



# Parents' experience of risk and health recommendations for alcohol consumption during pregnancy and breastfeeding

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## Background

In Switzerland, it is estimated that 4 out of 10 women continue drinking (some) alcohol during pregnancy (1) and in a recent Swiss Health Survey around 10% of the pregnant participants declared to have consumed wine during the 7 days prior to the questioning (2). This is in contrast to Swiss public health guidelines (3), which advise abstinence, as the most low-risk approach for pregnant women. There are no clear figures on alcohol consumption during breastfeeding in Switzerland.

## Objectives

In order to understand expecting mothers and fathers' perception of risk concerning alcohol consumption during breastfeeding and pregnancy, we are conducting a longitudinal qualitative study in the Swiss –German and French-speaking sides of Switzerland. The longitudinal design is key to understanding the development of risk perception during this period.

## Methods

We are leading one-on-one, semi-directive, qualitative interviews with 46 couples who are expecting a baby. The first two interviews with the pregnant woman and the male partner are conducted during pregnancy, while the third interview, which takes place around 4 to 5 months into the postpartum phase, is done with the woman only. The interviews are analysed thematically, using Atlas.Ti.

## Findings - Pregnancy Stage

In a preliminary analysis focusing on 46 interviews with pregnant women, we identified **three ideal-types** of lay construction of risk related to alcohol consumption during pregnancy:

**(1) consumes no alcohol during pregnancy – relies on “common sense knowledge” that women shouldn't drink alcohol during pregnancy – perceives alcohol consumption as high-risk for the foetus' health.**

**(2) consumes no alcohol during pregnancy - actively seeks information on alcohol consumption during pregnancy – perceives alcohol consumption as risky for the foetus' health, depending on quantity and type of alcohol.**

**(3) consumes some alcohol during pregnancy – actively seeks information on alcohol consumption during pregnancy – perceives particularly alcohol excess as risky for the foetus' health, but seeks to find a balance**

**between feelings of responsibility towards foetus and her own life habits.**

Concerning **health guidelines for alcohol consumption during pregnancy**, all three types report **(1) often not receiving recommendations** from health professionals, as well as **(2) being aware of a kind of “common sense knowledge” that alcohol should not be consumed during pregnancy.**

## Findings - Breastfeeding Stage

Early findings show that **(1) some women who were abstainers during pregnancy are no longer entirely abstinent during the breastfeeding period**, judging that the **risk for the baby has diminished**, while others **(2) maintained the abstinence**, stating that they **“can now see” the baby**. Next steps of our analyses will address how and why women's (and couples') risk perception changes over the transition to parenthood.

## Conclusion

**In sum, we find that the pregnant women's perception of alcohol risk morphs during the transition to parenthood: from conception, through birth and into the breastfeeding stage. Secondly, we find that according to our participants' reports, health professionals are not the main sources of information for guidelines concerning alcohol consumption during pregnancy.**

## References

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