

MEDIA RELEASE

Sudbury researcher uses art to bring attention to overlooked disability and how Instagram may play a role in its prevalence.

(Sudbury, April 4, 2022) Dr. Kelly Harding, a researcher with Laurentian University and the Canada FASD Research Network, is showcasing her art at the LUL SciArt Show to bring attention to alcohol consumption in motherhood and how industry marketing and a popular social media hashtag is playing a role.

Dr. Harding's interactive piece, "It's Mommy's Turn to Wine", explores the intricacies of the social phenomenon of the wine mom, including its darker underside. Featured at the LUSciArt Show at Science North, her art piece is a visual representation of her research findings on the impact of the #winemom hashtag on alcohol consumption and mothers.

The "wine mom" phenomenon has taken off online in recent years. In her research, Dr. Harding and her colleagues found that women use alcohol, specifically wine, to fight back against the traditional idea of what it means to be a good mother. But Instagram posts using the #winemom hashtag also portray alcohol as an acceptable form of self-care and a way to cope with the daily tasks associated with motherhood. Therein lies the darker side to the wine mom phenomenon. These posts normalize regular binge drinking and suggest that women use alcohol as a one-stop shop coping strategy for their daily stressors and mental health challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the emergence of new versions of the wine mom meme, increasing existing concerns about elevated alcohol use and mental health challenges among women, and particularly mothers of young children.

This culture and its popularity is especially concerning for experts working in the field of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Increased alcohol consumption in women of childbearing age can lead to increased risk of alcohol-exposed pregnancies. It can also lead to problematic relationships with alcohol that can carry into pregnancy. FASD is a lifelong disability impacting the brain and body of people who were prenatally exposed to alcohol. It already impacts 1.5 million Canadians, more people than autism, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome combined.

While the #winemoms corner online is an opportunity for women to connect and share the trials and tribulations of motherhood, its popularity highlights the growing need for better supports for women's mental health.

Dr. Harding's interactive art piece will be on display at Science North until April 10th as part of the Tenth Annual LUL SciArt Show.

Quotes:

"In this piece I really wanted to highlight how engaging the wine mom community can be. It's funny and bright and, on the surface, it seems like harmless good fun that fosters a sense of community. People can get sucked in by the humor and camaraderie, perhaps not recognizing how it impacts their relationship with alcohol until it's too late. The 'wine mom' lifestyle is being packaged, marketed, and sold to women with branded clothing, accessories, and homeware. My hope is that this art piece encourages people to critically think about why they connect with the #winemom identity and recognize that participation in this culture is not the only way to "survive" motherhood."

Dr. Kelly Harding, Research Associate and Director of Research Administration, Canada FASD Research Network

"Alcohol use among women is increasing with an increase in products and targeted advertising for women that markets alcohol as a way to have fun, cope with stressful situations, and relax. The normalization of alcohol use is concerning and is contributing to increased rates of alcohol use during pregnancy. Dr. Harding's work helps us understand the factors that may be contributing to women's alcohol use in pregnancy and motherhood so that we can support women in finding healthy coping strategies and other opportunities for connection."

Lindsay Wolfson, Research Manager, BC Centre of Excellence for Women's Health

"Dr. Harding's research shows that women are finding connection and support in the wine mom community, but it comes with risks to their health and wellbeing. Women deserve support and services that alleviate stressors and address mental health concerns while simultaneously encouraging their health and wellbeing and that of their families. CanFASD is pushing for a national FASD strategy that provides such supports and gives women good information and support to reduce or stop substance use, especially during pregnancy."

Audrey McFarlane, Executive Director, CanFASD Research Network

About CanFASD:

CanFASD is Canada's first national Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) research network. CanFASD works collaboratively with researchers and partners across the nation to address complexities of FASD. Our mission is to produce and maintain national, collaborative research for all Canadians, leading to prevention strategies and improved support services for people affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

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