

Alcohol abuse in the restaurant industry

[Food & Diet](#), [Alcohol](#)



Alcohol Abuse in the Restaurant Industry Shelsie Ann Lawrence University of West Florida Alcohol Abuse in the Restaurant Industry The purpose of this paper is to look at the high incidence of alcohol abuse in the restaurant industry and the possible causes. I will use studies done, but also incidences from my own personal experience of 15 years in the restaurant industry.

Background The American Psychological Association defines alcohol abuse as, “ a drinking pattern that results in significant and recurrent adverse consequences. ” (<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/alcohol-disorders.spx>).

These consequences can be lost work days, vehicle accidents, the breakdown and loss of relationships, serious illnesses. Alcohol abuse is extremely high in the restaurant industry. It is readily available and consistently used as a reward for good behavior. The consequences of alcohol abuse are much more tolerated. I worked for a chef that would come in to work hung over and late. She would clock in, and then sit down to have a beer to help the hangover. After the beer was consumed, it was time to make something to eat, all of this eating up the first 30 minutes of her work day.

She would not be punished for this behavior, because chances are, she was out drinking with one of our owners the night before. This scene would play itself out at least once a week. I also had a co-worker that was allowed to go home, due to a hangover. We will call her Sue. Sue was not much of a drinker. I would say, she probably went out once a month. Sue gets off work, and almost all her co-workers are at the bar drinking. At this particular restaurant, the kitchen and servers would close down the restaurant

between the hours of 10: 00pm and 11: 00 pm, this would put the time staff gets off work around 11: 00pm or midnight.

The bar would then stay open until 2: 00 am. To set the stage a bit more, it is also important to note a few other things about this particular restaurant. Staff was allowed to start drinking for free, any beer on tap and any wine sold by the glass, one hour prior to closing. Any other drinks, i. e. : cocktails, wine by the bottle, and bottled beers, were discounted half off. This restaurant did very well, and had minimal staff turnover, so they could afford to allow this. The staff dinner was served after the kitchen was cleaned and the wait staff done with all their tables.

Staff meal is also called “ FamilyMeal”, in the restaurant world. Family is what your co-workers become, in a restaurant. You spend more of your time with your co-workers, then anyone else. Restaurants are open on the days other people are off spending time with their families. You work every weekend together. You work every holiday together. You work every night together. Together you build contempt for those with “ normal jobs” This is all shared together. These are things that only your co-workers and other “ industry” people can understand. Most bars, in Seattle, when I cooked there, even offered “ industry” discounts.

Even if you aren't drinking at the place you work, you still get a discount. You are still awarded with alcohol. So, on this night, Sue gets off work to find all her co-workers finishing up dinner and pouring more rounds of drinks. She had a particularly good night and made a hundred dollars in tips. She has been working at this restaurant for six months and hasn't found herself fitting in yet. Fitting in, becoming friends with her co-workers, can afford

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many benefits. Servers are more likely to switch a shift with someone they like and know. They are more likely to help you out, by delivering food to your table, if you are someone they like.

She usually eats her dinner, then goes home, while the rest of the staff stays drinking and talking about their work night. They stay because the drinks are free; they stay because when they go home, if there is someone at home, they won't be awake to hear the stories of their work day. Sue decides to stay and have a drink, maybe get her co-workers to warm up to her a bit more. As soon as everyone sees that Sue is staying they cheer. Everyone has wanted to get to know her more, but feels that since she never stays after work, that she is probably stuck up.

Her manager buys her a shot, for a job well done that night at work. She pours a beer and immediately feels comfortable with everyone, partly because of the cheer, but also because she is now sitting down to her second drink of the evening. The evening progresses similarly to how it started. As more staff gets off work, more shots are bought. Other restaurant workers, friends of the staff are getting off work, and showing up. Pretty soon, the bar is filled with mainly employees and other restaurant workers. Before anyone notices, it is closing time. Now, if the owner of the restaurant was round, and chances are he was, he would allow the bartender to go home, or have a seat at the bar, and he would continue to serve the staff, with the front door locked, well after closing time. Tonight, the staff all drank until 4:00 am. Sue stayed right along with everyone. Sue comes to work the next day, green and doubled over. Everyone is setting up the dining room for dinner service later. Her co-workers look their normal tired selves, but keep in mind, they

drink heavily and often, this is just another day for them. Everyone see Sue and immediately cheers.

One server comments on how great it was that Sue hung out with everyone the night before. Sue runs straight for the bathroom. After some discussion, they decide that it is going to be a slow night, and everyone could probably pull together to cover Sues section. They send someone in to the bathroom to tell Sue she can go home. No one chastises her. She is not written up. She will miss getting paid for the evening, but it was going to be a slow night anyway. She goes home, goes back to bed, and wakes up the next day to go back to work, back to everything being normal.

This is a perfect example of the lack of consequences, in the restaurant industry, for alcohol abuse. Sue is practically rewarded for her bad behavior. By staying and drinking, she formed a bond with her co-workers. All her drinks were either free or heavily discounted, so she didn't feel any financial burden. When she showed up for work, unable to perform her duties, her co-workers pulled together to allow her to go home. According to them, they had been there before. One reason for such a high rate of alcohol abuse, in the restaurant industry is the high rate of young adults employed.

In a study done on young adult restaurant workers, 41% reported problem drinking. Young adults make up the majority of restaurant workers. Restaurant jobs offer the most pay, for the least amount of skill and time. Some restaurants require a degree to work in the kitchen, but no education is required to work as a server. If you are a student, and need a part time job, chances are you have worked, or do work as a server. College students consume large amounts of alcohol, with 31% meeting the criteria for alcohol

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abuse. (<http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/statssummaries/snapshot.aspx>) Serving positions allow for the flexibility needed for college students. You make the most pay, for the least amount of hours worked. The schedule is very flexible. If you need a night off to finish up homework, you can always call a co-worker to cover your shift. Chances are there is someone who needs money and can cover your shift. Even if you can't get someone to cover your shift, you can be sure that if you do have to work, you can get off work early if the restaurant is slow that night.

Less servers equal more tips for the rest of the staff, and like most servers, they always need more money. Restaurant workers live paycheck to paycheck. Most have no benefits, no health insurance, and are just one missed paycheck away from being completely broke. Out of the 10 restaurants I have worked in, only two offered health insurance. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median hourly wage of a food server in 2008, including tips, was \$8.01. The median yearly salary of a restaurant cook, in 2008 was \$21,990. There are exceptions to the rule, but the majority live at the poverty line.

When no vacations can be afforded, one can take a mini vacation at the bar. With no health insurance, no one is getting annual checkups. You can stay in denial about any health problems that might arise from alcohol abuse, because chances are you haven't been to a doctor in years. I had a co-worker that couldn't afford to go to the dentist to get a much needed filling. We can call him Bob. Bob had been complaining of an aching tooth for weeks. He just kept taking aspirin and upping his nightly alcohol intake to allow him to sleep through the night.

He knew eventually he would have to see a dentist, but he just didn't have the money to go see one at this point. In the end, he had to go to an emergency clinic to have his tooth pulled. He was put on pain killers and antibiotics. This all ended up costing him five hundred dollars. This was more than a week of pay for him. Bob was trying to save up to go on a vacation with his girlfriend. He hadn't taken a single day off of work in over a year. Now his prospects seemed even dimmer. He gets off work, pours a drink, and sits down to complain to his other co-workers.

They all understand. Only a few of them have taken time off that year. At the very least, they can all sit around, and have a few drinks together to ease the pain. They are depressed and find solace in each other. This is the point when alcohol abuse can become cyclical. Alcohol is a depressant. When a depressed person self medicates with alcohol they are only making the problem worse. Method The method used for this paper was through personal experience in the restaurant industry backed by research in journals and studies on alcohol abuse and restaurant workers. Findings

There are many causes for alcohol abuse; some of those being depression, the availability of alcohol, peer pressure and social factors, impulsiveness and low self esteem. Restaurants workers have alcohol readily available. They have discounts, and free drinks. They are awarded for good behavior with alcohol. The social factors that are prevalent in restaurant workers also play a role in alcohol abuse. Drinking becomes social with restaurant workers. It becomes their outlet. It is their way of bonding. They can definitely feel the peer pressure from co-workers to drink.

In my story of Sue, she felt that drinking with her co-workers was the only way she would be able to fit in. She wanted to be friends with everyone; she wanted the benefits of that friendship. They wanted her to drink with them. She knew that the only way to penetrate the group was by drinking with them after work. After a few times of hanging out, after work with everyone, it can easily become a habit. I would see people actually get upset and offended when someone that usually stayed for drinks, just went home after their shift. Results There is definitely a high rate of alcohol abuse amongst restaurant workers or many reasons; ranging from the social aspects, the availability of alcohol, the high stress work environment, the prevalence of poverty amongst the workers, the late hours and just the acceptance of heavy drinking among the staff and management. I don't see a change in the behaviors and attitudes of restaurant staff. I think this is a problem that will continue until stricter laws and rules are enforced. References ARTHUR H. FRIEDLANDER, D. , & STEPHEN. (2003). Alcohol abuse and dependence: Psychopathology, medical management and dental implications. J Am Dent Assoc. Peter E. Nathan, P. John Wallace, P. , Joan Zweben, P. , & and A. Thomas Horvath, P. (2010). Understanding Alcohol Use Disorders and Their Treatment. American Psychological Association . Rachel R. Doern, S. M. (2008). THE SOCIAL MEANINGS OF DRINKING: STRENGTHENING THE SOCIAL BONDS OF RESTAURANT EMPLOYEES. Advances in Consumer Research Volume 25 , 481-485. Roland S. Moore, P. C. (2009). Dimensions of Problem Drinking among Young Adult Restaurant Workers. AM J Drug Alcohol Abuse , 329-333. <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos162.htm> <http://www.ohsrep.org.au/hazards/fatigue-impairment/alcohol-and-work/index.cfm>