

Alcohol Abuse In Malaysia

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Submission date: 03-Dec-2020 09:58AM (UTC+0800)

Submission ID: 1463047339

File name: ALCOHOL_ABUSE_IN_MALAYSIA.docx (21.22K)

Word count: 1950

Character count: 10108

ALCOHOL ABUSE IN MALAYSIA

BY MUHAMMAD AIMAN BIN ABDUL RAZAK

Alcohol consumption is a behaviour that has become the general norm for some citizens in Malaysia and worldwide. As a result, not many restrictions or support have been carried out to combat the impending crisis of alcohol abuse. Alcohol abuse is by definition the excessive consumption of alcohol that has become increasingly common throughout the years. Seeing as though many families' lives have been ruined due to the fact that the family members are alcoholics, or many deaths have occurred because of it, it is quite safe to say that alcohol abuse is an issue that people should take more seriously. The annual total of alcohol-related deaths for people 16 years and above have practically doubled from 1999 to 2017, going from 35,914 to 72,558 (Edwards, 2020). What makes this scarier is that the victims of alcohol abuse might not even realize that they are directly being affected as they tend to think their behaviour is normal. On the other hand, people who realize they are under the effects of alcohol abuse tend to use it as a scapegoat to excuse their behaviours. Either way, it is not good practice for them to turn a blind eye to their sickness and it is also not good practice for us to ignore these people.

There are many causes as to why a person might fall into a state of alcohol abuse. One of the reasons as to why someone might ease their way into alcohol is peer pressure. Pressure from your peers can happen regardless of gender, age and race, and is most common in teenagers. However, this is not to say that the number of adults being pressured into drinking alcohol is small. An example of peer pressure in adults would be with officemates where they invite their friends for drinks during a big event. Constant occurrence of this instance will increase the chances of alcohol abuse. In teenagers, it often happens in school where the influence of friends is at an all-time high. With how exploitable teenagers are and how influential their friends are during that period; it is no wonder alcohol abuse has become so apparent among teenagers. Another cause for alcohol abuse is high amounts of stress that seems to be more prevalent in today's day and age. In an article regarding stress and alcohol consumption, Anthenelli's (2012) study found the following:

In the tension-reduction hypothesis, stress was seen to increase anxiety, and in response alcohol was consumed to reduce the anxiety. This connection between stress and alcohol was further linked by observations showing that in alcoholics the physiological responses to stress were perturbed. (pp. 381–382)

In short, many people drink alcohol as a coping mechanism for reducing anxiety caused by stress. This unhealthy coping mechanism can easily become a habit that is hard to break free

from. To further prove the depressing reality of alcohol abusers finding tranquillity in these disruptive substance, Villalba (2020) suggests that females who have undergone sexual trauma during their youth will grow up to be extremely anxious, causing them to start drinking in order to feel at ease. Drinking at an early age is also one of the causes as to why someone might abuse alcohol later in life. Dependence towards alcohol does not happen overnight, instead caused by heavy exposure to it. Not only does this cause drinking alcohol to become a habit, it will also raise the body's tolerance towards alcohol, making it more likely for you to drink more alcohol to feel its effects. With this in mind, it is surely no surprise that people who have started drinking during their teenage years often abuse alcohol when they reach their 20s and 30s. In Malaysia, a big reason as to why alcohol abuse is prominent is the lack of exposure towards this topic. It is a known fact that Malaysia is diverse in its religion. While religions such as Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism have not prohibited the consumption of alcohol, they have all warned about the dangers of overindulging. In Islam, which is the official religion in Malaysia and thus, the most common, it is a sin to drink alcohol. Despite that, many Muslims to turn a blind eye to this. The lack of emphasis that people give to topics such as alcohol consumption will lead to religious people not taking the dangers of alcohol seriously. Apart from religious teachings, there are not many campaigns, especially in Malaysia, that focus on the effects of alcoholism or alcohol abuse. This lack of exposure is detrimental to the mindset of people especially the younger generation.

The effects of alcohol abuse can range from internal problems to more noticeable physical problems. One of the most dangerous effects of alcohol abuse is difficulty concentrating. Difficulty concentrating can disturb your daily life in many ways. For example, teenagers who are studying may have a difficult time focusing during classes which in turn will cause an academic decline, a refusal to socialise and a bad reputation. However, while this may be a good enough reason to justify the dangers of alcohol abuse, we cannot overlook the dangers that poor concentration brings when it comes to driving. According to The Star Stays (2020), readings from 2010 to 2018 stated that 2,364 accidents were related to drunk driving, with an unfortunate number of 1,196 people killed. Not only is difficulty concentrating due to alcohol a huge burden in everyday life, it may also cause unwanted death in the streets. Another dangerous effect of alcohol abuse is the harm it can do to our body. For example, uncontrolled drinking habits can cause damage to the heart, which can lead to recurring strokes, heart failure and high blood pressure. Not only that, if you are a female, drinking alcohol can also interfere

with the reproductive system. A research that showcased the effects of alcohol on the female reproductive system explains that alcohol can lead to menstrual irregularities, disturbing the normal hormonal cycles and could possibly cause infertility (Allen & Columbus, 1995). Besides that, Liver damage is also no surprise when it comes to drinking alcohol. Even when people know how dangerous it is to overindulge on alcohol, they might still do it as they depend on alcohol to move on with their lives. Financial difficulties will also become a problem as a result of alcohol abuse. An alcoholic's physical dependency to alcohol will often result in a large sum of money being wasted to fulfil their drinking habits. We cannot fully blame them for doing this though, as the withdrawal symptoms that show up can be rather devastating.

As the saying goes, prevention is better than finding the cure. There are several ways that we can do to avoid getting into these types of situations and possibly create a better future for the younger generation. One method of preventing the likeliness of being involved in alcohol abuse is to simply choose better friends. It is a common fact that we tend to mirror our friends' behaviour which might end up being a good thing or a bad thing depending on the situation. This method, while being very simple, can prove to be very effective as it can prevent peer pressure to try bad substances while also teaching you good behaviour due to the fact that you are surrounded by better people. Apart from that, people who abuse alcohol as a coping mechanism to reduce anxiety or stress should find a better coping method. Using alcohol as a coping method is very unhealthy and will lead to more negative consequences in the long run, hence changing it to a healthier method is a good choice to make. A few examples of good coping mechanism would be to meditate, spend time with friends and family, and also reading a book. Another way to combat alcohol abuse is to educate people about the dangers of alcohol. Schools are a stepping stone to achieving major alcohol abuse prevention as schools can run campaigns that emphasize the fatal side of alcohol to teach students to not participate in alcohol abuse. Outside of school, bulletin boards consisting of information about alcohol can be put up near major public areas such as libraries, mosques and shops as a way to spread the information further. Although prevention is better than finding a cure, we must also pay attention and find a solution to those that have already become a victim to alcohol abuse as they are not only hurting themselves, but also hurting other people. One example of this is the act of drunk driving. Luckily, we can easily solve this by putting up large fines for drunk driving. According to a newspaper article by Yunus (2020), drunk drivers will be expecting a punishment of 20 years in jail and RM150,000, with first-time offenders expecting 15 years in jail and

RM100,000 fine. Other than that, alcoholics can always undergo treatment either from a professional or through close family and friends. If they are given enough support and guidance, they can easily withstand the withdrawal effects that happen when they quit alcohol and are not prone to drink it again. However, a surprising amount of people do not rely on this method even though it has proven to work. A survey done by Tucker, Chandler & Witkiewitz (2020) found that alcoholics who seek help from other people, either professionally or not, are only less than 20%.

Alcohol abuse can be a massive struggle to many people of all ages. As the years go by, the influences to be involved in bad habits such as these become much stronger ranging from friends and family, glorification of alcohol in movies, lack of education in this topic and as a way to cope with stress. The effects of alcohol abuse have been recorded time and time again, yet people still do not seem to grasp the seriousness of the issue. Examples such as heart failure, liver damage, difficulty focusing, slow reaction times and financial problems should be enough to justify getting help and treatment. We should always try to prevent these issues from starting in the first place instead of trying to cure it. However, we must also be supportive of the victims who have unfortunately suffered from this sickness and should guide them in treating alcohol abuse, especially teenagers and young adults. We must think of the consequences that will happen if we turn a blind eye to this issue. If we do not put time and effort into minimizing or stopping alcohol abuse, we will be raising a new generation where alcohol abuse and alcoholism will become the norm.

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