

Cheers to families The forgotten factor in family poverty



Confronting family poverty needs evidence-based alcohol policies

In his message on the International Day of Families 2011 the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon says: “On this International Day of Families, let us resolve to support families as they nurture the young, care for the old and foster strong communities”.^[1]

The UN has a long history of efforts to protect families, especially women and children. This year’s theme is very important as it allows development organizations and governments to direct the spotlight on a hidden but key issue – the impact of alcohol abuse on families. Effective action here will radically improve the conditions and future prospects of children, women and families in general.

The World Health Organization has noted that

“the impact of alcohol consumption reaches deep into society. It causes harm to the well-being and health of others. Diseases and injuries, for example, have social implications, including medical costs, which are borne by governments, negative effects on productivity, and financial and psychological burdens on families.”^[2] Alcohol use can severely impair the individual’s functioning in various social roles – the performance as parent, spouse or partner and as contributor to household-functioning. Research has piled up evidence showing that alcohol is present in a substantial number of domestic violence cases. In the USA an estimated 480,000 children are mistreated each year by a care giver with alcohol problems^[3] and in Europe 16% of all cases of child abuse and neglect are alcohol related.^[4]

The economic consequences of expenditures

on alcohol are significant especially in high poverty areas. Alcohol is a major factor in exacerbating poverty. In a month a rural laborer can spend as much as he earns on alcohol. The alcohol menace ruins families and contributes to the breakdown of the basic social fabric of society. Often it is the women who bear the brunt of this problem – wife battery, discord in the home, abused and deprived children, non-working or chronically ill husbands who become a burden to both family and society. ^[5] Evidence clearly shows the correlations between alcohol abuse, burdens on the family and poverty. Celebrating the International Day of Families, we need to commit ourselves to actions which support family development and reduce poverty. We need governments to get this right and to intensify their efforts to address

alcohol problems as part of their development aid, as well as to reduce alcohol availability and increase alcohol prices. Families all over the world, in each society and social class deserve these protective measures.

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1 Traditionally celebrated on May 15, this year's theme is "Confronting family poverty and social exclusion".

2 Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health, WHO, 2011

3 http://www.marininstitute.org/alcohol_policy/violence.htm

4 Anderson, P. & Baumberg, B. (2006) Alcohol in Europe. London: Institute of Alcohol Studies

5 WHO Global Status Report on Alcohol 2004



IOGT International is the largest worldwide community of non-governmental organizations with a mission to independently enlighten people around the world on a lifestyle free of alcohol and other drugs.

OFAP is a non-profit making, international affairs organisation responsible for assisting families in the Asia and Pacific Region, as well as families elsewhere.