A qualitative study exploring midwives’ attitudes and practices of advising pregnant women about alcohol

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Presenter disclosure

Lisa Schölin
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Any alcohol use during pregnancy

UK 41.3%  
Sweden 9.4%

Popova et al. (2017)
Prevention in antenatal care

Despite abstinence policy, some midwives still advise women that they can drink some alcohol Reasons being lack of evidence or making exceptions for drinking at special occasions (Crawford-Williams et al., 2015; Kesmodel & Kesmodel, 2011; van der Wulp et al., 2013)

Research from east England suggested not all midwives routinely asked about alcohol (60%) or provide information about alcohol and pregnancy (29%) (Winstone and Verity, 2015)

WHO (2014) guidelines outline that:
○ All women should be asked about their drinking
○ Women who are still drinking should be provided intervention or referred to specialist services
The aim of the study was to explore perceptions and practices of providing alcohol advice to pregnant women among frontline midwives in England and Sweden.

Methods

- Interviews with 16 midwives practicing in Liverpool (n=7) and Örebro (n=9)
- Swedish midwives all based in GPs, English midwives were community or hospital-based midwives
- Age range: 32-62 years
- Years of experience: 15-38 years
- Thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) and thematic network map
Pregnant women’s lifestyles/promoting a healthy lifestyle

- Most women stop drinking; some English midwives questioned clients’ honesty
- Partners rarely change their drinking habits – can be hard to engage
- Women’s drinking in general was seen as a public health concern

I actually think that people drink incredible amounts. And it is shocking sometimes when you hear how young women drink. They are wasted (Swedish midwife 8)

In general I think alcohol is just a massive issue for this country and this region in general […] massive public health issue isn’t it (English midwife 1)
Antenatal practices

- Abstinence preferred as the advice to give to women
- Difference in interpretation of risk at drinking small levels
- Routine questions used in both countries – difference in how formalised they were

Well we know that the risks are but we don’t know what level would be at risk, so I would give the information, I think that we should all be singing from the same hymn sheet (English midwife 7)
Midwifery role

- Discussing alcohol is part of the role – MI useful skill
- Relationship and trust important components
- Identified problem to advise women who drank before knowing about the pregnancy – guidance requested

I would really like to know what advice could be given to somebody say who’ve done it for about eight weeks. And maybe heavily. So I don’t know what the implications of that are. So I should be able to give her that advice, you know, what we do (English midwife 1)

I never say that it’s not dangerous. I don’t think I have ever said that, but you are very tempted. Because you want to do good (Swedish midwife 7)
Discussion

Cultural differences in risk perception seem to be part of both general public’s attitudes and practicing midwives’ (Schölin et al., 2017)

Midwives support abstinence as a message – practical guidance for supporting inadvertent exposure needed

Women want and do seek reassurance – equipping midwives to give good advice is important

Media framing may both support and hamper abstinence guidelines (McCallum & Holland, 2017) – communicating the complexity of the evidence is difficult, clear communication in antenatal care is key
Small alcoholic drink a day during pregnancy 'has no effect on baby'

Pregnant women can have a small alcoholic drink a day without it harming the development of their children, a study has found.

BABY BOOZE How many alcohol units can you drink while pregnant, how many are safe and what's foetal alcohol syndrome?

There has long been a debate on whether expectant mums can enjoy their favourite tipple.

BY JENNIFER NEWTON

THOUSANDS of pregnant women are drinking alcohol every day, research published yesterday has revealed.

What is the evidence for how much, if any, is too much?

Lover’s secret boozing during pregnancy left child damaged

Matthew Kaye can’t talk properly, has difficulty walking due to curvature of the spine, could suffer from learning difficulties.

BY AMANDA ROE WALTON

PREGNANT women who drink up to two standard glasses of wine a week are unlikely to harm their unborn baby, a new study suggested.

Pregnant? It’s okay to drink two glasses of wine a week says study
I think we should all be singing from the same hymn sheet” – English and Swedish midwives’ views of advising pregnant women about alcohol

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ABSTRACT

Many countries have adopted abstention guidelines for pregnant women, due to uncertainty around the risk of harm caused by small amounts of alcohol. There is a lack of research indicating how all such women might be made aware of how alcohol use during pregnancy and completion of procedures in different countries. Therefore, midwives in Estonia and Sweden were conducted with midwives working in England, Ireland, Estonia, Sweden, and Spain. The findings show that the majority of midwives believed pregnant women should be advised not to consume any alcohol during pregnancy, and that advice on alcohol use should be delivered in a way that is culturally appropriate. The midwives also highlighted the importance of communication between the midwives and the pregnant women, and the need for further research and education on this topic.

Introduction

Alcohol exposure during pregnancy is associated with the risk of harm, relating to negative pregnancy outcomes and fetal development. These include miscarriage, pre-term birth, low birth weight and small for gestational age infants, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). However, alcohol use during pregnancy is common in many countries. (Department of Health & Human Services, 2005; NIBRR, 2014; NIAAA, 2009; To prevent and reduce harm caused by alcohol exposure, educational materials are needed for prevention. International guidelines, published by the World Health Organization (WHO), recommend that all pregnant women are asked about their alcohol consumption and provided with an intervention if they continue to drink during pregnancy (WHO, 2014).

Pregnant alcohol use is relatively common in Europe. Recent estimates show that a quarter of European women have consumed alcohol at some point during their pregnancy. The rate of drinking, however, varies widely across countries. The UK, for example, has some of the highest prevalence rates (41.3%), while Sweden has one of the lowest (5.9%). (Popova, Lurik, Friderikis, Orell & Rehm, 2017). Differences in prevalence may relate to the level of alcohol consumption in the general population, but official drinking guidelines could also have an influence. Recommendations regarding alcohol use during pregnancy in the UK were reviewed in the Chief Medical Officer’s (CMO) Alcohol Guidelines in 2016. (Department of Health, 2016. Prior guidelines recommended abstention as the co-tailed option, even though women who choose to drink, should limit themselves to no more than two units per week after the first trimester (MAC, 2008). This revised drinking guidelines now advise that alcohol should be avoided completely (Department of health, 2016) and are aligned with guidelines in many other countries, including Sweden (NIAAA, 2016).

Although many countries have adopted abstention-based policies, research suggests a discord between recommended policy and practice. The proportion of midwives advising abstention to pregnant women has been reported as 61% in Denmark (Knudsen & Jernudd, 2011), 99% in England (Winstone & Forrest, 2015), and 98.4% in Australia (Payne et al., 2014). However, 41% of midwives in a study in England reported advising pregnant women to limit their alcohol...
References

- Crawford-Williams, F., Steen, M., Esterman, A., Fielder, A., & Mikocka-Walus, A. (2015). "If you can have one glass of wine now and then, why are you denying that to a woman with no evidence?": Knowledge and practices of health professionals concerning alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Women and Birth: Journal of the Australian College of Midwives, 28(4), 329–335.
Thanks!

Any questions?
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