Is moderate alcohol intake in pregnancy associated with the craniofacial features related to the fetal alcohol syndrome?

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Social drinking in pregnancy is common in many countries despite the fact that alcohol in high doses has teratogenic properties. The public health implications would be appreciable if even moderate alcohol consumption were associated with embryonal or fetal maldevelopment. A presumably sensitive marker of an alcohol effect was used in this study, namely the fetal craniofacial features included in the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. The study was based upon self-reported alcohol intake and photographs taken at birth or at 18 months of children born to mothers with a low or moderate alcohol intake during pregnancy. These women were selected during pregnancy by a two-stage sampling from all in well defined regions. Data were available concerning 323 pregnant women and some 200 to 220 children. A short palpebral fissure, a short palpebral fissure, a short nose to upper-lip distance and a broad root of the nose were expected to be associated with alcohol intake in early pregnancy, but such an association was only seen between binge drinking and a short palpebral fissure. No associations proved statistically significant at the 18-month examination and any association could merely be secondary to the known association between alcohol and birth weight.