

# Developing an Effective Response to Problem Drinking in the Leicester Sikh Community

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## Project Rationale

- Research has shown high rates of alcohol-related deaths and mental illness in the Sikh Community compared to the general population
- Community development workers have identified a growing alcohol problem in the Sikh community

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## Project Aims

- Conduct a focus group with Sikh community leaders and a series of one-to-one interviews with problem drinkers
- Explore cultural factors that motivate excessive alcohol consumption

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## Project Aims

- Identify any barriers to accessing alcohol treatment services
- Identify steps that could be taken to tackle problem drinking in the Sikh community

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## The Sikh Community

- Alcohol has existed in India long before the Sikh religion emerged in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century
- Baptised Sikhs adopt a strict code of discipline – alcohol and non-vegetarian food is forbidden. Most Sikh men though are not baptised

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## The Sikh Community

- Patriarchal family structure; male breadwinner, strong commitment to *khandhan* (family life). Roles more egalitarian today
- Key values: respect, obedience and conformity
- The Sikh community is established and growing: 2001 census recorded 11,796 Sikhs living in Leicester

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# Cultural Factors Motivating Excessive Alcohol Consumption

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## Cultural Factors

- Migration – trauma of being uprooted leaving behind loved ones
- Illegal migrants - persecution
- Desi sharab – availability of own supply results in higher consumption

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## Cultural Factors

- Alcohol – important aspect of non-baptised Sikh hospitality
- Easy affordability – more availability
- Myths and ignorance about dangers
- Abstainers under social pressure to provide alcohol for drinkers, even problem drinkers, at celebratory occasions and when socialising

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## Cultural Factors

- Sometimes alcohol is 'flaunted' at functions as a sign of wealth
- Alcohol use is glamorised in Punjabi songs and Bollywood films
- Sikhs often drink in the presence of children thereby normalising such behaviour
- Drinking alcohol is seen as 'macho' – gender identity

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## Cultural Factors

- Sikhs brought up in a Western culture are not always able to understand traditional ways of life
- The resulting disintegration of traditional values conflicts with the expectations of the older generations
- Resulting intergenerational conflict is often a cause of family problems

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## Cultural Factors

- Alienation results in the failure to take up recreational activities offered by the abstinent Gurudwaras'.
- Instead the youth resort to activities centred around alcohol e.g. playing pool in pubs

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## Cultural Factors

- Today Sikh women are more independent than previous generations
- Due to a University education and employment Sikh women are able to assert themselves more effectively

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## Cultural Factors

- Today fewer Sikh women have high tolerance levels towards their partner's excessive drinking
- Women prioritising their interests over the interests of their family defeat traditional expectations of men causing matrimonial disaccord

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## Cultural Factors

- Having a problem drinker in the family is considered shameful
- Results in denial – by individual and family members
- Cases where family have resorted to locking the individual in the home to prevent them from purchasing alcohol and others finding out

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## Cultural Factors

- Some afraid to access treatment in case local community interpreters are used
- Problem drinkers disowned - further exacerbating excessive drinking
- Some that sought refuge in the Gurudwaras have turned to their faith and gave up alcohol altogether

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## Barriers to Accessing Treatment

- Low uptake of alcohol treatment services by BME communities is well documented
- Services are perceived as Eurocentric and unable to cater for cultural needs
- Stigma within the family and community

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## Barriers to Accessing Treatment

- Lack of awareness of the existence of alcohol treatment services
- Mistrust of the healthcare services due to the proximity with the Home Office which has responsibility for immigration
- Language barriers and confidentiality issues. Interpreters appointed from the local community are sometimes known to the user

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## Recommendations and Actions

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### Recommendations

- Raise awareness of the dangers of alcohol use using Sikh Community Centres
- Sikh Community Centres are willing to provide space for publicity
- Publicity should be available in Punjabi and English – nothing is currently available even on generic services at public points of access

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## Recommendations

- Raise awareness of the existence of alcohol treatment services and the confidential nature of the services available
- Conduct brief interventions to enable Sikh community members to assess their own drinking
- Hold drop in alcohol advice sessions at Sikh community centres

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## Recommendations

- Gurudwaras offer scope for rehabilitation by providing an alcohol-free environment for prayer, socialising and recreational activities
- Need for more culturally competent services that understand the needs and nature of the Sikh community
- Need for Punjabi speaking front line alcohol support staff

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## Future Plans

- Leicestershire Information and Legal Advice Centre - LILAC Project
- Aims to raise awareness of the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption working with Gurudwaras
- Future plans to work with Community Centres attached to Mandirs and Mosques

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Thanking you for your contribution

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