

A Review on the Impact of Culture on Alcohol Abuse in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT: *The consumption of alcoholic beverages among young people in Africa has become a topical issue in many communities around the globe. This study reviews available literature showing the how culture impacts alcohol use among African young people. Anne and Bobby confirm, “Adolescent substance abuse is a global problem which educators have sought to address through school-based preventive education.” It is interesting to note that the same subject has received so much attention from different researchers ranging from psychologists to those in religion. There is a very interesting relationship between religion, culture and how people use and respond to alcohol use from place to place and time. This study confirms that there is an equal challenge of use of alcohol at a global level among the youths. One ethnic group in Zimbabwe was identified as fitting to confirm the impact of culture on the use of alcohol especially among young people.*

KEYWORDS: Culture, Alcohol, and Religion

Date of Submission: 26-06-2019

Date of acceptance: 11-07-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

In Africa there are few things to note about culture that should be a remembered especially in a subject like this of alcohol abuse. Often people want to argue that difference in culture affects how people respond to the use of alcohol. The assumption seems to suggest that culture in general controls reactions to life. However Ferguson says, “Culture.... is not something which can, in the long run, override the universals of human nature.” This is to say that culture cannot be an argument of doing something against human nature since he suggests that human universals remain the same besides the existing culture.

It is important at this point to note that culture in its different manifestations affect how people respond to the abuse of alcohol. However it should be recognized again that human behaviors remain with an expected ideal for the fact of being human beings. Ferguson goes on to say “People are, at bottom, very much the same in all times and places, and culture is simply a shorthand for the way groups of people have, in the past, chosen to deal with such factors as common property problems.” Therefore if people are all the same, the difference should not be too much on our response to alcohol in relation to our cultures.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the review of literature from different academic sources. The bulk of the literature which is used in this article is secondary to bring out the findings presented. Further, other literature was extracted from online library source as well as libraries that were accessible at the time of the study.

III. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURE AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

Sara et.al also refer to (Beccaria, 2010). “Almost all participants in the Italian sample had their first taste of alcohol at home, confirming the results of previous qualitative studies.” This shows that it is very true that the home has a very critical place in developing the attitude and perception of alcohol in the child. It is the parent or guardian who has the right to formulate the initial impressions in the child which can then be complimented with other agents as given. So the home can be the place for the first drink of the child.

The first drink has also been presented in memories like “... first memories associate drinking to special occasions characterized by a ritual or socializing use, which often leads to intoxication.” As it is in different cultures, alcohol is often used in rituals and social events especially in the African context. The cultural processes maybe different as you move from one place to the other but alcohol remains a constant. It is in these cultural ritual processes that the child builds their memories and probably gets their first drink.

Sara et.al uses two different European countries, Italy and Finland to demonstrate the effect of two contrasting drinking cultures. The authors present Italy under the group of countries that belong to the ‘Mediterranean drinking culture’ “where moderate alcohol consumption is a normal and appreciated part of

daily life” actually they go on to say that this drinking culture “children are allowed (and sometimes encouraged) to taste alcoholic beverages – which consist mainly of wine – from a young age” which shows that in the Italian culture, alcohol use is very much accepted and very much in order.

Thus one may not safely say to the Italian in this culture of drinking that use of alcohol among young people is a problem because at a certain tender age they encourage it.

However it is interesting to note that Finland belongs to a different group of countries in the ‘Nordic drinking culture’. In Finland, “alcohol is separated from normal daily life and its prevalent use and value is connected to intoxication”. This depicts a sharp difference in that there is no room for alcohol in the normal daily life to the Finland culture. Actually the authors, Sara et.al in their reference say, “in the Nordic tradition, alcohol is considered a dangerous substance to be kept away from children and adolescents” (Beccaria & Prina, 2010). This culture may relate well with many countries in considering alcohol a dangerous substance for children and adolescents.

The fact that identity is a critical issue for the young people, the variables have a motivation that it gives to the young people to behave in either ways. The same elements also affect their response to the messages that they get on prevention. Anne and Bobby agree to this notion as stated, “Ethnic pride was positively associated with increased substance use while in other cultures (e.g. African American, Mexican American) ethnic pride acted as a protective barrier against substance use.” Therefore it can be factual to consider the place of identity in relationship to substance abuse in young people.

Anne and Bobby react to the same relationship of culture and drug abuse in different people. “Cultures differ in their definitions of substance abuse.” This suggests that what one culture will call drug abuse may not be abuse in another. They give an example that “the legal age of drinking in the United States is 21 years of age, but is lower in some European countries and therefore this impacts the respective cultures’ views on alcohol use versus abuse”. Therefore the existing differences from one place to the other may actually affect other people moving with their children for example from United States to European countries.

Joao and Denish discusses the link between ages of alcohol use, misuse spirituality and culture in a very interesting way. They begin by presenting amazing variations in the study of world analysis of alcohol abuse in most regions in the continents. “Life-time abstention is most prevalent in North Africa/Middle East and south Asia, partly attributable to religious structures, while Eastern Europe and southern sub-Saharan Africa have the most detrimental pattern of drinking scores, while drinkers in Europe (eastern and central) and sub-Saharan Africa (southern and west) consumed the most alcohol.” The variance from one region to another is very interesting to note.

The same authors are quick to highlight that “...the culture of each location and the aspects of religiousness and spirituality are two critical factors of influence...” the cultures in Southern Africa are different from those in Northern Africa hence the effect becomes evident even in the records of alcohol use. They also present another view that, “It is possible that the process of acculturation may influence alcohol consumption in people who emigrate to western countries, such as the USA.” This may help to explain the variations that exist as we move from one region to another on the globe from one continent to the other continent.

It is noted that in the study “Different ethnic groups modify their alcohol use behavior in different ways during the processes of acculturation.” Thus culture continues to influence all groups of people in the use of alcohol despite being in their native culture or moving into a different culture. “Differences may also exist within the same ethnic group during the acculturation process, as in the case of Latinos from different countries who migrate to the USA.” People from the same ethnic group may respond to the different culture differently despite coming from the same native culture.

Shuyuan, Ian and Duane use the example of China to discuss the association of cultural orientation and abuse of alcohol in university students. The authors make it clear that cultural orientation is not the same with acculturation. “Cultural orientation reflects an individual’s cultural preferences as he or she encounters influences imported from an outside culture, such as Western values, while still living in and surrounded by his or her native culture.” In the case of cultural orientation, the individual does not move from their native culture but he or she encounters the foreign culture within their native familiar culture.

The environment created by cultural orientation makes it difficult for an individual to decide and in the decisions alcohol use is included. “Today, globalization makes changes in cultural orientation more likely, especially in countries like China that are experiencing new and increasing exposure to foreign influences.” The fact that the world has become a global village, the Chinese have not been spared by the wave. Hence their drinking culture cannot remain the same when they interact with more divergent cultures.

The Power of Culture on Alcohol Abuse

It is important to acknowledge what Sara et.al says, “People normally acquire attitudes, expectations and intentions about alcohol from childhood, and this knowledge is strongly influenced by the alcohol and drinking culture of the society to which they belong.” This means that the young people we see today engrossed in alcohol usage could have been raised up in an environment that was conducive if not supportive to the use of it. It becomes critical then to give attention to the upbringing environment of each child if their attitude, expectations and intentions are to be controlled or influenced for the good of their future.

Sara et.al presents a very important element to this matter that they refer to as the ‘alcohol socialization process’. This process is presented as a very important one because of the agents that are used in the process. “Many agents have an important role in the alcohol socialization process – parents, other family members, friends – along with other significant factors like school, community, the media, religion and culture more generally.” these agents are important in the process because they push elements which create a lasting impression on the children who soon become youths and adults in the same community.

The above authors give reference to (Ary, Tildesley, Hops, & Andrews, 1993; Brody et al., 2000) who say, “Among these parental modeling seems to have a significant influence, as often children learn more from what parents do than from what parents say.” In the light of all the agents presented as part of the alcohol socialization process, parental modeling is given a high place. This is because parents give the child the first influence from birth before anyone can access the child.

Joao and Denish confirms “It is inevitable that cultures will play a major role in attitudes towards alcohol use and misuse, abstinence as well as help-seeking.” The place of culture in the subject under discussion is uncontested in the sense that “Cultures influence the ways people think and also what is seen as deviant behavior.” Therefore cultures should be studied carefully and managed very well if interested institutions and individuals are to have a positive impact on alcohol usage especially in young adults.

The two authors agree to the fact that “Prevalence of alcohol abuse varies across cultures but further cross-cultural comparisons are needed in the context of abstinence and what makes it work, especially with focus on spiritual and religious values.” It is however true as they present that more attention need to be given to the area of religious and spiritual values in trying to influence the wide abuse of alcohol across the globe.

The relationship that exists between cultural orientation and the abuse of alcohol is fascinating. “Cultural orientation and its contribution in explaining some of the variances in individual alcohol use by young people was first reported the 1990s by Eide and Acuda”. Studies have been done and it has been recorded years back affirming that some individuals end up abusing alcohol as a result of their cultural orientation. The response to a foreign culture is largely personal than it can be community based or otherwise. It is at the individual level, that one will decide to will decide to go by the influence of another culture in line with alcohol use.

The three authors present from their study that “The more a student adopted a Western cultural orientation, the more likely he/she was to be a recent drinker.” This means that the western culture has so much influence on young people especially those in colleges and universities. They actually refer to a similar study done in Zimbabwe and gave results of a “... positive relationship between Western cultural orientation and drinking.” The influence is recorded as visible and outstanding.

Actually the authors say “...the relationship of cultural orientation to alcohol use among high-school students in Zimbabwe described Western cultural orientation as being associated with a higher probability of alcohol abuse, while a Zimbabwean orientation was associated with a lower probability of alcohol abuse”. Therefore young people in Africa are faced with a serious challenge of keeping to their native cultures that are associated with low probability of alcohol abuse. At the same time managing the strong influence the western culture that is seemingly becoming the ideal culture in Africa yet with high probability of alcohol use.

Some may increase their alcohol use from no use to moderate while others may actually move to abstinence from high abuse of alcohol. “It is possible that part of the acculturative process will lead to increased consumption to feel part of the new society where individuals may feel that that is the only way they may be accepted as a result of drinking as an act of socialization.” The variance within the ethnic groups is equally interesting as it is reflected from region to continent.

Parenting and Alcohol Abuse

The two contrasted drinking cultures show us that alcohol socialization has a vital role in developing the attitude, perception and impressions on alcohol. Sara et.al go on to show us that the Finnish parents try “to be permissive and let their children drink some alcoholic beverages at home, in order to limit overall consumption.” They do this despite the fact that their culture separates alcohol to normal daily life. “However, the result is not what parents would have hoped: the drink at home becomes the first of many and drinking just continues outside, with friends.”

Unfortunately like any other child, that will be like a license to use alcohol worse off in uncontrolled place and

drinking becomes part of their life more than it was intended.

Elisardo et.al also presents an existing relationship between the abuse of drugs such as alcohol and parenting styles. The author reference to Baldwin (1948) "...Is considered the first author to identify a relationship between parents' upbringing style and the subsequent behavior of their offspring." In different cultures, parents adapt to their own pattern of upbringing their children but it does not do away with the effect on the behavior of the child either. "He described three behavior patterns in parents: Authoritative, indulgent and accepting." In one way or the other, there are effects of each pattern that the parents will take. The authors again agree to the fact that, "If we consider that the family has a crucial role in the prevention and treatment of substance use in young people, then there is no doubt that parental styles can increase the risk of drug use or help to protect against it" This just confirms that parenting styles in different cultures affect the future position of every child in relation to alcohol abuse.

Sara et.al says, "Since Baumrind identified three parental styles and up to the present, the authoritative style has been highlighted as the most appropriate for the upbringing of children, as it produces the best results". Thus all styles work to bring up children but with the view of alcohol use, not all styles would work best. The authoritative style "... has been associated with lower levels of substance use in children." These authors agree to the power in this style of parenting but assumption still pop up that the twenty-first generation of young people do not work so well with too much authority. However it remains a subject of research to further close the gap of information.

The same authors however presents that "The parental style traditionally associated with substance use is that usually referred to as neglectful, considered a risk factor for the use of drugs in adolescents". Some cultures are so permissive to children even to the stage of losing the child. It also comes with the wave of cross-culture and globalization that has swept nations slowly but sure. It is a reality that cannot be denied and people in different places are found to be adapting to some cultures that they do not necessarily subscribe to because of the global village. It is apparent that the way people are living today is no longer the same as before. People are moving from one country to the other that is also moving from their native culture. They have to adapt to another set of beliefs and norms that they cannot question if ever they have to. Sadly, some people will become neglectful to their duty on children and thus alcohol use comes in and sweeps the children even into their adulthood.

Community, Family and Peers on Alcohol Abuse

May, Christina and David argues and say "Some of the strongest influences on adolescent drinking behavior come from the people that youth spend the most time with: family and friends." One cannot survive among a family or even friends that abuse alcohol so much and remain in abstinence. The effect will be overwhelming especially when we consider that the wave is going against an adolescent. Therefore the same authors further suggest, "Conversely, family support, bonding, and parental monitoring is associated with lower alcohol abuse." Therefore it is however possible to maintain low alcohol abuse and even go up to abstinence if necessary support systems are in place for the young people.

The author also presents an element of variables that are evident in different cultures that influence alcohol abuse in young people. These variables "are social factors, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions regarding religion and the family, cultural identity and stress factors characteristics which potentially influence student emotions, motivations and beliefs". These elements are very critical for the decision that the children will have to take in response to alcohol abuse. The factors are key in that they affect the daily livelihood of the young people at all times and they cannot ignore the effect.

Actually Anne and Bobby go on to say, "these variables impact adolescents' motivations to either abuse or avoid drug use their emotional response to prevention messages and their beliefs about the consequences of substance use and its impact on their identity or membership in a particular ethnic group." This means that some adolescents may actually use the drugs for the want to be identified or gain full membership into an ethnic group or family.

Religion and culture against alcohol Abuse

In the continued talk about the link between alcohol abuse and religion, Dr Wells says, "Numerous studies that have focused on adolescents and adults have clearly indicated that religiosity has an inverse relationship with alcohol use." This is to confirm that one cannot separate their religious inclinations from day to day behaviors especially in the abuse of alcohol. In another way, the religious beliefs influence the level to which either adults or adolescents engage themselves in alcohol abuse.

In trying to discuss the effects of religiosity and campus alcohol culture, Dr Wells goes on to say that, "Moreover, religious groups that are the most proscriptive on alcohol consumption had the lowest rate of alcohol use." In light of this statement, it becomes clear that not all religions help reduce the consumption or discourage the abuse of alcohol. Some religions are permissive to the different drinking cultures that exist.

However the author argues that it is the most proscriptive religious group that records a reduced usage of alcohol. So it is not just about a religion but what it upholds too.

In the studies done by Dr Wells, he says, "... as a person's religiosity increases, the likelihood of alcohol consumption decreases." This follows the same thought that the religious beliefs will influence one's decision on the abuse of alcohol for the good. Therefore in view of conservative religions that are not permissive to the use of alcohol, the consumption records of such believers should decrease as their religiosity increases. The opposite of that becomes equally true as well.

It is in the same study where the author presents that "A second finding is that students who attend a religious college have a higher level of religiosity than students who attend a secular university." When students attend a secular college, they have all the freedoms and less control that will not help them in any way to their religious life. However those at the religious college are introduced and taught in a religious way and the influence of the religious teachings will affect the behavior. This is why he says, "Students who attend a secular university are more likely to consume alcohol than students who attend a religious college." It comes from the religious beliefs that stand so much against consumption of alcohol.

The use of alcohol in colleges cannot be discussed without talking about the environment in which the students live. "College environment is a significant predictor of moderate and heavy alcohol consumption." This means that just by seeing the environment, one can easily tell the outcome of alcohol consumption in a particular campus. In light of this, Wells has this to say, "The campus alcohol culture of a religious college is different than the campus alcohol culture of a secular university in the same geographic area." The students may be in the same area but the drinking cultures in the different campuses will make the difference. The drinking culture sets the tone of the environment and at the end produce a character into the world.

Joao and Denish further presents that, "Cultural values and spirituality play an important role in alcohol use in both the general population and in minorities." It is interesting to learn the link between the cultures of different ethnic groups and the religion that thrives in such cultures. The spirituality of people and what they value in their culture determines to what extent they use alcohol in their daily life. "Minorities appear to have a greater predisposition to alcohol use and its problems" this can be greatly attributed to their culture that is not so familiar to the general population.

Talking about the link between abuse of alcohol, culture and spirituality, Joao and Denish says "General population data show that social modeling can play an important intermediary role in this relationship" This suggests that the use of models can actually help to reduce the use of alcohol to some good level. At the same time, they also agree with Dr Wells in that "Religiosity seems to be a protective factor for alcohol abuse among undergraduate students". The interlink age becomes strong and real when culture, religion and spirituality come together especially to help the young people in colleges to decide on the right attitude towards the use of alcohol.

Zimbabwe case

The challenge of alcohol use is also evident not only in the context of culture orientation but within the native cultures there are different extremes. In the case of Zimbabwe as mentioned by the studies done, there is a special ethnic group that has a strong bias to the use of alcohol above the average consumption of an ordinary Zimbabwean. The Tonga people who live in Binga area, Matabeleland north part of Zimbabwe are so much absorbed in the abuse of alcohol and other toxic substances.

This group of people is well known for to have high respect of everything that is traditional and cultural. So much activity has happened that could have affected and diluted the culture of these people but despite intermarriages, civilization and technology coming in their community, nothing much has changed. The Tonga people are well known to for employing traditional herbs to treat a host of ailments like snakebites and many others. Their old women have the knowledge of doing some medical procedures that would require a highly equipped modern theatre but they still do that in the bush and life goes on. All these things happening in their life, alcohol is part of almost all their traditions and rituals.

Talking of the abuse of alcohol and the Tonga people, there is virtually no gap between the two. The men in this ethnic group use so much of alcohol such that the married women complain about poor intimacy in their marriages. Alcohol and the life of the Tonga people are almost inseparable. It is interesting to note that in the search of information about the basis of this culture, so much has been unearthed.

In an attempt to understand more about this culture, informal interviews were conducted at Binga Centre among different groups of the Tonga people. The interviews were conducted among teenagers of age {13-19}, young adults {20-30} and adults {31++}. Among the interviewed people, females of the same age groups were also included as interviewees. The responses of the interviews were gathered together and analyzed to get the true reflection of the Tonga people.

It was discovered in the process that the abuse of alcohol is not only for the males only but almost everyone in the community. This is so because the culture has got so many rituals that they do through out the year and in almost every ritual that they perform, alcohol is key to complete the process. When going through the rituals, the elders of the land lead out even into the drinking of alcohol but a time comes for everyone in the community to partake of the drink. The children even at the age of 13 years or even young than that are also expected to drink of the beverage as an act of solidarity in the community.

This search of information agrees to Sara et.al when they discuss the idea of the 'first drink' for the children as in the case of Italy and Finland. In the interviews, 80% of the teenage girls confirmed to have taken their first drink of alcohol in the community rituals whilst 90% of the teenage boys confirm the same too. At the same time more than 75% of both male and female of the young adults say that they either started on alcohol in their homes or at the community rituals. This just confirms that culture can never be taken for granted in the life of people daily especially when we talk of the abuse of alcohol.

The information received from the interview of the adults confirm again that 60% of the adults use alcohol at the rituals and even in the homes as a way of showing the young people the identity of their culture. However 40% of the adults abuse alcohol because of the cultural demands and personal interest too. For the adult Tonga or parent who gives value to the culture, its respect and place the abuse of alcohol in relationship to the culture is nothing to be tempered with. It has to be done well and not haphazardly but in a befitting manner. This also is a way that the Tonga uses to maintain the culture ongoing from generation to generation.

However it has also been discovered that among the Tonga people, there are some who for one reason or another decide not to be part of the rituals or either of the cultural activities. The effect to such has been the loss of identity with their common people. Unfortunately identity is a critical element in our survival as human beings. It is because of such people that more information about this culture is now becoming available since it used to be known as a closed culture.

From the case of the Tonga people, it can be said of them that they live up to their culture and they can be easily be identified by their culture than anything else. In this ethnic group, we can be confident to say that culture and the abuse of alcohol cannot be separated, the two are one. This does not make the Tonga immune to the globalization, acculturation and cultural orientation effects. The people of this culture are equally affected the said forces of this world and some of the members of this culture have since been victims of the forces. It is however important to note that despite all that, among the many cultures that exist in Zimbabwe, this particular culture has managed to maintain its face to some good level.

IV. CONCLUSION

When we consider what authors in this paper are saying, one can easily agree with Anne and Bobby that substance abuse including alcohol is a global problem. Religious leaders, Educators and some Community are very much concerned with the effects of alcohol abuse especially among students in high school and college or universities. In their different capacities, they are doing all that they can to contain the problem but it is unfortunate that the force they have to fight against is much older than the practice or use of alcohol itself, that is culture.

So much of research has been done and follow-ups to the research work being done as well but the effects continue to manifest in different ways as time moves and revolves. Diversity in culture makes the whole game a vicious cycle becomes culture being dynamic affects every facet of life and the use of alcohol is not spared either. It is therefore made clear with this paper that culture is here to stay and the effects as well. Therefore the gap that needs to be filled in is helping individuals on how they can remain vigilant among the different forces such as globalization, acculturation and cultural orientation.

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International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI), vol. 08, no. 6,
2019, pp.38-44