



## July 2013 NEWSLETTER

### Alcohol is Not Bread

By Lise Gervais

While the ancient origins of alcohol and bread are similar, they are different when it comes to how they should be sold and regulated. While most consumers enjoy alcoholic beverages in moderation, overuse by a few results in pain, suffering and financial burden that is shouldered by everyone.

The most recent Gallup poll on alcohol indicates that 30% of Americans say that alcohol has been a cause of trouble in their family. With a US population of almost 314 million that translates to over 94 million people nationwide. With this many people affected by alcohol, it only makes sense to foster moderation and reasonable regulation. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1582/Alcohol-Drinking.aspx>

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, excessive alcohol use was attributed in:

- approximately 80,000 deaths each year in the United States.
  - more than 1.2 million emergency room visits and 2.7 million physician office visits in 2006.
  - 2.3 million years of potential life lost (YPLL) annually, or an average of about 30 years of potential life lost for each death.
  - economic costs of excessive alcohol in 2006 estimated at \$223.5 billion.
- <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm>

Despite the large number of people impacted, the harm caused by alcohol is often absent in public discussions about loosening regulations known to reduce the costs to society. Alcohol problems are sometimes hidden, as they can be seen as personal failings instead of a part of the illness of addiction. (In another Gallup poll, 76% of people who have a family member with alcohol

issues believe it is a disease.)  
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/24097/americans-addiction-their-family-believe-disease.aspx>

If, through balanced regulation and enforcement, we can limit access to problem drinkers and push back the age that young people start drinking, we can head off some of the resulting pain and suffering. According to the National Institutes of Health, people who start drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to become alcoholics and were more likely to be binge drinkers and engage in other risky behaviors.

<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/AA67/AA67.htm>

Each year, approximately 5,000 people under the age of 21 die as a result of drinking; this includes about 1,900 deaths from motor vehicle crashes, 1,600 as a result of homicides, 300 from suicide, as well as hundreds from other injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings. Studies suggest that higher prices and less availability are factors in keeping kids from drinking, as well as enforcement of laws already on the books. Prices can be balanced through curbs on aggressive sales practices which use low prices to increase volume purchases both in stores and in drinking places.

Family problems resulting from alcohol use can be painful to talk about. But, we are exceptionally grateful to those who are willing to step up and help others realize that they are not alone. Keeping reasonable regulations and enforcing them, is one way to lessen the cost to all of us.

Lise Gervais is an artist who does free-lance writing and works with young people on art projects. She is the mother of a 13-year old.

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