

# Introduction

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For several years the use of drugs during pregnancy, particularly cocaine, has been a major public health issue because of the concern about possible adverse behavioral effects on the neonate and the developing child. While many popular press publications have warned of the severe adverse effects of prenatal drug exposure, the scientific literature has been less clear on this issue, in part because of complex methodological issues that confront research in this field.

On July 12 and 13, 1993, the National Institute on Drug Abuse conducted a technical review at which researchers reviewed the state of the art regarding behavioral assessments of offspring prenatally exposed to abused drugs. Presenters identified and addressed the complex methodological issues that abound in both human and animal studies designed to assess behavioral effects of prenatal drug exposure, and they stressed the caveats involved in drawing causal conclusions from associations between maternal drug abuse and adverse behavioral outcomes in the offspring. This research monograph is based upon revisions of presentations made at that technical review. The fundamental aim of this research monograph is to clarify the methodological issues for future research in this field, to provide caution in the interpretation of research findings, and to suggest future research directions.

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