

How to make tangible the fetal risk of alcohol use? A sociological analysis of truth tests within concerned arenas, from science to public health and clinical practice.

This doctoral thesis analyses the risk of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. More precisely, it investigates the following question: “Do women have to choose between drinking alcohol and pregnancy?” In a pragmatic perspective, the aim of this research is to highlight the various formulations of alcohol and pregnancy risk. It deals with the practices of healthcare professionals working with this hazard – researchers, gynaecologists, paediatricians, public health and addictions specialists – and trying to make it tangible or to raise doubts about foetal alcohol toxicity.

The question of risk ontology is central to this research. Its definition varies depending on the arena where it is discussed: the medical research arena, the public health arena, the clinical arena, the media arena. This research is based on the following postulate: ontological variations of risk depend on risk testing and professional actors’ evaluation of risk. It concentrates on the French speaking part of Switzerland, which had yet to be explored in this perspective.

Various qualitative data was collected in order to conduct this “risk ethnography”: interviews with healthcare professionals, observations of scientific conferences and professional trainings, textual materials (health promotion sheets, scientific publications, press article).

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