

The Consequences of Alcoholism on University Female Students in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT Alcohol is known to make people merry, more outgoing and it is actually a depressant of the central nervous system. This paper determines whether alcoholism affects UNIVEN female students' academic performance. The research paper employed qualitative design data collection methods. Snowball sampling was used to select six participants who were all University of Venda students. Snowball sampling method was considered suitable for this paper as it was difficult to locate people who drank excessively and who were willing to participate in the study. Data was collected from female students who drank alcohol and were in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th level of their study. Data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that daily life challenges faced by female students lead them to drink alcohol which leads to numerous consequences. It has been recommended that drinking alcohol should be avoided since it is very dangerous to the lives of people, especially female students.

INTRODUCTION

Alcohol is known to make people merry, more outgoing and it is actually a depressant of the central nervous system. Alcoholism has also become a major problem in most universities. It is a stimulus of a variety of risky behaviours including unsafe sexual practices, behaviour leading to injury, damage to property, violence, suicide and illegal behaviour. It is the most popular drug misused by young people. World Health Organization Report (2011), indicated that 1.8 million people died in 2000 from alcohol related causes and this accounted for just over 3 percent of all deaths globally.

Hodgkinson (2013) indicates that alcoholism is a progressive disease that follows the same course in both men and women, except that for women, there are two added dangers, pregnancy and sex. Moreover, when women are under the influence of alcohol, they become sexier, more available and seek out more sexual gratification. The predicament that women put themselves in leads to the risk of unwanted pregnancy, contracting STIs and HIV and giving birth to a child

with fetal alcohol syndrome (Hodgkinson 2013). Gill (2015) in his review of 25 years of research in alcohol consumption and binge drinking within the United Kingdom undergraduate students, established that a significant number of male and female students drink more than the recommended weekly upper limit of 14 units for women and 21 for men. It appears that alcohol consumption has increased amongst women students and it resembles alcohol consumption in male students.

A study done by Morena et al. (2014) shows cases that predictors for alcohol use can be found on first year college students' 'Facebook' pages. They recommend that tertiary institutions use social media for informing students about alcohol use and misuse. According to Foster et al. (2014), females are more likely to experience negative outcomes linked to alcohol use than males. The consumption of large amounts of alcohol leads to students having various problems in daily living and academic studies rendering them a vulnerable population (Mallet et al. 2013). The use of alcohol poses a major threat to many South Africans' lives and this ultimately causes detrimental public health effects as well as negative socio-economic effects on the country (Sentlaletoa et al. 2010).

Furthermore, in a survey conducted by the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug use among university students in

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South Africa in 2009, they determined that 60 percent of students who drank alcohol tend to engage in sexual intercourse and only 645 of them use condoms. This indeed, highlights that alcohol has a major influence on our judgement as almost a half of the students do not use protection when under the influence of alcohol and this is an alarming habit. University of Venda is amongst the universities which have students at the peak of abusing alcohol because of various reasons.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this paper was to understand the academic effects, social effects, physical effects and other consequences of alcohol abuse amongst UNIVEN female students.

Objectives of the Study

The paper's main objectives were as follows:

- ♦ To determine whether alcoholism affects UNIVEN female students' academic performance
- ♦ To gain deeper understanding of whether alcoholism has any adverse effects on the UNIVEN female students' social life
- ♦ To come up with prevention measures and coping strategies towards the problem of alcoholism on campus.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, qualitative research method was used to collect in-depth descriptive data of University of Venda students based on the consequences of alcoholism on female students. The choice of the design was informed by the researchers' quest to understand the phenomenon in its entirety.

Population and Sampling

The researchers sought information from key informants. In this case informants were female students from the University of Venda. However, it was difficult to locate female students who drink excessively who were willing to participate in the study as the topic is rather sensitive. Snowball sampling was used as a sampling procedure for this study. In snowball sampling, a

few individuals from the relevant population are approached and these individuals then act as informants and identify other members for inclusion in the sample. Babbie (2013) supports this as he asserts that snowball procedure is appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate. Ultimately, the sample comprised six female students from the University of Venda in the second year of study and above who abuse alcohol. Therefore, six female alcohol abusers were sufficient as this enabled the researchers to acquire in-depth information as the researchers worked with a small number on a one-on-one basis.

Data Collection Strategies

Before the actual investigation, a pilot study was undertaken to ensure that the questions were clear, simple not leading, unambiguous and that the questions will answer the objectives of the study. As mentioned above, the researcher used an interview schedule as the data collection instrument. An interview schedule consists of instructions to the interviewer, together with the questions to be asked, and if they used response options (Sabatin et al. 2007). The study used semi-structured interview as it allows the researchers to acquire in-depth information, probe and do follow-ups as it is flexible. This choice of the research tool was also informed by Kumar (2005) who supports this as he says a semi-structure interview allows the investigator to obtain in-depth information by probing hence in situations where in-depth information is required a semi-structured interview is the preferred method of data collection. This tool also allows the researchers to use open-ended questions and it was suitable as it gives the respondents an opportunity to answer in their own words.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data gathered from the respondents was analysed thematically by identifying patterns and themes in the data and drawing certain conclusion from them (Brick 2004). The reasons for using themes is that they are best suitable for analysis of an in-depth individual interview or group interview. For the purpose of this study it was applicable as it enabled the researcher to acquire in-depth information from the participants' responses.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure credibility of the study findings, interview instruments were used. Prolonged engagement with the participants during interviews lasted for an hour and it enabled the researcher to collect more information through a lot of probing. Clear and understandable language was used in order for the research to be conducted smoothly based on the language spoken by the participants. Description of findings was documented in clear language based on the themes emerged from the study.

In order to ensure confirmability of the study findings and to assure quality of data the instruments were peer reviewed.

In order to ensure transferability of the study findings, rich content methodology relating to population sampling were explained so that they can be replicated in other settings without generalization because of the study sample size.

In order to ensure neutralization of the findings, it is important not to be biased by influencing personal factors in research. The researcher avoided the intrusion of personal bias by keeping personal notes, and not interfering with data during transcribing.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting the study, procedures for informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and participant withdrawal were designed to ensure ethical integrity and minimize any risks to participants in the study. The researcher made efforts to adhere to ethical standards. Cresswell (2014) states that ethics in research are the general obligation for researchers to conduct their craft in a socially responsive and responsible manner. Participants were adults, who each signed an informed consent form; which also served as a letter of introduction for one of the researchers who collected data. They were made aware that their participation was voluntary as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time they wished to. As this was an intrusion into their lives, respondents were further assured of the protection of their identity through anonymity. Pseudonyms names were used to identify them for the purpose of coding and analyzing data.

RESULTS

The results represent the voices of female students from the University of Venda in Vhembe District- Limpopo, South Africa with regard to the consequences of alcoholism.

Consequences of Alcoholism on University of Venda Female Students

Alcohol has come to be regarded as a significant disadvantage in a world in which there is increased demand for more education, to conscientize people on the dangers of alcohol mostly focusing on females. According to the World Health Organization report of 2000, 1.8 million people died in 2000 from alcohol related causes and accounted for just over 3 percent of all death globally. Alcohol was also ranked 5th in the list of global risks to health and caused 45 of the global burden disease, disability and premature death. In the recent statistics report by WHO (2011) excessive alcohol drinking has become increasingly alarming as some 2.5 million people die annually due to harmful alcohol use. In South Africa alcohol consumption has contributed to the prevalence of medical conditions such as carcinoma of the mouth, esophagus, stomach and pancreas, cirrhosis of the liver, psychological conditions such as addiction to other drugs (Sentlaletoa et al. 2010). The following themes derived from the consequences of alcohol on University of Venda female students. Hereunder follows a detailed discussion of the findings of the study:

Theme 1: Academic Effects

Alcohol consumption by students places a major strain on their academic development. Presly et al. (1995) indicated that female students performed poorly in a test or project and had missed a class during the last year due to alcohol use. *On the six University female students that participated in this study, some of them indicated that alcohol makes them miss classes due to hangover after heavy drinking.* The following excerpts attest to this claim:

"I miss classes especially after heavy drinking the previous night; I have also failed to write tests because I would not have prepared for the tests due to the fact that I will be out drinking, so I do not write because I know I will fail."

All the respondents agree that drinking alcohol affects their academic performance. They further acknowledged that they could obtain better grades if the case was that they do not compromise their school work because they always crave for alcohol.

Furthermore, Engs et al. (2016) state that though males experience high numbers of academic and non-academic problems due to drinking, females are more likely to miss class due to hangover.

Theme 2: Physical Health Effects

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Report (2004) maintains that excessive drinking may cause a person to have blurred vision, slurred speech, to stagger, have slowed reaction times and impaired memory. Jung (2010) contends alcohol abuse can also destroy the liver which is the main detoxifier for the metabolic breakdown of alcohol. Bennet and Woolf (2003) caution that high concentrations of alcohol damage the lining of the stomach and oesophagus, irritating the mucosa and cause inflammation. Brannon and Feistas (2013) also assert that heavy alcohol consumption reduces fertility since alcohol produces amenorrhea, cessation of the menstrual cycle and vitamin deficiency in women. Patrick et al. (2013) believe that binge drinking in high school predicts subsequent dropping out of college, although an increase in binge drinking during college is related to not dropping out.

Results from the study largely indicate the stomach irritation and cramps as body changes experienced by respondents and that it takes pain killers to reduce the pain. However, Jung (2010) in line with this view raises a concern that the tendency of alcoholics to use aspirin to reduce discomfort leads to bleeding as large doses of alcohol irritate the mucous membrane.

The majority of the respondents indicated that they become horny and also experience stomach cramps, memory loss and headaches after drinking. Results indicate participants engaging in high risk sexual behaviours such as having unprotected sex or having many sexual partners because of being drunk. Pithey and Morojele (2002) note that students who drink are likely to have unprotected sex with a stranger and in that case, some of them may not take preventive measures. The following are some of the participants' statements to validate this:

"Yes it would, alcohol is a stimulator, makes you want to have sex, it enhances the hormones, makes me feel like having sex right away no matter where I am."

"I had sex with four people in one night and the next morning felt as if my body had been run over by a train."

Theme 3: Social Effects

Hodgkinson (2013) explains this by stating that it is difficult for alcoholics to form intimate relationships because when they damp down their real feelings thus alcohol is basically viewed as a self-chosen anaesthesia.

Some of the respondents outline that their relationship between friends and family had changed due to alcoholism. They also mentioned that they are treated differently amongst their folks who do not drink alcohol because they drink alcohol.

One of the respondents clearly stated that:

"I drink every chance I get; my life revolves around drinking. Some of my friends stopped talking to me as they felt that I was a bad influence and had lost control of my life, while with some of them we just parted because we had developed different interests. Most girls do not talk to me because they associate drinking with prostitution, some are even scared I will take their boyfriends since I at times drink with their boyfriends."

Theme 4: Risk Behaviour Associated with Drinking

Cooper (2002) defines high risk sexual behaviours as any behaviour that increases the possibility of negative consequences associated with sexual contact including AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy. Most of the responses given show case that alcohol is a risk to their lives. Below are some of the responses that were shared.

One of the respondents said that, *"I had sex with four people in one night and the next morning felt as if my body had been run over by a train."*

Another respondent mentioned that,

"I had unprotected sex with a guy friend of mine and got pregnant and had to do an abortion"

These sentiments correlate with Wechsler et al. (2009), who point out that a national survey

of more than 17 000 collegiate youth for example, found that heavy episodic drinkers were nearly three times more likely to have had multiple sex partners, in the past month than a heavy episodic drinker.

DISCUSSION

This study discovered that alcohol affects female students' academic performance. These findings concur with those of Engs et al. (2016) who assert that males experience high numbers of academic and non-academic problems due to drinking whereas females are more likely to miss class due to hangovers. It has also been discovered that female students fail to concentrate in class due to having a hangover because of the previous day's drinking. Jung (2010) concurs with this in indicating that high concentration of alcohol damage the lining of the stomach and esophagus irritating the mucosa and cause inflammation.

It was also discovered that alcohol has an effect on the females' physical health. This study reflected that there are short-term physical effects of alcohol on females such as stomach pains, irritations in the stomach, memory loss, vomiting and change in the menstrual cycle. The study also raises concern that the tendency of alcoholics to use aspirin to reduce discomfort leads to bleeding as large doses of alcohol irritate the mucous membrane. Bennet and Woolf (2003) in line with this view contend that too much alcohol when taken into the system interferes with the production of certain digestive enzymes such that alcoholics are unable to absorb food properly from the intestines, when the enzymes break out of the pancreatic lining it results in abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting. Gwangwa (2011) in the same vein states that students who drink are likely to have unprotected sex and have sex with a stranger leading to high risk of STIs, teenage pregnancy and sexual assault. Alcohol also affects the social life of female students. It has been discovered that their relationships between and friends and family had changed due to alcoholism. Due to the connotation that drinking women are "loose" men tend to take advantage of them, because they are almost raped and sexually assaulted.

It has also been reflected that there are long-term and short-term risks that are subjected to

these females due to alcohol abuse. Pregnancy is one of the risk behaviours among female students due to alcoholism. It has been acknowledged that when they are drunk, female students really become horny leading them to having sex with multiple partners and at times having sex without protection.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that alcohol can destroy the future of young people more especially females. Therefore, it is important for female students to focus on their studies so that they can improve their lifestyles. The findings of this study revealed that daily life challenges faced by female students lead them to heavy drinking of alcohol that results in numerous consequences. It was also concluded that socio-cultural influence in the University of Venda impacts heavily on the female students so much that one will think the most popular way of socializing is through sharing of alcohol.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that there is a need to integrate counseling programs in the campus that would provide a service to female students regarding their dating life, family stress and academic difficulties.

Awareness campaigns on alcoholism should be initiated and done on a regular basis by knowledgeable people who specialize in alcohol abuse programs but this should be done in collaboration with students. The study also recommends that getting the students involved in alcohol abuse programs is vital as this empowers them rather than being passive members regarding anything that affects their lives.

LIMITATIONS

This study was confined to a limited sample of six female students who reside at the University of Venda campus residence within the Municipal area of Thulamela in the Vhembe District. The findings thereof do not suffice to be generalised to other districts within and outside the Limpopo Province. Future research should focus on the dangers of drinking alcohol by female students.

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