



**Prevalence of Externalizing Disorders and Autism Spectrum Disorder among Children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis**

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1           **Prevalence of Externalizing Disorders and Autism Spectrum Disorder among**  
2                           **Children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder:**  
3                           **Systematic Review and Meta-analysis**

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31

**Abstract**

32 Due to their central nervous system impairments, children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum  
33 Disorder (FASD) commonly exhibit externalizing behaviours such as hyperactivity,  
34 impulsivity, and/or delinquency. The purpose of the current study was to estimate the  
35 prevalence of neurodevelopmental disorders with prominent externalizing behaviours,  
36 namely Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Conduct Disorder (CD),  
37 Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), as well as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)  
38 among children with FASD. A comprehensive systematic literature search was  
39 performed, followed by disorder-specific random-effects meta-analyses. Of the disorders  
40 investigated, ADHD was found to be the most common co-morbid disorder among  
41 children with FASD (52.9%), followed by ODD (12.9%), CD (7.0%), and ASD (2.6%).  
42 When compared to the general population of the United States, these rates are notably  
43 higher: 15-times higher for ADHD, two-times higher for ASD, three-times higher for  
44 CD, and five-times higher for ODD. The results call attention to the need for identifying  
45 a distinct neurodevelopmental profile to aid in the accurate identification of children with  
46 FASD and the discrimination of FASD from certain idiopathic neurodevelopmental  
47 disorders.

48

49 **Keywords:** Autism Spectrum Disorder; Externalizing disorders; Fetal Alcohol Spectrum  
50 Disorder; Prevalence; Systematic Review

## 51 **Introduction**

52 Prenatal alcohol exposure can result in damage to the brain and other organs of the  
53 developing embryo and fetus. A broad range of effects and symptoms caused by prenatal  
54 alcohol exposure have been coined under the term Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder  
55 (FASD; Cook et al. 2016), which covers the following alcohol-related diagnoses: Fetal  
56 Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Partial FAS (pFAS), Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental  
57 Disorder (ARND), and depending on the diagnostic guideline, Alcohol-Related Birth  
58 Defects (ARBD; Chudley et al. 2005; Hoyme et al. 2016). Recently, Neurobehavioral  
59 Disorder Associated with Prenatal Alcohol Exposure (ND-PAE) was included as a  
60 condition that warrants further research and also as a specifier for the broader diagnostic  
61 term of Other Specified Neurodevelopmental Disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical  
62 Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association,  
63 2013). ND-PAE is intended to encompass the behavioural, developmental and mental  
64 health symptoms associated with prenatal alcohol exposure, and is appropriate for  
65 individuals with or without physical findings (Kable et al. 2016).

66 The unifying outcome for FASD is congenital damage to the central nervous  
67 system, which is variably associated with a wide range of mental and behavioural  
68 disorders (Burd et al. 2003; Fryer et al. 2007; O'Connor et al. 2002; Popova et al. 2016).  
69 The mental and behavioural disorders that occur increase the complexity of care, and can  
70 negatively impact the developmental trajectory of these individuals. Especially  
71 challenging is that individuals with FASD commonly exhibit externalizing behaviours  
72 that are directed toward the external environment and include aggression, anger, defiance,  
73 destruction of property, hostility, noncompliance, and violations of social rules. These

74 problematic behaviours are the core of a group of neurodevelopmental disorders known  
75 as externalizing disorders. Externalizing disorders consist of Attention-Deficit  
76 Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD; DSM-5 code: 314.0X; International Statistical  
77 Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10th revision [ICD-10] code:  
78 F90.X), Conduct Disorder (CD; DSM-5 code: 312.8X; ICD-10 code: F91.X), and  
79 Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD; DSM-5 code: 313.81; ICD-10 code: F91.3). The  
80 latter two consist of a persistent pattern of behaviour that include: angry and irritable  
81 mood, argumentative and defiant behaviour, and vindictiveness; and aggression,  
82 destruction of property, deceitfulness or theft, and serious violations of rules, respectively  
83 (American Psychiatric Association 2013). ADHD is characterized by inattention,  
84 impulsivity, and hyperactivity (American Psychiatric Association 2013).

85       Compared to IQ-matched, non-alcohol-exposed peers, it has been found that  
86 externalizing behaviours are elevated in children with FASD (Mattson and Riley 2000),  
87 who are often described as hyperactive, impulsive, disruptive, and/or delinquent (Nash, et  
88 al. 2006). Franklin and colleagues (2008) found that among their sample of children with  
89 FASD, 75% scored in the “clinical” range on the externalizing problems scale of the  
90 Child Behavior Checklist – a well-established standardized parent/caregiver  
91 questionnaire utilized for evaluating social competencies and behavioural problems in  
92 children 6 to 18 years of age. However, the presence of externalizing behaviours, whether  
93 in the clinical range or not, does not necessarily mean the criteria for a clinical diagnosis  
94 has been met.

95       It is speculated that both postnatal adversity (e.g., impaired parent-child  
96 interactions, poor quality of maternal caregiving, placement in foster care) and prenatal

97 alcohol exposure are significant predictors of externalizing behaviour in children with  
98 FASD (Rodriguez et al. 2009; Staroselsky et al. 2009). Prenatal alcohol exposure  
99 significantly increases the risk of postnatal adversity, making alcohol-exposed children  
100 inherently vulnerable to developing externalizing behaviours.

101 In addition to their behavioural impairments, children with externalizing disorders  
102 often have problems with their social and academic functioning. Although not an explicit  
103 externalizing disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD; DSM-5 code: 299.00; ICD-10  
104 code: F84.0) is associated with high rates of externalizing behaviours (Mahan and  
105 Matson 2011; Totsika et al. 2011). Children with ASD tend to have more severe  
106 externalizing behaviors such as poor attention, disruptive, hyperactive, delinquent and  
107 aggressive behaviors than typically developing children and children with intellectual  
108 disability (Brereton et al. 2006; Bauminger et al. 2010; Matson et al. 2009).

109 Given that externalizing behaviours are elevated in children with FASD, it is  
110 likely that rates of disorders with prominent externalizing behaviours are also elevated.  
111 Therefore, the aim of the current study was to estimate the prevalence of ADHD, ASD,  
112 CD, and ODD among children with FASD, and compare the prevalence of these  
113 disorders among children with FASD to the prevalence among the general population  
114 (i.e., children without FASD).

115

## 116 **Materials and Methods**

117 To begin, a comprehensive systematic literature search was performed to identify all  
118 existing studies that have reported the prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD, and/or ODD

119 among children with FASD. Then, disorder-specific random-effects meta-analyses on  
120 prevalence were conducted.

121

### 122 **Comprehensive systematic literature search**

123 A comprehensive systematic literature search was performed to identify all studies that  
124 have reported the prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD, and/or ODD among a sample of  
125 individuals with FASD. The search was conducted in multiple electronic bibliographic  
126 databases, including CINAHL, Embase, ERIC, Medline (including Medline In-Process),  
127 PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science (including Science Citation Index, Social  
128 Sciences Citation Index, and Arts and Humanities Citation Index). The search was  
129 conducted using the following keywords: 1) alcohol embryopath\*, alcohol\* related\* birth  
130 defect\*, alcohol related neurodevelopmental disorder, arbd, arnd, fae, fas, fasd, fetal  
131 alcohol effect\*, fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder\*, foetal alcohol  
132 effect\*, foetal alcohol syndrome, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder\*, partial fetal alcohol  
133 syndrome, partial foetal alcohol syndrome, pfas, prenatal\* alcohol expos\*, OR pre-natal\*  
134 alcohol expos\*; AND 2) frequenc\*, incidence\*, occurren\*, prevalence\*, OR rate\*; AND  
135 3) add, adhd, attention deficit disorder\*, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism,  
136 autism spectrum disorder\*, conduct disorder, externalizing disorder\*, OR oppositional  
137 defiant disorder; AND 4) cohort stud\*, cross\* sectional stud\*, prospective cohort stud\*,  
138 OR retrospective cohort stud\*.

139 The search was not limited geographically or by language of publication, and was  
140 performed to identify all studies published from November 1973 (when FAS was first  
141 described; Jones and Smith 1973) up to the end of September 2016. The search was

142 limited to human studies in all databases that allow for this restriction to be specified.  
143 Manual reviews of the content pages of the major neurodevelopmental  
144 disorders/behavioural journals, as well as citations in any of the relevant articles, were  
145 conducted. The full review protocol is available in PROSPERO  
146 (<http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/>), registration number CRD42016052041.

147

#### 148 ***Inclusion and exclusion criteria***

149 Articles were retained if they i) consisted of original, quantitative research published in a  
150 peer-reviewed journal; ii) included subjects with diagnosed FASD or any of the  
151 diagnostic entities that fall within the spectrum (ARBD, ARND, FAS, and pFAS); and  
152 iii) reported the prevalence of diagnosed ADHD, ASD, CD, and/or ODD among a sample  
153 of individuals with diagnosed FASD with a) a measure of uncertainty (confidence  
154 interval [CI] or standard error), or b) either the sample size or number of cases. Articles  
155 were excluded if they i) reported a pooled estimate by combining several studies (i.e.,  
156 meta-analysis), or ii) were published in iteration (i.e., dual publications). In cases where  
157 more than one study used the same dataset or cohort (or there was an overlap in samples),  
158 the study with the larger sample size was retained.

159

#### 160 ***Data selection and extraction***

161 Study selection began by screening titles and abstracts for inclusion. Then, full-text  
162 articles of all studies screened as potentially relevant were considered. Two investigators  
163 conducted each study selection step; any disagreements were reconciled by team  
164 discussion. All data was extracted by one investigator and then independently



165 crosschecked by a second investigator; all discrepancies were reconciled by team  
166 discussion. Effort was made to contact the corresponding author of studies where data  
167 was either missing or not reported due to small cell counts or there were discrepancies in  
168 the data reported.

169

### 170 *Critical appraisal of existing studies*

171 Each study was critically appraised using a tool specifically for use in systematic reviews  
172 addressing questions of prevalence (Munn et al. 2014). The following ten criteria were  
173 used: i) representativeness of the sample; ii) appropriate recruitment of participants; iii)  
174 adequate sample size ( $n \geq 100$ ); iv) participants and setting described in detail; v)  
175 sufficient coverage of the identified sample; vi) use of an objective, standard criteria for  
176 measuring the condition; vii) reliability of condition measurement; viii) appropriateness  
177 of statistical analysis; ix) identification and accounted for  
178 confounders/subgroups/differences; and x) adequate response rate ( $>70\%$ ). Two  
179 investigators independently appraised the quality of each study, and all discrepancies in  
180 quality ratings were reconciled by team discussion.

181

### 182 **Meta-analysis**

183 In order to estimate the pooled prevalence for ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD among  
184 children with FASD, disorder-specific random-effects meta-analyses (DerSimonian and  
185 Laird 1986) were performed. As recommended for meta-analyses of prevalence and to  
186 prevent the overweighting of studies reporting extremely low prevalence (i.e., a  
187 prevalence approaching zero; Barendregt et al. 2013; Rücker et al. 2009), the data were

188 transformed using the Freeman-Tukey double arcsine transformation (Freeman and  
189 Tukey 1950). Score test-based confidence intervals (CI) were estimated for each study  
190 specific point estimate, and Wald-type CI were estimated based on the approximate  
191 normal distribution of the transformed pooled point estimates. The resulting combined  
192 point estimates and respective CI were back-transformed and presented in forest plots.  
193 Given that the conceptualization of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD has changed over the  
194 years, studies were ordered by year of publication in the forest plots in order to explore  
195 whether a temporal relationship was likely to exist. Heterogeneity between double  
196 arcsine-transformed estimates of ADHD, ASD, CD and ODD was assessed using the  $I^2$   
197 statistic (Higgins and Thompson 2002). Publication bias was examined by visually  
198 inspecting the funnel plot (standard error plotted against the point estimate) for a skewed  
199 distribution, and by employing Egger's weighted regression test for small-study effects  
200 (Egger et al. 1997). It was decided a priori that i) if publication bias were present it would  
201 not be adjusted for, since it was assumed that the prevalence estimates of interest would  
202 likely be published even if substantially different from previously reported estimates; and  
203 ii) if heterogeneity was present, the following sub-analyses would be conducted:  
204 disorder-specific meta-analyses by a) population (general vs. special populations) and b)  
205 method of case ascertainment (active vs. passive). All meta-analyses were performed  
206 using Stata version 14.2.

207

208 **Comparison of the prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD among children with**  
209 **FASD to the prevalence among those without FASD**

210 The prevalence estimates of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD among children with FASD  
211 were compared to the prevalence of these disorders among the general population of the  
212 United States, obtained from the available literature.

213

## 214 **Results**

### 215 **Comprehensive systematic literature search**

216 Initially, the electronic search yielded a total of 931 articles and six articles were  
217 identified through the manual search. After removing 379 duplicate articles, a total of 558  
218 articles were screened using titles and abstracts. One hundred and forty-three full-text  
219 articles were retrieved for further consideration, 123 of which were subsequently  
220 excluded. Twenty articles were identified and included in the meta-analyses. It should be  
221 noted that one article that reported an extremely high prevalence of ASD among children  
222 with FASD (76.2%; Mukherjee et al. 2011) was excluded as it was conducted among a  
223 highly selected non-random group of individuals referred to a specialist psychiatric  
224 neurodevelopmental clinic. A schematic diagram of the search strategy is depicted in  
225 Figure 1.

226

227 - Insert Figure 1 about here -

228

229 Twenty studies reported the prevalence of ADHD among a total of 2,582 children  
230 with FASD, six studies reported the prevalence of ASD among a total of 1,029 children  
231 with FASD, five studies reported the prevalence of CD among a total of 1,514 children  
232 with FASD, and 11 studies reported the prevalence of ODD among a total of 2,719

233 children with FASD. The mean age of the participants in the identified studies ranged  
234 from 6.2 to 22.0 years, and the percentage of males in the samples ranged from 41.9% to  
235 78.3%. Thirteen of the studies utilized passive methods of case ascertainment (e.g.,  
236 surveys, medical charts) and seven studies actively assessed the study participants'  
237 neurodevelopmental status. Fifteen studies were conducted among a sample drawn from  
238 the general population, two studies were among an Aboriginal population, and three  
239 studies were conducted among children in care (e.g., children in foster care, orphanage).  
240 Only seven of the studies reported the diagnostic criteria used when diagnosing the  
241 disorders of interest (ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD), while 17 studies explicitly stated the  
242 criteria used for ascertaining cases of FASD. See Table 1 for the study characteristics and  
243 the prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD among individuals with FASD reported in  
244 the individual studies.

245

246

- Insert Table 1 about here -

247

### 248 ***Critical appraisal of existing studies***

249 Eighteen studies (90%) utilized a sample representative of the target population; 20  
250 studies (100%) recruited study participants in an appropriate way; 5 studies (25%) had an  
251 adequate sample size ( $n \geq 100$ ); 14 studies (70%) described the participants and setting in  
252 detail; 11 studies (55%) had sufficient coverage of the identified sample; seven studies  
253 (35%) used an objective, standard criteria for measuring the disorders of interest (ADHD,  
254 ASD, CD, and ODD); 15 studies (75%) measured the disorders of interest (ADHD, ASD,  
255 CD, and ODD) in a standardized way; 19 studies (95%) conducted an appropriate

256 statistical analysis of the data; 13 studies (65%) identified and accounted for  
257 confounders/subgroups/differences; and eight studies (40%) of studies had an adequate  
258 response rate.

259

## 260 **Meta-analysis**

### 261 *Pooled prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD among children with FASD*

262 The results of this meta-analysis revealed that ADHD had the highest prevalence among  
263 children with FASD (52.9%; 95% CI: 43.7%–62.0%), followed by ODD (12.9%; 95%  
264 CI: 8.4%–18.2%), CD (7.0%; 95% CI: 2.5%–13.2%), and ASD (2.6%; 95% CI: 1.4%–  
265 4.14%; Table 2). For the forest plots of the prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD  
266 among children with FASD see Figure 2.

267

268 - Insert Table 2 about here -

269 - Insert Figure 2 about here -

270

271 The tests of heterogeneity demonstrated that heterogeneity was present in the estimates of  
272 ADHD, CD, and ODD ( $I^2=94.6\%$  for ADHD,  $I^2=80.8\%$  for CD, and  $I^2=89.0\%$  for ODD;  
273 Table 2). Further, according to the funnel plots and Egger's weighted regression test,  
274 there was evidence for the presence of publication bias in the meta-analyses of ADHD,  
275 ASD, and ODD ( $P=0.000$  for ADHD,  $P=0.025$  for ASD, and  $P=0.046$  for ODD; Table  
276 2). For the funnel plots of the prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD among children  
277 with FASD see Figure 3.

278

279 - Insert Figure 3 about here -

280

281 *Sub-analyses*

282 Neither population or method of ascertainment were determined to be sources of  
283 heterogeneity in the disorder-specific estimates where heterogeneity was found to be  
284 present (i.e., ADHD, CD, and ODD). See Table 3 for the results of the disorder-specific  
285 meta-analyses by population and by method of case ascertainment.

286

287 - Insert Table 3 about here -

288

289 **Comparison of the prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD among children with**  
290 **FASD to the prevalence among those without FASD**

291 The prevalence among the general population of the United States was reported to be  
292 4.1% for ADHD (versus 52.9% among children with FASD; Kessler et al. 2005), 1.5%  
293 for ASD (versus 2.6%; Christensen et al. 2016), 2.7% for CD (versus 7.0%; Costello et  
294 al. 2003), and 2.7% for ODD (versus 12.9%; Costello et al. 2003). See Figure 4 for the  
295 prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD among children with FASD and without  
296 FASD (i.e., the general population).

297

298 - Insert Figure 4 about here -

299

300 **Discussion**

301 The current study revealed that, of the disorders investigated, ADHD was the most  
302 common co-morbid disorder among children with FASD (52.9%), followed by ODD  
303 (12.9%), CD (7.0%), and ASD (2.6%). These rates are notably higher compared to the  
304 general population of the United States: 15-times higher for ADHD, two-times higher for  
305 ASD, three-times higher for CD, and five-times higher for ODD (Christensen et al. 2016;  
306 Costello et al. 2003; Kessler et al. 2005). Based on a population of 73.6 million children  
307 and youth (0-18 years of age; U.S. Census Bureau 2016) and an FASD prevalence of  
308 1.5% among the general population (Popova et al. 2017), it is estimated that there were  
309 1.1 million children and youth with FASD in the United States in 2016. As per the results  
310 of the current study, 592.1 thousand children and youth with FASD in the United States  
311 will have a co-morbid diagnosis of ADHD, 144.4 thousand will have a co-morbid  
312 diagnosis of ODD, 78.4 thousand will have a co-morbid diagnosis of CD, and 29.1  
313 thousand will have a co-morbid diagnosis of ASD. These staggering numbers highlight  
314 the burden that FASD has on the mental health care system. To attest to this, it was  
315 estimated that the cost for psychiatric care hospital days associated with a diagnosis of  
316 FAS in Canada in 2008–2009 was approximately \$1.2 million (Popova et al. 2012).

317 However, the extent of the relation between FASD and the examined  
318 neurodevelopmental disorders (ADHD, ASD, CD and ODD) may be inflated due to two  
319 main reasons: i) overlapping diagnostic criteria, and ii) referral bias (McLennan 2015).  
320 First, currently, there are a number of clinical guidelines for diagnosing FASD (e.g.,  
321 Astley 2004; Chudley et al. 2005; Hoyme et al. 2016; Landgraf et al. 2013; Watkins et al.  
322 2013), and although there is considerable overlap in the current criteria, there are also  
323 notable differences. The general lack of consensus in the operationalization of the

324 diagnostic criteria of FASD and especially on the pathognomonic behavioural  
325 manifestation of prenatal alcohol exposure and/or FASD has resulted in the overlapping  
326 of the diagnostic criteria for FASD with that of other neurodevelopmental disorders  
327 among children who were not exposed to alcohol prenatally or for whom prenatal alcohol  
328 exposure is not etiologic (McLennan 2015).

329         Second, FASD research typically relies on clinically-referred samples. This is  
330 problematic given that children and youth with obvious disruptive behaviours are more  
331 likely to get referred to a specialized FASD diagnostic clinic than those without such  
332 behaviours. Further, clinical populations are likely to be much more severely impaired  
333 and have crossed a threshold where parents or caretakers are seeking help. Thus, relying  
334 on clinically-referred samples to determine the prevalence of neurodevelopmental  
335 disorders with prominent externalizing behaviours is likely to result in inflated estimates  
336 (McLennan 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the prevalence of co-morbid  
337 neurodevelopmental disorders among children with FASD in non-referred samples (i.e.,  
338 population-based samples). In addition, adverse life outcomes such as parental abuse and  
339 substance use could be the reason for the referral to a diagnostic clinic, which could have  
340 predisposed the child to mental health problems (Streissguth et al. 2004); thus, potential  
341 confounders need to also be considered.

342         Regardless, whether it is due to the diagnostic overlap or true co-morbidity,  
343 children with FASD often receive multiple diagnoses before they are appropriately  
344 assessed and diagnosed with FASD (Chasnoff et al. 2015). To attest to this, Chasnoff and  
345 colleagues (2015) found that ADHD was the most common referral diagnosis for children  
346 who ultimately were diagnosed with FASD. Alarming, misdiagnosed children are often



347 prescribed inappropriate medications and receiving therapies that are not necessary  
348 (Chasnoff et al. 2015). Another reason for the misdiagnosis of children with FASD is  
349 stigmatization – the diagnosis of an externalizing disorder is less stigmatizing as  
350 compared to FASD and therefore, they are preferentially used by health care practitioners  
351 (Elliott et al. 2006; Payne et al. 2005).

352 Misdiagnosis of FASD (and in general) has a number of consequences, namely  
353 implications for the pharmacologic and therapeutic approach to treatment,  
354 mismanagement of behavioural symptoms, inaccurate incidence and prevalence  
355 estimates, and reduced power to detect a clinically meaningful difference between groups  
356 in clinical research studies (Astley and Clarren 2000; Chasnoff et al. 2015). As such, this  
357 study highlights the need for teratological history to be sought for all children with any  
358 neurodevelopmental disorder (especially externalizing disorders) in order to enhance the  
359 differential diagnostic process and provide an accurate and appropriate diagnosis.  
360 Further, health care providers need to routinely consider prenatal alcohol exposure in the  
361 differential diagnosis of behavioural problems.

362 An early and accurate diagnosis of FASD is essential, as it can lead to early  
363 participation in targeted developmental interventions, which can ultimately improve the  
364 child's quality of life and lead to a more prosperous developmental trajectory in terms of  
365 social functioning. Early and accurate diagnosis is also important for parents/caregivers.  
366 It provides them with an explanation for the behavioural problems exhibited and can  
367 improve parenting by increasing their understanding of the child's disabilities and  
368 impairments, and can result in more realistic expectations for the future. However,

369 diagnosis is only useful if the necessary interventions are made available to the affected  
370 child.

371 It is important to acknowledge that externalizing behaviours exhibited by children  
372 with FASD can be considered either a response to or an impairment caused by the brain  
373 damage that is due to the exposure to alcohol prenatally. This distinction is important in  
374 terms of intervention, as behaviours can often be modified by behaviour management,  
375 whereas impairments can be managed by accommodations (Paintner et al. 2012).  
376 Additional research in this area is needed. However, the co-occurrence of the examined  
377 neurodevelopmental disorders (ADHD, ASD, CD and ODD) and FASD represent many  
378 complex cases, and deserve timely and tailored intervention.

379 The current study has a number of strengths such as, the comprehensive search  
380 strategy, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, critical appraisal of studies included in the  
381 meta-analyses, and identification of dual publications (thereby avoiding any potential of  
382 double counting cases). However, there are a few limitations worth noting. First, as stated  
383 above, FASD research studies typically rely on clinically-referred samples, and the  
384 studies included in the current investigation are no exception. Second, small sample sizes  
385 remain a common limitation in the field of FASD research, and the majority of studies  
386 (75%) included had a sample size below 100 participants. Third, very few (six) studies  
387 included explicitly stated the criteria used for identifying cases of ADHD, ASD, CD, and  
388 ODD. Fourth, the conceptualization of ADHD, CD, ODD and especially ASD has  
389 changed over the years, which was not possible to control for in the current study.  
390 However, as per the forest plots, a temporal relationship does not appear to be present for  
391 any of the disorders of interest (i.e., ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD).

392            Nevertheless, the results call attention to the need for identifying a distinct  
393 neurodevelopmental profile, which would aid in the accurate identification of children  
394 with FASD and the discrimination of FASD from certain idiopathic neurodevelopmental  
395 disorders. In addition, a neurodevelopmental profile, that is pathognomonic of FASD,  
396 will have important clinical implications by assisting in the ascertainment of accurate  
397 prevalence estimates, planning/development of appropriate targeted interventions, and  
398 enhancement of clinical services to children, adolescents and adults with FASD.  
399 Additional research in this area is needed, as it is possible that individuals with FASD  
400 exhibit more than one neurodevelopmental profile.

401            To conclude, the results of the current study should not be misused for the further  
402 stigmatization of children with FASD. Rather, they should be used as strong scientific  
403 evidence demonstrating to clinicians working with children the complexity of FASD and  
404 the large portion of children with FASD that meet the criteria for other  
405 neurodevelopmental disorders.

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594 **Table 1.** Study characteristics and prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD among children with FASD reported in the identified  
 595 studies

Reference; Country	Year(s) of data collection	Population	Age range in years (mean)	Gender: % of males	Sample size; Diagnostic breakdown	Prevalence of ADHD n (%)	Prevalence of ASD n (%)	Prevalence of CD n (%)	Prevalence of ODD n (%)	Diagnostic criteria used for comorbid disorders	FASD Diagnostic criteria used	Method of ascertainment
Astley 2010; United States of America	1993- 2005	General population	0-50 (9.0)	59.6	1270*; FASD = 59 FAS + 95 pFAS 394 SE/AE + 722 ND/AE	447 (57.3%)	-	42 (3.3%)	119 (9.4%)	n/a	4-digit diagnostic code (Astley & Clarren, 1999)	Passive: medical records
Bell et al. 2010; Canada	n/a	General population	2-49 (15.2)	59.8	425; FASD = 86 FAS/pFAS + 339 ARND	200 (47.1%)	8 (1.9%)	-	42 (9.9%)	n/a	Canadian diagnostic guidelines (Chudley et al., 2005)	Passive: medical records
Burd et al. 2003; United States of America	n/a	General population	0-56 (8.2)	58.9	303; FASD = 152 FAS + 151 pFAS	219 (72.3%)	-	-	53 (17.5%)	n/a	FAS Diagnostic Checklist (Burd & Martsolf, 1989)	Passive: registry
CDC 1995; United States of America	1981-92	Aboriginal population	0-31 (8.0)	58.3	60; 60 FAS	12 (20.0%)	-	-	-	n/a	Sokol & Clarren (1989)	Passive: medical records
Chasnoff et al. 2015; United States of America	n/a	Foster and adopted children/you th	4-18 (9.4)	63.8	156; FASD = 93 FAS + 1 pFAS + 61 ARND + 1 ARBD	88 (56.4%)	8 (5.1%)	-	4 (2.6%)	n/a	4-digit diagnostic code (Astley & Clarren,	Active: psychological assessment

Reference; Country	Year(s) of data collection	Population	Age range in years (mean)	Gender: % of males	Sample size; Diagnostic breakdown	Prevalence of ADHD n (%)	Prevalence of ASD n (%)	Prevalence of CD n (%)	Prevalence of ODD n (%)	Diagnostic criteria used for comorbid disorders	FASD Diagnostic criteria used	Method of ascertainment
Chen et al. 2012; United States of America	2007	General population	4-12 (7.5)	66.7	33; FASD = 5 FAS/pFAS + 21 ND/AE + 7 SE/AE	25 (75.8%)	-	-	-	n/a	1999) 4-digit diagnostic code (Astley & Clarren, 1999)	Passive: parental reports
Clark et al. 2004; Canada	2002	General population	17-43 (22.0)	41.9	62; FASD = 34 FAS/probable FAS + 28 FAE/probable FAE	40 (64.5%)	-	-	3 (4.8%)	n/a	n/a	Passive: survey (caregivers)
Elgen et al. 2007; Norway	1999-2004	General population	0-16 (7.8)	59.6	45; FASD = 25 FAS + 22 other-FASD	42 (93.3%) <sup>b</sup>	-	-	-	ICD-10	CDC diagnostic criteria (Bertrand et al., 2004)	Passive: survey (health professionals)
Elliot et al. 2008; Australia	2001-04	General population (including Aboriginals)	0-15 (3.3, median)	53.3	92; FASD = 25 FAS + 65 pFAS + 2 suspected FAS	11 (12.0%)	-	-	-	n/a	IOM criteria (Stratton et al., 1996)	Passive: survey (health professionals)
Fryer et al. 2006; United States of America	n/a	General population	8-15 (12.1)	53.8	39; n/a	37 (94.9%)	-	7 (17.9%)	15 (38.5%)	DSM-IV	n/a	Passive: interview (caregivers)
Green et al. 2009; Canada	n/a	General population	8-15 (10.7)	49.4	89; n/a	53 (59.6%)	2 (2.2%)	3 (3.4%)	19 (21.3%)	n/a	Canadian diagnostic guidelines (Chudley	Passive: medical records

Reference; Country	Year(s) of data collection	Population	Age range in years (mean)	Gender: % of males	Sample size; Diagnostic breakdown	Prevalence of ADHD n (%)	Prevalence of ASD n (%)	Prevalence of CD n (%)	Prevalence of ODD n (%)	Diagnostic criteria used for comorbid disorders	FASD Diagnostic criteria used	Method of ascertainment
Habbick et al. 1996; Canada	1992-94	General population (including Aboriginals)	0-28 (6.3)	52.7	207; n/a	68 (32.9%)	7 (3.4%)	-	10 (4.8%)	n/a	et al., 2005) Guidelines by the Fetal Alcohol Study Group of the Research Society on Alcoholism (Rossett, 1980) & Sokol & Clarren (1989)	Active: psychological assessment
Kvigne et al. 2004; United States of America	1981-93	Aboriginal population	4-21	53.8	78; FASD = 43 FAS + 35 "incomplete" FAS	20 (25.6%)	-	10 (12.8%)	-	n/a	n/a	Passive: medical records
Landgren et al. 2010; Sweden	1998-2002	Adopted children (from Eastern Europe)	5-10	56.8	37; FASD = 21 FAS + 10 pFAS + 6 ARND	21 (56.8%)	2 (5.4%)	2 (5.4%)	15 (40.5%)	DSM-IV	Revised IOM criteria (Hoyme et al., 2005)	Active: psychological assessment
Lewis et al. 2016; South Africa	n/a	General population	(11.0)	55.2	29; 29 FAS/pFAS	9 (31.0%)	-	-	-	Case definition provided	Revised IOM criteria (Hoyme et al., 2005)	Active: psychological assessment

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Reference; Country	Year(s) of data collection	Population	Age range in years (mean)	Gender: % of males	Sample size; Diagnostic breakdown	Prevalence of ADHD n (%)	Prevalence of ASD n (%)	Prevalence of CD n (%)	Prevalence of ODD n (%)	Diagnostic criteria used for comorbid disorders	FASD Diagnostic criteria used	Method of ascertainment
O'Connor et al. 2002; United States of America	n/a	General population	5-13 (8.3)	78.3	23; FASD = 2 FAS + 4 pFAS + 17 ARND	3 (13.0%)	1 (4.3%)	-	-	DSM-IV	4-digit diagnostic code (Astley & Clarren, 1999)	Active: psychological assessment
Rasmussen et al. 2010; Canada	2005-08	General population	4-17 (8.8)	53.8	52; FASD = 1 FAS + 6 pFAS + 13 ND/AE + 32 SE/AE	33 (63.5%)	-	-	-	n/a	4-digit diagnostic code (Astley & Clarren, 1999)	Active: psychological assessment
Stevens et al. 2012; Canada	n/a	General population	8-12 (10.3)	52.0	25; FASD = 5 pFAS + 20 ARND	16 (64.0%)	-	-	5 (20.0%)	n/a	Canadian diagnostic guidelines (Chudley et al., 2005)	Passive: medical records
Strömmland et al. 2015; Brazil	n/a	Children residing in an orphanage	2-12 (6.2)	43.8	16; FASD = 3 FAS + 6 pFAS + 7 ARND	6 (37.5%)	-	-	1 (6.3%)	DSM-IV & ICD-10	Revised IOM criteria (Hoyme et al., 2005)	Active: psychological assessment
Williams et al. 2014; Canada	n/a	General population	5-18 (11.5)	61.3	31; n/a	22 (71.0%)	-	-	-	n/a	Canadian diagnostic guidelines (Chudley et al., 2005)	Passive: medical records

596 ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; ARBD: Alcohol-Related Birth Defects; ARND: Alcohol-Related  
597 Neurodevelopmental Disorder; ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder; CD: Conduct Disorder; DSM-IV: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual  
598 of Mental Disorders, Fourth Revision; FAS: Fetal Alcohol Syndrome; FASD: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder; ICD-10: International  
599 Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10<sup>th</sup> Revision; ODD: Oppositional Defiant Disorder; pFAS: Partial Fetal  
600 Alcohol Syndrome; n/a: not available; ND/AE: Neurobehavioral Disorder, Alcohol Exposed; SE/AE: Static Encephaly, Alcohol  
601 Exposed  
602 \*The sample size for Astley (2010) was 780 for ADHD, 1271 for CD, and 1268 for ODD

603 **Table 2.** Pooled prevalence (results from meta-analysis) of ADHD, ASD, CD, and ODD  
 604 among children with FASD and results of the tests of heterogeneity and publication bias

Diagnosis	Number of included studies	Number of subjects	Pooled prevalence estimate	95% Confidence interval		I <sup>2</sup>	P-value (regression test)
				Lower	Upper		
<b>ADHD</b>	20	2,582	52.9%	43.7%	62.0%	94.6%	0.000
<b>ASD</b>	6	1,029	2.6%	1.4%	4.1%	15.1%	0.025
<b>CD</b>	5	1,514	7.0%	2.5%	13.2%	80.8%	0.534
<b>ODD</b>	11	2,719	12.9%	8.4%	18.2%	89.0%	0.046

605 ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder; CD:

606 Conduct Disorder; ODD: Oppositional Defiant Disorder

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607 **Table 3.** Sub-analyses of the pooled prevalence (results from meta-analysis) of ADHD,  
 608 CD, and ODD among children with FASD by population and method of ascertainment  
 609 and results of the tests of heterogeneity and publication bias

Diagnosis; Population; Method of ascertainment	Number of included studies	Number of subjects	Pooled prevalence estimate	95% Confidence interval		I <sup>2</sup>	P-value (regression test)
				Lower	Upper		
<b>ADHD</b>							
<i>Population</i>							
General population	15	2,235	57.5%	46.8%	67.8%	95.2%	0.000
Aboriginal population	2	138	23.1%	16.4%	30.6%	-	-
Children in care	3	209	55.1%	47.9%	62.1%	2.1%	0.060
<i>Method of ascertainment</i>							
Active	7	520	42.1%	29.4%	55.4%	86.2%	0.007
Passive	13	2,062	58.5%	46.7%	69.8%	95.8%	0.005
<b>CD</b>							
<i>Population</i>							
General population	3	1,399	5.8%	1.2%	13.1%	81.3%	0.932
<i>Method of ascertainment</i>							
Passive	4	1,477	7.5%	2.3%	15.0%	85.3%	0.725
<b>ODD</b>							
<i>Population</i>							
General population	8	2,418	13.0%	8.6%	18.1%	87.2%	0.097
Children in care	3	209	13.0%	0.0%	45.2%	94.0%	0.648
<i>Method of ascertainment</i>							
Active	4	416	10.0%	1.2%	24.4%	91.2%	0.546
Passive	7	2,211	14.7%	9.8%	20.4%	86.5%	0.097

610 ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; CD: Conduct Disorder; ODD:

611 Oppositional Defiant Disorder

612 *Note.* Sub-analyses were conducted for those disorders where heterogeneity was found to

613 be present, and as such, ASD was not included.

614 **Figure Captions**

615

616 **Figure 1.** Schematic diagram depicting the search strategy employed

617

618 **Figure 2.** Forest plot of the prevalence of ADHD (A), ASD (B), CD (C), and ODD (D)

619 among children with FASD reported in the studies included in meta-analysis

620 CI: confidence interval.

621 *Note.* The size of the box around the point estimate is representative of the weight of the

622 estimate used in calculating the pooled point estimate.

623

624 **Figure 3.** Funnel plot of the prevalence of ADHD (A), ASD (B), CD (C), and ODD (D)

625 among children with FASD reported in the studies included in meta-analysis

626

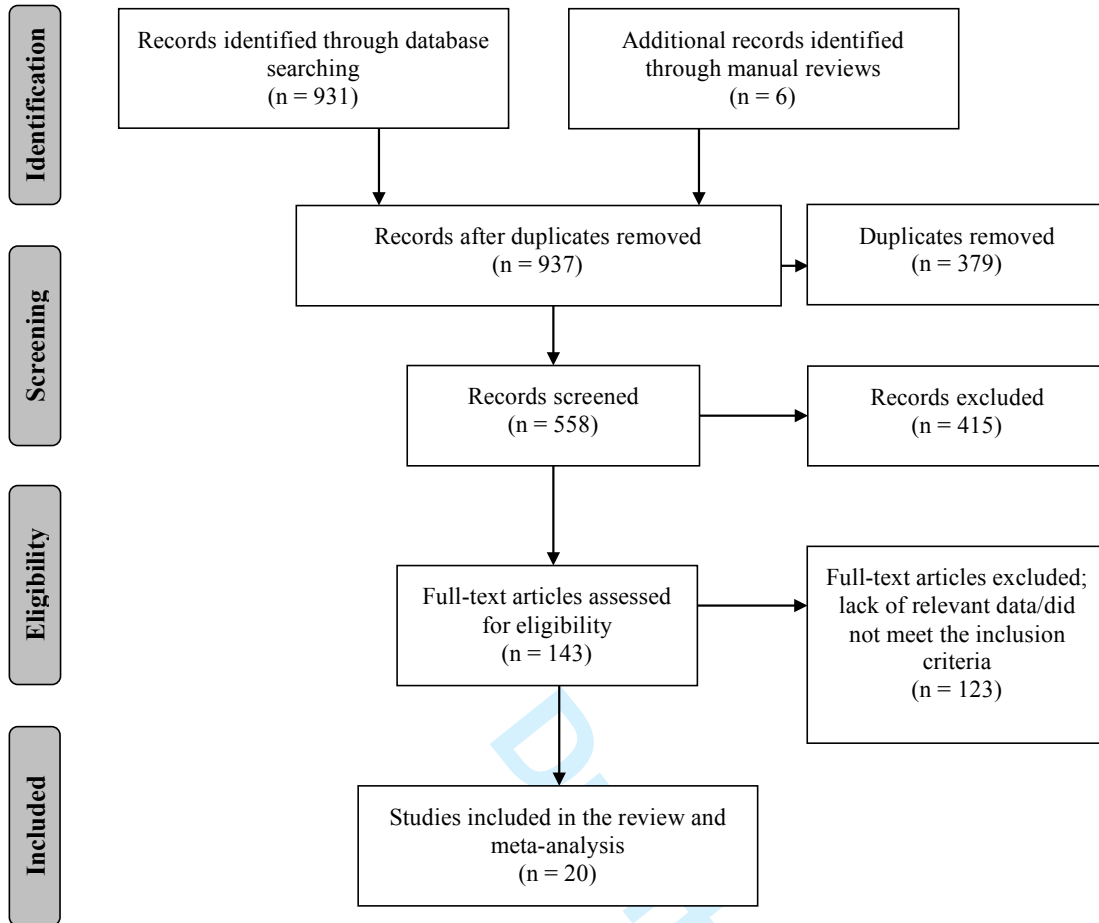
627 **Figure 4.** The prevalence of ADHD, ASD, CD and ODD among children with FASD and

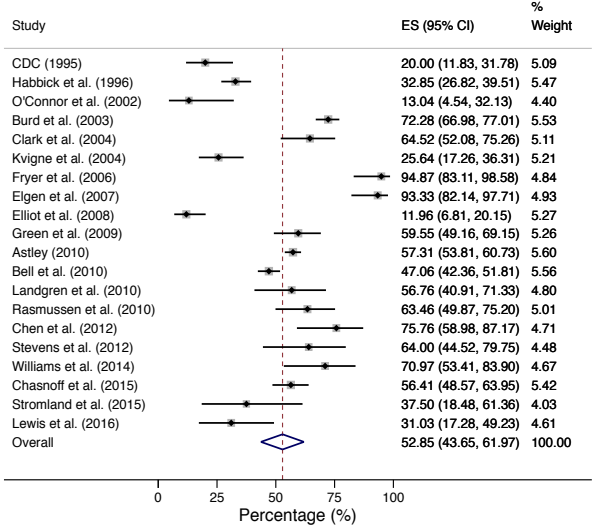
628 without FASD (i.e., the general population of the United States)

629 ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder; CD:

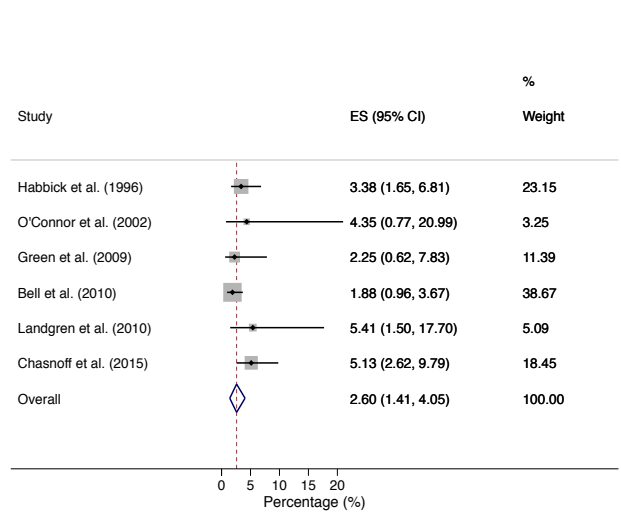
630 Conduct Disorder; ODD: Oppositional Defiant Disorder

631 *Sources:* Christensen et al. (2016), Costello et al. (2003), and Kessler et al. (2005).

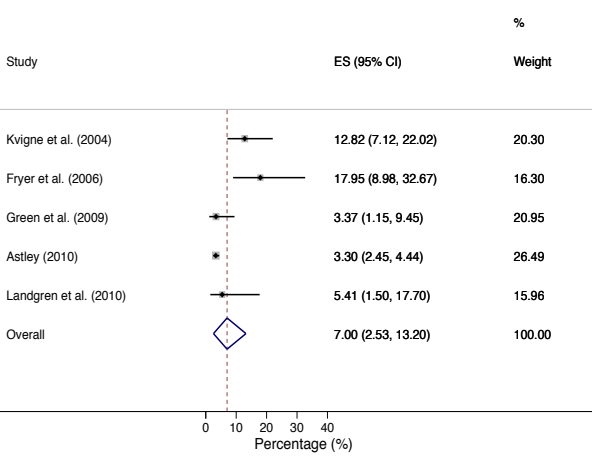




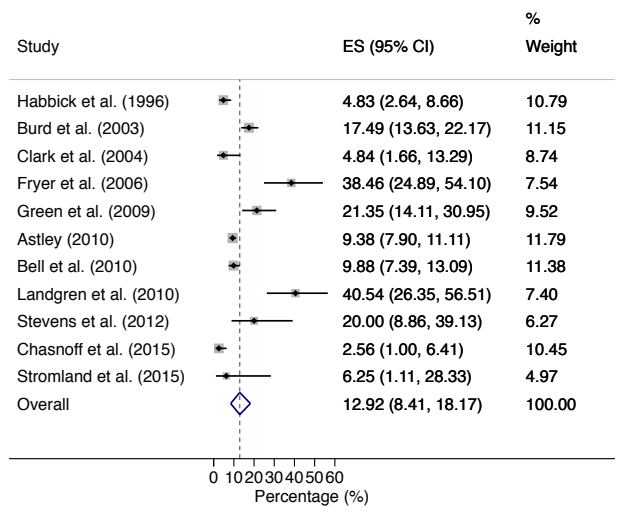
(A)



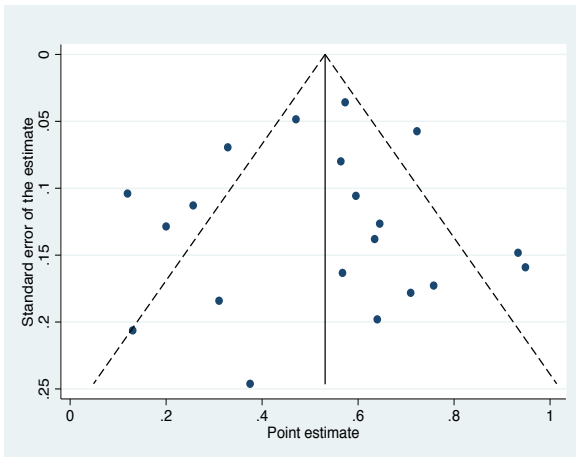
(B)



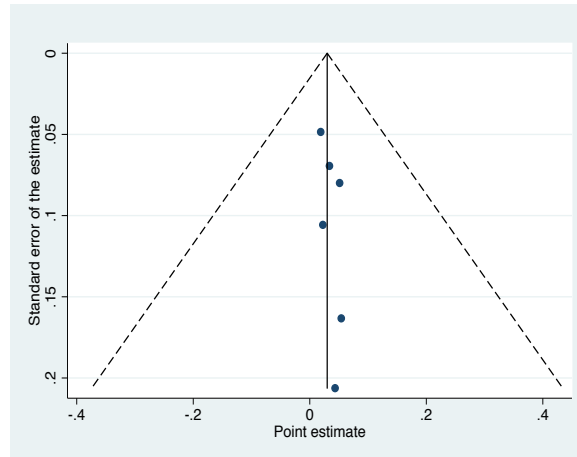
(C)



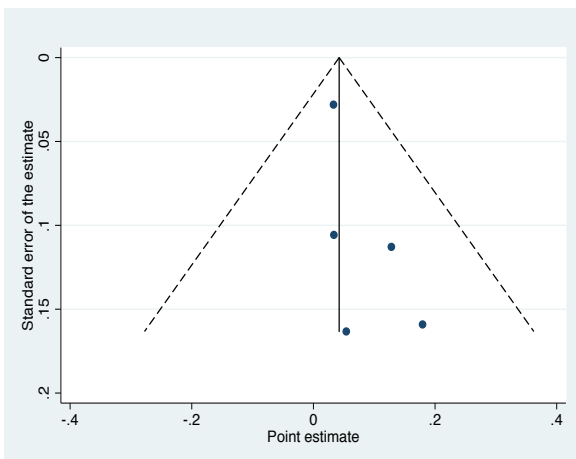
(D)



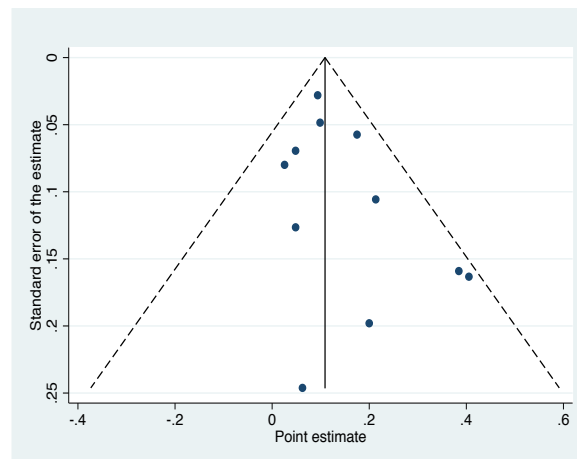
(A)



(B)

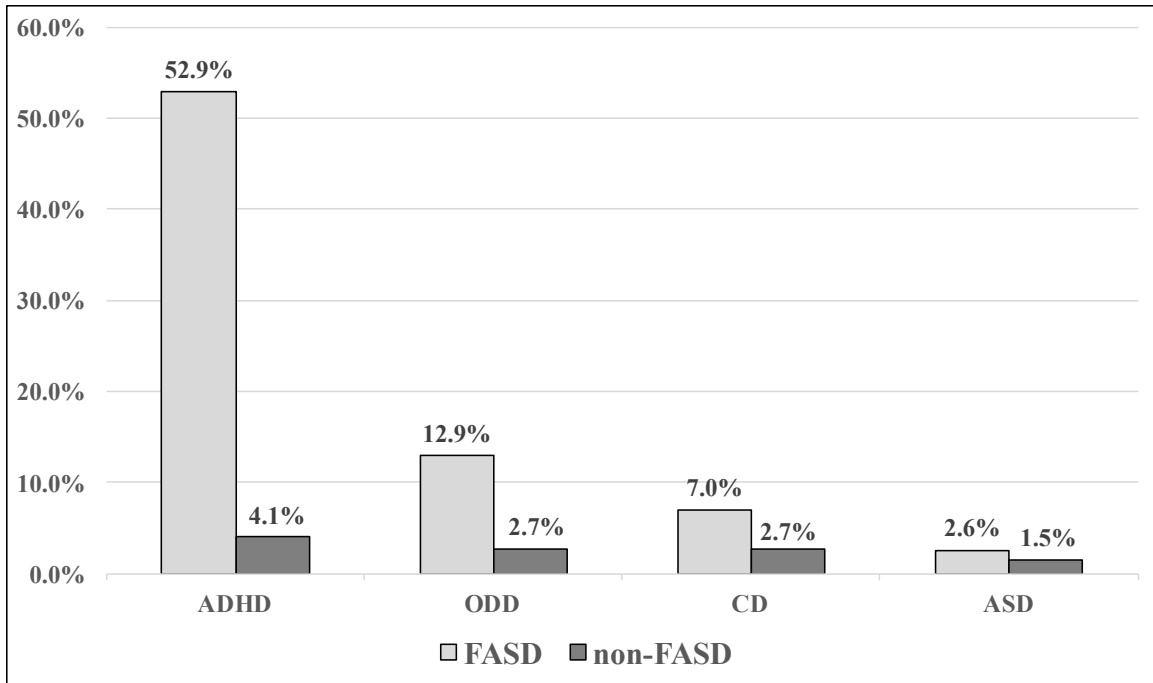


(C)



(D)





Draft