

Changing Patterns of Alcohol Consumption in Nigeria: An Exploration of Responsible factors and Consequences

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ABSTRACT

Alcohol consumption among different ethnic groups in Nigeria has a long history, especially among those groups where it was not forbidden by religion. In the traditional era, alcohol played complex roles in the socio-cultural relationships of different communities. It was used for rituals, marriage ceremonies, chieftaincy enthronements, etc. It was mainly consumed by male adults for pleasure while females and youths were culturally restrained from drinking. Excess consumption was not a norm and intoxication attracted negative sanctions. In the contemporary Nigerian society, patterns of consumption are changing rapidly following the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria, giving rise to new norms of alcohol use. This review examines the influence of disintegration of traditional values, non-regulation, advertising and other factors on these changing patterns of alcohol consumption. It concludes by exploring the consequences of these changing patterns and suggests some remedies for contemporary Nigerian society.

Keywords: Alcohol consumption, Nigeria, Changing pattern, Traditional values, Non-regulation, Advertising

INTRODUCTION

Alcohol is as old as human history and its consumption in different socio-cultural milieus extends beyond the last ten thousand years (Smart, 2007). Its consumption has been considered normal, especially when drunk without outright intoxication in Africa and other parts of the globe. Wine, beer, spirit and other fermented alcoholic beverages were drunk in traditional societies and some of these beverages are still used in this modern era for different purposes. In Africa, these and other alcoholic beverages such as *palm wine*, *burukutu*, etc. were consumed for pleasure soon after brewing or tapping (Odejide et al, 1999; Odejide, 2006) and were rarely traded in the market (WHO, 2002). Though alcoholic beverages have been consumed for hundreds of years, the pattern and purpose of consumption vary considerably among societies and even within communities. Excess consumption was not widely tolerated in many societies while few communities permitted it (Willis, 2006). For example, abuse attracted negative sanctions as recorded in the biblical Old and New Testaments (Seller, 1985; 1987).

Drinking of alcohol was culturally tolerated as part of ceremonial lives of many ethnic groups in what is now known as Nigeria, especially in communities where it was not forbidden by religion prior to the advent of colonialism (Heap, 1998; Obot, 2000). A unique feature of this area that is now known as Nigeria was that different locally produced alcoholic beverages distinguished ethnic groups. In the north, *pito* and *burukutu* were commonly consumed. In the south, palm wine tapped from the palm tree (Obot, 2000) was popular while the native gin locally called *ogogoro*, *kai-kai* (Demehin, 1984; Korieh, 2003), *akpuru-achia*, or *Sapele water*, distilled from the fermented palm wine was widely consumed, especially in the Niger-delta area. Though there were no written rules prohibiting females and adolescents

from drinking in this traditional era¹ (Odejide, 2006), consumption was the reserve of men and played a crucial role in political, religious and socio-economic relationships (Oshodin, 1995). In this era, alcohol played complex roles in religious and communities' rituals and served as a conduit for social cohesion. Because of these ceremonial functions, adult males were expected to drink being served by the youth. Alcohol was a key requirement for a bridal price to be paid in order to consummate marriages in many villages. It was consumed at almost all ceremonies including cultural festivals, chieftaincy enthronements, child dedications and even funerals (Oshodin, 1995).

Alcohol did not just play the role of fostering social cohesion as people drank locally brewed beverages together in groups. According to Korieh (2003), it was also a tool for 'imperial control' and a revenue source for Western Traders. It was also used by 'traditional rulers to exert power over their subjects' (Bowdich, cited in Willis, 2006 p.5). With colonisation and the influx of western cultures, alcoholic beverages from western countries became readily available to old and young, male and female, on a commercial basis.

In recent decades, the pattern, quantity and reason for consumption are changing rapidly, especially among youths (Chikere & Mayowa, 2011). This has resulted in an increased burden of alcohol-related problems, estimated to exceed those relating to tobacco consumption: alcohol misuse can result in death of the user (and non-users, due to drunk driving and other related accidents) and often disability in early years among young people (Jernigan, 2001). It is against this backdrop that this review critically explores the changing patterns of alcohol consumption in Nigeria and its consequences for contemporary Nigerian society. Adopting the public health approach, the aim is to bring to light the changing patterns of alcohol consumption, the factors that necessitate the changes and to advocate for prompt action to remedy the situation through policy and other regulatory measures. The next sections deal with an exploration of the new patterns of consumption and the factors that facilitated these changes. This is followed by the consequences of the new patterns and concluding remarks where the possible remedies are pointed out.

THE CHANGING PATTERNS OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN NIGERIA

In traditional Nigerian society, alcohol consumption was gender and age based. As noted earlier, it was mainly consumed by adult males in social engagements and customs and tradition regulated production and consumption of locally made alcoholic drinks (Heap, 1998; van Wolputte & Fumanti, 2010). Though young people in a *few* communities were permitted to drink, this was usually in the presence of adults who monitored the quantity they consumed (Obot, 2000). Even in the neighbouring Ghana, elders served as gatekeepers, by deterring younger people from alcohol consumption (Akyeampong, 1996). Alcohol consumption was not a daily affair and it was restricted for use in religious rituals, marriage ceremonies, kingship enthronements, cultural festivals, child naming, etc. that happened in intervals (Ibanga et al., 2005). Even on these occasions, excess consumption among adults was culturally controlled, partly because traditional wine cups were served based on age and title hierarchies (Umunna, 1967). Elders would drink first, served by the younger members of the tribe (Oshodin, 1995) and because the wine was not produced in commercial quantities, this often meant that little would be left for the latter group.

In this era, alcohol was consumed immediately after production, or few hours after production. This is because some of these beverages served as the staple food in some communities and were not meant for sale; and because they were not produced in quantity, since there were no means of preservation. Where trade in alcohol did exist, it was on a remarkably low scale (Willis, 2002). This trend was altered in Western Africa following the

influx of European slave traders and their 'trade spirit' in the fifteenth century (Olorunfemi, 1984 p.233). Despite the fact that alcohol was not new to the indigenous people, the influence of the Western traders popularised the sale of liquor and facilitated alcohol abuse due to the importation, sale and distribution of trade spirit (Olorunfemi, 1984; Olukoju, 1991). This trend was sustained during the colonial era and beyond, leading to the establishment of the first brewery (Nigerian Brewery limited presently known as Nigerian Breweries or NB Plc.) in 1946 with its first brew in 1949 (Jernigan & Obot, 2006; Obot, 2000; 2006).

The Guinness brewery was the next to establish its business in 1962 (Obot & Ibanga, 2002) and gradually the sector grew to the point where, in 1984, each of the 19 states had their own breweries (Demehin, 1984). The growth of alcohol industries was partly sustained by the economic boom of the 1970s and sophisticated marketing that promoted industry-produced beer and wine as desirable status symbols among the upper and middle classes. In the process, traditional alcoholic beverages were belittled (Demehin, 1984). This signified, a new trend, in alcohol consumption in the country. This emerging sector was comparatively resilient during the Nigerian economic crisis of the 1980s. A reason for this is that major brewers had nurtured a loyal following, ensuring that their products become household names. Additionally, there was a lack of government regulatory policy. The liberal economic policy of the government enabled brewers to adopt self-regulation. These loopholes on the part of the government arguably opened doors for many other patterns of alcohol consumption to evolve.

In more recent years, there have been some striking changes in the patterns of consumption, brought about by the development of the socio-political and economic structures of the country. Consumption is no longer solely regulated by custom and tradition of the people and it is no longer reserved for social gathering or entertainment of a guest alone (Demehin, 1984). The patterns of use, the users and reason(s) for consumption are changing rapidly, especially among young drinkers.

A sharp contrast from what hitherto existed is the *alcohol contest* among youths in bars, restaurants, drinking joints, hotels and nightclubs that are strategically located near various schools in Nigeria. This competition is always among boys and the winner is judged based on two standards - *the ability to drink large a quantity without showing a sign of intoxication and the ability to drink faster than the opponent*. Here, a large sum of money contributed by these competitors or alcohol marketers (especially those that market spirit) is awarded to the fastest drinker or alcohol *macho*. Marketers do this to introduce new products into the market or to promote existing ones that are not receiving enough sales. Though no study has been identified that focused on alcohol competition in the drinking joints in order to document the negative effects, but the fact remains that it contributes to binge drinking which has precarious consequences on human health (Cismaru et al, 2008; Peasey et al., 2005). In February 2012, a youth collapsed and died in a drinking competition in Lagos (Anonymous, 2012). Among these competitors, alcohol consumption is no longer for *pleasure* as it used to be, but for a *prize*.

Another recent development is an increasing drinking among youths as a means of showing off in *public places*. In the traditional era, youths were restricted from drinking by the norms in most communities. It was permitted within a few communities on festive days, during which youths were guided by adults (Obot, 2000); but this has changed. Although the minimum drinking age remains 18 years, young people buy and drink alcohol freely in public places. Some of the reasons for this are erosion of communal values, familial socialisation and peer influence. One of the African traditional societal values of brotherliness is increasingly fading away due to globalisation. Therefore, as people become individualistic,

they are hardly their 'brother's keeper' as in the past, where adults from one's community applied punitive measure to wayward adolescents on behalf of their parents (in return they received commendations from the latter). Therefore, young people cash in on this loophole to drink alcohol freely. Also, in many families, in Nigeria, parents send their young children to buy alcoholic beverages (Oshodin, 1995) which they then consume in their presence.

This has serious implication because researches have revealed that parents and siblings have enormous influence on the drinking behaviour of young people (Mares et al., 2011; Mares et al, 2012; Poelen et al, 2007; Van Der Vorst et al, 2005). Parental disapproval of adolescents' drinking according to Wood et al (2004), correlates with reduced peer influence. This lends credence to Yu's (2003) findings that parents who restrict their underage children from drinking alcohol at home equally affect their future drinking behaviour. A study conducted among teenagers in Benin City, (Oshodin, 1984) revealed that 85 per cent were current drinkers and 60 per cent revealed they began to drink from their homes while 79 per cent reported that their parents also drink.

The new trend of alcohol consumption among young people contributes to Nigeria's ranking among thirty countries with highest per capita consumption of alcohol globally (World Health Organisation, 2004). These rankings fail to account for the unrecorded production and consumption of alcohol (Jernigan & Obot, 2006). The 2009 report did not indicate a decline in consumption but rather revealed that Nigeria consumed 10.57 Litres per head of the population (Toroyan, 2009). This corroborates Gureje et al. (2007 p.7) findings that 'heavy episodic drinking, rather than moderate drinking is common among users of alcohol in Nigeria' and that alcohol is the most commonly used drug among Nigerians.

Another new trend is the increasing consumption of alcohol by females in Nigeria (Adelekan et al 1993). With the rising influence of globalisation and the upsurge of feminism in the country, women have recently begun to challenge the status quo that relegated them to the background and this seems to have been extended to alcohol consumption. In traditional society, the women hardly drank alcohol because of cultural constraints (Obot, 2006). Additionally, they were not economically empowered. In this contemporary era, many women have acquired education and other skills that enabled them to gain access to paid work. Consequently, many can afford to purchase and consume alcohol. There is also a recent popular maxim among Nigerian women that "*anything a man can do a woman can do it better*" (including harmful alcohol consumption), but this has negative consequences because studies have revealed high drinking problems among females in Nigeria (Room & Selin, 2005).

Other recent changes can be inferred from the findings of recent research conducted among undergraduates in Owerri, Imo State. The respondents gave some reasons why they currently use alcohol and these included: to enhance sexual pleasure, to *feel high* and to feel more sociable (Chikere & Mayowa, 2011). This is arguably linked to the way Guinness Extra Stout is portrayed in the advertisement as a vitality-enhancing beverage using young, partying people as models. The findings revealed that 11 per cent initiated alcohol use between the ages of 11 and 15; 45 per cent initiated drinking between the ages of 16 and 20 and 26.7% can be said to be binge drinkers (Chikere & Mayowa, 2011).

Alcohol in Nigeria has also assumed different *roles* as drinking patterns are evolving. Some alcoholic beverages are now associated with class status symbols or a sign of recognition of subgroups. For example, the elites display different bottles of *foreign* wine in their private bars as signs of affluence. Some social occasions do not permit the use of particular locally produced beverages *because they are not fit for the class involved*. In some communities, bridal price will not be accepted from the groom without presenting cartons of 'Guinness

Stout' and bottles of schnapps to the elders. This is contrary to the traditional era where male adults drank *locally made beverages*. In fact, among the Ubulu people of Delta State, this schnapps is called *maya-jeakwa (a drink that wore cloth)* rendering it as superior to the locally produced palm wine which comes in 'calabashes'. It is also worth noting the use of alcohol in deception by taking *alcoholic herbal mixture*. A very fascinating thing is that this is done by those who drink alcohol and those who are constrained by socio-religious factors. This is produced from a mixture of *ogogoro* with herbs or root of trees and administered as medications. In different parts of the country, this product is sold by vendors in motor parks (Kehinde & Olusegun, 2012; Oluwadiya, 2010) and the implication is that commercial drivers are some of the patrons. Some parents also administer it to their young children when they are sickly (Oshodin, 1984) contributing to the early alcohol initiation.

Factors Responsible for Changing Patterns of Alcohol Consumption in Nigeria

A major contributor to the changing patterns of alcohol consumption is the absence of alcohol policy in Nigeria. Globally, alcohol producers often frown at strict measures to regulate the production and marketing of alcohol through legislation due to economic interest (Miller et al, 2010). They often claim that restriction will reduce sales which will result in job loss. They solicit for self-regulatory 'responsible drinking', but this has been revealed to be highly ineffective in controlling alcohol misuse (Bakke & Endal, 2010).

In developed societies, policy makers always set the standard measurement of alcohol in volume and value. This helps to determine what responsible consumption is for adults who are legally qualified to drink. In UK for instance, the standard value of the unit of alcohol is 7.8 grams and women and men's maximum of drinks per week are 14 and 21 standard drinks respectively. Against this background, pregnant women or those who are likely to get pregnant are advised not to consume alcohol within the period of conception (Farke, 2011). Therefore, responsible drinking can be said to be consuming not more than four units for men and three units for women per day. In Australia, a standard drink contains 10g and males and females respectively are advised not to exceed four and two standard drinks daily (Jones & Gregory, 2009). In the USA, similar definition exists because the standard value of the unit of alcohol is 14 grams or 17.7ml and since 1989, the US government made it compulsory for all alcoholic beverages produced or imported to carry a warning message on their labels (DeCarlo, 1997).

In these countries, alcoholic containers carry alcohol by volume (ABV) and warnings on their labels as a means of informing consumers appropriately on what constitute responsible consumption. Though the effectiveness of warning labels on alcohol has generated debate for producing mixed results (Ringold, 2002), research findings have revealed that labels enhance awareness of the information they carry (Wilkinson & Room, 2009) because they help to reinforce 'already known hazards' (Kaskutas & Greenfield, 1992 p.12). Warnings encourage safe behaviour (Cox et al, 1997) while those that have coloured pictorial warnings enhance 'noticeability of warning information' (Laughery et al., 1993 p. 48) thus contributing to positive results. Many other countries such as Australia (Midford, 2005) and Sweden (Babor & Winstanley, 2008) have recorded success in alcohol policies and strategies. The success of Sweden comes from the increased alcohol tax, which led to the reduction of alcohol-related negative consequences.

Although Nigeria and many other African countries contribute to the global burden of alcohol-related problems due to increasing harmful use, only a few countries within Africa have policies to regulate alcohol use and misuse. Even those that have policies, the vested interest, which affects not just Africa, but the other part of the world (Babor et al, 2010; Bakke & Endal, 2010; Miller et al, 2011) can render policy ineffective and subject to misuse.

A Global call to regulate alcohol through policy became paramount out of the recognition of the rising harm caused by misuse. Therefore, a World Health Assembly resolution in 2005 had to call the World Health Organisation to work hand-in-hand with Member Countries to formulate policy aimed at checking alcohol misuse (WHO, 2005). Ten key policy strategies were, therefore, adopted in May 2008 (World Health Organisation, 2009). Since then, Nigeria has not formulated any policy to regulate alcohol use and misuse. It instead has continued to rely on self-regulation, as championed by alcohol producers who market their alcoholic beverages through sophisticated strategies while at the same time supplanting stringent policies from being pursued (Babor & Winstanley, 2008; Casswell, 2011).

Alcohol policies do exist in South Africa, although a move to ensure that alcoholic beverages carry warning labels did not come to fruition until 2009 (Parry, 2010). Since then, it has become mandatory for alcohol products to carry at least “one of the seven health messages and be at least one-eighth of the total size of the container label” (Parry, 2010 p.1341). A unique character of South Africa’s policy is that it is quite comprehensive compared to other African countries’ policies; it has also begun to produce results. Some aspect of the policy came from the findings of research sponsored by government agencies (Parry, 2010). Indeed, more alcohol research has been successfully conducted in South Africa than any other part of the continent (Parry, 2005). In Nigeria, there is limited manpower to facilitate researches due to out-migration of experts (Babor & Winstanley, 2008) and due to total neglect on the part of the government. The government provides remarkably little funds for such research and the findings from individual-funded research that would have aided policy formulation, end up in the university library shelves without implementation.

Alcohol policies also exist in Botswana. Stringent measures were recently introduced, one of which involves an increase in the liquor levy, in an attempt to regulate alcohol in that country (Pitso & Obot, 2011). The unique aspect of this policy is that the revenue from the liquor levy is used in programmes that are channelled toward reducing abuse of alcohol by empowering the youths economically. This measure is aimed at helping youths who drink due to idleness to become meaningfully engaged in other activities. Another part of the policy is to regulate further, the activities of alcohol producers (Pitso & Obot, 2011). Other African countries that have policies are Lesotho, Malawi and Uganda (Bakke & Endal, 2010) and the most recent is Kenya (Obot, 2012). Despite the fact that some of these policies are fraught with inadequacies due to the influence of alcohol producers’ high input on the policy process (Bakke & Endal, 2010), there is, nonetheless, some legal framework that can be improved upon within these countries.

In Nigeria, there is no policy to regulate the production, marketing, advertising and availability of alcohol that are giving rise to the changing patterns of alcohol consumption. The country relies on the ‘self-regulatory’ *drink responsibly* campaign by brewers. This campaign is never comprehensive because it involves awareness programmes via posters (Obot, 2007), seminars (Odejide et al, 1989) and placards to disseminate information that recommends moderate drinking rather than abstinence. This campaign can arguably be regarded as an advertisement and public relations to boost the image of the brewers rather than anti-drinking. This is because the campaigners wear branded T-shirts bearing the names and products of the brewers and it does not recommend *zero consumption even to drivers that are the target*. Additionally, the campaign has been championed by the brewers and the International Centre for Alcohol Policy (ICAP). ICAP is an organisation financed by multinational alcohol producers to influence policies that favour consumption rather than abstinence (Babor, 2010; Babor & Xuan, 2004). The campaign, therefore, is strategically loaded. It is driven by a hidden agenda and represents a paradox of deception as it aims to create a good image of their companies via what superficially appears as social

responsibility and also to distract any call for meaningful policy that will reduce consumption (which is likely to mar their businesses).

In the first place, before any country can determine 'responsible' or 'irresponsible drinking', there must be a clear definition of what a *standard drink* is for legally qualified consumers. In Nigeria, there is no definition of a standard or responsible drink by the government or the brewers and alcohol containers come in varying sizes and shapes and do not carry alcohol by volume (ABV) on their labels. Even locally made alcoholic beverages are packed and served in different sized bottles and glasses. There is no basis, therefore, for judging a responsible drink.

Other contributors to the changing patterns of consumption are the easy accessibility of alcohol and lack of implementation of the minimum drinking age by both the government and the brewers. Though an 18 years legal limit exists (on paper), many social constraints hinder adherence in Nigeria. Presently there are no means of identification of minors (or even adults) in Nigeria due to the failure of national identity card projects and the police do not arrest those who sell to minors. In bars and restaurants, young girls are strategically employed as sales girls in order to attract males to patronise the drinking joints. This encourages alcohol initiation, use and abuse because these young girls, who may not have been drinkers prior to their employment, may learn to drink as they serve these male patrons in order to satisfy their employers. In South Africa, Parry (2010) reported that part of the alcohol policy is aimed at protecting minors by ensuring that people less than 18 years are barred from selling or buying liquor. Such policy does not exist in Nigeria; the 18 years benchmark is flouted with impunity and some of the activities of brewers such as *night shows* facilitate this.

The locally produced gin (ogogoro) that was illegal in the colonial era was legalised in post-independence (Demehin, 1984). The reason for this legalisation appears similar to what happened in Ghana, where economic interest overruled public health interest (Luginaah, 2008). This gin has some unique features- it is often produced in an unhygienic environment and it contains a high level of alcohol by volume (ABV) that is over 20 per cent. The neglect from policy makers has existed since the early 1970s according to Anumonye et al (1977 p.27):

So far alcohol has not received the attention it deserves in Nigeria. It is increasingly abused. This abuse will become a serious problem within the next few years since: the prohibition on the formally illicit locally brewed gin has been lifted... beer breweries proliferated apparently for political purposes... Local distilling of gin has recently received government blessing...

Presently, bars, restaurants, hotels, etc. sell alcohol at any time of the day. There is no policy on *time, day, place and who* can sell or buy alcohol, nor is there enforcement of any law that prohibits sellers from selling to alcoholics. In Botswana, there is a policy on liquor sale where sellers are permitted to sell between 9 am and 11 pm 'except on Sundays, Good Friday and Christmas Day' (Pitso & Obot, 2011 p.902). The South African policy has a clause that made *training of sellers* a requirement and some sales outlets have had to be closed down (Parry, 2010) in order to limit easy access; such does not exist in Nigeria at present.

Other significant contributors are advertising, promotion and marketing which are getting more sophisticated and are highly unregulated. Popular musicians and footballers are employed to promote their products. Drinking of alcohol is glamorised and associated with success. They employ both foreign and local models and musicians (Obot & Ibanga, 2002)

to promote their products. In some of these promotions, free drinks, money and other souvenirs are given out to lucky winners. This has serious implications: A recent study by WHO Regional Office for Africa revealed that 14-year-old boy said that '*if I don't see the stout ad on television I feel bad*' (De Bruijn, 2011 p.37) and has developed an interest in drinking stout because he admires the advert. Also, another 14 years old girl said that she likes *Star* advertisement (a product from one of the major brewers), '*because you can win so many things, for example, free drinks*' (De Bruijn, 2011 p.37).

In order to attract more youths, brewers sponsor a variety of social events, including *Star Trek*, *Star Quest*, *Heineken Champions League viewing centres* (by NB Plc.), *Guilder Ultimate Search*, etc. This arguably is one of the reasons why industrial beer has become the most preferred alcoholic drink in Nigeria. A unique feature of these events is that youthfulness is a criterion for registration and participation. Winners may go home with new cars, cash (in millions) and in most cases, a musical record deal. These events that run over the course of several months are often held in main cities in Nigeria. Other features of the events are that they are mainly night events and youths are admitted freely or with minimal payment. In these events, young people (including those that are below 18 years) attend and in most cases offered free drinks or at reduced prices. These events receive wide coverage by the media including the government-owned media and some of them are staged in government properties such as the stadium and the national theatre. The implication of this is that these producers are not just encouraging alcohol initiation, use and misuse, but are also nurturing future patrons as alcohol consumption is portrayed in a positive light.

The Consequences of the Changing Patterns

The consequences of harmful alcohol use cannot be denied in the present world. It has social, health, economic, psychological and many other consequences (Klingemann & Gmel, 2001). In Ghana, consumption of the locally made gin has been linked to an increase in violence in local communities (Luginaah & Dakubo, 2003) and this is almost a daily occurrence in most Nigerian higher institutions (Rotimi, 2005). In many schools, in Nigeria, cult clashes have been on the increase and youths cruelly maim their rivals with dangerous weapons. This has been linked to the fact that alcohol is hazardously used among Nigerian youths, including undergraduates (Adewuya, 2005) as drinking joints are strategically located in and around schools. There is also increasing violence in many communities linked to alcohol misuse (Obot, 2006) and many incidences of wife battery and familial violence (Brisibe et al, 2012).

Though moderate alcohol consumption may enhance the control of coronary heart disease (Anderson & Baumberg, 2006), misuse has been linked to heart disease (especially as the user grows older) (Anderson & Baumberg, 2006). It also causes liver disease (Reuben, 2006; Reuben, 2007; Reuben, 2008; Zakhari & Li, 2007) for which there are as yet no effective 'treatment advances' (Reuben, 2007 p.283) in Nigeria. There is the option of transplantation (Reuben, 2008), but only a few can afford the cost in Nigeria. There is also a serious problem of how to determine moderate consumption in a country where there is no definition of a standard drink, no inclusion of alcohol by volume on labels and where alcoholic beverages are served in different sizes of bottles, cans, glasses and calabashes.

Harmful alcohol use by pregnant women affects the unborn child leading to foetal alcohol syndrome (Jones & Smith, 1973). It leads to malformation of the brain in the unborn (Clarren et al, 1978; Jones et al, 1973) resulting in birth defects (Jones et al, 1974). In Nigeria, there are no effective means of deterring this because there is no warning against drinking during pregnancy. The 'drink responsibly' message does not recommend zero consumption even

among pregnant women. The fact that women are beginning to drink even more than men now in Nigeria (Gureje et al., 2007) means that the country may continue to witness birth defects. Among the Ubulu people of Delta State, drinking of palm wine is highly recommended for pregnant women and nursing mothers as a means (myth) of enhancing breast milk. Though palm wine is low in alcohol by volume, continuous consumption of this sweet soluble may contribute to birth defects.

Another major consequence of the changing patterns of alcohol consumption is road traffic accidents due to drunk-driving. This has continued to claim lives yearly in Nigeria (Aworemi et al, 2010) and may continue because *drivers are advised to drink responsibly by the brewers rather than to abstain*. Nigeria presently ranks third out of the 10 countries with the highest number of deaths related to road accidents (Toroyan, 2009) and the problem may continue due to lack of policy to check alcohol availability, use and misuse. The sale of ogogoro is not regulated and the brewers are increasingly campaigning for moderate consumption among drivers, while at the same time supplying their beverages to commercial motor parks.

CONCLUSION

The review has shown that there is an urgent need to formulate policies in line with 10 proposed targets of WHO 2008 resolution on 'strategies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol' (WHO, 2009) in Nigeria. Policy makers and brewers should reconsider their economic interests and arise to the global call for action against the rising alcohol-related problems, of which Nigeria is a major contributor. There is a need to define what constitutes a standard drink and mandate labels to convey this definition. Campaigns should focus on rural areas initiatives rather than focus on the cities. This is because the majority of Nigerians live in the villages and they are the ones involved in local brews of ogogoro. Prices of beverages should be raised and, the activities of the brewers that have been making alcohol available to all should be curtailed.

There should be a total ban of advertising that paints alcohol consumption as good for youths and promotions that promise to offer free drinks should be also be banned. There is also a need to ban night events organised by brewers and re-orientate youths' perceptions of alcohol use. As research findings have revealed that the use of salient posters, pictorials and interchangeable messages on the cigarette are effective in encouraging behavioural change (Argo & Main, 2004; Hammond et al, 2004; Borland et al., 2009), these should be part of the policy. This is because many Nigerians are still below literacy level and may not be able to understand textual warnings. Until these remedial measures are taken, other harmful patterns and reasons for alcohol consumption in Nigeria may continue to emerge.

¹ The traditional era as used in the article refers to the period before the establishment of the first brewery in Nigeria in 1949: it includes the era prior to the contact with western traders in the mid-1660s and the declaration of Lagos as a British colony in 1861, extending to the period before the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914.

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