

9 out of 10 — that is, 90% — Canadians describe drinking while pregnant as a serious concern. Fully two-thirds, which is 68%, of the population and almost 8 in 10 women, which is 79%, of the population describe it as a very serious concern.”⁵⁰

The Decima survey also found that among women in the 18 to 24 year age group, 93% describe drinking while pregnant as a “very serious concern”.⁵¹

If these survey results are accurate and representative of the general Canadian population, they would indicate a high level of awareness among Canadians that drinking during pregnancy has definite risks for the foetus. The Sub-Committee has some concerns about these statistics, however.

First, if the Reid and Decima surveys are compared on the question of the perceived advisability of abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy, there is some difference in the findings. In the Angus Reid survey, when asked if any consumption of alcohol would harm a woman’s baby, 62% of female respondents replied in the affirmative (50% of males, 56% of Canadians overall).⁵² The Decima survey, as noted above, found that 88% of Canadian women believe that no alcohol should be consumed during pregnancy. Although the two survey questions were not identical, the 26% difference between the responses of women in the two surveys raises concern about their accuracy and representativeness.

The nature of the questions asked in the Reid Survey also raise some concerns in the minds of Sub-Committee members. The initial question posed in the Reid survey was: “To the best of your knowledge, does the excessive consumption of alcohol by a woman during pregnancy increase the potential for birth defects in her child, or not?”⁵³ In our view, there are a number of cues in this question which will tend to influence the response. The phrase “excessive consumption of alcohol” would, we feel, trigger a strong negative reaction from the respondent; the subsequent phrase, “increase the potential for birth defects” strongly suggests that alcohol may damage the foetus and, in our view, encourages the respondent to answer the question in the affirmative.

Dr. Eric Single of the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse commented on the Reid Group survey and on the question of public awareness:

“ . . .there are certain methodological problems (with the survey), and I guess you have also considered them. If you ask people whether they are aware of something, and given almost any statement, you will probably get close to 90% saying yes. So you have to look at that in detail. I am not necessarily saying the 92% is wrong.

“The other points would be that, first of all, there are degrees of awareness. Just being aware of it, do they really understand exactly what the nature of the problem is. There is the fact that we are not even sure about the risks involved with even very low-level drinking which might carry certain risks.

⁵⁰ Proceedings, Issue 11, p. 5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Angus Reid Group, “National Reid Poll (1-555-23)”, September 1991.

⁵³ *Ibid.*