

SELECTED FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ALCOHOLISM AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MWIMBI DIVISION, KENYA

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Abstract

Alcoholism has devastating effects especially on students' academic achievement and future career prospects. Therefore, this study sought to determine the factors contributing to the high rate of alcohol consumption among secondary school students in Mwimbi Division, Kenya. The study employed the descriptive survey research design on a sample size of 320 Form three students from secondary schools within Mwimbi division. Questionnaires were utilized as research instruments for collecting the necessary data while data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 14.0. The study findings indicated that pertinent factors including stress, alcoholic background, lack of religious morals, excess pocket money, broken families, low price of alcohol, availability of alcohol, peer influence and unpleasant school condition contributed to alcoholism among secondary school students. Hence, to mitigate alcoholism among students, it was recommended that school conditions be improved, parents desist from providing excessive pocket money to students, the government to regulate the sale of alcohol and religious institutions to make efforts in instilling religious values among the students.

Keywords: Alcoholism, Alcohol

Introduction

Alcohol consumption is not only legal but also socially acceptable in Kenya and the country is now slowly waking up to the reality of the growing alcohol problem among its citizens including school going children. The problem with alcohol is that it gradually takes control of its consumers who eventually become alcoholic; a state in which a person develops an overwhelming desire for the mental and physical effects of alcohol (Connie,

1994). Unfortunately, the permissive culture in the contemporary society has not put down stringent measures curbing the youth especially those who are still establishing life and career foundation from alcoholism. For instance, in the United States of America young people try alcohol because to them it is not a drug but a drink that causes them to become more talkative, confident and socially at ease (Cobb, 2004). Besides, majority of students in the United States of America use alcohol and are likely to continue with the drinking habits into adulthood (Neuback, 2007). Likewise, students in Kenya have been reported to indulge in alcohol and drug abuse (Chesang, 2013) a practice that has become an issue of concern to the government and local communities. Generally, the media through advertisements is purported to pose a great influence of alcoholism among young people. Still, the traders who cash in against cheap local brews further encourage alcohol consumption among vulnerable populations including the poor and young people (Chireshe, 2006). Technically, the effects of alcoholism are diverse and transcend beyond the individual alcoholic to affect relatives, friends, neighbours and the society alike. These effects may include accidents caused by alcoholic drivers; lost man hours due to hangovers; misappropriation of family income as well as resources; the spread of sexually transmitted ailments including HIV/AIDS; damage of internal body organs such as the liver; family conflicts; declining grades at school for students; antisocial behaviour among others (Wekesa & Waudu, 2013; Githui, 2011). Particularly, alcoholism has devastating effects on students' academic achievement and future career prospects thus, hampering the government's efforts towards realization of vision 2030 in Kenya. Essentially, school going children need exceptional protection from alcoholism because they are the future professionals and any continued national development depends on skilled manpower (Githui, 2011). Therefore, determination of factors contributing to alcoholism among secondary school students in Mwimbi Division, Kenya may assist school administrators, parents, school counsellors and education stakeholders in formulating appropriate policies and strategies for eradication of the vice among the students.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to determine selected factors contributing to alcoholism among secondary school students in Mwimbi Division, Kenya.

3. Metodology

The study employed the descriptive survey research design in determining the factors contributing to alcoholism among secondary school students in Mwimbi Division, Kenya. The target population constituted

6,788 students from the 27 secondary schools within the Division. The form three students were purposively selected for inclusion in the sample because this was deemed to be the most stable class since form one and form two students were still adjusting to the school environment while form four students were busy preparing for the final examinations. Stratified random sampling was then used to select 320 form three students from an accessible population of 1,697 Form three students in the 27 secondary schools. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the respondents. The reliability of the questionnaires was improved through a pilot study and a reliability coefficient of 0.8499 obtained by use of Chronbach Alpha Coefficient was considered appropriate. Permission for data collection was obtained from the National Council of science and technology after which the selected schools were visited by the researcher for the purpose of administering the questionnaires to the sampled students. Thereafter, the completed questionnaires were collected, edited, coded and entered into the computer for data analysis by use of SPSS version 14.0. The analyzed data were interpreted and a report written with regard to factors contributing to alcoholism among secondary school students.

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the results of the study and the discussion of those results.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the respondents

Basic attributes of the study participants including gender, age, residence and school type were determined. With regard to the gender of the respondents, female participants constituted 59% while the male made up 41% of all the respondents. The difference in gender composition of the respondents may be attributed to the probability sampling technique used to obtain the sample. The participants that were aged between 13 years and 15 years made up 5% of all the respondents, those between 16 years and 18 years comprised 88% while 7% were aged between 19 years and 21 years. It appears that majority of the respondents were aged between 16 years and 18 years which is within the range of the average age of form three students in Kenya. The residents of participants were categorized as rural and urban. The participants who came from urban setup comprised 51% while those from a rural setup constituted 49%. Based on the composition of participants by place of residence, it may be inferred that schools in Mwimbi Division proportionately serve students from rural and urban regions. Participant composition by school type was determined and the results indicated that 44% were from girls schools, 41% from mixed schools and 15% from boys

schools. The disparity in participant composition by school type blamed on the random sampling technique employed for the study.

4.2 Factors Contributing to Alcoholism among Secondary School Students

Information on table 1 represents respondents' views about their level of agreement with given statements on factors contributing to alcoholism among secondary school students. The responses were valued on a 5 level likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Not Sure (NS), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA).

Table 1: Factors Contributing to Alcoholism among Secondary School Students

Statement	SA	A	NS	D	SD
Alcoholism among students is caused by lack of religious morals	60.8	15.4	8.7	8.7	6.4
Alcoholic backgrounds make students to consume alcohol	55.3	15	8.6	11.8	9.3
Alcoholism among students is influenced by excess pocket money	51.4	13.2	11.3	8	16.1
Alcoholism in secondary schools is caused by low cost of alcohol	44.4	22.4	19.2	7.7	6.4
Alcoholism in secondary schools is enhanced by broken families	50.3	9.7	17.1	12.3	10.6
Alcoholism is caused by unpleasant school conditions	49.8	18.4	10.2	11.8	9.8
Peer influence is a cause of alcoholism in schools	60.4	21.1	8.9	5.8	3.8
Alcoholism among students is caused by ready availability of alcohol	53.5	17.2	10.5	12.1	6.7
Stress is the main reason for alcoholism among secondary school students	59	19.7	5.4	8.6	7.3

The information on Table 1 indicates that majority of the respondents comprising 76.2% either agreed or strongly agreed that alcoholism among secondary school students was caused by a lack of religious morals. This implies that adherence to religious morals and principles may mitigate alcoholism among students. Similar to these findings, Githui (2011) suggests that a lack of ethics and personal principles may influence alcohol consumption and hence fuel a drinking culture in communities.

Students from backgrounds where alcohol consumption is a norm were regarded by 70.3% of the study participants as most likely to consume alcohol. This may be attributed to familiarity with alcohol by the students who grow up in alcoholic homes and surroundings. For such students, alcohol consumption is part of life and is conceptualized as any other drink like water, tea or soda. This finding confirms the hypothesis that children of alcohol abusers are likely to have unrelenting abuse problems than the children of non abusers (Githui, 2011).

Most respondents comprising 64.6% agreed or strongly agreed that excess pocket money from parents and guardians facilitated alcohol consumption among secondary school students. Still, 66.8% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that low cost of alcohol further enhanced alcoholism among the students. These results agree with earlier finding suggesting that most local brews are cheap and packed in small quantities which students can afford to buy both for themselves and friends (Connie, 1994). Besides, cheap alcoholic drinks attract students because the alcoholic content is high causing those who consume them to get drunk quickly at a pocket friendly budget (Steinberg, 2012). Hence, excess pocket money for students together with the low cost of alcohol are factors contributing to alcoholism among students.

Majority of the study participants comprising 60% felt that students from broken families were more likely to consume alcohol. This finding relates to the proposition that children who are neglected by parents are more likely to indulge in alcoholism (Kioko, 2005). Further, students from broken families lack adequate advice from parents on social life including drug and alcohol abuse (Mbutu, 2009). Thus, such students are easy prey for alcoholism and other vices since parents are hardly available to guide, correct and direct behaviour. Further, according to Githui (2011) the family has a key influence of alcohol consumption among its members.

Most participants constituting 68.2% blamed alcoholism among secondary school students on unpleasant school conditions. This means that discomfort at school in terms of negative attitudes towards school, academic pressure, unwarranted punishments, conflict with fellow students as well as school staff and inadequate facilities may cause frustration and low academic performance leading to alcohol consumption among students (Connie, 1994).

Regarding peer influence on alcohol consumption among secondary school students, 81.5% of the study participants agreed or strongly agreed that peer influence contributed to alcoholism in schools. This means that many students were introduced to alcohol consumption by friends at school. According to Siegel (2000) youths learn to consume alcohol from peers who also provide support for the habit. Affirming this finding, Kanga (2008) purports that students affiliated to a company of alcoholics are likely to be alcoholics themselves since members of such groups are jeered at and not taken as grownups if they refuse to take alcohol.

Majority of the study participants comprising 70.7% agreed or strongly agreed that availability of alcohol contributes to alcoholism among secondary school students. This means that if alcohol was not easily accessible in the community, then there would be a decline in the proportion of alcoholic students in secondary schools. These results support the findings by Mbutu (2009) who reports the mushrooming of local brew dens as well as

regular beer bars in Kenyan villages particularly at Kangemi and Limuru. In addition, alcoholics are allowed credit services and payments in kind; aspects that encourage constant consumption of alcohol at the local brew dens and regular beer bars. Besides, Chireshe (2006) states that availability of alcohol in small take away packages enable students to buy and carry the alcohol to school consequently influencing other peers into alcoholism. It follows that availability of alcohol in terms of affordability and small packaging facilitates consumption of alcohol among students.

The study participants constituting 59% strongly agreed while 19.7% agreed that stress was the main reason for alcoholism among secondary school students. These results concur with the finding of Connie (1994) who asserts that young people from depression prone environments where feelings of alienation and hopelessness are high often meet alcohol users who provide an answer to the feelings of personal inadequacy and stress. Therefore, stressful conditions both at home and school seem to play a major role in influencing alcoholism among secondary school students.

5. Recommendations

- i. In order to root out alcoholism among secondary school students, there is need for a favourable school environment which encourages vibrant co curricula activities such as sports, music, drama, clubs and societies. Such activities will give students a strong sense of belonging and purpose in life therefore reducing boredom and idleness both of which are positively associated with alcoholism among the students.
- ii. Parents and guardians should desist from giving students a lot of pocket money which economically empowers them to acquire alcoholic drinks. Parents should also try and shield students from the effects of parental conflicts and family dysfunctions by ensuring those students' physical, emotional and social needs are met. Still, it is necessary for parents and guardians to establish firm rules and regulations at home regarding what time children should get home and other family expectations.
- iii. The government should regulate the sale of alcohol through licensing, packaging, pricing, restricting the age of consumers and regulating opening hours for the selling points. This will ensure that the selling points are located away from school premises, small portable packages are abolished, prices are non affordable to students, consumers below the age of majority are not accessible to alcohol and selling points are only operational during the night.
- iv. Religious institutions should endeavour to mould students' spiritual and moral values. This may help students to resist the

pressure to engage in alcoholism and immoral activities that are consequences of alcoholism. Likewise, the school guidance and counselling department should organize frequent counselling sessions to remind students of the negative long term effects of alcoholism. In addition, parents, teachers and other community members should act as good role models for the students by avoiding alcoholism.

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