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The Prenatal Exposure And Child brain and mental Health (PEACH) Study: protocol for a cohort study of children and youth with prenatal alcohol exposure

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4 The Prenatal Exposure And Child brain and mental Health (PEACH) Study: protocol for a cohort study
5 of children and youth with prenatal alcohol exposure
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Abstract

Introduction: Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), which is caused by prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE), affects an estimated 4% of North Americans, and is the most common preventable cause of intellectual disability. Mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, are experienced by nearly all individuals with FASD. However, there is very limited knowledge about effective treatments for mental health problems in individuals with FASD; effective treatments are hindered in part due to a lack of understanding of the basic neurobiology underlying internalizing disorders in youth with FASD.

Methods and analysis: The Prenatal Exposure And Child brain and mental Health (PEACH) study includes children aged 7-18 years. We will use longitudinal neuroimaging (anatomical T1-weighted, diffusion, and passive viewing function magnetic resonance imaging) and mental health assessments (Behaviour Assessment Scale for Children [BASC-3], Multi-dimensional Anxiety Scale for Children [MASC-2], Children's Depression Inventory [CDI-2], Kiddie Scale of Affective Disorders [K-SADS]) to: (1) characterize trajectories of brain development in youth with FASD, (2) determine whether brain abnormalities mediate increases in anxiety and depression in youth with FASD, and (3) identify baseline brain features that predict changes of internalizing symptoms over the next 2 years in FASD. All of this will be done while considering sex and adverse postnatal experiences, which can significantly impact mental health and brain outcomes.

Ethics and dissemination: Ethics approval has been obtained in both testing sites (Edmonton and Calgary). The results of this study will be disseminated in peer-reviewed journals, at relevant conferences, and in conjunction with our knowledge mobilization partners.

Significance: This project will forge new understanding of FASD and mental health from a neurobiological perspective, highlighting key time periods (i.e., sensitive windows) and brain regions (i.e., that may be susceptible to neurostimulation), while identifying factors that predict individual trajectories of anxiety and depression symptoms.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study

- We will measure brain alterations in children and youth with prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE) using magnetic resonance imaging
- Alcohol-exposed participants will have confirmed prenatal alcohol exposure, though specific measures of timing, frequency, and dose of prenatal alcohol exposure are often difficult to obtain
- We use multiple mental health assessments to measure symptoms of depression and anxiety, and include a comprehensive neurocognitive battery
- This study uses a longitudinal, prospective design and will follow children over 2 years
- We incorporate comprehensive assessment and analysis of both prenatal and postnatal adverse exposures

Introduction

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder caused by prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE). It is characterized by life-long cognitive, behavioural, and neurological deficits,¹ and its prevalence of FASD in North America is estimated to be 4%,^{2,3} with lifetime costs over \$1M per individual.³⁻⁵ Beyond the primary cognitive and behavioural deficits, over 90% of individuals with FASD experience co-occurring mental health problems,⁶⁻⁸ compared to 20% in the general population⁹. Depression and anxiety are among the most common, affecting 45-50% and 20-40% of individuals with FASD, respectively.¹⁰⁻¹² Developing early and appropriate interventions to minimize mental health problems and maximize adaptive outcomes in FASD is critical for improving quality of life and reducing the societal burden of FASD. Concerns have been raised that existing mental health treatments for individuals with FASD may be less effective than for the general population,^{13,14} perhaps hindered by a lack of understanding of their neurobiological basis.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) can be used to investigate neurological abnormalities in

1 FASD. The most common MRI finding in individuals with FASD is widespread reductions in brain
2 volume, which have been observed with anatomical MRI from neonates to adults.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Diffusion tensor
3 imaging (DTI) assesses microstructure of structural white matter connections via fractional anisotropy
4 (FA) and mean diffusivity (MD), measures sensitive to myelination and axonal density.¹⁸ Numerous
5 studies have shown lower FA and/or higher MD in children, adolescents, and young adults with
6 FASD.¹⁹⁻²² Recent studies suggest that brain diffusion alterations are also present in infants and young
7 children, though in the opposite direction (i.e., higher FA and lower diffusivity).^{23 24} Resting state
8 functional MRI (rs-fMRI) measures patterns of spontaneous brain connectivity by correlating functional
9 signals across regions (“functional connectivity”);²⁵ findings suggest atypical functional connectivity in
10 children and youth with FASD.²⁶⁻²⁹ Regional brain volume reductions, weaker white matter connectivity
11 (lower FA/higher MD), and atypical functional connectivity have been reported throughout the brain,
12 but alterations are most prominent in subcortical structures^{17 30} and prefrontal areas²⁹⁻³². Most studies to
13 date have been cross-sectional, and thus the trajectories of brain maturation remain unclear. The few
14 longitudinal MRI studies that do exist in FASD, show that children with FASD have faster changes of
15 cortical thickness,³³ volume,³⁴ and white matter connectivity³⁵ than unexposed controls; these faster
16 changes possibly reflect a “catch-up” in brain maturation. It is not known how key functional networks
17 change with age in FASD. Longitudinal research is critical for revealing the developmental trajectories
18 of brain connectivity in FASD.

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Previous studies have related cognitive abilities and clinical features (e.g., dysmorphology) to brain structure in FASD;^{29 34 36-39} however few studies have examined relationships between brain measures and mental health.⁴⁰ In individuals without FASD, internalizing symptoms are most commonly associated with brain alterations in the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dlPFC), amygdala, and hippocampus, as well as connections between these structures.⁴¹⁻⁴³ Resting state functional connectivity is higher in the ACC and mPFC in adolescents with depression,^{43 44} while weaker structural connectivity (lower FA/higher MD) in frontal

1 white matter (e.g., cingulum, uncinata) is associated with depression and anxiety in youth.⁴⁵⁻⁵⁰ Areas
2 identified by neuroimaging (e.g., PFC, cingulate) are used as brain targets for neurostimulation to treat
3 adults with depression and anxiety,⁵¹⁻⁵³ highlighting the importance of understanding the neurological
4 correlates of internalizing symptoms. Thus, brain alterations induced by PAE may increase the risk of
5 internalizing disorders.
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14 Little is known about the trajectories of mental health symptoms in youth with FASD, though
15 difficulties tend to persist or worsen with age.^{54 55} However, FASD is a heterogeneous disorder, with
16 heterogeneous outcomes,⁵⁶ so it is critical to consider differences at the individual level. In adolescents
17 without FASD, functional connectivity between the amygdala and mPFC predicts the severity of future
18 internalizing symptoms⁵⁷. Brain volumes in the hippocampus⁵⁸ and ACC⁵⁹ also predict treatment
19 response in adults with depression (but without FASD). However, it is unclear which baseline features
20 predict future mental health outcomes in youth with FASD, though this could inform treatment
21 decisions. Thus, longitudinal research is needed to understand associations between brain alterations and
22 trajectories of depressive and anxiety symptoms in individuals with FASD, to help predict individual
23 outcomes.
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38 Individuals with FASD frequently have adverse postnatal experiences (~43% have abuse or
39 neglect).⁶⁰⁻⁶² Such early adversity is commonly operationalized as adverse childhood experiences
40 (ACEs),⁶³ which provides a cumulative risk score accounting for abuse, neglect, and other household
41 dysfunction in childhood. In the general population, ACEs are associated with heightened risk of anxiety
42 and depression⁶⁴ and alterations to frontal and limbic brain structure and function.⁶⁵⁻⁷³ Animal studies
43 show that PAE and postnatal adversity interact to increase depression risk⁷⁴. Very few human studies of
44 FASD have incorporated any measure of postnatal risk. Two recent human studies show differential
45 associations between socio-economic status and brain volumes in children with and without PAE,^{75 76}
46 and one showed that postnatal adversity (neglect, abuse, etc.) moderates the association between PAE
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1 and brain connectivity.²² All of this evidence underscores the need for FASD studies to consider early
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4 adversity. ACEs treats all adverse experiences similarly, although different types of adversity may have
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6 different effects on individuals.⁷⁷ We recently developed a risk characterization framework that accounts
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8 for the duration, frequency, timing, and type of risks, which we believe is more appropriate for children
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10 with FASD, who may experience a wide range of adversities.⁶¹
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14 Understanding brain development in FASD, its relation to internalizing symptoms, and predictors of
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16 positive outcomes is critical for targeting treatments at the right time (e.g., age-appropriate therapy),⁷⁸
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18 for the right brain regions (e.g., for neurostimulation),⁵¹ and for the right person (e.g., considering
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20 individual circumstances).⁷⁹ In this study, we will recruit 125 FASD and 125 control youth (7-18 years)
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22 and acquire longitudinal MRI and mental health assessments to study trajectories of brain and mental
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24 health with the following aims:
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28 1. Characterize developmental trajectories of brain connectivity in youth with FASD. *Hypothesis 1:*
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30 Structural and functional connectivity to the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala will
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32 show faster increases in FASD compared to unexposed controls.
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36 2. Determine whether brain structure and function mediate the relationship between FASD and
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38 internalizing symptoms. *Hypothesis 2:* Brain connectivity between the amygdala, hippocampus,
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40 and prefrontal cortex (specifically, lower FA and stronger functional connectivity) will mediate
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42 the association between FASD and symptoms of anxiety and depression.
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46 3. Identify baseline factors that predict changes of internalizing symptoms over time in FASD.
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48 *Hypothesis 3:* Weaker structural connectivity, stronger functional connectivity, and smaller brain
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50 volumes at baseline will predict worsening anxiety and depressive symptoms over the
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52 subsequent two years.
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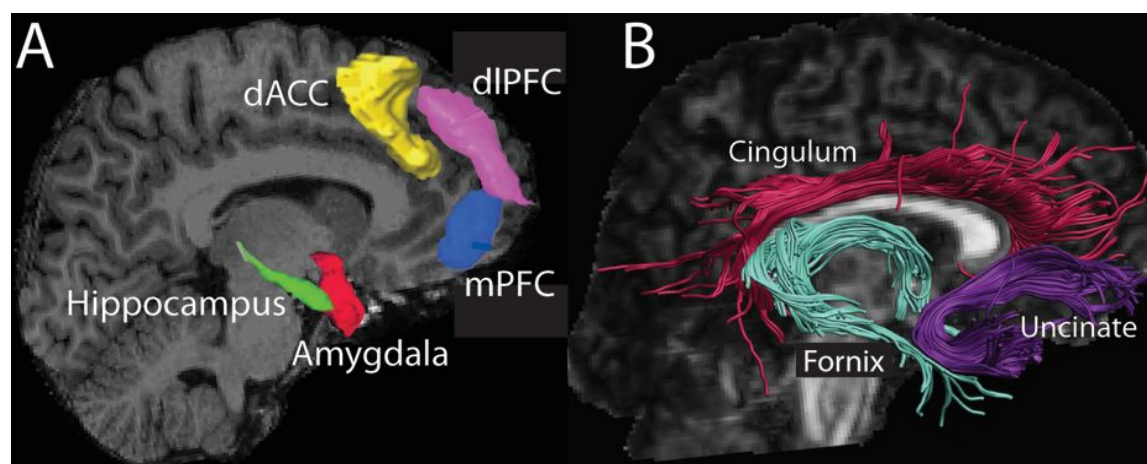


Figure 1: Key gray matter regions (A) and white matter connection (B) related to anxiety and/or depression symptoms. Volume of the regions in A, functional connectivity between pairs of regions in A, and structural connectivity (diffusion metrics) of tracts in B will be measured.

Methods and Analysis

Participants. We will recruit 125 children and youth with PAE and 125 unexposed controls aged 7-18 years. This age range was chosen because: (a) FASD diagnosis typically occurs at ~6-7 years in Alberta,⁸⁰ (b) 7-18 years includes the most common ages of onset for anxiety disorders,⁸¹ (c) depression and anxiety symptoms are common in youth with PAE of this age range,⁸ and (d) children this age are more likely to tolerate MRI scanning than younger children.⁸² Repeat assessments and MRI scanning will occur 2 years after baseline, which allows for measurable brain development within individuals,⁸³ as well as meaningful changes in mental health symptoms. Approximately equal numbers of males and females will be recruited to be able to appropriately examine sex effects, and approximately half in Edmonton and half in Calgary. Informed written consent will be obtained from parents/guardians, as well as written assent from children/youth.

PAE Group. Participants will be recruited through diagnostic clinics throughout Alberta (including the Pediatric RASD Clinic at the Glenrose Hospital in Edmonton and the Cumulative Risk Diagnostic Clinic at the Alberta Children's Hospital in Calgary), Alberta Children's Services, parent/caregiver support groups for FASD, community groups (e.g., Calgary and Edmonton Fetal

Alcohol Networks), as well as online advertisements and word of mouth.

Participants in the PAE group must have a diagnosis of FASD or confirmed PAE at levels consistent with Canadian FASD diagnostic guidelines (≥ 7 drinks/week or ≥ 2 binge episodes at some point during pregnancy).¹ Alcohol exposure will be confirmed via biological mother's self-report, reliable observations by close family or friends, clinical observation, and/or medical, legal, or child services records. Participants with genetic disorders associated with significant intellectual or developmental impairments, diagnosed with a neurological disorder (e.g., epilepsy, cerebral palsy), or with contraindications to MRI (i.e., metal implants, dental devices, claustrophobia) will be excluded.

Control Group. Controls must have confirmed absence or minimal PAE (≤ 5 drinks total in pregnancy, with no binge episodes) via biological maternal report, no diagnosis of genetic, neurological, or developmental disorders, and no contraindications to MRI scanning. Controls will be recruited through online advertisements, parent groups in Edmonton and Calgary, and word of mouth.

MRI Scanning. MRI scanning at baseline and 2-year follow-up will take place at the Alberta Children's Hospital (ACH, Calgary) on a research-dedicated General Electric 3T MR750w system, or at the Peter S Allen MRI Centre (Edmonton) on a research-dedicated Siemens 3T Prisma. The imaging protocol is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Magnetic resonance imaging protocol. Parameters are given for GE MR750w before Siemens Prisma; if only one set of parameters is given, they were the same for both scanners.

Sequence	Scan Time (min:sec)	Resolution (mm ³)	Slices	FOV (cm)	TR (ms)	TE (ms)	Other information
Passive viewing fMRI (ss-EPI)	8:10	3.6x3.6x3.6	36	23	2000	30	Acquired while watching a clip from Planet Earth
ASL (3D)	5:01	3.5x3.5x3.5 / 1.9x1.9x3.5	34	23/24	4600/4845	15.6/10.1	TI 1990/2025 ms
DTI	7:08/14:12	2.2x2.2x2.2	57	22/24.2	6300/12000	55/98	5/10 b0, 30 dir b900, 30 dir b2000
3D T1 (FSPGR BRAVO/MP-RAGE)	4:57	0.8x0.8x0.8	192	25.6/24	1880/8.25	2.9/3.16	Flip angle 10, TI 948/600 ms,

QSM (3D SPGR/R2Star)	5:16	1.0x1.0x2.0 / 0.47x0.47x2. 0	80	24	42/44.8	3.8- 36.8/4.1- 37.9	7/8 echoes, flip angle 17/15
ihMT	3:09	0.9x0.9x5.0	30	22	8500/15000	85/103	

fMRI = functional magnetic resonance imaging; EPI = echo planar imaging; SPGR = spoiled gradient; ASL = arterial spin labeling; DTI = diffusion tensor imaging; FSPGR = fast spoiled gradient; MP RAGE = magnetization prepared rapid acquisition gradient echo; QSM = quantitative susceptibility mapping; ihMT=inhomogeneous magnetization transfer

Image Analysis. T1-weighted images will be processed using FreeSurfer's⁸⁴ longitudinal processing stream.⁸⁵ Each subject's parcellation will be manually checked and receive minor corrections if necessary. Brain volumes of the left and right hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortical areas (dACC, dlPFC, mPFC) will be extracted.

Diffusion data will be quality checked, brain extracted, and corrected for eddy currents and head motion. Fractional anisotropy (FA) and mean diffusivity (MD) maps will be generated for each subject. Tractography (FA>0.2, angle<30°) will be used to reconstruct white matter fibers connecting frontal and limbic regions (uncinate fasciculus, cingulum, fornix). FA and MD will be assessed within each white matter fiber bundle as primary variables of interest. The dual b-value scan also allows for more advanced diffusion models and analysis,^{86 87} which will be examined in follow-up analyses after primary aims are complete.

Assessment of rs-fMRI data will use AFNI and FSL tools.^{88 89} Each individual's fMRI data will be registered to their anatomical (T1-weighted) scan, then to a pediatric brain template for 5-18 year olds.^{89 90} Volumes with high framewise displacement (>0.25 mm) will be identified and regressed out. Scans with <5 minutes of low-motion data will be eliminated. For each prefrontal region (dlPFC, mPFC, dACC) and the hippocampus and amygdala, averaged time courses will be generated. Correlations between time courses in each pair of regions will be analyzed to measure functional connectivity.

Mental Health Assessments. Mental health assessments will occur at baseline, a subset of tests will be administered online at 1-year follow-up, and the full set will be administered again at 2-year follow-up (see Table 2). Symptoms of depression and anxiety will be measured using both self- and caregiver-

1 reports on the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC-3)⁹¹, Child Depression Inventory-2
2 (CDI-2),^{92 93} and the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC-2).⁹⁴ The MASC-2 is a self-
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5
6 report assessment of anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents (8-19 years of age). The CDI-2 is a
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9 brief questionnaire that measures cognitive, affective, and behavioural signs of depression in children
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11 and adolescent ages 7-17 years. For youth/young adults ≥ 18 years, we will use the Beck Depression
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13 Inventory (BDI)⁹⁵ and PROMIS Anxiety Short Form⁹⁶ to assess depression and anxiety symptoms,
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15 respectively. The BASC-3 provides a validated assessment of a range of mental health symptoms,
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17 including anxiety and depression, while the CDI-2 and MASC-2 provide more specific measures of
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19 depression and anxiety symptoms, respectively, that are consistent with diagnostic criteria. The BASC-3
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21 caregiver report and self-report (only children ≥ 12) will be used to assess behaviour.
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25 To determine whether an individual meets diagnostic criteria for anxiety or depression, youth ≥ 12
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27 years of age and all caregivers will complete a diagnostic assessment of internalizing mental health
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29 disorders with a trained and reliable clinician using the mood and affective disorders subscales of Kiddie
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31 Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia – Lifetime Version (K-SADS-PL).⁹⁷ The K-SADS-
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33 PL is a semi-structured diagnostic interview and gold standard for assessing a variety of mental health
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35 disorders in youth based on DSM-5 diagnostic criteria.⁹⁸ The Diagnostic Interview for Anxiety and
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37 Mood, and OCD and Related Neuropsychiatric Disorders (DIAMOND)⁹⁹ will be used for participants
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39 over 18 years.
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44 We also examine the frequency, chronicity and location of pain of children and youth in the past 30
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46 days.^{100 101} The Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS-3) is a comprehensive parent report
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48 measure of the adaptive or daily functioning skills of children and youth across the lifespan.¹⁰² The
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50 Sensory Profile (SP-2) measures a child's sensory processing patterns in various contexts (home, school,
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52 and community settings).¹⁰³
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Table 2: Questionnaires and Assessments

Questionnaire and assessments are listed below for each study time point. Caregiver refers to a parent or guardian who regularly cares for the child. Study personnel support younger children in completing the questionnaires if necessary.

	Time 1 (in person)	Time 2 (online)	Time 3 (in person)	Age limits
Mental Health				
Child Depression Index (CDI-2)	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) for youth >17 years
Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC-2)	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	PROMIS Anxiety for young adults ≥18 years
Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC-3)	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	Self-report only for children ≥12 years
Kiddie Scale of Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia (K-SADS)	Caregiver interview Child interview		Caregiver interview Child interview	Child interview for children ≥12 years DIAMOND for young adults >18
Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS-3)	Caregiver report		Caregiver report	
Pain questionnaire		Caregiver report Child report		
Sensory Profile 2 (SP-2)	Caregiver report		Caregiver report	For children <15 years
Cognitive Function				
Weschler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI-II) 2-subtest form	Matrix Reasoning, Vocabulary			
Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test (Rey-O)	Child		Child	
Weschler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT-III)	Word Reading, Pseudo-Word Reading, Oral Reading Fluency, Reading Comprehension, Numerical Operations		Word Reading, Pseudo-Word Reading, Oral Reading Fluency, Reading Comprehension, Numerical Operations	
NEPSY-II	Inhibition, Word Generation		Inhibition, Word Generation	Children <17 years
California Verbal Learning Task -Child (CVLT-C)	Child		Child	CVLT-3 for youth ≥17 years

Wisconsin Card Sort Task (WCST)	Child	Child	Child
Other information			
Demographic questionnaire	Caregiver	Caregiver	Caregiver
Prenatal and postnatal exposure assessment	Caregiver; medical, legal, Children's Services records		
Puberty questionnaire	Caregiver, child	Caregiver, child	Caregiver, child
Gender identity questionnaire	Caregiver, child		
Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)	Caregiver on behalf of child		

Cognitive Assessments. IQ will be assessed using the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence – Second Edition (WASI-II)¹⁰⁴ 2-subtest form at baseline to obtain an estimate of Full Scale IQ (FSIQ). The Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test (Rey-O)¹⁰⁵ examines visuospatial ability and visuospatial memory in individuals between 6-89 years of age. The Wisconsin Card Sorting Test (WCST)¹⁰⁶ is an executive functioning measure used to determine cognitive flexibility and set shifting in individuals 6 to 89 years of age. The California Verbal Learning Test (CVLT-C) measures learning and long-term recall and recognition of verbal information in 5-16.11 year olds.¹⁰⁷ The CVLT-3 will be used for youth ≥ 17 years. The NEPSY-II is a neuropsychological assessment tool for children aged 3-16 years of age that assesses functioning in 6 domains;¹⁰⁸ we will use the subscales of Inhibition (measuring inhibition) and Word Generation (verbal productivity). The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT-III) measures academic abilities in children and adolescents aged 4-50.11 years¹⁰⁹.

Early Adversity. Adverse exposures are assessed using questions adapted from the National Crittenton Foundation ACEs survey,^{63 110} a validated survey deemed acceptable by families and caregiving agencies.¹¹¹ For children in foster or adoptive care, adverse experiences will be ascertained through child services records and interviews with biological and/or adoptive parents. With this information, we will apply our own characterization tool, which accounts for the timing, amount, and

1 type of adverse exposure(s) experienced.⁶¹

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4 *Other Variables.* Caregivers will complete a comprehensive demographic survey that includes
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6 information about other individuals in the house, household income, parent education, etc. Caregivers
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8 will be asked if youth have other diagnoses or if they are taking medications. Youth will be asked to
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10 self-report their sex and gender. Sex will be included as a covariate in all analyses, and sex-by-age or
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12 sex-by-anxiety/depression interaction terms will be included where appropriate. Gender and its
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14 interaction terms will be used as additional covariates if numbers permit.
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19 *Statistical Analysis.* Statistical analysis will occur in SPSS (IBM), R (www.r-project.org), and
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21 Matlab. Aim 1 will begin with a cross-sectional analysis using a regression model including age, sex,
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23 group, and age-by-group interaction terms, run separately for each brain measure. Once longitudinal
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25 data is available, linear mixed effects models in R (using lme4 and lmerTest)^{112 113} will be used to
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27 determine developmental patterns of structural and functional connectivity for the FASD and control
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29 groups. Subject will be modeled as a random factor, with sex, age, group, and age-by-group included in
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31 the model. For both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, postnatal adversity and IQ will be
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33 included as covariates. Mixed effects models will be run separately on volumes of each region,
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35 structural connectivity (FA) for each white matter tract, and functional connectivity (correlation) for
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37 connections between each pair of regions in the prefrontal-amygdala-hippocampus network (shown in
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39 Fig. 1). False discovery rate (FDR) will be used to correct for multiple comparisons.
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45 For Aim 2, mediation will be carried out by testing the first pathway from the main predictor
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47 (PAE) to each brain measure (volume, structural or functional connectivity), controlling for age and sex
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49 of participants, and then testing the second pathway from each brain measure to each mental health
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51 measures (anxiety or depression symptoms), with age, sex, and postnatal adversity as covariates. The
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53 overall mediation effect will be tested using percentile-based bootstrap confidence intervals, computed
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55 from 5000 simulations.¹¹⁴ Caregiver-report *T*-scores from the CDI-2 and MASC-2 will be used as
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1 primary measures of depression and anxiety symptoms, respectively. BASC-3 *T*-scores on the anxiety
2 and depression subscales of internalizing symptoms will be used as secondary information. Self-report
3 scores will be used for supplementary analysis, as they sometimes provide different information.^{115 116}
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9 For Aim 3, change in anxiety and depression will be calculated by subtracting the *T*-scores at
10 Time 2 from the *T*-score at Time 1. Primary variables will be caregiver-reported CDI-2 and MASC-2
11 scores for depression and anxiety, respectively. Brain measures, postnatal adversity, sex, IQ, age, and
12 group will then be entered into a multiple regression model to determine which baseline factors predict
13 anxiety and depression trajectories over time. Change in BASC-3 *T*-scores on the anxiety and depression
14 subscales over the 2 years, as well as self-report scores on CDI-2 and MASC-2 will be used in a
15 supplementary analysis. Initially, change in anxiety and depression outcomes will be used as a
16 continuous measure. If enough youth meet criteria for a diagnosis of a depression or anxiety disorder (as
17 measured by the K-SADS), a group analysis (those who symptoms changed in severity to meet criteria
18 for a diagnosis vs those who do not) will also be conducted.
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33 *Power Calculations.* We collected preliminary data, including MRI, mental health assessments,
34 and postnatal adversity on 17 children with FASD and 19 controls without PAE aged 7-15 years.
35 Control subjects (part of a different study)^{86 87} had follow-up scans and assessments ~2 years later. This
36 preliminary data showed age-by-group interactions in structural and functional connectivity with effect
37 sizes of 0.067-0.192 (partial η^2). To detect effects this size for Aim 1 with power ≥ 0.8 using an
38 ANOVA with main effects and interactions, we require 112 individuals total (calculated in G*Power).
39 Preliminary data shows small-medium effects for both FASD-brain and brain-anxiety pathways in the
40 mediation. According to simulations,¹¹⁷ these effects require a sample size of ≥ 162 total individuals to
41 detect mediation using percentile bootstrap with power ≥ 0.8 (Aim 2). Linear regression of relationships
42 between brain measures and changes in anxiety and depression in controls showed effects of $r=0.4-0.6$.
43 To detect these effects (Aim 3), we require at least 130 participants total (G*Power). Thus, we aim to
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1 have ≥ 162 individuals total (81 per group) at time 1 (Aims 1, 2), and ≥ 130 (65 per group) with
2 longitudinal data (Aims 1, 3).
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7 *Patient and Public Involvement.* Ms. Tortorelli (co-investigator on the project) was an Associate
8 Director of Alberta Children's Services, and was involved in study design. She has since moved on to a
9 role as Assistant Professor at Mount Royal University, but we continue to involve staff from Children's
10 Services in the design and execution of the study, and will involve them in interpretation and
11 dissemination of findings. We also have active relationships with organizations serving individuals with
12 FASD and their families, including the Calgary and Edmonton Fetal Alcohol Networks (CFAN, EFAN)
13 and CanFASD. These organization have provided study feedback and support, and will assist with
14 interpretation and dissemination of findings.
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25 ***Ethics and Dissemination.***

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28 This study has been approved by ethics boards at both sites (Calgary: REB17-0663; Edmonton:
29 Pro00093230). Data collection takes 4-6 hours for youth, and 2-3 hours for caregivers (Table 1) and
30 occurs at the Alberta Children's Hospital (Calgary) or University of Alberta Hospital (Edmonton).
31 Caregivers complete some questionnaires ahead of the visit, and additional questionnaires and
32 interviews during the visit. Children complete the MRI scan, mental health and neuropsychological
33 assessments, and questionnaires during the visit. Children ≥ 12 years complete the KSADS interview.
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35 Breaks are given and support is provided as necessary for children and youth. Snacks, parking, and an
36 honorarium (\$150 at baseline visit, \$50 at one-year visit, \$250 at two-year visit) are provided for each
37 family. The honorarium reflects the commitment of the families, as this study requires substantial time
38 commitments from both child and caregiver. If an MRI reveals any incidental findings, it will be
39 referred to the site's medical director (a neuroradiologist) for review and follow-up. If the mental health
40 assessments reveal any concerns, youth will be referred by a child clinical psychologist (Drs. McMorris
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1 or Pei) for appropriate follow-up through the child's physician or other appropriate mental health
2 services.
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7 Communication of our findings to other researchers will occur via publications in peer-reviewed
8 journals and presentations at pertinent conferences (e.g., Organization for Human Brain Mapping,
9 Canadian Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry). As we publish our research findings, we will
10 produce lay summaries and infographics for distribution to stakeholders via our website, our twitter
11 accounts, Kids Brain Health Network's website (researchimpact.ca), social media (including Kids Brain
12 Health Network's YouTube, Facebook and twitter accounts), and email.
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21 Knowledge translation to the wider community will include direct communication (via reports,
22 presentations, meetings) with diagnostic clinics and Children's Services. Results will be presented at
23 policy and practice meetings (e.g., International Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment,
24 Canadian Association of Pediatric Health Centres, Canadian Pediatric Society, Alberta College of Social
25 Workers).
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33 *Potential Limitations.* Research on children and youth with FASD is complex due to confounding
34 pre- and postnatal exposures, missing information, and behavioural difficulties. If recruitment or
35 retention are lower than anticipated, we will recruit participants outside Calgary and Edmonton (e.g.,
36 through the other 10 FASD Networks across Alberta). The strict diagnostic criteria used here will ensure
37 that all participants have a minimum level of PAE, though exact amounts may not be known. We will
38 use all available sources to characterize other risks and diagnoses in our participants and will statistically
39 control for these in our analyses.⁶¹ In some cases, information will be missing, which is a challenging
40 but unavoidable aspect of doing research in this population.
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51 **Significance**

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54 FASD is a common disorder (~4% of Canadians) with a very high societal cost (>\$17B
55 annually). Most individuals with FASD experience co-occurring mental health issues throughout their
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1 lifespan, but effective treatments are hindered by a lack of understanding of the neurobiological basis for
2 these problems. The use of quantitative MRI to understand the brain abnormalities and atypical
3 development patterns underlying mental health problems in youth with FASD is critical to early
4 identification and appropriate intervention strategies to improve outcomes. This study will reveal
5 developmental patterns of brain connectivity, identify the underlying neurological correlates of anxiety
6 and depression symptoms in youth with FASD, and identify baseline brain features that can predict the
7 worsening of anxiety and depression symptoms. This knowledge is crucial for advancing research and
8 identifying prevention and early intervention strategies, which will have substantial benefits for these
9 children and youth with FASD, their families, and the public health system and society. Thus, this
10 innovative project will address significant gaps in the literature, inform prevention strategies, and
11 promote early detection and intervention of internalizing issues in children and youth with FASD.
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CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS APPROVAL

Ethics approval for the following research has been renewed by the Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board (CHREB) at the University of Calgary. The CHREB is constituted and operates in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS 2); Health Canada Food and Drug Regulations Division 5; Part C; ICH Guidance E6: Good Clinical Practice and the provisions and regulations of the Health Information Act, RSA 2000 c H-5.

Ethics ID: REB17-0663_REN4

Principal Investigator: Catherine Lebel

Co-Investigator(s): William (Ben) Gibbard
Carly McMorris

Student Co-Investigator(s): Sarah MacEachern
Quinn Andre
Kelsey Friesen
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Preeti Kar
Daphne Nakhid

Study Title: Mental health and brain alterations in children with multiple early risks

Sponsor: Addiction & Mental Health Strategic Clinical Network
Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Effective: 8-Jun-2020

Expires: 7-Jun-2021

Restrictions:

This Certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to the CHREB for approval.
3. An annual application for renewal of ethics certification must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.

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4 4. A closure request must be sent to the CHREB when the research is complete or
5 terminated.
6

7 **Approved By:**

Date:

8
9 Kathleen Oberle, PhD, Vice-Chair , CHREB

14-May-2020

10 *Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).*
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For peer review only

Health Research Ethics Board

201 Centre Street
University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 1R3
P: 780-492-2754 (Biomedical Panel)
P: 780-492-2022 (Health Panel)
P: 780-492-2433

Approval Form

Date: August 12, 2019
Principal Investigator: Christian Beaulieu
Study ID: PHS000020
Study Title: Calgary Led MRI Study of Children with Prenatal Alcohol Exposure - Mental Health & Cumulative Risk
Approval Expiry Date: August 11, 2020
Date of Informed Consent: Approval Date: 8/12/2019, Approved Document: Youth Consent Aug 2019, Guardian Consent Form UASA - Aug 2019

Funding/Sponsor: Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Health Research Ethics Board - Biomedical Panel. Your application has received a delegated review in light of the prior approval by the University of Calgary CHREB. The study is now approved. The following documentation forms part of this approval: Protocol (uploaded 8/8/2019), guardian consent (August 2019), youth consent (August 2019), CHG assent (August 2019), consent to contact, Advertisements (Control and PHE) (each dated August 2019), CRDC Alcohol Exposure Assessment Form, Demographic Survey Form - Birth Parent, Demographic Brain Mental Health (2019-06-03), Gender Puberty (2019-06-03), Household Information (2019-06-03), AFHS MRI Screening Form.

The Health Research Ethics Board assessed all matters required by section 50(1)(a) of the Health Information Act. Subject consent for access to identifiable health information is required for the research described in the ethics application, and appropriate procedures for such consent have been approved by the HREB - Biomedical Panel. In order to comply with the Health Information Act, a copy of the approval form is being sent to the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Any proposed changes to the study must be submitted to the REB for approval prior to implementation. A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date (August 11, 2020), you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

The membership of the Health Research Ethics Board - Biomedical Panel complies with the membership requirements for research ethics boards as defined in Division 5 of the Food and Drug Regulations and the Tri Council Policy Statement. The HREB - Biomedical Panel carries out its functions in a manner consistent with Good Clinical Practices.

Approval by the Health Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the patients, staff or resources of Alberta Health Services or other local health care institutions for the purposes of the research. Inquiries regarding administrative approval, and operational approval for areas impacted by the research should be directed to the Alberta Health Services Research Administration office (Edmonton Zone) at ethics.consent@albertahealthservices.ca or Government Health Research Administration (research@governorhealth.ca) as applicable.

Sincerely,

Gonzale R. Morin, MD, PhD, FRCP(C)
Associate Chair, Health Research Ethics Board - Biomedical Panel

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).



BMJ Open

The Prenatal Exposure And Child brain and mental Health (PEACH) Study: protocol for a cohort study of children and youth with prenatal alcohol exposure

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4 The Prenatal Exposure And Child brain and mental Health (PEACH) Study: protocol for a cohort study
5 of children and youth with prenatal alcohol exposure
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39 **Authors' contributions:** CL, BG, CT, JP, CB, MB, and CM contributed to conceptualization of this
40 study. CL wrote the first draft of this manuscript; all authors (CL, BG, CT, JP, CB, MB, and CM) edited
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Abstract

Introduction: Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), which is caused by prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE), affects an estimated 4% of North Americans, and is the most common preventable cause of intellectual disability. Mental health problems, including anxiety and depression, are experienced by nearly all individuals with FASD. However, there is very limited knowledge about effective mental health treatments for individuals with FASD; effective treatments are hindered in part due to a lack of understanding of the basic neurobiology underlying internalizing disorders in youth with FASD.

Methods and analysis: The Prenatal Exposure And Child brain and mental Health (PEACH) study includes children aged 7-18 years. We will use longitudinal neuroimaging (anatomical T1-weighted, diffusion, and passive viewing function magnetic resonance imaging) and mental health assessments (Behaviour Assessment Scale for Children [BASC-3], Multi-dimensional Anxiety Scale for Children [MASC-2], Children's Depression Inventory [CDI-2], Kiddie Scale of Affective Disorders [K-SADS]) to: (1) characterize brain development trajectories in youth with FASD, (2) determine whether brain alterations mediate increased anxiety and depression in youth with FASD, and (3) identify baseline brain features that predict changes of anxiety and depression symptoms over the next 2 years. All of this will be done while considering sex and adverse postnatal experiences, which can significantly impact mental health and brain outcomes. This project will forge new understanding of FASD and mental health from a neurobiological perspective, highlighting key time periods (i.e., sensitive windows) and brain regions (i.e., that may be susceptible to neurostimulation), while identifying factors that predict individual trajectories of anxiety and depression symptoms.

Ethics and dissemination: This study was approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board and the University of Alberta Health Research Ethics Board. Study results will be disseminated in peer-reviewed journals, at relevant conferences, and in conjunction with our knowledge mobilization partners.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study

- We use longitudinal neuroimaging to assess brain structure and brain growth
- Alcohol-exposed participants will have confirmed prenatal alcohol exposure, though specific measures of timing, frequency, and dose of prenatal alcohol exposure may be difficult to obtain
- We use multiple mental health assessments to measure symptoms of depression and anxiety, and include a comprehensive neurocognitive battery
- This study uses a longitudinal, prospective design and will follow children over 2 years
- We incorporate comprehensive assessment and analysis of both prenatal and postnatal adverse exposures

Introduction

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder caused by prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE). It is characterized by life-long cognitive, behavioural, and neurological deficits.¹ The prevalence of FASD in North America is estimated to be 4%,^{2,3} with lifetime costs over \$1M per individual.³⁻⁵ Beyond the primary cognitive and behavioural deficits, over 90% of individuals with FASD experience co-occurring mental health problems,⁶⁻⁸ compared to 20% in the general population⁹. Depression and anxiety are among the most common, affecting 45-50% and 20-40% of individuals with FASD, respectively.¹⁰⁻¹² Developing early and appropriate interventions to minimize mental health problems and maximize adaptive outcomes in FASD is critical for improving quality of life and reducing the societal burden of FASD. Concerns have been raised that existing mental health treatments for individuals with FASD may be less effective than for the general population,^{13,14} perhaps hindered by a lack of understanding of their neurobiological basis.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) can be used to investigate neurological abnormalities in FASD. The most common MRI finding in individuals with FASD is widespread reductions in brain

1 volume, which have been observed with anatomical MRI from neonates to adults.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Diffusion tensor
2 imaging (DTI) assesses microstructure of structural white matter connections via fractional anisotropy
3 (FA) and mean diffusivity (MD), measures sensitive to myelination and axonal density.¹⁸ Numerous
4 studies have shown lower FA and/or higher MD in children, adolescents, and young adults with
5 FASD.¹⁹⁻²² Recent studies suggest that brain diffusion alterations are also present in infants and young
6 children, though in the opposite direction (i.e., higher FA and lower diffusivity).^{23 24} Resting state
7 functional MRI (rs-fMRI) measures patterns of spontaneous brain connectivity by correlating functional
8 signals across regions (“functional connectivity”);²⁵ findings suggest atypical functional connectivity in
9 children and youth with FASD.²⁶⁻²⁹ Regional brain volume reductions, weaker white matter connectivity
10 (lower FA/higher MD), and atypical functional connectivity have been reported throughout the brain,
11 but alterations are most prominent in subcortical structures^{17 30} and prefrontal areas²⁹⁻³². Most studies to
12 date have been cross-sectional, and thus the trajectories of brain maturation remain unclear. The few
13 longitudinal MRI studies that do exist in FASD, show that children with FASD have faster changes of
14 cortical thickness,³³ volume,³⁴ and white matter connectivity³⁵ than unexposed controls; these faster
15 changes possibly reflect a “catch-up” in brain maturation. It is not known how key functional networks
16 change with age in FASD. Longitudinal research is critical for revealing the developmental trajectories
17 of brain connectivity in FASD.

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41 Previous studies have related cognitive abilities and clinical features (e.g., dysmorphology) to
42 brain structure in FASD;^{29 34 36-39} however few studies have examined relationships between brain
43 measures and mental health.⁴⁰ In individuals without FASD, internalizing symptoms are most commonly
44 associated with brain alterations in the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), medial prefrontal cortex
45 (mPFC), dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dlPFC), amygdala, and hippocampus, as well as connections
46 between these structures.⁴¹⁻⁴³ Resting state functional connectivity is higher in the ACC and mPFC in
47 adolescents with depression,^{43 44} while weaker structural connectivity (lower FA/higher MD) in frontal
48 white matter (e.g., cingulum, uncinata) is associated with depression and anxiety in youth.⁴⁵⁻⁵⁰ Areas
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1 identified by neuroimaging (e.g., PFC, cingulate) can be used as brain targets for neurostimulation to
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4 treat adults with depression and anxiety,⁵¹⁻⁵³ highlighting the importance of understanding the
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6 neurological correlates of internalizing symptoms. Given the overlap between structures identified as
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8 atypical in children and youth with FASD, and brain areas associated with anxiety and depression, brain
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10 alterations induced by PAE may underlie, at least in part, the increased the risk of internalizing
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12 disorders.
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16 Little is known about the trajectories of mental health symptoms in youth with FASD, though
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18 difficulties tend to persist or worsen with age.^{54 55} However, FASD is a heterogenous disorder, with
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20 heterogeneous outcomes,⁵⁶ so it is critical to consider differences at the individual level. In adolescents
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22 without FASD, functional connectivity between the amygdala and mPFC predicts the severity of future
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24 internalizing symptoms⁵⁷. Brain volumes in the hippocampus⁵⁸ and ACC⁵⁹ also predict treatment
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26 response in adults with depression (but without FASD). However, it is unclear which baseline features
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28 predict future mental health outcomes in youth with FASD, though this could inform treatment
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30 decisions. Thus, longitudinal research is needed to understand associations between brain alterations and
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32 trajectories of depressive and anxiety symptoms in individuals with FASD, to help predict individual
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34 outcomes.
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39 Individuals with PAE/FASD frequently have adverse postnatal experiences (~43% have abuse
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41 or neglect).⁶⁰⁻⁶² Such early adversity is commonly operationalized as adverse childhood experiences
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43 (ACEs),⁶³ which provides a cumulative risk score accounting for abuse, neglect, and other household
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45 dysfunction in childhood. In the general population, ACEs are associated with heightened risk of anxiety
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47 and depression⁶⁴ and alterations to frontal and limbic brain structure and function.⁶⁵⁻⁷³ Animal studies
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49 show that PAE and postnatal adversity interact to increase depression risk.⁷⁴ However, few human
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51 studies of FASD have incorporated any measure of postnatal risk. Two recent human studies show
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53 differential associations between socio-economic status and brain volumes in children with and without
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1 PAE,^{75 76} and one showed that postnatal adversity (neglect, abuse, etc.) moderates the association
2 between PAE and brain connectivity.²² All of this evidence underscores the need for FASD studies to
3 consider postnatal adversity. ACEs treats all adverse experiences similarly, although different types of
4 adversity may have different effects on individuals.⁷⁷ We recently developed a risk characterization
5 framework that accounts for the duration, frequency, timing, and type of risks, which we believe is more
6 appropriate for children with PAE who may experience a wide range of adversities.⁶¹
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16 Understanding brain development in individuals with FASD, its relation to internalizing symptoms,
17 and predictors of positive outcomes is critical for targeting treatments at the right time (e.g., age-
18 appropriate therapy),⁷⁸ for the right brain regions (e.g., for neurostimulation),⁵¹ and for the right person
19 (e.g., considering individual circumstances).⁷⁹ In this study, we will recruit 125 youth with heavy PAE
20 or FASD and 125 control youth (7-18 years) and acquire longitudinal MRI and mental health
21 assessments to study trajectories of brain and mental health with the following aims:
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- 30 1. Characterize developmental trajectories of brain connectivity in youth with FASD. *Hypothesis 1:*
31 Structural and functional connectivity to the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala will
32 show faster increases in FASD compared to unexposed controls.
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- 37 2. Determine whether brain structure and function mediate the relationship between FASD and
38 internalizing symptoms. *Hypothesis 2:* Brain connectivity between the amygdala, hippocampus,
39 and prefrontal cortex (specifically, lower FA and stronger functional connectivity) will mediate
40 the association between FASD and symptoms of anxiety and depression.
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- 46 3. Identify baseline factors that predict changes of internalizing symptoms over time in FASD.
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48 *Hypothesis 3:* Weaker structural connectivity, stronger functional connectivity, and smaller brain
49 volumes at baseline will predict worsening anxiety and depressive symptoms over the
50 subsequent two years.
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Methods and Analysis

Participants. We will recruit 125 children and youth with heavy PAE or FASD and 125 unexposed controls aged 7-18 years. This age range was chosen because: (a) FASD diagnosis typically occurs at ~6-7 years in Alberta,⁸⁰ (b) 7-18 years includes the most common ages of onset for anxiety disorders,⁸¹ (c) depression and anxiety symptoms are common in youth with PAE of this age range,⁸ and (d) children this age are more likely to tolerate MRI scanning than younger children.⁸² Repeat assessments and MRI scanning will occur 2 years after baseline, which allows for measurable brain development within individuals,⁸³ as well as meaningful changes in mental health symptoms. Approximately equal numbers of males and females will be recruited to be able to appropriately examine sex effects, and approximately half in Edmonton and half in Calgary. Informed written consent will be obtained from parents/guardians, as well as written assent from children/youth.

FASD/PAE Group. Participants will be recruited through diagnostic clinics throughout Alberta (including the Pediatric RASD Clinic at the Glenrose Hospital in Edmonton and the Cumulative Risk Diagnostic Clinic at the Alberta Children's Hospital in Calgary), Alberta Children's Services, parent/caregiver support groups for FASD, community groups (e.g., Calgary and Edmonton Fetal Alcohol Networks), as well as online advertisements and word of mouth.

Participants in the PAE group must have a diagnosis of FASD or confirmed heavy PAE at levels consistent with Canadian FASD diagnostic guidelines (≥ 7 drinks/week or ≥ 2 binge episodes at some point during pregnancy).¹ Alcohol exposure will be confirmed via biological mother's self-report, reliable observations by close family or friends, clinical observation, and/or medical, legal, or child services records. Additional prenatal exposures (e.g., tobacco, cannabis, illicit drugs) and adverse experiences (e.g., lack of prenatal care, maternal mental health problems) will be documented where information is available.⁶¹ Participants with genetic disorders associated with significant intellectual or

developmental impairments, diagnosed with a neurological disorder (e.g., epilepsy, cerebral palsy), or with contraindications to MRI (i.e., metal implants, dental devices, claustrophobia) will be excluded. Participants will not be excluded for common comorbid developmental disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or learning disabilities.

Control Group. Controls must have confirmed absence or minimal PAE (≤ 5 drinks total in pregnancy, with no binge episodes) via biological maternal report, no diagnosis of genetic or neurological disorders, and no contraindications to MRI scanning. Controls will be recruited through online advertisements, parent groups in Edmonton and Calgary, and word of mouth. Controls must not have significant intellectual or developmental impairments, but will not be excluded for neurodevelopmental disorders such as ADHD or learning disabilities.

MRI Scanning. MRI scanning at baseline and 2-year follow-up will take place at the Alberta Children's Hospital (ACH, Calgary) on a research-dedicated General Electric 3T MR750w system, or at the Peter S Allen MRI Centre (Edmonton) on a research-dedicated Siemens 3T Prisma. The imaging protocol is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Magnetic resonance imaging protocol. Parameters are given for GE MR750w before Siemens Prisma; if only one set of parameters is given, they were the same for both scanners.

Sequence	Scan Time (min:sec)	Resolution (mm ³)	Slices	FOV (cm)	TR (ms)	TE (ms)	Other information
Passive viewing fMRI (ss-EPI)	8:10	3.6x3.6x3.6	36	23	2000	30	Acquired while watching a clip from Planet Earth
ASL (3D)	5:01	3.5x3.5x3.5 / 1.9x1.9x3.5	34	23/24	4600/4845	15.6/10.1	TI 1990/2025 ms
DTI	7:08/14:12	2.2x2.2x2.2	57	22/24.2	6300/12000	55/98	5/10 b0, 30 dir b900, 30 dir b2000
3D T1 (FSPGR BRAVO/MP-RAGE)	4:57	0.8x0.8x0.8	192	25.6/24	1880/8.25	2.9/3.16	Flip angle 10, TI 948/600 ms,
QSM (3D SPGR/R2Star)	5:16	1.0x1.0x2.0 / 0.47x0.47x2.0	80	24	42/44.8	3.8-36.8/4.1-37.9	7/8 echoes, flip angle 17/15
ihMT	3:09	0.9x0.9x5.0	30	22	8500/15000	85/103	

fMRI = functional magnetic resonance imaging; EPI = echo planar imaging; SPGR = spoiled gradient; ASL = arterial spin labeling; DTI = diffusion tensor imaging; FSPGR = fast spoiled gradient; MP RAGE = magnetization prepared rapid acquisition gradient echo; QSM = quantitative susceptibility mapping; ihMT=inhomogeneous magnetization transfer

Image Analysis. T1-weighted images will be processed using FreeSurfer's⁸⁴ longitudinal processing stream.⁸⁵ Each subject's parcellation will be manually checked and receive minor corrections if necessary. Brain volumes of the left and right hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortical areas (dACC, dlPFC, mPFC) will be extracted.

Diffusion data will be quality checked, brain extracted, and corrected for eddy currents and head motion. Fractional anisotropy (FA) and mean diffusivity (MD) maps will be generated for each subject. Tractography (FA>0.2, angle<30°) will be used to reconstruct white matter fibers connecting frontal and limbic regions (uncinate fasciculus, cingulum, fornix). FA and MD will be assessed within each white matter fiber bundle as primary variables of interest. The dual b-value scan also allows for more advanced diffusion models and analysis,^{86 87} which will be examined in follow-up analyses after primary aims are complete.

Assessment of rs-fMRI data will use AFNI and FSL tools.^{88 89} Each individual's fMRI data will be registered to their anatomical (T1-weighted) scan, then to a pediatric brain template for 5-18 year olds.^{89 90} Volumes with high framewise displacement (>0.25 mm) will be identified and regressed out. Scans with <5 minutes of low-motion data will be eliminated. For each prefrontal region (dlPFC, mPFC, dACC) and the hippocampus and amygdala, averaged time courses will be generated. Correlations between time courses in each pair of regions will be analyzed to measure functional connectivity.

Mental Health Assessments. Mental health assessments will occur at baseline, a subset of tests will be administered online at 1-year follow-up, and the full set will be administered again at 2-year follow-up (see Table 2). Symptoms of depression and anxiety will be measured using both self- and caregiver-reports on the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC-3)⁹¹, Child Depression Inventory-2

(CDI-2),^{92 93} and the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC-2).⁹⁴ The MASC-2 is a self-report assessment of anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents (8-19 years of age). The CDI-2 is a brief questionnaire that measures cognitive, affective, and behavioural signs of depression in children and adolescent ages 7-17 years. For youth/young adults ≥ 18 years, we will use the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)⁹⁵ and PROMIS Anxiety Short Form⁹⁶ to assess depression and anxiety symptoms, respectively. The BASC-3 provides a validated assessment of a range of mental health symptoms, including anxiety and depression, while the CDI-2 and MASC-2 provide more specific measures of depression and anxiety symptoms, respectively, that are consistent with diagnostic criteria. The BASC-3 caregiver report and self-report (only children ≥ 12) will be used to assess behaviour.

To determine whether an individual meets diagnostic criteria for anxiety or depression, youth ≥ 12 years of age and all caregivers will complete a diagnostic assessment of internalizing mental health disorders with a trained and reliable clinician using the mood and affective disorders subscales of Kiddie Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia – Lifetime Version (K-SADS-PL).⁹⁷ The K-SADS-PL is a semi-structured diagnostic interview and gold standard for assessing a variety of mental health disorders in youth based on DSM-5 diagnostic criteria.⁹⁸ The Diagnostic Interview for Anxiety and Mood, and OCD and Related Neuropsychiatric Disorders (DIAMOND)⁹⁹ will be used for participants over 18 years.

We also examine the frequency, chronicity and location of pain of children and youth in the past 30 days.^{100 101} The Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS-3) is a comprehensive parent report measure of the adaptive or daily functioning skills of children and youth across the lifespan.¹⁰² The Sensory Profile (SP-2) measures a child's sensory processing patterns in various contexts (home, school, and community settings).¹⁰³

Table 2: Questionnaires and Assessments

Questionnaire and assessments are listed below for each study time point. Caregiver refers to a parent or guardian who regularly cares for the child. Study personnel support younger children in completing the questionnaires if necessary.

	Time 1 (in person)	Time 2 (online)	Time 3 (in person)	Age limits
Mental Health				
Child Depression Index (CDI-2)	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) for youth >17 years
Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC-2)	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	PROMIS Anxiety for young adults ≥18 years
Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC-3)	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	Caregiver report Self-report	Self-report only for children ≥12 years
Kiddie Scale of Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia (K-SADS)	Caregiver interview Child interview		Caregiver interview Child interview	Child interview for children ≥12 years DIAMOND for young adults >18
Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS-3)	Caregiver report		Caregiver report	
Pain questionnaire		Caregiver report Child report		
Sensory Profile 2 (SP-2)	Caregiver report		Caregiver report	For children <15 years
Cognitive Function				
Weschler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI-II) 2-subtest form	Matrix Reasoning, Vocabulary			
Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test (Rey-O)	Child		Child	
Weschler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT-III)	Word Reading, Pseudo-Word Reading, Oral Reading Fluency, Reading Comprehension, Numerical Operations		Word Reading, Pseudo-Word Reading, Oral Reading Fluency, Reading Comprehension, Numerical Operations	
NEPSY-II	Inhibition, Word Generation		Inhibition, Word Generation	Children <17 years
California Verbal Learning Task -Child (CVLT-C)	Child		Child	CVLT-3 for youth ≥17 years
Wisconsin Card Sort Task (WCST)	Child		Child	
Other information				

Demographic questionnaire	Caregiver	Caregiver	Caregiver
Prenatal and postnatal exposure assessment	Caregiver; medical, legal, Children's Services records		
Puberty questionnaire	Caregiver, child	Caregiver, child	Caregiver, child
Gender identity questionnaire	Caregiver, child		
Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)	Caregiver on behalf of child		

Cognitive Assessments. IQ will be assessed using the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence – Second Edition (WASI-II)¹⁰⁴ 2-subtest form at baseline to obtain an estimate of Full Scale IQ (FSIQ). The Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test (Rey-O)¹⁰⁵ examines visuospatial ability and visuospatial memory in individuals between 6-89 years of age. The Wisconsin Card Sorting Test (WCST)¹⁰⁶ is an executive functioning measure used to determine cognitive flexibility and set shifting in individuals 6 to 89 years of age. The California Verbal Learning Test (CVLT-C) measures learning and long-term recall and recognition of verbal information in 5-16.11 year olds.¹⁰⁷ The CVLT-3 will be used for youth ≥ 17 years. The NEPSY-II is a neuropsychological assessment tool for children aged 3-16 years of age that assesses functioning in 6 domains;¹⁰⁸ we will use the subscales of Inhibition (measuring inhibition) and Word Generation (verbal productivity). The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT-III) measures academic abilities in children and adolescents aged 4-50.11 years¹⁰⁹.

Early Adversity. Adverse postnatal exposures are assessed using questions adapted from the National Crittenton Foundation ACEs survey,^{63 110} a validated survey deemed acceptable by families and caregiving agencies.¹¹¹ For children in foster or adoptive care, adverse experiences will be ascertained through child services records and interviews with biological and/or adoptive parents. With this information and prenatal exposure (see above), we will apply our own characterization tool, which accounts for the timing, amount, and type of adverse exposure(s) experienced both prenatally and

1
2 postnatally.⁶¹
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4 *Other Variables.* Caregivers will complete a comprehensive demographic survey that includes
5 information about other individuals in the house, household income, parent education, etc. Caregivers
6 will be asked if youth have other diagnoses or if they are taking medications. Youth will be asked to
7 self-report their sex and gender. Sex will be included as a covariate in all analyses, and sex-by-age or
8 sex-by-anxiety/depression interaction terms will be included where appropriate. Gender and its
9 interaction terms will be used as additional covariates if numbers permit.
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12 *Statistical Analysis.* Statistical analysis will occur in SPSS (IBM), R (www.r-project.org), and
13 Matlab. Aim 1 will begin with a cross-sectional analysis using a regression model including age, sex,
14 group, and age-by-group interaction terms, run separately for each brain measure. Once longitudinal
15 data is available, linear mixed effects models in R (using lme4 and lmerTest)^{112 113} will be used to
16 determine developmental patterns of structural and functional connectivity for the FASD and control
17 groups. Subject will be modeled as a random factor, with sex, age, group, and age-by-group included in
18 the model. For both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, postnatal adversity and IQ will be
19 included as covariates. Mixed effects models will be run separately on volumes of each region,
20 structural connectivity (FA) for each white matter tract, and functional connectivity (correlation) for
21 connections between each pair of regions in the prefrontal-amygdala-hippocampus network (shown in
22 Fig. 1). False discovery rate (FDR) will be used to correct for multiple comparisons.
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44 For Aim 2, mediation will be carried out by testing the first pathway from the main predictor
45 (PAE) to each brain measure (volume, structural or functional connectivity), controlling for age and sex
46 of participants, and then testing the second pathway from each brain measure to each mental health
47 measures (anxiety or depression symptoms), with age, sex, and postnatal adversity as covariates. The
48 overall mediation effect will be tested using percentile-based bootstrap confidence intervals, computed
49 from 5000 simulations.¹¹⁴ Caregiver-report *T*-scores from the CDI-2 and MASC-2 will be used as
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1 primary measures of depression and anxiety symptoms, respectively. BASC-3 *T*-scores on the anxiety
2 and depression subscales of internalizing symptoms will be used as secondary information. Self-report
3 scores will be used for supplementary analysis, as they sometimes provide different information.^{115 116}
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9 For Aim 3, change in anxiety and depression symptoms will be calculated by subtracting the *T*-
10 scores at Time 2 from the *T*-score at Time 1. Primary variables will be caregiver-reported CDI-2 and
11 MASC-2 scores for depression and anxiety, respectively. Brain measures, postnatal adversity, sex, IQ,
12 age, and group will then be entered into a multiple regression model to determine which baseline factors
13 predict anxiety and depression trajectories over time. Change in BASC-3 *T*-scores on the anxiety and
14 depression subscales over the 2 years, as well as self-report scores on CDI-2 and MASC-2 will be used
15 in a supplementary analysis. Initially, change in anxiety and depression outcomes will be used as a
16 continuous measure. If enough youth meet criteria for a diagnosis of a depression or anxiety disorder (as
17 measured by the K-SADS), a group analysis (those who symptoms changed in severity to meet criteria
18 for a diagnosis vs those who do not) will also be conducted.
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33 *Power Calculations.* We collected preliminary data, including MRI, mental health assessments,
34 and postnatal adversity on 17 children with FASD and 19 controls without PAE aged 7-15 years.
35 Control subjects (part of a different study)^{86 87} had follow-up scans and assessments ~2 years later. This
36 preliminary data showed age-by-group interactions in structural and functional connectivity with effect
37 sizes of 0.067-0.192 (partial η^2). To detect effects this size for Aim 1 with power ≥ 0.8 using an
38 ANOVA with main effects and interactions, we require 112 individuals total (calculated in G*Power).
39 Preliminary data shows small-medium effects for both FASD-brain and brain-anxiety pathways in the
40 mediation. According to simulations,¹¹⁷ these effects require a sample size of ≥ 162 total individuals to
41 detect mediation using percentile bootstrap with power ≥ 0.8 (Aim 2). Linear regression of relationships
42 between brain measures and changes in anxiety and depression in controls showed effects of $r=0.4-0.6$.
43 To detect these effects (Aim 3), we require at least 130 participants total (G*Power). Thus, we aim to
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2 have ≥ 162 individuals total (81 per group) at time 1 (Aims 1, 2), and ≥ 130 (65 per group) with
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4 longitudinal data (Aims 1, 3).
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7 *Patient and Public Involvement.* Ms. Tortorelli (co-investigator on the project) was an Associate
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9 Director of Alberta Children's Services and was involved in study design. She has since moved on to a
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11 role as Assistant Professor at Mount Royal University and remains involved with the project. We
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13 continue to involve staff from Children's Services in the design and execution of the study, and will
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15 involve them in interpretation and dissemination of findings. We also have active relationships with
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17 organizations serving individuals with FASD and their families, including the Calgary and Edmonton
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19 Fetal Alcohol Networks (CFAN, EFAN) and CanFASD. These organizations have provided study
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21 feedback and support and will assist with interpretation and dissemination of findings.
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26 *Potential Limitations.* Research on children and youth with FASD is complex due to confounding pre-
27
28 and postnatal exposures, missing information, and behavioural difficulties. If recruitment or retention
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30 are lower than anticipated, we will recruit participants outside Calgary and Edmonton (e.g., through the
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32 other 10 FASD Networks across Alberta). The strict diagnostic criteria used here will ensure that all
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34 participants have a minimum level of PAE, though exact amounts may not be known. We will use all
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36 available sources to characterize other risks and diagnoses in our participants and will statistically
37
38 control for these in our analyses.⁶¹ In some cases, information will be missing, which is a challenging
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40 but unavoidable aspect of doing research in this population.
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45 *Significance.* FASD is a common disorder (~4% of Canadians) with a very high societal cost (>\$17B
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47 annually). Most individuals with FASD experience co-occurring mental health issues throughout their
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49 lifespan, but effective treatments are hindered by a lack of understanding of the neurobiological basis for
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51 these problems. The use of quantitative MRI to understand the brain abnormalities and atypical
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53 development patterns underlying mental health problems in youth with FASD is critical to early
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55 identification and appropriate intervention strategies to improve outcomes. This study will reveal
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1 developmental patterns of brain connectivity, identify the underlying neurological correlates of anxiety
2 and depression symptoms in youth with FASD, and identify baseline brain features that can predict the
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developmental patterns of brain connectivity, identify the underlying neurological correlates of anxiety and depression symptoms in youth with FASD, and identify baseline brain features that can predict the worsening of anxiety and depression symptoms. This knowledge is crucial for advancing research and identifying prevention and early intervention strategies, which will have substantial benefits for these children and youth with FASD, their families, and the public health system and society. Thus, this innovative project will address significant gaps in the literature, inform prevention strategies, and promote early detection and intervention of internalizing issues in children and youth with FASD.

Ethics and Dissemination.

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board (REB17-0663) and the University of Alberta Health Research Ethics Board (Pro00093230). Data collection takes 4-6 hours for youth, and 2-3 hours for caregivers (Table 1) and occurs at the Alberta Children's Hospital (Calgary) or University of Alberta Hospital (Edmonton). Caregivers complete some questionnaires ahead of the visit, and additional questionnaires and interviews during the visit. Children complete the MRI scan, mental health and neuropsychological assessments, and questionnaires during the visit. Children ≥ 12 years complete the KSADS interview. Breaks are given and support is provided as necessary for children and youth. Snacks, parking, and an honorarium (\$150 at baseline visit, \$50 at one-year visit, \$250 at two-year visit) are provided for each family. The honorarium reflects the commitment of the families, as this study requires substantial time commitments from both child and caregiver. If an MRI reveals any incidental findings, it will be referred to the site's medical director (a neuroradiologist) for review and follow-up. If the mental health assessments reveal any concerns, youth will be referred by a child clinical psychologist (Drs. McMorris or Pei) for appropriate follow-up through the child's physician or other appropriate mental health services.

Communication of our findings to other researchers will occur via publications in peer-reviewed journals and presentations at pertinent conferences (e.g., Organization for Human Brain Mapping,

1 Canadian Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry). As we publish our research findings, we will
2 produce lay summaries and infographics for distribution to stakeholders via our website, our twitter
3 accounts, Kids Brain Health Network's website (researchimpact.ca), social media (including Kids Brain
4 Health Network's YouTube, Facebook and twitter accounts), and email.
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10 Knowledge translation to the wider community will include direct communication (via reports,
11 presentations, meetings) with diagnostic clinics and Children's Services. Results will be presented at
12 policy and practice meetings (e.g., International Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment,
13 Canadian Association of Pediatric Health Centres, Canadian Pediatric Society, Alberta College of Social
14 Workers).
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Figure Caption

Figure 1: Key gray matter regions (A) and white matter connection (B) related to anxiety and/or depression symptoms. Volume of the regions in A, functional connectivity between pairs of regions in A, and structural connectivity (diffusion metrics) of tracts in B will be measured.

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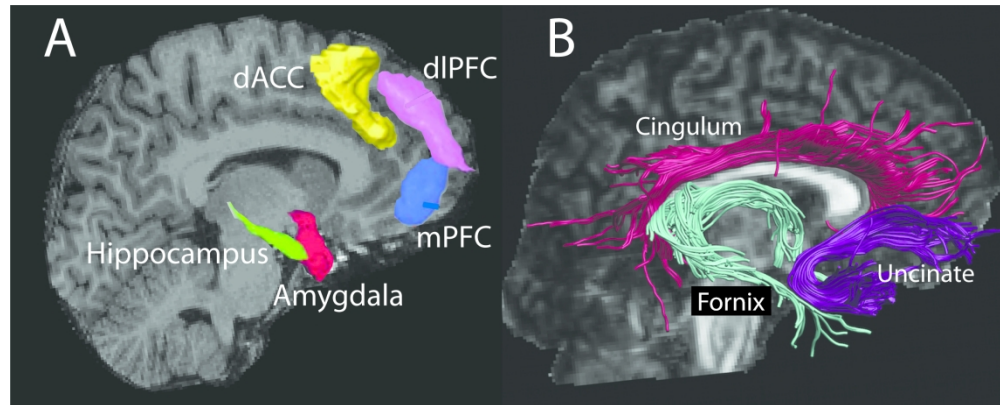


Figure 1

Key gray matter regions (A) and white matter connections (B) related to anxiety and/or depression symptoms. Volume of the regions in A, functional connectivity between pairs of regions in A, and structural connectivity (diffusion metrics) of tracts in B will be measured.