

# **Alcohol Now a Social Issue Costing R7.7 billion!**

By Mbali Sithole & Karibu Staff

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The month of December is a time of celebrations of all sorts in South Africa. Celebrations include weddings, family gatherings, parties, and even the welcoming back of those who return from the traditional initiation school into manhood.

During this time, many families across the social classes, go out of their way to make the festive season a success. In working class communities such as in Soweto, one of the major factors that families look at is the people that come to support them. The main ingredient that glues this social aspect is none other than alcohol.

A cause for concern is the overwhelming number of community members who use the festive month to get a way to get sloshed with alcoholic drinks and at the same time misuse whatever little money they manage to get hold of.

due to peer pressure, many look at alcohol as an achievement, to look cool and some use it to cope with the things that they went through over the year. These feelings and perspectives are overwhelming in the working class community.

Pulane Sithole (29), says that sometimes “alcohol is a way of enjoying and living in the moment without having to worry about life problems for that particular moment.” In general, many look at alcohol consumption like it is a pet on one’s back for one making it through the year.

Spending on activities such as buying fun experiences in the mould of museums to learn about history, adventures like safaris, road drives, or family-orientated activities, pales in comparison to spending on alcohol.

It is a given that alcohol impairs one’s thinking, and many will forego the safety precautions when they drink alcohol. Several reports over the 2024 festive season noted a 3% spike in traffic accidents by 19 December 2024 with Transport Minister Barbara Creecy telling media, “It is unfortunate to report to you today, that despite all the work that we’ve been doing, there has been an increase in (road) accidents, also an increase in fatalities; 3% increase in serious accidents, with a total of 426 crashes that involve fatalities since the 1st of December”.

Local Kliptown resident, Itumeleng Ntuli (25), shared her views that December is a “time to drink and not feel bad about it as it is holidays, and it [alcohol] brings families and friends together.

Thabo Janes from Soweto thinks that community members who deal with problems like unemployment, and lack of finances resort to alcohol to avoid overthinking.

Regardless of the reasons, alcohol addiction is a low-key problem but is increasingly being picked up on various platforms and given the attention it needs. With alcohol-related spending topping R7.7 billion in under a week between 25 to 31 December 2024, prolific and organic essayist, Veli Mbhele, led a discussion about alcohol addiction in black working class communities.

In the discussion, Mbhele linked the issue to its cruel usage as wages during apartheid

and colonialism while picking up health-related concerns such as foetal alcohol syndrome. Mbhele also talked about the role of women in the activism against the problems brought on by the installation of 'Beer Halls' where working class black men would drink themselves to a stupor. This is a lingering problem that needs to be tackled.

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