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Newsletter**

Women Take the Lead on Key Alcohol Laws It's to Protect their Families

By Pamela S. Erickson

Even before women could vote, they were leaders in the effort to curb major social and family problems created by alcohol. Today, the media portrays these women as cartoon characters bent on being moralistic buzz-kills.

But the reason women became active is that alcohol created major problems for families. Since most women did not work outside the home in those days, they were dependent on their husband's income. By the late 1800's saloons were clustered near manufacturing plants. They sold alcohol very aggressively and allowed patrons to pledge their future paycheck against the bar bill. But, when payday rolled around, there was often little left for the family.



Frances Willard

Women were leaders in the Temperance Movement, which was viewed as the only solution to the "alcohol problem." One of those was Frances Willard, a woman with many accomplishments. In an era when women remained in the home, college, obtained a

degree and taught school for

several years. She then became the president of a women's college and was active in the women's suffrage movement. Eventually, she helped found the Women's Christian Temperance Union where she became a skilled educator, speaker and lobbyist. She worked hard at culture change and in 1883 spoke in every state of the union.

Eventually the nation approved a constitutional amendment to make Prohibition the law

of the land. But, while it solved some problems, it created others. The law was poorly enforced and organized crime flourished as it supplied alcohol and operated illegal bars called "speakeasies."

Prohibition became unpopular as family issues continued to be a problem. Many who originally supported Prohibition, changed their minds and began to speak about regulation as an alternative. One of those was Pauline Sabine who told a Congressional Committee: "Today in any speakeasy in the United States you can find boys and girls in their teens drinking liquor, and this situation has become so acute that the mothers of the country feel something must be done to protect their children."

Today, women are still leaders on this issue and, again, it is about the harm done to families.



Candace Lightner,
MADD founder

In 1980, Candace Lightner's daughter, Cari, was killed by a drunk driver. But it was not the first time her family was victimized. Several years earlier, her mother and daughter were injured by a drunk driver; and, shortly thereafter, a driver impaired by tranquilizers hit her son, Travis. He was critically injured and in a coma for 4 days.

After Cari was killed, Lightner quit her job and used her savings to form a grassroots organization that eventually became Mothers Against Drunk Driving. She is credited with the growth of MADD to 400 chapters worldwide and a membership of 2 million people. Over 700 bills have been passed at the state and national level. She has since left MADD and formed another organization called, "We Save Lives".

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Today, it fights against drunk, drugged and distracted driving.



Sandy Heverly

In my own state of Nevada and my community of Henderson, there is an organization called "Stop DUI". It is headed by a woman named Sandy Heverly. Her involvement began in 1983 when her family was hit by a drunk driver. All members of her family were injured including herself, her husband, mother and four children. Her

mother eventually died of her injuries. Ms. Heverly is credited with the passage of laws that benefit the victim and have made Nevada a state with some of the strictest laws in the nation.

In conclusion:

1. The women who have led efforts to reduce alcohol harm should receive greater recognition.

We need women to continue their strong, passionate efforts. If you work with prevention and public health organizations, they are often populated with lots of passionate women. We all owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to these women for their efforts which have made our country a lot safer.

2. Harm to families from alcohol misuse is not "just a woman's issue". It is everybody's issue.

There are many ways innocent family members are harmed by alcohol misuse: DUI crashes and arrests, academic failure due to underage/excessive drinking, addiction of adult family members, harm to family finance and loss of employment, divorce and family disintegration. The harms are many and all adults--male and female--need to work to reduce the impact of alcohol misuse.

3. Alcohol regulations and laws save lives and reduce harm to families. But such laws have been loosened in recent years, possibly creating more problems for families.

For several decades the Gallup polling organization has tracked harm to families by asking whether "drinking ever has been a cause of trouble in your family." In 2019, 36% said "yes" versus the era of the 1950's, 60's and early 70's, when around 12% said "yes." While consumption

hasn't increased much, it seems that family issues due to alcohol are greater. Today, alcohol is much more available. A greater number of retailers now are alcohol licensees. Drug stores, grocery stores, gas stations, and even kitchen stores now sell alcohol. Until recently, some states only allowed alcohol to be sold in "package stores" which were closed on Sunday. And, many "dry" counties and cities have voted to allow alcohol sales.

4. The general public, as well as research, support a strong system of alcohol policies.

Oddly enough, the loosening of alcohol regulation comes at a time when such regulation enjoys a high degree of public support. According to a recent survey from the Center for Alcohol Policy, 86% agreed that alcohol needs to be regulated and 80% agree that getting rid of alcohol rules could make problems worse. According to Jim Hall, former Chairman of the national Transportation Safety Board and Center for Alcohol Policy Advisor, "Public support for responsible state alcohol regulation has remained consistently high over the last decade."

Research confirms the importance of an alcohol policy system. Tim Naimi and colleagues from Boston University have compared states using a composite of 29 alcohol policies. Naimi concluded, "The bottom line is that...alcohol policies matter--and matter a great deal--for reducing and preventing the fundamental building block of alcohol-related problems."

Sources:

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Photo credits:

May Wright Sewall Collection, Library of Congress, LC-USZ61-790 (Frances Willard)

We Save Lives website (Candace Lightner)

Stop DUI website (Sandy Heverly)

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