

Research Article

The Nexus between Ramifications of Alcohol Abuse and Work Productivity (The Case of East London 2020 Research Study Participants)

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Abstract

Unequivocally, a global increase and normalisation of the culture of alcohol consumption in the workplace has multiple ramifications on occupational productivity. A qualitative paradigm was used to explore and describe the nexus between ramifications of alcohol abuse and occupational work productivity. In-depth interviews and focus group discussion were conducted among 26 participants from business entities, government, and non-governmental organisations. The findings revealed that: alcohol abuse normalises an unethical code of behaviours in the workplace, alcohol consumption undermines workers' morale and motivation, and undermines their pace and capacity to deliver their services. It also increases their chances of occupational hazards. This study recommends proactive strategies by the business entities and government in order to address workers' occupational productivity of the organisations.

Keywords: Alcohol abuse; Workplace; Work productivity; Business entities; Unethical behaviours

Introduction

Globally, there is an overwhelming increase of alcohol abuse which facilitates over 3 million deaths each year [1]. Moreover, since the past decade, African countries have always been engaging in episodes of a protracted war against substances, with alcohol abuse being the gravest episode [1,2]. Currently, alcohol is largely the most abused substance in South Africa [3,4]. On the same note, appalling abuse of alcohol in South Africa continues to paint a bleak picture of the country to the international community, this occurring at the detriment of foreign direct investment (FDI) [5]. Diverse literature establishes that the culture of alcohol consumption in South Africa is increasingly being entrenched and normalised, with statistics indicating that the country consumes five million litres of alcohol every year [6,7]. Furthermore, evidence abounds that in the face

of the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, many people on social media platforms have incessantly been complaining against the lock down rules that have denied them the right to take alcohol, with cases of liquor shop break-ins being recorded by law enforcement agencies increasing exponentially [8]. Perhaps this explains the depth into which alcohol abuse has sunk in the South African society.

Furthermore, this global behaviour has penetrated the workplace environment and destroyed the work ethics, morality and principles. Eclectic literature corroborates the above by pointing out that globally, alcohol is the most abused and misused psychotropic substance in the workforce [9]. On the same note, 9% of permanent employed population manifest alcohol use disorder in the United States. Report shows that workers from mining industries and construction have highest rate (17%) of alcohol consumption in United States. Despite silence of statistics in African countries, pockets of literature highlight impact of alcoholism in the workplace among different professions. The other studies confirmed severe impact of alcohol abuse on secondary schoolteachers in Uganda. On the same note, many researcher laments that the quagmire of alcohol consumption in the workspace is exponentially increasing and compels proactive intervention measures in South Africa. Similarly, the study conducted by recommended that the government needs to increase the use of breathalysers as an intervention to reduce or mitigate the heavy consumption of alcohol in the workplace.

Undeniably, the above behaviour of alcohol consumption has been associated with risky behaviours that directly af-

fect occupational work performance and productivity. In addition, alcohol consumption affects psychomotor performance required for work. On the same note, studies attest that alcohol abuse produce work inconsistency. Moreover, two studies conducted in different years shared similar findings that alcohol in the workplace spell doom to the occupational productivity. On the same account, a number of business entities have confirmed that alcohol abuse perniciously impacts upon their productivity. The above also points to a possibility of a general lowered occupational work productivity of the South African workforce due to higher consumption of alcohol. Furthermore, National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) state that increase of alcohol consumption in the workplace has caused a number of expensive problems in America. Evidence shows that workers with alcohol abuse behaviour neglect their work responsibilities and perform their tasks languidly. Other studies highlight that alcohol consumption in the workplace is risky especially for those who work with heavy machineries and injuries linked with intoxication have costs to employers [10].

Furthermore, other authors allude that alcohol related hangover episodes cause headaches, nausea, drowsiness and sensitivity to sound which lowers work performance [9]. On the same account some studies have established an inextricable link between alcohol abuse and absenteeism in the workplace. Moreover, alcohol abuse has been associated with unethical behaviours such as being late and leaving work early, which also affects productivity. Other studies suggest that alcohol consumption in the workplace has had more effect on productivity than absenteeism. Evidently, alcohol consumption, especially heavy drinking is associated with low work morale which affects productivity. On the same note, heavy alcohol consumption has been associated with disciplinary suspensions. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the nexus between the ramifications of alcohol abuse and work productivity with the hope to raise awareness against this behaviour.

Methods

Research setting

The research was conducted in East London, Eastern Cape. East London is a city in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality of the Eastern Cape Province. It is dominated by Xhosa speaking people (61.8%), 21.2% English speaking, 13.3% Afrikaans speaking and 3.8% users of other languages. East London is the second largest industrial centre in the Eastern Cape, after the city of Port Elizabeth. East London is observed to be manifesting dire alcohol abuse problem, both among working and non-working people.

Research approach/method

This study adopted a qualitative paradigm to explore the nexus between the ramifications of alcohol abuse and work productivity in East London. The selected approach was deemed appropriate because the researchers sought to enquire both direct and subjective insights from the participants about the impact of alcohol on work productivity. In

addition, the interest of exploration is to reveal the gravity of the problem with the purpose of mobilising interventions. Significantly, a qualitative paradigm recognises that humans are not homogenous and values all opinions contributing to the study equally. Therefore, the researchers embraced that human produce knowledge through their different experiences and views about the problem. Specifically, information was gathered through in-depth scrutiny and exploration of the phenomenon under study.

Sampling method

This study utilised a purposive sampling technique, which is a subtype of non-probability sampling method and is largely used in qualitative research. This technique selects participants through judgement and researcher/s' intuition. Purposive sampling handpicks information rich individuals, groups or organisations based on what is being studied. In response to choosing the experienced and knowledgeable samples, it is crucial to select available and willing samples that better meet the defined selection criteria than everyone else. Furthermore, purposive sampling is utilised to attend to atypical cases. Therefore, for this study, the researchers purposively selected 26 participants using judgement intuition to respond to the questions.

Data collection process

The information accumulation procedure was cross-sectional. The researcher gathered information inside a brief timeframe, or the process was a once-off data collection process. Cross-sectional studies offer several advantages on a study, are cheaper and can be carried out faster, and allow the researcher to examine multiple factors and multiple outcomes in one single study. On the other hand, the researchers obtained permission from the gatekeepers to conduct this study. The research proposal and tools of data collections were submitted to Govan Mbeki's University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Fort Hare that led to the award of an ethics certificate number KAN041SBAL01. Additionally, letters were written to request permission from community and business entities and government organisation leaders that were involved in this study.

Data analysis

The study embraced thematic analysis that entailed breaking down crude information to categories through coding to arrive at themes and subthemes. Thematic analysis is the procedure of bringing mountains of crude data into an orderly manner usually through structuring, arranging and rearrangements to arrive at thematic and sub thematic categories. It is a process of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within the data. It negligibly sorts out and portrays information into subtle elements [6]. Furthermore, six steps were followed in the formulation of the themes that were derived manually from the content and sentiments expressed by the participants. In response to the above steps, the researchers familiarised themselves with collected data, generated of initial codes, searched for themes, reviewed themes, defined and named themes and

produced the report. In doing so, the views and opinions of the participants were interpreted by the researchers. The process of data coding and the analysis were done manually.

Ethical considerations

As a prelude to conducting the interviews, the researchers requested permission from the gatekeepers which involved business entities, governmental and non-government organisations. Additionally, participants were made aware that participation in the study was voluntary, that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so. The data collection tool was submitted to the Uni-

versity of Fort Hare ethics committee to eliminate potential harm. To approve conduct of this study, the researchers were provided an ethical certificate with the UREC's approval number KAN041SBAL01. Furthermore, the researchers ensured privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Specifically, researchers withheld personal identities of the participants and used code naming. The participants were made aware that the data will only be used for academic purposes which include journal publications.

Findings of the study

Table 1 describes demographic details of the participants from government and non-governmental organisations.

Table 1: Demographic details of the participants from government and non-governmental organisations.

Government and NGOs	Code Names	Age	Gender	Race	Marital Status	Educational level	Occupational rank
Department of Social Development	KIP1	49	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Social Worker
Buffalo City Municipality	KIP2	55	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Community liaison officer
Department of Education	KIP3	48	F	Black	Single	Tertiary	Senior Education Specialist
Department of Health	KIP4	51	F	Black	Married	Tertiary	Senior Nurse
Secondary School	KIP5	59	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Principal
Secondary School	KIP6	58	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Principal
Rehabilitation centre	KIP7	42	F	White	Single	Tertiary	Counselling Psychologist
Rehabilitation centre	KIP8	43	F	White	Married	Tertiary	Social Worker
SANCA	KIP9	50	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Social Worker
NICRO	KIP10	48	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Social Worker
Department of Social Development	KIP11	42	F	Black	Married	Tertiary	Social Worker
Buffalo City Municipality	KIP12	54	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Ward Councillor
Department of Education	KIP13	48	M	Black	Single	Tertiary	Senior Education Specialist
Buffalo City Municipality	KIP14	50	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Community liaison officer
Buffalo City Municipality	KIP15	53	M	Black	Married	Secondary	Ward Councillor
South African Police Service	KIP16	52	M	Black	Married	Tertiary	Sergeant

Table 2 describes demographic details of the participants from business entities.

Table 2: Demographic details of the participants from business entities.

Characteristics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Code names	BEP1	BEP2	BEP3	BEP4	BEP5	BEP6	BEP7	BEP8	BEP9	BEP10
Age	50	48	57	36	40	40	45	53	47	51
Gender	M	F	M	M	F	M	F	M	M	F
Race	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Coloured
Marital status	Married	Single	Married	Single	Single	Single	Single	Married	Married	Single
Education Status	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Tertiary	secondary	Tertiary
Occupational RANK	Communication officer	Social Worker	Assistant Manager	General Worker	Supervisor	Security	Cleaner	Communication officer	General worker	EAP practitioner

Table 3 describes thematic findings.

Table 3: Thematic findings.

No	Thematic Findings
1	Alcohol abuse normalises an unethical code of behaviours in the workplace
2	Alcohol consumption undermines workers' morale and motivation
3	Impact of alcoholism negatively affects the rendering of services
4	Impact of injuries associated with alcoholism to work productivity

Thematic findings

Alcohol abuse normalises an unethical code of behaviours in the workplace: Study findings established that alcohol abuse normalises unethical work behaviours of neglecting their work responsibilities. The participants also indicated that most employees with alcohol addiction problems become unreliable as far as their work behaviours are concerned. Findings further revealed non-adherence to time work schedules, manifestation of episodes of lateness for duty, as well as debunking duties especially in the late part of the working afternoons. The excerpts below support the above findings:

“Alcohol abuse behaviour affects the integrity in the workplace. Firstly, they tend to be late for work and go before time on other days”

“In South Africa, the weekend starts on Friday, hence employees with alcohol abuse problem never show up on Fridays at work”

“I have observed that people with alcohol abuse problem never adhere to time schedules and other work principles”

“Absenteeism is a common behaviour among the employees who have alcohol consumption problem”

“Usually, employees with heavy alcohol drinking problem conduct illegal activities where they steal things from the business entities with the aim of selling to satisfy their cravings”

The above excerpts indicate that alcohol abuse promotes their work unreliability and poor dedication to duty. This makes users disregard professional code of ethics and hence undermine their work productivity, morality and ethics.

Alcohol consumption undermines workers' morale and motivation: The findings revealed a link between alcohol abuse problem and work productivity. Participants confirmed that alcohol abuse among employees reduces work motivation and morale which affects their performance. The verbatim below support these findings:

“Alcohol abuse affects work energy of the employees. This is because during work time, they are always tired and nursing their work hangovers. Their performance and productivity go down. Their appetite to work is also drowned by obsession to drink.

“We sometimes find others sleeping during the time of work, more especially on Mondays. This gravely compromises their productivity”.

“Poor quality performance of employees with alcohol abuse problems constitute a huge loss to companies”

The above verbatims insinuate that alcohol consumption in the workplace perfidiously affect workplace productivity in multifarious ways.

Impact of alcoholism negatively affects the rendering of services: The study established the phenomenon of alcoholism negatively impacting on the rendering of services in the workplace. The participants attested that the workers with heavy drinking problem tend to perform poorly at work and render substandard and inadequate services. The findings further revealed that poor work performance associated with alcoholism directly affects clientele. The sentiments below support the above findings:

“We have observed for many years the increase of heavy alcohol use among educators which has facilitated poor performance on the work duties. Thereafter, this affects performance of the learners.” “Intoxication in the workplace has serious effects on service rendering. For example, we once had an incident where we found through a truck tracker that one of the company drivers went to tavern with the customer's building material which was urgently needed.

“It is sad that despite ethical guidelines, professionals continue to consume alcohol during work time, which has also affected service delivery to clients. We have colleagues who we know that on Fridays, they don't pitch up on time and leave early because of their heavy drinking behaviour, while clients come from far rural areas in need of help and have to. Go back both frustrated and unattended to.”

The above excerpts indicate that alcoholism in the workplace undermine work morals and ethics. This has an effect on the implementation and success of social policies.

Impact of injuries associated with alcoholism to work productivity: The data gathered from the participants demonstrated that injuries associated with alcoholism affect productivity in the workplace. The participants attested that the intoxication at work has been linked with severe injuries which cost a lot to the business entities. The sentiments below support these findings:

“Alcohol consumption at work poses danger to employees, more especially those who use heavy machines. This can result in serious injuries prompting workers to claim a lot of compensation from the company”.

“The alcohol use in the workplace has been a setback to the business entities because employees make expensive claims when they are injured due to working under alcohol intoxication”.

“The companies are also liable to pay for other health problems caused by alcoholism among employees”.

The multiple health problems and injuries linked with al-

coholism posed danger to both business entities and employees. Therefore, the financial setbacks as well as health loss to the employees directly affect productivity of the business entities.

Discussion

The age of the participants from business entities ranged from 36 to 51 years while key informants ranged from 42 to 59 years. Notably, most of the participants belonged to the middle age group of the society, which is typically the experienced and productive segment of the society. Literature corroborates the above view with the contention that middle age groups range between 36 and 55 years and this constitutes their most productive period of their occupations. Additionally, the age between 34 and 55 years is a middle age where majority of the workers record optimal productivity, both for themselves and their professional occupations.

There was a gender disparity from business entities and key informants with men being preferred to women. This could insinuate that despite the democratic dispensation in South Africa promising to eliminate gender inequalities in the workplace, this was still a mirage, as women continue to experience gross inequalities in the labour market. This could be a reflection that South African legislations continue to fail to eliminate gender disproportions in the workplace [5].

This study established that a lion's share of the participants was single than those who were married or divorced. This reflects the South African demographic profile where most of the citizens tend to be embracing single than married status. This freedom (from marriage commitment) may have an implication in the culture of substance abuse such as consumption of alcohol. The South African 2018 Statistics report revealed that statistics of single adults continue to escalate significantly in South Africa among people in the age group of 18-34 years, and within the middle age group.

Educationally, the participants who had attained tertiary education were more compared to those with secondary education. This may be a reflection that substance abuse cuts across all educational levels. Eclectic literature on South Africa alcohol abuse problem highlights that there is increasing evidence of substance abuse among South Africans regardless of their educational statuses. It is perhaps critical at this juncture to indicate that the country consumes more than 5 million litres of alcohol per annum, this being the highest consumption capacity per country in the globe.

The demographic findings on occupational rank of the study participants revealed that they occupied various positions with different knowledge packages. Perhaps this reflects and can be a pointer to the fact that alcohol abuse cuts across different levels of professions. This further heralds that prevention and treatment of substance abuse requires a diversity of professional experts. Therefore, challenges associated with alcohol abuse attract the application

of a multidisciplinary approach, through which different skilled professionals would collaborate with and complement one another.

Study findings established that alcohol abuse normalises unethical work behaviours. The findings resonate with the work of who contended that alcohol abuse among the employees is linked to unethical conducts which affects employees' productivity. Also avers that alcohol abuse has an immoral effect in that, it influences individuals to embark on illegal activities such as having the employees steal things from the business entities with the aim of selling to satisfy their cravings. Evidence abounds that alcohol abuse impairs morals and professional judgement of the employees. This further supports existing link between alcohol abuse and lack of professionalism which impairs work performance.

Furthermore, substance abuse has been associated with absenteeism among employees and therefore impacting negatively on their work performance. Moreover, absenteeism from work disturbs the interdependence of activities in the workplace, which then affects the entire business productivity. This is in line with the holds that absenteeism associated with alcohol abuse among employees in the workplace has long affected both public and private organisations' productivity [4]. Several authors argue that absenteeism associated with alcohol consumption have gravely affected production in governmental institutions. Add that excessive alcohol consumption causes tiredness resulting in absenteeism.

Study participants established an inextricable link between alcohol abuse problem and minimal work performance. Support the above contention by highlighting that the business community in the United States loses more than \$ 100 billion yearly due to alcohol abuse among the employees. The scenario above finds corroboration in the study conducted by that underscored that excessive alcohol use has made the U.S. to lose an estimate of 249 billion dollars annually, with and 72% of that cost emanated from lost work productivity This is because alcohol alter individuals' motor abilities and perceptions, which then affects their performance and productivity. On the same note, research has shown that alcohol has more abrupt effect on performance, because of the extent through which cognitive functioning is impaired after drinking [10].

The study established a negative impact of alcoholism to the rendering of services. The study conducted by Rukundo and Magambo revealed that alcoholism among educators affects their teaching quality. This unequivocally proves that intoxication in the workplace influences workers' inability to carry and complete their responsibilities. The findings from the study by further alludes that heavy alcohol consumption affects cognitive processing which reduces information production among the educators. Add that educators with alcoholism habits were inclined to absenteeism and not marking students' assessments. Highlights that alcohol consumption among municipal employees continues to undermine their service provisions.

The data gathered from the participants demonstrated that injuries associated with alcoholism affect productivity in the workplace. Despite a scanty of literature in response to this subject, statistics shows that business entities suffer from high increase of compensation claims associated with alcoholism linked injuries. Pockets of ad hoc literature highlight that the injuries and fatalities correlated with alcoholism in the workplace affects productivity. More so, alcoholism exacerbates risks of injuries among employees working with machines.

Conclusion

This article highlights the pernicious impact that alcohol abuse imposes on workplace productivity. Evidently, this behaviour has been associated with a number of perfidious unethical activities which affect the performance of the employees. This should attract proactive response because it affects the productivity of the organisations. It is then critical that governments in tandem with substance abuse NGOs as well as private individuals funding the war against substance abuse work both collaboratively and synergistically to mitigate if not to annihilate the effects of substance abuse. These researchers wish to see institutions of learning playing a more proactive role in the war against substance abuse. It is incumbent upon the management of the institutions to ensure that substance abuse education is adequately mainstreamed in the school curriculums. It would be important that children from as early as nascent classes are socialized with substance abuse education. These researchers also need to see members of the social service professions such as the social workers being in the front line to unleash advocacy and education on substance abuse as widely as possible. The role of philanthropic organizations that fund the campaign are welcome to come up with feasible and novel strategies to strengthen the campaign.

Disclaimer and Disclosure

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