



Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems

MICAP / RECAP

Volume 115, Number 3 - August 2020

A Publication of the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems,
an entity of the American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation

AADIF / MICAP

P.O. Box 10212
Lansing, MI 48901
(517) 999-0013
info@micap.org

Officers

President
Mr. Mike Tobias
Perry, MI

Vice President
Pastor Donna Sperry
Ionia, MI

Treasurer
Rev. William J. Amundsen
Lansing, MI

Secretary
Eileen R. Ellis
Lansing, MI

Board of Directors

Mr. Richard Braun
Allen Park, MI

Mr. John Lauve
Holly, MI

Vernon K. Smith, Ph.D.
Scottsdale, AZ

Challenges for Alcohol Drinkers During COVID-19 Pandemic

by Nadia Ashtari, Program Assistant, Michigan Overdose Data to Action
Mini-grant(MODA), Graduate Student in Public Health,
Central Michigan University

The current COVID-19 pandemic has swept through the world bringing anxiety, alarm and confusion to people with its quick spread. Public health employees and government officials have worked diligently to inform and educate communities about best practices to assure the safety of their citizens. While numerous handouts, articles, and fact sheets have been distributed regarding coronavirus symptoms and spread, there is little information on the effect this pandemic will have on the consumption of alcohol for those in recovery, as well as the anticipated increase in binge drinking.

Those struggling with an Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) have a different set of concerns that they must live with daily regarding their recovery. With the threat of COVID-19, a person with an Alcohol Use Disorder may face anxiety and loneliness, due to the need for social distancing and being instructed to remain in homes. Chronic alcohol use also compromises the immune system, increasing an alcohol user's susceptibility to certain infectious processes. Even the drastically restricted access to alcohol can lead to severe symptoms of alcohol withdrawal¹. It is very important that we, as a community, acknowledge that those struggling with AUD will face challenges regarding self-medicating and increasing their risk of contracting COVID-19.

The continuing threat of COVID-19 makes it easy to understand why many are dealing with stress and anxiety themselves or for their loved ones. Lack of knowledge, contradictory news on TV or online, and the fear of dwindling financial support can be very scary. However, using alcohol can increase one's anxiety, which can lead to starting or continuing problematic alcohol use. Studies have shown that the relationship between anxiety and AUD is clear because prolonged drinking and alcohol withdrawal are both associated with increased anxiety. One study estimated that 18.3% of people with Generalized Anxiety Disorder self-medicated with alcohol, while 3.3% of people with panic disorders self-medicated with alcohol¹. Additionally, nearly 13% of people with anxiety who self-medicated with alcohol developed an AUD, based on the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions¹. The threat of the virus calls for increased attention to mental health, and should encourage behaviors to combat anxiety such as

Continues on Page 2

Challenges for Alcohol Drinkers During COVID-19 Pandemic

Continued from Page 1

taking walks outdoors, doing at-home exercises, eating balanced meals and getting restful sleep.

Isolation from peers and support systems during this time may be challenging for those struggling with Alcohol Use Disorders due to their feeling of already being alone. With the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advising social distancing strategies and groups no larger than 10 people, support groups and recovery meetings have been canceled or moved online. Studies have shown social withdrawal increases loneliness and depression, which are risk factors associated with Substance Use Disorders¹. Although it is important to minimize the spread of the virus, not being able to socialize with your support system may have adverse effects on someone with Alcohol Use Disorder. Luckily, technology has made it easy to connect with loved ones as well as to join virtual peer-support meetings.

If you or someone you know is currently struggling with alcohol abuse or an Alcohol Use Disorder, one resource is SAMHSA'S National Helpline. SAMHSA's National Helpline is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders. The SAMHSA National Helpline can be reached by calling the following number, 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

Resources:

- 1 Coronavirus (COVID-19) & Alcoholism. (2020, March 23). Retrieved from <https://www.alcohol.org/resources/coronavirus-and-alcoholism/>
- 2 Chanell.Baylor. (2019, November 6). National Helpline. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

Donate Today

The Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems relies solely on the donations of our generous supporters to bring you the MICAP RECAP throughout the year. Your gifts truly make a difference in our work, as we shed light on the consequences of alcohol abuse and inform on legislative policy that can help save lives. Donate today at micap.org.

Cocktails, COVID, and Alcohol – Not a Good Mix

An Opinion Editorial by Michael A. Tobias,
Michigan Alcohol Policy Promoting
Health and Safety

Shortly after the Legislature voted to pass bills that expand access and availability of alcohol in Michigan, the state is facing a surge in COVID-19 cases stemming from a bar in East Lansing. This legislation permits the sale of cocktails to go and allows for the creation of “common areas” for pseudo outdoor watering holes.

The science tells us that by increasing access and availability of alcohol during a global pandemic will only create more problems for Michigan residents. The current outbreak arising at an East Lansing bar is a reminder for why alcohol and COVID-19 are a recipe for disaster with real and dangerous consequences. This case has Michigan garnering national headlines for all the wrong reasons.

I understand the economic costs have been significant for bars and restaurants, but to adopt these policies is simply counter to what the public health science recommends, and certainly what our local data reflects.

Ensuring consumer convenience to alcohol is weighing heavily on the minds of our state policy makers. However, reports of record alcohol sales, rising 55% during the week ending March 21, 2020, tells us consumers have ease of access to alcohol.

At a time when COVID-19 is spreading quickly through our communities, these changes to provide unprecedented access and availability will most certainly increase alcohol-related harms, including interpersonal violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, youth violence, elder violence and violence against children. Not to mention that heavy use of alcohol increases the risk of acute respiratory distress syndrome, one of the most severe complications of COVID-19.

These policy changes to alter the way alcohol is sold in our state will not help us in our collective effort to flatten the COVID-19 curve.

Michael A. Tobias
Michigan Alcohol Policy Promoting
Health and Safety
517.803.5586
michiganalcoholpolicy@gmail.com

Drunk Walking: Alcohol's Myopic Transformation of the Brain

Dr. David Sebastian, Dean Emeritus, Anderson University. (Anderson, Indiana)

I remember the summer night my mother picked me up at an outdoor basketball court where I played pickup basketball games. As I got into the car, I could tell by my mother's face she had been crying. I said, "What's wrong?" She replied, "Uncle Fred was killed tonight. He was hit by a car as he walked along the highway." I was stunned because I had just talked to him earlier in the day.

My uncle Fred was a fun-loving outgoing man. Every year or two he would show up on foot at our house. My mother would put a cot on the back porch in the summer or in our heated garage in the winter. My parents would find odd jobs for him to perform for pay. I loved to have him around because he was a kid at heart. He took an interest in me. While my parents never went into detail, I knew from my uncle's tremors he had a problem with alcohol. I never saw him drink in our house but sometimes at night after chores and dinner he would take a walk down the highway to a bar. This fateful summer night he never returned.

I have not thought about my uncle in years. However, in the April 2020 AARP Bulletin there was an article about the dramatically increasing number of pedestrian deaths since 2009. "In 2018, nearly 33% of pedestrians killed in traffic accidents had a blood alcohol level over 0.08%." When I first read the article, I thought pedestrians were being killed by drunk drivers. However, the article identified a new phenomenon called, "drunk walking."

In his book, *Proof: The Science of Booze*, Adam Rogers describes the effect of alcohol as it passes through the brain. Alcohol at low doses can arouse the brain cells and the consumer feels euphoric, energetic even ecstatic. Between drink one and two, the chemical effect on the brain is a sense of pleasure or what the industry calls the alcoholic sweet spot. "The sweet spot often becomes the hedonistic highway, demanding higher doses to bring about a former pleasure."¹ As alcohol moves through the brain it coats the frontal lobes making the drinker slightly numb. As it seeps to the amygdala it decreases the ability to react accurately to external stimuli. As alcohol continues along the hedonistic highway it finally penetrates the cerebellum, causing wobbling and falling. When alcohol is consumed either in large quantities via binge drinking or is ingested over years of pro-

longed use it negatively impacts the hippocampus causing blackouts and loss of memory.

The Alcohol Industry promotes its product as a substance to bring comfort and joy. Many consumers understand alcohol as a legal and harmless drug intended to foster sociability, sexuality, and status. Many never link alcohol consumption with domestic violence, sexual assaults and even death by drunk walking.

Malcom Gladwell in, *Talking to Strangers*, references the work of Steele and Josephs. Their research disproves alcohol to be a drug that disinhibits, enabling people to discover their true self but proves alcohol to be a drug that transforms people into becoming a false self.² This transformation into a false self can be at times heroic and at other times horrific. Surprisingly, this heroic or horrific self-transformation can be within the same personality as in the case of General Ulysses S. Grant and a myriad of other personalities.³

The new research calls this transformative ability of alcohol the myopic effect. Myopia is "a state of shortsightedness in which superficially understood, immediate aspects of experience have a disproportionate influence on behavior and emotions."⁴ In other words, alcohol can transform people so they do things sober conscious people would consider unwise. Alcohol created a sense of shortsightedness in my uncle Fred. He thought he could walk alongside a busy state highway without consequence. Alcohol hijacked his cerebellum causing him to stumble in front of an automobile ending his life.

The tragic story of my uncle Fred also shines a light on the fact that only 10% of people needing help for alcohol and drug abuse ever get treatment.⁵ As a young man he never intended the recreational use of a legal drug to blind him from the long-term consequence of a brain transformed by alcohol.

Many people have family members who suffer from alcohol abuse. While there are many reasons for 6,590 pedestrian deaths in 2018 it is unfortunate that nearly 33% were legally drunk. Whether walking, running, driving, flying, riding, working, or any other activity alcohol can negatively impact lives. If alcohol is a problem, get help. Counselors are available. Sobriety is possible.

1 Rogers, *Proof: The Science of Booze*, 163.

2 Gladwell, *Talking to Strangers*, 207-210.

3 Cheever, *Drinking in America-Our Secret History*, 7-8.

4 Gladwell, 207.

5 Cheever, 6-7.



Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems
American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation
Mailing address: P.O. Box 10212, Lansing, MI 48901

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LANSING, MI
PERMIT NO. 1624

American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation Welcomes Two New Members to Its Board of Directors

Mr. Nicholas Klempf

Nick grew up in, and still lives in, the town of Holly where he has worked for 11 years with the Holly Area Community Coalition, a youth prevention agency. He previously worked for Oakland County's Alliance of Coalitions for Healthy Communities collaborating on state-wide initiatives like MCRUD, Michigan Alcohol Policy group and Marijuana Prevention Task force. Nick is also Administration Pastor for Journey Church in Holly and has also been a Youth Pastor and Church Planter. Nick has a bachelor's degree in Education and holds a Certified Prevention Specialist License. He enjoys working with students in the Holly School district at after school programs and running the Youth Action Board at Holly High School. Nick has been married for 22 years to his wife Jennie and has two children, Trinity and Claudia.

Dr. Williams H. Jones

Bill Jones served as a senior pastor for 23 years in the Church of God in Anderson, Indiana. From 2002-2019 he served as the State Pastor for the Church of God in Michigan, overseeing approximately 100 churches. A graduate of Anderson University and its School of Theology, he received his Doctor of Ministry degree from Grace Theological Seminary in 2000. Bill retired from ministry in December of 2019 and is happy to return to the AADIF board, where he previously served. Married to his wife Jalene for 46 years, they have two adult children, Jaela and James, and enjoy 4 grandchildren with another due to arrive any day.