

Is it alcohol abuse or alcohol dependency?

Orrin Singh

WHILE the South African government's new proposed Liquor Amendment Bill is still up for public comment, the fact the country is the largest consumer of alcohol in the world still hangs over the head of a democracy that approaches its



mid-twenties.

Local counselling psychologist and clinical hypnotherapist, Di Southgate, believes government's attempts to address the problem, by imposing stricter laws, will not make a significant difference.

'It will not alleviate or reduce the problem of harmful drinking that we have in South Africa,' she told the ZO.

Having completed her masters and qualified as a psychologist in 1988, Southgate has since been in private practice for 24 years as a counselling psychologist.

'I have a passion for and special interest in identifying and treating alcoholism.

'I firmly believe that broad based psycho-education and awareness campaigns are required to address the problem.'

Southgate has been researching alcoholism for the past six years and has written a lengthy thesis on the problem, which she hopes to use towards

obtaining her PhD.

She is currently in the process of establishing an Alcoholism Outpatient Recovery Programme.

'The public needs information regarding what alcoholism is, how to recognise it and what to do about it.'

Alcoholism

Southgate identified three key steps of the programme:

- Assessment/Diagnosis (mild, moderate or severe drinking)
- Risk factors (consequences of continual heavy drinking)
- Treatment options (what to do about it and where to get help)

'There is a lot of confusion as to what constitutes a drinking problem.

'People are often muddled between alcohol abuse and alcohol dependency; the two are closely related.

'While both indicate problem drinking with negative consequences, alcohol abuse has relatively fewer or lesser symptoms than alcohol dependency.

'We need to understand that alcoholism is an illness and not the person's fault,' she said.

Southgate believes early intervention by the person affected can prevent alcohol abuse from

Local counselling psychologist & clinical hypnotherapist, Di Southgate, believes that many people in Zululand need help with alcoholism and how to understand the illness

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reaching alcohol dependency.

'Alcoholism is progressive.

'The most telling symptom is that most alcoholics, despite being aware of the harm alcohol is doing in their lives, continue to drink.

'They make on-going desperate attempts to control their drinking; to cut back and to drink responsibly,

most often with disastrous consequences.

'After repeated failed attempts to drink normally, most alcoholics begin to accept the idea that they have an illness,' noted Southgate.

Highest in the world

According to Minister of Trade and Industry, Rob Davies, South Africa currently has the highest level of alcohol consumption in the world at

10-12% as compared to the world average of 6%.

'We are also the highest with regards to the Foetal Alcohol Syndrome in the world, and 41% of injuries are from incidences related to alcohol consumption,' he told the media recently.

South African citizens and other interested parties have until 28 February 2017 to comment on the new

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proposed Liquor Amendment Bill which proposes (among other things) banning the supply of liquor and methylated spirits to persons under the age of 21 – up from 18 currently.

This includes any and all alcoholic advertisements which are aimed at people under the age of 21.

CAGE Questionnaire for Detecting Alcoholism

| Question | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| C: Have you ever felt you should C ut down on your drinking? | 1 | 0 |
| A: Have people A nnoyed you by criticizing your drinking? | 1 | 0 |
| G: Have you ever felt G uilty about your drinking? | 1 | 0 |
| E: Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning (E ye opener)? | 1 | 0 |

A total score of 0 or 1 suggests low risk of problem drinking
 A total score of 2 or 3 indicates high suspicion for alcoholism
 A total score of 4 is virtually diagnostic for alcoholism

The CAGE Questionnaire is a simple 4-question screening tool. The acronym CAGE is derived from the question evaluation of Cutting down, Annoyance by criticism, Guilty feeling, and Eye-openers