

THE QUESTIONS ADOLESCENTS ASK MOST FREQUENTLY ABOUT

Alcohol and Cigarettes

AND THEIR ANSWERS

Vol. 8



This booklet was developed together with adolescents
by REPRO 

Recent studies in Tanzania show that a large percentage of adolescents have had experiences with drugs or substances like tobacco and alcohol at a low age. At the same time they lack basic knowledge about the effects and dangers of its consumption. This ignorance often puts them at risk. Health problems, diseases, including HIV/AIDS and social problems are a real threat to uninformed youth.

This booklet has been developed in response to this situation. It is meant to provide youths with information on the most crucial facts and guide them in becoming responsible decision-makers for their own lives. Without sufficient knowledge adolescents cannot make informed choices, and experience has shown that informed youth often choose the safer option!

All of the questions in this booklet have been collected in the year 2001 from pupils in primary and secondary schools. The youths originate from different regions of Tanzania and their ages range 11 to 20 years. Please note that none of the questions are made up by adults!

The booklet has been developed by a multi-disciplinary team of social scientists, medical doctors and education specialists. The adolescents were involved in all stages of the process. With the publication of this booklet, we hope to contribute to the prevention of avoidable hardship for adolescents, caused by their ignorance.

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Why do people like drinking alcohol?

Drinking alcohol is part of the culture in Tanzania and many other countries of the world. People like drinking alcohol at social or religious celebrations, at home or in bars. They drink alcohol to relax and enjoy, but also to gain confidence, to overcome their shyness or to forget about their problems for a while. Some young people, especially boys, think that they are grown up and mature when they drink alcohol.

Drinking a bit of alcohol is harmless and socially accepted. But uncontrolled and excessive drinking can be dangerous or even deadly and is not accepted by the society as it weakens responsibility, honour and reputation.

Is it true that smoking makes you happy and relaxed?

Yes, but only at the beginning and for a short period of time. This is because at first the nicotine in a cigarette results in more blood flowing through your brain. This has a stimulating effect that makes you feel happy. Nicotine also has the effect of relaxing all muscles in your body which makes you feel relaxed.



After a while you will feel the opposite effects. If you smoke more, less blood and oxygen will flow through your body and brain. This slows you down and you may feel tired, "down" or even depressed.

Unfortunately some advertisements or friends suggest you, that smoking is cool and makes you feel adult. But they never talk about all the negative effects on your health and the difficulties to stop smoking, once you have got used to it. Nicotine is often called a "gateway-drug". This means, that sometimes young people start smoking cigarettes and then move on to take hard drugs.

And of course smoking is also expensive!

How does alcohol affect your body and mind?

Alcohol enters the blood and circulates through your whole body including your brain. It has effects on several organs in your body and on your brain, which influences your behaviour and feelings.

Drinking a lot of alcohol can harm several organs. For example the liver is especially vulnerable. It is responsible for the decomposition of alcohol in your body. If you drink excessively this can harm the liver in a way that it is not able to function properly any more or even ceases to function at all, thus leading to death. Too much alcohol may lead to cancer in the liver and the stomach.

The biggest risk nowadays is getting and spreading HIV/AIDS. A drunkard is often careless and forgets about essential precautions, like using a condom when having sex. He might also sleep with more persons or with persons whose health status he does not know. In addition, the body of a drunkard is often in a weak condition and more susceptible to all kinds of infections and diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Alcohol has a negative impact on sexual performance. It might be difficult to have an erection.

Alcohol influences your brain and primarily those parts of the brain, which control consciousness and emotions. First you may feel more relaxed and free, but you may soon have difficulties to co-ordinate your movements and walk straight. You will have problems concentrating and seeing properly and it will become more and more difficult to judge situations right. Often people start behaving strange and different after drinking alcohol. They become quarrelsome and do things that are not acceptable such as wetting on clothes or urinating in public. If you continue drinking you might become intoxicated. Each intoxication destroys millions of brain cells. First you will have problems to remember what happened (black out), but you might also completely lose your memory. If you drink excessively over a long period of time it may lower your intelligence and in the end even lead to serious mental decay.

Alcohol is also a drug; it can make you an addict. Addicted people spend a lot of money and time on

alcohol, which can be a heavy burden for the family and community. Once a person is addicted, it is very difficult to drink less or to stop drinking. If the person tries to stop he has tremors, rapid heartbeats and sweating and difficulty falling asleep at night. Such a situation is very painful and dangerous. Therefore



people who are addicted to alcohol and want to stop should always seek medical help.

It is important to remember that all these negative effects depend on the amount of alcohol you drink. If you keep an eye on the amount you drink, it does not have to be harmful.

Can women also get drunk?

Yes, women and girls can also get drunk. In general women and girls feel the effects of alcohol faster and stronger than men. This has to do with their lower body weight and the amount of fat and water in the female body. The alcohol is more concentrated in a woman's body. A woman's liver is more likely to get damaged by excessive alcohol consumption than a man's.

With alcohol girls or women may be ready to do things, which they would not do if sober. Men may take advantage of this situation and convince them of engaging in sex without taking precautions, like using a condom and thus prevent getting infected with HIV/AIDS.

If a child smokes or drinks alcohol, what problems will it get?

Children should never drink or smoke! Children are particularly vulnerable to health hazards of smoking and drinking because they are still developing. They may harm their body and brain for the rest of their life.



There are serious risks for the psychological and social development of a child. Misuse of alcohol and cigarettes can have serious implications on a child's potential to attain full maturity.

Does drinking harm the community?

Yes it does! People who drink too much can harm the community in several ways.

Most harm to the community occurs because people do things, they would not do when sober.

When people are drunk, they can be aggressive and violent and thus hurt others physically or emotionally. Furthermore, many road and work accidents happen because people are drunk. Often innocent people are hurt and disabled or lose their life as a result of accidents related to alcohol. People who drink too much alcohol tend to become careless and thus contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS within the community. People who drink might commit a crime in communities. People that drink a lot are unreliable workers and spend more time away from work than others.

Alcohol dependent people spend a lot of money getting alcohol and a lot of time planning how to get money for their drink. And as alcohol is expensive, less money is available for the family and for important payments like house rent, school fees, uniforms and food.



Young people abusing alcohol may start stealing money from home in order to buy alcohol. Alcohol misuse often is a reason for trouble in the family and the breaking up of a friendship. It also often leads to a bad performance in school or dropping out of school, with all the consequences like losing the opportunity to find a job, support yourself, your family and the community.

People say that if you drink alcohol you get more blood, is this true?

This is not true! You get neither more blood nor more strength nor vitamins from alcohol!

The truth is that too much drinking disturbs the absorption of vitamins and minerals from food into your blood. Vitamins are essential for keeping up a strong immune system that helps you resist illness, including diseases like HIV/AIDS. Therefore you should make sure that you eat fresh fruits and vegetables, because they really strengthen you!

Others say that beer makes you fat, is this true?

It is true that some alcoholic drinks can cause weight gain, because they contain sugar and starches. This is especially the case with beer.

Is it true that a person who drinks a bit lives longer than a person who does not?

No. Until today, scientists could not prove that you live longer if you drink a bit of alcohol.

In general you will see, that people who lead an overall healthy and happy lifestyle live longer than those who do not take care of their body and mind. Alcohol in reasonable amounts may be part of it. Drinking a bit of alcohol is harmless, but you have to keep an eye on your consumption and not exaggerate.

Do gongo and cigarettes help to digest?

It is a misconception that spirits, when used in small amounts after a meal assist the digestion of particularly fatty foods. Alcohol can even decrease the normal flow of important digestive fluids and hence delay rather than enhance digestion.

Nicotine in a cigarette on the other hand, increases the activity of the intestines and therefore facilitates digestion. But nicotine also increases the release of acid in the stomach, which can cause mild to severe stomach-aches.

Is it true that the side effects of inhaling smoke are lower than breathing in smoke?

Both inhaling and breathing tobacco smoke is harmful. If you smoke a cigarette and draw the smoke of it through your mouth into your lungs you will directly

experience various negative effects on your organs.

If you stand close to a smoker and breathe in the smoke, some effects are less direct. On the other hand as a bystander you may breathe in more of the



poisonous elements in tobacco, because there is no filter. Factory-rolled cigarettes have a filter that filters out certain toxic elements like carbon and tannins, which are irritating for the lungs.

Can a cigarette be poisonous for a person?

Yes! The nicotine contained in tobacco is a poison. If you have high doses of nicotine in your blood you will feel nauseous, vomit, you will have increased salivation, abdominal pain and diarrhoea and you will feel weak. Other symptoms include headache, dizziness, increased heart rate and blood pressure, tremor and cold sweats. Too much nicotine can also lead to difficulties in concentrating as well as to sleep disturbances.

Which diseases can you get from smoking cigarettes?

There are many different diseases and problems you can get by smoking.

The most vulnerable organ of a smoker is the lung. After inhaling, the carbon and tannins contained in tobacco rest on the lung. This heavy deposit of carbon



and tannins causes difficulties in breathing and might cause lung abscesses.

The irritation of the lung makes a smoker more vulnerable for infections. This can be a chronic cough, but it can also lead to pneumonia including tuberculosis (TB) and cancer. Nicotine is also particularly harmful for the stomach. It can lead to a loss of appetite and abdominal pain.

You may see that heavy smokers often have dark or dirty teeth. This is because carbon is deposited on them and causes them to change colour. People who smoke frequently also tend to have an unpleasant mouth odour as well as problems with their skin.

Is it true that when you drink milk after each smoke you do not get bad effects?

No, this is not true, because milk can not wipe away the damages nicotine causes in the mouth, the heart, lungs or in the brain. Drinking milk after each smoke may only help to decrease the irritation in the stomach caused by acid.

Can you die from smoking or drinking alcohol?

Yes, you can die from smoking or drinking, but only when you really exaggerate.

If you smoke a large number of cigarettes you might get severe nicotine toxicity, this can cause immediate death. This happens particularly with people who have heart problems. On the long run you can die from cancer caused by smoking heavily over a long period of time.

Alcohol can also kill you immediately. If you drink large amounts of alcohol this may result in a complete suppression of the activity of the brain. This means that centres in the brain that control our breathing and our heart beat no longer work, resulting in death.

But alcohol is also the reason for many traffic and work accidents. Remember that alcohol is responsible for many, many more deaths than other drugs!

Why is it so difficult to stop smoking?

This is exactly the danger with all drugs that you get used to them and think you can not do without them!

With cigarettes you get used to their relaxing effect and to situations where you feel the "need" to smoke. Like many people you might think, that in a certain situation, e.g. in combination with alcohol, after hard work, after eating etc. you need a cigarette. So if you want to quit smoking you have to change your habits to avoid temptations and you have to fight against yourself and your desires! This is a real effort, which needs a strong will.

Once you try to smoke less or give it up completely you will experience a so-called withdrawal reaction. This can be very unpleasant and painful. Usually you will feel



tense and irritable, you will have difficulties concentrating, experience drowsiness alternating with difficulties of sleeping at night, your heart rate and blood pressure falls, your appetite and weight increase and your motor performance decreases. Once a person is addicted, it no longer becomes just a habit, but a disease. Many people dependent on nicotine do not smoke for the pleasure that smoking brings but to avoid the pain caused by the withdrawal syndrome described above.

Can alcohol lead to dependence?

Yes. Like nicotine, alcohol can lead to dependence. Therefore it is wise to be very careful when you are

using alcohol and fix a limit to what you drink. If an addict wants to stop drinking, he or she will feel withdrawal symptoms, like trembling and anxiety.



Why do people quarrel and become violent if they are drunk?

The effects of alcohol on the brain cause people who are drunk to quarrel. Under the influence of alcohol people lose their normal social behaviour and find it difficult to control emotions or behaviour or to make sound judgements of situations. As a result, situations or words are often misinterpreted. Drunken people are easily irritated or become tearful about things they would have ignored if sober. Often they strike out to hit others where they would have handled a situation differently if sober. Drunken people tend to forget about the consequences of their behaviour.



If you come into a situation within your family or friends, try to stay away and avoid the drunkard. You should not try to argue or discuss with a drunken person; they most probably would not understand you anyway.

Why does a man like to have sex when he is drunk and why are a lot of girls getting into temptations after drinking alcohol?

Alcohol changes certain brain functions making people think less before they get involved in sex. They resist less, when they are tempted. Alcohol makes people relaxed and careless. That is why HIV/AIDS and alcohol are linked.

Why should pregnant mothers not smoke or drink alcohol?

Pregnant women, who smoke or drink endanger the health or life of their unborn children!

The baby in the uterus is nourished through the blood of the mother. If the mother smokes or drinks, the

nicotine or alcohol, which enter her blood, will also reach the the baby. Alcohol attacks the developing heart and brain of the unborn child. Mothers who drink a lot during pregnancy might get babies with a heart disease and low intelligence, because brain cells could not grow properly. Often children are born with abnormalities in their facial appearance. For a baby alcohol is a real poison, even small amounts of alcohol can harm the unborn child!

A drinking mother might become careless and forget about protecting her own body and the growing child. If the mother gets HIV/AIDS, the baby can also get the virus.



Women, who smoke during pregnancy, are much more likely to bear children who die suddenly for no apparent cause during their first year of life. Babies of smoking mothers are usually also smaller and lighter than

others, because the baby gets less nourishment when in the mother's womb.

The message is clear: women who want to have healthy babies should definitely not smoke or drink when pregnant!

Is alcohol abuse one of the causes of HIV/AIDS or other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's)?

Alcohol abuse is not in itself a cause of HIV/AIDS or other STD's, but the behaviour of drunken people puts them at higher risks of getting and spreading these diseases.

Alcohol leads people to forget about the dangers of having many different sexual partners and having sex with persons whose health status they do not know. They forget to protect themselves and their partners by using a condom and they forget about their responsibilities towards their wives and children.

People, who drink a lot weaken their immune system and thus viruses enter their body more easily.



Remember that there is still no cure for HIV/AIDS. The only way to protect yourself is by a reasonable behaviour!

Are there specialists in Tanzania to help people with drinking problems?

Yes. In Tanzania it is primarily the field of mental health that deals with this problem. Several different specialists work together, for example psychiatrists and psychologists. Social workers who have skills in understanding the social and cultural dimensions of

drinking and who also have training in counselling can provide support, as well as mental health nurses that work in both hospital and community settings.

Most of these specialists work in public hospital settings. Some work in the private health care sector as well as in non-governmental organisations that have programmes directed at the prevention of drug including alcohol abuse.



These include NGO's like SOBER Tanzania, AMREF, Save the Children, SPW etc. (see contact addresses on the last page).

You can also ask a traditional healer for his advice.

Are cigarettes also drugs?

Cigarettes are not considered drugs in the sense of being illegal. But nonetheless cigarettes contain nicotine and this is what makes the cigarette a drug, because nicotine can lead to dependence.

Why is it forbidden to grow or smoke bangi, but growing and smoking tobacco is allowed?

The law in Tanzania defines drugs as either legal or illegal. Tobacco has for a long time been socially acceptable and it is only in the past 50 years or so that the harm associated with tobacco use (nicotine) has been fully appreciated. Nonetheless, until today tobacco is a legal substance, while bangi, on the other hand, is by law considered an illegal drug in Tanzania.



But as nicotine in cigarettes is harmful, the government has taken steps to warn smokers and

prevent young people from smoking. There is a new law in Tanzania that requires manufacturers of tobacco products to include a health warning on all the products they produce and sell. Since the year 2000 every tobacco product has to have a warning printed on it that says: "Smoking is dangerous to your health".

Why is home brew more dangerous than commercially produced beer?

Commercially produced alcohol is subject to strict quality controls. This means that there are specialists in the factories, testing the products on a regular basis on their cleanliness, the percentage of alcohol and the composition of ingredients. The danger with home brew is that there is no such control. Very often additives, e.g. fertilisers and other ingredients are added to speed up the fermentation process. Sometimes poisonous alcohol (eg. Methylalcohol) develops during the production process. Unfortunately it happens quite

often, that people are severely harmed after drinking locally produced alcohol, some get blind and some even die.



Why are alcohol and cigarettes still advertised when they are harmful?

The government has to decide whether there are adverts for alcohol and cigarettes or not. The government is in the difficult situation to decide between protecting peoples' health and the pressure it gets from Tanzanian farmers as well as tobacco and alcohol producing companies, workers in the industry and shopkeepers that want these products advertised

because they get their income from producing and selling them. The government itself also has an interest in advertising tobacco and alcohol, because their sale provides revenue to the government through taxes.

In Tanzania the government decided that advertisements for tobacco products have to include a warning that says: "Smoking is dangerous to your health". This informs the smoker about the dangers of smoking and leaves it to every person to decide.



What should I tell a person who is trying to get me involved with gangs who smoke and drink alcohol?

If you decide not to smoke or drink alcohol, that is a very good and healthy decision. It is your own personal right to take this decision, like all other people are also allowed to make decisions about their own lives.

Sometimes it is very difficult, but if you decide that you do not want to join in a group of people who smoke or drink it is very important to say so. Try to clearly say "no"!

Try to explain that you want to lead a healthy lifestyle without alcohol and cigarettes and explain your friends why. Tell them,

that you know what you do and that you are convinced, that smoking and drinking endangers your health, costs a lot of money and

will prevent you from reaching your goals in life. If you are convinced, the people will most probably not bother you anymore.



And, if you are looking for friends, don't forget: a friend is someone who cares, protects, and looks after the welfare of his mate! Therefore how can a person who willingly and purposely provokes you to do something harmful and does not respect your decisions be a real friend?

If people want to stop drinking alcohol or smoking what should they do?

First of all people really must want to stop! This needs a clear decision and a strong will, because it is not easy to stop.

Secondly, the person has to think about the situations where he or she feels the "need" to smoke or drink. This is usually with a specific group of friends, at a party, after hard work, after or with eating. So if people want to quit smoking or drinking they have to change their habits and lifestyle to avoid temptations.

A first step to stop could be by setting targets: e.g. not to smoke the whole week. Reward yourself if you reached your target. If you once failed, start again.

Very few people manage stopping completely at the first trial. Most people are not able to only reduce but have to stop completely.

How can I help someone to stop smoking or drinking?

Try to find out, why your friend or relative has the habit of smoking or drinking too much. Try to be there for him or her or get your friend involved in activities that keep him or her busy. Look together with him for alternatives, take him or her along for activities and introduce him or her to friends who do not use any drugs. Tell him or her, how important it is to stay away from temptations. Convince your friend or relative that it is much easier to manage negative situations or feelings in life when being sober. And of course, do not drink or smoke yourself!

It may happen that the person gets angry with you or



that your friendship cannot continue. Do not blame yourself! You tried to help and you did the best you could. Sometimes it is even better, if you terminate the friendship for your safety and the sake of your friend. He or she might start to realise that there is something wrong and subsequently decide to address his or her problem. It might be necessary for him or her to seek professional help.

Organisations providing support on drug and alcohol abuse:

AMREF:
P.O.Box 2773
Dar es Salaam
Tel.: 022-2116610
Fax: 022-2115823
amrefzt@africaonline.co.tz

Save the Children:
P.O. Box 10414
Dar es Salaam
Tel.: 022-2760798
scfdar@maf.org.uk

Student Partnership Worldwide
(SPW):
P.O. Box 737
Iringa
Tel./Fax: 026-2700224;
spwtz@maf.or.tz

Infectious Diseases Clinic:
P.O.Box 10011
Dar es Salaam
Tel.: 022-2137540

UMATI (Temeke):
P.O. Box 1372
Dar es Salaam
Tel.: 022-2111638/9, 2111774

SOBER Tanzania:
P.O. Box 1925
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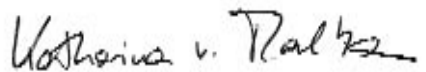
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This booklet is part of a series of eight booklets with the following titles:

1. **Growing Up**
 2. **Male-Female Relationships**
 3. **Sexual Relationships**
 4. **Pregnancy**
 5. **Healthy Relationships**
 6. **HIV/AIDS and the New Generation**
 7. **Drugs and Drug Abuse**
 8. **Alcohol and Cigarettes**
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If you are interested in any of the booklets,
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