

“IF YOU CAN HAVE ONE GLASS OF WINE NOW AND THEN, WHY ARE YOU DENYING THAT TO A WOMAN WITH NO EVIDENCE”: KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS CONCERNING ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DURING PREGNANCY

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Introduction / Issues: Alcohol consumption during pregnancy has the potential to cause significant harm to the fetus. Current Australian guidelines state it is safest not to drink alcohol while pregnant. However, conflicting messages often appear in the media and it is unclear if the message to avoid alcohol is being effectively conveyed to pregnant women. This research aimed to explore advice provided by health professionals to pregnant women about alcohol consumption.

Method / Approach: Ten semi-structured face to face interviews were conducted with health professionals who regularly provide antenatal care. These include midwives, obstetricians, and shared care general practitioners. A six-stage thematic analysis framework was used to analyse interview data in a systematic way including coding data extracts, followed by major theme identification.

Key Findings: Health professionals displayed adequate knowledge that alcohol can cause lifelong physical and mental complications; however, knowledge of the term FASD and the broad spectrum of complications associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy was limited. Although health professionals were willing to discuss alcohol with pregnant women, many did not make this a routine part of practice, and several concerning judgements were noted.

Discussions and Conclusions: Communication between health professionals and pregnant women needs to be improved to ensure that accurate information about alcohol use in pregnancy is being provided. Further, it is important to ensure that the national guidelines are being supported by health professionals.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Health professionals providing antenatal care to women need to be further educated about the effects of alcohol consumption during pregnancy

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