

**PERCEPTION OF ALCOHOL AVAILABILITY, PROMOTION AND POLICY BY  
NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

As a follow-up to the Monitoring Alcohol Marketing and Promotion in Africa (MAMPA) project conducted in Nigeria and three other countries in Africa, a survey of Nigerian students was conducted to assess their perceptions of alcohol promotion and policy in the country. Nearly five hundred students drawn from five faculties in the University of Uyo, Nigeria completed a perception of alcohol policy survey, in which they indicated their levels of agreement with statements on alcohol policy. The sample consisted of 265 (53.9%) male and 227(46.1%) female students; with age range of 16-37 years (mean of 24.8 years). Findings revealed that respondents were in support of policy options that sought to reduce availability of alcohol (in terms of access and cost). They also agreed with statements on alcohol as the cause of health and social problems; supported strong laws against drunk-driving; and agreed with the statement that the industry flouts self-imposed code on alcohol advertising. Chi-square analyses of data however confirmed the hypothesis that drinkers will significantly differ from non-drinkers in their perception of alcohol policy in Nigeria. The implications of these findings were discussed in the context of the development of effective alcohol control policy in Nigeria and other low and middle-income countries.

**Key Words:** Perception, alcohol policy, alcohol advertising, university students

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**INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria has an estimated population of 160 million, spread across 36 states and a federal territory, making the country by far the most populous in Africa and accounting for one out of five people in the continent as a whole. This population is projected to grow to 176 million by 2015 and more than 300 million by 2050. Many are young – about half of all Nigerians are under the age of 25.

The urban population more than doubled in a span of thirty years, growing from 23 percent in 1975 to 48 percent in 2005. This high proportion of young people in the population and the increasing number of them living in urban areas have significant implications for alcohol marketing and consumption, especially as much of the advertising of alcoholic beverages is directed at young people. Added to this, per capita income has been growing in the past decade and the projections for the

future seem to indicate a better economic condition.

About half (49.4%) of male, 74% of female and a total of 61.7% of Nigerians abstain from alcohol consumption (WHO, 2011). This high abstention rate is in part due to religious prohibitions, in Islam and some Christian groups. The most popular beverage is western commercial beer but traditionally brewed or distilled beverages are consumed widely, mainly because of their relative affordability. However, Nigeria has one of the highest adult alcohol per capita consumption rates in Africa at 12.3 litres of pure alcohol (compared to the African average of 6.2 litres). Considering that a majority of Nigerians are abstainers, this level of per capita consumption means that drinkers in the country consume large quantities of alcohol. Recent data from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011), show this to be the case – total APC among drinkers is 32 litres; 37 litres for male drinkers and 23 litres for female drinkers. Nearly a third of male drinkers engage in heavy episodic drinking, defined as the consumption of 60 grams (5-6 drinks) or more of pure alcohol on at least one occasion weekly.

A few surveys have shown that heavy alcohol use is a pervasive and enduring public health problem and the hazardous pattern of consumption in Nigeria is increasingly associated with social and health problems, especially unintentional injuries among young men (Roerecke, Obot, Patra, & Rehm, 2008). Hospital admissions data also show that harmful drinking seems to have significant effects on the mental health of Nigerians, and has been implicated in domestic and other types of violence (Obot, 2006, 2007).

In spite of this negative picture, Nigeria is one of many countries in Africa without a coordinated response to alcohol problems. Though there are laws that prohibit sale of alcoholic beverages to underage children, time of sales and stipulated maximum legal blood alcohol concentration, these laws are rarely enforced. In addition, there are no policy provisions to regulate marketing and promotion of alcohol. What semblance of control exists is one that

was initiated by the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) and the industry but it is not clear how much the industry does what it promises to do. There has, therefore, been some interest in studying the marketing and advertising practices of alcohol producers in the country (e.g., Jernigan & Obot, 2006; Obot & Ibanga, 2002), especially in the context of growing consumption and related problems. Issues surrounding alcohol policy, health and social consequences of alcohol use have also attracted research interest (Parry, Rehm and Morojele, (2010).

Lavigne, Witt, Wood, Laforge & DeJong (2008) examined predictors of alcohol control policy support among students at a public university and found less support among men, heavier drinkers, and frequent drinking drivers. A few other studies in extant literature have shown students' support for some alcohol control policies (DeJong, Towvim & Schneider, 2007; Wechsler, Lee, Nelson & Kuo, 2002). However, the relationship between students' perceptions of alcohol policies and their individual alcohol use is largely unexplored, especially in Nigeria. As a follow up to the MAMPA study in Africa which confirmed the widespread availability, affordability and accessibility of alcohol in urban and rural Nigeria (De Brujin, 2010), this work aimed at extending the limited research on student support for alcohol control policies in Nigeria and to compare the characteristics of drinking students to those of non-drinking students with respect to their perception of such policies. In specific terms, this paper is tailored to assess the views of drinkers and non-drinkers about policies directed at alcohol demand/supply control. It was hypothesized that drinkers will differ from non-drinkers in their perceptions of alcohol policy in Nigeria.

## METHOD

### Participants and setting

Four hundred and ninety two (492) Nigerian students were conveniently drawn for this study which was conducted in six faculties of

the University of Uyo, south- south Nigeria and distributed as follows: College of Medical Sciences, 81(16.5%); Faculty of Social Sciences, 113(23%); School of Management Studies, 103(20.9%); Natural and Applied Sciences, 122(24.8%); Faculties of Engineering and Agriculture, 73(14.8%). Sample consisted of 265(53.9%) males and 227(46.1%) females. Of the male participants, 127(47.9%) were alcohol drinkers while 138(52.1%) abstained. Similarly, female drinkers were 98(43.2%), while 129(56.8 %) of the female participants were abstainers. Participants had an age range of 16 – 37, with a mean of 24.84.

### Measures

Demographic information was collected by requesting respondents to state their age, gender, department and level of study in the university. To delineate between alcohol drinkers and non drinkers, an item, adopted from Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) enquired about the frequency of use of drinks containing alcohol with options which ranged from 'never' through '2 to 4 times a month' to '4 or more times a month'.

A structured questionnaire on the perception of alcohol policy (Davies & Walsh, 1983; Karlsson & Osterberg, 2001) was used to generate data for this study. The questionnaire consists of 16 items structured in a five-point Likert format of 'strongly agree', 'somewhat agree', 'somewhat disagree', 'strongly disagree' and 'don't know'. It probes into the perception of respondents on alcohol related issues such as: perception of social and health consequences; availability, accessibility, affordability and promotion strategies; perception of alcohol policies with emphasis on control/enforcement efforts and ease of obtaining alcohol. In a pilot study using more than two hundred students of higher institutions in Akwa Ibom State, PAPS was subjected to SPSS (version 17.0) analysis and it yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.95 and a split-half range of 0.82 to 0.96.

### Procedure

The researchers, together with a research assistant did the questionnaire distribution/

administration during large faculty lectures in the Faculties of Social Science, Business Studies, Natural and Applied Sciences, Engineering and Agriculture. The lecturers in charge were briefed of the aims and objectives of the study and permission to use about five minute of their lecture time sought. With permission granted, students were addressed on the essence of the study, the study time frame of 5 minutes was emphasized just as they were informed that participation was optional. Respondents' anonymity was guaranteed by asking them not to write their names, registration number and other identification data on the research materials. Few students however declined participation and informed consent was therefore assumed on the basis of voluntary acceptance, completion and return of questionnaire. Five hundred (500) copies of questionnaire were administered over a time frame of three days. Of this number, four hundred and ninety two (492; 98.4%) were retrieved with useable data.

### Design and statistics

A cross sectional survey design was adopted for this study. Simple percentages were also used to describe the response pattern of respondents and chi-square test of independence was applied in hypothesis testing.

## RESULTS

This section presents tables of the overall perception of alcohol policy and the differential perceptions of such policy by drinking and non-drinking students in Nigeria. The number and corresponding percentages of drinkers and non drinkers are also highlighted.

Table1 shows that respondents acknowledged the serious social and health hazards posed by alcohol consumption in Nigeria as over 97% (80.5% of respondents who strongly agreed and 17.1% who somewhat agreed) supported statement 1. A little over 84% (61.0% and 23.8%) of the respondents also confirmed that the harm to society caused by alcohol is more than the economic benefits from

**Table 1:** Response patterns to statements on alcohol and alcohol policy

Statements	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1. Alcohol consumption poses serious social and health hazards in Nigeria.	396(80.5%)	84(17.1%)	5(1.0%)	4(0.8%)	3(0.6%)
2. Harm to society caused by alcohol is more than the economic benefits from alcohol production and sale.	300(61.0%)	117(23.8%)	42(8.5%)	26(5.3%)	7(1.4%)
3. Government has to intervene in order to protect individuals from alcohol-related harm caused by their drinking.	323(65.7%)	111(22.6%)	25(5.1%)	23(4.7%)	10(2.3%)
4. Alcohol is a commercial product like any other and does not require any special restriction.	93(18.9%)	86(17.5%)	87(17.7%)	211(42.9%)	15(3.1%)
5. Alcohol products are too expensive and not affordable to most Nigerians	31(6.3%)	39(7.9%)	91(18.5%)	298(60.6%)	33(6.7%)
6. It is easy to buy alcohol anywhere in Nigeria.	372(75.6%)	49(10.0%)	20(4.1%)	30(6.1%)	21(4.3%)
7. Alcohol taxes should be increased.	215(43.7%)	71(14.4%)	44(8.9%)	108(22.0%)	54(11.0%)
8. Alcohol is sold in too many places in Nigerian town.	360(73.2%)	79(16.1%)	17(3.5%)	12(2.4%)	24(4.9%)
9. The number of alcohol outlets in Nigeria should be decreased.	281(57.1%)	87(17.7%)	44(8.9%)	54(11.0%)	23(4.67%)
10. There is a law that regulates the sale of alcohol to minors in Nigeria.	95(19.3%)	70(14.2%)	40(8.1%)	127(25.8%)	160(32.5%)
11. Billboard advertising alcohol should not be erected near primary/secondary schools in Nigeria.	278(56.5%)	88(17.9%)	45(9.1%)	67(13.6%)	67(13.6%)
12. Alcohol advertisements on Nigerian television are broadcast only from 9pm, after minors have gone to bed.	135(27.4%)	75(15.2%)	49(10.0%)	158(32.1%)	75(15.2%)
13. There should be a strong law against driving when drunk.	451(91.7%)	9(1.8%)	5(1.0%)	14(2.9%)	13(2.6%)
14. Advertising of alcohol should be restricted	233(47.4%)	91(18.5%)	69(14.0%)	82(16.7%)	17(3.5%)
15. The blood-alcohol limit for drivers should be kept as low as possible to prevent drunk driving.	384(78.1%)	56(11.4%)	10(2.0%)	15(3.1%)	27(5.5%)
16. Breath testing of drivers should be widely enforced all year round.	353(71.8%)	82(16.7%)	12(2.4%)	14(2.8%)	31(6.3%)

alcohol production and sale. Over 88% of the respondents consented to statement 3 calling on government to intervene in order to protect individuals from alcohol-related harm caused by their drinking. However, more than 60% expressed some level of disagreement with item 4, which states that alcohol is a commer-

cial product as any other and does not require any special restriction. Item 5 ‘alcohol products are too expensive and not affordable to most Nigerians’ however attracted negative responses as over 79% disagreed with this statement. Over, 85%of the respondents confirmed that it is easy to buy alcohol anywhere

in Nigeria. More than half (58.1%) agreed that alcohol taxes should be increased, about 11.0% did not know if such policy would curb alcohol demand, while 30.9% disagreed with this statement. More than 89% of the total respondents confirmed the availability of alcohol in Nigeria by registering their agreement with item 8 which suggested that alcohol is sold in too many places in Nigerian towns. Item 9, 'the number of alcohol outlet in Nigeria should be decreased' attracted positive responses as 74.8% of the total respondents agreed with this statement. Item 10 however elicited mixed reactions from the respondents as less than a half (33.5%) agreed that there is a law that regulates the sale of alcohol to minors in Nigeria; however, a sizeable proportion of the respondents (32.5%) did not know of the existence of such law, while 33.8% stated that such law does not exist. Statement 11- billboards should not be erected near primary/secondary schools in Nigeria also got the support of 74.4% of the total respondents, while item 12, which stated that alcohol advertisement on Nigerian television are broadcast only from 9pm, after minors have gone to bed also elicited mixed responses; 42.7% of the respondents were in support of this statement, 42.1% disagreed with this statement, while 15.2% expressed ignorance. About 93% of the respondents supported statement 13, which calls for a strong law against drunk driving. About 65.9% called for the restriction of alcohol advertising (item 14). A sizable proportion of the respondents ( 89.4%) consented to the proposal that the blood-alcohol limit for drivers should be kept as low as possible to prevent drunk driving, while 88.4 supported statement 16 – breath testing of drivers should be widely enforced all year round.

Item 17 probed the respondents' frequency of taking a drink containing alcohol. It was instrumental in dichotomizing respondents into the drinking and non drinking categories. Of the 492 respondents who took part in this survey, 225(45.7%) were alcohol drinkers while 267(54.2%) were non-drinkers.

Sixteen policy related statements are presented in Table 2. Chi-square analysis of data reveals a significant difference between

drinkers' and non-drinkers' perception of alcohol policies in about 9 of these statements. Non-drinkers (262; 98.1%) were significantly different from drinkers (218; 96.9%) in their agreement to statement 1 which states that alcohol consumption poses serious social and health hazards in Nigeria  $\{X^2 (1) = 4.03; p < 0.05\}$ . A significant difference between drinkers (183; 81.3%) and non-drinkers (234; 87.6%) was also established in students' agreement to statement 2 'harm to society caused by alcohol is more than the economic benefits from alcohol production and sale'  $\{X^2 (1) = 6.24; p < 0.05\}$ . A chi-square analysis of data  $\{X^2 (1) = 5.31; p < 0.05\}$  also confirmed a significant difference in students' perception of statement 3 which calls for governments' intervention in order to protect individuals from alcohol-related harm caused by their drinking, as only 193(85.8%) drinkers consented to this call compared to (241; 90.3%) of the non-drinkers. Statement 4 which states that alcohol is a commercial product like any other and does not require any special restriction was also perceived differently by drinkers and non-drinkers  $\{X (1) = 4.85; p < 0.05\}$ . A smaller proportion of drinkers 130(57.8%) disagreed with this statement compared to non-drinkers 168(62.9%). Another significant difference in students' perception  $\{X^2 (1) = 5.05; p < 0.05\}$  was observed in their responses to statement 7- alcohol taxes should be increased. About 124(55.1%) of drinkers supported this statement compared to 162(60.7%) of the non-drinkers. Statement 9 – the number of alcohol outlets in Nigeria should be decreased- also attracted a significant perceptual difference between respondents in both categories  $\{X^2 (1) 4.98; p < 0.05\}$ ; about 164(72.9%) of the drinkers agreed compared to 207(77.5%) of the non-drinkers. A significant difference was established in students' agreement to statement 11 which suggests that billboards advertising alcohol should not be erected near primary/secondary schools in Nigeria  $\{X^2 (1) 7.39; p < 0.05\}$ ; 157(69.8%) drinkers compared to 209(78.3%) non-drinkers agreed to this statement. Statement 14 which calls for the restriction of alcohol

**Table 2:** Differential perceptions of alcohol policy by drinking and non-drinking students

Statement	Drinkers (n=225)		Non-Drinkers (n=267)		X <sup>2</sup>	p
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree		
1. Alcohol consumption poses serious social and health hazards in Nigeria.	218(96.9%)	5(2.2%)	262(98.1%)	4(1.5%)	4.03	< .05
2. Harm to society caused by alcohol is more than the economic benefit from alcohol production and sale.	183(81.3%)	35(15.6%)	234(87.6%)	33(12.4%)	6.24	< .05
3. Government has to intervene in other to protect individuals from alcohol-related harm caused by their drinking.	193(85.8%)	22(9.8%)	241(90.3%)	26(9.7%)	5.31	< .05
4. Alcohol is a commercial product as any other and does not require any special restriction.	88(39.1%)	130(57.8%)	91(34.1%)	168(62.9%)	4.85	<.05
5. Alcohol products are too expensive and not affordable to most Nigerians.	36(16.0%)	183(81.3%)	34(12.7%)	206(77.2%)	1.36	>.05
6. It is easy to buy alcohol anywhere in Nigeria.	199(88.4%)	20(8.9%)	222(83.1%)	30(11.2%)	1.26	>.05
7. Alcohol taxes should be increased.	124(55.1%)	73(32.4%)	162(60.7%)	79(29.6%)	5.05	< .05
8. Alcohol is sold in too many places in Nigerian towns.	203(90.2%)	13(5.8%)	236(76.0%)	16(6.0%)	2.48	>.05
9. The number of alcohol outlets in Nigeria should be decreased.	164(72.9%)	48(21.3%)	207(77.5%)	50(18.7%)	4.98	< .05
10. There is a law that regulates the sale of alcohol to minors in Nigeria.	84(37.3%)	77(34.2%)	81(30.0%)	90(33.7%)	0.05	>.05
11. Billboard advertising alcohol should not be erected near primary/secondary schools in Nigeria.	157(69.8%)	62(27.6%)	209(78.3%)	50(18.7%)	7.39	< .05
12. Alcohol advertisements on Nigerian television are broadcast only from 9am, after minors have gone to bed.	96(42.7%)	103(45.8%)	114(42.7%)	104(39.0%)	1.69	>.05
13. There should be a strong law against driving when drunk.	210(93.3%)	7(3.1%)	250(93.6%)	12(4.5%)	3.48	>.05
14. Advertising of alcohol should be restricted.	133(59.1%)	91(40.4%)	191(71.5%)	60(22.7%)	10.38	< .05
15. The blood-alcohol limit for drivers should be kept as low as possible to prevent drunk driving.	201(89.3%)	12(5.3%)	239(89.5%)	13(4.9%)	3.28	>.05
16. Breath testing of drivers should be widely enforced all year round.	195(86.7%)	11(4.9%)	240(89.9%)	15(5.6%)	4.66	< .05

advertising attracted a significant difference in the perception of drinking and non-drinking students {X<sup>2</sup> (1) 10.38; p< 0.05}. It is glaring from table 2 that 133(59.1%) of drinkers compared to 191(71.54%) of the non-drinkers supported this statement. Statement 16, breath

testing of drivers should be widely enforced all year round attracted 195(86.7%) drinkers against 240(89.9%) non-drinkers in support. A chi-square analysis reveals a significant difference in perception of students in both categories {X<sup>2</sup> (1) 4.66; p< 0.05}.

## DISCUSSION

Emerging insights from this study corroborate previous findings of high alcohol availability, accessibility and affordability in Nigeria (Obot, 2006; De Brujin, 2010). It reveals that Nigerians are aware of the health and social implications of hazardous alcohol consumption, just as a majority of them are skeptical, if not completely ignorant of existing alcohol regulatory laws in the country; hence their inevitable call for government intervention in order to protect individuals from alcohol-related problems. The position of Nigerians as reflected by their call for governments' intervention supports the findings of Wechler et al., 2002; Dejong, Towvin & Schneider (2007) and may not be unconnected with the obvious social, health, domestic and other problems posed by harmful alcohol use as evidenced in increased violence, accidents, unintentional injuries, etc. (Obot, 2006; 2007; Roerecke, Obot, Patra & Rehm, 2008).

The significant association between drinking and unfavourable perception of alcohol policy implementation in Nigeria and as inferred by respondents' reaction to statements 1,2,3,4, 7, 9, 11, 14, and 16 (see table 2) is also glaring. Drinking students tend to favour options that support availability, and opposed to intervention strategies aimed at restricting alcohol advertisement, and those aimed at encouraging taxation and reducing alcohol outlets. Drinking students also showed disapproval to statements that protect the minors from exposure to alcohol advertisements and also disagreed with major drunk driving policies. This result supports the findings of Lavigne, Witt, Wood, Laforge & DeJong (2008) and could be explained by the expected resistance always exhibited when substance users' source(s) of pleasure eliciting stimuli (alcohol drinking) are threatened.

### **Practical implication of result and Suggestion for policy implementation**

This study found a preponderance of alcohol drinkers in Nigerian universities (45.7%), with a male to female drinkers' ratio of 48%

to 43%. Evidence abounds to support the assumption that apart from the health and social consequences of drinking, declining academic performance and/or eventual drop-out holds potential for this population (Tumwesigye & Kasirye, 2005). The resistance that should be envisaged from the drinking population in the course of implementation of interventions in the Nigerian universities is also highlighted by the result of this study. However, allowing this population of drinkers to suffer the afore-stated effects spells doom for the nation's valuable resource-the youth.

This paper therefore re-echoes the need for strict enforcement of alcohol control policies at the macro level through taxation and other demand/supply reduction strategies. It is also pertinent to emphasize the regulation of the physical availability of alcohol by partial or total bans, regulating retail outlet, hours and days of retail sale, restriction on eligibility to purchase and sell alcohol, minimum alcohol purchasing age laws, promotion of alcohol free activities and community mobilization approach.

Data from this and other supporting studies provide ample evidence that efforts designed to persuade students and by extension, Nigerian youth, to understand and support attempts to reduce high risk drinking as enumerated above, may be too broad, thus may not effectively address the targeted population. Resistance (subtle or confrontational) should be expected as majority of respondents may have only expressed verbal support for policies. Thus, apart from use of access restriction and alcohol taxation strategies mentioned above, we recommend that intervention would benefit from approaches that target both student perception and specific policies that are more conducive to student support engagements in Nigerian campuses. In specific terms, we advocate that the university authorities should use more economically efficient and potentially more effective targeted approaches geared towards changing the perception and behavior of drinking students who may perceive alcohol policies as being stringent.

In addition, using social norms marketing to correct misperceptions of drinking norms is

encouraged. Moreover, publicizing the majority support for alcohol control policies on campus may impact on the attitudes of students. It is also suggested (Buettner, et al., 2010), that using mass media campaigns to promote positive attitudes towards university policies might make it easier for university officials to implement strict penalties for alcohol related violations without provoking strong resistance from students.

The perception of alcohol policies in Nigeria and other developing societies deserves further investigations as no cause-and-effect relationships can be established from findings of this study. A cause-and-effect relationship between student perceptions of alcohol policies and the drinking behavior of students should therefore be explored in further studies. Moreover, the sample drawn for this study was confined to one university in a small Nigerian town, so the findings are limited in terms of generalizability. Future studies on this should include many more schools across the whole country and also members of the general public.

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