# The impact of alcohol use during pregnancy on maternal health, neonatal outcomes, and infant development

## Author

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## Summary

This project is a longitudinal follow-up of a pilot study of pregnant women and their partners when their children reached 12 months of age. This study examines the impact of parental alcohol use during pregnancy on maternal health, neonatal outcomes, and infant development.

This study hypothesised that women in the non-clinical group would be less likely than women in the clinical group to report exposure to violence and poor mental health including antenatal depression, anxiety, and stress.

## Outcomes

The outcomes of this study were consistent with the research hypotheses. This study found that alcohol was the most commonly used substance among pregnant women in the clinical group; and that pregnant women with reported substance use problems (clinical group) were highly disadvantaged, and both licit and illicit substance use was common in pregnancy, particularly poly drug use. The three most commonly used drugs were nicotine, cannabis, and alcohol. It also found that substance use problems in pregnancy were associated with poorer obstetric and neonatal outcomes for mothers and infants.

Women in the clinical group were significantly more likely to report vaginal bleeding, severe vomiting and nausea, and poor fetal and infant growth.  
It was also found that 71% of the clinical group had an unplanned pregnancy with only 15% using birth control.

Children born to mothers who reported problematic substance use in pregnancy had poorer cognitive and language development at 12 months of age as assessed by a trained, independent clinical psychologist; however, no differences in motor or socio-emotional functioning were identified at 12 months; but this is based on maternal self-reporting, and therefore likely to be biased by maternal perception.

Prenatal substance use and mental health problems in pregnant women and their partners were also significantly related to poorer family functioning at both 8 weeks and 12 months, including lower scores on measures of family cohesion and parent-infant attachment at 12 months, and higher scores on measures of conflict.

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