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## **Accessibility of alcohol as a risk factor contributing towards alcohol abuse amongst the youth of a selected rural community in Limpopo Province, South Africa**

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**Abstract.** Alcohol abuse amongst the youth is one of the major problems the world is facing, especially in rural communities where the majority of young people are unemployed and have little to do with their time. This study sought to determine the accessibility of alcohol amongst the youth of a rural community in Limpopo province, South Africa. This was a qualitative study which employed the exploratory case study research design which allowed the researchers to explore the risk factors for youth alcohol abuse. Interviews were conducted to collect data which was analysed thematically. The Eco-systems theory was used as a guiding theory for this study. The study found that there were clear associations between physical availability of alcohol, its affordability and high density of liquor outlets in one area and youth alcohol abuse. This study concluded that alcohol and other substance abuse call for preventative and intervention measures in rural communities targeted at the youth. Issues such as educating parents and guardians on how to improve their parenting skills in relation to alcohol consumption and the dangers thereof proved to be of greater need in the rural communities.

**Keywords.** accessibility; alcohol abuse; risk factors; youth; availability; affordability

### **1. Introduction**

Alcohol and drug use among the youth is a cause of increasing concern. According to Rehm *et al.* (2009), alcohol has historically been part of the human culture. This assertion explains the general societal acceptability of the use of alcohol. It is also for this reason that alcohol is easily accessible for young people, even minors who are by law prohibited from drinking alcohol. Indicative of this are results from Moore *et al.* (2007) who averred that heavy alcohol consumption and misuse is observed among the young adults. In another study by Thatcher and Clark (2008) it was reported that the abuse of alcohol and other substances in many cases would be associated with the environmental and contextual risk factors. These authors indicate that environmental factors include, amongst others, family-related characteristics such as family functioning, parenting practices, and child maltreatment. Similarly, Chilwalo *et al.* (2021) point to contextual factors such as peer influences, socioeconomic status, alcohol availability, and consumption opportunities.

Other environmental risk factors of youth alcohol use, are stated by Komro *et al.* (2007) who revealed that adolescents and young adults consume alcohol not just because of intrapersonal factors, such as personality type or social skills; they drink alcohol because it is

part of their daily lives in their communities and, for many youth, in their homes. Mafa (2020) concurs by indicating that young people's drinking behaviour is compounded by their parents' permissive attitude towards alcohol consumption.

The physical and commercial availability of alcohol correlates with its high usage among the youth with devastating effects. Lebesse *et al.* (2014) found that substance abuse has become a worrisome phenomenon in most villages and urban areas of South Africa, because youth are dying morally, socially, psychologically and physically. In the same vein, Mafa (2020) showed that when under the influence of alcohol, young people engage in risky behaviour such as fighting, driving, and engaging in risky sexual behaviour.

There is association between the number of alcohol outlets within the neighbourhood and the excessive use of alcohol by young people as it is easily accessible. Ayuka *et al.* (2014) also discovered the increased availability of alcohol retailers increases the opportunity to procure alcohol products and therefore providing an environment that supports ready access to alcohol, which in turn may affect purchasing and consumption behaviour. These effects are likely to be particularly pertinent for populations bounded to their local environments (for example, younger and older age groups, those out of the work force, and full time care givers) who rely heavily on the local infrastructure.

## **2. Review of literature**

Alcohol consumption among the youth continues to rise. Wagenaar *et al.* (2005) assert that the main cause of this is that youth have easy access to alcohol from various sources, including directly purchasing alcohol from commercial establishments, despite laws prohibiting such sales to young people under the age of 18. Mafa (2020) in addition, indicate that underage buyers are able to purchase alcohol without producing identification documents to prove their age. This assertion is observed even in rural communities in South Africa, that the laws that prohibit young children from accessing alcohol is ignored by tavern owners and government officials who are designated to enforce these laws. Young children are allowed to enter and purchase alcohol in local taverns without any form of questioning. Some children would ask an elder person to buy alcohol on their behalf so that they may get the opportunity to enjoy it.

This availability of alcohol is categorized by Babor *et al.* (2015), in terms of physical availability, which refers to the arrangements made by governments that determine how convenient or difficult it is to obtain and consume alcoholic beverages. These authors further indicate that, in broader sense, alcohol availability includes, among other things, other contraptions that regulate or facilitate access to alcohol, such as economic, subjective and social availability. Economic availability refers to how price and disposable income affect the affordability of alcohol. Social availability refers to the degree of normative support for drinking provided by a person's key social groups such as family, friends, sports clubs and the neighbourhood public house. Subjective or psychological availability refers to how accessible people perceive alcohol and their response to alcohol marketing.

Alcohol consumption, like any other commodity, is sensitive to the price at which it is sold at (Hawkins *et al.*, 1992). However, alcohol is not an ordinary commodity. It is an addictive, psychoactive substance that can cause significant harm to the individual and wider society if consumed excessively (Wilson *et al.*, 2010). The intensity of liquor outlets in one area has a lot to do with the drinking patterns of the people living in that area. Gorman *et al.* (2001) established that there is a clearer positive link between the number of liquor outlets you find in an area and the way in which people in that particular area indulge in alcohol consumption. Hasheela *et al.* (2019) also found a positive relationship between proximity, density of alcohol restaurants and the drinking patterns of people in communities where such may be observed.

They further indicated that an increase in alcohol outlets in the Southern African countries like South Africa calls for concern as it has become a social and a political pressing issue (Livingston, 2012). More liquor facilities in the community creates easy access to alcohol and also saves time to procure the alcohol beverage of choice.

This study aimed to determine the accessibility of alcohol amongst the youth of a rural community in Limpopo province, South Africa.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

The ecosystems theory was used to guide this paper. Bronfenbrenner in Greene (2017) defines the ecological approach to human behaviour as the “scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation throughout the life course between an active, growing human being and his or her environment”. Greene (2017) sees the approach as a broad framework that synthesises ideas from a number of human behaviour and social work practice theories and a perspective that offers a rich, extensive social work knowledge and practice base. The eco-systems theory allows the researcher and social workers to view the behaviour of the youth as broadly influenced by the environment and the subsystems that are found in it. Spencer *et al.* (1997) as well as Maripe and Setlalentoa (2016) indicated that the perception and behaviour of one-self is influenced by experiences in different contexts such as home, school, peer groups, work, laws, policies, social rules and community.

The ecosystems theory guides the researcher’s viewpoints with regard to the reciprocity and relatedness of youth alcohol users with their bio-, psych-, socio-cultural, economic, political and physical environments (Weyers, 2011). The focus of the ecosystems is on the interaction between the person and his environment, thus giving a clearer understanding of how the person’s decision-making can be influenced by the environment he or she is found in (Suppes & Wells, 2003). The ecosystems approach also facilitates the exploration of diversity, gender, and cultural differences, including the effectiveness or non-effectiveness of these interactions when dealing with matters relating to the youths alcohol abuse (Maripe & Setlalentoa, 2016). For instance, alcohol consumption can be influenced by cultural practices in some communities, or issues of gender can also play a massive role on the influence of youth alcohol abuse. Furthermore, the use of this theory enabled the researchers to understand factors within the youths’ environment that increase the likelihood of engaging in alcohol consumption. It also enabled the researchers to understand the context in which alcohol is accessed by young people in the rural areas.

### **4. Methods**

This study was based on a qualitative approach with an exploratory design. Creswell and Creswell (2018) aver that qualitative data can be obtained using interviews. For this study, the researchers conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with participants who were aged between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. Participants were sampled using the snowball sampling technique.

The use of this data collection method enabled the researchers to explore and describe risk factors associated with alcohol abuse amongst young people Bless *et al.* (2013). Audiotape recordings were made during the interviews with the consent of the respondents. Field notes were written in English after each interview. Before data collection commenced, ethical clearance was obtained from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limpopo, while permission to conduct the study was granted by the traditional authority of the selected rural community.

Data collected was thematically analysed. The raw data from interview transcripts, field notes and recordings was coded, and themes were developed so that meanings could be interpreted and conclusions made. These included knowledge and perceptions of the respondents on the subject matter. The researchers followed O’Leary’s five steps of analysing data. According to O’Leary (2017), the process of qualitative data analysis requires researchers to:

- Organise their own raw data
- Enter and code that data
- Search for meanings through thematic analysis
- Interpret meaning
- Draw conclusions.

## **5. Findings**

The data analysed generated the following themes:

- Physical availability of alcohol and liquor outlets density in the neighbourhood
- Affordability of alcohol

### **5.1. Physical availability of alcohol and liquor outlets density in the neighbourhood**

Physical availability of alcohol has greater effect on the consumption patterns of the youth in rural communities. The majority of the participants in this study have reported to not live far from liquor outlets in the community. Some said that they live about 500m away from liquor outlets, whereas few indicated that they were not sure but it could be less than a kilometer; and some were not sure of the distance between their places of residence and liquor outlets. Fewer respondents do not believe that being closer to a liquor outlet has a positive influence on their drinking behaviour. Those who believe the number of liquor outlets in the community and the distance between them have a positive impact on their drinking behaviour reported the following responses:

*“For the fact that I find my home to be closer to a few taverns in my community, it makes it easier for me to access alcohol because I do not have to travel far. When the nearby tavern start playing music on weekends, I am always persuaded to go there and have a drink”.*

Another participant said:

*“When I want to drink I just rush there and get myself beers and it does not even take me more than ten (10) minutes”.*

Setlalentoa *et al.* (2010) found that there exists a positive relationship between alcohol consumption and availability of establishments from which alcohol can be obtained in that a person’s decision is influenced by location, time, and affordability of alcohol.

### **5.2. Affordability of alcohol**

The majority of participants reported that they usually use the money that they get from parents to buy alcohol. The money would however be earmarked for the youth’s commute to school or lunch. For instance, some of the participants said:

*“I would put aside money every day to make up for the weekend. When my parents give me R40.00 for transport and pocket money daily, I put ten rands (R10.00) aside every day. So by Friday afternoon I have R50.00 to buy alcohol. My friends will do the same and we bring the money together so that we can buy more alcohol and enjoy the weekend”.*

Babor *et al.* (2015) reported that alcohol is sometimes made available to the youth by the significant other who purchases it for their loved ones or give them resources to acquire alcohol.

Other respondents reported to be having piece jobs that assist them to buy alcohol. Some of the respondents were vehicle mechanisms and the others would, time and again, find themselves piece jobs at the local warehouse where they would be offloading and loading cement into trucks for delivery purposes. Some of the participants indicated that:

*“I would sometimes find odd jobs in the supermarkets and hardware stores in and around this community where I would be paid for the work done on that specific day. So I use the little money I got to buy alcohol and share with my friends”*

Mafa (2020) showed that youth who cannot afford to buy alcohol may also resort to deviant behaviour such as theft in order to feed their consumption desires.

## **6. Discussion**

The findings of this study show that there is a positive relationship between the availability of alcohol; proximity and the density of the liquor outlets; alcohol affordability and the drinking behaviour of the youth. Moreover, this is evidenced by a high number (seven) of liquor outlets found in this community. These outlets are said to be less than a kilometre away from each other throughout the community. The ease of access to alcohol by young people in this community is shown in the number of taverns, bottle stores and shebeens available in the community. These findings are well related to studies conducted by Hasheela *et al.* (2019) and Rapholo *et al.* (2019) which also found that the more alcohol outlets within a vicinity the more likely are the youths in that area to engage in the abuse of alcohol.

The findings of this study further indicate that there is correlation between alcohol consumption/accessibility and its affordability thereof. The youths in this community use the monthly allowances obtained from their parents intended for school commute and lunch to purchase alcohol. This finding resonated with Mafa *et al.* (2019), who established that alcohol is sometimes made available to the youth by significant others who would either purchase alcohol for their loved ones or give them resources to acquire alcohol. Such significant others were reported to be family and social acquaintances, which makes it seem normal for young people to engage in alcohol consumption. This finding indicated that perhaps parents give their children more money than they are supposed to. The government of the Republic of South Africa has a feeding scheme programme for schools, but parents still give their children more money when they go to school. This is likely to promote alcohol consumption by young people who do not necessarily have a need for lunch money when food is freely provided for them at their schools.

In order to afford alcohol, youth in the community in question find odd jobs from the local stores which affords them financial capabilities to buy alcohol.

## 7. Conclusion and recommendations

The data indicate that there are worrying risk factors for youth alcohol abuse in rural communities of South Africa. This calls for departments in the government sector to design and to implement robust programmes aimed at intervention techniques. Plans should also be strengthened throughout the spheres of government. The results also showed that though parents of the youth may not be aware, they are somewhat contributing to abuse of alcohol by their children as they give them more money when they go to school, which is ultimately saved for use on alcohol on weekends. Programmes aimed at educating the youth on the dangers of abusing alcohol should be prioritised in this community. So should the establishment of alcohol abuse rehabilitation centres so that services relating to alcohol abuse may be accessible at all times.

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The authors declare that there are no competing or potential conflicts of interest regarding the publication of the paper

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