

Drinking during pregnancy—who is responsible?

We the undersigned organizations are deeply concerned about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, and we work to make women aware that they should not drink during pregnancy. Many of us are parents of children with FASD or professionals working daily with children with FASD. We are not in favor of punishing women who drink during pregnancy. According to statistics from various European countries, up to 50% or more of women may drink during pregnancy. We do not believe they are bad mothers, who are knowingly abusing their children. We recognize that there exist many reasons why women drink during pregnancy.

1. They do not know they are pregnant. Many pregnancies are unplanned, and many pregnancies are not recognized in the early months.
2. Despite the advice of many experts that women should not drink during pregnancy, many women are still advised by their doctors that the occasional drink is not harmful.
3. They are confused about information they read in the press or internet. Some articles say that drinking is harmful for the baby; some say that drinking can even be beneficial.
4. They are addicted to alcohol and need help. We the undersigned are in favor of providing help and support to women who want to stop drinking and need professional help. If drinking is criminalized, then women will try to hide their drinking rather than ask for help.
5. Society accepts the dissemination of alcohol advertisements which suggest that having fun and friends is inextricably linked with alcohol consumption. This message increases the pressure on pregnant women to continue drinking alcoholic beverages.

Punishing women who drink during pregnancy will make it LESS likely that their damaged children receive help. Women will not ask for help for their children, because they will not want to admit drinking during the pregnancy. Doctors will not diagnose Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, if, by so doing, they will sentence the mother to punishment. Thus the children will also be punished by receiving no help.

The position of the undersigned is that

1. Alcohol should not be consumed during pregnancy.
2. That every pregnant woman has the right to receive correct information about the risks associated with use of alcohol during pregnancy.
3. That every pregnant woman who did or does drink during pregnancy should receive the necessary support from society.
4. We as a society should not allow advertising that gives the message that alcohol is necessary for fun. We should require that information on the harmful effects of alcohol consumption during pregnancy be included in alcohol advertising.

Signatories



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