

Couples' perception of maternal drinking: a sociocultural approach of an "ordinary" risk.

Consuming alcohol during pregnancy and breastfeeding is a public health problem characterized by uncertainty regarding the effects of a low or moderate intake. Health policy-makers have adopted a precautionary approach and recommend complete abstinence from alcohol as the safest choice. In this context, maternal drinking is not only a public health challenge but also an important sociological issue.

Drawing on a socio-cultural perspective that explores how people experience risk as part of their everyday lives, this longitudinal qualitative project aims to better understand how couples conceptualize and manage the issue of alcohol consumption during pregnancy and breastfeeding. The objective is to examine the values, norms, knowledge and constraints that shape the meaning of alcohol use as a health risk. The project will focus on risk perception as a two-fold process, by considering how the issue of alcohol use is dealt with in the transition to pregnancy and breastfeeding stage, and how such a transition is managed within the couple relationship.

The research design includes two series of semi-directive interviews with about 40 couples expecting their first child in two cantons of Switzerland (Vaud and Zurich). In the first series, pregnant women and their partner will be interviewed separately. In the second series, the mother only will be interviewed during the breastfeeding stage.

The project intends to contribute to sociological and midwifery debates about the influence of risk discourses and uncertainty on health attitudes in the contemporary medicalisation of motherhood. By providing an understanding about couples' representations and partners' role, especially in connection with moderate or occasional alcohol consumption, it will have implications for healthcare professionals involved in pregnancy and maternity care, as well as for public health stakeholders.

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