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Binge Drinking: Real & Devastating Consequences

When I was growing up I had a favorite Uncle. "Unc" was my mom's youngest brother and we had great adventures together. I vividly remember him and I riding through the desert on horseback outside Las Vegas, Nevada in the late '60's. I always rode "Regret" a Shetland Pony who was aptly named for her cantankerous behavior. Uncle would ride "Snicker" an old gelding with only one good eye. One day as we neared the corral, Unc yelled, "Race yah!," and off we went. We didn't get very far when Regret gave one good buck and off I flew landing right in a cactus patch, and of course Regret kept running. After making sure I hadn't broken any bones, Unc wiped my tears and took off after that mean Shetland, while I sat and plucked out cactus stickers. He returned without Regret and I got to ride behind him on gentle 'ol Snicker.

As I got older I began to realize that my Uncle would sometimes drink a lot. As I became an adult, it was clear that Unc had a drinking problem. He would disappear for days. Mom said that he was on a binge and that he drank to quiet the ghosts from Vietnam. So to me, binge drinking was when someone drank for days on end. Today, I know different.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, binge drinking is defined as a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 grams percent or above.[1] This usually happens when men have 5 or more drinks, or when women have 4 or more drinks of an alcoholic beverage within a two hour period. Binge drinking greatly increases the risk of several health, social, and economic consequences. The consequences are real, potentially devastating, and are felt by the individual, his/her family, and the larger community.

Health consequences of binge and heavy drinking include unintentional injuries from car accidents, falls, burns, drowning, as well as high blood pressure, stroke, cardiovascular disease, and liver disease.[2]

"...binge drinking is defined as a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 grams percent or above. This usually happens when men have 5 or more drinks, or when women drink 4 or more alcoholic beverages, over about a 2 hour period."

Binge Drinking: Real & Devastating Consequences

Binge and heavy drinking affects blood sugar levels and can result in poor diabetes control, and can potentially exacerbate existing chronic health conditions.[3] When women drink with babies in utero, the health consequences of alcohol use are extended to the unborn baby. There is no safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy and binge drinking is associated with increase risk of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).[4]

Binge and heavy drinking can be devastating to families. A parent or other adult member of the family with an alcohol problem can place a great amount of stress on the family. From intimate relationships to caring for children, alcohol abuse impedes family members from effectively performing their roles as mother, father, grandparent, aunt, or uncle. Alcohol abuse is a major risk factor for and a consequence of child abuse.[5,6,7] Why is this so? Some studies have demonstrated that parental alcohol abuse is associated with abuse and neglect. In addition, children that have been abused are at an increased risk for alcohol-related problems later in life.[5] Substance abuse is present in 40-80 percent of families in which child abuse has been substantiated.[6]

Even if we reside in families where problem drinking does not occur we are still impacted by the enormous economic burned binge and heavy drinking places on the larger society as a result of health-care expenses, crime, and lost productivity. “Drinking too much, including binge drinking, causes 80,000 deaths in the US each year and in 2006 cost the economy $223.5 billion,” says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.[8]

Population statistics help us to understand the broad impact of alcohol abuse within the larger society, but may not adequately descried the devastation to individuals who struggle with consequences of alcohol abuse. If you know someone who drinks above the recommended limit (≥5 drinks for men & ≥ 4 drinks for women) encourage them to talk with their physician/ healthcare provider about strategies that have been shown to decrease use. Most people who binge drink are not alcohol dependent or alcoholic. However, my Uncle became both—alcohol dependent and alcoholic. In fact, at the age of 45, he died from cirrhosis. We buried him on my birthday that year. For more information or to learn about local alcohol prevention or treatment services in the Black Hills region please call 605-791-4445.

Just One: Alcohol Prevention Campaign

In October the Health Education and Promotion Council launched the Just One Alcohol Prevention Campaign to not only educate the public about the dangers of binge drinking, but also to promote alcohol use abstinence. The radio public service announcements can be heard on most radio stations in the Black Hills area throughout the holiday season and the New Year. Radio ads and other media developed for the campaign can be found at www.heapc.org.

Health Consequences Associated with Excessive Drinking[8]

Unintentional Injuries (car accidents, falls, burns, drowning)

Intentional Injuries (firearm injuries, sexual assault, domestic violence)

Alcohol Poisoning

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Children born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

High blood pressure, stroke, and other cardiovascular diseases

Liver Disease

Neurological Damage

Sexual Dysfunction,

Poor Control of Diabetes.

What can I do to prevent binge drinking

Choose not to binge drink and help others not to do it.

Support effective community strategies to reduce binge drinking, such as joining a local prevention coalition. Call 605-791-4445 to find out how.

Support local control of the marketing and sale of alcohol.

Support the minimum legal drinking age of 21.

Talk with my family and friends about the health and social consequences binge drinking.

You're Just Like Your Mother

By Lois Wuestewald, BSSW

Children are like living and breathing video cameras. As parents we may not realize it but those human data recorders are watching and listening to our every move. Children love their parents and aspire to grow up to be just like them. Have you ever found yourself saying or doing something that your parents might have done in your youth? Now that we are the parents, it is our children who will copy us.

One theory that helps us to understand this phenomena is Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which explains human behavior in terms of a three-way, dynamic, reciprocal model in which personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior continually interact."[9]

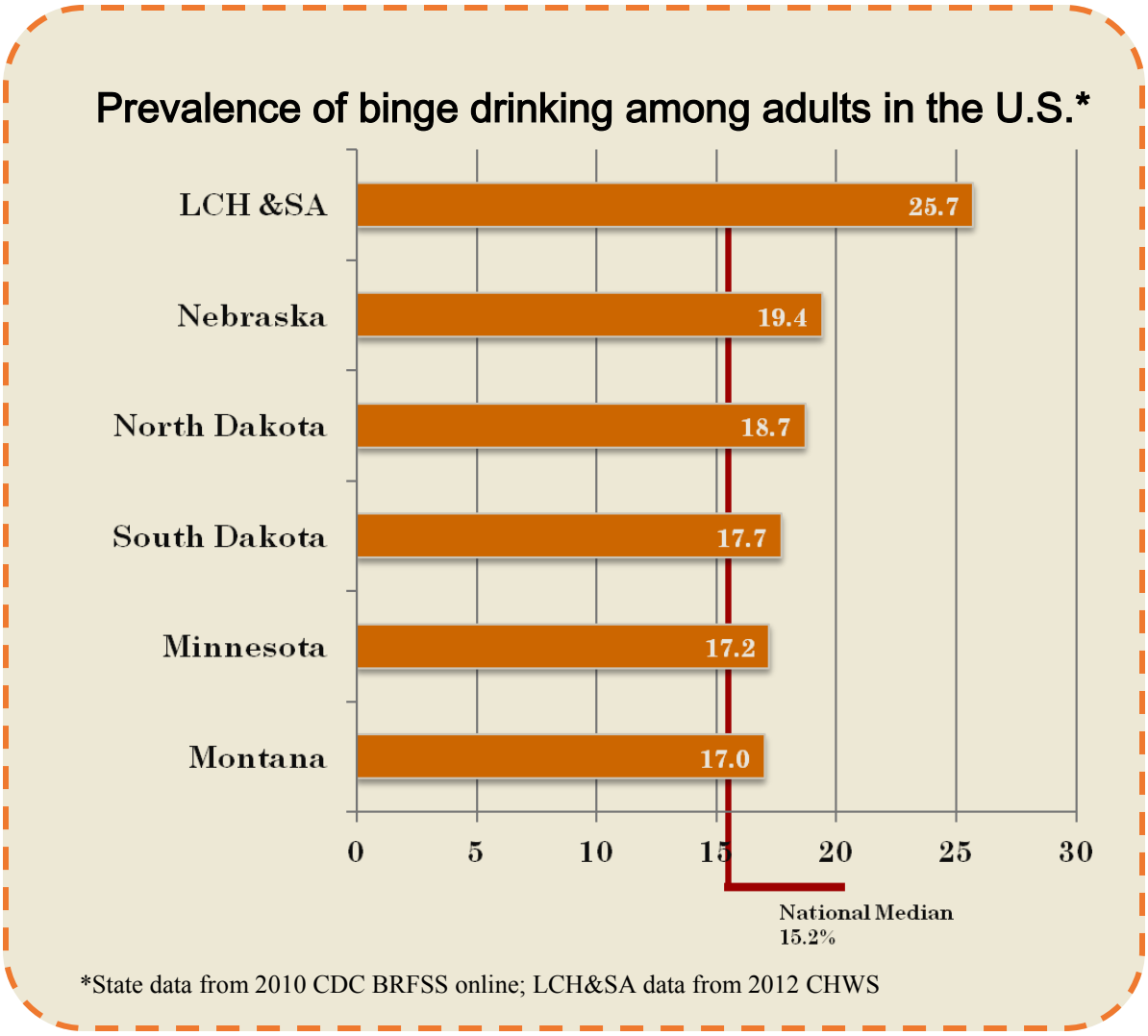
When children make cognitive decisions they rely on strategies they have observed and monitored to formulate a plan of action. The information that a child is constantly gathering socializes them into the adult world. If the child's parent likes a particular sporting event and corresponding team, the chances the child will mimic these preferences is very high.

Consequently a child can be socialized to perceiving binge and heavy drinking as a "taken for granted" part of life. Children living in homes were excessive drinking is common associate drinking behavior with fitting in and a normal part of family life. As a parent, if we engage in occasional binge drinking or live in households where habitually drinking is common, we may be unwittingly sending the wrong message to our children about what is normal, how to effectively solve problems, and how to cope with life's challenges.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University conducted a survey comparing: 1. children who had fathers living at home who did not approve of alcohol; 2. children who had fathers living in the home that approved of alcohol use; and 3 children who had no father in the home. The children who resided in homes where the father was present but approved of drinking were one and a half times more likely to consume alcohol underage as compared with those children who had no father in the home.[10] Children learn by example and if the example they are receiving is that drinking is ok, they will drink.

As a parent I have learned that my children see what I do far more than they listen to what I say. I have made a decision long ago that I will not jeopardize my children's healthy development over a weekend of heavy drinking? We may not realize it but those human data recorders are watching and listening to our every move. They love us and aspire to grow up to be just like us. So it is important for us to be vigilant and take care how we teach our children how to cope and deal with life's challenge.

How common is binge drinking in our Region?



Rapid City Precinct 4-3 and 4-2 is the primary geography where the Health Education and Promotion Council provides direct community services. Lakota Community Homes (LCH) and Sioux Addition (SA) are two distinct neighborhoods included within this geography. The above graph illustrates the prevalence of binge drinking for South Dakota, several surrounding states, and Lakota Community Homes and Sioux Addition. While the prevalence of binge drinking LCH&SA are much higher than the surrounding states (shown), the prevalence of current alcohol users within LCH&SA (47.2%) is lower than South Dakota (58.2%) as well as the nation (54.6%) (not shown).

Oyate Community Center

Almost two years ago the Health Education and Promotion Council (HEAPC) re-opened the doors of the Oyate Community Center. Located in the heart of Lakota Homes and North Rapid, the Community Center is in a prime location for delivering community programs that aim to strengthen families and provide educational opportunities beyond the classroom. In 2012, HEAPC began a revitalization process that has brought new life, community partnerships, and opportunities to the Community Center. The revitalization process provided restoration of the building physically as well as a new infusion of programs and services for youth and adults of all ages. In a short period of time HEAPC has successfully developed relationships with a number of local partners in order to implement a variety of programs and services:

Afterschool Youth Programs

The Oyate Community Center provides youth with science and cultural enrichment beyond the k-12 classroom. Afterschool programs are implemented in blocks for youth 7 years and older and cover a variety of topics related to 1. Science, technology, engineering, and medical fields, 2. Lakota language and culture; 3. Leadership; and 4. Art and music. In addition to learning, young people are encouraged to be physically active. The Oyate Community Center is a safe place for children to grow with the mentorship of caring and engaged adults.

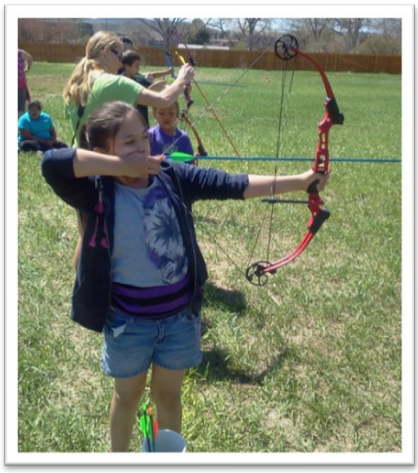
Health Promotion

The Oyate Community Center hosts regular community events and trainings that are intended to promote healthy lifestyle choices and decrease preventable disease. Community members are encouraged to take control of their health and the health of their families. Educational topics include, but are not limited to healthy eating, improving health literacy, breastfeeding techniques, and how to quit smoking. Health education opportunities are provided to both youth and adults. Two annual health education events include ***National Women's Health Week*** and the ***Black Hills Free Flu Shot Clinics.***

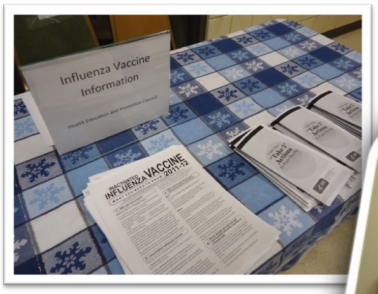
Substance Abuse Prevention

The Health Education and Promotion Council is a state accredited prevention agency and delivers high quality prevention services through the Oyate Community Center. The abuse of alcohol, commercial tobacco, and other drugs (ATODs) takes a heavy toll on health and wellbeing of families and the entire community. The Oyate Center offers evidence-based programming for the prevention of ATODs as well as community support groups such as Talking Circles and AA meetings.

Youth Programs



Health Education



Substance Use Prevention

In order to be able to continue our important work we need your help! While HEAPC and its partners have worked diligently to implement community programs and services that provide meaningful experiences and learning opportunities, it is of vital importance that HEAPC leverage funding to sustain its current work. Delivering high quality programs year round is expensive and without the assistance of concerned citizens such as you, our vision for a thriving community center may not be realized.

HEAPC accepts tax deducible gifts large and small. Please see the form **Giving Hope** enclosed to pledge your support. Visit us on our website at **www.heapc.org** to learn about our organization, our work, and giving options.

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