

Attitudes towards alcohol use during pregnancy and motherhood

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BACKGROUND: WOMEN AND ALCOHOL

- ▶ The gender gap in alcohol use is decreasing primarily due to increased drinking in women.
- ▶ Women are more vulnerable to alcohol's negative effects, and develop physical and mental health problems at lower drinking levels than men.

BACKGROUND: MATERNAL DRINKING

- ▶ UK >> one of the highest rates of alcohol exposed pregnancies (41.3%) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD, 3.2%).
- ▶ Some mums consume alcohol on a regular basis (16.4% drink daily), significant increases at 1-year postpartum.
- ▶ 1.3m children are affected by parental alcohol use p/a.
- ▶ Maternal drinking (inc. at non-dependent levels) increases risk of child mortality, physical and mental health problems, social services involvement, alcohol problems later in life, impaired mother-child relationships .

The impact maternal alcohol use can have on the woman and child's health and well-being make it a significant public health concern.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Why do women drink alcohol and why do they abstain during pregnancy and motherhood?
- What are the perceived harms of alcohol consumption during these periods?
- How are the attitudes of women and healthcare professionals different or similar in terms of alcohol use?

PARTICIPANTS

- Pregnant women (n=6)
- Mothers with dependent children (children <18 years of age living at home) (n=8)
- Relevant healthcare professionals (midwives, GPs, substance misuse practitioner) (n=7, four had children).
- Over 18 years or older, Fluent English speaker, Able to provide informed consent
- Majority: White British (71.43%), 30+ years of age (85.71%), Bachelors degree+ (85.71%), Cohabiting/married (92.86%)

METHODS

- Focus groups and semi-structured interviews (participant preference)
- Open questions >>
 - attitudes around drinking during pregnancy and motherhood (e.g. risks, benefits)
 - motives for and against alcohol use
- Healthcare professionals >> alcohol consumption of mothers and pregnant women (not theirs)
- Reflexive thematic analysis (by drinking period and group, but many themes overlapped)

RESULTS: ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DURING PREGNANCY

THEME 1: TO DRINK OR NOT TO DRINK

Sub-themes	Quotes
Low level drinking is acceptable	<p><i>"I can't speak about other people, my personal reason is if I want to have a glass of wine I'll have a glass of wine but as I say that's been very seldom" (P2)</i></p> <p><i>"I think you'd need to convince people that it was dangerous and it would need to feel like it's not propaganda...that if it was harmful that the harms outweighed the benefits" (M6)</i></p> <p><i>"Obviously I think you have to be responsible...So I wouldn't condone sort of regular binge drinking or erm even regular sort of erm 1 or 2 drinks a night, but I don't see a problem with having the odd drink...think a lot of the time we're made to feel bad about it." (M2)</i></p>
Better to be safe	<p><i>"Just don't think it was worth the risk knowing that it's going straight to the baby." (M1)</i></p> <p><i>"I think the benefit is zero because like the safest amount it's difficult to measure...so that's why it recommended zero and again you know in general people drink too much so it's wise advice not to drink" (P6)</i></p>

RESULTS: ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DURING PREGNANCY

THEME 2: DRINKING DURING PREGNANCY IS ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH RISK

Sub-themes	Quotes
<i>Consequences to baby</i>	<i>"...addiction of the child but also their health, it's like smoking obviously smoking is bad and they say smoking's bad so your child will be born quite small, they'll have health issues..." (P2)</i>
<i>Consequences to mother</i>	<i>"I mean if you know that you've damaged your child because of something that you didn't need to do, that's that must just be awful." (GP2)</i>
<i>Damage to relationships</i>	<i>"I guess it depends on the amount that you'd be drinking and then how people would view your pregnancy and view you because another thing is that you know you're viewed as very much like a home for another being you're not you, stop being like just yourself. So people are very judgemental about what you choose to do no matter whether you're drinking or not drinking, or what you're eating, what you're not eating." (P5)</i>

RESULTS: ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DURING PREGNANCY

THEME 3: STRONG BEHAVIOURAL MOTIVES TO DRINK

Sub-themes	Quotes
Drinking as Coping Strategy	<p><i>"I think depression. I don't drink but I think a few people I have come across have been depressed. Some first-time mums, they might not really know what to do, and when they are depressed, confused, worried they find solution or comfort from alcohol which is not a good idea you know?" (M8)</i></p> <p><i>"...coping for all sorts of reasons for mental health, for general stress, going through a bad time, could be something like domestic violence, it could be anything really." (MW)</i></p>
Awareness and Beliefs about Consequences	<p><i>"Oh well yes I had a glass of Guinness because I've got low iron', we get that a lot, 'my iron is low so I've had a Guinness', no it's not how it works." (MW2)</i></p> <p><i>"...every now and then there are some headlines and some stories saying...it's not as bad as we thought...and people generally stop trusting science and recommendations and guidelines...whenever there is anything that opens a little window to it I think people will gladly take it as they would rather have a couple..." (P3)</i></p>
Drinking Provides Normality	<p><i>"We went for a very nice meal to a ... 2-Michelin star restaurant the other day and it was a very special occasion so I had a small glass of wine." (P2)</i></p>
Social Aspects	<p><i>"...you feel left out, you don't feel part of the normal circle, you look different to people and you might not be happy with how you look. So you just want normality, you want to keep some things the same and if that's drinking and socialising is one of them that will be the benefit." (MW3)</i></p>
Challenges of changing health behaviour	<p><i>"Someone's just handed you a stick and said you're pregnant change all your life you know you're drinking habits, your smoking, your food, don't eat this don't eat that there you go and you don't feel connected to the baby yet at that point." (MW1)</i></p>

RESULTS: ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DURING PREGNANCY

THEME 3: STRONG BEHAVIOURAL MOTIVES TO NOT DRINK

Sub-themes	Quotes
Negative Consequences to baby and mother	<p><i>“It’s kind of the information out there about the impact that you know that it goes you know the placenta doesn’t stop it goes straight to the baby any alcohol that you drink. So I think it’s just concerns over that” (M1)</i></p> <p><i>“I think if anything did happen you’d probably feel like there was a dereliction of duty somewhere along the way like you hadn’t done what you were supposed to do again like I mentioned before I already felt a failure” (M6)</i></p> <p><i>“Women are told that it is bad for the baby, so they stop because they can and because it’s temporary, it’s not like someone saying you have to never drink at all.” (GP2)</i></p>
Personal preference	<p><i>“...if you’ve already got other children who are making you...and feeling sick and poorly I just did not want to have a drink in those first few months” (M2)</i></p> <p><i>“They just find they can’t drink during pregnancy, it makes them feel ill and they don’t actually want to have a drink.” (GP1)</i></p>
Fear of stigma	<p><i>“You don’t really want to be a bump sat in a pub with a pint.” (MW1)</i></p>

RESULTS: ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DURING MOTHERHOOD

THEME 1: LOW-LEVEL DRINKING IS ACCEPTABLE

Quote

“It all depends on the situation, so if the mother is, you know from one end is just having one drink with a friend and her children are being well looked after, I don’t see there’s an issue but you have another side of the spectrum where a mother is alcohol-dependent, her children are at risk, they’re not having their physical, mental, emotional needs being met, and she is herself, making herself vulnerable if she is also intoxicated. It can be, you know, drinking in motherhood can be completely fine or completely detrimental to the children. It’s just a spectrum.” (GP1)

RESULTS: ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DURING MOTHERHOOD

THEME 2: EXCESSIVE DRINKING POSES RISKS

Sub-themes	Quotes
Health consequences	<p><i>“If you’re drinking excessively your mental health is going to duck you know it has an impact on mood” (M5)</i></p> <p><i>“People can easily start drinking especially in the evening or when the kids have gone to bed, and they think ‘oh it’s time for me and I’m gonna relax’ and that’s the way that they kind of quickly relax and that can so easily become a habit and get out of control, really I think. I’ve seen quite a few women, where that’s being the problem and they’re aware of it.” (GP2)</i></p>
Poor parenting	<p><i>“I’m breastfeeding my little boy, erm and I know there’s a lot of sort of mixed reviews over whether or not you’re able to drink or not whilst you’re breastfeeding. Erm, I personally do, I have a glass of wine or two each week, erm and it’s my understanding I’ve done a lot of reading around it and my understanding is drinking in moderation isn’t harmful when you’re breastfeeding.” (M7)</i></p> <p><i>“If the alcohol will become a problem that could affect their you know learning and their support that they get from parents erm maybe they will have less attention, maybe they will you know have less help ... then you know it will be just dragging behind them for you know their opportunities and the chances they get in life” (P3)</i></p> <p><i>“If the kids there the kids going to see you so it’s going to affect mentally, physically and emotionally erm erm yes that its yes just more the child really” (P1)</i></p>
Damage to relationships	<p><i>“You see families breaking down because of alcoholism...You know, they can maybe do impulsive, reckless behaviour and can break down relationships, as well.” (GP1)</i></p> <p><i>“Serious implication on bonding with the child” (M5)</i></p>

RESULTS: ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DURING MOTHERHOOD

THEME 3: STRONG BEHAVIOURAL MOTIVES TO DRINK

Sub-themes	Quotes
Drinking as coping strategy	<p><i>“Stress erm a way to unwind cause its incredibly difficult you know when you’re a new mum and like erm I found it really hard a combination of sleep deprivation erm boredom like it’s so boring at times it’s so tedious being a new mum” (M6)</i></p> <p><i>“...Like some single parents, you know when they are just alone or on their own, or the man is not involved in their life they tend to fall into depression. So, they see the alcohol as a kind of comfort to them...” (M8)</i></p> <p><i>“I think motherhood is a really stressful time for women, so they may, their drinking might increase, so what was usually a controlled habit might become more using it as a coping strategy for the stresses...” (GP3)</i></p>
Social and cultural aspects	<p><i>“You can go back to feeling like you were before you had babies and erm you know you’re out and about” (M3)</i></p> <p><i>“I think there’s just so much about that it’s acceptable for women to drink erm because they’ve got kids. ‘Oh I’ve got to have a glass of wine you know the kids are driving me mad you know’, there’s that association I think is quite strong erm and I’ve always thought, found that on social media. There’s like a book ‘Hurrah for Gin’ erm you know there’s a lot of things about there’s probably more that promotes it for mothers than puts people off” (M3)</i></p> <p><i>“It was actually harder not to drink after having the baby because I’m suddenly feeling you know I just want to claw back a little bit of having a social life having a bit of a life.” (MW1)</i></p>

RESULTS: ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DURING MOTHERHOOD

THEME 3: STRONG BEHAVIOURAL MOTIVES TO NOT DRINK

Sub-themes	Quotes
Parental responsibilities	<p><i>"My fear is...needed to go to the hospital in the middle of the night and I couldn't drive" (MW2)</i></p> <p><i>"I think the big things modelling behaviour isn't it, if your way of parenting is to sit in the pub and the kids just run around and you're just socialising and getting drunk which let's face it there's loads of people that do that of a weekend don't they." (MW1)</i></p> <p><i>"...hangover was bad enough when you could stay in bed...now having hangover when you have kids jumping on your head and...needing care and food and err it doesn't sound like fun in the first place" (P3)</i></p> <p><i>"... the stigma of it like if you were to go out and see ... a family having a meal ... both of them drinking...it's more frowned upon if it's a woman because they're not supposed to do that... society's perception of you and your role so I think that would be it, you don't want to be seen as a bad mum" (M6)</i></p> <p><i>"...I think at the end of the night when the baby's gone to bed you feel like you've got a bit of your time... when you've got a baby, you can't really go out and have a drink out ... it's just impossible so it's like a way of still having a drink and having a relax but adapting it" (M6)</i></p>
Personal preference	<p><i>"Personal choice. I think now there's a big movement about veganism, being very, you know, body conscious, and being aware of what you eat and drink and organic, and so we have a lot of patients that are being very very healthy, almost extreme life styles." (GP1)</i></p> <p><i>"I mean I've cut down on my drinking overall because my dad was erm alcoholic erm and he passed away" (P5)</i></p>

RESULTS: SUMMARY

Attitudes

- ▶ PW&M: Low level drinking in pregnancy is acceptable due to insufficient evidence.
- ▶ PW&M & HCP: prenatal drinking can be high risk. Direct harm to baby, physical and mental health problems for mum, blame and guilt for mum, family disruption.
- ▶ HCP/PW&M: drinking in moderation is acceptable in motherhood, but excessive drinking carries great risks.

Motives

- ▶ Drinking to cope - a major motive for drinking in PW&M.
- ▶ Drinking to socialise and feel like 'yourself' can also be important.
- ▶ Potential harm to the baby, feeling guilty, social stigma - major motives not to drink.

DISCUSSION

- ▶ Most participants who drank more talked about social pressures and online narratives of mums needing to drink.
- ▶ Inconsistencies between what was said during interviews, and between interviews and quant measures
 - ▶ Ambivalence?
 - ▶ Don't see their drinking as an issue, don't recognise grey area drinking (all or nothing)
 - ▶ Need to protect themselves?

DISCUSSION POINTS

- ▶ *Under-reporting?*
 - ▶ *How do we overcome this?*
- ▶ *Lack of diversity*
 - ▶ *How do we overcome this?*
- ▶ Increase awareness in a non-judgmental way
 - ▶ HCP need more training and more time
 - ▶ PW&M were aware alcohol could harm physical and mental health but gave no specifics (e.g., breast cancer)
 - ▶ Clear and consistent advice - explain, don't tell!

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THANKS