

Substance Abuse among Adolescents: 1. Prevalence and Patterns of Alcohol Use in Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT : *The misuse of alcohol has major public health consequences and its high prevalence calls for concern especially in the hands of adolescents. This study sought to determine the prevalence and patterns of alcohol use among Junior Secondary School Students in Benue State of Nigeria. A stratified random (multistage) sampling was applied involving 12 junior secondary schools and a total of 1200 students. Data was collected with an anonymous self administered questionnaire adapted from the Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (MAST) and analysed with SPSS version 17.0. Majority of respondents are Males (57.7%), Christians (94.2%) and fall within age group 10-20 years (92%). Prevalence rate was 21%; initiation age was 10-17 yrs (62.2%) with more male drinkers (89.2%); the most preferred drink is beer (79.3%) and major source are friends (56.8%). Summarily, the prevalence of alcohol use among Junior Secondary School students in Benue State is low but most users begin at a very early age which is of concern. There is a need to intervene to curtail this trend and to further explore the contextual situations surrounding alcohol use among these adolescents.*

KEY WORDS: *Adolescents, Alcohol, Patterns, Prevalence, Substance abuse.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The misuse of alcohol has major public health consequences because of its relationship with many acute and chronic physiological and behavioural problems [1]. The high prevalence in the use of alcohol calls for concern especially in the hands of adolescents as escalation of alcohol use may be unusually rapid during adolescence. Compared with individuals initiating drug use in adulthood, adolescent-onset individuals have been shown to have “accelerated” dependency courses, with shorter times from first exposure to dependence for alcohol and cannabis and shorter times between their first and second dependencies [2]. Many studies have indicated an alarming rise in adolescence usage of alcoholic beverages [3- 5]. Adolescence is a segment of the population with age range between 10-24 years. Most junior and senior secondary school students in Nigeria are usually within the adolescent age range of 10-20 years [6]. The objectives of this study are therefore to determine the prevalence and patterns of alcohol use among junior secondary school students in Benue State of Nigeria,

II. METHODS

Study Population : The study population was the students in Junior Secondary Schools in Benue State of Nigeria and all students of selected classes were eligible to participate in the study.

Sampling : Stratified random (Multistage) sampling was applied for this study. Only government funded schools were chosen. . 4 schools were selected from each senatorial districts, 2 from each of the distinct groups. From each distinct group schools were selected based on urban/ rural basis. One school was selected from their senatorial headquarters (urban) and one outside the headquarters (rural). This brought the total number of schools selected to 12. From each school, 100 students were sampled (30 in JSS1, 2 and 40 in JSS 3) bringing the total number of students sampled to 1200.

Data Collection and Analysis was collected by using an anonymous self administered questionnaire adapted form the Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (MAST). Following the pre-test, a few modifications were made in the final questionnaire. The final data collected was analysed with the aid of SPSS version 17.0.

Ethical Clearance : Permission to conduct the survey was sought and obtained from the school principals and the students.

III. RESULTS

A total of 1250 questionnaires were distributed to students and 1,182 of them were filled and returned to the investigator. 33 of them did not either have basic information or were not readable, thus excluded from the study. Finally, 1,149 were included in the analysis, giving a response rate of 91.9%

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents : In this study, majority (92%) of the respondents fall within the age group of 10-20 years and there are more males (57.7%) than females (42.3%). Majority (94.2%) of the respondents are Christians. The respondents are distributed into JSS 1 (20.4%), JSS 2 (37.9%) and JSS 3 (41.7%).TABLE 1

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	663	57.7
	Female	486	42.3
Age (years)	10-15	584	50.8
	16-20	473	41.2
	20 and above	92	8.0
Religion	Christian	1082	94.2
	Muslim	67	5.8
Class	JSS1	234	20.4
	JSS2	436	37.9
	JSS3	479	41.7

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Prevalence of Alcohol Use : Study shows that 21% have had alcoholic drink (79% are life-time abstainers. Regarding the use of other stimulants or drugs, 89.6% of respondents have never while 10.4% have indulged in them. With regards to age of initiation of habit, study shows that 62.2% initiated the habit at age-group 10-17 years and 37.8% at age 18 years and above. There are more male (89.2%) than female (10.8%) drinkers and majority (67.2%) drinkers fall within the 16-20 years age bracket. TABLE 2

Table 2: Prevalence of Alcohol Use

Variables		Frequency	(%)
Have you ever had alcoholic drink	Yes	241	21.0
	No	908	79.0
Have you used other stimulants/drugs besides liquor	Yes	25	10.4
	No	216	89.6
Age of Initiation	10	10	4.1
	11-13	17	7.1
	14-17	123	51.0
	18 and above	91	37.8
Prevalence by Sex	Male	215	89.2
	Female	26	10.8
Prevalence by Age	10-15	13	5.4
	16-20	162	67.2
	20-25	66	27.4

Drinking Patterns : The most preferred alcoholic drink is beer (79.3%) followed by wine (13.3%) and least favoured is the local spirit –Ogogoro (7.5%). Only 26.6% of them have ever taken mixtures of alcoholic drinks. With regards to frequency, 39.4% drink once a week, 34% twice a week and 3.3% on a daily basis with 29.9% haven ever got drunk after taking alcohol mixtures (47.3%), more than 2 bottles of beer (37.1%) and as low as 1 bottle (2.5%). For those who have ever got drunk, the feelings after is that of depression (53.1%), feeling sorry (25.3%), relieved of stress (17.4%) and happiness (2.5%)..Majority (88.8%) claimed it is easy to obtain alcoholic drinks and the major source for them are their friends (56.8%) and self-purchase (31.1%).Sources of funds include Pocket money (72.2%); from parents under deceit (14.1%) and book fees (4.2%). TABLE 3.

Table 3: Drinking Patterns

Variables		Frequency	(%)
What type of alcohol do you usually drink	Beer	191	79.3
	Spirits (Ogogoro)	18	7.5
	Wine	32	13.3
Do you sometimes take mixtures of alcoholic drinks	Yes		26.6
	No	64	73.4
How often do you drink		177	
	Daily		3.3
	Twice weekly	8	34.0
	Once a week	82	39.4
	Others	95	23.2
Is it easy to get alcoholic drink	Yes		88.8
	No		11.2
How do you get your alcoholic drink		214	
	Buy	27	31.1
	Friends		56.8
	Others	75	12.0
Source of funds		137	
	Pocket money	29	72.2
	Book fees		4.2
	School fees		0.4
	Parents under deceit	172	14.1
	Others	10	9.1
Have you ever got drunk?		1	
	Yes	34	29.9
	No	22	70.1
How many bottles do you consume before you get drunk	1 bottle		
	2 bottles	72	2.5
	>2bottles	169	7.9
	Taking mixtures		37.8
	Others		47.2
How do you feel when you get drunk			4.6
	Happy	6	
	Relieved of stress	19	2.5
	Depressed	91	17.4
	Sorry	114	53.1
	Others	11	25.3
			1.7
		6	
		42	
		128	
		61	
		4	

IV. DISCUSSION

The major thrust of this study was to evaluate the prevalence and patterns of alcohol use among secondary school students.

Demography : The survey reveals that majority of the respondents (92%) are aged between 10 -20 which falls within the adolescent age group [6]. There were more male than female respondents which tallies with other reports [7] and indicative of a higher population of male students. There are more Christians than Muslims in the study population, a true reflection of the general population of Benue State.

Prevalence and Patterns of Alcohol Use : The results indicate that the prevalence of alcohol drinking is generally low (21%) among Junior Secondary School students in Benue state and tallies with some other studies [8, 9]. Reports from some studies have recorded higher rates [10- 13]. However, most of the studies conducted in Nigeria have reported higher prevalence rates. There was a significant gender difference in the number of drinkers, with males having a higher proportion indicating that drinking is primarily a male behavior. This tallies with studies conducted among Nigerian and US students [9, 14]. However, all the students belong to one of the two major religions, even though more of Christians. The two religions have been posited to influence people's drinking behaviour and both are intolerant of alcohol consumption [15]. Studies have reported a correlation between religious association and reduced substance use/abuse including alcohol [16-18]. This situation may also have informed the low prevalence rates seen in this population.

Initiation Age : The initiation age was as low as 10yrs in 4.1% whilst a higher proportion (51%) initiated the habit between 14-17 years of age and some above 18 years (37.8%). However, majority of the students (62.2%) initiated the habit of drinking alcohol at age-group 10-17yrs which tallies with other studies [1, 19] but emphasizes that alcohol drinking habit occurs very early in childhood and efforts should therefore be directed at preventing its onset. It has also been reported that, on average, boys start drinking earlier than girls [20]. A study had reported that kids who have tried alcohol at the age of 11 years or earlier are more likely to misuse alcohol at the age of 17 – 18 years than respondents who started experiencing alcohol later [21]. This means that if they are properly guided at this stage, the problem of alcoholism will be reduced to the barest minimum. This implies that somewhere between the ages of 15 and 18 years is when these students actually develop these habits. This study actually recorded the highest prevalence of alcohol use (67.2%) in the 16-20 age group. It has been suggested that the early experience with alcohol is attributable to certain personal characteristics of the individual – such as thrill seeking or adventurousness [22]. More importantly, there is increasing evidence that early initiation with drinking leads to high likelihood of alcohol misuse and alcohol – related injury during lifetime [1]. Friends are the major sources of alcohol (56.8%) whilst 31.1% buy alcohol themselves with funds from their pocket money, an option that is most unconvincing as majority of the students come from relatively poor families who could hardly afford to give them enough pocket money; perhaps the other option of obtaining money from their parents deceitfully is most probably the case.

The most preferred alcoholic drink is beer (79.3%) followed by wine (13.3%) and least favoured is the local spirit –Ogogoro (7.5%). This tallies with most literature reports which indicate that young consumers tend to prefer beer over wine and spirits in addition to a wide range of products with a relatively low alcohol content, such as alcopops, coolers, fortified wines with spirits to raise the alcohol content to 20%, cider and energizing drinks [23]. However, a study among Southwestern Nigerian students reported that the most commonly used alcoholic beverage was palm wine (60.1% of users), followed by beer (20.8%), locally fermented wine and locally distilled gin (14.7%) [9]. With regards to frequency, 39.4% drink once a week, 34% twice a week and 3.3% on a daily basis. A study in Wales has reported a weekly consumption rate of over 50% [24]. Only a small fraction (26.6%) have ever taken mixtures of alcoholic drinks with 29.9% have never got drunk after taking alcohol mixtures. A study had reported that teenage drinking was almost exclusively focused on getting drunk, observing that only one of the groups displayed very low levels of alcohol consumption not associated with intoxication. It is claimed that once young people managed to access alcohol they quickly progressed to drinking to get drunk [25]. In this study, about half of the respondents do take alcoholic mixtures, perhaps with intention to get drunk in the process. Even though, a majority of them said they are never drunk for now, this may be as a result of not having enough money to drink in quantities that will get them drunk or they are lying as a result of being apprehensive of some repercussions. Whatever the motives for drinking alcohol, these are betrayed in the state of drunkenness as more than half of them (53.1%) in this state are depressed and a quarter (25.3%) actually feel sorry for themselves. This may not be unconnected with the fact that people who drink alcohol sometimes vomit. Besides, they may actually feel sick the following day, when they are going through a period of 'hangover'. Only a handful (2.5%) feels happy being drunk.

V. CONCLUSION

The prevalence of alcohol use among junior secondary school students in Benue State can be said to be quite low compared to most studies conducted in Nigeria but still of concern. Quite a number of them initiated the habit very early in life, as early as 10 years. There are significantly more male alcohol users and Beer is the most favoured alcoholic drink. Friends are the major sources of alcohol whilst a sizable proportion buy alcohol from their pocket money and from monies obtained from their parents under deceit. There is a rising tendency for the adolescents to indulge in alcohol use with the intention of getting drunk, a situation that needs urgent

attention. At an early age, a strategic intervention is capable of arresting the level of alcohol use among secondary school students especially if we also explore the contextual situations that surround the habit.

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