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By [Fiona Macrae](#)



Poisoning baby: Professor Barry Carpenter says pregnant women who drink are condemning their children to a lifetime of learning disabilities. (Posed by model)

Young women are poisoning their babies and condemning them to a lifetime of learning disabilities by binge drinking in pregnancy, a government adviser has warned.

Professor Barry Carpenter said Britain was facing unprecedented rise in the number of children born with learning disabilities - and boozy young mothers-to-be were largely to blame.

He told a Royal College of Nursing summit that large numbers of 19- to 24-year-old women are not planning to get pregnant and continue to drink through the first three months of pregnancy.

'In the UK we have the highest binge drinking levels in the world,' he said.

'Drunken young women are poisoning their babies – it is child abuse by umbilical cord.'

Professor Carpenter, the national director for educational special needs, said that up to one in 100 babies is born with foetal alcohol syndrome disorder (FASD), which causes problems such as attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity and poor co-ordination, and can be traced back to alcohol in the womb.

'This the largest group of children going into fostering and adoption in the UK - and the largest group going into the criminal justice system.

'Their ability to retain information from one day to the next is very poor and 30 per cent of people with FASD commit suicide in later life because their lives are unbearable.'

He told the conference that the number of youngsters with learning disabilities had risen by 25 per cent in the last five years, while the incidence of profound and multiple learning disabilities has risen by 29 per cent over the same period.

The surge can also be partly attributed to better survival rates among premature babies and a boom in the birth of twins and triplets through IVF, the magazine Learning Disability Practice reports.

Mervi Jokinen from the Royal College of Midwives, said: 'While Professor Carpenter's ultimate aims may be laudable, I think that his use of language is perhaps less than helpful in encouraging these young women to think about their actions.

'Midwives can discuss the evidence about drinking during pregnancy with young women and encourage informed choice about drinking alcohol when pregnant.

'The evidence about the effects of drinking during pregnancy is not clear. Because of this, and while we would not couch it in the language used by Professor Carpenter, our advice is to remove all doubt and avoid alcohol while pregnant.

'We would also advise women trying to start a family to stop drinking alcohol.

'The advice on avoiding binge drinking and alcohol during pregnancy is also a public health message for everybody, not just young pregnant women.'

The Department of Health also says abstinence is the best policy.

But others say women can safely drink small amounts.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists also advises no more than one to two units, no more than once or twice a week.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence advises women to avoid alcohol in the first three months of pregnancy, if possible.

`Those who decide to drink should get through no more than four units a week.'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1293208/Health-expert-Barry-Carpenter-labels-British-binge-drinking-pregnancy-child-abuse-umbilical-cord.html?printingPage=true>