



THE PRIMARY DRUG OF ABUSE

“South Africa has the highest level of alcohol consumption in the world”

The words were uttered by Rob Davies, the then Minister of Trade and Industry at a press briefing where he released the National Liquor Amendment Bill, 2016 - for public comment.

Whether the minister's claims are true or false, there is trouble brewing.

The World Health Organization (WHO) states that globally, 3 million deaths are attributed to the harmful use of alcohol, which is also a causal factor in more than 200 diseases and injury conditions. The organization reports that alcohol - seen to be on the rise among adolescents and young adults, is a toxic, psychoactive additive substance detrimental to the health of individuals and the community at large. It causes and perpetuates harm to those who consume it, including family members and children being the most vulnerable.

The less obvious consequence of high alcohol consumption is Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FAS); a pattern of physical abnormalities that impair mental development seen with increasing frequency among children with alcoholic mothers. This exposure in a developing infant can result in negative health effects such as slowed development of the brain, mental health, and lifelong disabilities.

Substance abuse such as alcohol may cause many types of social ills. These include and are not limited to alcohol dependency, violence, and injuries, but also in spheres as diverse as family stresses, violent outbreaks and criminal behaviour, including injuries and ultimately death. Supplementary to health consequences, the harmful use of alcohol carries significant social and economic losses to individuals and the broader society.

South Africa is noted as the mecca of drunk driving, traffic deaths, and injuries. The report by the National Department of Transport (NDOT, 2002) indicates that in 2001, there were over 500 000 crashes which resulted in more than 7000 road traffic deaths and 150 000 injuries. The cost to the carnage was estimated at approximately R13,8 billion. Notably, the WHO, in its 2014 report, estimated figures for South Africa in 2009 to be approximately 300 billion rand.

A few studies on the consumption of alcohol by young people have been conducted. One such: 'the 2002 and 2008 South African youth risk behaviour survey among learners in grade 8 to 11' recorded the following data:



Alcohol consumption: (Youth admission ...)	2002 survey	Total %	2008 survey	Total %
- To 1 or more drinks of alcohol in their life time	56% male 44% female	49%	54% male 45% female	50%
- To a drink of alcohol on more days before the survey	39% male 26% female	32%	41% male 30% female	35%
- To binge drinking (imbibed 5 or more within a few hours on 1 or more days in the month before the survey)	29% male 18% female	23%	34% male 24% female	29%

Own illustration

Alcohol may be the world’s oldest known drug. Fermented grain, fruits and other sources of sugar have been used to make alcohol. However, in recent times, the production of products containing alcohol has become a multimillion dollar business; And the consumption and abuse of alcohol has become a major **public health concern** (and problem). This is and it remains a challenge for the country and affects not only the individual, but also the individual’s families, friends, communities and government resources.

The Department of Social Development is the custodian of the **Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act (No. 70 of 2008)**. The department has the responsibility to ensure that the Act is implemented, but also to provide legal framework for the functioning of the Central Drug Authority (CDA).

Risky behaviour and destructive drinking patterns such as intoxication and binge drinking (heavy episode drinking), tends to be particularly common among adolescents. This is

also one of the contributory factors to conduct such as drunk driving, violence, unsafe sexual practices which in turn increases the risk of contracting HIV/Aids and other diseases such as brain damage, cirrhosis of the liver, kidney failure ... and even death.

The Association for Alcohol Responsibility and Education advocates strongly that children **say NO to drinking** when under the legal drinking age. As part of its focus area, the organization embarked on an early intervention programme, “It Starts Today. Future You Now” to empower young people with knowledge and information to enable them to make better choices pertaining to underage drinking.

In evaluating the intervention, a pilot study was conducted in two provinces, one being the Free State Province in Botshabelo. The study also identified a variety of factors that affect the level and patterns of alcohol consumption. Details emanating from the report can be found in the booklet ‘Stakeholder Report’ from www.aware.org



The ability to turn the tide, curl this abusive behaviour and arrest the brewing trouble, lies in our hands. It starts today: to increase awareness, reduce alcohol related harm and to find solutions for the betterment of individuals and society at large.

The time to **introspect** is now. To look at the inner self and ask: Why do people drink?

One would say: 'it make you fit in with friends and have fun'.

While drinking alcohol is itself not necessarily a problem. Drinking to intoxication and binge drinking can cause a range of consequences and increase one's risk for variety of problems. This is truer as reflected in the words as said by one of the celebrities in this country.

"I was frustrated and so I drank a little to find happiness. It wasn't that I needed it or that I was addicted. But I got to a point where one night I finished the whole bottle (of wine) by myself"

Despite all of it, she says: *"It wasn't a nice place to be"*

It really is not a nice place to be: When alcohol abuse has widespread negative social consequences. When the country has also been identified by the World Health Organization to exhibit a high

per capita alcohol consumption coupled with binge and harmful drinking patterns, suggesting that the country has a serious alcohol problem.

It is assessed, in 'Estimating the burden of disease attributable to alcohol use in South Africa', that 7.0 per cent of all deaths and 7.1 per cent of the burden of disease in South Africa were attributed to alcohol, which figures are significantly higher than the global averages.

Could you have a drinking problem?

If you find yourself in similar situation; **reach out,**

If compulsive and uncontrolled alcohol consumption, binge drinking, blackouts and reckless behavior under the influence dominate your life; **speak out.**

If your compulsion to drink becomes so powerful that reputation, personal care, family, relationships and career are sacrificed and at risk; **speak to someone.**

For further information, contact:

Sub-directorate: Substance Abuse
051 409 0546 / 051 409 0773 or
051 409 0668

Sub-directorate: Wellness Programme
051 409 0660 / 051 409 0514 or 051 409
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SOURCES: Available on request



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