

## Perception of youth about substance abuse: The case of Ghanaian youth on alcohol usage

Keywords: Perception, Substance abuse, alcohol

### **Abstract**

Substance abuse, namely alcohol abuse, has been one of the primary concerns of governments and public health professionals across the globe. Abuse, whether physical, emotional, or social, is a worldwide epidemic that can be defined as the intentional infliction of misery on another individual. To accomplish this objective, a systematic review methodology was employed. The type of systematic review used was the rapid review, which draws new conclusions from extant research documents and data. The primary purpose of this paper is to investigate the views of young Ghanaians on substance abuse, specifically alcohol abuse.

The majority of Ghanaian adolescents abuse alcohol for a variety of reasons, according to this study. Using perspectives from psychology, sociology, economics, medicine, culture, and sexuality, the youth characterised drinking as a coping mechanism for numerous negative emotions, such as stress, anxiety, melancholy, difficulties, broken relationships, low self-esteem, and excitement. This study indicates that a comprehensive strategy that includes restrictions on marketing alcohol to children, increased police presence to reduce alcohol-related car accidents, more accessible counselling for patients with problematic drinking habits, and stricter pricing policies for the cheapest varieties of alcohol would have the greatest impact on preventing alcohol abuse.

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Substance Abuse, particularly alcohol has been one of the major concerns of governments and public health professionals around the world. Physical, mental, or social abuse is a worldwide epidemic that may be described as the deliberate infliction of distress on another

person (Mathews, Pacella, Dunne, Simunovic, & Marston, 2020). Substance abuse, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is the harmful or dangerous use of psychoactive substances like alcohol and narcotics. The detrimental effects on people's health are a major consequence of people using illegal drugs (World Health Organisation, 2023). The National Cancer Institute also defined substance abuse as “the use of illegal drugs or the use of prescription or over-the-counter drugs or alcohol for purposes other than those for which they are meant to be used, or in excessive amounts. Substance abuse may lead to social, physical, emotional, and job-related problems” (National Cancer Institute, 2023).

The cost of drug abuse to people, families, and society is substantial. There are several forces at play in the intricate development of the world-wide illegal drug problem. Gender, age, and urbanisation rates are only a few socio-demographic factors that have an impact. In Africa, cannabis is still by far the most popular illegal drug. West and central Africa have the highest reported frequency and growth, with rates between 5.2% and 13.5% (World Health Organisation, 2023). Throughout recent years, ecstasy and other amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) have become more popular throughout Africa. Benzodiazepines including diazepam and chlorpromazine and other inhalants were also used by the children and teenagers studied in Sierra Leone, while 3.7% reported injecting drugs. Sharing used needles and syringes is a major route of transmission for blood-borne viruses including HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C, all of which are associated with injection drug use (World Health Organisation, 2023).

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, peak rates of first-time drug use occur between the ages of 18 and 25 across most nations and within most drug categories (United Nations, 2021). Also, according to Poznyak and Rekve, worldwide, 26.5% of 155 million adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 are identified as users; this number rises to 43.8% in Europe, 38.2% in the Americas, and 37.0% in the Western Pacific Region (Poznyak & Rekve). For 2019, it was anticipated that the global prevalence of tobacco use will be 20.1% among men and 4.95% among females (Poznyak & Rekve). This equates to an estimated 155 million persons in this age range who currently smoke. In the Pacific Islands, Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, France), Chile, Turkey, and Greenland, the youth smoking rate was over 33% (Reitsma, Flor, Gupta, Hay, & Gakidou, 2021). Youth usage of ENDS (ages 8-20) is estimated as 7.8% at present, while monthly e-cigarette uses among US adolescents climbed 78% by 2017 (Yoong, et al., 2021). Cannabis, which young people view as harmless until it's legalised is the third most often used drug. Around 14 million, or 5.7%, of students aged 15 to 16 worldwide used cannabis in 2019, with particularly high usage recorded in Oceania (18%), the Americas (12.5%), and Europe (12%) (Brighthaupt, Schneider, Johnson, Jones, & Johnson, 2019). However, lower national averages hid the fact that heroin usage among US high school students had reached 7.0% in certain metropolitan centres by 2017; in 2018, rates of cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin use among young people reached 11.4%. By 2020, 6% of college students in the United States will have used non-medical prescription opioids, while 21% will have used stimulants. High mortality (15-27%) among young persons 15-29 years old from accidents and injuries due to alcohol drinking is only one of several negative health outcomes linked with substance use in adolescence and early adulthood. Increased chances of developing cancer, cardiovascular illness, and chronic respiratory disease were shown to be connected with alcohol and cigarette use (Kollath-Cattano, Hatteberg, & Kooper, 2020).

Teens who smoke are more likely to engage in other risky behaviours, such as eating poorly, being inactive, experiencing stress, and not getting enough sleep. Tobacco, cannabis, and illegal substance usage were all linked to an increase in e-cigarette use in the same studies

(Chadi, Hadland, & Harris, 2019). Marijuana usage has been linked to the initiation of other drug use and the development of mental illnesses in young people; this is supported by research. As the number of young people with unmet support requirements rose, the public health measures implemented in response to the Covid-19 pandemic—such as greater self-isolation and social distancing—exacerbated the problem (Hall, et al., 2016).

An estimated 10 L of alcohol per person per year is consumed in Ghana, with most of that coming from home-brewed drinks (Tachi K, J, Agyei-Nkansah, & Archampong, 2020). Lifetime alcohol use (history of ever taking alcohol) was 22.8% prevalent in a recent large scale research utilising data from the research on global ageing and adult health (SAGE) among 3,533 Ghanaians aged 50 and older. A total of 100% of these participants reported drinking within the previous 30 days. There was a 6.2% prevalence of hazardous drinking among current drinkers, whereas the prevalence of non-hazardous drinking was 93.8%. Lifetime alcohol usage was more common among males than women (Tachi K, J, Agyei-Nkansah, & Archampong, 2020). Another research employing SAGE survey data at the national level found that 7.6% of Ghanaian people aged 60 and up are current daily smokers. Males, those living in rural areas, and alcoholics were more likely to be tobacco users (defined as having used tobacco at some point in their lives). The survey also found that smoking rates varied by area, with the highest rates seen in Ghana's northern regions (Upper East, Northern, and Upper West) (Li, Jiang, Zhang, & al., 2017). The prevalence of drug use among Ghana's elderly appears to be lower than that of the overall population and that of older persons in certain middle- and high-income nations, according to research. However, the rising rate of substance abuse among Ghana's senior citizens is cause for concern, especially in light of the ongoing epidemic. This is because many people still turn to alcohol and cigarettes as a means of dealing with the stress, worry, and sadness that come along with the epidemic (Callinan, et al., 2020).

In Ghana, like in the rest of the globe, alcohol use is central to many social, religious, and cultural rituals. Recent years, however, have seen an increase in both consumption volume and dangerous consumption patterns among the youth, which together constitute a serious threat to public health (Ssebunnya, et al., 2020). The negative effects of alcohol intake extend beyond the person and have a negative impact on society and the economy (WHO, 2018). Problems with focus, language acquisition, and memory are only a few of the unfavourable outcomes linked to drinking alcohol as a child or adolescent (Spear, 2018). These adverse effects contribute to future behavioural, emotional, social, and academic difficulties (Brown, et al., 2008). Mental and behavioural disorders, injuries, violence, and poor academic performance have all been linked to heavy alcohol use. Studies have found that heavy drinking is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer, liver disease, hepatitis, unsafe sexual behaviours and STDs, and all of these outcomes (Parker & Neuberger, 2018).

Alcohol use among Ghanaian teenagers has been the subject of several research (Oti, 2016). The lack of research on alcohol consumption's scope and contributing causes makes it hard to execute effective treatments. The media and non-media in Ghana have recently shown an upsurge in the promotion, competition, and popularity of alcoholic beverages. These alcoholic drinks are far less expensive than sodas. Therefore, the youth often drink alcohol because of its easy availability, inexpensive cost and their general perspective of alcohols and its abuse (Osei-Bonsu, et al., 2017). This paper's main objective is to examine the perception of Ghanaian youths on substance abuse, especially, the abuse of alcohol.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

This section examines the research methods that will be used to achieve the objectives of this work. Research methods may be considered of as the methods, processes, or techniques that are employed in the process of gathering data or evidence for the goal of analysis in order to either develop new information or a deeper understanding of a topic. This study utilised previously collected information on respiratory tract illnesses in children under the age of five. This includes previously published papers, dissertations, and internet resources such as books and websites. This technique is referred to as the systematic method. A "systematic review" is a special type of review that use a predefined and methodical technique to collect and assess data in order to reach conclusions on research issues. The term "systematic review" refers to a certain review method. A systematic review is a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of the relevant published literature on a specific topic or clinical issue. Alternatively known as a meta-analysis. For the purpose of enhancing scientific writing, a step-by-step method to doing a systematic review has been presented. Not only can systematic reviews provide the evidence foundation for knowledge translation products such as patient decision aids, clinical practise guidelines, and policy briefs, but they can also help decision-makers better comprehend the conclusions of individual research in the context of the overall data. Rapid review, a subset of systematic review, was employed in this investigation. Rapid reviews can be considered a sort of knowledge synthesis in order to provide information in a timely way. Certain components of the procedure for performing systematic reviews are either shortened or eliminated in quick reviews. During the search for data, the terms *perception*, *Substance abuse and alcohol* were utilised as keywords.

The table below provides a summary of the research articles, books, internet resources, and data utilised by the study to reach its conclusions.

<b>No</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Results</b>
1	<i>“The correlates of substance use among older adults in Ghana during the COVID-19 pandemic”</i>	Prince Peprah, Francis Arthur-Holmes, Williams Agyemang-Duah, Shadrack O. Frimpong, Akwasi A. Gyimah, Faustina Kovor	2022	Ghana	The study used multivariable logistic regression analysis to evaluate demographic, socioeconomic, and health-related correlates of alcohol and tobacco use using data from a survey on coronavirus-related health literacy among 474 adults aged 50 and up in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.	In addition to the 16% prevalence of tobacco smoking and/or alcohol consumption before the pandemic, the research found that prevalence was 11.4% for alcohol usage and 6.8% for cigarette smoking. Substance use was more prevalent among male participants after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Substance use was less common among college-educated older persons and those who self-reported low socioeconomic position.
2	<i>“The correlates of substance use among older adults in Ghana during the COVID-19 pandemic”</i>	Prince Peprah, Francis Arthur-Holmes, Williams Agyemang-Duah, Shadrack O. Frimpong, Akwasi A. Gyimah and Faustina Kovor	2022	Ghana	To evaluate the demographic, socioeconomic, and health-related correlates of alcohol and tobacco use, we conducted a multivariable logistic regression analysis using data from a survey on coronavirus-related health literacy among 474 adults aged 50 and up in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.	16% of participants reported using tobacco products and/or using alcohol before the pandemic began, while 11.4% of participants used alcohol. Substance use was more prevalent among male participants after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Substance use was less common among college-educated older persons and those who self-reported low socioeconomic position.
3	<i>“Alcohol consumption and</i>	Kenneth Tachi, John Tetteh,	2020	Ghana	Wave 2 data from the World Health Organization's Study	About a quarter of elderly persons in Ghana regularly use

	<i>fruits and vegetable intake among older adults in Ghana: a cross-sectional survey based on WHO-SAGE Wave 2 data</i>	Alfred Edwin Yawson, Adwoa Agyei-Nkansah, Timothy Archampong			of Global Ageing and Adult Health in Ghana were utilised for this study, which was conducted in 2014 and 2015. Statistical analysis was performed on collected data pertaining to demographics, FnV use, and alcohol use. Alcohol use and low FnV intake were analysed using multivariate Poisson, logistic, and probit regression models.	alcohol, and almost half have insufficient FnV. Inadequate FnV intake is strongly linked to alcohol usage. Alcohol policy regulation should be part of any solution to the problem of low FnV consumption among the elderly in Ghana.
4	<i>“Alcohol Ghana alcohol use in: Ghana situational analyses”</i>	Micheal Boachie, Mustapha Immurana Abdul-Aziz Iddrisu, Emmanuel Ayifah Divine Darington Logo, Samuel Owusu	2022	Ghana	Situational analyses	The vast majority of Ghanaians have never had an alcoholic drink in their lives. However, Ghana has one of the worst rates of alcoholism and alcohol dependency in all of sub-Saharan Africa.
5	<i>“The association between abused adults and substance abuse in Taiwan, 2000–2015”</i>	Chi-Hsiang Chung, Iau-Jin Lin, Yao-Ching Huang, Chien-An Sun, Wu-Chien Chien, Nian-Sheng Tzeng	2023	Taiwan	Two million persons with universal health insurance were analysed using data on their outpatient, emergency, and inpatient care from 2000-2015. This case study defines the ICD-9 diagnostic codes 995.8 (abused adult) and E960-E969 (homicide and harm purposefully done	Substance misuse is more likely in people who have experienced adult violence than in those who have not.

					by other individuals), focusing on first-time violent offenders between the ages of 18 and 64. (study group). Male and female patients who had not been victims of abuse served as the comparison group; they and the abusers were matched on age, pre-exposure Charlson comorbidity index, and medical treatment year. For this study, we utilised SAS 9.4 and Cox regression to analyse the data.	
6	<i>“Cross-analyzing addiction specialist and patient opinions and experiences about addictive disorder screening in primary care to identify interaction-related obstacles: a qualitative study”</i>	Maxime Pautrat, Caroline Renard, Vincent Rifault, David Ciolf, Agathe, Edeline, Hervé Breton, Paul Brunault and Jean Pierre Lebeau	2023	France	Qualitative study with purposive maximum variation sampling among nine addiction specialists and eight individuals with addiction disorders conducted between April 2017 and November 2019 in Valde-Loire, France.	New ideas of shared self-censorship and the patient's personal red line, issues not addressed during consultations, and opposition between how physicians and patients would like to approach addictive disorder screening are the four main interaction-related obstacles to early screening for addictive disorders in primary care.
9	<i>“Illicit drug use in university</i>	Maeve Boden and Ed Day	2023	UK and Ireland	The research systematically combed through academic	University administrators, academics, and policymakers in

	<i>students in the UK and Ireland: a PRISMA-guided scoping review”</i>				articles published in the UK and Ireland before to August 2021-2 about the consumption of psychoactive substances by college students. research variables that were retrieved included: authors, publication year, journal, data collecting location, research design, and mode of delivery.	the UK and Ireland can utilise the identified areas as a framework for thinking about how to respond to the issue of drug use among college students.
12	<i>“Alcohol consumption among tertiary students in the Hohoe municipality, Ghana: analysis of prevalence, effects, and associated factors from a cross-sectional study”</i>	Richard Gyan Aboagye, Nuworza Kugbey, Bright Opoku Ahinkorah, Abdul-Aziz Seidu, Abdul Cadri & Paa Yeboah Akonor	2021	Ghana	Institutional-based cross-sectional study	Higher education students in Ghana's Hohoe Municipality have a higher than average lifetime rate of alcohol use, which has negative health, social, and economic outcomes.

### **3.0 DISCUSSION**

#### ***Alcohol abuse in Ghana***

Ghana, like other African nations, relies heavily on locally/traditionally made alcoholic drinks that are not officially recognised and categorised. However, it's important to note that the estimated rate of alcohol use in Ghana does not account for the consumption of traditional alcoholic drinks, which may account for a bigger percentage of alcohol consumption. Alcohol use is a major public health problem that contributes to millions of premature deaths and is a root cause of violence and injury across the world. The global burden of disease and death may be traced in large part to alcohol intake (Degenhardt, Charlson, & Ferrari, 2018). Alcohol abuse is becoming a big public health problem in Ghana despite the fact that a vast percentage of the population does not engage in it. The average annual consumption per individual is 2.7 litres (4.6 litres for men and 0.7 litres for women), according to the available statistics (Euromonitor International, 2022). It is true that Ghana's drinking habits have changed throughout time. In 1960, the average amount of alcohol consumed by a single person was 1.46 litres, climbed to 2.43 litres in 1976, then dropped to 2019's 1.59 litres. The average annual usage for the period 2010-2019 was 1.69 litres. The total volume of pure alcohol consumed throughout this time period increased from 29 million litres in 2010 to 40.2 million litres in 2019. While this may appear minimal, it is really one of the leading causes of mortality and disability (Vision for Alternative Development, 2022). In addition, there is a significant risk to the nation's health due to the widespread availability of alcohol to children and young people. Without any oversight, businesses promote and sell alcohol to minors. Even fewer stores (12.4%) prohibit sales to minors (Endal, 2022).

Beer, wine, and spirits are just some of the alcoholic drinks available in Ghana. Malt beer, wine manufactured from grapes, distilled spirits, and alcoholic drinks made from cereal grains including maize, millet, and sorghum are all considered beer (Barry, et al., 2015). One concerning trend in young people's alcohol consumption is the increasing prevalence of early alcohol introduction. The national average beginning age for alcohol usage among young individuals in the United States was found to be 15 (Frimpong-Mansoh, 2013). Another poll performed in Thai found that 79.7% of current drinkers are above the age of 15, with most young people starting to drink between the ages of 15 and 24 (Hemphill, et al., 2011). A study of drug use among secondary school and non-school-attending teenagers in Ghana found that the median age of first use was between 14 and 19 years old, with peak usage occurring between the ages of 16 and 23. The majority of young people in Ghana regularly partake in the use of alcohol, cigarettes, cannabis, and heroin (National Statistical Office, 2005). According to the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, 42% of males in the Volta Region and 37% of females in the Upper West Region reported ever having consumed alcohol. However, there is minimal regulation of the sale and use of alcohol among young people in Ghana; hence, anybody of legal drinking age can purchase and consume alcohol at any drinking establishment. Researchers in Accra discovered that among students with a mean age of 17 years old, 25.1% had tried alcohol at some point in their lives and another 42.0% were regular drinkers (GSS, 2009).

#### ***Perception of Ghanaian youths on alcohol abuse***

In a research done by Mensah, Olutobi, & Leonard, six key reasons are discussed in the participants' narratives on alcohol use facilitators (in order of dominance): psycho-social, economic, medical, socio-cultural, and sex-related aspects. Alcohol consumption was reported by participants in reaction to a wide range of emotional responses, including worry,

anxiety, melancholy, difficulty, broken relationships, low self-confidence, and enthusiasm (Mensah, Olutobi, & Leonard, 2022). Their stories demonstrated that individuals drink whether they are feeling happy or sad. When discussing the effects of economic hardships on alcohol use, several groups emphasised job loss, unemployment, and poverty. On the other hand, alcohol is used to increase productivity. Health benefits of alcohol consumption, such as pain relief, sickness management, better sleep, and increased hunger, were also reported by participants. Some of the 'supernatural power' ceremonies practised in the communities under investigation involve the use of alcoholic concoctions, and those who are particularly dedicated to achieving their goal may drink excessively. A number of respondents remarked that alcohol is sometimes used as a libido enhancer (Mensah, Olutobi, & Leonard, 2022).

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Governments and public health officials all around the world have made combating substance abuse, especially alcoholism, a top priority. Abuse, whether it be physical, mental, or social, is a worldwide pandemic that may be defined as the intentional infliction of pain on another person. Rapid economic, social, and cultural changes are occurring in most nations in sub-Saharan Africa, opening the door to more frequent and disruptive alcohol consumption. The monetary, emotional, and social toll of drug misuse is high. The complex evolution of the global drug issue is the result of a number of interconnected factors. Some examples of such socio-demographic characteristics are gender, age, and the degree of urbanisation. Cannabis is the most widely used illicit substance in Africa. Alcohol consumption among the youths in the Ghana is on the rise and now a public health concern. Problems with focus, language acquisition, and memory are just a few of the unfavourable outcomes linked to drinking alcohol as a child or adolescent. This work used the systematic review method to examine the perception and reasons for this rise of alcohol consumption among Ghanaian youths.

It was found in this study that, most youths in Ghana abuse alcohol because of a number of reasons. Considerations from the fields of psychology, sociology, economics, medicine, culture, and sexuality, the youth described drinking as a coping mechanism for a wide range of negative feelings, such as stress, anxiety, depression, difficulties, broken relationships, poor self-confidence, and excitement. This study recommends that, the greatest effect to avoid alcohol abuse would come from a comprehensive strategy that included restrictions on marketing alcohol to children, increased police presence to reduce alcohol-related car accidents, more accessible counselling for patients with problematic drinking habits, and stricter pricing policies for the cheapest varieties of alcohol.

#### **5.0 DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS**

The author has confirmed that there were no potential conflicts of interest over the course of this work's research, writing, or publication.

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