

Alcohol fuels HIV infection rate

Discussion about the role of alcohol in risky sexual behaviour among young people comes into sharp focus

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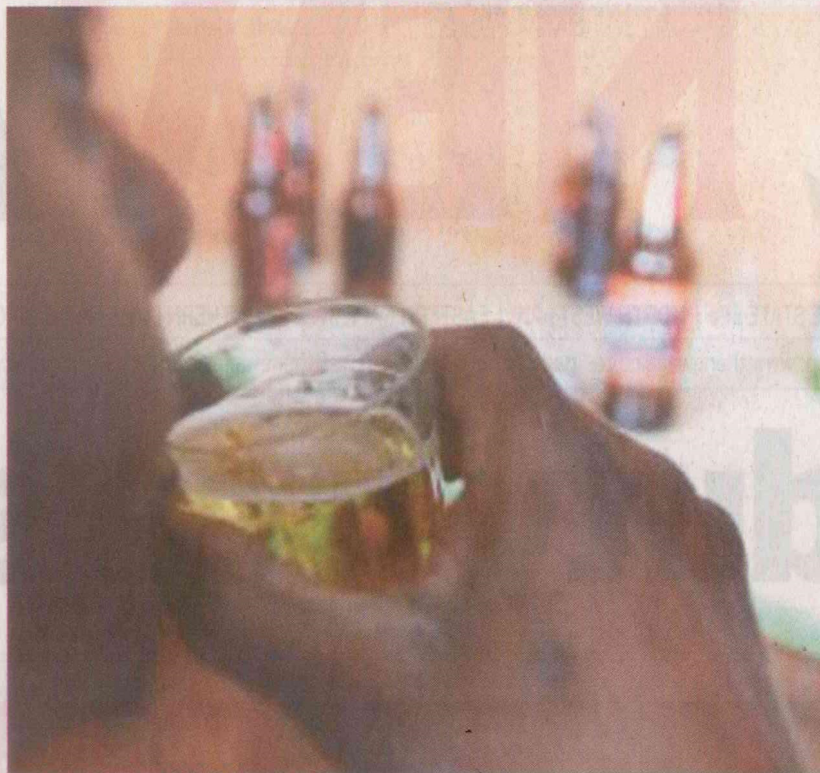
INCREASING alcohol usage in South Africa is fuelling the burden of HIV infection among young women aged 15 to 24.

That's according to a report by Dr Leane Ramsoomar an honorary lecturer at the school of public health at Wits University.

Interventions needed to remedy the situation includes developing an integrated alcohol-sexual risk reduction policies

The discussion about the role of alcohol in risky sexual behaviour came under sharp focus at a media briefing by the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication yesterday.

"Alcohol use influences particular choices because of its disinhibitory nature, it influences choices around sex, firstly whether to have sex or not. It diminishes the skills that we need to make effective decisions about condom use and not just condom use but consistent and correct condom



THE BURNING ISSUE: The discussion about the role of alcohol in risky sexual behaviour came under sharp focus at a media briefing yesterday.

use," Ramsoomar said.

Ramsoomar said while studies had established globally and nationally that women drink less than men, they appeared to be more harmed by their drinking than men.

"Research has found a few things, one

that drinking establishments, particularly informal drinking places, are also sex meeting places so they are places where women meet with a casual partner and engage in risky sexual behaviour.

"Similarly in a rural study in SA has

HIV infections are high among women aged 15 to 24

- » Alcohol fuels risky sexual behaviour which drives up the infection rate among young women
- » Alcohol is used as a currency for transacting for sex
- » Alcohol abuse is not being taken as seriously as other drugs
- » Social and economic factors also contribute to risky sexual behaviour

found that frequenting alcohol outlets was associated with increased sexual risk-taking among women after heavy drinking," she said.

The institute's advocacy manager, Savera Kalideen, said the fact that alcohol was not taken as seriously as other addictive substances was problematic.

The institute has been advocating for safer drinking spaces and calling for the distribution of condoms in shebeens.

According to Ramsoomar, factors that increase women's vulnerability to HIV include sex work, unsafe drinking contexts, transactional sex and gender inequalities among others.

"Sex work itself is symptomatic of the low social economic status of women. We know that most women who are engaged in sex work don't want to be

engaged in sex work. It's usually something that is not a matter of choice for women," she said.

She said alcohol was being used by men as a currency for transacting sex.

"Alcohol is seen as a commodity for exchange, a lot of the qualitative work done has indicated that women are prepared to exchange sex for alcohol because they see alcohol as something that can help disinhibit whatever anxieties or shame they might have," Ramsoomar said.

According to Ramsoomar "interventions needed to remedy the situation include developing integrated alcohol-sexual risk reduction policies, responsible beverage service and effective implementation of education policies, among others.

Thoko Budaza, Eastern Cape provincial manager at Soul City Institute, decried the lack of alternative recreational spaces for women.

She also called for informal drinking places to be made safe for women, saying toilets at these facilities are often dingy and at the back of the building where there is no lighting with no security in place.

"Alcohol addiction is not viewed as seriously as other drugs, we know that women drink.

"We need the spaces that they drink in to be safer for them," Budaza said.

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