Prenatal Alcohol Exposure and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Although the relation between prenatal alcohol exposure and characteristics defining fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) has been known since the early 1970’s, only recently have studies suggested an association between alcohol consumption during pregnancy and the occurrence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Based on their review of studies completed since 2002, Beth Bailey, Ph.D., and Robert Sokol, M.D., reported that prenatal alcohol exposure is likely to place infants at increased risk for SIDS. A study of infants in a Plains Indians population (Iyasu et al., 2002) showed that alcohol consumption in the early stages of pregnancy was related to increased SIDS risk, even when other possible influential factors had been controlled; binge drinking during the first trimester, in particular, was related to occurrence of SIDS. At least one other study supports the role of binge-drinking in increasing the risk.

Bailey and Sokol also related another line of research that may be relevant. Studies of infant sleep patterns suggest that prenatal alcohol exposure is associated with sleep disturbances. Troese et al. (2008) reported that prenatal alcohol exposure was associated with disturbances in sleep state in infants resulting in shorter periods of sleep and alterations in movement patterns while sleeping as well. In addition, prenatal alcohol exposure was related to awake behavior in these infants; they showed lower levels of alertness and were more irritable by mother report. Bailey and Sokol report that sleep disturbances of this sort have been related in the past to SIDS.
While there are suggestions in the current research that alcohol consumption during pregnancy is related to an increase in risk for SIDS, the design of these studies is complicated, and, according to the reviewers, more research with larger samples is needed to define the association more clearly.

References:


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