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ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION, UNEMPLOYMENT AND THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG INMATES CONVICTED FOR VIOLENT CRIMES IN JOS PRISON, NIGERIA.

*Julie O. Orshi **Rosaleen T. McNeil

*Dept of Psychology and **Anatomy
University of Jos, Jos-Nigeria, P.M.B. 2084, Jos

Correspondence: Rosaleen T. McNeil

Department of Anatomy, University of Jos, Jos-Nigeria, P.M.B. 2084, Jos

ABSTRACT

Background: Alcohol consumption is a social habit. However, if alcohol is taken in a large quantity or if the individual is addicted to it, it is said to be abnormal for the behaviour that emanates from it can be dangerous and harmful to those around; some become violent or commit violent crimes. This is the basis for this work.

Objective: The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between crime, alcohol abuse and unemployment..

Methods: A sample of 83 male prisoners convicted for murders and confined in the Jos prison (82 men and 1 female) were evaluated using a structured clinical interview using a questionnaire.

Results: Results show that there was no significant relationship between unemployment and violent crimes as well as alcohol and violent crimes ($P > 0.05$); 83.4% of those unemployed and who committed the crime were not under the influence of alcohol while 78.7% of those employed who committed the crime

Keywords: Alcohol, violence, criminal behaviour, unemployment

INTRODUCTION

Alcohol is a drug used at social functions but has the tendency for dependence, tolerance which can be social, psychological and physical¹. Alcohol consumption can be a problem to the consumer or society

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with consequences which are better prevented ranging from mild self harm to criminal actions like murder; Previous study of inmates showed that alcoholism plays a role in criminal tendencies². Children of parents who drink are therefore at risk for alcohol consumption.

Alcohol augments personality disorders and significant impairment of social work functions so that the individual becomes inflexible and maladaptive. The results indicate that there is need to equip primary health care staff, by way of training and supervision of problem drinkers rather than focusing on changing their attitude alone³. The potential role of nurses is still uncertain and not utilized sufficiently. However, many if not most cases of mental disorders first come to the attention of mental health professionals on referral from courts for problems such as child abuse or alcoholism⁴. Some cases of mental disorders may do great harm to themselves and/or to others. Those with psychological disorders are not dangerous at all,⁵. One of the most studied alcohol-induced personality disorders is the anti-social disorder which presents in the form of lying, stealing, cheating or showing little or no sense of responsibility⁶.

A study conducted in the USA, showed that 30% and 1% men and women have anti-social behaviour due to alcoholism¹. According to Spitzer et al (1983) this disorder is common among people raised in economically deprived

environments⁶. An established study showed that, parents and peers group influence adolescent behaviour⁷. Individuals with alcohol parents and/or peer group have higher tendency for anti- social behaviour.⁸

Adolescence is the time for experimenting but is also a time of fluctuating psychological and physical growth and habits acquired often linger into adult life⁹. On the other hand, brain cells or neurons are especially important during this developmental period and must be protected. The brain has no pain fibers nor has it the ability to produce new brain cells after damage. Damage is therefore often permanent. Because of this side effect of alcohol, the legal drinking age should be enforced^{10, 11}. Because alcohol causes abnormal brain function, it may cause abnormal behaviour and is said to be related to violent behaviour¹².

Furthermore, high levels of marital harmony have been related to lower levels of adolescent substance use,¹³

and so anti-social behaviour and crime. Harmonious marital relationships are likely to alleviate stress. Stress is a common antecedent of alcohol use¹⁴

Adolescents whose parents abstain from using cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs have been less likely to abuse substances than peers with substance using parents^{15,16}

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Psychologically healthy parents therefore lower the risk of adolescent alcohol abuse.⁷ from old, punitive inconsistent discipline is a common finding in poor marital relationship and is a known cause for production of antisocial children.^{17, 18}

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between alcohol and/or unemployment and crime. Participants used for the study were eighty-three (83) prisoners convicted for murder, eighty-two (82) males and one female in the Jos main prison. The assailant had a mean age of 37 and their age range 9 to 77 years. Twenty-two out of the total number were employed with their income ranging from N1000 to N10, 000 while the remaining sixty-one were farmers.

A questionnaire comprising of two sections, A and B was used in data collection. Information was gathered in two, through interviews with offenders and completion of interview guide through the use of prison records.

Section A, comprised of twelve (12) questions while section B had thirteen (13) questions. The A part of the questionnaire was information about the assailant while the B part is about the victim.

The Jos prison was used and information collection was made

possible from several visits to the prison. The assailants were brought out of their cells in a group of five (5) and each one of them asked to respond to the questionnaire independently. The assailants that could not respond independently because of language barriers had the questions translated for them in Hausa language.

RESULTS

Out of the Eighty-three (83) assailants, only two (2) had been convicted before; one was for theft and the other for attempted murder. Using the Chi-Square (X^2) test, the first hypothesis that, greater number of those incarcerated were likely to have been unemployed (UE) than employed (E) at the time of crime proved no support and the second hypothesis that, greater number of the assailants were likely to have been under the influence of alcohol (UA) rather than not under the influence of alcohol (NUA) also proved no support. The age range of participants was 19 to 77 years with a mean of 37 years.

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TABLE 1: RESPONSES OF PARTICIPANTS

	RESPONSES		TOTAL
	Those Unemployed(U E) at time of crime	Those Employed(E) at time of crime	
Number under alcohol (UA) influence	13	6	19
Number not under alcohol(NUA) influence	61	22	83
TOTAL	74	28	102

TABLE 2: MEAN VALUES OF RESPONSES

	UE	E	TOTAL
UA	13.78 ^a	5.22	19
NUA	60.22	22.78	83
TOTAL	74	28	102

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DISCUSSION

From the result of this study, 83.4% of those unemployed and who committed the crime were not under the influence of alcohol. Also, 78.7% of those employed who committed the crime were not under the influence of alcohol. This means alcohol was not the likely cause of the crime committed by these inmates. Furthermore, only 27.55 of all participants used in this experiment were unemployed at the time they were charged with the crime. Unemployment was also not associated with criminal behaviour in these subjects.

Verbal disagreements often end in physical violence^{19, 20, 21}.

Alcohol consumption increases the risk of interpersonal violence^{22, 23, 24}. This is because alcohol depresses brain functions and so, clouds judgment in a complex manner^{1, 24}.

Unemployment predisposes to crime as a result of poverty, competition for economic resources and friction²³. Poverty, which is a common factor in the third world, is therefore a risk factor for violence. So also is alcohol²³. These points to the possibility of prevention or reduction of crime through National, State or organizational effort.

Although many studies have not been conducted in this area in Nigeria, much has been done in the western world. It is of great importance to note that violent Crime or murder occurs as a result of provocation rather than considering the assailants as psychopaths. They could be said to suffer from other forms of antisocial personality disorder if at all but definitely not psychopaths. This is supported by the fact that only two out of the eighty-three assailants had prior

conviction – one was for attempted murder while the other was theft.

In a study of official criminal records were obtained in December 2001, 27.3 % of the delinquents with alcohol abuse, and 47.2 % with a family history of alcohol abuse recidivated with a crime²⁵.

This means that alcohol abuse is highly correlated with criminal recidivism and should be considered in treatment and aftercare programs.

Furthermore ethnicity may play an important role in drug dependence and violence; both were more common amongst white women than black/mixed race women. This is however outside the scope of this study. Borril et al found that self-harm and attempted suicide were generally more common among white women; but black/mixed race women dependent on drugs had the highest proportion of women reporting self-harm.²⁶

From the above findings however, the effect of alcohol and non-alcohol as opposed to unemployment and employment cannot be related. This is reflected in the fact that the observed value is greater than the table value;

Observed value = $P < .05$ and $df = 1$.

The Table value = 0.3 $df = 1$

Finally, the assailants due to long years of incarceration exhibited some evidence of mental illness. A significantly large number of them were not under the influence of alcohol and at the same time unemployed while an insignificant number were unemployed and said to be under the influence of alcohol. From our findings it can not be concluded that people who committed violent crimes can be termed as psychopaths. If on the first instance the assailant is convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment or convicted and hanged, then there will be no opportunity to know

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if such a person will likely commit the same crime or not.

There is therefore need to subject assailants to clinical observations and seek expert opinions instead of convicting them immediately.

Also, it is important to note that when some of them are sentenced more or less forgotten in the prison environment for up to 5 to 15 years before they are executed. It was observed that some of them were already at the verge of total mental disintegration due to the fear of imminent death.

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