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Spiritually-based narratives: Women's stories about alcohol addiction facilitated by alcoholics anonymous

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Public discourses and policies concerning pregnant women who drink alcohol are condemnatory, blaming, and unsympathetic. Therefore, women often deny the claim that they are alcohol dependent because of the intense fear of being stigmatised. Also, the harmful effects of alcohol during pregnancy have been well documented. So, it begs the question: should women be punished or banned from drinking during pregnancy for the sake of preventing fetal harm? The purpose of this paper is to consider the appropriateness of criminalizing drinking as a means to prevent fetal harm and consequently Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). This paper presents arguments for and against the criminalisation of alcohol exposed pregnancies in order to critically analyse health policy that focuses on maternal actions only when paternal actions can be equally harmful especially when the policy is not evidenced based and when the health problem is not an individual but a systemic one. This theoretical paper critically reviewed the literature through a feminist psychology lens and evaluated whether health policy should be in favour of criminalising pregnant women who drink or not. The search terms, 'criminalising pregnant wom(a)en*', 'pregnancy police' was used to identify articles relating to policy on pregnant women who drink. The search strategy was applied to PsycINFO, MEDLINE, Web of Science and the Global Health Database. Time restrictions were excluded to maximise the identification of relevant literature. The findings suggest that an ethically befitting and useful reaction to FASD prevention necessitates a systematic multifaceted approach that does not punish, but instead aims to assist women and children.

Biography

Liezille Jacobs has completed her Master's in Psychology Internship at the Center for Drug Abuse Research in Washington, DC, USA. She graduated with her PhD from Stellenbosch University, in South Africa and postdoctoral studies from Antwerp University Department of Social Medicine and Epidemiology, in Belgium. She is a Senior Lecturer at Rhodes University, South Africa. She has published more than 20 papers in reputed journals, book chapters, monographs and several blog posts on the Mail & Guardian's Thought Leader.

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