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Alcoholism in Northampton County, PA

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COUN 6785: Social Change in Action: 
Prevention, Consultation, and Advocacy

Social Change Portfolio

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OVERVIEW

Keywords: Alcohol Use, Alcohol Use Disorder, Alcoholism, Males, Prevention, Northampton County, PA

Alcoholism in Northampton County, PA

Goal Statement: The goal is to reduce alcoholism rates in Northampton County, PA by addressing stigma associated with alcohol use, providing age-appropriate education about alcohol in schools targeting youth, and supporting the creation of public policies that facilitate these prevention efforts.

Significant Findings: In Northampton County, the percentage of the population who report excessive alcohol use is higher than the national average (Lehigh Valley Health Network, 2022). Risk factors to alcoholism can include childhood trauma, lack of economic opportunities, and societal norms (SAMHSA, n.d b). Prevention can begin within our youth by implementing strategies that target societal norms. Male adults within Northampton County are at an even greater risk (White, 2020) due to stigma, stressors, and a lack of proper services. Creating a plan for advocacy can start with our youth in schools and progress to public policy that supports eliminating barriers to prevention within the community.

Objectives/Strategies/Interventions/Next Steps: When considering lowering alcoholism rates, it is important to consider prevention strategies to help support this. Understanding the risk and protective factors within the levels of the social ecological model can help determine where prevention efforts should lie. By looking at behavioral intention and social cognitive theories, it is seen that the common ground for alcoholism is the societal norms that surround it. This can be

addressed through a mentoring program such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters (Social Programs that Work, 2018). Other advocacy that can be done is spreading awareness and promoting social change within the community. Understanding that societal norms play a huge part in mental health and creating available services within the community is recommended moving forward.

INTRODUCTION

Alcoholism in Northampton County, PA

I reside in Northampton County, PA, which has a population of over 300,000 people, with most of the residents being US citizens. The population within this area is not very diverse, with 73% of the population being white non-Hispanic (Data USA, 2023). The poverty rate for the area is lower than the national average, sitting at 8.76%. When it comes to mental health in the area, the provider-client ratio is 1 provider for 356 individuals (Data USA, 2023). Looking at Northampton County, PA, there are concerns for heavy alcohol use (Lehigh Valley Health Network, 2022). My paper will focus on how this concern affects our community and why it is a concern, factors that are contributing to this concern, ethical and cultural considerations, prevention, and advocacy for alcoholism.

PART 1: SCOPE AND CONSEQUENCES

Alcoholism in Northampton County, PA

Over 141 million Americans have used substances within their lifetime. Roughly half of users have a coexisting disorder (NCDAS, 2025a). This is a large number of our population

dealing with not only a mental health disorder, but also a substance use disorder, including alcohol. My portfolio is going to investigate alcohol use in Northampton County, PA, and how the continuum of care model can help support the opportunities within the community to address this issue. The continuum of care model is a model that supports organizations in helping communities overcome different societal issues (Parents Lead, n.d). In Northampton County, 21.55% of adults report excessive drinking, which is higher than the national average and the state average (Lehigh Valley Health Network, 2022). According to NCDAS (2025b), 10% of individuals over the age of 12 suffer from AUD. In the US, around 141,00 deaths are related to alcohol use every year, with over 5,000 deaths per year in PA. This indicates that there is a community problem surrounding the use of alcohol within the county, and that needs to be addressed to avoid problems within the community. Leaders of the community report this issue and call for solutions and prevention strategies to address this concern (Lehigh Valley Health Network, 2023).

Alcohol use can have a major impact not only on an individual's life but also on the whole community. Alcoholism can have health and financial consequences for the community. If alcohol is consumed heavily, it can lead to health issues for that individual. This can be a health problem that is related to alcohol consumption or health care costs related to accidents that were sustained due to alcohol use. According to NCDAS (2025b), over 50% of alcohol related deaths are due to AUD. The use of alcohol limits productivity, which will affect employment and cost the community long-term. According to NCDAS (2025b), in PA, over 9 billion was spent due to alcoholism. Some problems can arise in families due to alcohol use, such as relationship problems, child abuse/neglect, domestic violence, and an increased risk of poverty (T, 2023).

Individuals who drink alcohol excessively can be diagnosed with Alcohol Use Disorder, which is usually coexisting with another disorder, such as anxiety and depression.

When looking at the issue of alcohol within my community, there are many rehabs and support groups to help someone heal from alcoholism. Society has focused on healing and fixing issues once they become an issue. However, there is a lack of support for the prevention of these issues. According to Tucker (2015), we learned how to fix the problem instead of considering what started the problem. These observations highlight the importance of taking a proactive approach; therefore, looking at the problems that lead to alcoholism in the first place is crucial in the prevention of alcoholism. This transition in focus sets the stage for exploring the social-ecological influences addressed in the next section.

PART 2: SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

Alcoholism in Northampton County, PA

When examining the behaviors of an individual, including alcoholism, Bronfenbrenner developed an ecological systems theory that explains how different environmental systems affect a person's development (Guy-Evans, 2020). The social-ecological model considers factors of a problem in the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. When looking at alcoholism, individual risk and protective factors can be linked to their communities and themselves. This can be seen through various factors, including the vulnerability of the community and the individual, availability, and characteristics of the individual (Gruenewald & Remer, & LaScala, 2014).

Individual Level

On an individual level, age is considered a risk factor for alcoholism. Individuals who are under the age of 30 are more at risk of alcoholism. This is due to brain development, major life changes, finding out their identities, and pressures from other adults (NIH, 2025). According to NIH (2025), women who are not heterosexual are at greater risk for AUD. This is likely due to the vulnerability of this population. A few other individual risk factors to consider are the genetic component and the stress that an individual suffers from. Alcoholism can be inherited or can be a result of a person having major stressors or traumatic events that lead them to drink in the first place (NIH, 2025). In contrast, according to SAMHSA (n.d b), protective factors include that if an individual is confident in who they are, they are less likely to turn to alcohol during stressful moments. If an individual has self-control, then they are more likely to use healthier coping skills rather than turning to alcohol. If an individual has social competence, they are less likely to turn to alcohol in order to function in social settings.

Relationship Level

Alcoholism has many different risk and protective factors that are seen within the relationship level of the social-ecological model. One risk factor that needs to be considered is parents who abuse alcohol themselves (SAMHSA, n.d b). It has been seen that alcohol affects your productivity. This means that parents who abuse alcohol are less productive and are less involved. On the other hand, positive parental involvement can be protective (SAMHSA, n.d b). According to Salvatore et al., (2016), another risk factor to consider is dating multiple people versus being in a stable relationship. This can be due to several factors, but a big factor to consider is the emotional toll that it takes on a person. A committed relationship is shown as a protective factor, as it does not take an emotional toll on an individual, reducing the desire for large alcohol consumption. Child abuse and neglect are another risk factor on the relationship

level for alcoholism (SAMHSA, n.d b). This is due to the traumatic stress that one experiences, which may impact their decision-making. On the other hand, one can argue that a healthy childhood can be linked to lower alcoholism due to the lack of traumatic stress that the individual has.

Community Level

When looking at a community level, a risk factor that should be considered is poverty (SAMHSA, n.d b). Poverty within the community leads to stress, which leads to an increase in alcohol consumption. A protective factor within the community that should be considered would be the availability of resources within the community (SAMHSA, n.d b). If individuals can access resources within the community that would lower stress, then they are less likely to turn to alcohol due to that stress. Another risk factor to consider would be the availability of alcohol within the community. If alcohol is widely available, then more individuals are likely to use it. When looking at a protective factor, community involvement should be considered. According to the Recovery Research Institute (2025), volunteering decreases your risk of alcoholism. This can be because individuals who are involved in healthy events do not turn to alcohol out of boredom.

Societal Level

When looking at a societal level, it is important to consider the lack of economic opportunity to be a risk factor (SAMHSA, n.d b). If individuals do not feel that they have opportunities in life, they may turn towards alcohol. According to the Recovery Research Institute (2025), being excited about your future decreases your risk of using substances. On the other hand, individuals who have more opportunities to succeed in society are less likely to turn to alcohol due to the feeling of not wanting to ruin what they are working towards, making economic opportunity a protective factor. Another risk factor that should be considered is

societal norms (SAMHSA, n.d b). If society views alcohol use as a way to relax or something that is viewed as acceptable, then more people will consume alcohol to “fit in”. A protective factor on the societal level would be laws and policies limiting individuals' access to alcohol (SAMHSA, n.d b). An individual must be 21 to be able to buy alcohol, which helps eliminate alcohol use by minors. Some states do not allow alcohol to be sold in stores, sold on certain days, or sold during certain times of day.

PART 3: THEORIES OF PREVENTION

Alcoholism in Northampton County, PA

The concern for alcoholism within Northampton County warrants the investigation of prevention. According to NCDAS (2025c), from 2015 to 2019, the excessive alcohol deaths increased by 45%. When considering theories of prevention for alcoholism, it is important to understand how a theory works. Theories are ways for individuals to understand behaviors, patterns, and events and connect them with different variables (National Cancer Institute, 2005). Theories are ways an individual can make connections to make change on different societal levels. Prevention starts at the youth level. If prevention of alcohol use starts from youth, that will help reduce the risk of those same youth struggling with alcohol in adulthood (Quigley et al., 2019). To address this growing problem of alcoholism in Northampton County, one must consider theories of prevention for this problem.

One theory of prevention that can be used is the behavioral intention theory. This theory was created in 1985 by Azjen. This theory outlines that the behavior displayed is from the individual's intention to act on that behavior. This theory is used with many individuals facing

addiction to understand why that individual started the behavior in the first place. This can be connected to different influences and motivational factors that the individual faces in their life, such as subjective norms, personal attitude, and behavioral control (Brookes, 2023). An example of how this theory relates is how youth perceive the social norm of alcohol consumption for their age. If this social norm is addressed, it can lower alcohol consumption among our youth (Johnson et al., 1988).

Another theory to consider is the social cognitive theory. This theory connects a person's behaviors with outside factors. These factors include a person's beliefs, a person's behaviors, and environmental influences. It is believed that a person's self-confidence and their surroundings play a huge role in determining their behaviors (Nickerson, 2025). Alcohol consumption has grown in acceptance over the years, and it has been seen as a positive social influence. However, the negative consequences are far greater but are not seen within the social norms (Fairbairn & Kang, 2025). Using this theory, when it comes to prevention, it involves looking at how alcohol consumption is seen within our society. There should be less emphasis on the positive effects and more emphasis on the negative effects.

The common ground for the two theories presented is the social norms of alcohol use within the community. Prevention starts in our youth to decrease alcoholism in adulthood. One intervention that is evidence-based is Big Brothers Big Sisters Community-Based Mentoring (Social Programs that Work, 2018). This is a mentorship for disadvantaged youth, so these youth have a positive adult figure in their life. This mentorship is not for the adult to fix the youth's behavior but rather to model positive behavior (Social Programs That Work, 2023). Disadvantaged children are part of the vulnerable population. These youth are more at risk for alcohol use (Quigley et al., 2019). These youth are surrounded by an environment that shows

large consumption of alcohol is a social norm. Utilizing this intervention can help fix that social norm for these youth.

PART 4: DIVERSITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Alcoholism in Northampton County, PA

Alcoholism is a continuing problem within our country, and statistics show that Northampton County, PA, has rates for alcoholism greater than the national average (NCDAS, 2025c). It is important to always consider culture and how it impacts the symptoms and treatment of the issue (SAMHSA, n.d a). To fully understand the issues of alcoholism within the community, it is important to understand which part of the population is being most impacted or has contributed most to the rates. In Northampton County, males have contributed to the issue the most, but are the most impacted and the most contributing portion of the rates.

Marginalized Population

When looking at different mental health disorders, it is important to consider how social determinants play a role, and it is important to consider these cultures for prevention (Lund et al., 2018). It is reported to NCDAS (2025b), males are more likely to die due to alcohol use, and 64% of men are diagnosed with AUD, while only 35% of women are. Although rates for women with alcohol use are rising, males still consume more alcohol (White, 2020), which can increase male-related cancers and lead to hospitalization due to alcohol (CDC, 2025). Understanding that males are more at risk for alcoholism is crucial when considering different interventions and prevention strategies. Males are most at risk for developing alcoholism, which increases the issue

within the community, as it affects community safety due to alcohol use in men increasing sexual violence (CDC 2025), community finances, and individuals within the community

Prevention Mechanisms

When looking at the culture of adult males, they are less likely to seek out treatment for mental health. According to Field (2023), a greater percentage of women received counseling compared to men, and men are at a greater risk for suicide. This means that more adult males are suffering from untreated mental health issues than women. Alcoholism usually co-occurs with other mental health disorders. If both AUD and the other co-occurring disorder are treated together, then the rate of recovery is higher (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2022). The community needs to have proper treatment options for mental health for adult males. These options can include low costs so men do not have to fear financial struggles when getting the proper treatment, online so the treatment can be more discreet, and a male-based center so the men who are getting treatment can feel like they are able to connect with others. Another factor to consider is the masculine norms. According to Iwamoto et al., (2011), it is a masculine trait to drink alcohol. Recreating these social norms for men will help prevent heavy drinking in males. This can be done in several ways, such as spreading awareness, providing informative information, and breaking generational norms.

Ethical Considerations

It is always necessary to consider ethical considerations in prevention. Some of these considerations include informed consent, collaboration, and confidentiality. The ACA ethics outline that it is important to provide informed consent and allow the client to commit themselves voluntarily to the process. This is an ongoing process and must be documented by the counselor (American Counseling Association, 2014, A.2.a). Sometimes, counselors are part of an

interdisciplinary team that works in the best interest of the client. This means counselors may work with other professionals (with the consent of the client) to help the well-being of the client (American Counseling Association, 2014, D.1.c). Finally, everything must be confidential. The only times when a counselor may break this is if the client signs consent to collaborate with another professional, if there is legal or ethical justification, such as child abuse and harm to self or others (American Counseling Association, 2014, B.1.c).

PART 5: ADVOCACY

Alcoholism in Northampton County, PA

Sometimes clients need more traditional counseling, which is why counselors advocate for their clients to promote social change (Toporek & Lewis & Crethar, 2009). Counselors can advocate for change for their clients in order to see them succeed. Advocacy is the fourth part of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, which allows counselors to work on advocacy at three different levels (Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, 2015). Counselors, who are agents of social change, can make a difference when it comes to alcoholism at the institutional level, community level, and public policy level. However, it is important to identify system barriers and what actions can be taken at each of these levels.

Institutional Level

When looking at advocacy at an institutional level, this is seen through institutions within the community (Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, 2015). As stated previously, prevention can start within our youth. When considering the institutional level, we

can consider how to advocate within our schools. Looking at the barriers when advocating within our schools can include a lack of resources or trained staff to handle prevention within the schools. Through a study that was conducted, it was shown that barriers for alcohol interventions can include a lack of trained staff, a lack of confidence to teach the information, and a lack of resources (Jaimon et al., 2025). Staff within a school need to be properly trained on how to advocate for the prevention of alcohol through breaking stigma and generational habits that may be formed, specifically in males. To help overcome this barrier, “What Works In Prevention” is an approach that can be implemented in schools (Commonwealth Prevention Alliance, 2024). This approach focuses on decreasing factors that contribute to drug and alcohol use while increasing more positive supports for the individual (Commonwealth Prevention Alliance, 2024). Advocating for this approach within our schools will allow schools to address alcohol use within our youth even further by addressing factors that contribute to it.

Community Level

When looking at advocacy at a community level, this is seen through social norms and values within the community (Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, 2015). A barrier that can be seen within men in the community when it comes to alcohol use is the social norm for men to drink and the stigma that men do not need treatment to overcome it (Jaimon et al., 2025). An action that can be taken against this barrier is advocating for a change in the stigma against men and alcohol. It is shown that sometimes using community resources such as local media and events is an effective way to communicate with the community about change (Holder, 2024). Communication with the community about the myths that lead to male alcohol use stigma is important to get the facts out to the community. In PA, "Life Unites Us" is

an organization that takes stories of individuals who have faced addiction, including alcoholism, to help change the stigmas around it (Life Unites Us, n.d).

Public Policy Level

When looking at advocacy through a public policy level, this is seen through laws and policies that affect human development and growth (Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, 2015). There are many barriers when it comes to this, including a lack of government prioritizing the issue of alcoholism (Jankhotkaew, 2022). It has not been a priority to implement new policies that address the issue of alcoholism. An action that can be implemented at the public policy level is limiting the number of places that can serve and sell alcohol within an area (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, n.d). At this time, in PA, there is 1 liquor license for every 3,000 residents (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2016). Advocating for this law to be stricter can help limit access to alcohol within the community, addressing the alcoholism rates.

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DATE: 10/30/2025

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