

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01 HRS ON WEDNESDAY 1 JULY 2015

More support for substance-using pregnant women needed

Better support for pregnant women who use alcohol or other drugs is needed, research from the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) has found.

ICPS researchers examined the outcomes of identifying Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) use during pregnancy on women, their partners and their children by consulting widely, and reviewing the literature and existing policies in Australian states and territories relating to the identification of maternal AOD use in pregnancy.

The researchers found that screening alone is unlikely to improve outcomes for pregnant women who use alcohol and other drugs. Instead they found that early engagement and the provision of support and treatment services for women, not only for their AOD use, but also for mental health, domestic violence and homelessness, is vital to improve outcomes for these women and their families.

Lead researcher Associate Professor Stephanie Taplin, Associate Director, ICPS, said there is currently no evidence that pregnant substance-using women receive the services they need.

“Pregnancy is often the best time to address maternal AOD use. Women may enter treatment when pregnant to address their AOD use, but at the same time they are likely to present late to antenatal services and be fearful that they will be reported to child protection services and have their baby removed from their care.

“Our research suggests that an increased emphasis on supporting and treating these women beyond a focus on screening and reporting is needed. Improved cross-disciplinary training and support of staff accompanied by the increased availability of comprehensive and accessible services for pregnant AOD-using women is more likely to improve outcomes for these women and their families,” Associate Professor Taplin said.

Associate Professor Taplin said the Report had implications for both policymakers and service providers.

“The focus of any policies and practice should be on ensuring that every pregnant women and developing foetus are healthy, and that every child has a right to be safe and well cared for. We have a duty to support pregnant women with substance-use problems and to provide them with adequate services and longer-term support to help them safely parent their children.”

The research was funded by the former Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD). Please

contact Amy Ripley (details below) for a copy of the Report.

The ICPS is a research institute within the Learning Sciences Institute Australia (LSIA) at Australian Catholic University (ACU).

The ICPS is at the forefront of research, evaluation and community education to enhance the wellbeing of children, young people and their families.

Media Contact: Amy Ripley | Phone: 020 9739 2015 | Mobile: 0475 965 092 | Email:
amy.ripley@acu.edu.au