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## **Experiences and opinions of youth towards alcohol abuse in and out of school in Oshikango, Ohangwena Region, Namibia**

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**Abstract.** Alcohol abuse has become a global concern as heavy episodes of drinking among most youth in African countries have become prevalent. The aim of the study was to explore experiences and opinions of youth towards alcohol abuse in and out of school in Oshikango, Ohangwena Region, Namibia. This study adopted qualitative research approach and exploratory research design. Data was collected using semi structured interviews from five focused groups of in and out of school youth. For this, purposive sampling was used to sample the participants. The data was manually transcribed and thematically analysed into key subthemes. The study showed that the youth engage in alcohol related activities due to factors such as peer pressure, socioeconomic status, environmental as well as political which makes them vulnerable at the expense of their health, development and wellbeing. Their involvement in alcohol abuse is largely influenced by social modelling, perceived norms, and self-efficacy as well as outcome expectancies. The findings indicated that the environmental dynamics play a major role in the young people's health, development and wellbeing and alcohol becomes a powerful risk factor for them to abuse. The study concludes that environment plays a big role in the way the youth learn and develop alcohol related behaviours. Furthermore, recommends that recreational facilities that are non-alcoholic to be extended to that part of the country.

**Keywords.** Alcohol abuse, experiences, Youth, School, Oshikango

### **Introduction and Problem Formulation**

Alcohol abuse has become a global concern as heavy episodes of drinking among most youth in African countries have become prevalent. As a psychoactive substance, alcohol abuse has been said to lead to death and diseases. Roerecke, Obot, Patra, and Rehm (2008) and Rehm, Baliunas, Borges, Graham, Irving, Kehoe, and Taylor (2010) accentuate that there is evidence pointing to high incidences of disability and death among the youth who are abusing alcohol. It has been reported that globally, alcohol accounted for 3.2% and 4% of death occurrences and diseases respectively (Swahn *et al.*, 2011). Makhubele (2012) also contends that 3.8% of the detrimental alcohol has led to death while 4.6% has resulted into diseases globally. For instance, Sereta, Amimo, Ouma and Ondimu (2016) accentuated that drug and alcohol abuse continued to pose serious behavioural social and health problems among children and adolescents. This shows how substance abuse has not only been detrimental to the health, development and wellbeing of the youth but also affected individuals of all classes and ages. Simango (2014)

enunciated that drugs such as dagga, tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, opiates and cocaine are substances that are commonly abused.

Substance use and abuse has increased progressively and they vary from country to country (Schonfeldt, 2007). In Africa, Algeria has been rated the highest country, which abuses substances with 71% followed by South Africa with 68% (WHO, 2010). Botes (2012) adds that about 60% of South Africa's citizens have been said to have a drinking problem while 40.8% of Zambia's adolescents have imbibed alcohol (Swahn *et al.*, 2011). However, it has emerged that South Africa has an overwhelming rise of substance abuse (Watson, Kehoe, Erzse, Compaoré, Debpuur, Nonterah, & Barker, 2020). In Kenya, the youth are the majority of drug users catering 40% between the ages of 15 to 64 years who have drunk at least one type of alcohol with about 13% being current alcohol consumers in all provinces except for the North Eastern Region (Sereta *et al.*, 2016).

Swahn *et al.* (2011, 2013) posit that alcohol use in sub Saharan Africa has been associated with early engagement in alcohol use, mental disorders, roads traffic accidents and injuries as well as unprotected sex, which is risky sexual behaviours. Namibia has not been an exceptional to this scourge which resulted in multiple social problems such as teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse related crimes, unprotected sex, Gender Based Violence, as well as strained parent child relationships (Lightfoot, Maree & Ananias, 2009, Mufune, 2008). A Ministry of Health and Social Services (MOHSS) study estimated 53.5% of youth between the ages of 13 and 30 having consumed alcohol in their lives (Barth & Hubbard, 2009). Swahn *et al.* (2011) explains that alcohol use corresponds with demographic attributes like "age, gender, income", living standards as well as attitudes and perceptions regarding the use of alcohol, alcohol access, peer imbibing, self-efficacy, exposure to alcohol through adverts and promotions. The phenomenon has led to the youth experiencing it at one point in their lives. Nyambura (2012) accentuated that a number of young people get addicted to drugs while in the process of experimenting consequently, posing danger to their health as well as creating difficulties for the social systems such as family and society. The aim of the study was to gain insight into the experiences and opinions about Alcohol Abuse among the in and out of school youth.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory that underpinned the study was Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which looked at how socio environmental and cognitive variables influenced the young people's involvement in alcohol abuse in Oshikango town. Predictors of behaviour are engraved in the cognitive determinants of SCT which range from self-efficacy, motivation, outcome expectancies and social support, (Bandura, 1986). On that note, the study looked at how the youth in and out of school acquire and maintain behaviour taking into consideration the social environment in which the behaviour is performed (Wayne, 2018). The study took into account the young people's personal past experiences which categorized their behaviour and were later influenced by reinforcements, expectations and expectancies of alcohol and their social, economic, environmental as well as political perspectives. Eslami, Norozi, Hajhosseini, Ramazani and Miri (2018) postulate acquiring and maintaining of addictive behaviours and patterns are grounded in SCT. These self-regulative functions are acquired through observations of what young people's models do. This is to say, young people's abusing of alcohol is influenced by social reinforcements that are both internal and external (Wayne, 2018).

Debvi, Khandelwal and Das (2017) allude that in SCT individuals learn and acquire behavioural and social competencies as well as cognitive skills by observing others. Thus, the study explained how the youth in and out of school regulate their behaviour through control and

reinforcements of others in order to achieve the desired behaviour of abusing alcohol over time. The application of the theory in this study was in order to “presume the young people’s expectancies and attitudes of their models” (Giovazolias & Themeli, 2014:78), in this case peers, parents and the community at large. The use and abuse of alcohol determined the immediate (positive) and not the future (negative) effects, which in turn facilitated the outcome (Alfonso & Dunn, 2007).

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopted the qualitative research approach to explore the experiences and opinions of youth towards alcohol abuse in and out of school in Oshikango, Ohangwena Region, Namibia. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) stipulate that qualitative study helps in the interpretation and denoting of individual meanings. The qualitative research approach explored and facilitated broad experiential descriptions and analysis of alcohol abuse amongst youth within their natural and social context thereby allowing interactions that entailed realities of the youth in and out of school. The researchers opted for exploratory research design. This design assisted in uprooting different opinions of youth towards alcohol abuse in Oshikango. The study used semi-structured interviews with five groups (focused discussions) of in and out of school youth. This allowed researchers to make follow up questions and clarify the experiences while taking note of the verbal and nonverbal cues. Semi-structured interviews bargain insights into respondents’ memories and explanations of why things have come to be what they are, as well as descriptions of current problems and aspirations (Stake, 2003). The researchers facilitated the interviews by first asking the primary question and then employed probing questions where necessary (Brink, 2006).

The focused group discussions comprised of 5 groups of which 4 were youth in school and one was out of school youth. The groups comprised of 7 to 10 participants of which was 100 % participation and they were an hour long. The study used judgemental sampling also known as purposive, as the youth were seen to construct a robust view of the phenomenon under study from their perspective. According to Creswell (2014), this is an intent selection of individuals and sites where researchers intend to gain an understanding of the central phenomenon. While in the field, the researchers interpreted and analysed data after each interview so as to capture the themes that preliminarily emerged and informed subsequent interviews. The data was manually transcribed where the emerged themes were later thematically analysed into key and sub themes. The researchers used the five steps of data analysis as resonated by Creswell and Creswell (2018) which include organizing and preparing data, reading and coding, generate descriptions of patterns and themes as well as visualizing, representing and displaying data.

### **Findings**

The presentation of the results were done through key and sub themes substantiated by verbatim statements and relevant literature where necessary. This was done in order to buttress the youth’s views on alcohol abuse.

### **Peer Pressure**

All the participants attributed their experiences and opinions of engagement of young people in alcohol abuse to peer pressure. In line with this, National Youth Council Namibia [NYCN] (2014) made a proclamation that peer pressure contributes to the prevalence of alcohol abuse among Namibian youth. In this study, the findings of NYCN were reaffirmed. In the focus group discussion, one of the participants shared the following:

*“We do it because of peer pressure and to be seen as a ‘cool’. It can also be through bad friends within the gang.”*

Another participant added that:

*“Ahh...I would say, young people actually start the consumption of alcohol sometimes based on friends’ influence. Sometimes I also do that because I want to be famous in school, like I am well-known for drinking alcohol.”*

Other said:

*“We drink alcohol just for fun, enjoyment, to keep us busy, not to feel left out. Sometime is just having money to spend on alcohol, to feel cool... Because if you are with your friends you will not feel nice buying juice. Just...you want to look like Mr. Nice guy”.*

The participants attributed peer pressure as a tool used for a sense of belonging, popularity and desire to escape social problems. This view upheld the views of Wallace (2013) who indicated young people indulge into alcohol abuse due to the pressure they receive from their peers. Moreover, Giovazolias and Themeli (2014) explained that as far as alcohol consumption is concerned, it has been shown that, while higher actual levels among peers are related to higher consumption by a member of the group, the subjective estimation concerning the norm is a more powerful predictive variable. This means that peers model through social enforcement of behaviours which are non-conforming.

### **Poverty and Unemployment**

There was a consensus among participants with regard to poverty as being one of the contributing factors as to why young people engage in alcohol related activities. In 2012, Namibia Statistic Agency (2012) reported that Oshikango town has a significant number of people living in poverty due to unemployment and inequalities experienced. It is worth noting that, it is within this region that records high usage of homebrewed alcohol consumption (Hasheela *et al.*, 2019). During the focus group discussion, one of the participants indicated that:

*“Poverty leaves us with no choice but to engage in alcohol related activities. You leave with a grandma who is physically disabled and is unable to provide for the family except for her pension money. So the blessers help us a lot as they would buy groceries and food for the family and when the grandma asks where you got the groceries and food from, you lie to her that you did a piece work somewhere. But we sometimes earn money through holiday jobs though rare”.*

The Namibia Statistics Agency (2012) further reports that Ohangwena region is one of the seven regions in the country with above 28.7 percent national rate of incidence poverty rates. The report substantiate what the participants are experiencing on the ground, which inevitably results in young people sourcing for older men’s assistance in rescuing the family basket crisis. Addison *et al.* (2008) reported that Namibia is hit with socioeconomic challenges which includes poverty and high rate of unemployment among youth ranging from 67% for those ages between 15 to 19 and 59% for those 20 to 24 years respectively putting youth at risk of abusing alcohol. Thus, unemployment and poverty are key socio economic issues that necessitates alcohol abuse.

### **Accessibility and Availability of alcohol outlets**

All participants agreed that alcohol is easily accessed and available for young people within the homestead especially home brew which is normally given to them by elders. The production of alcohol (homebrew) has blinded people from negative reality, which created an un conducive environment for families to bond (Makhubele, 2012). Participants consensually explained that young people are introduced to alcohol drinking by grand parents, friends and shebeen owners. Hill et al. (2010) posit, dependence and abuse of alcohol puts disregarded youth with social conventions at higher risk of abusing alcohol due to poorly managed families and environments. One participant noted that:

*“Alcohol drinking starts at a very young age and the environment normally contributes. Young people are introduced to alcohol through observations from parents and other adults in the community”.*

Another participant said:

*“Drinking alcohol has become habitual and alcohol is easily accessible both in villages and in town”.*

This was validated by the observations during data collection and sightseeing. The availability and accessibility of alcohol outlets has resulted into the youth drinking 24 hours. This was substantiated by several authors who have reported that there is a clear association of alcohol abuse with availability and accessibility amongst the youth (World Drug Report, 2012, Matlakala & Makhubele, 2019, Mafa and Makhubele, 2020). Moreover, Kauaria, Kaundjua and Mfuno, (2015) accentuate that alcohol availability at social functions and drinking outlets enhance its abuse as well as indulgent of risk behaviours.

### **Role Models**

Participants elaborated that parents introduce young people to substances when they ask them to help in the selling and serving of alcohol. Young people seem to be imbibing alcohol by what they would term “role models”. These models are central to individual people such as celebrities, friends or family members (Sarafino, 2006). One of the participants echoed that:

*“We drink alcohol with “cool Uncles”, parents and friends. One person can drink one create (12 x 750mls), say from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm. If shebeens or bars are closed, we move to pubs which only close in the early hours around 05:00 hours in the morning. This is normally on Fridays and Sundays. We have Sunday sessions of alcohol and braai. But everyday young people drink alcohol”.*

Most youth are influenced by their communities into imbibing alcohol and have access to it within the community (National Youth Council of Namibia, 2012; Barth & Hubbard, 2009). It is possible that someone may find out, for example, that consuming alcohol leads to relaxation by observing the positive effects that occur when their parents consume alcohol after a strenuous day at work (Giovazolias and Themeli, 2014).

### **Porosity in Law and Policy Implementation**

Porosity in the policy implementation was one of the concerns raised by participants. Obot (2013) avers that the alcohol industry have policies which overlook public health and the effects thereof as they are designed in such a way that they take control over the environment in which they operate from. In this study, participants raised their discomfort with policies that

regulates the drug industry. Participants held a view that due to porousness of this policies, alcohol abuse emanate. One of the participants echoed that:

*“The production of alcohol should be burned because it is destroying our future. The government should limit the amount of alcohol, which is imported, and raise the tax tariffs on alcohol”.*

Other said:

*“Limiting the beer which is brewed for Namibians will help in changing the behaviour”.*

In addition, another participant stated that law enforcement is challenged when it comes to “Tombo” (traditional brew) as its regulation does not appear in the Liquor Act no. 6 of 1998 of Namibia:

*“Within villages, the Liquor Act don’t apply..... should be. There is no provision of for tombo license in the Namibian Liquor Act. Otherwise it is difficult”.*

The above showcases that modern legislations do not make an exception for traditional brews. This was also noted by Obot (2013) who enunciated that there has been lack of alcohol policies enforcement in Africa especially when it comes to producers and marketers of the product (Obot, 2013). This goes to show that most consumed traditional brewed beer have not been officially recorded in the majority of African government records. This entails that implementing the law and bring the culprits to book is a challenge for law enforcers. As such, Babor, Babor, Caetano, Casswell, Edwards, Giesbrecht, and Graham (2010) and WHO (2011) indicated that there should be strict measures related to alcohol availability, market control as well as promotion can be put across to reduce alcohol related problems. However, Obot (2013) noted that there are a very few African countries which have policies in place to regulate the production, distribution and consumption of alcohol.

### **Marketing Strategy**

Beauty is used in trading alcohol and as a marketing strategy. The study indicate that shebeen owners use beautiful girls as a marketing technique to grow their business. This is done by offering them free alcohol with the aim of the female youth to attract more customers especially the blessers’. Being offered free drinks through an alcohol company representative significantly increased reports of current alcohol use, drunkenness and drinking problem (Swahn *et al.*, 2011). In light of that, some participants indicated that:

*As it is the shebeen/ bar owner will buy alcohol to one beautiful lady and will be told that if she brings other beautiful ladies she will get free alcohol. The bar owner knows if at his shebeen there are a lot of beautiful girls, then more men will go to his shebeen and they will buy more alcohol”.*

Another participant indicated that:

*“Let’s say, I arrange 3 girls for the older men, I am likely to walk away with a N\$ 1000 which is a starter for my beers or these older men will buy me alcohol in return; so I will have alcohol for free”.*

Alcohol marketing has been one of the factors that influence risk behaviours among youth. Swahn *et al.* (2011:2) stipulates “exposure to alcohol advertising and ownership of alcohol promotional items such as T-shirts, lighters, matches, hats or sunglasses with an alcohol brand name on it, increases the risk of alcohol use among adolescents”. The participants

explained that beautiful girls are normally used for the promotion and distribution of alcohol. This shows how unregulated the Liquor Act no.6 of 1998 when it comes to marketing and promotional activities of alcohol. Such a gesture attract young people making alcohol the centre of their socioeconomic condition. The phenomenon of targeting young women to promote alcohol has been on the increase in Africa (Obot, 2013).

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Overall the environment plays a big role in the way the youth learn and develop alcohol related behaviours. Their possessed personal factors of self-beliefs as well as outcome expectancies, which resonated from aspirations of their social systems that include thoughts, feelings and actions, enables them to facilitate control over their psychomotor with regard to alcohol. There should be limited alcohol production and import in the country and that prices and tax should be very high. There was also a cry to have all liquor outlets (regardless of its status) to open and close at the same time (10:00 to 22:00 hours). This will help to bring sanity to the town, give the youth ample time to focus, be productive and enhance quality family relationships. The absence of recreational facilities in the area also played a role to some extent and the youth recommended recreational facilities that are non-alcoholic to be extended to that part of the country.

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