

Many pregnant teens use alcohol and drugs, study finds

February 18 2015, by Maria Andrea Campetella

New research from The University of Texas at Austin suggests that many teenagers, especially younger teens, may not be getting the message about the risks of using alcohol and other drugs during pregnancy—but that having involved parents and being engaged academically can help.

The study, led by Assistant Professor Christopher Salas-Wright at UT Austin's School of Social Work and published in the Spring 2015 issue of *Addictive Behaviors*, examines the relationship between substance use and [teen pregnancy](#) using a large, nationally [representative sample](#).

Nearly 3 in 5 (59%) pregnant teens reported having used one or more substances in the previous 12 months, a rate that is nearly two times as great as that of nonpregnant teens (35%). Additionally, the study suggests that use of these substances continues during pregnancy for many teens, particularly younger ones. More than one third (34%) of all pregnant adolescents ages 12-14 reported having used one or more substances during the previous 30 days. The substance use, however, decreases dramatically for all pregnant youths as they progress from the first into the second and third trimesters of pregnancy, according to the study. The most commonly used substance is alcohol (16%), followed closely by cannabis (14%), and finally other illicit drugs (5%).

"To our knowledge, this is the largest study to date on the relationship between substance use and teen pregnancy," Salas-Wright said.

"Mothers' substance use during pregnancy can have important

consequences for the health and development of newborn babies. Despite efforts to prevent substance use among pregnant teens, our findings suggest that we still have a lot of work to do."

The study was co-authored with Michael G. Vaughn of Saint Louis University's School of Social Work and graduate students Jenny Ugalde and Jelena Todic of The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work.

"We found that the odds of substance use were roughly 50 percent lower among pregnant teens reporting consistent parental support and limit-setting, as well as those who expressed strong positive feelings about going to school," Vaughn said. "This suggests that it makes sense to engage both parents and teachers in efforts to address substance use among pregnant teens."

The study used data from a large, nationally representative study (National Survey on Drug Use and Health) of youths in the United States between 2002 and 2012. Their sample included 97,850 adolescent girls between the ages of 12 and 17. A total of 810 said that they were pregnant.

Researchers examined the prevalence of the use of a wide array of [substances](#) including [alcohol](#), cannabis, cocaine/crack, methamphetamine and opiates among pregnant and nonpregnant youths during the previous 12 months. Additionally, they examined the prevalence of substance use among pregnant and nonpregnant teens during the previous 30 days, and across each trimester among the pregnant teens.

More information: "Teen Pregnancy in the United States: Evidence from the NSDUH 2002–2012," *Addictive Behaviors*, Available online 13 February 2015, ISSN 0306-4603,

[dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2015.01.039](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2015.01.039).

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