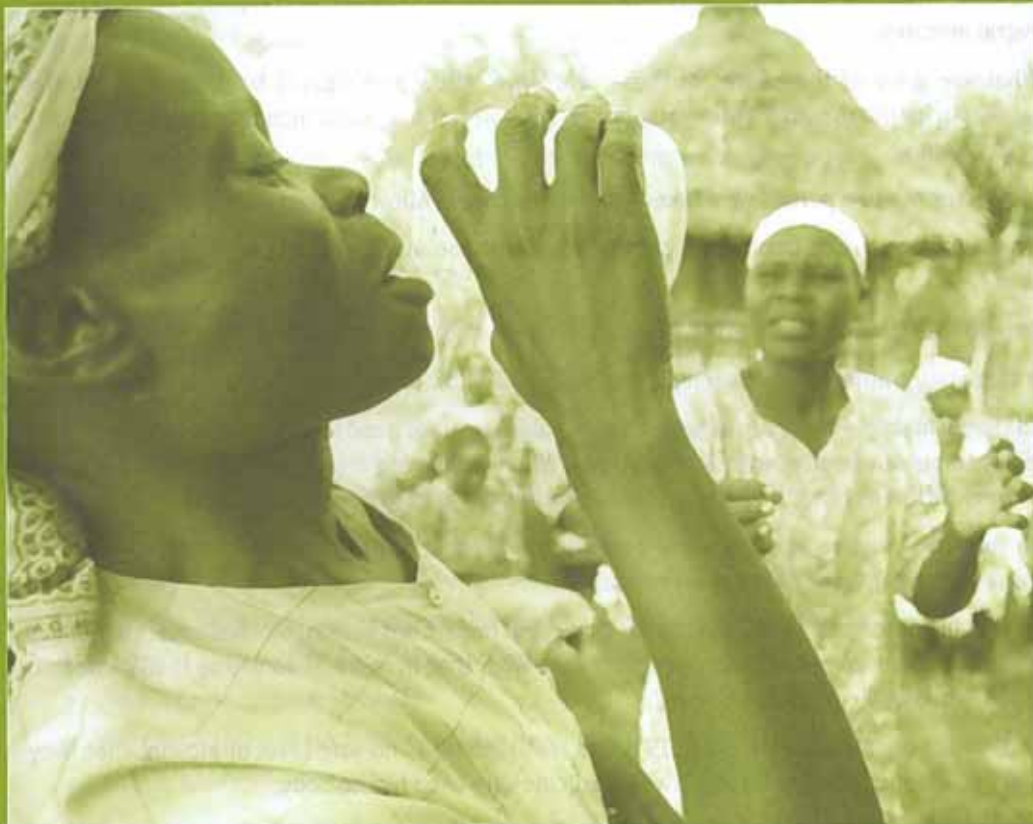


# Alcohol and drug abuse



This chapter explores how alcohol abuse affects our families, relationships, and communities, as well as the health risks associated with drug and alcohol abuse.

# 1. Alcohol abuse



## Session objectives

By the end of the session, participants should be able to:

- List health risks associated with alcohol abuse.
- Describe how alcohol abuse can affect a family.



## Session guide

1. **Ask:** What are some of the problems in our families? Allow participants to discuss for several minutes.
2. **Ask:** What are some of the causes of these problems? Allow participants to discuss for several minutes. Participants should mention alcohol at this point, if not, ask if alcohol contributes to any of these problems.
3. **Ask:** What happens to a person who takes too much alcohol? Allow participants to discuss.
4. **Ask:** What happens to the family of a person who takes too much alcohol? Allow participants to discuss.
5. **Ask:** How does drinking alcohol affect our health? Allow participants to discuss.
6. **Ask:** Is there any connection between alcohol and HIV? Allow participants to discuss.
7. **Explain** that drinking alcohol can affect people's ability to make good decisions and can make them more likely to put themselves in risky situations. When people are drunk they may make decisions that are very different from the decisions they would make if they were not drinking.
8. **Ask:** Do you know anyone who has made a decision while drinking that affected them negatively? Encourage participants to share experiences.
9. **Explain** that in addition to making decisions that could impact our health, alcohol lowers immunity and can lead to alcohol-related malnutrition. **Ask:** With that in mind, if someone is HIV infected how would drinking alcohol affect them?
10. **Explain** that for people who are on AIDS drugs (ART), there is no safe level of alcohol that they should drink. Alcohol affects the way these medicines are used by the body.
11. **Ask:** What can we do to address the problem of alcohol in our families and community? Allow participants to discuss. Encourage them to come up with solutions they can actually use.
12. **Explain** that we will conduct a Timeline with a man who has been invited to go with some friends to drink some home brew. He has a wife and children at home waiting for him. He has been very stressed because the place where he works has been talking about having to reduce the workforce and people may be fired. He is very worried and thinks spending some time relaxing with his friends may help him feel better.

This man will be the key player for the Timeline activity. In this Timeline, the crisis is deciding whether or not to go drinking with his friends. Timeline will be used to examine both options. A crisis leads people to make behaviour choices that can change their lives permanently for the better or the worse. Timeline helps us to explore these options.



Take participants through all 9 steps in a Timeline session:

1. **Prepare** the setting. You will need a chair for the key players. Rearrange participants to clear space for a corridor equal to the length of the meeting space or room. This is called the Time Corridor. One end of the Time Corridor represents the moment the parents learned they were pregnant. The other end represents the key player's future and their child's future. Somewhere between these two is the present moment, in which the decision about going out drinking has to be made.
2. Set up the present moment. **Ask** questions to help participants imagine and describe the key player's current situation. Sample questions:
  - What is his name? Where does he live?
  - How old is he?
  - What does he do for a living?
  - What is his wife's name?
  - How many children does he have?

Place the chairs in the time corridor, with space to the front and the back. Explain that this position represents the present moment. Ask the key player to sit in the chair.

3. **Define** the crisis. The man decided to go for drinks with his friends. He thought it would help him relax and make him feel better about all the stress in his life. Now he is very, very drunk and heading home.
  - How does he feel?
  - What will he do when he gets home?
  - How will his family be affected by him making this decision?
  - What sort of life lies ahead for this person?
4. **Explore** the choices the key player has now.
  - What can this person do now?
  - What is the best choice for this person to make?
  - Why is it the best choice?
  - What choice will the person actually make?
5. **Explore** the key player's past. Move the chair back a few feet towards the past. Explore his life and experiences at that time. Sample questions:
  - Did his parents drink alcohol?
  - Was there abuse in his family growing up?
  - What is his family life now?
6. **Discuss** the causes of the current behaviour. Ask participants how the key player's experiences and attitudes have led to the decisions he makes now. Sample questions:
  - Why did he think that going to drink was a good idea?
  - How have his attitudes led to his current behaviour?
7. **Explore** the future Timeline: Move the chair well beyond the present moment, and explain that this is the future. Explore what life is like for him now. Sample questions:
  - What is the key player's life like now?
  - How is his family?
  - What is his health like?
  - What kind of risk behaviour does he practice?

- What kind of relationship does the key player have with his family?
  - How has their happiness and health been affected by the key player's behaviour choices?
  - How is the key player's current life the result of past behaviour decisions?
  - What is the best possible life situation for the key player today?
  - What behaviour option should he/she have chosen in the past to enjoy the best possible life today?
8. **Explore** the future Timeline: Now ask participants to talk about his and his family's future if he had not gone drinking that night.
9. **Discuss** consequences. Discuss how decisions about alcohol can affect an entire family.
13. **Ask:** How can we address alcohol abuse in families and in our community? Allow participants to discuss.
14. **Ask:** Are there any other drugs that are abused in our community? Allow participants to discuss. Use the information in the background notes to address any questions.



### Main messages

- Drugs are chemicals that change the way a person's body and mind work. Common drugs in Kenya are alcohol, marijuana or bhang, miraa, glue, and cigarettes.
- Abusing alcohol and drugs can damage the brain, heart, and other important organs.
- Drinking alcohol can make it difficult to think clearly and make good decisions.
- Alcohol and drug abuse can have serious emotional and social consequences in addition to physical ones.





## Background notes

### Alcohol

When a family member (especially a parent) drinks too much alcohol it can destroy a family. The other family members cannot easily predict how someone will behave when they are drunk. Families can fall apart when a parent is drinking too much alcohol. To keep alcohol abuse from destroying a family, family members should try to get outside help and support.

### **Drug and alcohol abuse**

Drugs are chemicals that change the way a person's body and mind work. When people talk about drugs, they usually mean abusing legal drugs or using illegal drugs. Common drugs in Kenya are marijuana or bhang, miraa, glue, alcohol, and cigarettes.

Not all drugs are bad or illegal. When we are sick, we may take medicines. Medicines are legal drugs that can help us. Doctors can recommend patients take them, stores can sell them, and people can buy them. But it's not legal, or safe, for people to use these medicines any way they want or to buy them from people who are selling them illegally. Cigarettes, alcohol, and miraa are legal drugs that can cause serious health problems.

### **Why are illegal drugs dangerous?**

Illegal drugs are not good for anyone, but they are very bad for a young person whose body is still growing. Illegal drugs can damage the brain, heart, and other important organs. Cocaine, for instance, can cause a heart attack - even in a young person. While using drugs, a person is also less able to do well in school, sports, and other activities. It's often harder to think clearly and make good decisions. People can do dangerous things that could hurt themselves - or other people - when they use drugs.

### **Why do people use illegal drugs?**

Sometimes young people try drugs because their friends are using them or they might be curious or just bored. A person may use illegal drugs for many reasons, but often because they help the person escape from reality for a while. If a person is sad, a drug can - temporarily - make the person feel better or forget about problems. But this feeling only lasts until the drug wears off.

Drugs do not solve problems and using drugs often causes even more problems than the person had in the first place. A person who uses drugs can become dependent on them, or addicted. This means that the person's body becomes so used to having this drug that he or she cannot function well without it. Once a person is addicted, it's very hard to stop taking drugs. Stopping can cause a person to feel sick until the person's body gets adjusted to being drug free again.

### **Can I tell if someone is using drugs?**

If someone is using drugs, you might notice changes in how the person looks or acts. Here are some of those signs, but it's important to remember that feeling sad or another problem could be causing these changes. A person using drugs may:

- Lose interest in school or work.
- Become negative, in a bad mood, or worried all the time.
- Ask to be left alone a lot.
- Have trouble concentrating.
- Sleep a lot (maybe even in class).
- Get in fights.
- Have red or puffy eyes.
- Lose or gain weight.
- Cough a lot.

### **How can you help?**

If you think someone is using drugs, the best thing to do is to tell an adult who you trust. This could be a parent, other relative, teacher, coach, or school counsellor. The person might need professional help to stop using drugs. An adult can help the person find the treatment he or she needs to stop using drugs. Another way young people can help each other is by choosing not to try or use drugs. It's a good way for friends to stick together.

### **Health risks**

The health risks of commonly used drugs are described below.

**Drinking alcohol** can affect your coordination, judgement, vision, and memory. Alcohol affects your brain and can damage every organ in your body. When you drink alcohol it goes straight into your blood and can increase your risk for a variety of diseases, including cancer. Alcohol affects your self-control and can lead to risky behaviours, such as having unprotected sex. Drinking large amounts of alcohol at one time or very fast can cause alcohol poisoning, which can lead to a coma or even death.

**Alcohol** that is made by people (and not bottled and sold by a company) is sometimes called kumi kumi or changaa. This is even more dangerous because it is not regulated. It can cause headaches, blindness, or even death.

**Using glue** can cause personality changes, memory loss, seeing things, loss of coordination, not speaking properly, feelings of numbness, paralysis, and weight loss. It also damages the nerves, blood, brain, heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, muscles, and skin.

**Smoking marijuana** (bhang) can cause memory loss, reduces learning skills, lead to chronic cough, bronchitis, and lung damage, and increases risk of cancer of the head, neck, and lungs.

**Chewing miraa** or (chat/khat) can cause sleeplessness, worry, loss of appetite, not being able to go to the toilet, bad dreams, and affect a man's ability to have sex. Soon after chewing, miraa can cause dizziness, fast heartbeat, and pain in the stomach. Chewing miraa can lead to reduced sperm count and increased risk of heart disease and liver problems.

**Cigarettes** have chemicals, like nicotine and cyanide, which are poisonous. The body knows when it is being poisoned, so many people find it takes several tries to get started smoking. First-time smokers often feel pain or burning in the throat and lungs, and some people feel sick or even throw up the first few times they try tobacco. Over time, smoking can cause cancer, and damages the lungs, heart, and other organs. It is hard for smokers to do well at sports. Smoking can make it difficult to become pregnant and can cause sexual health problems in men. Health problems from smoking may seem very far off when we are young, but smoking can affect a person's body quickly. Young smokers are sick more, do poorly at sports, become injured more, and take longer to get better after falling ill. Also, they have bad breath, bad skin, and bad smelling hair and clothes.



### **Gender and alcohol and drugs**

Gender can play a large role in alcohol abuse. Alcohol is an important part of male socializing. Alcohol abuse is also a common coping mechanism for men dealing with feelings of anger or sadness. Alcohol is often associated with violence against women and used to excuse such violence. It is critical to understand and address the underlying gender related roots of alcohol abuse.



## Notes