Increased Mortality Among Women Who Drank Alcohol During Pregnancy

In an article published in the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, the MSACD Project investigated the mortality rates among women who were participating in the MSACD Project’s research efforts. Accordingly, mortality at 20 years post MSACD Project recruitment was examined in a sample of 570 women recruited between 1979 and 1986. The women who drank more than 1 ounce of absolute alcohol per week during pregnancy were compared to abstainers matched for ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Using data from archival information and state mortality records, hazards survival models were constructed to determine whether alcohol use, cigarette use, infant birthweight, infant dysmorphia score, and alcohol use and abuse by the woman’s own mother were associated with increased risk for mortality.

At follow-up, 9.5% of the sample had died, with the rate for controls being 3.6%; for those alcohol users who stopped during pregnancy 12.7%; and, for the alcohol users who continued drinking throughout pregnancy, 12.5%. Thus, women using alcohol in pregnancy, whether they stopped or continued to use, were significantly more likely than abstainers to have died by follow-up. Nondrinkers’ mortality rate was lower than that of other women from this sample, while the drinker’s rate was 2.7 times higher.

Factors found to have contributed to the mortality risk included alcohol use, cigarette smoking, and a family history of substance abuse by the woman’s own mother. Obviously, drinking at any level during pregnancy should be regarded as a risk factor for the mother as well as for the offspring. Health care professionals working with such women should provide information, support, and referral to appropriate substance abuse treatment providers.
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The Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project is funded in part by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD).