



# MICAP RECAP

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*Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems  
Celebrating its 110<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2015*

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## Understanding the Relationship between Alcohol and Crime By Pastor Donna Sperry, MICAP Board Member

A 2012 survey by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) indicated approximately 7.2 percent of 17 million adults in the United States ages 18 and older, and an estimated 835,000 adolescents ages 12-17, had been diagnosed with an Alcohol Use Disorder. This diagnosis meant that drinking alcohol interfered with taking care of one's daily needs: including home, family, job or school. These numbers did not include those who had not sought or had been court ordered to treatment which would have significantly increased the overall numbers.

Therefore, it is prudent to take a look at how Alcohol Use Disorder is related to crime. It appears to be a high risk factor when it comes to crime. More than two-thirds of local jail inmates (68%) were found to be dependent on or abusing drugs or alcohol at the time they committed their crime, according to a 2002 survey of men and women held in local jails.

The rate of substance dependence or abuse varied by gender, race, and offense:

- 44% of men and 52% of women were dependent on drugs or alcohol.
- 78% of white, 64% of black and 59% of Hispanic inmates were dependent on or abusing drugs or alcohol.
- Inmates convicted of burglary had the highest rate of substance dependence or abuse (85%), followed by inmates convicted of DWI/DUI (82%), weapons violations (79%), and drug possession (75%).

In 2011, The Pew Center on the States, a nonprofit organization (a division of The Pew Charitable Trusts) that identifies and advances effective solutions to critical issues facing states published a research study entitled: **State of Recidivism, The Revolving Door of America's Prisons**. This study took an in-depth look at what happens when these same substance dependent individuals are returned to their communities. While it has been clearly documented the vast majority of criminal offenses leading to incarceration involve the use of alcohol or other drugs at the time of offense, what hasn't been the focus of research is the fact that a substantial amount of re-offenses and parole violations also involve the use of alcohol or other drugs.

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# Alcohol and Your Health: Recent Research in the News

By Vernon K. Smith, PhD, MICAP Board Vice President

The New York Times weekly science section recently discussed the relationship between depression and alcoholism.<sup>1</sup> According to Dr. Shelly Greenfield, a professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, drinking alcohol makes people more vulnerable to depression, and depression makes people more vulnerable to alcohol. The article quotes Dr. Kathleen Brady, a distinguished university professor at the Medical University of South Carolina: “Depressed people who drink will most likely see their depression worsen, because alcohol is a depressant, tamping down the nervous system.”

The *New York Times* story is a reminder of the many ways drinking alcohol can affect our health. Most of the health effects of alcohol are negative, even though we often see news reports of certain benefits, like the finding that moderate drinking of red wine can have a protective effect on the heart. However, even that finding is now coming under question.

In fact, researchers recently concluded that any health benefits of moderate drinking have been overblown, citing a recent comprehensive study of 53,000 British people that found “little to no health benefit linked to alcohol consumption, once the results were adjusted for personal, social, economic and lifestyle factors.”<sup>2</sup> In that study, researchers concluded that any benefits of consuming alcohol “are so minimal that they might be explained by so-called ‘selection bias.’” Craig Knott, one of the authors, concluded: “It seems sensible for current drinkers to consider moderating the amount of alcohol they consume, and for non-drinkers to remain abstinent.”

Indeed, an impressive amount of research continues to show that even light to moderate drinking, including drinking red wine, can have a range of impacts that are not at all positive to our health. In today’s culture, and with the constant stream of advertising for alcohol products, it is no wonder that few people are aware of, or minimize, the many ways drinking alcohol can affect our physical and mental health. Research shows that the effects are quite similar whether the alcohol is in the form of craft beer, fine wine or strong spirits.

From studies published in medical journals, here are a few recent findings that **many of us** may not be aware of:

- Risk of skin cancer: A recent study in the *British Journal of Dermatology*<sup>3</sup> documented the relationship between drinking alcohol and the risk of skin cancer, and that the risk increases with the degree of alcohol consumption. The increased risk of melanoma ranged from 10% for light drinkers (less than one drink a day) up to about 20% for moderate to heavy drinkers, with heavy drinkers having a 55% elevated risk. The authors conclude that the “data reveals that alcohol consumption is positively associated with the risk of CM (cutaneous melanoma).”
- Alcohol and other cancers: Drinking alcohol increases the risk of developing certain cancers, including cancers of the mouth, esophagus, throat, liver, pancreas and breast. A recent study of 136,000 adults, published in the *British Medical Journal* on August 18, 2015, found that light to moderate drinking was associated with an increased risk of breast cancer in women and several other cancers in men who smoked.<sup>4</sup> Yin Cao, Harvard School of Public Health and the lead researcher on the study, said in a *Time* interview: “For men, especially those who ever smoked, they should limit alcohol to even below the recommended limit. And smoking and heavy alcohol consumption should be absolutely avoided to prevent cancer.”<sup>5</sup> In a *BMJ* editorial accompanying the study, Jurgen Rehm, director at the Centre for Addiction and Mental health in Toronto, wrote that: “Alcohol can cause cancer, even at levels of light to moderate drinking. The present study reinforces this statement.”
- Alcohol and risk of complications after surgery: Being a moderate to heavy drinker increases the risk of serious complications following surgery. A study in the *Annals of Surgery*<sup>6</sup> found that high consumption of alcohol was associated with a 58% higher risk for wound complications, 73%

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greater risk of post-operative infection, 80% greater likelihood of experiencing difficulty breathing, a doubled risk for pulmonary complications, and a tripled risk of dying in the month following surgery. The authors indicated that heavy alcohol use compromises the immune system, which makes the body more susceptible to infections.

- Alcohol and your heart: Drinking over a long time, or drinking too much at one time, can damage the heart, causing irregular heartbeat, stroke, high blood pressure or cardiomyopathy.<sup>7</sup>

Many other studies could be listed, and additional studies will continue to reinforce the current evidence. Modern science has given us a lot to consider about the relationship between drinking alcohol and our health.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Karen Weintraub, "Ask Well: Can you be an alcoholic and not suffer from depression?" *New York Times*, page D6, September 29, 2015.
- 2 Craig Knott and Scott Krakower, *British Medical Journal*, February 2015; and, Dennis Thompson, "Health Benefits of Moderate Drinking Overblown: Report," *HealthDay*, February 10, 2015.
- 3 Rota, et al., "Alcohol Drinking and Cutaneous Melanoma Risk; A Systematic Review and Dose-Risk Met-analysis," *British Journal of Dermatology*, May 2014.
- 4 Cao, et al., "Light to moderate intake of alcohol, drinking patterns, and risk of cancer: results from two prospective US cohort studies," *British Medical Journal*, August 18, 2015.
- 5 Karen Park, "The Connection Between Light Drinking and Cancer: Study," *Time Magazine*, August 18, 2015.
- 6 Eliassen, et al., "Preoperative Alcohol Consumption and Postoperative Complications: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *Annals of Surgery*, May, 2013.
7. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, accessed September 30, 2015 at [www.niaaa.gov/health/alcohol-effects-body](http://www.niaaa.gov/health/alcohol-effects-body)

## Understanding the Relationship between Alcohol and Crime

The Pew Center set out to determine just how prevalent this occurrence was. Their findings for the state of Michigan in 2004 were as follows: 14,217 or 38% of those paroled or released from prison were re-incarcerated within three years, for committing a new crime or for violating conditions governing their release. This is most often related to the use of alcohol or other drugs. However by 2009, that number had decreased to 10,985 or 31 %. Here is how Michigan reduced its recidivism numbers and saved taxpayer dollars at the same time.

Determined to stop recidivism while addressing its' relationship to the problem of alcohol and drug use, it developed and implemented the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI). It launched in 2003 and expanded statewide in 2008, the initiative's mission is to equip every released offender with tools to succeed in their community. MPRI begins at intake, when a prisoner's risks, needs and strengths are measured to develop individualized programming. Prior to parole, offenders are transferred to a reentry facility. A transition plan which addresses employment, housing, transportation, mentoring, counseling and any necessary treatment for mental illness or addictions, is finalized in close collaboration with community service providers. After release, officers use firm but flexible graduated sanctions (including short stays in a reentry center if needed) to manage rule breaking before it escalates to more serious transgressions.

By focusing on the total person and treating the individual, the state of Michigan was able to substantially reduce the number of parolees who reoffended or violated their parole conditions. The key was their focus on how addictions, particularly alcohol and other drugs, influence ones path to

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## **Understanding the Relationship between Alcohol and Crime**

recidivism. The NIH has issued several suggestions on avoiding relapse. They are an invaluable starting point and helpful resource when seeking treatment. In 2012, they shared this statement on their website (NIH.gov) “ultimately, receiving treatment can improve an individual’s chances of success in overcoming an alcohol related disorder.” They suggest talking with your doctor to determine the best course of action for you and viewing the following publications on their website for more information, [Rethinking Drinking](#) and [Treatment for Alcohol Problems: Finding and Getting Help](#).

## **Please Consider a Year End Donation to MICAP**

MICAP is a small non-profit organization with a mission to provide information about the consequences of alcohol abuse, and to promote public policies that address these issues. It is a big task, and we are committed to doing our part.

For this work, MICAP depends 100% on gifts from people like you. A large share of gifts and bequests are made near the end of the calendar year, in November and December. Our work year-around depends directly on these gifts. MICAP could not do its work without your financial support, which truly makes a difference in this important work.

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