

# **FACT SHEET NINE**

## **ALCOHOL AND HIV**

Some of the more important links between alcohol and HIV are outlined below.

### **Disinhibition**

There is a widely held view that alcohol consumption is a catalyst or excuse for behaviour which might not otherwise be tolerated. There is also a common belief that alcohol has an effect on sexual feelings:

Alcohol consumption is also associated with risk taking. Studies demonstrate that after drinking alcohol or using drugs people are less likely to use a condom during penetrative sex (Stall, 1987).

After drinking alcohol people may also be less careful about their drug injection practice and be more likely to share needles.

### **Social Setting**

Licensed premises are often associated with sexual contacts - in fact some premises are known as 'singles bars' or 'gay bars' and are used for this purpose. Also male and female prostitutes use licensed premises to facilitate contact with clients. For these reasons licensed premises are of particular interest in health promotion campaigns.

### **Immune System**

It is possible that HIV infection is most likely to occur in people whose immune systems have already been weakened. A variety of psychoactive drugs including alcohol, cocaine, cannabis, opiates and volatile nitrates have all been shown to reduce human immune responses (Dunne, 1989). Thus far however alcohol does not appear to be a co-factor in the course of AIDS related illness.

## **Alcohol use as a consequence of HIV infection**

People who have tested positive for HIV may well seek comfort by using alcohol which may be contra-indicated with medication they are taking. Their doctors or consultants may therefore refer them for counselling at an alcohol problems agency like **apas** where the needs of people with HIV or affected by AIDS are recognised.

### **References and further reading:**

*Dunne F.J* (1989) Alcohol and the Immune System. *British Medical Journal*, 298, pgs 543-44

*Hingson RW et al* (1989) Beliefs about AIDS, use of alcohol, dugs and unprotected sex among Massachusetts adolescents. *Alcohol Epidemiology Symposium*, Kettil Bruun Society, ICAA, Maastricht, Netherlands

*Plant MA* (1990) Alcohol, sex and AIDS: a review. *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 25 (2/3) pgs 293-302 (Plus Personal comms of *Stall R* (1987) included above)

*Robertson JR* (1990) The role of alcohol and illicit drugs in the martial adjustment of young people. M.Phil. Thesis, University of Edinburgh

*Room R et al* (1983) Introduction. In *Alcohol and Disinhibition: Nature and Meaning of the Link*. NIAAA, Research monograph 12, US Dept of Health and Human services

*Stall R et al* (1989) Relapse from safer sex: the next challenge for AIDS prevention work. Unpublished paper, Centre for AIDS prevention Studies San Francisco

*Woods SC et al* (1983) Ethanol and disinhibition: physiological and behavioural links. In *Alcohol and Disinhibition: Nature and the meaning of the link*. NIAAA, Research monograph 12, US Dept of Health and Human services