# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 3305**

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**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 36)**

**Mrs M O Clarke (DA) to ask the Minister of Health:**

What (a) research has been conducted to determine the decline in fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) within each province, (b) is the current level of FAS in each province and (c) was the previous available FAS statistics within each province? **NW4102E**

**REPLY:**

Foetal alcohol syndrome is a congenital disorder caused by alcohol exposure on the foetus during pregnancy. Though it is a congenital disorder which manifests post-delivery (anywhere from birth to eight years based on the severity of the condition), FAS is not a genetic condition but rather the consequence of a socio-behavioural matter.

The diagnosis of FAS is purely clinical and has many complexities. To be diagnosed with FAS, some or all of a set of criteria must be met including, the presence of characteristic physical features of FAS, documented prenatal alcohol exposure, pre and post-natal growth deficiencies, brain growth deficiencies, neurobehavioral/developmental impairment which may include or exclude cognitive impairments.

The National Department of Health is reimplementing the birth defects notification system following the approval of the Clinical Genetic Service Guideline in November 2021. The aim of this system is to collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate congenital disorders data. This system reports on data collected at birth, making reporting of FAS through this system a challenge as the physical features of FAS (which initiate further assessment) only become more pronounced as the child grows delaying diagnosis.

To strengthen the identification of FAS and other congenital disorders, NDOH is incorporating the prevention and management of congenital disorders in the Integrated School Health Program training, ensuring that School Health Nurses are capacitated in screening learners for congenital disorders including FAS. It is through this platform that data for preliminary FAS cases and other congenital conditions will be reported.

1. The Department of Health has not conducted a research to determine fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) rates in the provinces. The department relies on research conducted by academia from the different tertiary institutions for statistics on FAS. Research on FAS and other fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) was conducted by the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch, in collaboration with Foundation for Alcohol related Research (FARR).
2. The current level of FAS in the province is not immediately known.
3. The previous national research was conducted by FARR in collaboration with Stellenbosch University in 2016. This research focused only on 3 provinces: Gauteng, Northern Cape and Western Cape, and it reported national fetal alcohol spectrum disorders prevalence rates ranging from 29 – 290 per 1000 live births.

END.