**WHAT WOMEN FROM ONTARIO KNOW ABOUT THE DANGERS OF DRINKING DURING THE GESTATIONAL PERIOD**

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**Objectives:** When alcohol is consumed during pregnancy, it can lead to irreparable damage in the developing fetus (Walker et al., 2005). Individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectum Disorder (FASD) experience common symptoms such as growth deficiencies, facial anomalies, skeletal deformities, speech and language deficits, motor dysfunctions, learning and behavioural difficulties, and sleeping and eating irregularities (Cook et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2005). When asked, the majority of women know that alcohol is harmful to the developing fetus and should not be consumed during the gestational period (Peadon et al., 2010). Though people seem to realize that alcohol can be harmful during pregnancy, there is considerable confusion when it comes to what a “safe” amount is. Environics Research Limited (2000) found that participants in their study were divided on their views of a “safe” amount of alcohol; for example, 47% of Canadians felt that drinking two alcoholic drinks on two or three occasions during pregnancy is safe, leaving 52% who disagree. As there is no amount of alcohol that has been proven to be safe, this is a very concerning finding (Beckett, 2011). Within the sample there were differences based on gender and province; men tended to be more likely to endorse higher levels of “safe” consumption during pregnancy, as were individuals from Quebec (Environics Research Limited, 2000). The purpose of this study is to gain more up to date knowledge of Canadians’ knowledge regarding alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

**Method:** Canadian men and women 18 years old and older were recruited through the use of social media and flyers, but this poster will focus on women from Ontario specifically. Participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire regarding their knowledge of the effects of alcohol consumption during the gestational period.

**Results:** Preliminary results indicate that, while a large portion of people do know the harms of alcohol consumption during pregnancy, the message is still not reaching everyone. Most notably, 30.1% of our sample either did not believe that any alcohol could harm a developing fetus or were unsure. Differences within the group (such as age, rural and urban settings, and education levels) will also be discussed.

**Discussion/Conclusion:** FASD is one of the most common preventable causes of developmental disability (Townsend, Hammil, & White, 2015). In addition to the social and physical costs to the individuals, FASD also has a high cost to society. In the US, the median adjusted costs to society are approximately $3.6 billion (Lupton et al., 2004) and data for Canada is very similar with the National total ringing in at approximately $4 billion (Stade, Ungar, Stevens, Beyen, & Koren, 2007).This study is important as it contributes to the literature surrounding knowledge of the risks of drinking during the gestational period and FASD in Canada. In addition to the practical application of this research in the public health and medical fields. If we can understand why women drink during the gestational period, we can better design prevention and education campaigns for the general public and healthcare providers.

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