

ISSUES

Exploring where **The Salvation Army** stands on moral and social issues

ALCOHOL

Alcohol causes more harm in society than any other addictive drug and the extent of its impact is widely underestimated.¹ Some health-related consequences of alcohol excess, such as liver disease, are well known, but others, such as increased risk of heart disease and many types of cancer, are not.² There is a strong case to be made that alcohol excess is the number one threat to public health in the UK.³

Heavy drinking carries a risk not only to good health, but also to the security of employment and even housing.⁴ Dependency is not uncommon and creates a downward spiral of physical, psychological and social harm.

The negative effects of alcohol extend beyond the individual. Alcohol excess causes harm to others - for example, through increased violent crime, road traffic accidents, domestic violence and child abuse.⁵ It also causes significant harm to society as a whole, through increased family breakdown, antisocial behaviour, absenteeism and increased pressure on policing and health services.

Despite this level of harm, alcohol excess is endemic and considered by many to be normal.⁶ The Salvation Army believes that excessive use of alcohol in society should not be accepted as normal behaviour.

Alcohol consumption has risen sharply over recent decades.⁷ This is explained in part by the proven link between affordability and consumption and the sale of cut-priced alcohol in shops and venues.⁸ Recent years have also seen an increase in supermarket sales, home delivery and extended licensing hours. As a result alcohol is more affordable and more available than ever before.

Health bodies and many charities share these concerns and call for an appropriate, evidence-based response.⁹ However, in the face of opposition from the drinks industry with its substantial resources and aggressive lobbying, such calls for action have largely been ignored. It is in this context that The Salvation Army seeks a biblical understanding and an appropriate response.

The Bible teaches that all people are created in the image of God and have unique and intrinsic value.¹⁰ Accordingly The Salvation Army promotes the welfare of the body, mind and spirit.¹¹ It is the experience of Salvationists that holistic wellbeing (fullness of life) is possible without the need for mind-altering drugs.¹²

Drinking alcohol is not sinful in itself but the Bible warns that self-indulgence and excess is dangerous in many aspects of life.¹³ Drinking alcohol in order to experience its intoxicating effects is condemned in Scripture, which highlights both the harmful effects of alcohol excess and the destructive consequences of intoxication.¹⁴

The Bible also teaches that where an activity or behaviour becomes a problem for another person, a responsible and compassionate response is to abstain from that behaviour.¹⁵ Therefore The Salvation Army promotes abstinence as a rational response to the risks of drinking and as a loving choice in response to alcohol-related suffering. All soldier members of The Salvation Army demonstrate this alcohol-free lifestyle as a positive lifechoice. In their abstinence they stand in solidarity with those who struggle with

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alcohol dependency and those affected by alcohol abuse. In support of this, The Salvation Army will continue in the intentional provision of alcohol-free spaces.¹⁶

Whilst drinking in moderation is widely held to be socially acceptable, there is good evidence that no level of drinking is risk free.¹⁷ Consequently, whilst The Salvation Army does not require abstinence of adherent members, it still counsels towards limited consumption.¹⁸ In this, The Salvation Army recognises the value of self-control as a personal attribute and a gift of God.¹⁹

Calling on its own history and a contemporary understanding of the effects of alcohol, The Salvation Army endorses the use of effective interventions (locally, nationally and globally) to reduce consumption and protect public health.²⁰ In particular, it supports legislative measures to reduce the affordability, availability and promotion of alcohol.²¹ Recognising the destructive effects of alcohol on innocent bystanders and vulnerable groups, The Salvation Army also supports interventions that protect children and young people, prevent unwanted pregnancies and address domestic violence.²²

Identifying with the call of Jesus to love our neighbour, and in particular to stand with the poor, vulnerable and oppressed, The Salvation Army will continue to care for individuals, families and communities affected by alcohol.²³ With its position of abstinence, and its presence in the local community, The Salvation Army is well placed to combat alcohol related harm on a pastoral, practical and societal level.

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Key Words

Dependent - unable to stop drinking
Psychological - affecting the mind and emotions
Social - relating to society
Absenteeism - failure to go to work on a regular basis
Endemic - common
Lobby - a group of people trying to influence the thinking of officials in favour of a cause

Excess - more than is needed
Intoxication - excitement or stimulation caused by alcohol
Abstinence - to commit to not doing something
Solidarity - stand alongside someone
Contemporary - current or modern
Vulnerable - in need of special care or protection

Footnotes

¹¹ 'Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own...?' 1 Corinthians 6:19

¹² 'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...' Ephesians 5:18

'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full!' John 10:10

¹³ '...nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.' 1 Corinthians 6:10

¹⁴ 'Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.' Proverbs 23:29-30

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To see the full footnotes check out www.salvationarmy.org.uk/positional-statements