



## **Family Digest 32**

**July 18<sup>th</sup> 2020**

### **Alcohol, Cigarettes and the COVID-19 Lockdown**

*“Beyond health consequences, the harmful use of alcohol brings significant social and economic losses to individuals and society at large”.<sup>1</sup>*

The narrative of the COVID-19 pandemic has been dominated by the controversy surrounding the ban on the sale of cigarettes and alcohol. The ban was sudden and took the public by surprise. The initial regulations of Lockdown Level 5 had the support of most South Africans. However, the length of the Lockdown, and the implementation of Lockdown 4 without any amendment to those regulations, resulted in widespread dissatisfaction.

The health consequences of smoking are primarily borne by the individual smoker concerned. There is legislation in place to limit the impact of secondary smoke. The ban on the sale of cigarettes is motivated by a concern that smokers might take up hospital beds due to an already compromised respiratory system. It must be noted that this is a contested policy, with even some medical professionals questioning whether a sudden cessation of smoking would undo the harm already suffered by the lungs of habitual smokers. It did not take long for a widespread black market in the sale cigarettes to emerge. This has resulted in major losses in terms of tax revenue and, according to some experts, has played into the hands of organised criminal syndicates.

The ban on the sale of alcohol was more complicated. The abuse of alcohol has far more negative consequences for families and communities. “We’ve got such a problem with drinking in this country. If we had responsible drinking we wouldn’t have needed the ban.”<sup>2</sup> Alcohol abuse plays a consistent role in crime, gang violence, domestic violence and driving under the influence of alcohol. The Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism comments that the “temporary nine-week liquor sales ban has been a necessary intervention to limit COVID-19 transmission in the early stages of the epidemic. We cannot ignore its immediate effects in contributing to a reduction in violence and injuries, but do recognise that it was not sustainable”.<sup>3</sup>

The limited sale of alcohol under Level 3 Lockdown has seen an increase in crime, trauma as a result of violent conflict, and vehicle accidents. Alcohol related injuries under Lockdown 3 are now taking up space in trauma units and this is cause for concern. So while the “ban on alcohol sales may be over, the effects of alcohol on our society are not. An alcohol ban is unsustainable, but tighter regulation isn’t.”<sup>4</sup> There is an urgent need to explore more effective ways of limiting alcohol consumption, and in so doing limit the damage inflicted by irresponsible drinking.

The links below provide further information:

<https://www.news24.com/Columnists/GuestColumn/jessie-duarte-alcohol-abuse-hinders-o>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-27-more-must-be-done-to-limit-alcohol->

<https://bhekisisa.org/health-news-south-africa/2020-05-28-south-africa-coronavirus-lockd>

[https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/lifting-alcohol-ban-wmc-genocide--eff?utm\\_source=](https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/lifting-alcohol-ban-wmc-genocide--eff?utm_source=)

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/government-said-no-to-alcohol-sales-during-lockdown-but-said-yes-to-the-industrys-money-for-years->

[20200601?utm\\_source=24.com&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign= 3781 + 33397326 + 52038 &utm\\_term=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.news24.com%2Fnews24%2Fsouthafrica%2Fnews%2Fgovernment-said-no-to-alcohol-sales-during-lockdown-but-said-yes-to-the-industrys-money-for-years-20200601](https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/government-said-no-to-alcohol-sales-during-lockdown-but-said-yes-to-the-industrys-money-for-years-20200601?utm_source=24.com&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=3781+33397326+52038&utm_term=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.news24.com%2Fnews24%2Fsouthafrica%2Fnews%2Fgovernment-said-no-to-alcohol-sales-during-lockdown-but-said-yes-to-the-industrys-money-for-years-20200601)

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/malema-you-cant-ban-cigarettes->

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-06-05-illicit-trade-in-cigarettes-and-alcohol->

[https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/alcohol-abuse-is-taking-away-hospital-beds--alan-w?utm\\_source=Politicsw](https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/alcohol-abuse-is-taking-away-hospital-beds--alan-w?utm_source=Politicsw)

[https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-06-11-lets-be-more-like-the-russians/?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_ca](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-06-11-lets-be-more-like-the-russians/?utm_medium=email&utm_ca)

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/gauteng-to-consider-joining-call-for-sale-of-alcohol-to-be-ban>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/alcohol>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bhekisisa.org/health-news-south-africa/2020-05-28-south-africa-coronavirus-lockd>

<sup>3</sup> <https://bhekisisa.org/opinion/2020-06-11-why-did-south-africa-ban-alcohol-during-lockdown-covid19-coronavirus-evidence/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.news24.com/news24/columnists/guestcolumn/could-the-debate-over-south-africas->