

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Community Affairs

**Effective approaches to prevention, diagnosis and support for Fetal Alcohol
Spectrum Disorder**

19 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000242

Question Subject: National Drug Strategy Household Survey historical data

Type of Question: Spoken

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Senator: Catryna Bilyk

Question:

Senator BILYK: Sorry, my connection has been dropping in and out a bit this morning, so I might have missed this if you already referred to it. Historic data on women's alcohol consumption that looks at whether they drank before they were pregnant, when they were pregnant, knowing they were pregnant and that sort of thing: how far back does that go? Have you got information about how far back that data collection goes?

Mr Frost: The National Drug Strategy Household Survey dates back to 1985. I would need to take on notice whether those exact questions have been asked throughout the time of that survey. Since then, it's been run every two to three years. The National Perinatal Data Collection is just starting now, from 1 July 2019. That will provide useful information over time, from then on. But I can get back to the committee about how far back those particular questions go in the survey, noting that the survey itself goes back as far as 1985.

Answer:

Since 2004, the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) has asked pregnant women the following question about their alcohol use:

In the last 12 months when you were pregnant, in general, did you drink more, less or the same amount of alcohol compared to when you were neither pregnant nor breastfeeding?

- *More*
- *Less*
- *Same amount*
- *Don't drink alcohol.*

In the 2013 and following surveys, the questions on drug use during pregnancy were updated to provide a more accurate picture of drinking during pregnancy. Since 2013, the survey asked women whether they had used alcohol before and/or after knowledge of their pregnancy. It also asks about their use of tobacco, pain-killers/opioids and illicit drugs. The question is worded as follows:

At any time in the last 12 months when you were pregnant but did not yet know, did you use any of the following?

- *Alcohol*
- *Tobacco*
- *Prescription pain-killers/pain-relievers and opioids for non-medical use*
- *Illicit drugs (e.g. cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine)*
- *None of these.*

The survey then asks about the use of these substances after knowledge of pregnancy, and the question is worded as follows:

At any time in the last 12 months when you were pregnant, did you use any of the following after you knew you were pregnant?

- *Alcohol*
- *Tobacco*
- *Prescription pain-killers/pain-relievers and opioids for non-medical use*
- *Illicit drugs (e.g. cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine)*
- *None of these.*

Each question collects information about slightly different concepts which should be taken into consideration when interpreting these results. There have been no changes to the pregnancy questions since 2013. Further questions were also added in 2013 to capture how much alcohol women consumed during pregnancy:

In the last 12 months when you were pregnant, how often did you have a drink containing alcohol?

- *Never*
- *Monthly or less*
- *Two to four times a month*
- *Two to three times per week*
- *Four or more times a week.*

In the last 12 months when you were pregnant, how often did you have six or more drinks on one occasion?

- *Never*
- *Less than monthly*
- *Monthly*
- *Two or three times per week*
- *Four or more times a week.*

Results from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 2007 to 2019

Table 1: Amount of alcohol pregnant/breastfeeding women, aged 14 to 49, drank compared with when they were neither pregnant nor breastfeeding, 2007 to 2019 (per cent)

Amount of alcohol consumed	While pregnant ^(a)					While breastfeeding ^(b)				
	2007	2010	2013	2016	2019	2007	2010	2013	2016	2019
More	n.p.	**0.4	n.p.	n.p.	—	**0.2	n.p.	*1.2	*0.6	*1.1
Less	57.0	48.8	46.1	43.2	34.6#	70.7	62.2	60.6	54.9	47.2#
Same amount	*2.8	*2.0	*1.2	*1.1	*0.8	4.6	3.5	2.7	*2.7	*2.5
Don't drink alcohol	39.7	48.7	52.7	55.6	64.6#	24.5	34.1	35.5	41.9	49.2#

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25 per cent to 50 per cent and should be used with caution.

** Estimate has a high level of sampling error (relative standard error of 51 per cent to 90 per cent), meaning that it is unsuitable for most uses.

Statistically significant change between 2016 and 2019.

n.p. Not published because of small numbers, confidentiality or other concerns about the quality of the data.

— Nil.

(a) Base is only pregnant women or women pregnant and breastfeeding.

(b) Base is women who were only breastfeeding or pregnant and breastfeeding.

Note: Data from 2007 was revised in 2019, and may not match previously published results.

Source: NDSHS 2019.

Table 2: Quantity and frequency of alcohol consumed, by pregnant women aged 14 to 49 who consumed alcohol during pregnancy, 2013 to 2019 (per cent)

Quantity	2013	2016	2019
1 - 2 drinks	95.8	97.3	96.5
3 - 4 drinks	*2.7	n.p.	n.p.
5 - 6 drinks	**1.4	—	**1.1
7 or more drinks	—	n.p.	n.p.
Frequency			
Monthly or less	77.9	81.0	90.2
Two to four times a month	17.0	16.2	*9.3
Two to three times per week	*2.7	**1.7	n.p.
Four or more times per week	*2.4	n.p.	—

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25 per cent to 50 per cent and should be used with caution.

** Estimate has a high level of sampling error (relative standard error of 51 per cent to 90 per cent), meaning that it is unsuitable for most uses.

n.p. not published because of small numbers, confidentiality or other concerns about the quality of the data.

— Nil.

Note: Base is pregnant women who consumed alcohol during pregnancy.

Source: NDSHS 2019.

Table 3: Drug taking behaviours before and after knowledge of pregnancy, pregnant women aged 14 to 49, 2013 to 2019 (per cent)

	Before they knew they were pregnant ^(a)			After they knew they were pregnant ^(a)			All pregnant women ^(b)		
	2013	2016	2019	2013	2016	2019	2013	2016	2019
Alcohol	56.0	48.7	54.9	26.1	25.2	14.5#	41.8	34.7	29.7
Tobacco	17.4	15.7	21.9	10.6	11.3	10.8	15.0	11.3	12.1

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25 per cent to 50 per cent and should be used with caution.

** Estimate has a high level of sampling error (relative standard error of 51 per cent to 90 per cent), meaning that it is unsuitable for most uses.

Statistically significant change between 2016 and 2019.

(a) Base is women who, in the previous 12 months, reported a period of time when they were pregnant but did not know they were pregnant.

(b) Base is women who, in the previous 12 months, reported a period of time when they were pregnant.

Note: Respondents could select more than one response.

Source: NDSHS 2019.