

Abstaining From Alcohol During Pregnancy Still The Best Choice For Baby

January 7, 2014 – *Experts Call Mass Media Misrepresentation Of Recent Alcohol-Related Studies ‘Harmful’*.

Brentwood, TN – “Children Of Mothers Who Drink Alcohol During Pregnancy ‘Better Behaved,’” and “Pour It Up Pregs,” coupled with images of smiling pregnant women sharing in a wine toast, are just some of the messages flooding news headlines in recent days following publicity of a study aimed at examining the behavioral outcomes of children whose mothers consumed alcohol during pregnancy. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) experts call the vast majority of the media’s misinterpretation of the studies potentially “harmful.”

“It’s deeply concerning,” said Kenneth Lyons Jones, MD, who is president of *MotherToBaby*, a service of the international non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Diego, and considered the world’s leading expert on FAS, as well as other areas of birth defects research. The research causing such concern among experts, like Jones, over misinterpretation, is a series of studies out of the University of Copenhagen. “The take-home message of this study should in no way be to encourage drinking in pregnancy as a means to better mental health for children.”

Janni Niclasen, a psychologist, surveyed approximately 37,000 Danish women who reported on drinking habits during pregnancy. The study results showed that women who drank as much as one glass of wine per week had children with better emotional and behavioral outcomes by age seven compared to children of mothers who claimed to not drink at all. However, the author also points out that mothers who reported drinking tended to be more educated and have other potentially healthier characteristics overall. In addition, the author points out that the timing of the alcohol exposure during the surveyed pregnancies, which can play an important role in how the fetus is affected, was ignored.

“Even the author points out the significant limitations of her study, the problem is how the findings are being interpreted in the mass media,” said Christina Chambers, PhD, *MotherToBaby* epidemiologist and professor of pediatrics at the UC San Diego. “The study does not show that drinking caused mothers to have children with fewer behavioral concerns — rather that mothers who reported drinking were very different from mothers who did not in multiple ways. These differences in family and home environment, along with the way that alcohol exposure and child health were measured, could easily mask any associations with low level alcohol.”

Chambers also points out how the study used a maternally reported measure of mental health in the children. “The children were not formally tested, so the measures of mental health might not be so objective,” she said. “For example, mothers who admitted to drinking more might have been less likely to report problems in their children.”

According to Jones and Chambers, the study only further illustrates the ongoing conclusion that a “safe” amount of alcohol that any individual woman can drink during pregnancy has simply not been established.

Julie Pollock, vice president of the Southern CA chapter of the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS) couldn’t agree more. “When I read the way this study was being reported in the media, I wanted to scream,” she said. Pollock’s son, whose birth mother drank alcohol during pregnancy, was found mentally incompetent to stand trial after he was accused of killing his friend when he was just 10 years old. “Don’t buy into the hype. Those of us who live the reality of drinking while pregnant know the truth. There is no safe amount of alcohol to an unborn child. Please don’t look for an excuse to continue a behavior that is wrong.”

MotherToBaby is a one-stop-shop for evidence-based free counseling available to women and the general public. All North Americans can be connected with MotherToBaby experts and receive individualized risk assessments regarding alcohol, medications and other exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding through the toll-free, bilingual (English/Spanish) counseling service (866) 626-6847 or online at MotherToBaby.org.

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Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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