

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION PATTERNS OF STUDENT-ATHLETES IN A KENYAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY.

Elijah G. Rintaugu (Ph.D)

Senior Lecturer
Department of Physical Education and Sport
University of Nairobi
Nairobi, Kenya.

Mwisukha, Andanje (Ph.D)

Lecturer
Department of Recreation Management and Exercise Science
Kenyatta University
Nairobi, Kenya.

FRANCIS M. MUNDIA (Msc)

Tutorial Fellow
Department of Recreation Management and Exercise Science
Kenyatta University
Nairobi, Kenya.

Abstract

Alcohol use and abuse among university students is a rapidly growing concern in universities in Kenya. The purpose of this study was to evaluate alcohol consumption among university student-athletes and data was collected through self-administered questionnaire from (n=207) student athletes. Findings indicated that student athletes consume alcohol due to social and psychological reasons. There were no gender differences in alcohol consumption and student-athletes face numerous and diverse problems associated with alcohol consumption. Educational and intervention programmes need to be put in place by sport psychologists and other help providers to student-athletes who are consuming alcohol. Future studies should focus on alcohol consumption among student-athletes in specific sports, high school athletes and elite athletes.

Keywords: Alcohol consumption, student-athletes, intervention procedures.

INTRODUCTION

Alcohol use in our society has become a major concern in today's social atmosphere (Bray, Martin, & Widmeyer, 2000). However debate ensues on whether alcohol is a drug or food. Alcohol (ethyl alcohol, ethanol) is a drug but technically it can be classified as food because it provides energy of about 7Kcal per gram. One drink of alcohol is considered to be an amount typically found in 340ml of beer, 14ml of wine or 35ml of 40 percent (80 proof) spirits. Alcohol affects all cells in the body but the most immediate physiological and psychological effects are in the brain. Researchers have discovered that people can develop alcohol use disorder from dependence and long term use which essentially can be considered a serious illness. The above scenario is also evident in universities resulting in fatal and highly social disorders. The university environment makes the students very susceptible to alcohol use and abuse due to diverse reasons. For many students, the university experience is their first time away from their families and parents which in turn prevents use of rules or curfews (Archer, 1991). Consequently, students struggle to keep control of their lifestyle because there no authority figures to watch over their decision making (Watson, 2002).

This new found freedom and a sense of invulnerability and a strong desire for exploration can lead to the development of alcohol use and abuse (Osgood, Wilson, Omalley, Bachman, & Johnson, 1996). Researchers have also found that university students are amongst the highest percentile for binge drinking due to the increases in stress level from school and academia (Presley & Mailman, 1994; Lorente, Peretti-watel, Griffet, & Grelot, 2003) Despite the general perception that athletes are more health-conscious than their non-athlete counterparts, studies indicate that athletes also abuse alcohol (Nattiv, Puffer & Green, 1997, Stainback, 1997, Leichlifer, Meilmn, Presley, & Cashin, 1998, Wechler & Austin 1998).

McDaniel, Kinney and Chalip, (2001) observed that there is inconsistency between alcohol consumption and the physical demands of sports participation. McGuifficke, Rowling and Bailey, (1991) found that consumption of alcohol is typically associated with sport among Australia teenagers and youth adults as an important component of post-game celebrations. The reasons which make student athletes consume alcohol include constant exposure and elevated status on campus, constant levels of stress and apprehension, difficulties of handling athletics and school, adapting to social change, attempting to gain the upper edge in athletics, coping with hardships on and off the field (Watson 2002, Moulton & Schnieder, 1993, Stainback, 1997, Martens, O'Conner & Beck, 2006). Parkins (1992) reported that on campus men are consistently found to drink more frequently and in greater quantities than women and experience more alcohol related problems. Alcohol consumption among athletes disinhibits and can increase self-confidence, helping tackle and reduce performance anxiety; it also decreases pain sensitivity meaning that some injuries might be considered minor. The best known and most widely seen use of alcohol in sport is both in reducing anxiety and in reducing hard tremor. Brenner and Swanik (2007) reported the elevated alcohol consumption patterns of athletes over non-athletes. They found that NCAA I school reported more high risk or problematic drinking athletes (78%) as contrasted to NCAA II athletes (76%) and NCAA III athletes (67.5%) in a 12 month period.

The study is based on the adaptation theory which tries to explain the relationship between athletes and alcohol use and abuse. Advocates of these theories have analyzed how exceptions and beliefs about what alcohol will do for the user, influence the rewards and behaviors associated with its use. They recognize that any number of factors including internal and external causes as well as subjective environmental experiences will contribute to abuse and addictive potential. They support the views that alcohol abuse and addiction involves cognitive and emotional regulation to which past conditioning contributes. Investigators have noted that alcohol users rely on alcohol to adapt to internal needs and external pressures. Ego deficiencies and other psychological deficits have been implicated as the major reasons why athletes turn to alcohol. Such deficiencies are self-esteem, peer friendships, confidence, self-acceptance and respect by others (Watson, 2002: Ford, 2007).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Watson (2002) indicates the significant issues faced by many college student athletes due to stress and pressure associated with maintaining balance behavior between athletics and academia. An overwhelming number of college students many of whom are below the minimum drinking age use alcohol and that the pattern of binge drinking causes numerous problems among college campuses. Binge drinking causes numerous problems for those around the drinker such as fighting and drunken driving which causes accidents. Wechler, Lee, Kueo, Seibring, Nelson and Lee, (2002) reported that student-athletes were more likely to be occasional and frequent binge drinkers than non-athletes and that college student in general were more likely to be problematic drinkers than non-college students. Literature suggest that alcohol use among adolescents athletes is fairly high but the problem is rather complex (Passer, 1983). Young athletes may be more likely to abuse alcohol than their non-athlete peers and more likely to suffer from behavioral and psychological problems as a result of drinking (Passer, 1983). Nattiv, *etal* (1997) found that NCAA I athletes involved in contact sports such as ice hockey and football consumed alcohol at greater frequency and quantity than their non-contact sport counterparts. This pattern was consistent among both males and females.

The drug related deaths and arrest of several professional and college athletes have fueled a public interest for examining the role which alcohol plays in the lives of athletes (Schneider & Greenberg, 1992). Martens, O'Connor and Beck (2006) speculated that the excessive time demands for college athletes may also lead to problematic alcohol problems. He also noted the possibility of social isolationism as athletes are often separated from their non-athlete peers. He noted possible psychological athletes feel as they experience demands to excel and to live up to coaches, fans and family expectations. Physically, they also speculated that when athletes are injured they may feel stressed about recovery and thus turn to alcohol. Literature shows that alcohol abuse within college athletics have been recognized as a major problem plaguing universities and colleges across the world (Choi, Kueffler & Lim 2006). Recently researchers have also investigated the alcohol usage rate of college students, student athletes, their motives for use, perception of alcohol use by their peers and alcohol consumption based on selected demographic characteristics (Choi *etal* 2005). Lorente, *etal* (2003) investigated patterns of alcohol consumption and intoxications in French sport science students. 20.4% reported more than six episodes of intoxication during the previous year. Male students drank more frequently and were more frequently intoxicated than were female students. Sports students drank less frequently but had more episodes of intoxication.

Donato, Assaheli, Marconi, Corsini, Rosa and Monarca (1994) studied the reasons why athletes turn to alcohol use. They found that student athletes feel more pressure to perform at a higher level than their peers both inside and outside the classroom. They also found that athletes encounter pressures on a daily basis such as isolated living quarters, long hours spent training and travelling. The study identified four behavioural tendencies which cause an athlete to use and abuse alcohol as opinions by the public eye and media, fear of intense failure, fear of aggression and peer pressure associated with athletes. Dumas, Turrisi and Wright (2006) studied 249 college freshmen and found a disturbing prevalence of binge drinking among students and an even greater prevalence among athletes. They found that college athletes consumed an average of 5.07 drinks per weekend, former high school athletes 4.19 and non-athletes students 3.5 drinks. Gill (2002), reviewing 25 years of research in alcohol consumption and binge drinking within UK undergraduate students found that a significant number of male and female students drink more than recommended weekly limits (14 units for women and 20 for men). He observed that alcohol consumption has increased among women students and it resembles that in male students. With the above studies it is apparent that none of them was conducted in Africa in general or Kenya in particular. Therefore it was apt to establish the alcohol consumption patterns of student-athletes in a Kenyan university. Secondly, the study was out to address the following research questions.

1. What type of drinkers are the university student-athletes?
2. Why do student athletes consume alcohol?
3. Do university student-athletes consume alcohol to cope with academic and sports pressures?
4. Are university student athletes involved in binge drinking?

The findings of the study will possibly have both theoretical practical knowledge on how to come-up with intervention measures to reduce alcohol consumption among student athletes. Secondly, significant others who are associated with student athletes will possibly be informed on the student-athletes alcohol consumption patterns.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design

This study was conducted to examine the use and abuse of alcohol by students athletes during their competitive and non-competitive seasons in a public university in Kenya (due to sensitivity of issue, the name of the university will not be disclosed). Therefore a cross-sectional survey research design was used as there were no variables to be manipulated. Secondly, the manifestations of alcohol use and abuse on student's athletes had already taken place.

Sample:

The study targeted female and male athletes participating in sports (both recreational and competitive) in a public university. The men's teams included football, rugby, basketball, track and field athletics while the female athletes were drawn from football, track and field, basketball and volleyball. The athletes' (N=130) males (n=130), females (n=77) and ages range, mean and standard deviation on 21-23, 21.3±2.5 years respectively.

Research Instrument:

A self-administered questionnaire was utilized for data collection. It was constructed by the researcher after a robust review of literature. It consisted of two sections, where section A sought the student's demographic information of gender, age, sport and section B gathered information on drinking patterns and motives for alcohol consumption. Items in section B were borrowed from the Daily Drinking Questionnaire; Drinking Motives Questionnaire and Athlete drinking scale (Ford, 2007) which examines sport related drinking motives. The resulting data was analyzed for frequencies and was reported in means and percentages. Tables were used to present a pictorial representation of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table I: Distribution of athletes based on drinking patterns and gender.

Type of drinker	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Non-drinker/abstainer	16	12.3	-	-	16	7.72
Light drinkers	38	29.3	26	33.76	64	30.91
Moderate drinkers	56	43.07	48	62.33	104	50.2
Heavy drinkers	20	15.38	3	3.89	23	11.1
Total	130	62.8	77	37.19	207	99.93

Table 1 indicates that a majority of the student-athletes 104 (50.2%) are moderate drinkers, followed by 64(30.9%) light drinkers while 23 (11.1%) are heavy drinkers and 16(7.72%) are non-drinkers. Among the male athletes 56(43.07%) were moderate drinkers and38 (29.3%) were light drinkers. On the other hand 48(62.33%) of female athletes were moderate drinkers and 22(33.76%) were light drinkers. Comparatively more male athletes 20(15.38%) were heavy drinkers with female heavy drinkers comprising of 3(3.89%).The motives which spur the athlete’s to drink is shown in table 2

Table 2: Reasons as to why the student-athletes consume alcohol.

	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I don't	25	19.2	-	-	25	12.07
Socialize	32	24.61	48	23.1	80	38.64
Escape pressure	1	0.76	-	-	1	0.48
To get drunk	35	26.92	14	18.18	49	23.67
The above three	36	27.69	15	19.4	51	24.63
Total	130		77		207	

Results in table 2 show that 80(38.64%) of the athletes consume alcohol to socialize and 49(23.67%) consume alcohol to get drunk. Equally, 51(24.63%) consume alcohol due to a combination of socialization and getting drunk. The male athletes36 (27.69%0 consume alcohol to socialize and get drunk with the female athletes consuming alcohol to socialize 48(23.1%).The frequencies on consuming alcohol due pressures are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Drink to cope with pressure of academic and athletics.

	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Never	74	56.9	60	77.9	134	64.7
Once a month	34	26.1	13	16.8	47	22.7
Once a week	13	10	4	5.19	17	8.21
More than once a week	4	3.07	-	-	4	1.93
Every time	5	3.8	-	-	5	2.41
Total	130	62.8	77	37.19	207	99.95

Table 3 shows that a majority of student athletes 134(64.7%) never drink due to pressures of academia or sports participation and only47(22.7%) drink once a month due to the above pressures.74(56.9%)of male athletes never drink due to these pressures and 60(77.9%) of the female athletes ever drink due to pressures of academia and sports participation.

Table 4: No. of drinks per sitting

	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	19	14.61	13	16.88	32	15.45
1-3	23	17.69	15	19.48	38	18.35
4-7	30	23.07	32	41.55	62	29.95
8-11	36	27.69	14	18.18	50	24.15
Over 12	32	16.92	3	3.89	25	12
Total	130		77		207	99.97

Table 4 shows that 62(29%) of the athletes drink 4-7 bottles of beer per sitting followed by 50(24.15%) who drink 8-11bottles in a sitting. For the male athletes 36(27.69%) drink 8-11 bottles in a sitting followed by 30(23.07) who take 4-7 bottles. The female athletes 32(41.55%) drink 4-7 bottles in one sitting. Consequently it appears that male athletes are involved in binge drinking than the female athletes.

DISCUSSION

Findings indicate that 191(92.27%) of the student-athletes consume alcohol with 23(11.11%) being heavy drinkers. This confirms our thesis that student athletes are not more health-conscious than non-athletes. These findings corroborates with previous studies (Watson, 2002) who found that college athletes consume more alcohol than non-athletes.

These studies had observed that young athletes may be more likely to abuse alcohol than their non-athlete peers and more likely to suffer from behavioral and psychological problems as a result of drinking. This is not remote as 11.11% of the respondents confessed to be heavy drinkers and it may be postulated that they may suffer from alcohol related problems. The influence of gender on drinking revealed that 77(100%) females were drinkers while 114 (87.69%) males were drinkers. Previous studies have reported that male gender was strongly associated with weekly alcohol use among young adult athletes. Men were more likely to be intoxicated more 10 times a year and women were more likely to be intoxicated (Faulker & Slattery, 1990, Aaron *etal* 1995, O'Malley & Johnston, 2002). Traditionally alcohol consumption was a male preserve but due to erosion of traditional cultures at the mercy of western civilization females are equally consuming alcohol. This is buttressed by the fact that university female athletes are operating away from parental control and peer influence is awash with daring into activities such as dancing which is a male preserve. In university contexts where traditional sex roles have been significantly challenged and deviant lifestyles are more likely tolerated a raise in the level of women's alcohol abuse so that it approaches that of college might be expected(Parkins,1992.,Gill,2002).

The reasons which make student-athletes consume alcohol are varied and diverse. Some of the reasons which spur alcohol consumption include elevated status, constant stress, difficulties in handling athletics and academia (Watson, 2002).Present findings indicate that majority of the student athletes 80(38.64%) consume alcohol in order to socialize and 49(23.67%) consume alcohol to get drunk. Remarkably 51(24.67%) of the athletes' consume alcohol due to a combination of factors of socialization and getting drunk. Only 11(5.31%) student-athletes consume alcohol to escape pressures. These reasons have been reported elsewhere (Ford 2007) where student athletes drink alcohol to please many people including coaches, teammates, teachers, school officials, classmates, fans and members of the media. Osgood *etal* (1996) observed that participation in sports provides opportunities for young people to drink alcohol as well as to consume other drugs because it takes participants to venues where they are out with adult and parental control. As student-athletes consume alcohol due to different reasons, then different counseling and intervention measures need to be put in place by all the significant others in sport participation.

The thesis of this study was that athletes consume alcohol to cope with pressures of academic and athletics. However, the findings of the study revealed that it is only 83(40%) of the student-athletes who drink due to pressure from academia and participation in sports. The combination of gender and drinking due to pressure of sports and academia reveals that it is only 5(2.41%) of the students-athletes who drink every time. Results also indicated that female athletes binge drink less than male athletes. Male athletes indicate that 28% of the student athletes' binge drinks every time they drink while 4% of the female athletes binge drinks every time they drink. Lorente, *etal* (2003) reported that male students drank more frequently and were more intoxicated than were female students. Presley and Meilman (1994) indicated that most students drink with an average of five drinks consumed per week and abuse correlated with a host of problems such as residence hall damage, sexual assault, fights, drunk driving and impaired academic functioning. 42% of the respondents surveyed reported at least one episode of binge drinking.

Leichliter *etal* (1998) found that male student-athletes drink on average 5 more drinks per week than other male students and female student-athletes drink on average one more drink per week than other female students. Studies have suggested that college athletes often report problems such as negative and unsatisfactory relationships with teachers, coaches and fellow athletes (Humphrey, Yow &Bowden, 2000, Ford, 2007). Results of the study showed that 50% of male athletes indicated that there is a drinking problem with all the student-athletes. 57.9% of female athletes indicated that there is a drinking problem with all the student athletes. These results corroborate with Humphreys *etal*, (2000) that almost half of the male athletes indicated that stress associated with sport participation such as pressure to win, excessive anxiety, frustration conflict, irritation and fear significantly affected their mental or emotional health.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of the study have shown that male and female student athletes consume and abuse alcohol due to different reasons. The student-athletes are engaged in both social and binge drinking which results in numerous problems related to alcohol use. From the findings of the study, it is recommended that there is need for education on the dangers of alcohol consumption and preventative interventions need to be mounted in universities. Group counseling for student-athletes who are using alcohol should be put in place.

There is need for sport psychologists, counselors and other help providers to assess and provide treatment for the alcohol abuse needs of college student-athletes. Future studies need to focus on alcohol use and abuse in specific sports and other studies can be done at high school and elite levels to establish the connection between alcohol consumption and participation in sports.

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