



## Unreliable estimation of prevalence of fetal alcohol syndrome

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Svetlana Popova and colleagues (March, 2017)<sup>1</sup> estimated that about one quarter of pregnant women in Europe drink alcohol. The authors state that this estimate is 2·6 times higher than the global prevalence and estimate that Europe has the world's highest fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) prevalence of 37·4 per 10 000 people. If true, these numbers are alarming and require urgent action; however, we are not convinced that they are valid for contemporary Europe.

The estimated drinking prevalence of 45·8% for Denmark is based on six Danish studies, five of which describe pregnant women in the 1980s and 1990s. This prevalence is much higher than reported in surveillance data,<sup>2,3</sup> which showed that, in Denmark's two most urbanised areas, 3% and 15% of pregnant women consumed alcohol in 2012. Drinking during pregnancy has reduced markedly in Denmark—eg, from 70% in 1998 to 15% in 2013 in the Aarhus area.<sup>3</sup> We therefore consider the estimation of alcohol use in pregnancy and consequently prevalence of FAS to be seriously overestimated. We are concerned that a similar overestimation could apply to other countries. According to the National Danish Patient Registry<sup>4</sup>, which covers all inpatient and outpatient contacts in Denmark, approximately 12 children are diagnosed with FAS every year, corresponding to two per 10 000 children; although record-based ascertainment is known to be underestimated,<sup>5</sup> this is still considerably lower than the estimated 68 per 10 000 children reported by Popova and colleagues.

FAS is one of few preventable congenital diseases, and we highly appreciate the efforts of the authors. Still, we believe that more critical reflections on the validity of the

estimations would have benefitted their work.

We declare no competing interests.

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