conducted a case control study to examine the linguistic system (i.e syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and short-term memory) of ten children with FASD (age range: 4 years, 5 months to 6 years, 10 months) as compared to a group of typically developing children of the same age level (control group 1), to a younger group of typically developing children of the same linguistic level (control group 2), and to a group of children with Prader-Willi syndrome of the same age level and linguistic level (control group 3).

The author used a two tailed t-test for paired samples when comparing the FASD group with the three control groups. Generally, FASD children performed like the younger typically developing group in terms of comprehension of syntactic forms and

A further limitation was that n

Future research could also focus on case studies within a large sample and determine trends between the cases.