

# Even moderate drinking in pregnancy can affect children at school

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(Medical Xpress)—New research from The University of Queensland has found that women who regularly drink as little as two glasses of wine per drinking session while pregnant can adversely impact their child's results at school.

The research was led by Associate Professor Rosa Alati from UQ's School of Population Health and the Centre for Youth Substance Abuse Research in collaboration with the universities of Oxford and Bristol.

It showed children of [women](#) who frequently drank moderate amounts while pregnant performed less well in [school](#) tests by age 11.

"These findings confirm Australian [alcohol](#) guidelines that women should avoid alcohol altogether while pregnant or when planning to conceive," Dr Alati said.

"We could see a clear link between a mother's alcohol consumption and her child's [academic outcomes](#)."

The study of more than 7000 English children found that women who drank two 150ml glasses of wine or about two stubbies of full-strength beer during [pregnancy](#) had children who received lower scores in NAPLAN-style school tests at age 11.

The more frequently women drank these quantities, the more likely their children were to underperform at school, the study found.

In contrast, the children whose fathers consumed similar levels of alcohol during the pregnancy were unaffected.

Dr Alati said this comparison provided new evidence that the effect of [alcohol consumption](#) was passed from the mother to the unborn baby and was not due to factors such as the mother's socio-economic or educational status.

While drinking one unit of alcohol a day – about half a glass of wine – was not found to lower children's academic abilities, Dr Alati said more research was needed on the topic.

"Other studies of the same cohort of children have found that genetic or environmental factors can mean some [children](#) are more susceptible to the impact of alcohol while in the womb than others," she said.

Dr Ron Gray, from the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit at the University of Oxford and a co-author of the study, said alcohol consumed during pregnancy could have a toxic effect on the developing brain.

"In this study that translates into poorer academic outcomes at age 11," Dr Gray said.

"It remains unclear whether any amount of alcohol is safe in pregnancy. The safest plan is to avoid it."

This research was based on the long-term British study, The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) [www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/) and is published 9 October 2013 in *PLOS ONE*.

**More information:** Alati, R. et al. Effect of prenatal alcohol exposure

on childhood academic outcomes: contrasting maternal and paternal associations in the ALSPAC study, *PLOS ONE*.

[dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0074844](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0074844)%3Cbr%20/%3E

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