

**Alcoholism and Latino (Hispanic Culture)  
Alcoholism Case Study**

Subject: Sociology

Professor's Name

Date

## INTRODUCTION

Alcoholism per se is an individual problem, but if this individual health or personal problem affects other people in groups, institutions, and more so the whole society, this becomes a social problem. We must make things clear first. Alcohol in itself is a safe drug when moderately used, but dangerous when abused. It acts as a depressant that affects the central nervous system, and ultimately slows brain activity and muscle reactions (Eitzen and Zinn, 1992). Then what is alcoholism? This is otherwise known as alcohol dependence, a recurring disease characterized by too much dependence on alcohol. As of now, Medical science hasn't figure out what would be the exact cause of alcoholism, and the cure for it is still unknown, but various treatments are being done to aid alcoholics to avoid alcohol and help them live a healthy, normal life (MSN Encarta, n.d., date accessed: 10 May 2007).

Alcohol dependence cuts across social classes of people from the upper to the lower class people whether in developed and underdeveloped societies. This problem breaks through the different cultural barriers. I have stated the physiological effects of alcohol in the body, specifically the central nervous system, thus making alcohol dependence the leading cause of accidents in the USA. Here are some of the important statistics pertaining to accidents being pointed out to alcohol abuse as a cause ( all cited from Eitzen and Zinn, 1992):

- Almost 125,000 people die yearly from alcohol abuse (Research 84, 1988)
- In 1986, 52% of all traffic deaths occurred in alcohol-related accidents (one death every 22 minutes) (USA Today, 1987a:9A)

- Alcoholics have a suicide rate 6 to 15 times more than the rate for the general population, and they die in fires 10 times more frequently than non-alcoholics (Associated Press, 1984).
- Seventy percent of the 4000 drowning victims in 1986 had been drinking before their deaths.

Other problems in society have been linked to alcohol dependence more in terms of crime commission. Crimes such as rapes, burglaries and assaults are examples of such crimes. The social cost of alcoholism was also high, such as money lost due to absenteeism caused by alcoholism. Other immeasurable impact to society of alcoholism would be broken families, desertion and other emotional problems (Eitzen and Zinn, 1992).

Although I have stated here statistics in the USA, this also speaks true in the case of Latinos all over the world. Alcoholic dependence has been a favorite topic of most researches among Latinos or those people with Hispanic culture not only in the medical science field, but more so the social sciences.

The importance of this study is to delve into the reasons why rates of alcoholism are high among Latinos, its possible causes (health or social) and its possible social consequences. This study also aims to enumerate the various studies done in the past related to this topic, and in a

way propose a possible social remedy applicable to Latino societies in the world related to alcoholism.

**Figure 1. Theoretical Framework:**

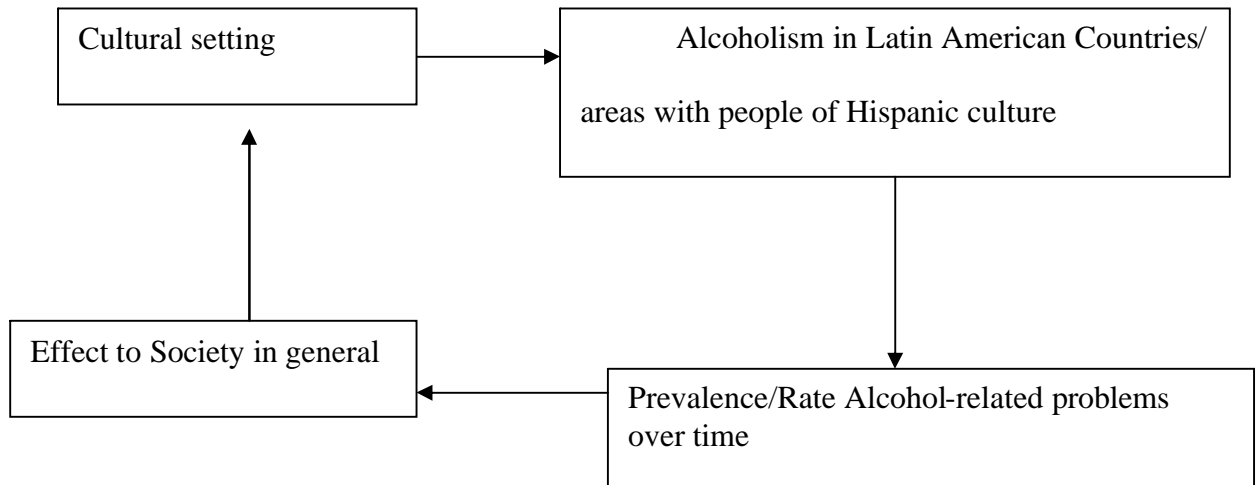


Figure 1 shows my proposed theoretical framework for this case study, specifically alcoholism among Latinos. The social/cultural setting might have something to do with the prevalence of high rate of alcoholism or alcohol-related problems to Latin Americans or people with Hispanic culture.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This section will look into the different literatures relevant to our topic, alcoholism. Most of the studies found on the net focused on the health cause and effects of alcoholism. Other studies/researches dealt with the social area of the problem. To date, literatures on this topic would reflect that this is a well-researched area, to the point that up to now, more and more social and medial scientists/experts are still interested to shed a new light on it.

A study conducted by the National Diversity Forum found that Hispanic-American subgroups in the USA share the limelight with the Native Americans having high proportion of alcohol-related traffic fatality records. This is in reference to other ethnic groups in the USA such as Caucasians, Asians and Pacific islanders. The study was done among more than 199,000 people who were fatally injured in crashes from January 1, 1990 to December 31, 1994. Results were drawn from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), which was a government census of all fatal US crashes. Among the Hispanic American sub-groups, Mexican-Americans had the highest alcohol-related traffic fatality rate (59.7%), while Cuban Americans have the lowest with 33.7%. Table 1 shows the results of the statistics related to this study (Driven magazine, 1999).

Table 1. Alcohol and Non-Alcohol Fatalities by Ethnic Group

| <b>Alcohol and Non-Alcohol Fatalities by Ethnic Group</b> |               |                |                 |
|---|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
|   | Alcohol       | No Alcohol     | Percent Alcohol |
| White   | 65,309        | 87,737         | 44.1%           |
| African American  | 11,072        | 12,453         | 47.1%           |
| Native American   | 2,197         | 804            | 73.2%           |
| Asian/Pacific Islander                                    | 1,094         | 2,942          | 27.1%           |
| Mexican   | 7,968         | 5,387          | 59.7%           |
| Puerto Rican  | 529           | 654            | 44.7%           |
| Cuban   | 240           | 473            | 33.7%           |
| Central/South American                                    | 1,005         | 961            | 51.1%           |
| Other Hispanic/Unknown                                    | 1,834         | 1,657          | 52.5%           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>91,248</b> | <b>108,068</b> | <b>45.8</b>     |

*Note: Alcohol-related crash=fatality occurred in a crash in which at least one active participant had a non-zero BAC.*

Source: Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, Prevention Research Center, 1999.

A medical study on alcoholism used a cross-sectional interview study in an urban teaching hospital-based primary care practice. This study focused more on Latino subjects with informed consent. Researchers used 2 alcoholism screening tools, the CAGE (Spanish version, the 4M), and the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test, plus a criterion standard for the identification of alcohol abuse and dependence, the Composite International Diagnostic Interview. Results showed that among the 210 interviewed, 36% of them had a lifetime diagnosis of alcohol abuse based on the criterion standard; 31% were presently drinking hazardous amount of alcohol. When the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test was used, 51% of the subjects were detected to have alcohol disorders. This study concluded that alcohol abuse and dependence are common among Latinos in primary care settings (Saitz et al, 1999).

In 2003, Caetano reviewed the alcohol epidemiological evidence on health disparities across whites, blacks, and Hispanics. Compared with other ethnic groups especially with Caucasians, Hispanic men have higher rates of alcohol-related problems and intimate partner violence. The basis for the results of this study came from the Survey data from the US household population 18 years and above who have been used to distinguish drinking patterns and level of alcohol-related dilemmas across U.S. Drinking patterns among Caucasians have reduced, while among Hispanics and black men, the rate had been stable from 1984 to 1995. Another study conducted by Caetano in 1998 found that among Hispanics, Mexican-Americans were found to have more alcohol-related problems compared to Cuban Americans and Puerto Ricans. In year 2000, Caetano with Clark conducted a study of DUIs (Driving Under the Influence of alcohol), DUI arrest rate for Hispanic men were 4 times higher than black and

Caucasian men. Hispanic men were also found to have the highest rates of having been arrested for DUIs (Caetano, 2003).

There are also studies that focused on the gender differences in terms of alcohol dependence. One study was conducted by Pyne et. al, (2002) in Latin America and Latin American Countries (LAC). In LAC, men are more likely to drink heavily and excessively than women. Some LACs have displayed the differences of alcohol dependence among social classes. For example, in Argentina, rate of alcoholism among men in slum areas is higher compared to those in the urban areas (SciELO Public Health, 2002).

Another study compared male with female alcoholics. The researcher used a longitudinal study of 114 male and 57 female alcoholics who began treatment between 1990 and 1994 at the Botucatu Medical School Outpatient Clinic. Results were retrospectively and prospectively assessed in 1997. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among the subjects. It was found that in poor families, 55.6% of women and 65.7% of men were reported to have relationship problems and 74.1% of women and 61.1% of men reported domestic violence.

Women subjects started to have alcohol abuse in later period of their life compared to men (Sim et. al, 2002).

All-in-all, I can most of the studied I included here focused on statistics, but failed to explain what could account for the generally high rates of alcoholism among Latin people, especially men.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this section, methods that I will use for my case study will be discussed. Based on my Theoretical framework, the cultural setting of Hispanic societies might have something to do

with the preponderance of alcoholism in their society. I will employ a descriptive study of the social/cultural setting of selected Hispanic societies, so that we can better explain and understand what is innate in their culture. Next, the use of secondary data will also be used, specifically statistics related to alcoholism in the countries or societies that will be included. With this, I will compare statistics between and among countries or societies. After the comparisons, it is better to again connect the statistics with my descriptive study or analysis of cultural setting. In general, I will use two social research methods here: Descriptive study and secondary analysis.

#### *Advantages and Disadvantages of these methods:*

Since this would entail the use of a descriptive study, biases from the researcher cannot be avoided. In addition, it would be less reliable since my proposed study will not be backed up by a study using quantification like surveys. However, in terms of quantification, the use of figures (statistics) will help me give a stronger interpretation of my findings. I will be dealing here with quality rather than mere quantity. In addition, given that I will be focusing on the macro-level approach, I will be using generalized data that would minimize my time to interpret or analyze my study.

#### *Sampling Method*

The population of this study would be all Latin-American Countries and areas/territories with Hispanic culture. I will just employ a Systematic Random Sampling method in choosing which countries/territories to include.

### *Data collection plan*

Secondary analysis – the use of data collected by other researchers or credible institutions or organizations

### *Protection of Human subjects*

In this method, human subjects are assured on their anonymity since I will be dealing with generalized data.

## **CONCLUSION**

The strength of my particular study over all studies I have reviewed in this paper is that the former will focus on cross-cultural comparisons of societies to explain alcoholism. Alcoholism is not anymore a personal problem, but a societal one, so we need to look at this problem in the societal level, to help us come up with policies that would aid us in the solution of the problem.

## REFERENCES

Caetano, R. (2003). Alcohol-Related Health Disparities and Treatment-Related Epidemiological Findings Among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics in the United States Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research, 2003 - meagherlab.tamu.edu <http://meagherlab.tamu.edu/M-Meagher/%20Health%20Psyc%20630/Readings%20630/Healthcompro/etoh%20disparities%2003.pdf>.

*DRIVEN magazine, Spring 1999* Mexican Hispanics & Native Americans Hardest Hit  
<http://www.madd.org/stats/0,1056,5981,00.html>

Eitzen, D.S. and Zinn, M.B. (1992). Social Problems 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Allyn and Bacon.

MSN Encarta online. Date accessed: 10 May 2007

Saitz, R., Lepore, M.F., Sullivan, L.M., Hortensia, A., & Samet, J.H. (1999). Alcohol Abuse and Dependence in Latinos Living in the United States Validation of the CAGE (4M) Questions *Arch Intern Med.* 1999;159:718-724. <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/159/7/718>

SciELO Public Health. (2002) Gender and alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems in Latin America and the Caribbean GDOFA USE - Rev Panam Salud Publica, 2002  
<http://www.scielosp.org>

Sim, M.O., Kerr-Corr F., Dalbenand, I., & Smaira, I. (2002). Alcoholic women and men: a comparative study of social and familial aspects and outcome.  
<http://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbp/v24n3/11029.pdf>.