

The impact of substance abuse in South Africa: a case of informal settlement communities.

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abstract

substance abuse is a major challenge for many young people globally. South Africa has been reported as a country that is experiencing high levels of alcohol abuse. The focus of this paper is to articulate the contributing factors to substance abuse in South Africa. This paper is presenting the results of the study that was conducted in the informal settlement areas. Conclusions made in this paper about substance abuse in South Africa are based on the findings of substance abuse in the informal community. This study found that the high consumption and abuse of alcohol in South Africa are found amongst young people. The factors such as unemployment, lack of effective mentorship, lack of family values, poor parenting guidance, and loss of hope contributed. This study applied a desktop research methodology, the secondary data was analyzed and unpacked to address the objectives of the study. The main objective of this study was to investigate the causes and the reasons why young people are abusing alcohol. The investigation focused on the excessive and abnormal use of alcohol by young people.

Keywords:

Substance abuse, Alcohol, Drugs, Community, Youth

Introduction

Substance abuse is defined by Hilton, Betancourt, Morrell, Lee and Doegey (2018: 510) as taking the drugs that are not legal but further to that, they define substance abuse as taking alcohol, prescription medicine, and other legal substances too much or in the wrong way. The World Health Organization (2016: 05) defines substance abuse as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. In this study, the applicable definition of substance abuse is the one that indicates the abnormal use of alcohol. The alcohol consumption rate in South Africa is growing every year. South Africa is now amongst the 20 top countries that are highly consuming alcohol. The rating of the World Health Organization (WHO) provided the international statistics of alcohol consumption across 194 countries. The study was based on the per capita use of alcohol, in South Africa, 11.5 litres per capita per year is reported in 2015 which is higher than the 11.0 litres consumption of 2014. In 2015, South Africa was ranked as the third biggest drinking nation in Africa and ranked number 19th biggest drinking nation in the world. Alcohol consumption in South Africa is double the average 6 litres consumption regulated by WHO (BusinessTech, 2016: 01).

Table 1: The world's biggest drinking nations (litres per capita, 2015)

#	Country	Alcohol consumptions
1	Maldova	17.4
2	Belarus	17.1
3	Lithuania	16.2
4	Russia	14.5
5	Czech Republic	14.1
6	Serbia	12.9
6	Romania	12.9

8	Australia	12.6
9	Slovakia	12.5
9	Portugal	12.5
11	Hungary	12.4
12	UK	12.0
13	Finland	11.9
14	Ukraine	11.8
14	Namibia	11.8
14	Gabon	11.8
17	Croatia	11.7
18	France	11.6
19	Poland	11.5
19	South Africa	11.5

Source: BusinessTech 2016

The above table indicates the ranking of alcohol consumption per capita for countries. South Africa is listed amongst the top 20 countries that are abusing alcohol. History has proven that alcohol plays a major role in social engagement and bonding for many. In other instances, people consume alcohol for pleasure and they consume moderate alcohol. Substance abuse is associated with several negative outcomes such as the diseases and health impacts, crime, road accidents, and also the dependency on alcohol (Ritchie and Roser, 2018: 02). Global drinking demographics have proven that moderate alcohol consumption is not associated with the negative impacts of alcohol. The negative impacts of alcohol use such as like liver disease, heavily outweigh it is not caused by

the moderate use of alcohol. Consuming high levels of alcohol which is also regarded as the abuse of alcohol has been identified as the cause of various diseases. Substance abuse has an impact on health and also affect the population and life expectancy (American Addiction Centres, 2017: 01).

Theoretical framework

Different studies have provided proof that moderate consumption of alcohol is not dangerous to human health. Rehm, Shield, Gmel, Rehm and Frick (2013: 89) states that the daily use of alcohol can lead to harmful drinking and could cause alcohol dependency (AD). People that accept the drinking problem and seek help have the advantage of prolonging their lives. Many people are ignorant and do not seek help because of fear of being labeled as alcoholics. The stigma associated with people that are regarded as alcoholics makes it difficult for people to seek help. The societal judgment of people that are alcoholics stops people from seeking assistance. Another factor that stops alcoholics from getting help is the approval of medications to treat the AD. The medication to treat Alcohol Dependency has been very limited because of the regulatory laws (Witkiewitz, Hallgren, Kranzler, Mann, Hasin, Falk, Litten, O'Malley and Anton, 2017: 180).

In South Africa alone, alcohol and drug use are estimated to be responsible for around 5% of the global disease burden. South Africa has the highest rate of alcohol-related deaths, 58% of deaths on the road are associated with alcohol consumption. Alcohol abuse affects human behavior and that leads to unruly behavior. Many road rage deaths and fights are associated with the abuse of alcohol. Alcohol abuse affects the psychological behavior and causes the mental disorder which affects the compulsive behavior (Lago, Glantz, Kessler, Sampson, Al-Hamzawi, Florescu, Moskalewicz, Murphy, Navarro-Mateu and Torres de Galvis, 2017: 1557). Most alcohol users in South Africa do not regard themselves as people that abuse alcohol but they view themselves as people who have a habit of drinking alcohol. Alcohol abuse leads to alcohol dependency and dependency refers to patterns of harmful consumption of alcohol. Nevertheless, both conditions contribute to broken family values and lack of direction from most young people who are depending on alcohol and lack proper guidance. These conditions affect the academic performance of those who are in the institutions of higher learning. Alcohol abuse is the hazard not only for the user but also for others (dos Santos, Nazário, Freitas, Henriques and de Paiva, 2019: 285).

Alcohol abuse is not only found in South Africa but many countries are experiencing the same problem of alcohol abuse. The World Health Organization (2016: 01) estimated that there are about two billion consumers of alcoholic beverages and 76.3 million people with a diagnosable alcohol disorder. Alcohol is not a problem at all but the problems are caused by people who abuse alcohol. The problems associated with alcohol are caused by excessive drinking which causes a substantial risk of harm to individuals. High-level drinking daily has many side effects and disadvantages. Alcohol abuse has serious consequences depending on the person that is involved but in most cases, serious consequences have been reported such as car accidents. Alcohol abuse directly affects the social norms of people and has physical consequences (Islam, Sultana, Rabbani and Chaudhury, 2016: 05). In South Africa, alcohol abuse is postulated to link with high levels of HIV infections, Mental illness and relationship breakups. Alcohol abuse in many instances led to intimate partner abuse and mainly resulted in an unplanned pregnancy. Depressed women resort to taking alcohol as a way of feeling better or trying to forget about the abuse caused by their partners. The alcohol abuse in South Africa is also found amongst pregnant women which in the main, harm the health of the mother and the baby. The government's fight to stop the spread of HIV is unsuccessful because of alcohol abuse. Many people that are drunk and could not account for their actions put their lives and the lives of those that are with them in danger. More than half of domestic violence cases in South Africa are cases that were committed under the influence of alcohol. This suggests that alcohol abuse is the third-largest contributor to death through accidents, infectious diseases and interpersonal violence (Davis, Rotheram-Borus, Weichle, Rezai and Tomlinson, 2017: 176).

Alcohol abuse is regarded as a serious burden of undesirable outcomes mostly for young people. Alcohol abuse by young people is not only affecting their health conditions and social conditions but it also affects their future. The planned future for young people that are abusing alcohol is delayed compared to those who are not abusing alcohol. Some plans by young people who are abusing alcohol remain plans without proper implementation. The South African government has not been able to properly control the control of alcohol use by young people who have passed the minimum legal age (Ismail, 2017: 02). The most contributing factor that leads to alcohol abuse by young people is the lack of motivation and unemployment. The high rate of youth unemployment leads to the country having many young people who are unemployed and economically inactive. The inactive youth resort in alcohol consumption as the substitution of not being employed.

However, this is not the only cause of having more young people active in alcohol abuse. Many young people are economically active in different forms, employed or in business but still abuse alcohol. For young people who are abusing alcohol, there are so many contributing factors such as family values and social influence. Young people that are influenced by people that are not consuming alcohol and also have role models that are not consuming alcohol are unlikely to abuse alcohol. Alcohol abuse amongst young people led to child neglect, absenteeism from the workplace (Frank, Calvin, Agnes, Anesu, Miriam, Winnie, Johanna, Prudence and Frans, 2019: 12). South Africa has been rated as one of the top countries that are at risk of drinking patterns. The surveys have shown that young people are more vulnerable and at-risk, colored low-income men, farmworkers, and young black females (Lesch and Adams, 2016: 168). The young people are not only affected in their social lives by alcohol abuse but also in terms of safeguarding their generation. The current generation is living different lifestyles and most family values are not taken into consideration. The alcohol consumption amongst young people leads to various activities that directly affect their future. Many young people have lost hope and give themselves to alcohol abuse (Koketso, Calvin and Prudence, 2019: 07). Young people of today do not pay enough attention to recreational activities which then opens a vacuum. The vacuum created by a lack of participating in various youth activities is filled in by alcohol use. The high use of alcohol by young people in South Africa is mainly by students and this is primarily caused by the freedom of staying away from home. Universities accommodate young people of different backgrounds and different experiences. Some young people start drinking alcohol in their first year of study because of social and peer influence. The feeling of trying to impress other people in a university level by young people is also the cause of alcohol abuse (Tesfai, 2016: 09).

Alcohol abuse by young people, in general, led to risky behavior which is widely investigated across Africa. The violence amongst young people and the failure to resist the peer-pressured which led to the high number of suicide cases is attributed to the alcohol abuse (Bhengu, Tomita, Mashaphu and Paruk, 2019: 02). Alcohol abuse amongst students does not only affect the future of young people but also the future of the country. Addressing alcohol abuse by young people is a collective responsibility of community leaders and parents. Academic institutions cannot solve the social issues of young people and alcohol abuse (Moagi, Mulaudzi and Van Der Wath, 2020: 107).

Data and methodology

The desktop study is regarded as the secondary research, secondary research is carried out purely through research. Secondary research is a study that analyzes the existing data to link with the objectives of the new study. Newspaper articles, online news, journal articles, and conference proceedings are analyzed and articulated to find their relevance to the study that is being conducted (Designbuildings, 2019: 01). On the other hand, Juneja (2015: 02) argued that desk research is divided into two, the internal desk research and external desk research. The internal desk research consists of the study that is taking place inside the organization while external desk research is the study that relies on external information like online information, newspapers, journal articles, and government published articles. For this study, the external desk research method was applied and the data was articulated and analyzed accordingly.

Findings and discussion

There have been drastic changes in alcohol consumption in South Africa, the patterns have been changing over the years. Some years have a high rate of alcohol consumption while other years have a low rate of alcohol consumption. Alcohol consumption is legal in South Africa and sold in many outlets based on the issued licenses by the government. There is no regulation of how much alcohol an individual can consume unless a person will be driving. The lack of regulation of consumption by the government leads to alcohol abuse. This study found that individuals drink as much as they want because no law regulates the level of alcohol consumption that is allowed (World Population Review, 2020: 03). South African government does not have proper guidance on alcohol use. People decide whether to properly abuse alcohol or drink it properly in their accord. The government needs to develop a social program that will ensure that young people are not abusing alcohol. The current programs developed by the government to bridge the gap and close the unemployment vacuum are not adequate to replace the abnormal use of alcohol (VinePair, 2018: 01). The alcohol control measures that are developed by the South African government are not assisting in the abnormal use of alcohol. Excessive alcohol consumption was reported amongst males and females age between 25-34 years. The age allows them to voluntarily drink alcohol but there is no prescribed limit of consumption. Of the 48 countries in the World Health Organization (WHO) African region, South Africa (SA) had the highest per capita alcohol consumption (in

terms of pure litres of alcohol) by individuals aged ≥ 15 years in 2010. The harmful pattern of drinking in South Africa results in the quantity of alcohol consumed per occasion. High consumption of alcohol in South Africa takes place on occasions such as family parties, festive seasons, and various events. Some people excessively drink alcohol daily in their private places and sometimes in public places. WHO has developed a score for alcohol consumption and the score rating range from 1 to 5. Score number 1 in the country that least consumes alcohol and the level of alcohol abuse is too low while 5 indicates a high level of alcohol consumption and the alcohol abuse is too high. South Africa is amongst the nine countries that scored level 5 of alcohol consumption. This rating score indicates that the country has a high consumption of alcohol and alcohol abuse (Vellios and Van Walbeek, 2018: 33).

South Africa is not only noted as the country that abuse alcohol but also noted as the country that has high cases of drunken driving. The increased mortality rate related to car accidents especially over the festive season is caused by alcohol abuse. Alcohol abuse in South Africa does not only have a negative impact on people but also affect the national economy. The country is losing people that are contributing to the national economy through road accidents and some people are not economically active because of the excessive use of alcohol. Despite the intervention of different community formations and non-governmental organizations that fight against alcohol abuse, the level of alcohol abuse is going up daily (Mail & Guardian, 2017: 01). The high levels of alcohol abuse in South Africa are not found in all areas. There are areas in South Africa that are well known for abusing alcohol, areas mostly that are informal settlements. Northern Cape province is regarded as the province that has high instances of alcohol abuse and a drinking problem. Women in Northern Cape are reported to be drinking more than men. The history of the Northern Cape according to Statistics South Africa (2019: 06), is producing more wine. The apartheid system designed demographics for the country and people were segregated according to their races. Northern Cape was allocated to colored people. The winery companies employed people that were living in the surrounding areas only during the apartheid era. People were provided with wine as a form of payment and that led to people abusing alcohol because it was available all the time. Many people were residing in the informal settlements and the taverns were within their proximity. The excessive use of alcohol is on the rise even today. The drinking patterns

in South Africa have gone up and this affects most of the informal settlements regardless of the history of the area (Bodumela, 2018: 04).

The denial of the South African government to admit the excessive use and abuse of alcohol makes it difficult to develop effective strategies to fight against alcohol abuse in the country. The findings and rankings made by ranking agencies such as WHO has been dismissed by various institutions and organizations. At the press briefing, the minister of trade and industry mentioned that South Africa has a high level of alcohol consumption and proposed National Liquor Amendment Bill for public comment. Amongst other things that were part of the bill was to increase the minimum age of consuming alcohol to 21 years (Bhardwaj, 2016: 01). The drinking patterns gives effect to the association between alcohol consumption and related harms and problems. Various alcohol-related conditions show a relationship between the volume of alcohol consumption and risks antagonistic outcomes, suggesting that heavy drinking occasions have higher risks for toxic effects (Trangenstein, Morojele, Lombard, Jernigan and Parry, 2018: 43).

As discussed earlier, the study focused on alcohol as substance abuse however, substance abuse includes many other types of drugs. For this reason, other drugs that are mostly taken together with alcohol are presented. Some people have admitted to abusing alcohol and also abusing drugs and therefore required some recovery assistance. This shows that there is a problem with substance abuse in the country.

Figure 1: reported instances of substance abuse from 2016 to 2017



Source: Akeso Clinics 2018

The above figure 1 shows the reported cases of substance abuse in South Africa from 2016 to 2017 however, many instances are not reported and not known. In South Africa, the abuse of alcohol and cannabis have been reported as the most substances that are abused. Up to 60% of crimes reported in South Africa are caused by people who abuse either alcohol or cannabis. HIV infections amongst young people are high and substance abuse is the cause (Parker, 2019: 03).

This study found that drinking and smoking between men and women of different demographics have increased compared to the last decade. An essential denominator among drinkers and smokers is that both men and women of lower financial status are the majority that abuse alcohol. The percentage of women and men age 18 and older who drink alcohol has increased since the last decade. The study found that 26% of women aged 15 and older are abusing alcohol in South Africa.

Table 2. alcohol abuse and risky drinking: women

Background characteristic	Ever drank alcohol	Drank alcohol in past 12 months	Drank alcohol in past 7 days	Drank five or more drinks on at least one occasion in past 30 days ¹	Show signs of problem drinking by the CAGE test ²	Number of women
Age						
15-24	29.3	20.9	8.3	5.1	3.1	1,429
15-19	23.4	16.3	5.3	1.6	2.4	721
20-24	35.2	25.6	11.3	8.6	3.9	708
25-34	29.2	22.6	11.3	6.1	3.3	1,391
35-44	25.1	17.0	9.5	6.0	3.1	1,022
45-54	22.1	15.5	10.5	4.4	2.2	866
55-64	21.3	16.0	11.2	3.7	2.7	701
65+	20.8	13.1	9.2	2.0	1.1	719
Population group						
Black/African	22.2	15.7	7.7	4.5	2.6	5,170
White	58.2	48.9	36.1	4.2	1.6	320
Coloured	42.9	28.6	17.6	10.2	5.6	516
Indian/Asian	13.2	9.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	114
Other	*	*	*	*	*	6
Residence						
Urban	30.8	22.4	12.3	6.0	3.2	3,996
Non-urban	16.0	11.0	5.5	2.6	2.0	2,130
Province						
Western Cape	38.1	27.3	18.0	9.0	4.8	703
Eastern Cape	27.7	19.9	10.1	4.9	3.3	730
Northern Cape	40.3	27.4	13.6	10.9	6.8	127
Free State	29.3	22.2	12.1	6.0	4.6	325
KwaZulu-Natal	12.8	10.1	4.8	1.4	1.0	1,191
North West	26.9	20.6	12.5	8.7	6.6	398
Gauteng	30.8	22.0	12.0	5.2	2.0	1,534
Mpumalanga	30.7	19.1	7.2	4.7	2.6	473
Limpopo	12.2	8.1	4.0	1.5	1.0	646
Education						
No education	19.4	13.5	10.2	6.9	2.7	495
Primary incomplete	16.4	10.3	5.4	2.3	2.6	664
Primary complete	19.1	9.9	6.0	1.7	0.9	293
Secondary incomplete	24.6	17.3	8.2	5.2	3.5	2,695
Secondary complete	28.8	21.7	12.2	5.6	1.8	1,328
More than secondary	40.9	32.3	18.6	4.2	2.4	652
Wealth quintile						
Lowest	16.5	11.7	5.2	3.7	1.9	1,163
Second	20.3	14.3	6.9	3.7	3.6	1,152
Middle	24.7	17.6	8.8	5.5	3.5	1,242
Fourth	30.1	21.3	11.9	8.0	3.5	1,258
Highest	35.1	25.9	15.9	3.2	1.3	1,311
Total 15+	25.7	18.4	9.9	4.8	2.7	6,126
Total 15-49	27.6	20.1	9.8	5.4	3.0	4,300

Source: South Africa DHS 2016

The above table presents the alcohol drinking levels per province and the economic status of people. The presented data indicated that the drinking patterns of women in urban areas are

growing. Alcohol abuse or substance abuse in South Africa varies according to the race of people. Alcohol abuse was less common among Indians/Asian men and whites, this is primarily informed by the population margins of the country. Black males and females were found to be higher in numbers of alcohol abuse because of the higher population. Another finding on alcohol abuse was age-based, there is an increase from 12% of men age 15-19 to 31% of men age 20-24 and 36% of men age 25-34. Gauteng province was identified as the province that has higher levels of alcohol consumption (Shezi, 2017: 01).

Substance abuse and particularly the alcohol abuse in the informal settlement areas are higher compared to people that are staying in suburban areas. People that are staying in various townships are more involved in substance abuse. The study found that the reason many people in the informal areas and townships abuse alcohol is because of their economic conditions. Stress caused by economic situations amongst people that are living in the informal settlement resort in using alcohol as the way out (Dada, Burnhams, Erasmus, Parry, Bhana and Timol, 2017: 01). The data that was analyzed in this study have shown that the increase in the population and the statistics have shown that the population consists of more young people. More young people are unemployed and this leads to more young people not economically active which creates a vacuum that is filled by consuming alcohol. The provinces that have more informal settlements and have more young people also have more people that are abusing alcohol. Irresponsible consumption of alcohol led to many consequences and broken many families. This is supported by the number of HIV infected people and TB infected people in the informal settlement areas (Peltzer and Ramlagan, 2009: 01).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has discovered that substance abuse does not start immediately when a person is involved in alcohol or drug use. Alcohol abuse is influenced by several factors which include social influence, economic influence, and family values. The instances of physical violence in the informal settlements have been mostly caused by people that are highly intoxicated. Alcohol abuse in many communities has become a daily lifestyle and it has been difficult to stop.

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