

FASD - An approach in Tusla

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Content

Tusla's approach and understanding of FASD

Engagement with the national health service in the HSE

Tusla training and working to create awareness and response.

Tusla Assessment Consultation and Therapy Service (ACTS)

International research

Approach with Juvenile Justice in Ireland - Oberstown

Approaches

- Ireland key responsibility for public health and for medical diagnosis is with HSE. Tusla have experience of seeking support for children where they are presenting with behavioural and other symptoms seeking support. Tusla working with HSE to develop an FASD response for children in care and others we support.
- USA, Washington. UK.
- Canada, Australia - wider population health approach focussed on prevention, data collection, guidance and integrated responses
- Scotland initially diagnosis approach and now developing an approach based on a continuum of neuro diversity.



Service development

- HSE workshops in 2024 with the [Fetal Alcohol Advisory Support and Training Team \(FAASTT\)](#) at University of Edinburgh, funded by Scottish Government;
- Key points raised and discussed:
 - FASD diagnosis can enable greater understanding of children's needs and more appropriate treatment, yet significant concerns about stigma
 - Specialist FASD centres or pathways are unsustainable and unlikely to meet the needs of children with complex physical and mental health needs – need for single neurodevelopmental pathway
 - Training alone insufficient for implementation of clinical guidelines
 - Importance of a trauma-informed approach






Scotland single Neurodevelopmental pathway

Diagram 1: Neurodevelopmental Services within the agreed Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing model:



*CAMHS and / or neurodevelopmental service



Ireland – Tusla response with HSE

- Awareness of stigma in FASD and in care services
- HSE developing a public health response and hope to start with a public awareness campaign in 2026
- HSE recognise the need for developing a response
- Development of FASD Ireland with advice and support for FASD with growing awareness and response pathways.
- HSE and Tusla working together to develop a shared and integrated understanding and response for children in care.
- Attending training in Scotland and plans to pilot and approach from 2026.

International Research

10% of a sample of Canadian Male Adult Prisoners met diagnosis of FASD, and for a further 15% FASD could not be ruled out.


MacPherson, P.H., Chudley, A.E. & Grant, B.A. (2011).

...the life span prevalence was 61% for Disrupted School Experiences, 60% for Trouble with the Law, 50% for Confinement (in detention, jail, prison, or a psychiatric or alcohol/drug inpatient setting), 49% for Inappropriate Sexual Behaviours on repeated occasions....

Streissguth, et al. (2004)



International Research

- 
- 161 Canadian individuals diagnosed or at risk for FASD
 - substance use (50 %)
 - involvement in child welfare (75 %)
 - criminal justice systems (30 %)
 - Involvement with the child welfare system was associated with higher chances of having anxiety
 - Involvement with the criminal justice system was associated with higher rates of past substance and cannabis use

Popova, S. et al (2021)



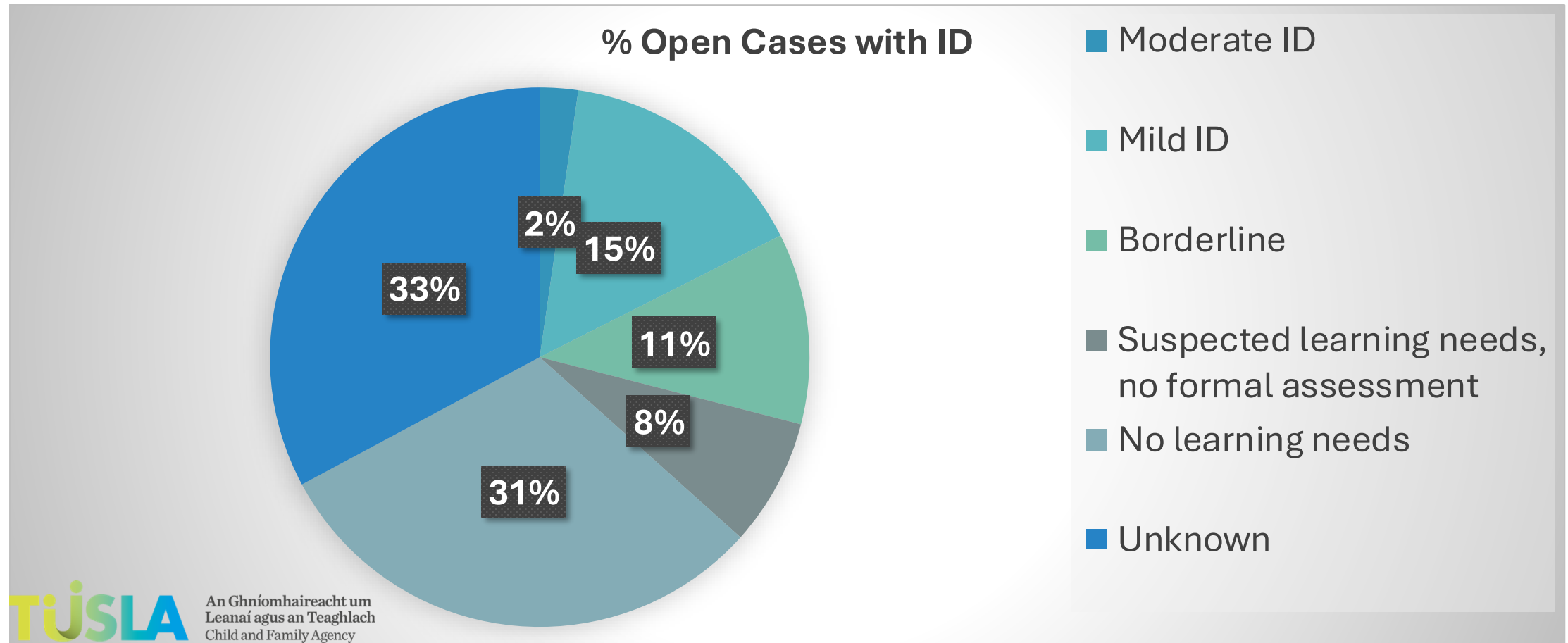
Irish Youth Justice

- Circa 10,000 cases a year come to the attention of the Gardai
- 80-90% will be dealt with through diversion
- 10-20% will go through the courts
- < 1% will result in a detention order (Oberstown Children's Detention Campus)

TÚSLA

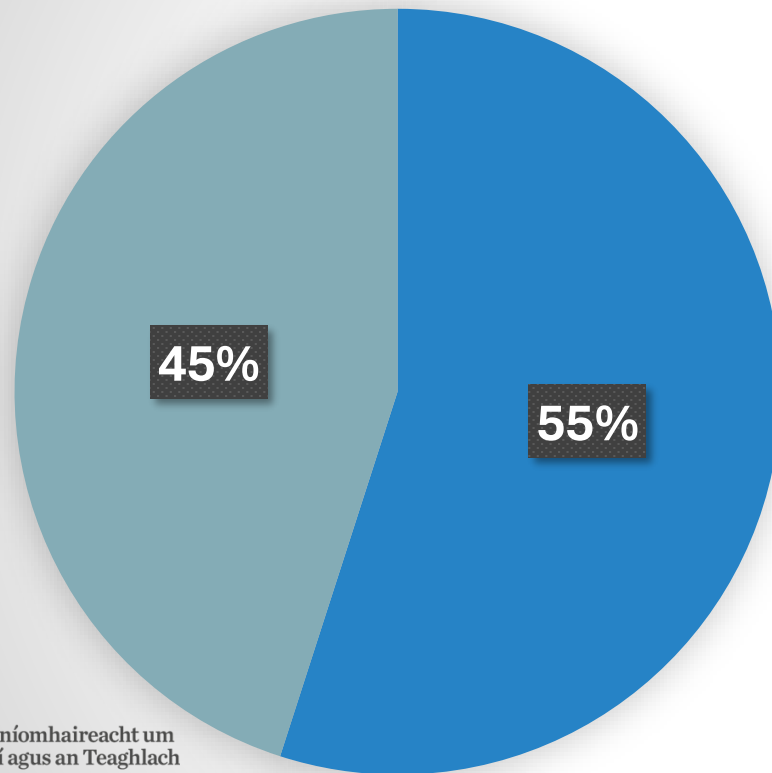
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Neurodevelopmental profiles in the Oberstown Population (Nov 2023 – Dec 2025)



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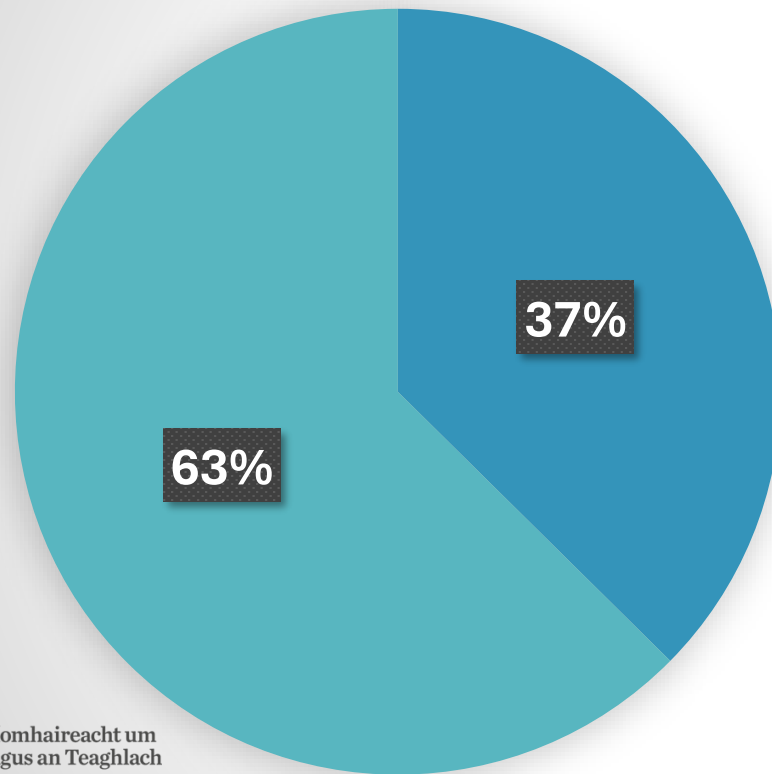
% open cases With a Speech, Language Communication Need (SLCN)



- Young People with a SLCN
- Young people with No SLCN

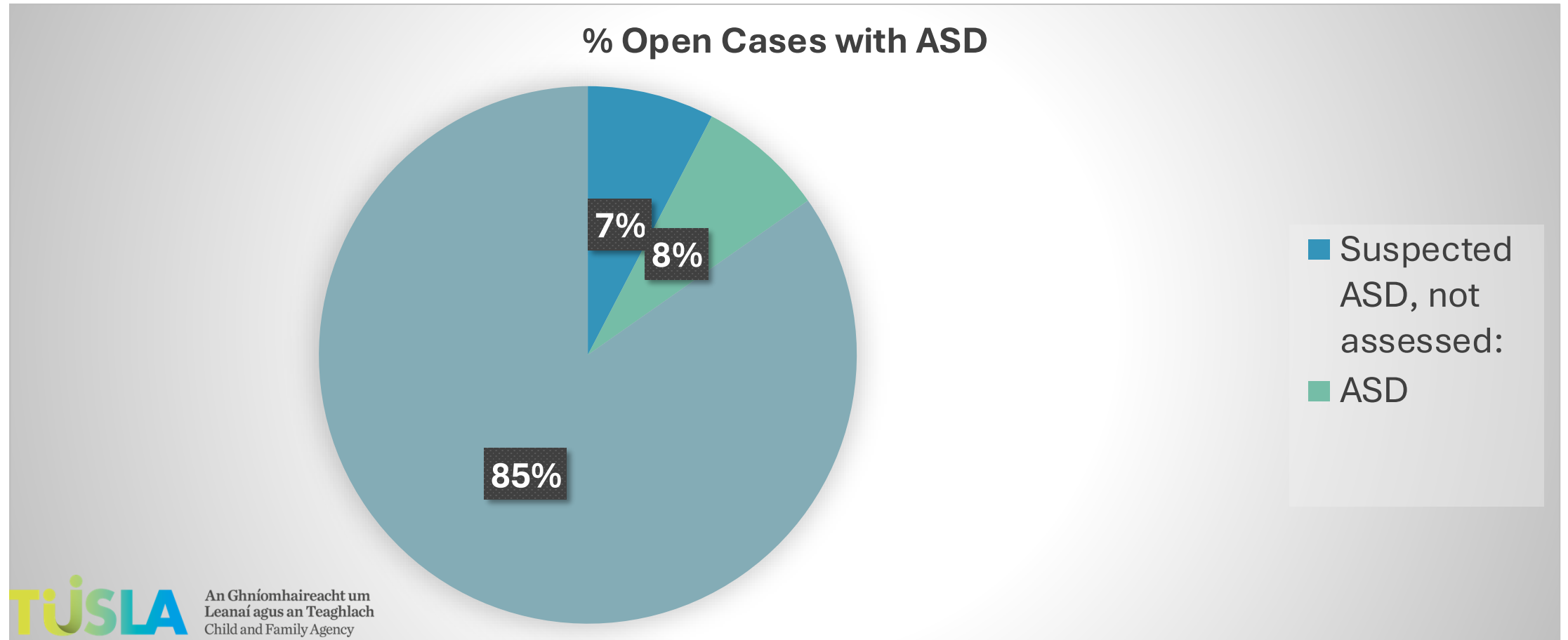
Neurodevelopmental profiles in the Oberstown Population (Nov 2023 – Dec 2025)

% Open cases with Social Communication Needs



- Social Communication Needs Identified
- No Social Communication Needs Identified

Neurodevelopmental profiles in the Oberstown Population (Nov 2023 – Dec 2025)



Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN 156)



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- **Multidisciplinary Approach:** Emphasises collaboration across health, education, social care, and justice sectors.
- **Person-Centred Care:** Focuses on the individual's needs, strengths, and challenges throughout their lifespan.
- **Early Intervention:** Highlights the importance of timely diagnosis and support to mitigate long-term impacts.
- **Prevention Focused:** Stresses the significance of public health messaging and support for women to avoid alcohol during pregnancy.
- **Evidence-Based Recommendations:** Grounded in systematic reviews of current research and best practices.



Systematic Information Gathering: Comprehensive history taking, including prenatal alcohol exposure (PNAE).



Specialist Assessment: Involves Paediatricians, Geneticists, Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists and other relevant specialists



Criteria for Diagnosis: Utilises established diagnostic criteria (e.g., Canadian, 4-Digit Diagnostic Code, or similar, adapted for context) considering growth, facial features, and central nervous system (CNS) abnormalities.
Functioning in three areas at -2 Standard Deviations from the mean (2nd %ile)

Tailored Interventions: Strategies for managing neurodevelopmental challenges (e.g., attention, executive function, social skills).

Educational Support: Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and classroom accommodations.

Behavioral & Mental Health Strategies: Access to therapy, counseling, and pharmacological interventions where appropriate.

Family & Carer Support: Resources, education, and respite care to support families.

Lifespan Approach: Addressing needs from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood, including transitions.



: Recommendations for Management & Support



Challenges

- Late Diagnosis
- Complex Presentations
- Challenging Behaviour/Hard to Reach Populations
- Detention as a point of crisis
- Disability Services and Offending

Examples of Responses

Court Intermediaries

Court
accompaniment for
child defendants
through the Youth
Diversion Projects

TUSLA National
Interagency
Prevention Program
(NIAPP) Keep Safe
Intervention

References

MacPherson, P.H., Chudley, A.E. & Grant, B.A. (2011). Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in a correctional population: Prevalence, screening and characteristics, Research Report R-247. Ottawa (Ontario), Correctional Service Canada

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