
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING – Barbara Wiedenhofer

The main idea of the 3rd goal is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at every age. Therefore, there are several sub-items which all target different purposes. For example, goal 3.5: its central intention is to strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse. Another goal (3.1) aims to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered the progress of SDG3 immensely. In consequence, 68 million children are known to lack of vaccinations for diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. But it is not only physical illnesses that have deteriorated our population since the pandemic. The number of mental health issues has also increased massively. For this reason, I have thought of a project, which could help to raise awareness of psychological disorders, especially of addictions.

In 2012 in Austria, about 340,000 people were considered to be alcoholics and 760,000 regularly consumed alcohol to an extent that is harmful to their health. In 2020, around 370,000 people were considered to be alcoholics and so Austria was in the 17th place in terms of per capita alcohol consumption worldwide. Whereby 300,000 approximately corresponds to the number of inhabitants of Graz, the second largest city in Austria. With these facts given, the question one may ask is: “Why is that rate so high?”

To answer this question, we first have to examine the reasons behind drinking alcohol. One of the most common motives is the taste. Studies suggest the alcohol acts on the same areas of the brain as sugar and so many people like the taste. A similar explanation is provided by our brains’ chemistry. Alcohol increases the release of dopamine, which is a neurotransmitter involved in controlling the pleasure/reward system in the brain, and therefore tells our brain that after the first drink, we should have a second, as it seems to make us happier. With that, we come to the third reason: alcohol leads to a loss of self-restraint, which increases our sociability. On account of that, one seems to have a lot more fun while being on a party or in a club. Another motive behind drinking is its impact on the sleeping process. While alcohol does not improve our sleep, it is scientifically proven that it speeds up falling asleep.

Now that we have found out some of the motives behind alcohol consumption, there is a new question: “Why do we drink alcohol instead of using other substances in order to satisfy our needs?”

That question is easily answered: In western culture, alcohol is usually not regarded as a drug but as a stimulant, which leads to its consumption being played down. For example, it is considered completely normal to drink a glass of wine at a family gathering or to have a few drinks when being out with friends. In fact, it is almost taken as an insult when declining the alcohol and may earn some strange glances. For this reason, it is not surprising that it comes natural for us to drink, when being in stressful situations.

But what can we do to prevent alcoholism?

It is important to not only rely on alcohol or other substances, in order to solve problems. One should try from early ages on to create social safety nets and build healthy problem-solving strategies and habits. Those can manifest themselves in different activities, like sports clubs, art classes or simply friend groups. It is also essential to inform the people about the potential dangers. One thing that we could do at our school is provide flyers or classes on the dangers alcohol can produce. This would be an easy way to spread awareness and information. Furthermore, excessive alcohol consumption should not be taken lightly. It is a mind-altering substance and should therefore be relished with caution.
