

# Alcohol during pregnancy causes impaired social skills in children

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A recent study published in *Child Neuropsychology* has found that drinking alcohol while pregnant means your child is more likely to develop issues with social skills as they grow older.

The results of the study indicate that [children](#) with prenatal [alcohol exposure](#) (PAE) who do not have a global intellectual disability are at high risk of developing significant problems in a broad array of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social domains.

125 children aged between 6 and 12 participated in the study, 97 of whom met diagnostic criteria for a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. The children underwent a comprehensive multi-informant assessment of neurocognitive, emotional, social, behavioral, and adaptive functioning.

The results of the study indicated that the children who had prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE), returned significantly poorer scores compared to the non-exposed group on tests measuring executive functioning (the processes that help us connect past experience with present action, the skills we use for organization and planning), attention, working/visuospatial memory, linguistic abstraction, adaptive behaviour, emotional/behavioural functioning, and social cognition (understanding of why people do the things that they do).

The study showed that while the children with PAE and the non-exposed children attributed hostile intentions towards provocative behaviors by their peers, e.g. pushing and shoving, the children affected by PAE were

more likely to attribute hostile intentions to situations that did not involve physical provocation e.g. asking if they can play and being told 'no'.

The parents of children with PAE also gave greater reports of inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive behavior and the children were shown to also be more likely to show depressive symptoms.

The group of children with PAE were also shown to have more social problems according to assessments involving parents and teachers. These results maintained their significance past controlling for IQ, demonstrating that relying on IQ alone to guide parental, peer, and school expectations may be misleading. The study also notes that this may also suggest that the negative effects of PAE are above and beyond the control of intelligence.

The study concludes by suggesting that the results mean it is becoming increasingly more evident that there is a pressing need for early identification of social issues related to [prenatal alcohol exposure](#) and intervention in order to take advantage of the developing brain's plasticity and to maximise the likelihood of effecting meaningful functional improvement.

**More information:** Justin L. Quattlebaum & Mary J. O'Connora  
"Higher functioning children with prenatal alcohol exposure: Is there a specific neurocognitive profile?" *Child Neuropsychology: A Journal on Normal and Abnormal Development in Childhood and Adolescence*  
Volume 19, Issue 6, 2013 [DOI: 10.1080/09297049.2012.713466](https://doi.org/10.1080/09297049.2012.713466)

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