**Alcohol and Anxiety**

Purpose: Contrast the popular belief that alcohol relieves stress and anxiety to the realistic impacts of alcohol

**Step 1:** Consider common portrayals of alcohol’s effects, as implied by “Boy, I need a drink” or other quips regarding destressing with alcohol. These comments indicate that alcohol will have what mental and behavioral effects?

**Step 2:** Ask students to draw parallels between neurotransmitters affected by alcohol and neurotransmitters affected by prescription remedies for ailments, such as depression and anxiety (e.g., SSRI anti-depressants).

Consider that “a 2015 review of numerous studies found that among alcohol-dependent patients, 37% suffered from additional mental disorders. Researchers noted that – when compared to people without alcohol dependence – those with alcohol dependence had:

* Almost four times the risk for depression.
* More than six times the risk for bipolar disorder.
* More than four times the risk for generalized anxiety disorder” (Godman & Lavine, 2019).  
  <https://health.usnews.com/conditions/mental-health/depression/articles/is-alcohol-a-depressant>

**Step 3.** Discuss with students the actual – as compared to believed – effects of alcohol on anxiety and depression.

* Gilpin et al., (2012): <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0031466>
* Kushner, M. G., Abrams, K., & Borchardt, C. (2000). The relationship between anxiety disorders and alcohol use disorders: a review of major perspectives and findings. *Clinical psychology review*, *20*(2), 149-171.

**Step 4.** Ask students to consider societal factors that contribute to, maintain, and mislead people regarding binge drinking.

* Comparison of 1980s vs 1997-19997 binge drinking in US: <https://www.newswise.com/articles/binge-drinking-declines-in-late-80s-rises-again-in-late-90s>
* Comparison of lifespans in former Russian countries based on drinking habits/culture: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6241027/>
  + Also, in Russia, the sharp rise in male deaths can be attributed to the end of Gorbachev’s anti-alcohol campaign: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3818525/. NBC coverage -- http://www.nbcnews.com/id/31544292/ns/health-addictions/t/alcohol-blamed-half-s-russian-deaths/#.X3ticGhKiUk. Loosening of alcohol restrictions were lifted. The report claims that drinking doubled in Russia between 1987-1994
  + Former Soviet Union regions comprise 4 of the top 6 worldwide consumers of alcohol: https://www.alcohol.org/guides/global-drinking-demographics/. Belarus is a clear #1. In Belarus, the average consumption of alcohol per person is 1200 mL of pure alcohol – let’s say vodka – per month! (That’s like drinking 20-25 standard vodka-tonic drinks in a month’s time.

**References:**

Gilpin, N. W., Karanikas, C. A., & Richardson, H. N. (2012). Adolescent binge drinking leads to changes in alcohol drinking, anxiety, and amygdalar corticotropin releasing factor cells in adulthood in male rats. *PloS one*, *7*(2), e31466.

Godman, H., & Levine, D. (2019). Is alcohol a depressant? US News & World Report, <https://health.usnews.com/conditions/mental-health/depression/articles/is-alcohol-a-depressant>

Health Behavior News Service (2004). Binge drinking declines in the late ‘80s, rises again in late ‘90s. *News Wise*, <https://www.newswise.com/articles/binge-drinking-declines-in-late-80s-rises-again-in-late-90s>

Penina, O. (2017). Alcohol-related causes of death and drinking patterns in Moldova as compared to Russia and Ukraine. *European Journal of Population*, *33*(5), 679-700.