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# Older Pregnant Women and Binge Drinking: Increasing the Risk of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

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# Older pregnant women and binge drinking:

## Increasing the risk of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Identifying maternal characteristics that increase the risk of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is a critical step toward creating targeted pregnancy intervention. A Wayne State University researcher discovered that one such characteristic is maternal age.

Lisa M. Chiodo, Ph.D., assistant professor in the College of Nursing, has found that children born to older mothers who binge drink during pregnancy are not as attentive as children whose mothers were younger when exposing them to alcohol prenatally. The longitudinal research study was published in the October 2010 edition of *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

Attention problems are understood to be among the more common FASD in children, which can affect physical, mental and behavioral development.

Nearly 40,000 babies are born with FASD each year, and statistics show that women 34 or older are 37 percent more likely to report drinking while pregnant than their younger counterparts.

Chiodo and her colleagues examined 462 children born to inner city African-American women who were recruited from a university antenatal clinic. At the age of 7, each child was administered the Conners' Continuous Performance Test (CPT) to measure his or her inattention and impulsivity. In addition, their teacher's completed the Achenbach Teacher Report Form to assess attention problems in the classroom.

Overall, the results indicated that children whose mothers were 30 years of age or older when they were born had poorer attention scores than children born to younger mothers when exposed

prenatally to higher levels of alcohol. The CPT in particular revealed that children born to older drinking mothers had the most difficulty sustaining attention during the test and made more mistakes compared to children born to younger drinking mothers.

"It is very important that women are warned that with increasing maternal age, fetuses may be more severely affected by alcohol exposure, even when the mother's alcohol intake during pregnancy has not increased from previous pregnancies, and even older children from prior pregnancies appear to be unaffected," said Chiodo.

Moreover, Chiodo and her colleagues believe that understanding the influence of maternal age on the relation between prenatal alcohol and neurobehavioral outcome might assist in the development of focused primary care interventions for older drinking mothers.

"Our findings may justify targeting older drinking mothers for particular attention in primary care settings because their fetuses are at greater risk than those of younger drinking mothers for alcohol-related deficits in attention," said Chiodo. "Health care professionals need to be aware that increased maternal age among their pregnant patients increases the susceptibility of the fetus to effects of alcohol. Physicians need to be able to appropriately tailor their interventions to patients during standard clinical visits about the relative risks of maternal drinking to fetuses when mothers are older."

Chiodo's collaborating partners from Wayne State University include Virginia Delaney-Black, M.D., professor of pediatrics, who is the principal

investigator on this National Institute of Drug Abuse-funded project. Other collaborators were John H. Hannigan, Ph.D., deputy director of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child and Family Development; Robert J. Sokol, M.D., director of the C.S. Mott Center for Human Growth and Development, and distinguished professor of obstetrics and gynecology; James Janisse, Ph.D., assistant professor of family medicine and public health sciences; Mark Greenwald, Ph.D., associate professor of psychiatry; and Joel Ager, Ph.D., retired professor of family medicine and public health sciences. Chandice Covington, Ph.D., interim dean at the Anita Thigpen Perry School of Nursing at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center also is a partner.



### About Dr. Lisa Chiodo:

*Dr. Lisa Chiodo received her B.S. in psychology from the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, and her M.S. and Ph.D. in development psychology from Wayne State University. She joined Wayne State University's College of Nursing in 2009.*

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