Drinking during pregnancy is currently defined as a serious public health problem in all Western countries (Leppo & Hecksher 2010, 7). Many studies show that heavy alcohol consumption during pregnancy is associated with birth defects, mental retardation and central nervous system abnormalities (Nilsen et al. 2010, 161). Some studies also report that even moderate amounts of prenatal alcohol use may cause adverse neurobehavioral effects in children, like attention deficits, hyperactivity and delayed learning. In general, however, the question, whether such kinds of neurobehavioral effects of moderate alcohol consumption exist, remains controversial (Comasco et. al 2012, 1779). For example, Armstrong (2003, 6) argues that although ‘fetal alcohol syndrome’ (FAS) and its kinship syndromes “are often presented as clearly established diagnostic paradigms (…) considerably uncertainty pervades our understanding of the relationship between alcohol and reproductive outcome” (see also Leppo & Hecksher 2010).

The national public health policies in different countries have reacted to the concern of adverse effects of alcohol on the fetus in diverse ways. Some countries aim at to regulate the drinking during pregnancy by providing consistent zero tolerance messages while others also specify that moderate alcohol consumption is connected to minimal risk to the fetus (O’Leary et. al. 2007, 468; Leppo & Hecksher 2010, 9).

Sweden represents the countries where alcohol guidelines recommend abstinence during pregnancy (Nilsen et. al. 2012, 737). It provides an interesting case to study public health interventions to women’s pregnant drinking. First of all, in Sweden women’s drinking has increased considerably in the last decades (Johansson 2008). Nowadays, few women are abstainers and most have developed a habit to use alcohol regularly as part of their lifestyle before becoming pregnant (Danielson & Sundström 2006, 161). Secondly, in the last decades women have increasingly moved to the labor market and expanded their traditional identities as mothers and wives to include new kinds of breadwinner and citizenship identities (Lovell 2004, 38). At the same time, welfare state policies have consistently aimed at advance the gender equality between men and women in their domestic and public roles (Julkunen, 2010). The building of Swedish welfare state has been interpreted as a process that has strengthened women’s agency and power to make independent choices in life, like postponing the birth of the first child.

These changes in women’s social roles and lifestyles make the reproduction issues and the public health campaigns against women’s drinking during pregnancy morally heated and tension-driven domains. On the one hand, it is understandable that societies want to control the drinking during pregnancy since the fetus represents the future of their nation. The regulation of pregnant drinking is also an effective way to make an intervention to public...
health. For example, Sweden has a comprehensive system of public antenatal care centers that reaches virtually all pregnant women (Nilsen et al. 2012, 737).

On the other hand, in the public health campaigns against pregnant drinking women become easily addressed one-sidedly as emotional and non-independent citizens who are not believed to make rational and responsible choices. For example, in 2004 the alcohol committee launched a public health campaign that warned women of fertile age of the adverse effects of alcohol use on the fetus and aimed at to get women to abstain from drinking during pregnancy by using fear appeal messages. The campaign got a controversial reception in the media and it was accused, among others, of casting blame on pregnant women for enjoying a small amount of wine and of forcing a “health morality” upon them that no one else would be willing to follow (Roumeliotis & Törrönen, forthcoming).

In the paper we analyze recent Swedish public health campaigns against drinking during pregnancy produced by Swedish National Institute of Public Health (FHI) and Swedish National Food Administration (SLV). FHI is responsible for implementing and evaluating the Swedish alcohol policy and SLV is responsible for food safety. Both agencies have developed pamphlets against drinking during pregnancy that are available in the maternity clinics. FHI’s pamphlet is titled “A good start” and SLV’s pamphlet has a heading “Advice about food for you who are pregnant”. In addition, both agencies have developed more elaborated texts for midwives where they legitimize their total abstinence recommendations with scientific knowledge. In the paper we analyze all this material that consists both of textual and visual messages.

Our research question is tripartite. First, we will analyze how drinking during pregnancy is defined in the public health campaign material as a health risk and what kind of scientific knowledge (biological, psychological, sociological, etc.) is used in these definitions (c.f. Clarke 2004, 112).

Secondly, we will analyze what kinds of techniques the health campaigns recommend for women to restrain from drinking during pregnancy. What is the rationality of these techniques?

Thirdly, we will analyze how the textual and visual health campaign messages address women. Do they address women as rational decision-makers by neutral risk information or as irrational and emotional actors by sentimental, exaggerated and fear raising risk images?

**Contribution of the study**

The study will increase the understanding of how scientific research is used in the public health campaigns. It will also be informative in specifying how women can be addressed in the public health interventions as rational decision-makers or emotional actors or in both ways. This kind of information is much needed when developing rational and egalitarian alcohol policies, health campaigns and prevention projects.

**References**


Roumeliotis, Filip & Törrönen, Jukka (forthcoming). From mothers of the ’People’s Home’ to biologically rational consumers – A press analysis of changing conceptions of women’s drinking in Sweden from 1955 to 2010. Accepted for publication to Feminist Media Studies.