

RELIGIOUS LEADERS PERSPECTIVE ON THE EFFECTS OF 'HITTING THE BOTTLE HARD' AMONGST THE YOUTH IN MUSINA TOWN, LIMPOPO PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

Binge drinking has enormous effects on the youth and the hardships reverberates beyond an individual, felt by family and community at large. There are numerous effects that are associated with excessive drinking including, risky sexual behaviour, increased risk of sexual transmitted diseases and socio-economic challenges. Therefore, this study aimed as exploring and describing the effects of hitting the bottle hard amongst the youth in Musina Town in Limpopo province. The researchers used qualitative research approach to explore the effects of alcohol abuse. The type of research used was a mixture of exploratory and descriptive in nature. In particular, multiple case study design was used. The study constituted of church leaders and they were purposively chosen because they are custodians of moral values and conducts which abhor excessive use of alcohol within their communities. Besides purposeful chosen, their availability and convenience were considered. Data was collected through structured interviews and thematic data analysis method was used. Ecosystems theory was used to guide the study. It was discovered that those who hit the bottle hard are at risk of unsafe sexual intercourse, workplace absenteeism and neglect their family responsibility and involve themselves in unlawful acts. As such, the study conclude that youth experience tremendous effects after they intoxicate themselves and therefore, this study recommends that the programmes and services targeting young people should be developed and be contextualised as per their needs.

Keywords: Religious leaders, Perception, Effects, Alcohol abuse, Youth.

INTRODUCTION

The effects of alcohol abuse on youths vary and unbearable and these include: damage to the property, involvement in road accidents, risky behaviours such as rape and engaging in physical fights. In support of that several authors (Martin 2001; Miller, Levy, Spicer, & Taylor 2006; Howard, Griffin & Boekeloo 2008) all concur that the probability of youth taking part in criminal exercises happens when they are intoxicated with alcohol. Notwithstanding falling prey to criminal activities, young people are additionally in danger of being exploited, for example, they are sometimes given hard labour, such as digging graves, making bricks, carrying cements and be paid with alcohol. In support of this, Abbey, Clinton-Sherrod, McAuslan, Zawacki and Buck (2003); and Connor, You and Casswell (2009) contended that the social setting in which alcohol is

consumed implies that not exclusively are young drinker at risk of behaving in a risky way, they are additionally at an expanded risk or danger of turning into the casualties of alcohol fuelled crimes. For example, young people can sell their household products in an attempt to secure money in order to intoxicate themselves during drinking sessions.

Excessive drinking is responsible for increased alcohol illness and deaths on users. Evidently, Stevenson (2005) states that binge drinking has an effect on the rise of blood pressure and its continuation will worsen the situation and make it chronic. High blood pressure can lead to many other health problems including kidney disease, heart disease and strokes. Whereas, Baliunas, Rehm, Irving and Shuper (2010) discovered that those who engage in heavy, episodic drinking (binge drinking) had double the risk of contracting HIV infection as compared to non-binge drinkers of HIV infection. With that said, the researchers believe that for the fact that people under the influence of alcohol have a high risk of engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse, they raise HIV and rape cases in this country. Similarly, several authors (Naimi *et al.* 2003; and Prager *et al.* 2007) have documented that alcohol abuse is not only linked to Sexual Transmitted Diseases but also leads to unwanted teenage pregnancy and abortion. To that end, this study sought to explore and describe religious leaders' perspectives on the effects of 'hitting the bottle hard' amongst the youth in Musina Town, Limpopo Province.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Psychosocial Effects of Alcohol Abuse

Donovan (2004) avers that drinkers often use alcohol as a means of coping with stress, anxiety, or depression. Donovan (2004) further acknowledges that few studies of adolescents focused on negative affectivity as a motivation to start drinking. On the opposite, Armstrong and Costello (2002) assert that children who later become problem drinkers have been found to have high rates of school dropout and poor achievement, rebelliousness, antisocial behaviour, aggressive behaviour, delinquency, and family problems.

Robertson, David and Rao (2003:6) content that "early risks, such as out-of-control aggressive behaviour, may be seen in a very young child. If not addressed through positive parental actions, this behaviour can lead to additional risks when the child enters school". This denotes that behaviour modification is needed earlier whilst the child interacts with his or her peers at school. Robertson and colleagues further note that reason for problems such as academic failure, rejection by peers and punishment by teachers are the results of aggressive behaviour in school. In other words, alcohol does not only have an effect on the behaviour but has also effect on social exclusion on youth. Again, genetic studies have shown that antisocial behaviour and antisocial personality disorder share common genetic conditions with alcohol and drug use disorders (Kendler, Prescott, Myers, & Neale 2003). This is in line with the view of Lloyd and Anthony (2003) who linked alcohol consumption with inadequate supervision of children during late childhood as well as in early adolescence.

Economic Effects of Alcohol Abuse

According to Makhubele (2012:24), “alcohol has diverse influences on people’s economic status. The effect of alcohol on poverty is more than through just the money spent on it and the converse influence of poverty on alcohol, has far more to it than found in the absurd explanation that heavy consumption is the result of the harshness of poor lives”. It could be deduced that unemployment is associated with an increase in alcohol abuse because some individuals drink while on duty. As a result, some end up losing their jobs. Many people are poor, unemployed and depend on social grants, yet some social grant is spent on alcoholic beverages which also contribute to high rates of alcohol abuse. It should be noted that in South Africa, some families rely on grants as their main or a substantial source of income. Evidently, Nkosi (2011) avers that social grants are sole source of income for many poor families. As such, substance abusers use the social grant money to feed their addiction and little goes to maintain their family, and this aggravates poverty. The situation is even worse in the area where there is no social worker who is responsible for substance abuse programmes and services (Setlalentoa *et al.* 2015).

According to Lynch and Kaplan (2000), levels of education, income and accessibility of alcohol are important markers of socio-economic position. Where there is an easy access of alcohol, the prevalence of alcohol misuse is high among residents of disadvantaged communities. Morojele, Parry and Brooks (2009) also state that structural factors such as poverty and unemployment make substance abuse problems devastating and difficult to solve in poorer and marginalised communities. Of concern are the negative socio-economic effects that are experienced by the drinkers, families and society. Setlalentoa *et al.* (2015) reported that youths as young as 18 years of age are at risk because they abuse alcohol. They drop out of school before Grade 10 to do seasonal work on farms. On their return from seasonal work, they drink their salary or wage excessively until they finish it.

Risky Sexual Behaviours

Alcohol plays a powerful role in risky sexual behaviours, including unwanted, unintended, and unprotected sexual activities, and sex with multiple partners. Alcohol is increasingly being recognised as a key determinant of risky sexual behaviour and, as a result, an indirect contributor to the transmission of HIV (Fritz, Woelk, Bassett, McFarland, Routh & Tobaiwa 2002) although this relationship is complex, experts conclude that further research is needed to establish causality (Parry, Rehm, Poznyak & Room 2009).

The overwhelming utilisation of alcohol is additionally connected with expanded dangers of risky sexual behaviour including having various sexual partners and unprotected sex. Thus, other researchers such as Naimi, Lipscomb, Brewer, and Gilbert, (2003); Prager, Steinauer, Foster, Darney and Drey (2007) indicate that the expanded rate of risky sexual behaviour is related with Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), pregnancy and abortion. It could be deduced that overwhelming drinking is responsible for STDs because when people are intoxicated, alcohol affect their decision making processes. Additionally, Field, Caetano, and Nelson (2004) have noticed that drinking alcohol increases the risk of committing violence towards a partner. As it is, it could be hypothesized that intimate partner violence is more severe and more inclined to bring about physical damage when the culprit has consumed alcohol.

A global meta-analysis of 10 studies demonstrated that those who consumed alcohol before or at the time of sexual intercourse had an 87% increased risk for HIV infection (Baliunas, Rehm, Irving & Shuper 2010). They additionally attest that those who engaged in heavy, episodic drinking (binge drinking) had double the risk of contracting HIV infection as compared to non-binge drinkers of HIV infection. According to Mbulaiteye, Ruberantwari, Nakiyingi, Carpenter, Kamali, Whitworth (2000); and Fisher, Cook, Sam, Kapiga (2008), a number of studies have reported that there is a relationship between alcohol and HIV sero-positivity (giving positive results in a test blood for the presence of a virus) in sub-Saharan Africa. Kalichman, Simbayi, Kaufman, Cain and Jooste (2007) found that any alcohol use and greater quantities of alcohol use were strongly associated with the risk of HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study the ecosystems theory was used. The researchers used the ecosystems lens to analyse the religious leaders' perspectives on the effects of alcohol amongst youth in their environment. This theory was used because of its ability to provide rich understanding of the interaction between the person's experiences and their environmental systems (Ahmed, Amer & Killawi (2017). Mattaini and Meyer (2002:16) avers that ecosystems theory "views individuals and environments as constantly interacting with and adapting to one other in a series of "interconnected transactional networks". In other ways, when one is an alcohol abuser, the family will suffer because he or she might not fulfil his or her socioeconomic obligations. Hence, Siporin (1980) avows that an ecosystem consists of people, their life situations, and the well-functioning or dysfunctioning behaviour patterns that result from their interaction. In most instance, alcohol abusers associate themselves with other alcohol users. Evidently, Gale *et al.* (2012) stipulate that peer effect is an essential determinant of whether, how frequently, how much, and under what conditions an adolescent will drink. To that end researchers developed a keen interest in other to understand from the religious leaders' perspectives, what kind of effects does youth experience from subsystems that they consistently interact with. However, Ross-Sheriff and Husain (2004) indicated that subsystems such as school and family might act as competing socialization agents that may eventually lead young people to struggle to negotiate between the two. For example, peer might tell the young person that to be seen as man, one needs to be engage in sexual activities and while the family abhors sexual debut at the young age. The young person experiencing stress, might resolve to alcohol and end up being involved in reckless behaviours due to his or her inability to negotiate amongst various agents of socialisation.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers used qualitative research approach as they sought to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting their context and gathering information personally (Creswell 2010). Exploratory and descriptive were used in this study. Exploratory was chosen due to its ability to explore an area where little is known (Kumar 2014) while descriptive was chose to describe the religious leaders' perspectives on the effects of excessive use of alcohol by youth.

Focus group interviews were conducted with church leaders from different Christian affiliations. Participants were purposively chosen because they are custodians of moral values and conducts which abhor excessive use of alcohol within their communities. Besides purposeful chosen, their availability and convenience were considered. Researchers considered that besides them being church leaders, church leaders are also parents in their homes, they might be in the best position to know the effects because they engage with youth and parents at different levels and platforms. Thematic analysis was used in this study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:4), “Thematic Analysis is a rarely-acknowledged, yet widely-used qualitative analytic method within social science arena.” As such, thematic analysis was used because of its flexibility and ability to assist in developing well-structured themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Increased risk for sexual intercourse

Some of the participants, during the focus group interviews, acknowledged that young people are not only victims of unplanned pregnancy, they acknowledged that the two cannot be divorced as they stated that, when young people are intoxicated, they engage in risky sexual behaviours and contract sexually transmitted diseases. Some of the responses they gave were as follows:

“They do not carry condoms with them when they go to the taverns or alcohol spots, they only take money for alcohol... They will end up being infected with AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases.”

In corroboration, another participant echoed that:

“The age group that gets pregnant, is as a result of alcohol. It is not always that a girl could be pregnant and not consume alcohol.”

From the findings, religious leaders pointed out that young people when they are intoxicated they become irrational and they even neglect safe precautionary measures and, as a result, they contract Sexually Transmitted Diseases. This upheld the views of Adolescent Substance Use (2011) that state that adolescents who are sexually active and use substances have high rates of unintended pregnancy and of repeat unplanned pregnancy as compared to their counterparts who are not using substances. On the other hand, Naimi, Lipscomb, Brewer, and Gilbert (2003); Prager, Steinauer, Foster, Darney and Drey (2007) are all in agreement that risky sexual behaviours relate to Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), pregnancy and abortion. Given the fact that South Africa has legalised abortion, high rates of abortions are skyrocketing because young people with the favour of fun, pay less attention to safe precautions. From researchers’ observation, young people are, in most cases, worried about pregnancy and they forget that they contract other sexual transmitting diseases. Some taverns, especially those in rural areas, do not have condoms for their customers. As exposed by participants, young people when they go to taverns they only think of caring money and others are not important because they believe in withdrawal and morning after pills. It could

be deduced that overwhelming drinking is responsible for STDs and unplanned pregnancy because when people are intoxicated they loosen up.

Workplace Absenteeism

Majority of the participants during focus group stated that young people who are using alcohol absent themselves to work because they are having hangovers. The following were responses given during focus group:

“We, whom travel to work by bus in the morning, see it all. Some would dodge work and they are not even ashamed to say they are not going to work.”

This finding affirms findings of Anderson (2012) and Bacharach, Bamberger, Biron (2010) who both discovered that heavy drinking, increases the risk of illness and absenteeism for those at work. Absenteeism and illness are also coupled with late arrival from work because those who were indulging into alcohol slept late and hangover does them no good. As such, Bacharach *et al.*, (2010) stipulated that episodic heavy drinking result in those who are at work place faces disciplinary actions while others are suspended from work because of late arrival and absenteeism. Inevitably, as previously noted, Harold (2001) states that alcohol- dependent people and heavy drinkers have more sick-leave days than other employees have and thus cost their employers considerable amounts. However, other employers tend to retrench or fire those who are dependent to alcohol to maximise productivity. For this reason, alcohol abuse will give birth to both low productions in factories and unemployment respectively.

According to Zawaira (2009) in Africa, poverty in most cases is the challenge experienced by alcohol users. Evidently, Harold (2001) assert that unemployment and heavy drinking tend to go together. This now goes back to the above raised fact that poverty strikes families because breadwinners are drinking their money instead of looking after their families. When these employees face suspension or disciplinary hearing, they stop receiving money and they cannot maintain their family. Evidently, as already discussed, Harold (2001) asserts that unemployment and heavy drinking tend to go together. The causative effect can work both ways: heavy drinkers have a higher risk of losing their jobs but becoming unemployed often leads to increased drinking. In other words, alcohol users indulge in binge drinking to deal with the stress of losing their jobs.

Neglecting Family Responsibilities

Substantial majority of the participants stated that those who are indulging into alcohol do not maintain their family financially. Some of the response that were raised are as follows:

“People who drink alcohol do not support their families financially, and alcohol is expensive, and they drink every day.”

The study depicts that people spend significant money to purchase alcohol and, as a result, they neglect their families. When a breadwinner fails to take responsibilities, family suffers indirectly as they fall into poverty line. This relationship was also seen by Zawaira (2009:4) who postulated

that “poverty is one of the problems experienced by people who abuse alcohol in Africa”. On the other hand, the researchers are of the view that those who are unemployed and receive foster and children’s grant, spent substantial amount of money on alcohol and beneficiaries (children) suffers the consequences. Evidently, Setlalentoa *et al.*, (2015) discovered that in an area where there is no social worker, alcohol users spend their children’s grant on alcohol. This should be a wake-up call to Department of Social Development that areal social workers should be placed in rural areas to ensure that social security money is used for relevant purposes. Alcohol invades families and leaves them to end up in poverty, and families break up and result in in child-headed households.

Unlawful Acts

Substantial majority of the participants during focus group echoed that those who are intoxicated fall prey to criminal activities. The following are some of the responses that they made:

“Intoxicated youth rob people, rape and steal...They get hit by cars, play truant from school or end up smoking nyaope.”

Alcohol abuse is closely linked to violent crimes such robbery, and rape. Notwithstanding criminal activities findings, young people often loses their lives when they are intoxicated. When people are intoxicated they start to be irrational and engaged into irrational decisions and criminal activities become a result. Nonetheless, while others commit crime while they are intoxicated, others are unable to feed their alcohol addiction and, as a result, they end up stealing and selling property just to quest their alcohol thirst. This shows that criminal activities can be married to death as others can be shot while committing robbery. This finding upheld the views of Fergusson and Horwood (2000) who postulate that alcohol put youths at expanded dangers of a scope of violations including, namely: brutality, vandalism, sexual wrongdoings, accomplice violence and property violations. Those who commit the above criminal activities faces jails while others get suspended sentences. However, society cannot rejoice to lose future leaders because of actions which were taken when people were intoxicated because other obtain criminal records.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that after indulging into alcohol, young people engages in reckless sexual practices without thinking of the repercussions. Those who are employed end up absenting themselves from work due to hangovers. In the same vein they ignore their family responsibilities which results in their own families facing unpleasant situations such as starvation. In an attempt to deal with their daily impediments, they also resolve to unlawful acts wherein they commit robbery just to feed their addiction. Over and above, as much as society sees alcohol as a major contributing factor to the economy, the repercussions outweighs the positivity that the community sees. The programmes and services targeting young people should be developed and be contextualised as per their needs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was wholly funded by the National Commission on Research Science and Technology of Namibia and the National Research Foundation of South Africa.

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