

Let's Talk About Alcohol and Responsibility

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"Africans, men and women, alcohol tastes nice. But if you love someone, you owe it to yourself to talk to the one that you love and say, 'please, may we just call it quits. We have children at home. Go home. Your family needs you.'"

These were the heartfelt words of actor Warren Masemola at the funeral of his close friend, Presley Oagile Chweneyagae, who died on 27 May 2025. Masemola's message was not just a tribute, but a candid call for accountability, especially within black communities, regarding alcohol abuse.

Masemola revealed that he and Chweneyagae often debated alcohol's role in their lives, particularly about family and responsibility.

Masemola's remarks touch on a deeper, often overlooked history. Alcohol consumption in black communities has roots in colonial policies like the 1908 Durban system. Through this system traditional beer was regulated and used as a means of social control. Over time, alcohol became more widely accessible but also coincided with increases in social ills such as child neglect, gendered violence and femicide, among others.

While there's no public record linking Chweneyagae to alcohol many of the examples, Masemola's point remains urgent. Alcohol abuse continues to harm families and communities. Groups like Sisonke Gender Justice highlight alcohol as a major factor in gender-based violence and femicide. Drunk driving also contributes to high road fatality rates in South Africa.

This is not the first time such concerns have stirred debate. In 2022, Khanya College held a youth forum after the Enyobeni tavern tragedy in the Eastern Cape, where many young lives were lost. The question then, as now, remains: can we afford to ignore the cost of our drinking culture?

To buttress the issue for further consideration, the World Health Organization said that in 2024, alcohol consumption led to the deaths of around 2.7 million people worldwide, accounting for 4.7 per cent of global deaths. For SA directly, 59% of alcohol drinkers are also binge drinkers, which means they exceed the standard amount advisable for drinking in a single sitting.

To reduce alcohol intake, South Africa should ban advertising and limit access to under-18s, permitting showing of images only at licensed sellers' quarters. The government should also reduce the amount of alcohol in circulation at any given point.

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