



THE SALVATION ARMY UNITED KINGDOM TERRITORY  
WITH THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

**POSITIONAL STATEMENT**  
**ALCOHOL**

Alcohol causes more harm in society than any other addictive drug and the extent of its impact is widely underestimated.<sup>1</sup> Some health-related consequences of alcohol excess, such as liver disease, are well known, but others, such as increased risk of heart disease and many types of cancers, are not.<sup>2</sup> There is a strong case to be made that alcohol excess is the number one threat to public health in the UK.<sup>3</sup>

Heavy drinking carries a risk not only to good health, but also to the security of employment and even housing.<sup>4</sup> Dependency is not uncommon and creates a downward spiral of physical, psychological and social harm.

The negative effects of alcohol extend beyond the individual. Alcohol excess causes harm to others – for example, through increased violent crime, road traffic accidents, domestic violence and child abuse.<sup>5</sup> It also causes significant harm to society as a whole, through increased family breakdown, antisocial behaviour, absenteeism and increased pressure on policing and health services.

Despite this level of harm, alcohol excess is endemic and considered by many to be normal.<sup>6</sup> The Salvation Army believes that excessive use of alcohol in society should not be accepted as normal behaviour.

Alcohol consumption has risen sharply over recent decades.<sup>7</sup> This is explained in part by the proven link between affordability and consumption and the sale of cut-priced alcohol in shops and venues.<sup>8</sup> Recent years have also seen an increase in supermarket sales, home delivery and extended licensing hours. As a result alcohol is more affordable and more available than ever before.

Health bodies and many charities share these concerns and call for an appropriate, evidence-based response.<sup>9</sup> However, in the face of opposition from the drinks industry with its substantial resources and aggressive lobbying, such calls for action have largely been ignored. It is in this context that The Salvation Army seeks a biblical understanding and an appropriate response.

The Bible teaches that all people are created in the image of God and have unique and intrinsic value.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly The Salvation Army promotes the welfare of the body, mind and spirit.<sup>11</sup> It is the experience of Salvationists that holistic wellbeing (fullness of life) is possible without the need for mind-altering drugs.<sup>12</sup>

Drinking alcohol is not sinful in itself but the Bible warns that self-indulgence and excess is dangerous in many aspects of life.<sup>13</sup> Drinking alcohol in order to experience its intoxicating effects is condemned in Scripture, which highlights both the harmful effects of alcohol excess and the destructive consequences of intoxication.<sup>14</sup>

The Bible also teaches that where an activity or behaviour becomes a problem for another person, a responsible and compassionate response is to abstain from that behaviour.<sup>15</sup> Therefore The Salvation Army promotes abstinence as a rational response to the risks of drinking and as a loving choice in response to alcohol-related suffering. All soldier members of The Salvation Army demonstrate this alcohol-free lifestyle as a positive life-choice. In their abstinence they stand in solidarity with those who struggle with alcohol dependency and those affected by alcohol abuse. In support of this, The Salvation Army will continue in the intentional provision of alcohol-free spaces.

Whilst drinking in moderation is widely held to be socially acceptable, there is good evidence that no level of drinking is risk free.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, whilst The Salvation Army does not require abstinence of adherent members, it still counsels towards limited consumption.<sup>18</sup> In this, The Salvation Army recognises the value of self-control as a personal attribute and a gift of God.<sup>19</sup>

Calling on its own history and a contemporary understanding of the effects of alcohol, The Salvation Army endorses the use of effective interventions (locally, nationally and globally) to reduce consumption and protect public health.<sup>20</sup> In particular, it supports legislative measures to reduce the affordability, availability and promotion of alcohol.<sup>21</sup> Recognising the destructive effects of alcohol on innocent bystanders and vulnerable groups, The Salvation Army also supports interventions that protect children and young people, prevent unwanted pregnancies and address domestic violence.<sup>22</sup>

Identifying with the call of Jesus to love our neighbour, and in particular to stand with the poor, vulnerable and oppressed, The Salvation Army will continue to care for individuals, families and communities affected by alcohol.<sup>23</sup> With its position of abstinence, and its presence in the local community, The Salvation Army is well placed to combat alcohol-related harm on a pastoral, practical and societal level.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor David Nutt, former government chief drug adviser, and other members of the Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs published a study in *The Lancet* in November 2010: 'Drug harms in the UK: a multicriteria decision analysis' (**Volume 376, Issue 9752**). In it, 20 drugs were rated using 16 criteria addressing harm to the individual and to others. Crack cocaine was rated as the drug most harmful to the individual. Alcohol was rated as the drug most harmful to others, and when combining the scores, the most harmful drug overall – more harmful than crack or heroin.

The ALICE RAP project (Addictions and Lifestyles in Contemporary Europe – Reframing Addictions Project), co-financed by the European Commission, brings together around 200 scientists from more than 25 countries and 29 different disciplines. Their first briefing paper, *Alcohol - the neglected addiction*, 2012, also concludes that alcohol is Europe's 'most dangerous drug'.

## **2 Lesser-known health consequences of heavy drinking:**

One in fourteen cancers are caused by alcohol - Alcohol, the neglected addiction, ALICE RAP, 2012.

Drinking heavily increases the risk of coronary heart disease (heart attacks and angina) by 1.7 times, doubles the risk of having a stroke, and increases the risk of high blood pressure by a factor of four. *The scale of alcohol-related harm*, Department of Health, 2007.

The World Health Organisation estimates that, in the developing world, alcohol is responsible for 1 in 20 strokes. *The World Health Report 2002. Reducing Risks, Promoting Healthy Life*, WHO, Geneva, 2002.

In 2011/12 there were an estimated 1.2 million hospital admissions in England related to alcohol consumption, more than twice the number of 2002/03. *Health First; An evidence-based alcohol strategy for the UK*, Alcohol Health Alliance, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> In 2004 a World Health Organisation study found that in Europe, alcohol is the single biggest cause of disease and disability amongst those aged 15-79 (ahead of tobacco, obesity and high blood pressure). *Risk Factor Estimates for 2004; Attributable standard DALYs*, WHO, 2004.

Reducing harmful drinking is a key priority of The Department of Health as announced in March 2013. The London Health Improvement Board, established by Andrew Lansley, also lists alcohol misuse as one of its top priorities for early action to protect the health of Londoners (alongside cancer and obesity).

4 One important Salvation Army study found a high prevalence of alcohol abuse amongst hostel residents, peaking in the 18- to 25-year-olds at 66%. *Seeds of Exclusion*, The Salvation Army, 2009.

#### 5 Regarding harm to others:

47% of victims of violent crime believed the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol. *The Crime Survey of England and Wales*, ONS, 2012.

In 2012, drink driving accounted for 6,680 reported road traffic accidents and 290 fatalities (17% of all reported road fatalities). *Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain: Estimates for accidents involving illegal alcohol levels*, Department for Transport, 2012.

A Home Office study of male domestic violence offenders in England found that 49% had a history of alcohol abuse. *Domestic violence offenders: characteristics and offending related needs*, Gilchrist et al. The Home Office, 2003.

2.6 million children in the UK live with parents who drink hazardously. 705,000 live with dependent drinkers. *New estimates on the number of children living with substance-misusing parents*. Manning et al. *Journal of Public Health*, 2009.

Alcohol plays a part in 25-33% of known child abuse cases. *Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England*, Cabinet Office, 2004.

6 Each week, 26% of men and 17% of women drink at hazardous levels. *General Lifestyle Survey*, ONS, 2012.

7 UK alcohol sales, expressed in litres of pure alcohol per adult, were estimated at 9 litres in 1975 and rose steadily to reach double figures in 1997. Consumption peaked in 2004 at 11.5 litres before dipping to 9.5 litres in 2011. This dip is explained by a gradual decrease in on-licence sales (ie, alcoholic drinks sold in pubs and clubs). Off-licence sales (supermarkets and shops) continue to rise steadily. *Statistical Handbook 2012*, British Beer & Pub Association, 2012.

8 *Health First* is an important report speaking into public policy with regards to the harm caused by alcohol. It was produced under the auspices of the Alcohol Health Alliance and is endorsed by over 70 UK health bodies including the British Liver Trust, The Royal Colleges of Physicians, The Royal College of Nursing, The Royal Society for Public Health, Cancer Research UK, The British Medical Association and Alcohol Concern. It is written purely out of concern for public health and community safety and with no involvement from the drinks industry. See chapter three for an excellent discussion of the evidence regarding alcohol pricing, affordability and consumption. *Health First; An evidence-based alcohol strategy for the UK*, University of Stirling, 2013.

9 *Ibid.*

10 'Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.' Genesis 1:26–27

11 'Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own...' 1 Corinthians 6:19

12 'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...' Ephesians 5:18

'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' John 10:10

13 '...nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.' 1 Corinthians 6:10

'Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.' Proverbs 23:20-21

The Bible sometimes refers to wine symbolically as a blessing or a gift from God (Deuteronomy 7:13; Amos 9:14). In his first miracle, Jesus created large quantities of fine wine for a wedding party (John 2). However, the nature of wine and attitudes towards its drinking then were very different from today. Care must be taken not to misrepresent these texts as an endorsement of drinking to 'unwind' or 'loosen up', drinking to relieve emotional strain or distress, or more obvious excess.

14 **Biblical warnings regarding excess alcohol consumption and intoxication:**

'Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.' Proverbs 23:29-30

'Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, pipes and tambourines and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord, no respect for the work of his hands.' Isaiah 5:11-12

'Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.' Romans 13:13

'The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.' Galatians 5:19-21

'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...' Ephesians 5:18

'For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.' 1 Peter 4:3-4

15 'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.' 1 Corinthians 10:31-32

'If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.' Romans 14:15

'It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.' Romans 14:21

16 All Salvation Army premises, including LifeHouses, operate an alcohol-free policy.

17 *Alcohol – the neglected addiction*, ALICE RAP, 2012.

18 The Salvation Army offers two forms of membership. A person becoming an adherent member makes a simple statement of faith and wishes to identify with a local Salvation Army centre as their place of worship. Those who wish to become a soldier member must accept 11 statements of belief and make various commitments about how they wish to live their life, including abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, gambling and 'all else that could enslave the body or spirit'. *The Articles of War*, The Salvation Army.

19 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.' Galatians 5:22–23

20 *Alcohol – the neglected addiction*, ALICE RAP, 2012.

*Health First; An evidence-based alcohol strategy for the UK*, University of Stirling, 2013.

In the late 19th Century, The Salvation Army was ahead of its time in recognising and responding to the individual and societal harm caused by alcohol. Its early influence in promoting abstinence and rescuing dependent drinkers led to significant and violent opposition from local publicans and breweries.

21 One particular threat is the increasing use of new media for the promotion and marketing of alcohol. The Salvation Army seeks to advocate for the monitoring and regulation of this new challenge to public health.

22 *Alcohol, The Seeds of Exclusion and The Salvation Army*, The Salvation Army, 2011.

23 'Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself.'" Matthew 22:37–39

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' Luke 4:18–19

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."... The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:35–36, 40

'But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:29–37

***All Bible quotations are taken from the New International Version 2011 (UK) edition.***

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