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Pregnant Women's Attitudes Regarding Alcohol Use During Pregnancy and Accessibility and Quality of Information Available - A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Considering children prenatally exposed to alcohol present substantial challenges to parents, schools, and societies and considering minimum safe dose of alcohol during pregnancy is unknown, WHO, EU and different countries suggest zero consumption. Despite of that, research shows that there is a substantial number of women who continue to drink.

Taking into consideration that information is the base to make an informed decision about alcohol use during pregnancy, understanding the availability and quality of information available to pregnant women is also an issue for research.

As far as we know, in Portugal no studies have looked at the pregnant women's attitudes regarding alcohol use during pregnancy and accessibility and quality of information available. This work presents a qualitative approach exploring these dimensions.

Participants were 21 pregnant women recruited (until theoretical saturation was achieved) through snowball sampling strategies and at one public health center. After informed consent, in-depth interviews were conducted, transcribed and then thematically analyzed.

Two participants described alcohol use during pregnancy (social use). Pregnant women reported mixed messages and confusion about consequences of prenatal exposure to alcohol and about safe level of consumption, with implications on decision to drink during pregnancy. Mass media and relatives were mentioned as the most important sources of information about alcohol in general. Lack of consistent screening and information from healthcare professionals is other result. None of the participants knew existing international or national guidelines.

Evidence-based information is the base to make an informed decision about alcohol use during pregnancy. As this study showed, there are limitations with accessibility and quality of information available, including for pregnant women. To ensure that all (pregnant) women are aware of alcohol recommendations for pregnancy, we underline the importance of the different professionals involved in healthcare arena, particularly within pregnancy care setting.