

By Mitchell Gordon on April 13, 2017



Some years ago, *Today Show* hosts Kathie Lee Gifford and Hoda Kotbe made “Booze-day Tuesday” a thing. Likewise for “Wines-day Wednesday” and “Thirsty Thursday.” All of a sudden the idea of having a glass of chardonnay or a martini at 10am was appropriate and even encouraged. Viewers, often stay-at-home moms, would call in to the show or tweet to say they were drinking along with Kathie Lee and Hoda while they folded laundry or after they dropped their kids at school.

From my perspective, it seemed harmless. Being a parent is hard. Being a stay-at-home parent is really hard. If Mom wants to have a little nip of zinfandel to treat herself after a stressful day, she should.

But now I’m not so sure. At my law firm, we are starting to notice a significant uptick in the number of divorces that are the result of addiction and, specifically, wives addicted to alcohol. Husbands (and a few wives in same-sex marriages) come into our office and tell us the same story: my wife was a successful professional who stepped away from her career to raise our children and now her drinking is out of control. It’s become so common that around our office we’ve started calling it “The Booze-Day Tuesday Effect,” a shorthand we use to describe the situation in which a casual glass of wine at lunch with other moms turns into a couple glasses at home alone and eventually a whole bottle of pinot before noon. We had a client who went to after-school pickup drunk and then drove away without her kids (and didn’t realize they weren’t in the car until she got home hours later). We had another client whose children called him because “Mommy was sleeping again.” When he got home, his wife was passed out. In the front yard. We’ve also been on the other side of it, with clients whose 5pm Happy Hour habit spiraled out of control to the point where their spouse had filed for divorce and was demanding full custody of the children with mom having only supervised visitation.

There is real evidence to support what we’ve noticed at our law office: that alcohol addiction among women is on the rise. According to studies cited in a February 2017 article in the *Washington Post*, the ratio of male to female drinking problems has shrunk from 3:1 to 1.2:1, meaning that men and women are starting to have alcohol dependencies/addictions with similar frequency. The *Post* article also cited a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fact sheet which noted that “approximately 12 percent of adult women report binge drinking three times a month.”

Why is this happening? George Koob, the director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, said in an interview that “women report depression and anxiety twice as much as men, and . . . depression and anxiety are often comorbid with addictions.” Furthermore, among women who drink, “alcohol use tends to escalate more quickly than with men.” Suddenly those cocktail napkins with sayings like, “Vodka is Cheaper than Therapy” and “Wine is Like Duct Tape: It Fixes Everything” seem less cheeky and more tragic.

A parent with addiction and alcoholism is always tragic, and even more so when that parent is the primary caregiver. This situation can not only put the children at risk, as in the examples I previously mentioned, but can further stress the family because now the working parent essentially has to function as a single parent, with no help or support from the addicted parent. In some cases the addicted parent may be granted only supervised visitation by the court; and oftentimes, the court may order that that parent undergo alcohol monitoring. Meanwhile, the working parent has to find a way to continue working and supporting the family while simultaneously taking care of the children. The only thing harder than parenting is single parenting. Unfortunately many of our clients have found themselves in this situation because of their spouse’s addiction.

It is not my intention to point fingers or blame anyone for their alcoholism. Addiction is a disease; it’s no one’s fault, and certainly not Kathie Lee’s or Hoda’s. But as a divorce attorney who has seen families torn apart by alcohol, I’m bothered by the cultural phenomenon that glamorizes day-drinking and puts “Mommy Juice” labels on wine glasses. Moms are tough and resourceful and capable. I should know; I have one and I’m also married to one. We should definitely be raising a metaphorical glass to them. But preferably not a goblet-sized margarita and preferably not at 10am.