



National data collection on alcohol in pregnancy: A qualitative study

Purpose of this research

As part of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to the enhancement of perinatal data to capture more information about antenatal care and alcohol use during pregnancy. Since 2010, the AIHW has been working to develop a nationally agreed, uniform method for measuring and recording alcohol use in pregnancy. Information on alcohol use of all Australian mothers, such as dose and frequency, will help in planning to improve pregnancy health and support children who have problems because they were exposed to alcohol before birth.

The AIHW commissioned the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute to explore the views of maternity staff and pregnant women in mainstream and Indigenous specific services on asking about alcohol use and the feasibility of using a standardised screening tool.



Ethics approval

This study was granted ethics approval by the AIHW and Human Research Ethics Committees for each participating site.

Participants

Focus groups and interviews were held at 2 hospital maternity care sites, 3 public hospitals (including 1 in a disadvantaged area) and 1 private hospital. Participants included English-speaking women from a diverse range of age groups, geographical locations, and cultural, Indigenous and socioeconomic backgrounds. Maternity staff were mostly midwives, and included Indigenous health workers and general practitioners. Overall, 48 maternity staff and 28 pregnant women from non-Indigenous and Indigenous health services in Victoria and the Northern Territory participated in the study.

This is a summary of what Indigenous women and their maternity workers told us.

Their views

Asking about alcohol

It was important to:

- build trust and a positive relationship with women before asking them about drinking alcohol
- ask about alcohol at every visit and encourage women to drink less if they found it difficult to stop.

There are many reasons why a woman drinks in pregnancy.

Maternity staff at Aboriginal health services asked pregnant women about their drinking habits at almost every appointment.

Knowledge of harm from alcohol

Maternity staff knew the harms from drinking alcohol in pregnancy and how to talk to women to help them.

Pregnant women knew that drinking alcohol in pregnancy was bad for the baby, but were sometimes not sure about the actual effects on the baby.

"That's great that you've told me. What would you like to do about it now?"

"All it takes is 1 question to ask, so ask it like you really care."

"Whatever you're eating and drinking, that's what your baby is drinking and eating as well."

The women had strong opinions that not drinking at all was best. Both groups felt it was important to raise awareness of the dangers of drinking in pregnancy by engaging the whole community and educating young women early on.

A safe place and strong families would help pregnant women not to drink.

Information about alcohol use in pregnancy

It is important to ask about alcohol at most antenatal appointments and to report this information to the AIHW to help provide services where they are needed.

Next steps

Views of participants will help introduce processes in clinics to gather information about alcohol use by pregnant women in clinics.

For more information about this study

Contact NMDDSec@aihw.gov.au or visit <http://www.aihw.gov.au/mothers-and-babies/>.

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"It's all about prevention and education."

"If you have a supportive, strong family that help each other, that's good. If you've got friends that are just drinking, there's nothing else you can do but drink."

"If they are able to do that, then the right people are getting the right funding."