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Article in *The International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research* · October 2013

DOI: 10.7895/ijadr.v2i2.104

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Professional impotence: Impact of alcohol abuse on secondary schoolteachers in Uganda

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Abstract

Aims: We conducted this study to explore the impact of alcohol consumption on teachers' jobs in Uganda. Specifically, we investigated the types of alcohol consumed by schoolteachers, reasons for alcohol abuse among teachers, justifications for mixing different types of drinks while drinking, and the effects of alcohol abuse on secondary schoolteachers.

Design: Cross-sectional, descriptive.

Participants: We involved 54 teachers (79.6% males and 20.4% females) in focus group discussions (FGDs) and four teachers (all male) in in-depth interviews.

Measurement: Interviews were conducted to validate the data from FGDs as done by vanTartwijk, den Brok, Veldman and Wubbels (2008). Thematic analysis was employed to describe themes and emerging trends.

Results: Data gathered from both in-depth interviews and FGDs show that teachers in Uganda drink a variety of "local" and "exotic" types of alcohol, for a variety of reasons. Results also indicate that during drinking sessions, teachers mix drinks for different reasons, but mainly to increase or decrease the potency of alcoholic drinks, depending on their types. All participants mentioned that over-consumption of alcohol negatively affects the teacher's job and career in ways that include poor performance, neglect and loss of job.

Conclusion: While teachers in Uganda drink many types of alcohol for apparently "good" reasons, those teachers who over-drink eventually fall into job inefficiency.

A typical Ugandan secondary schoolteacher experiences a mosaic of challenges, including low pay, exploitation, large classes, family pressures and the ever-increasing academic competition among schools. As a consequence of such problems and their demanding routine, some teachers resort to drinking alcohol. Unfortunately, there has been little research on alcohol use by teachers in Uganda, with most knowledge based on limited information from civil society groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Thus, the problem of alcohol use among teachers in Uganda is an area in need of immediate academic attention.

Excessive use of alcohol is a feature of many groups of adults (Botvin & Griffin, 2007; Degenhardt et al., 2008; Obot, 1990, Smithson, 2006; Watson & Pucel, 1985) and teachers, in particular, especially those of lower socio-economic status and income (Kalichman, Simbayi, Kaufman, Cain, & Jooste, 2007). Consumption of alcohol among teachers is viewed as a means of enjoying a better social life. In particular, after a few drinks, teachers feel more confident, as alcohol depresses the nervous system and produces a sense of relaxation and calm (Ader, Porter,

& Van Teijlingen, 2007). In the belief that it will help them enjoy a good sexual life, teachers may also consume alcohol as an aphrodisiac, even though it has been shown to have the opposite effect, increasing sexual desire but dulling sexual performance (Asbridge, Lavers, Moonie, & Scott, 2006; Richards, 2003).

Available evidence indicates that alcohol consumed in Uganda is locally manufactured and packaged in various sizes and brands, but there is no clear regulatory policy on the use of alcohol among adult Ugandans. Alcohol is available in many locations including bars, shops, supermarkets, clubs, markets, and restaurants (Uganda Youth Development Link [UYDL], 2010). Evidence from NGOs and the reported experiences of individual teachers suggest that alcohol drinking patterns and styles among teachers have metamorphosed and new trends of drinking have emerged—for instance, mixing different kinds of alcoholic drinks during drinking sessions. These drinking behaviors can have a devastating impact on teachers' careers.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to describe alcohol drinking behavior among teachers in Uganda and how alcohol consumption affects their profession.

Research Questions

1. What types of alcohol are consumed by secondary schoolteachers in Uganda?
2. What are the reasons for alcohol abuse among teachers in Uganda?
3. To what extent do teachers mix different types of alcoholic drinks during drinking sessions and why do they mix drinks?
4. What is the impact of alcohol abuse on teachers?

Method

We employed a descriptive, cross-sectional qualitative approach to obtain rich information about the impact of alcohol consumption on secondary schoolteachers. The study involved conveniently and purposively selected schools and teachers respectively from initially stratified regions of Central, Western, Eastern, and Northern Uganda. Teachers at schools in major regional towns were considered for participation in the study. Within schools, teachers who participated in focus group discussions were randomly selected and participation was voluntary. Teachers who participated in interviews were selected on the basis of their work experience and on the grounds that they consumed alcohol.

In total, 54 teachers were involved in focus group discussions (FGD) (43 men) and four teachers (all men) participated in in-depth interviews. There were fewer women than men because most women were uncomfortable discussing issues related to alcohol use. There were 18 participants from Central Uganda, 10 from the North, 16 from the West, and 10 from the East. One teacher from each region participated in the in-depth interview.

The study collected data using an interview guide and focus group discussion guide (FGDG). The questions in the FGDG corresponded to the study's themes, and the interview guide was used to collect in-depth data from key respondents. We conducted interviews to validate the findings from the FGDs. This method has been used elsewhere and found to produce credible results (van Tartwijk, den Brok, Veldman, & Wubbels, 2008). Interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was employed to describe central themes and emerging trends. The themes that occurred repeatedly were placed into meaningful categories for interpretation.

Results

Four focus group discussion themes guided the study, namely: types of alcohol consumed by teachers, reasons for consumption of alcohol among teachers, drinking behavior of teachers, and impact of alcohol consumption on teachers.

For quotes provided below, we refer to all teachers who participated in in-depth interviews as T, and the superscript letters against the statements indicate the region(s) of Uganda from which the data were collected (n = North, c = Central, e = East, w = West).

Types of Alcohol Consumed by Teachers

For this variable, we distinguished between "exotic" and "local" varieties of alcoholic drinks consumed. The "exotic varieties" of alcohol have been defined as alcohol from large-scale and licensed manufacturers, while "local varieties" are those types of alcohol from small-scale brewers/distillers. The results of the group discussions are summarized in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, teachers consume a variety of "local" and "exotic" types of alcohol. This was supported by the following statement from an individual interview:

My uncle, who used to teach within the same school, a mathematics/physics teacher, is a habitual drinker. He actually has drinking on his daily programme and if he goes for a seminar, he first has to survey the place to see where he can obtain a drink when he is free in the evening. It looks like when he goes there and gets a drink, he comes back and gets a comfortable sleep. If you invite him home, you have to cater for this part [drinks] but if you do not include the Malwa, it will have been a bad visit for him . . . teachers here drink in a group. They make contact with the lady who brews the Ajon and even if they are not yet paid, they go and she gives them on credit, or if one of them has the money he pays for the rest (T^e, October, 2012).

Surprisingly, teachers from Northern and Central Uganda hardly mentioned wines and spirits as examples of the "exotic" alcohol they drink. A possible explanation was the higher cost of these types of alcohol. This was confirmed by the assertion:

. . . beer drinking is not as frequent as for local brews because of financial implications. Drinking of wines and spirits is even very rare due to the high prices of these drinks (Tⁿ, November, 2012).

Reasons for Alcohol Abuse among Secondary Schoolteachers

Table 2 shows that participants gave three main reasons for drinking by teachers: for leisure, as a pastime and to be happy; to manage burnout and stress; and for confidence—that is, to avoid shyness when speaking. The account below confirms that teachers drink alcohol for leisure. As Tⁿ explained:

Yes, we drink for leisure but also it helps someone to get information. You can easily get important information which you cannot get from other place . . . there is some information somebody cannot give you if they are sober, but when tipsy, they let off such information. Again, you get to learn about what is happening in the community" (Tⁿ, November, 2012).

Table 1*Types of alcohol consumed in Uganda*

Region	“Exotic” types	“Local” types
Eastern	Spirits, wines, beers	<i>Kwete</i> (made from maize flour), <i>Malwa</i> (made from sorghum flour), <i>Ajono</i> (millet brew), <i>Enguli</i> (distilled from sugar cane and cassava), <i>Mwenge bigere</i> (made from bananas)
Central	Beers	<i>Tonto</i> (brewed from bananas), <i>Malwa</i> (from sorghum), <i>Waragi-regular</i> (from bananas), <i>Ndume/Umkomboti</i> , <i>Kasese-super</i> (from bananas), <i>Bwakwata</i>
Northern	Beers, spirits (mainly <i>Uganda waragi</i>)	<i>Marwa</i> , <i>Kwete</i> , <i>Lira-lira</i> , <i>Aloi</i> , <i>Kasese</i> , ‘Sackets’ (<i>Chief waragi</i> , <i>Zebra</i> and <i>Gold waragi</i>)
Western	Beers, wines, spirits, whiskys	<i>Amarwa</i> , <i>Kwete</i> , <i>Omubisi</i> , <i>Omunanasi</i> , <i>Kalibate</i> , <i>Crude waragi</i> , <i>Tonto</i> (local beer), <i>Omuramba</i> , <i>Omukomboti</i> , <i>Enturire</i> .

Table 2*Reasons for Consumption of Alcohol among Teachers*

For leisure, as a pastime, and to be happy ^{n,c,e,w}
To manage burnout and stress ^{n, c, e, w}
To stimulate and sharpen thinking ^{n,e}
For confidence and to avoid shyness when speaking ^{n,c,e,w}
To show off, show economic power, show that you have money ^{n,c,w}
For socialization purposes ^{n,c,e}
It is a therapy for . . . it can be good for the heart ⁿ
Because of problems with relationships—i.e., to run away from domestic problems ^{c,e}
Addiction ^c
For business ^e
To gain respect ^e
Influenced by colleagues ^e
To get sleep ^c
To attack others ^w

We then asked the respondents how drinking alcohol helped them in “business.” They clarified that it “attracts customers”—that is, some of them sell unpackaged alcohol, and must first taste the product before giving it to customers, “to assure them that the drink does not contain poison, and in the process you end up getting drunk” (FGD, November, 2012).

T^c explained this scenario in more detail:

If a teacher has a business of selling alcohol, then it is the wife who sells. The husband has to be there to give customers some company, to socialize with them, and usually the teacher who sells alcohol is also a drinker. Again, if fellow teachers know you as having a bar in the centre, they always come around to support your business and you have to be there to give them company (T^c, November 2012).

Alcohol Drinking Behavior of Secondary Schoolteachers

For this paper, the aspect of alcohol drinking behavior that we are concerned with is the mixing of different types of drinks during drinking sessions. “Mixing of drinks” denotes putting different drinks in one container, or taking more than one drink in different containers but concurrently. We asked teachers about the types of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks they mix during drinking. As shown in Table 3, teachers reported mixing both spirits (especially *Waragi*) and sodas (especially Coca Cola) with other alcoholic drinks.

Reasons for Mixing Drinks

Table 4 illustrates that teachers in all regions of Uganda mix alcoholic drinks mainly in order to increase the concentration of alcohol, so that the drink will have more effect and the drinker will get “knocked off” quickly and easily. We also observed that teachers mix alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks to camouflage their drinking habits. T^c’s reasoning supports this:

Table 3**Types of Drinks Mixed by Teachers during Drinking Sessions**

Region	Alcoholic drinks	Alcoholic+non-alcoholic drinks
Central	Beers and spirits (especially tot pack <i>waragi</i>)	<i>Waragi</i> and sodas (coke), <i>waragi</i> and orange/lemon juice, <i>malwa</i> and soda (Coca Cola)
Northern	<i>Marwa</i> and ‘sackets’ (<i>waragi</i>) and beers, <i>aloe</i> and ‘sackets’ (<i>waragi</i>) lira-lira and ‘sackets’ (<i>waragi</i>)	‘Kasese’ and sodas, beers and fruit juice, ‘kasese’ and dissolved sugar
Western	Beers and <i>waragi</i> , <i>tonto</i> and <i>waragi</i> , <i>kwete</i> and <i>omuramba</i>	<i>Waragi</i> and sodas, wine and sodas, wine and water, <i>mukomboti</i> and sodas, <i>tonto</i> and sodas
Eastern	Distillate <i>waragi</i> and <i>ajono</i> , <i>mwenge bigere</i> and <i>waragi</i> , beers and spirits (especially <i>waragi</i>)	<i>Waragi</i> and sodas, <i>waragi</i> and water, <i>eubisi</i> and <i>malwa</i> , <i>waragi</i> and fruit (orange) juice

Table 4**Reasons for Mixing Drinks**

Reasons for mixing alcoholic drinks	Reasons for mixing alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks
Increase the concentration of alcohol, so that it has more effect and you get drunk quickly and easily get “knocked off” ^{m,c,w,e}	To hide your drinking and confuse the public, especially when spirits are mixed with colored non-alcoholic drinks ^{n,c,e}
Explore tastes, modify tastes, have a variety ^{n,w,e}	To reduce or moderate concentration of alcoholic drinks ^{n,c,w,e} , “for example ‘Kasese’ is too bitter and mixing it with soda makes it a little sweet” (Teacher, FGD, November 2012)
To save money, reduce expense (that is, some drinks are cheaper than others) ^{c,w,e}	Gives it a better scent, reduces smell ^{w,e}
To increase libido ^c	Avoid getting drunk very quickly ^c
To get appetite ^c	Medicinal purposes ^w
To increase time taken while drinking ^c	To save money ^c
For curiosity ^c	To reduce hangover
Addiction ⁿ	Out of excitement ⁿ

When you do not want to get drunk quickly you have to be at the same pace with your friends. So you mix the drinks and sip slowly so that one or two bottles make the evening. Again, there are people who cannot be knocked off by beers alone, not even after taking several bottles. So you have to add something stronger to increase the alcohol content of the beer (T^c, November, 2012).

Tⁿ provided a similar description:

You want to drink to raise the spirit to some level but using beer only is expensive. So you start with the cheaper ones and they take you to some level and then you start on beers. . . . It is a common practice at a drinking joint for teachers to offer free drinks to their friends/colleagues. . . . If you are taking beer and a friend gives you a sachet or vice versa, you end up mixing the two (Tⁿ, October, 2012).

Impact of Alcohol Abuse on Secondary Schoolteachers

We categorized the impact of alcohol abuse into three subthemes: the effects of alcohol on teachers’ (i) job performance, (ii) students, and (iii) classroom performance. Regarding the first subtheme, job performance, participants from all four groups mentioned that alcohol consumption

can lead to job loss or neglect for a teacher who over-drinks alcohol. T^c had a different view:

There is a way drinking [that] is relatively acceptable. The head teachers often advise their teachers to drink responsibly. Moreover, most teachers who drink perform equally well on their jobs, save for the smell due to alcohol. But even if the teachers come to class smelling [of] alcohol, students take it normally and you will not see any complaint from students (T^c, November, 2012).

The view of most respondents, however, was reflected in the following statement:

But those teachers who drink too much have problems with school administrators. They do not mark papers on time and end up “manufacturing” marks, and often come to school late, especially for the eight o’clock lessons. Maybe that can lead to their eventual dismissal. Even in staff meetings, those teachers who drink a lot are “roasted” because of their drinking behavior and at times, those teachers have to be shifted from one stream to another (T^c, November, 2012).

Teachers from all four groups also suggested that alcohol consumption leads to poor time management, as the above comments by T^e indicate. Other effects which were mentioned included limited opportunities for promotion^w and lack of concentration.ⁿ When asked about these issues, T^c described related health effects:

Some teachers who overuse alcohol end up developing health complications. My friend with whom I taught used to take alcohol and black out; [he] got a stroke after getting an injury while drunk. One whole left side of his body does not function and I don't think now he can be promoted or concentrate on teaching (T^c, November, 2012).

Regarding the impact of alcohol abuse on students, all four discussions touched on the poor academic performance of students when teachers drink heavily. The participants also unanimously agreed that a teacher's alcohol consumption makes students lose confidence in and respect for the teacher, and eventually they develop a negative attitude toward the teacher, leading to poor academic performance. According to T^w, "Teachers who are habitual drunkards lose their respect in society and among students/pupils" (T^w, November, 2012). Respondents also suggested that use of alcohol by teachers leads students to imitate wrong behaviour,^{n,e,w} lose self-esteem,^{n,e,w} and become subjects of teachers' sexual abuse^{c,w} and nagging.^{n,c} Although not all groups raised the same issues, three groups mentioned poor time management such as coming late for classes^{n,e,c} as a consequence of teachers' drinking. This supported T^e's earlier assertion that teachers who drink miss morning lessons. He noted that:

Some teachers start drinking in the morning or even during working hours, but there is that element of someone ignoring the time factor and at times you give priority to drinking. Again, when someone overdrinks, it may not be easy for him or her to wake up early in the morning to work. . . . when someone drinks too much, you find in the morning they are still drunk (Tⁿ, November, 2012).

It was also established that alcohol consumption by the teacher leads to poor decision making in assessing students,^{n,c} poor organization, planning and delivery of lessons,^{n,c} and poor learning environment (e.g., if the teacher smells of alcohol).ⁿ However, one groupⁿ believed that alcohol consumption "increases performance, especially for mathematics teachers."

Discussion

This study describes how secondary schoolteachers in Uganda use a variety of "local" and "exotic" types of alcohol, and that alcohol consumption affects teachers in a number of ways. This confirms the findings of previous studies, including that of Odejide (2006) who notes that alcohol is part of African heritage, and that of Ndom, Igbokwe, and Ekeruo (2012) regarding the prevalence of alcohol use among teachers. The reasons advanced by teachers regarding their use of alcohol partly confirms the argument by Medina-Mora (2005) that contextual factors,

such as poverty and the easy availability of alcohol, contribute to alcohol use. Other studies elsewhere have also related alcohol abuse among adults to low wage and inflexible employment (Karriker-Jaffe et al. 2012). Also, Kalichman et al. (2007) described alcohol consumption among teachers as a means of coping with stress, suggesting that teachers' consumption of alcohol is partly hinged on social circumstances (Sanchez-Craig, Annis, Bornet, & MacDonald, 1984).

The study found that teachers mix different types of alcoholic drinks, or mix alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, during drinking sessions for a variety of reasons. The results are consistent with Odejide (2006), who suggested that with increasing commercialization and social influence, the pattern of drinking is changing in Africa.

The impact of alcohol use on teachers was also investigated in this study. Consistent with other research, we found that many of the effects of alcohol on teachers are closely tied to expectations (Guillermo, Delva, Bares, & Grogan-Kaylor, 2013), beliefs, behavioral, and cultural factors (Bond et al., 2010; Dimatteo & Leslie, 2002; Marks et al., 2005).

The results of the study show that overconsumption of alcohol can have devastating effects on teachers' jobs. This finding is consistent with previous studies, including those by Skinner (1994), Odejide (2006) and Kalichman et al. (2007), that suggest that excessive drinking among teachers leads to loss of job, marital breakdown, delusional jealousy, and a downward trend in social status. Prolonged excessive alcohol use leads to teachers' poor job performance and eventual job loss. Kalichman et al. (2007) also suggest that alcohol consumption negatively affects teachers' decision making. Hence, when teachers overuse alcohol, the end result is possible dismissal and loss of employment.

Another notable finding is that alcohol consumption leads to poor classroom performance of teachers and, consequently, poor academic performance among students. Indeed, studies show that alcohol consumption may lead to alcohol myopia: a teacher's thinking and perception becomes dulled and shortsighted (Coon, 2004). One of the reasons given by teachers for their alcohol consumption was to reduce anxiety, but drinking has indirect consequences on information processing, making cognitive processes more shallow and reducing awareness of information, which could lead to a negative self-evaluation (Helman, 1994; Marks et al., 2005). In addition, social learning theory (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003) suggests that teacher may impact students by modeling drinking behaviors.

Finally, teachers who engage in excessive drinking may be absent from school because of hangovers and reduced energy due to malnutrition (Coleman & Kerbo, 2002). The present findings suggest that alcoholic teachers often miss classes and, if they do attend, they often fail to complete their daily tasks or schedules. This negatively affects the

quality of their work and how they deliver subject material to their students.

Conclusion

While teachers in Uganda drink many types of alcohol, alcohol consumption may eventually condemn those teachers who over-drink to professional impotence. The effects of alcohol can go beyond the teachers themselves to affect the entire educational structure, and even other sectors. The results of the present study suggest the need for further study into this area to quantify the magnitude of alcohol use and abuse among schoolteachers in Uganda.

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