

## Attitude towards drinking alcohol during pregnancy

### Background

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy increases the risks of miscarriage, stillbirth or of a baby being born with a range of lifelong effects. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is the term used to describe these effects (Ministry of Health, 2009). The Health Promotion Agency (HPA) and the Ministry of Health advise that there is no known safe level of alcohol use at any stage of pregnancy. Therefore, women should not drink alcohol while pregnant or planning a pregnancy (Ministry of Health, 2010).

Results from the 2007/08 New Zealand Alcohol and Drug Use Survey showed that at least one in four women reported drinking during their pregnancy. However, it is not known whether the women knew they were pregnant when they consumed alcohol (Ministry of Health, 2009). There is other evidence that self-reported drinking during pregnancy does not match with physical evidence of prenatal alcohol exposure, so self-reported drinking may not show the true extent of alcohol use during pregnancy (Lange et al., 2014).

This factsheet is an analysis of data about alcohol and pregnancy collected in HPA's 2013 Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS). ABAS is an annual survey about alcohol that focuses on New Zealander's drinking behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol use. It includes one question on the acceptability of drinking small amounts of alcohol during pregnancy.

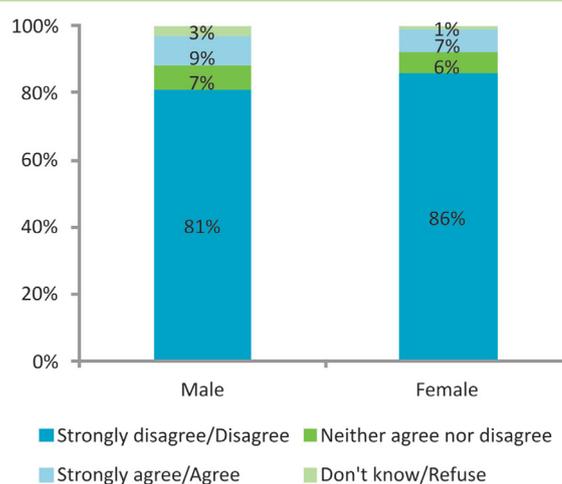
### Methodology

The 2013 ABAS asked people (15+ years) about their agreement with the statement: "During pregnancy drinking small amounts of alcohol is OK". Responses were collected on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Responses were compared by gender, ethnicity, age, household income, and patterns of alcohol consumption. Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) are reported.

### Acceptability of drinking small amounts of alcohol during pregnancy

The majority of respondents 'disagreed' (9%, 8-10%) or 'strongly disagreed' (75%, 73-76%) with the statement "during pregnancy drinking small amounts of alcohol is OK", while fewer than 1 in 10 'agreed' (5%, 4-5%) or 'strongly agreed' (4%, 3-4%). Seven percent (6-8%) were unsure, reporting 'neither agree nor disagree' with the statement.

Females (86%) were more likely than males (81%) to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement (see Figure 1). There were no significant differences in responses to this question by age, ethnicity, household income or patterns of alcohol consumption.



**Figure 1. Gender differences in agreement with the statement 'During pregnancy drinking small amounts of alcohol is OK'**

## Key points

- The majority of New Zealanders (15+ years) believe that drinking even small amounts of alcohol is not acceptable during pregnancy.
- Attitudes towards drinking during pregnancy vary according to gender. Females are more likely than males to disagree that drinking small amounts of alcohol during pregnancy is acceptable.

## About the Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey

- The ABAS is an annual telephone survey about alcohol. The survey focuses on behaviour related to the previous month and last drinking occasion, and a range of attitudes/opinions towards alcohol. The ABAS 2013 consisted of a sample of 4,001 New Zealanders aged 15 years and over. The survey was conducted between November 2013 and February 2014.
- The main sample, with a response rate of 22%, included 662 Māori, 245 Pacific peoples, 314 Asian people and 2,780 people of European or other ethnicities (prioritised ethnicity).
- The data have been adjusted (weighted) to ensure they are representative of the New Zealand population.
- For this analysis, proportions and 95% confidence intervals were produced to compare responses between groups. The significance level used for statistical analyses was set to  $\alpha=0.05$ .
- Comparison groups for these analyses were as follows:
  - gender (male, female)
  - ethnicity (Māori, Pacific, Asian, European/other)
  - age (18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, 65 to 74, 75+)
  - household income (<\$50,000, >= \$50,000, <\$100,000, >=\$100,000)
  - pattern of alcohol consumption over the last month (number of occasions consumed seven or more alcoholic drinks and frequency of drinking alcohol).
- A full description of the 2013 ABAS survey methodology and further ABAS publications can be found online at <http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>.

## References

Health Promotion Agency (2014). *Alcohol – the Body and Health Effects. A brief overview*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.

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Ministry of Health (2009). *Alcohol Use in New Zealand: Key results of the 2007/08 New Zealand Alcohol and Drug Use Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

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## Citation

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## About HPA

HPA is a Crown entity that leads and delivers innovative, high quality and cost-effective programmes and activities that promote health, wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, and prevent disease, illness and injury. HPA also enables environments that support health and wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, and reduce personal, social and economic harm and undertakes functions specific to providing advice and research on alcohol issues.

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