

Innovations

Attitude of freshmen at the University of Lagos toward alcohol use

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Abstract

The use and abuse of alcohol is widespread among students. This observation has led many researchers to conclude that the use of alcohol among university students has become a culture. Harmful use of alcohol among undergraduates has remained a prominent public health problem in Nigeria and across the globe. This study aimed to investigate the attitude of first-year university students towards alcohol use as alcohol consumption levels are highest among this age group. This was a descriptive survey study with 278 university students responding to the research instrument. The mean age of the participants was 19.55% (SD=2.27). The majority of them were females (66.9%) and between 16 – 19 years (60%). The Attitude to Alcohol Use scale was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with a combination of independent t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings showed that students had a negative attitude towards alcohol use and that age, religion and positive history of alcohol use had no significant influence on their attitude toward drinking. However, there was a significant gender difference, with males having a positive attitude toward alcohol use compared to females. The positive attitude of male students towards alcohol use needs to be given adequate attention. Therefore, developing a preventive intervention that will focus on dealing with risky behaviours including harmful alcohol use and enhancing protective factors among university students was recommended.

Keywords: 1.Alcohol, 2.Alcohol abuse, 3.Attitude, 4.Harmful use

Introduction

Alcohol consumption among adolescents and young adults has become a very topical issue and global public health problem. Although the use of alcohol dates back to many centuries, and it is embedded in many cultures and societies, there have been changes in the pattern of use, which has become a source of concern across the globe. Research has shown that heavy episodic drinking among young people is on the increase (Mekonen, Fekadu, Chane and Bitew, 2017). Many young people today do not only associate alcohol consumption with fun and happiness, they also see it as a way of coping with emotional problems, breaking down barriers and overcoming personal limits that could condition their interaction with the outside world.

The prevalence of heavy alcohol use among students in developed and developing countries has been reported. El Ansari & Salam (2021) reported a 41% current prevalence of alcohol use among university students in Finland; Mereu et al., (2021), and Messina et al., (2021) found a range of 35% -53.3% in Italy; and Htet et al., (2020) reported a rate of 20.3% in Myanmar. In Africa, similar findings were reported. For instance, Gebremariam, Mruts, Neway, (2018); Alemu et al. (2020); Gabreslassie, Feleke, Melese, (2013) found a range of 16.9% - 34.5% in Ethiopia; Olashore et al (2018) reported a prevalence of 31.9% in Botswana. In Ghana, it was 19.4% (Aboagye et al., 2021) and in Uganda, 8.9% was reported (Kamulegeya et al., 2020). Mereu et al. (2021) noted that 17% of the students increased their alcohol intake after their enrollment into the university.

In Nigeria, the use of alcohol by adolescents and young adults has been an issue of great concern. This is especially so because of the critical nature of the adolescent period (marked by several changes). Asagba, Agberotimi, and Olaseni (2021) reported that 31.4% of students in Nigeria Universities use alcohol and that 9.1% of them have alcohol use disorder. Similar studies across different regions in the country also report a high prevalence of alcohol use among this population. For instance, in the North Central region, a range of 12.5% - 33.3% was reported (Makanjuola, Abiodun&Sajo, 2014; Ajayi, Owolabi&Olajire 2019; Eze&Uzoeghe, 2015); in the South East it was 61.1% - 78.4% (Aguocha&Nwefo, 2021; Chikere&Mayowa, 2011), in the South West it was 72.3% - 85% (Babalola, Ogunwale&Akinhanmi, 2013; Adekeye, Adeusi, Ogbuiyi, &Chenube, 2015) and in the South-South a prevalence of 27.5% -58% was reported (Johnson, Akpanedkpo, Okonna, Adeboye&Udoh, 2017; Adeyemo, Ohaeri, Okpala&Ogodo, 2016).Chikere and Mayowa (2011) in their study on the prevalence and perceived health effects of alcohol use among male undergraduate students reported a prevalence of 78.4% with 27% being heavy drinkers. They also reported the top reasons for the use of alcohol among the students including to deal with stress and feel relaxed (52.6%), to feel high (24.4%), and because their friends use (16.4%).

Perceived peer attitude towards drinking was identified as one of the strongest predictors of alcohol use among students. Several other reasons have been given for alcohol consumption among university students such as having favourable attitude towards drinking, social enhancement, enjoyment, image enhancement, peer influence, and parental attitude among others (Lee, Patrick, Neighbors, Lewis, Tollison, and Larimer, 2010; Taremian et al., 2018, Gervilla et al., 2020). Environmental factor such as campus culture that perceives drinking as normative could also explain why some students use alcohol. This is because students are typically free of adult supervision on campus. For many of them it is the first time they will leave their homes to be independent. For those who were non-drinkers, mingling with their peers that drink facilitates their access to alcohol.

According to the social learning perspective, an individual's beliefs about the effects of alcohol, that is the alcohol expectancies, influence his/her likelihood of drinking alcohol. These expectancies are involved in the commencement and continual use of alcohol from adolescence through adulthood. Positive attitudes towards alcohol use correlate positively with future alcohol use (Collins, Witkiewitz, and Larimer, 2011).

The reinforcement principles is also implicated in alcohol use in the sense that alcohol use stimulates the pleasure centers of the brain, therefore the individual seeks this feeling repeatedly, causing positive reinforcement. The use of alcohol is usually preceded by favourable disposition to it, because individuals' attitudes have strong influence on their behaviours. While there is overwhelming evidence on alcohol consumption in this population, there is dearth of literature on the role of attitude on drinking behaviour.

Statement of Problem

Alcohol consumption has been identified as the world's third largest risk factor for disease and disability. The WHO Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health (2018) indicated that 3 million deaths (5.3% of all deaths) linked to harmful alcohol use occurred in 2016, and 13.5% of all deaths among individuals between ages 20- 29 years were attributed to alcohol consumption; and over 200 diseases and injuries have been implicated in harmful alcohol use. In addition to the morbidity and mortality, there are other numerous well-documented consequences of harmful

alcohol use. This includes academic underachievement (Mazur, Tabak, Dzielska, Waz and Oblacinska, 2016), injuries and hospitalization, risky sexual behavior or sexual assault, and harm to others (Hingson and White, 2014; Kim, Asrani, Shah, Kim and Schneekloth, 2012; risk for developing alcohol use disorders (Arria, 2008; Hingson, Heeren and Winter, 2006); the risk for neurocognitive impairment and poor executive function (Bava and Tapert, 2010; Silveri, 2012) legal problems and driving under influence (DUI) crashes and deaths. Furthermore, risky alcohol use was reported to be a strong predictor of students' mental ill health in the sense that it contributes to increased feeling of depressive symptoms, and self-harm behaviors such as suicidal attempts and aggressive behaviors (Peltzer, Pengpid, and Tepirou, 2016; Bravo, Pearson, and Henson, 2017). In view of the myriad of consequences associated with risky alcohol use, it will be almost impossible for any student who engages in risky drinking behavior to perform optimally in his/her academic pursuit. This would mean turning out low quality graduates into the society, thereby increasing the number of unemployable youths in the society. The long term consequences will be increase in crime rate and criminality among the youths. The observation of this problem gave rise to this research.

Statement of Objectives

The objectives of the study include:

- i. To assess the attitude of undergraduates towards alcohol use
- ii. To find out the influence of age, gender, and religion on attitude to alcohol use.
- iii. To ascertain the impact of positive family history of alcohol use on attitude to alcohol use

Significance of study

The findings of this study are likely to provide the university authorities with information on the risk factors for alcohol use among the students. This would enable them to design highly targeted health programs and messages for the students, especially the freshmen. The students would likely understand the implications of risky alcohol use and improved academic performance will be achieved.

Research Hypotheses

- i. Age does not have significant influence on attitude to alcohol
- ii. There is no significant difference between male and female students in respect to their attitude towards alcohol use
- iii. Religion does not have significant influence on students' attitude to alcohol
- iv. Positive family history of alcohol use does not have significant impact on attitude to alcohol use

Scope of study

This study was conducted at the University of Lagos, Akoka (UNILAG). It is one of the public universities in Nigeria, located in the metropolitan city of Lagos. It was chosen for the study because of its cosmopolitan nature.

Methods

Research Design

This was a cross sectional study. It was conducted among the first-year undergraduates of university of Lagos, Akoka

Population of study

This was made up of the first-year students of the twelve academic faculties of the University of Lagos. They include the faculties of Art, Basic medical sciences, Management sciences, Clinical sciences, Dental sciences, Education, Environmental sciences, Law, Pharmacy, Sciences, and Social sciences.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Two-stage cluster sampling technique was used in selecting the participants for the study. In the first stage, the Simple random sampling method (ballot) was used to select the Social science faculty from the twelve academic faculties in the university. In the second stage, the same method (ballot) was used to select five of the seven departments in the faculty of Social sciences. The selected departments include Psychology, Political science, Economics, Sociology, and Social work. The participants were selected based on the proportional cluster of students in each department. They include students that were in their first year of study, duly registered for the session, present in the class during data collection and were able to give their consent or assent to participate in the study. Students who were repeating the first year were excluded from the study

Sample size calculation

The sample size for this study was determined using the Taro Yamane formula (1967) below:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + N(e)^2)}$$

n = required sample size
 N = estimate population (660)
 e = degree of error tolerance (5%)

$$n = \frac{660}{(1 + 660 (0.05)^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{660}{(1 + 1.65)}$$

$$n = \frac{660}{2.65}$$

$$n = 249$$

To cater for 10% attrition rate

$$n = \frac{n}{1-NR}, \text{ NR} = \text{Non-response rate (10\%)}$$

$$n = \frac{249}{1-0.1}$$

$$n = \frac{249}{0.9}$$

$$n = 276.66, \quad n = 277$$

Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used for the study. It consisted of two parts. The first part was designed to gather the socio demographic information of the participants. The second part of the questionnaire was the Attitude scale. It was developed by Francalanci, Chiassai, Ferrara, Ferretti, and Mattei (2011), to evaluate the factors responsible for conditioning the behavior of adolescents and young adults towards alcoholic substances. It is a 15 item questionnaire in which participants had 5 response options (Likert scale) ranging from ‘absolutely false’ to ‘absolutely true’. The 15 items were grouped into three different domains, namely:

Domain 1: Social ease - Describes drinking behaviour that emanates from the individual’s perception that alcohol can ease social relations, relationships with the opposite sex and belonging to peer groups. High score in this domain implies that the individual believe that alcohol use enables him/her to relate freely with others.

Domain2: Unease - Describes drinking behaviour prompted by the individual’s need to escape from feelings of despair, sadness or anger or to deal with personal, family or relationship problems. High score in this domain indicates that the participant perceive alcohol use as a way of coping with emotional problems.

Domain 3: Economic aspects - Describes drinking behaviour driven by the ease /inexpensiveness of obtaining alcohol. Participants with high score in this domain believe that alcohol should be consumed whenever it is accessible, available and affordable.

The questionnaire has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.91. The domains 1, 2, 3 also have the Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.91, 0.79, and 0.84 respectively. For this study, a Cronbach alpha of 0.94 was obtained for the entire scale. The domains 1, 2, 3 also have the Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.87, 0.93, and 0.86 respectively.

Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research and Ethical committee of Federal Neuropsychiatric hospital, Yaba, Lagos. The students were seen in their classrooms immediately after their lectures. The purpose of the study was explained to them in order to give them an informed choice to participate. Balloting method was used to select the number of participants required from each department. Confidentiality of their responses was assured and verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant. The questionnaires were administered to them with the assistance from two trained research assistants who had tertiary level of education. Instructions for completing the questionnaires were explained to them at the beginning and subsequently whenever the participants needed clarification.

Data Analysis

The collected data were imputed into the computer and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. Independent sample t-test and one-way analysis of variance were used to test the hypotheses.

Results

Out of the 280 questionnaires distributed, 278 (99.3%) were correctly filled and returned. The mean age of the participants is 19.55 (± 2.27). There is a preponderance of female respondents (66.9%). The majority of the participants are between 16 to 19 years old (60%). While 33.8% are 20 to 23 years old. Over 80% are Christians, 14.4% are Muslims and the rest (4.3%) did not belong to any religion. Only 12.2% reported having a positive family history of alcohol use. More than two-third (76.6%) of the participants live with their parents, 16.5% live with either friends or hostel mates, while 6.1% live with guardians and 3.6% with siblings.

Table 1: Participants’ attitude to alcohol use

Attitude measures	Frequency	%
Attitude scale (overall score)		
Negative	231	83.1
Positive	47	16.9
Domain 1 (social ease)		
Negative	239	86
Positive	39	14
Domain 2 (unease)		
Negative	234	84.2
Positive	44	15.8
Domain 3 (economic aspect)		
Negative	240	86.3
Positive	38	13.7

On the overall measure for attitude towards alcohol consumption, 83% of the participants have negative attitude to alcohol use. For each of the three domains, the percentage of participants with negative attitude to alcohol use are higher compared with those with positive attitude (see table 2).

Hypothesis I: Age does not have a significant influence on attitude to alcohol

Table 2: One-way ANOVA on Attitude towards Alcohol Use and Age

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	158.602	2	79.301	0.459	0.633
Within Groups	47555.142	275	172.928		
Total	47713.745	277			

The ANOVA table shows that there is no significant difference in the attitude to alcohol use across the different age groups, $F(2,275) = 0.459, p = 0.633$

Hypothesis II: There is no significant difference between male and female students in respect to their attitude towards alcohol use.

Table 3: Result of t-test and descriptive statistics for attitude by sex

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.			
Attitude towards alcohol	Male	92	29.52	13.71	3.53	276	0.000			
	Female	186	23.72	12.41						
Social ease	Male	92	9.61	5.12	3.23		276	0.001		
	Female	186	7.65	4.59						
Unease	Male	92	9.51	5.11	2.71			276	0.007	
	Female	186	7.81	4.77						
Economic aspects	Male	92	10.39	5.51	3.21				276	0.002
	Female	186	8.25	4.54						

There are statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level of significance, between male and female students on their attitude to alcohol use. The results show that males had positive attitude to drinking compared to females.

Hypothesis III: Religion does not have significant influence on students' attitude to alcohol.

Table 4: Attitude towards alcohol use and religion

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Group	190.518	2	95.259	.551	.577
Within Groups	47523.226	275	172.812		
Total	47713.745	277			

There is no significant difference in attitude towards alcohol use across different religions. The null hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis IV: Positive family history of alcohol use does not have significant impact on attitude to alcohol use

The result of the independent sample t-test shows that there is no significant difference in mean between the students with a positive family history of alcohol ($M=28.35, SD =14.57, n=34$) and those without ($M=25.26, SD=12.89,$

n=244), at 0.05 level of significance ($t = -1.28$, $df = 276$, $p = 0.19$). This implies that history of alcohol use in the family does not significantly influence attitude to alcohol use. The null hypothesis is accepted

Discussion

The present study aimed to assess attitude and factors that influence attitude towards alcohol use among first year students at the University of Lagos. The findings of this study revealed that a large proportion of the students have negative attitude towards drinking. This is in line with the findings of Fadupin, Ogunkunle and Gabriel, (2014) in their study on knowledge, attitude and consumption pattern of alcohol among university students which showed that majority of the students perceived alcoholic drinks as dangerous to health and reported negative attitude towards it. Awareness of the consequence of a behavior is usually a form of deterrent for such behaviour.

The study found that age and positive family history of alcohol use did not have statistically significant influence on the students' attitude to drinking. However, there was significant gender difference in their attitude to drinking. Male Students had positive attitude to alcohol use compared to females in all the domains. This implies that they perceive drinking as a coping mechanism and as a means of socializing. Earlier studies on Gender differences in attitude towards alcohol reported similar findings (Sukhwal & Suman, 2008). The negative attitude towards alcohol use by females reported in this study may be due to socio-cultural reactions to drinking in females. While drinking alcohol by females is unacceptable in Nigerian culture, it is seen as a normal way of socialization by males. More so, differences in the socialization of males and females could also account for the finding. Dodd, Glassman, Arthur, Webb, and Miller (2010) noted that the most common reasons reported by males for consuming alcohol include relaxing, getting high, alleviating boredom, coping with social anxiety, taking advantage of cheap-drink nights, taking a break from academics, and escaping problems.

This study found no significant difference in the student's attitude toward alcohol use across different religions. Although alcohol is socially and culturally accepted in Nigeria, all religions including the traditional religions frown at harmful drinking behavior. In this study, more than 95% of the students belonged to one religious body or another, confirming previous findings that individuals who attended one religion or another have less favorable attitude to alcohol use, maintain good health behavior, mental health and social relationship (Sukhwal and Suman, 2013; Strawbridge, Shema, Cohen, and Kaplan, (2001).

Recommendations

The results obtained could be useful for developing gender focused strategies for drug prevention among undergraduates. Trainings that will focus on early detection of drug use and the appropriate interventions should be introduced as part of the students' general courses. There is need for the university to introduce interventions programs that would target the students who are at risk of developing alcohol abuse or dependence. This will enable the school authority to curb the problem early. The associations between heavy drinking and health beliefs suggest that challenging these attitudes may be a fruitful approach to prevention in this population. Therefore, university authorities need to be aware of the problems of heavy drinking among students in order to take proactive steps

Limitations of Study

The responses were purely based on self-report from the students, therefore may have some reliability issues. Only first year students were surveyed, making it difficult to generalize the findings to more diverse population. The study was limited to one university which is not representative enough for all the universities in Nigeria

Suggestions for Further Study

Further research is needed to generalize to larger more and diverse populations, and understand the formation of positive and negative attitudes towards alcohol use amongst individuals. Further studies on risk and protective factors

for alcohol and drugs use among undergraduates in Nigeria should be considered. Similar studies should be conducted across a wider scope so as to obtain a more representative findings on the attitude of university students toward alcohol use

Conclusion

A significant proportion of the students reported a negative attitude toward alcohol use. That is not to say that the few who had positive attitudes should be overlooked, bearing in mind that the students have just resumed school for the first time and many of them are yet to form social relationships. Moreover, some of them are still very much connected with the morals from their homes. The positive attitude of male students towards alcohol use needs to be given adequate attention. This is because of the possibility of peer influence. Previous studies have shown that peer attitude to alcohol use is among the strongest predictors of adolescent alcohol use. Therefore, developing preventive interventions that will focus on dealing with risky behaviors including harmful alcohol use, and enhancing protective factors among university students is very necessary.

Conflict of interest: No author has any conflict of interest to declare

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