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Gender Differences in Alcoholism and its Implications during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The study explored alcohol consumption among residents in Agbani community in Nkanu-West Local government area of Enugu state, South-East Nigeria. It focused on ascertaining if there is any variation in consumption of alcohol during the covid-19 era according to sex, age grade and marital status of those that consumed alcohol, type of alcohol consumed more, reasons for consumption, and the consequences of excessive alcohol consumption. This study made use of oral stories, eye witness account, comparative time analysis and also qualitative method by reviewing existing literatures and data as its methodology. The study anchored on interactionist cultural transmission perspective which opines that humans learn how to behave in social situations whether properly or improperly by interacting with others. The findings revealed that married women consumed more alcohol than unmarried women. The findings also showed that among the alcohol beverages spirits are consumed over beer because they are cheaper. Also majority of the research participants started using it because it served the purpose of protecting them from covid-19 infection due to its high volume of alcoholic content. Findings showed that majority of the residents are ignorant of the implication(s) of alcohol abuse to their health and well being though they have fair knowledge of its cultural implications. The study therefore suggests proper alcohol sensitization especially its negative impact on ability to reproductive system such as sterility and infertility which has devastating effect on marital and family relationships. The study also suggests that accessing alcohol especially spirits should be regulated/implemented by law through its supply and pricing factors to make it less accessible. In conclusion, there is an increase in alcohol consumption without gender or age differences. The increase is associated with perceived learned knowledge that it is a preventive strategy to the world pandemic corona virus.

Keywords: Alcohol consumption, Beverages, Covid-19 Coping Strategies, Gender, Marital status.

Introduction

Alcohol has been defined as an organic substance formed when a hydroxyl group is substituted for a hydrogen atom in a hydrocarbon (Sheil, 2018). Oxford Dictionary on Lexico defines alcohol as a colourless volatile flammable liquid which is produced by the fermentation of sugars and is the intoxicating constituent of wine, beer, spirits and other drinks, and is also used as an industrial solvent and as fuel. Alcohol especially beverage alcohol has existed traditionally as

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naturals and local brews such as palm wine, ogogoro, pito, burukutu, etc. Recently factory brewed alcohol beverage such as beer, wine, spirits, etc are seen everywhere and is easily accessed and consumed over other alcohol beverages, the traditional alcohol beverages are still being drunk everywhere both in the urban and rural areas (Obot, 2000) though more is consumed in the rural areas than in the urban areas due to unfettered access of sachet alcohol which predisposes people to more alcohol consumption, ritual marriage ceremonies, etc (Adebowale, 2019). Alcohol is classified as a type of drug (Brown, 2016) that is socially accepted in most countries including Nigeria. Drug is any chemical substance when taken into the system changes the physiology of the system positively or negatively, it can either be natural or synthetic. Drugs of any nature whether socially approved or not, use without prescription is drug abuse. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) 2.3 billion people consume alcohol in the world and about 75 million are classified as having alcohol disorder (Meroni, Longo & Dongiovanni 2019). Also alcohol is defined according to the percentage of ethanol in it for instance in the USA, any alcoholic beverage is beverage containing over 5% ethanol. Different people consume alcohol of different ethanol percentage for different purposes. Type and volume of alcohol consumed is dependent on the environment and season. Worse still is its easy access anytime, anywhere, at whatever quantity by anybody, at whatever economic status (Lasebikan, et al 2018) no regulations.

Alcohol is also defined according to types which include ethyl, denatured, isoprophl and rubbing. The one well known to us is the ethyl alcohol also called ethanol or grain alcohol used in making beer, wine and liquor (Los Angeles Times, 2020). For Brown (2016) from the cheapest beer to the most expensive wine or liqueur, all alcohol is made with the same fermentation process. Alcohol as a beverage is widespread and generally tolerated in many parts of the world and Nigeria inclusive. Alcohol consumption cuts across all age, sex, marital status, religion, social status, etc. Different people consume alcohol of different ethanol percentage for different purposes. In fact humans have been consuming alcohol for thousands of years (Yerby, 2020), type and volume of alcohol consumed is dependent on the environment and season. For instance it has been rumoured that alcohol is good for cool weather. Okeahialam (2016) noted that alcohol was consumed to overcome the cold season of harmattan in Sub-Saharan Africa. Some other reasons for increase in consumption include the pleasure that users get from consuming it, aggressive marketing strategies of alcohol companies, (Lasebikan, et al 2018; Dumbili, 2013), media advertisement that use women as brand ambassadors (Graves, 2021), its social acceptance (Brown, 2016). People consume alcohol for the pleasure they get from it, other factors are poverty, illiteracy, greed, improper socialization, lack of parental care, peer pressure, societal expectation, (Dumlili, 2013) etc. In Nigeria alcohol beverage consumption increased sporadically (Obot, 2000; Lasebikan, et al, 2018) it may be linked to rumours that alcohol has the ability to overcome cold state and since it has gone viral that covid-19 virus thrives healthy in cool environment (Rublin, 2018) there is an indication that it may have been a factor that influence more of alcohol consumption. Findings have shown that women are more susceptible than men to the effects of alcohol (Graves, 2021; Ritchie, 2018), outlining the effects of alcohol

on women Graves opined that women who consume alcohol do have long term health dangers such as liver damage, heart disease and cancer than men. Other social consequences of alcohol consumption according to Graves are unstable marital and social relationships which may include lack of trust, lack of communication, abuse, adverse effect on children, etc. The negative consequences of alcohol consumption are socio-psychological, economic and even cultural (Lasebikan, et al 2018) which affects the individual, family, community and nation at large and cuts across all ages, sex, social status, etc. Therefore this study investigated gender implications of covid-19 coping strategies on alcohol consumption.

Statement of the problem

Alcohol has existed earlier as naturals and local brews such as palm wine, ogoro, pito, burukutu, etc. Recently factory brewed alcohol such as beer, wine, etc are seen everywhere and is easily accessed and consumed over other alcohol beverages though the traditional alcohol beverages are still being drunk everywhere both in the urban and rural areas (Obot, 2000). According to World Health Organisation (WHO) 2.3 billion people consume alcohol in the world and about 75 million are classified as having alcohol disorder (Meroni, Longo & Dongiovanni 2019). Alcohol is also classified as a type of drug (used as medicine, relaxative, etc) (Brown, 2016) that is socially accepted in most countries including Nigeria. It is also classified as hallucinogens for its capacity to make users hallucinate. Alcohol as a drug can be abused and involves the repeated and excessive use of intoxicating substances to give pleasure or cause escape from reality and has devastating consequences. In other words alcohol can be abused and is injurious and according to WHO alcohol chronic consumption is one of the most common causes of mortality worldwide (Meroni, Longo & Dongiovanni 2019). Though alcohol is classified a soft drug it is compulsive, alcohol is the most commonly used and abused psychoactive drug among young adults in the world (Ajayi, et al, 2019; Brown, 2016) and Kehinde and Oguntayo (1991) noted that alcohol is the first drug that was abused in Nigeria. Apart from its perceived pleasurable benefits excessive alcohol is not beneficial to people whether as individuals, groups or community. For the individual, it leads to contraction of STIs, loss of job, stress, depression, stigmatization, ostracism, life of turmoil and fear, etc. The effect on the immediate family may include poverty, chaos, lack of cooperation and trust, increase in crime, etc. Alcohol consumption has a causal impact on more than 200 health conditions (disease and injuries) and in 2016 globally 1 in 20 deaths was occasioned by alcohol and men accounted for $\frac{3}{4}$ of these deaths (Ritchie & Roser, 2019; Abiona, et al, 2019). The larger community is not left out as it faces social and economic instability, ethnic rivalry, political instability, marital instability, etc. Okeahialam (2016) and Brown (2016) corroborating Drug and Alcohol information and Support, explains the effects of excessive alcohol on the biology of man as excessive alcohol in the body depresses the brain, meaning it slows down the brain's ability to control the body and the mind. It acts like sedative and slows down muscle coordination, reflexes, movement and speech. If careless decisions are made regarding alcohol beverage, one may face terrible health and social consequences such as one becoming dependent on it. Such

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dependency is known as alcoholism. Alcoholism has these characteristics: craving, impaired control, physical dependence, tolerance (Brown, 2016). Alcohol abuse is a social problem (Lasebikan, et al, 2018; Siddiqui, et al 2020) and the effect in society compared to the effects of terrorism, insurgence, corruption, etc. In America according to Brown quoting the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence and the National institute of Health (2015) there is a yearly increase in crime committed as a result of alcoholism. Kerr et al (2012) advised that drinkers should drink bearing in mind the ethanol content of the beverage they are taking to avoid the risk of negative consequences. In their empirical research they noted that ignorance was the major reason for excessive intake of ethanol by drinkers as they do not bother with alcohol guidelines to keep safe and not aware of safe limits (Abiona et al, 2019).

Other factors influencing alcohol use can be attributed to attitude. For instance Cockerham (1978) theorized that social environment of a person such as living conditions, poverty (economic status), norms, values and cultural context affects ones attitude to a particular factor. That is, what a person does, who a person is and where a person lives can affect his/her behavior, age, sex, life style and general physical condition of a person also can affect ones behaviour. The findings of Graves (2021) noted that her female respondents stated that they went into drinking to overcome loneliness, as a result of social activities, to overcome role conflict, etc. In Nigeria like in other countries increase in alcohol consumption can be attributed to the pleasure that users get from consuming it, aggressive marketing strategies of alcohol companies (Garves, 2021; Lasebikan, et al 2018), its social acceptance (Brown, 2016), rumour of its ability to cushion the effect of cold (Okeahialam, 2016). Other factors according to the findings of Osei-Bonsu et al. (2017) include peer influence, advertisement, availability and accessibility, social networking, parental influence, curiosity and of less influence are religion and occupation. Osei-Bonsu et al (2017) noted that people consumed alcohol for fun, to stimulate appetite for food, for sexual enhancement, imitate role model, and overcome unemployment issue. Cockerham (1978) explained that as long as definitions of a social situation remain relatively constant, behaviour will generally be orderly. Communities have socially prescribed standards and values pertaining the use and consumption of alcohol beverages peculiar to each society. Therefore the social environment conditions the attitude individuals of all age, sex, social status, etc display towards the quantity and quality of alcohol consumption. Traditionally, women did drink alcohol in the close and quantity as allowed by their male counterparts this is because the traditional pattern of women's socialization includes the belief that the needs of spouse, children and others come first and that the expressions of anger, and competition (consequences of alcoholism) are unfeminine (Martins 1994). Recently while record shows that due to liberalization of laws women represent a growing percentage of drinkers though men have higher rates of alcoholism but where consumption is high gender differences is low (Ritchie & Roser, 2019). For younger women he noted the proportion of drinkers is beginning to equal that of men. He stated that older women drink less and have fewer drinking problems than older men. His findings showed that there is no sex differences in type consumed except that women used less frequently. He indicated that there was increase in adolescents that used all type of drugs the rationale being availability of purer

products and decline in price. Alcohol is also consumed to overcome cold weather as it is assumed to warm the body (Okeahialam, 2016; Rublin, 2018). That may have engineered the rumour that since covid-19 does not survive in hot environment except in a cool or cold environment and alcohol being hot can solve the covid-19 pandemic (Saddiqui, et al., 2020; Spring, 2020; Abdoli, 2020) and may have factored increase in the sales and consumption of alcoholic drinks irrespective of age, sex, social status, educational qualification without a reflection to its negative consequences (Obot, 2000; Lasebikan, et al, 2018). The study therefore x-rayed the gender implications of Covid-19 coping strategies on alcohol consumption in Agbani community in Nkanu-West Local government area of Enugu state, South-East Nigeria.

Theoretical perspective

Interactionism was coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937. Other philosophers of this theory include George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, etc. Interactionist cultural transmission perspective opines that culture is created and maintained by the way people interact and in how individuals' interpret other's actions. It is a perspective that is most concerned with face to face interactions between members of the society and this explains the contribution of the media especially face book, whatsapp, twitter, etc on covid-19 pandemic and the probable solutions. This perspective believes that culture is highly dynamic and fluid, it is dependent on how meaning is interpreted and how individuals interact when conveying these meanings. This explains why it was readily accepted that alcohol which is hot in nature is an antidote for covid-19 which does not survive in hot environment and that explains why there was an increase in consumption of alcohol especially spirits by all sexes, social status and even age. It derives social processes from human interaction. This perspective believes that people take the attitude of another in a social system. Hearing and seeing others consume spirit for prevention of covid-19 pandemic was enough to adopt the attitude of consuming same spirit to prevent it. The well packaging, easy access and cheap nature of this alcoholic drink served as an accelerator for use as medicine. Therefore, action or behaviour is a constant adaption to the environment as enunciated by this theoretical perspective.

Types of alcohol consumed

Alcohol consumed can either be natural or synthetic. The synthetic is factory made either locally or foreign brewed. They contain different percentages of ethanol which determines the grading. For instance, beer has 4.5% to 5% alcohol by volume (ABV), wine 11.6% and spirits 37% though alcohol by volume of spirits can be as high as 80% to 90% but most fall much closer to the middle (Siddiqui, et al, 2020). In Ghana among the youths more of beer (34%) is consumed over other types of alcohol beverage followed by wine (31%) and spirit (21%) (Lasebikan et al, 2018), while in Nigeria it is spirit (Ogogoro) that has between 30-60 percent alcohol (Obot, 2000). In Nigeria alcohol consumption starts from infancy as the new-born is introduced to the traditional drink by being given a drop from time to time. While some communities encourage

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both sexes and ages to be involved in alcohol consumption because it serves as a social drink and as medicine for the eye, others see it a taboo for the female folks. While others would forbid it for pregnant women in order not to affect the unborn child, it is medicine for lactating mothers as it increases the flow of breast milk example palm wine. Others would prefer their women to drink in the private as it is not feminine to drink in the public as it has marital negative consequences others take their women out even for binge drinking. Graves (2021) in the research she carried out opined that American women are drinking more now than they used to drink as studies shows that from 2001 to 2013 alcohol use in women rose to about 16% and those who consumed about four to five drinks rose to 54% and they drink mainly spirits. In the research conducted by Kaskutas and Graves (2000) in urban cities in America among pregnant women, alcohol beverage consumers consumed more than the standard ethanol size which is 12g. In fact those that consumed spirit drinks were six times the standard size. They also noted that these women were at risk of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. In another alcohol assessment research carried out by Kaskutas and Graves (2001) on pre-pregnancy drinking, they noted that though the difference between self-selected drink size and the standard size was significant for all drinks, it was much higher for spirits (307% for spirits as against 49% for beer against the standard size). Osei-Bonsu et al (2017) findings in Ghana show that there is prevalence of alcohol consumption among the youths (43%) though more of males consumed alcohol than females even though they did not give any reason for this disparity. Those between the ages of 20 -25 were found to consume more, no difference along the lines of education, more of the unmarried to the married group. The findings also showed that alcohol consumption decreased with age. According to Ajayi, et al (2019) alcohol use is responsible for 320 deaths every hour globally and the impact is more on the youth.

Covid-19 pandemic: Rumours and Realities

Rumour refers to unfound tales and has been since inception of man on earth. When it comes to health and illness, especially with the rise of pandemic people rumour a lot of solutions that tend to be dangerous to man. For instance, there were rumours concerning the inceptions and solutions to numerous epidemics like SARS, Ebola, AIDs, (Bali, et al 2016). Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that broke out first in China in 2003, also Influenza; a Virus Subtype H7N9 (H7N9) also broke out in china in 2013 (Wuqi, Cordia, Ayan & Jing, 2018), the source noted in their findings that there were rumours that went viral among which is that Banlangen (probably native to China) and vinegar could prevent and control SARS. For H7N9 it was rumoured that people could get infected from eating chicken and pepper and onions could prevent it. These rumours engineered attitude change as lots of citizens engaged in purchasing the remedies which were not scientifically proven. Also during the Ebola pandemic a lot of people died as a result of the rumoured solution of drinking and bathing with salt which spread like wild fire across the global, thanks to the social media (Bali, et al, 2016). Social media serves as a source of information dissemination and worse of it is that sometimes it carries or allows inaccurate information that cause system failure or sickness (Jalali & Mohammadi, 2020).

Rumours can induce behavioral change in such a way that it may be detrimental to health, economy, and religion and so on to the individual, organization, and/or countries. For instance, Bali et al, (2016) in their findings noted that rumours that followed the outbreak of Ebola in 2013 made the pharmaceutical companies suffer due to changes in consumption patterns.

Amidst a lot of unfound rumours about covid-19 especially from the social media and other sources such as word of mouth, mobile phone short messages, etc is that the virus cannot survive in hot weather which has affected attitude towards alcohol beverage consumption to ensuring prevention. This has given it a global concern considering the spread rate which is fast and also the death rate which is astronomical. Therefore world governments irrespective of status of country took to measures to combat the spread. Such measures include social distancing, no crowding, use of face mask, washing of hands every 20 minutes with alcohol based sanitizer, etc. which engineered how seriously the virus is. These measures invariably affected behaviours that are expected (Ugwu & Nwankwo, 2020) such as in the consumption of alcohol beverage. Records have it that the quick spread and astronomical death was more in Europe and Asia and America so the belief that the virus thrives better in cold environment. While the record of spread and death due to the covid-19 was small comparatively in Africa and some other hot regions the argument that the salient factor was the hot weather which justified the intake of alcohol to keep the body hot and further keep at arm's length the deadly virus. The chemistry of alcohol beverage causing warmth in the body when taken especially in chilly weather is a shadow as Hiskey (2013) and Okeahialam, (2016) noted that though it makes one feel warmer but it doesn't actually keep one warm or prevent hypothermia instead it lowers the body temperature because alcohol is a vasodilator. Likewise Rublin (2018) advised against drinking alcoholic beverages in hot weather as it helps in quickening dehydration which can cause a lot of other negative side effects such as heat stroke, dizziness, muscle cramp, fatigue, etc, he explained that the body's temperature is regulated by the hypothalamus gland and alcohol causes a slowing down of the hypothalamus, so if the body is hot already because of heat, the effect of the alcohol will even make the body "feel" hotter.

Alcohol beverage consumption and interventions in Nigeria

The first drug known to have been abused in Nigeria is alcohol (Kehinde & Oguntayo, 1991), alcoholism affects about 1.5m Nigerians yearly (Abiona, et al, 2019). Alcoholism like terrorism, kidnapping, religious and ethnic conflict, bad governance, etc is a social issue for its ability to affect negatively all persons in the society and the society itself. Alcoholism has been attributed to family history, divorce or separation, living alone with children, relaxation, to control unpleasant feelings, etc (Martins, 1994). Brown (2016) attributed the causes of drug abuse to availability of drug, peer influence and curiosity. Alcohol consumption in Nigeria is very high (Lesebikan & Ola, 2016) even though Lasebikan, et al (2018) noted that most of alcohol users do not know its harmful consequences. Globally Nigeria ranks third in alcohol consumption after Eastern and Western Europe as a result of liberalization of law (Ritchie & Roser, 2019). Abiona,

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et al (2019) quoting WHO noted that Nigeria consumed an average of 23.1litre of pure alcohol annually while 50.1g of pure alcohol is consumed daily by drinkers aged 15years and above. Within Nigeria Lasebikan, et al (2018) quoting NBS noted that South-South ranked first followed by South-East in alcohol consumption. Due to alcohol consumption consequences which are high in Nigeria, WHO records that both heavy and non heavy drinkers felt the effects of alcohol while at work, some were involved in road traffic accidents, some others were involved in domestic violence as they reported that 51 percent of husbands who stabbed their wives was as a result of alcoholism.

Nigeria has been unable to have a comprehensive policy on alcohol control (Abiona, et al, 2019); due to her high consumption and consequences, NAFDAC is making moves to stop alcoholic drinks (especially the sachets and small PET bottles) being effective supposedly from 30th of September 2020 (Obinna, Chioma. 'NAFDAC moves to stop...', Sept, 2020). The reasons given by NAFDAC for the proposed ban were mainly on its ability to affect the consumer health-wise such as its negative effect on public health, safety and security, its toxic proactive substance which encourages dependence, its uncontrolled access and availability especially in sachets and PET (Poly-Ethylene Terephthalate) bottles. Other reasons include loss of appetite since it gives energy which otherwise would have been provided by foods, malnutrition since alcohol beverage have poor nutritional value and its ability to cause hormonal imbalance. Before this move by NAFDAC, the Nigerian government had earlier enshrined into the schools' curricula (all levels) drug education which she deemed necessary since alcohol beverage is socially accepted to control its excessive use, it needs total re-socialisation, therefore she found it pertinent to emphasis the effects of overuse to the from infancy through the family to the nation. Abiona, et al (2019) noted that at local, national and international levels, seminars, conferences, etc on alcohol have been held for parents, guardians, parastatals of nations by both governmental and non-governmental organizations, etc for proper alcohol orientation to help give quick response as soon as signs and symptoms of any drug abuse is dictated and control its distribution, advertisement, etc. Enlightenment, employment, traditional social control such as ostracism, confinement, banishment, capital punishment such as death have also been used by communities.

Materials and methods

The study used the qualitative research design and in particular the ethnographic research design. This study was limited to men and women of Agbani community in Nkanu-West LGA of Enugu state whether married or single (divorced, separated or never married), no educational or social status barrier, and age 18 and above. The rational for involving all without stratification is that in the said study area, alcohol consumption has no barrier in terms of age, sex, social status, educational qualification, etc since the new-born is given alcohol especially palm wine but this study restricted the age from 18 years and above to abide by the constitutional age of responsibility.

The study elicited data from Agbani urban and rural communities. The choice enabled the researcher identify peculiarities due to location. Agbani town is considered the commercial nerve centre of Nkanu-West LGA; it ran a four day market which gradually has turned to a daily market because of increasing population (Moran, et al., 2018). Except for civil servants and students, indigenes of Agbani are mainly illiterates and mainly traditionalists with a few Christians. In fact Agbani is a melting point for students and business men. It has eight communities which include Ogbeke, Amaiyiagwo, Amigbo, Mbaogodo, Ukwuruta, Amakpu, Eziaba and Umuuba with a population of about 146, 695 by 2006 census (Okafor, et al., 2016). Mbaogodo houses the LGA headquarters, Nigerian law school and Air force secondary school and Eziaba houses part of ESUT community and the Eke market. These two communities were used as urban communities and the others referred to as rural communities.

Purposive sampling was used to interview customers, retailers and snow ball sampling method was used to get the wholesalers. This enabled the researcher to reach the respondents who are alcohol consumers and also the sellers. It also helped the researcher lay hold on the study content. For this study, qualitative research was used for all respondents (the retail store/kiosk owners and wholesalers) of alcoholic drinks. Two kiosks that sold alcohol were located and observed. The retail stores that were chosen was on the bases of which one was busiest with customers (this was determined by constant monitoring of these retail stores for one week, though it was on a tip off), the retailers were interviewed and the researcher with the research assistant visited some of these retailers (as purposively chosen) to monitor and observe (participant observation) the activities that were involved in alcohol transaction and consumption such as frequency of sales, type sold, who bought (age, social status and sex) and also discussions that went on during these activities both verbal and non-verbal within a period of at least two hours. We made it compulsory to participant in the evenings because that was when customers were much and they relaxed and discussed issues though we visited in the afternoons but mainly to observe the buyers.

For IDI respondents also purposive sampling was used because the researcher sought wholesale alcohol stores. The researcher observed two retail stores from the urban areas each giving a total of four retail stores. One retail store was also observed from each of the other five (5) designated rural areas giving a total of nine retail stores. The rationale was to help establish the location factor of alcohol consumption in the study area. The researcher intended to interview wholesalers from the communities to help establish the location but found out that majority of the retailers got their commodities from Eziaba (which houses the market place 'Eke' that serves as the main market where wholesalers are mainly located) otherwise from Enugu metropolis, where prices are cheaper. Wholesalers were interviewed and the researcher with the research assistant visited these wholesalers to monitor and observe (participant and non-participant observation methods) the activities that were involved in alcohol transaction.

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Both primary and secondary sources were made use of to enable reliability of information. For primary data, oral interview, eye witness accounts were used and for secondary data oral stories and other empirical works were used. For IDIs the researcher and the research assistant administered it, field notes were made to take care of non verbal behaviours or expressions. Also during the eye witness account, social transactions that took place in the course of alcohol transaction which includes consumption were recorded which were later collated and analyzed thematically also eye witness account and other secondary sources were used to substantiate findings.

Findings

This study adopted a survey method of research. The researcher and the assistant went out in the evenings and a few times in the mornings and afternoons because empirical findings have shown that most times people went out in the evenings to relax after working hours. The researcher observed and interacted with both the owners of the businesses and customers. It took a period of six months (April-September) during the covid-19 lockdown (the lockdown was not really adhered to in the study area but the researcher and research assistant made sure they used nose mask while in their mist). It was observed that many stores (Kiosks, Beer parlours, provision stores, etc) in the research area had varieties of spirits even when they may not be selling other types of alcohol. Most kiosks and provision stores fall under this category. Beer parlours sell mainly beer but still have spirit alcohol of different brands and sizes showcased. Most kiosks sell only spirits in sachets, PET bottles ranging from thirty to hundred naira and the main big bottles though it was noticed that the big bottles of spirits had mixture of roots in them and are sold in shots at the rate of twenty to fifty naira depending on choice. When most customers came they were not wearing face mask and were not interested in it, did not wash their hands or used hand sanitizer even where the paraphernalia were available. When they used it, it was in mockery as you would hear them say 'they said it is covid-19, let us wash hand but it is their disease it will never come to us.' Also when such customers came they placed order for spirits which were mainly available in sachets and pet bottles and are affordable. When the order is delivered most of the customers (both male and female, married, unmarried alike) emptied it in one gulp there and then and move on. Sometimes they ask for extra which they went away with. There were few cases where children were sent to purchase spirits. It was also observed that married women came personally and accessed more of this spirits than unmarried women.

There usually was no drinking gathering with spirits and no time for a drinking binge except for kiosks that had a closure and few seats, drinking spree can be any time (unlike with beers where there is a drinking spree from the evening to last morning as the case maybe) though one can ask that those who needed the spirit alcohol be given and he/she pays for them. Also a number of youths (mainly males) accessed this spirit drinks from these kiosks and retail stores that were studied. We could not access the inside of the kiosks because of its closure but we were able to observe a few interactions. First the drinks were displayed over the counter that usually was open

to viewers; from there we were able to determine which of the alcoholic beverages were in high demand as the retailer removes them from the counter and replaces them. We observed that most times the bottles with roots were often taken, at intervals the PET bottle and sachet spirits were taken. There were discussions which were usually in high tones. Sometimes between the customers and the retailer (both kiosks had women retailers). On one of our visits we saw some people gathered, on enquiry we understood that they were discussing one man whom they allegedly has been patronizing the kiosk seller and is almost insane due to alcoholism. The said man was staggering and soliloquizing in high tone, this finding supports the findings of Agba (2015) that talkativeness is one of the consequences of alcoholism. According to them many of them have become alcoholics and causing nuisance to the community, this supports the findings of Lasebikan, et al (2018) that increase in alcohol consumption causes alcoholism which causes nuisance in the society.

While in one of the retail shops one mid day, an incident took place, a female customer came along demanded that a particular spirit alcohol PET bottle be sold to her, there she opened it and gulped it once, belged and made a comment “I have arrived.” As soon as she left one middle aged male customer commented that women no longer have shame, they drink in the public, they want to be like men, see the way she drank the spirit in one gulp in front of everyone, well women of these days are lucky, if it were then.... The attitude of this woman exemplifies Martins (1994) assertion that liberalization of laws has encouraged increase in women alcohol drinkers.

In the course of friendly interaction with some of the customers, the researcher found that majority of them increased the number of bottles (volume) they took a day, some of the reasons being that it charged them, prevents them from cold, gives them joy, it gives energy and some would say it is medicine to this covid-19 after all government says covid-19 does not survive in cold weather. Some consumed as much as others could buy for them. When asked where and when government told them some said those who use phone told them (from friends) even while drinking, their drinking mates told them, some said they read it up from the media supporting the interactionist cultural transmission perspective which opines that humans learn how to behave in social situations whether properly or improperly by interacting with others.

A retailer when interviewed said that the major reason for increase in sales and consumption of spirits is because it helps prevent cold during the Harmattan. She further explained that they sell more during the harmattan season. Substantiating the increase in consumption (though the period of the study was not Harmattan season) but maybe connected to the rumour that it prevents contraction of covid-19 because of its hot nature (Mrs. Nwachukwu, an alcohol beverage retailer, Eziaba).

Some of them we accessed in the evening were into binge drinking (male, female, single married, mainly adults, of all social class) and were mainly consuming beer though at intervals

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there were demands of spirits in PET bottles which were mainly added to the beer. When we chatted with some of them to know the reason for the mix up majority said that beer was their brand but sometimes they add spirit to heighten their moral and to keep safe from covid-19 pandemic (as they laughed, we were not sure if it was as a matter of joke). Also it was observed that most of the females found in beer parlour joints were singles and mainly consumed alcohol beverage that contained lesser alcoholic volume. The choice maybe due to the fact they are still singles because most of the married ones as we confirmed through interactions were taking beer, spirits, etc.

During the interaction we asked if they knew the quantity they should take, one said, of course when I start getting tipsy I know I have taken enough for the day which others agreed to, this finding supports Abiona, et al's (2019) finding that consumers of alcohol are not aware of safe limits. And when asked if they knew any health implications of overdrinking, they showed this non-chalant attitude as some laughed, some signed and one made a comment which elicited others agreement "that if drinking alcohol did not negatively affect his fore-fathers why should it affect him," it makes him happy and helps him forget his problems, most importantly now they said it prevents covid-19 virus. In fact they do not even know the percentage volume of alcohol they consume nor should consume a day and are not interested to know since they drive joy from consuming it and get a sense of security from covid-19.

Most customers as were observed were people from low economic background though the research area does not really have much of middle class as workers especially government workers come from the metropolis.

The interviews with the wholesalers show that there is an increase in the rate at which they sell spirits especially the ones in sachets and PET bottles as majority of them noted that covid-19 may have been the reason since "they" said it prevents the virus from spreading. This corroborates the findings of Ugwu and Nwankwo (2020) that situations trigger behavioural change. They explained that recently there are varieties in sizes and shapes of spirits that are affordable and easily accessed as new companies bring in their products into the market with speed and beautifully packaged. For them the companies are in competition. Of importance is to note that while in the Eke market the researcher observed that these spirits in PET bottles and sachet were sold in every nook and cranny of the market including inside the park supporting the theories explaining its easy access. They are neither aware of the alcohol percentage of these drinks (probably not interested in knowing) nor aware of the extent of damage these alcoholic beverages cost; their interest is to put food on their tables.

The findings show no location difference; this may be connected to the importance alcohol plays in the lives of this community, corroborating the findings of Nwagu, et al., (2017) that alcohol beverage of any type is of great importance in the history of man.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, this study found that in the research area, the rate of consumption of alcohol has increased among all ages, sex, social status, and no differences in the type consumed, etc, except that the men take more at a time that women though women intake of alcohol has increased due to law liberalization and relaxation of customs and traditions, a multiplier effect of westernization. Increase in alcohol consumption especially spirits is in connection to its easy access, cheap nature, aggressive marketing strategies of alcohol companies and perceived false sense of security from covid-19 pandemic. Also in the research area no knowledge of percentage volume of alcoholic content on any alcohol beverage they take or what is meant by Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC), also they are not aware of safe limit of alcohol. There is an agreement that the effect of alcohol is more on women than men though modern health care has eased the level of effects on women.

The researcher therefore recommends that NAFDAC should implement her agreement with manufacturers to consistently and drastically reduce the volume of alcohol in spirit alcohol especially to avoid the unforeseen especially in dismissing the rumour that has to do with its medicinal value on covid-19 epidemic in the rural areas. Rumour creates a false sense of security which ends negatively in most cases. The increasing intake of alcohol especially spirits to prevent covid-19 should be combated. The media should be used to re-socialise the public on the falsehood of this rumour. It has been empirically proven that when the right information is given and understood and monitored, right behaviour/attitude follows suit as Ugwu and Nwankwo (2019) noted in their study that people who held burials during covid-19 maintained the covid-19 safety regulations because it was highly monitored by law enforcement agents, so with right and well understood information and implementation on alcohol beverage the expected attitude will be the result. Government should enter faithfully into synergy with communication agencies so as to wake them up to their responsibilities and seriously work on censoring information that pass through their networks. Ministry of health and other government drug agencies like NAFDAC do not have any regulatory policy on alcohol, this study therefore recommends that they should seriously work on their drug law implementation ability and collaborate with other law enforcement agencies like Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) to reduce the rate of negative consequences of alcoholism through traffic regulations. It is usually not easy to overcome alcohol consumption but through planned strategies can be regulated to the barest minimum. Proactive measures should be taken for instance use regulatory policies that will appeal to the consciences of consumers when an offence is committed due to alcoholism, like permanent withdrawal of drivers' license, professional license (lawyers, teachers, doctors, engineers, etc) and for artisans, their union leaders should be made responsible for any offence committed by their members due to alcoholism by that they will effect the regulatory policies of alcohol on their members.

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