

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION CONTEXT AND ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AMONG STUDENTS IN GOVERNMENT TERTIARY COLLEGES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at evaluating the influence of interpersonal communication context on alcohol consumption among students in government tertiary colleges in Kenya. The study was anchored on the two-step flow of communication model and the social cognitive theory. The research used the descriptive cross-sectional survey design and utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data. From the campuses identified, a representative sample from each campus was chosen. A questionnaire was used to obtain qualitative data from sampled students. An interview guide was instrumental in interviewing key informants, while another guide for focus group discussions was used among the students to gather further qualitative data. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (mainly percentages) and inferential statistics (the chi-square goodness of fit test) with the aid of SPSS. The findings revealed that interpersonal communication context had a significant influence on the alcohol consumption behavior among college students. It was recommended that there is need for awareness to be created for learners to uphold interpersonal communication context that supports their goals and valuable outcome rather than alcohol consumption behavior.

Keywords: Interpersonal communication context, Alcohol Consumption, College Students

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Interpersonal communication is generally the information sharing between two or more people (Murtiningsih, Kristiawan, & Lian, 2019). Specifically, Interpersonal communication involves the information sharing both verbally and non-verbally between individuals with an aim of establishing, enhancing or sustaining relationships and interactions (Izquierdo & Anguera, 2021). Through interpersonal communication, participants tend to understand what others want their perceptions and most importantly, learn behavior and traits. According to Ezeah et al. (2020), interpersonal communication is not only about sharing information but also observing to understand one another's attitudes, behaviours, expectations and their overall

perception on given matters such as sociocultural, myths and believes. One of the key components of interpersonal communication is the context of communication, also known as interpersonal communication context. According to Guevarra et al. (2021), context in interpersonal communication is the circumstance or condition that the communication takes place in. It is more of the environment, the driving factors, the subject matter and intended objectives of the communication (Felsher et al., 2021). Interpersonal communication context refers to the scenario set in the information sharing, and the incidences/activities that drive the communication.

Interpersonal communication context plays an integral role in influencing behavior, in that the incidence and motive that drives one to participate in interpersonal communication must have a desired output that ought to be achieved (Tsuma, Mberia, & Muchunku, 2018). According to Anyim (2017), the context of interpersonal communication presents the subject matter of the information shared and the environment in which the information is shared upon which behavior is influenced. According to Berg, Rogers, Liu, Mumford, and Taylor (2019), a behavior like alcohol consumption is highly contagious through interpersonal communication context. This is because prolonged interpersonal communication with the context aligned to a given behavior has the ability to persuade and convince the view of an idea or action. Felsher et al. (2021) alludes that interpersonal communication context has the ability to change the way one thinks, including liking behaviours that they hated before. According to Salandy and Nies (2013), behavior is autonomous in nature and can be precipitated by factors that individuals perceive to be fundamental and intrinsic in nature. When an individual learns of specific experiences that are likely to make them feel more fulfilled, they are most likely going to shape their behavior into that dimension. This is what interpersonal communication does to individual's behavior, in that it draws a context of given scenarios, which appear intrinsic to the listener, thus influencing their behavior (Anyim, 2017).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), alcohol has emerged as one of the leading risk factors for poor health, causing a major burden of disease and injury globally, while exposing many people globally to life-threatening risks and diseases (WHO, 2017). Alcohol is blamed for causing more than 200 disease and injury conditions. It is directly linked with a risk of developing health problems such as liver cirrhosis, alcohol dependence, cancers and injuries (Shield, Parry and Rehm, 2013). WHO (2018) reported that though 61.7% of the population aged 15 years or more had not drunk alcohol between 2017 and 2018, where over 16.0% of this age engages in heavy episodic drinking.

In Kenya Government, the National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) reported that alcohol and drug abuse is highest among young adults aged between 15 and 29 and lowest among adults who are 65 years or older (NACADA, 2013). About 16.6 percent of urban dwellers consume alcohol as compared to 11.4 percent of rural dwellers. The lowest rate of alcohol abuse (below 10 percent) is in North Eastern and Central regions. At 15.7 percent, Nairobi, the capital city, has the highest number of alcohol consumers. The prevalence of alcohol consumption among the youth in Kenya paints a picture of a nation whose big population is enslaved by alcoholism. The age group (15-29 years) most affected by harmful consumption of alcohol (Ross & DeJong, 2008) include students of KMTTC. This category may themselves serve as role models for other youth, since today's medical students

will be tomorrow's health care providers and health promoters (Shah et al., 2010). Facts available portray alcohol consumption as one of the major challenges facing the youth in Kenya, with statistics indicating alcohol consumption is on the increase among the youth, including medical college students. The age of initiating alcohol use in Kenya is at a very tender age, between 11 – 20 years (NACADA, 2011), meaning that even College students are not an exception.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread awareness about dangers of excessive alcohol consumption in Kenya, its abuse still remains high, particularly among the youth (Duhachek et. al, 2014). According to NACADA (2018), alcohol consumption and abuse in Kenya is mainly rampant among the youth, who comprise of persons aged 15 years and 30 years. This being the most productive age, and strength of a country's prosperity, alcohol consumption behavior among such crucial group puts the entire country and its vision in a brim. According to Khamis et al. (2022), college students positively view alcohol use and the attendant experience as socially-acceptable within a peer group context, and younger populations in Kenya are viewed as most likely to engage in excessive alcohol consumption, without considering negative consequences. According to Kendagor et al. (2018), peers act as an influential model to other peers by introducing, providing, or pressuring risky activities related to alcohol use. Empirical studies have found interpersonal communication context to be one of the major factors influencing behavior, including alcohol consumption behavior (Berg et al., 2019; Diep et al., 2016). According to Dillard, Li, and Cannava (2022), through the interpersonal communication contexts such as cultural, social, physical aspects and psychosocial circumstances, individuals are influenced to copy certain behavior, with drug and alcohol abuse being among the major behaviours that are highly contagious through the context of interpersonal communication. These studies however have been carried out in varied locales which may not represent the scenario in the Kenyan tertiary colleges. This justified the current study to assess the relationship between interpersonal communication context and alcohol consumption among students in government tertiary colleges in Kenya.

1.3 Objective of the Study

1. To examine the influence of interpersonal communication context on alcohol consumption among students in government tertiary colleges in Kenya.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

- H₀₁:** Interpersonal communication context has no significant influence on alcohol consumption among students in government tertiary colleges in Kenya.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on two-step flow communication model by Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) and elaborated by Elihu Katz and Lazarsfeld in 1955. The model posits that most people form opinions as a result of the influence of opinion leaders, who are in turn influenced by the mass

media (Lazarsfeld, 1944; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The model holds that ideas flow from mass media to opinion leaders first, then from the opinion leaders to a wider population. According to the theory, opinion leaders pass on their own interpretation of information in addition to the actual media content.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

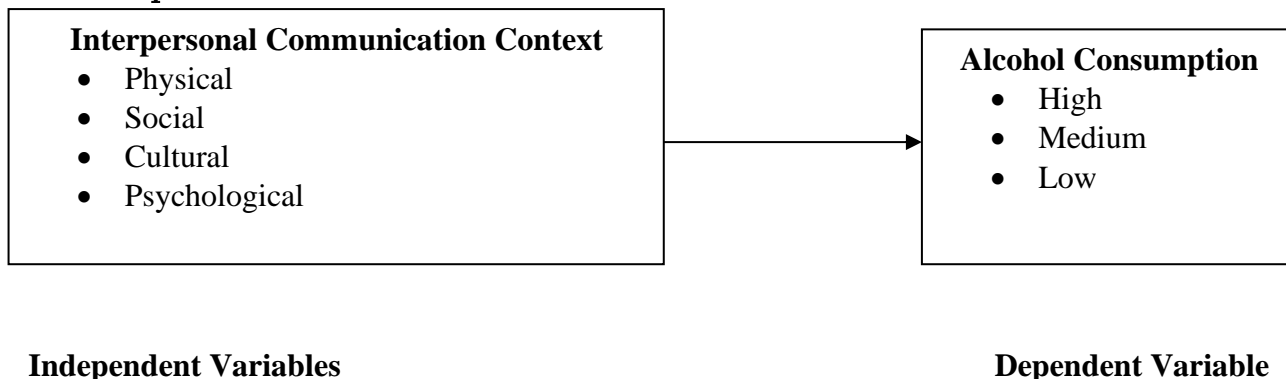


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

2.3 Empirical Review of Studies

Wright, Rosenberg, Egbert, Ploeger, Bernard, and King (2013) assessed the effect of communication competence, social support on depression and drug use among college students. The study aimed at assessing the relationship between the ability, context and means of communication and indulge into drugs and depression among the college students in Canada. The authors employed an exploratory research design and sampled 116 college students in Canada. The findings revealed that the ability to communicate and the context of communication had a significant influence on drug use or depression among the college students. Wright et al. (2013) noted the communication context determined the drug abuse though the type of information shared, the psychological and social support. Capetti, Sterrantino, and Niero (2017) support this by indicating that the communication context can both influence individuals to use drugs or influence them to stop drug use. This is determined by the support the victims get and how they are aligned to understanding the context and target group for any communication.

Simoes and Esposito (2014) carried out a study on the influence of interpersonal communication context and nature on the resistance or acceptance of change. The study aimed at pointing out the role played by interpersonal communication nature and context on the acceptance of change and how the latter influenced the rejection of change. The authors narrowed their study to alcohol consumers in Spain. They used a cross-section research approach and sampled 426 respondents drawn from individuals consuming alcohol and those that had previously been consuming but stopped recently who were surveyed using structured questionnaires. The study revealed that alcohol consumption was mainly influenced by the information shared by other users. Simoes and Esposito (2014) noted that alcohol consumption was related with the nature and the context of communication. The authors noted that the

physical nature of communication and the social aspects connected to communication of alcohol related content influenced the respondents to either accept change by joining or leaving the drinking behaviour or to reject change by maintaining the status quo.

Huang, Unger, Soto, Fujimoto, Pentz, Jordan-Marsh, and Valente (2014) assessed the influence of online and offline friendship networks on adolescent smoking and alcohol use in China. Their study sought to analyse the relationship between the context of communication on the use of drugs (alcohol and cigarettes) among the adolescents in China. The scholars used a descriptive research design and collected data from a sample of 302 respondents drawn from adolescent city dwellers in china. Their findings showed that the context of communication had a significant influence on the use of drugs among the adolescents. According to Huang et al. (2014), the adolescents are keen to explore and the availability of information through both online and offline communication influences their decision t uptake drugs and substance use.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research used a cross-sectional survey design and utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data. According to Nachmias and Nachmias (2006), cross-sectional studies allow researchers to make statistical references to broader populations and generalize their results to real-life situations, thus increasing the study's external validity. Cross sectional studies are also conducted in their natural settings while allowing researchers to employ random probability samples.

3.2 Target Population

The target population for the study was all the students in government tertiary colleges in Kenya, which is KMTC. As at December 2019, the College had 71 campuses spread across 43 counties out of the 47 counties in Kenya (KMTC, 2019). The study targeted 46,750 students in the 71 the college's campuses. The key informants targeted in the study were the students' counselors in the 71 campuses. Each campus had one counselor, and so there were 71 counselors targeted.

3.3 Sampling

The sample size was determined by using the following formula by Fisher et al. (1991) and Cochran (1977) formulae that are designed for large populations. According to Fischer, any population of more than 10,000 people is considered infinite, and the sample size is calculated using the formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p (1-p)}{e^2}$$

z = is the Z value for the corresponding confidence level (i.e., 1.96 for 95% confidence);

e = is the margin of error (i.e., 0.05 = ± 5%) and

p = is the estimated value for the proportion of a sample that have the condition of interest.

P = 50% (the most conservative estimate)

$$N = \frac{1.96^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

$$n = \frac{e^2}{0.05 \times 0.05} = \frac{1.96 \times 1.96 \times 0.5 (1 - 0.5)}{0.05 \times 0.05} = 384$$

Stratified random sampling was used to pick the 384 respondents from 15% of the campuses. This was informed by Kothari (2014) who argues that between 10% and 30% of the units of analysis is adequate for a study. This study used 15% of the 71 campuses hence 11 campuses were selected. These campuses were selected based on Creswell (2013) argument that in a target population where there are autonomous groups, it is appropriate to prioritize the groups with the high number of members since this is most likely to have the characteristics of the entire population. For the qualitative sample, counselors were purposively picked from the 11 campuses where one counselor was selected from each campus. These were the key informants for interviews. In addition, 12 students were engaged in two focus group discussions. As such the total qualitative sample size was 23 (11 counselors and 12 students) and this according to Scholar (Year) was an acceptable number of qualitative sample.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the 384 student respondents using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered through drop and pick method and online means through Google forms.

Interview guide was used to collect data from the 11 key informants, who comprised of Counselors (one from each of the eleven KMTC Campuses), were contacted a day before to book an appointment.

Two focus group discussions were conducted with students to probe and elicit discussions among students so as to gather further qualitative data not fully covered by the structured questionnaires. Each focus group comprising of six students (3 males and 3 females) was convened by informing the respondents two days before.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were taken through a coding scheme to classify responses. All data was cleaned to minimize data entry errors. The data was entered in Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). It was then be analyzed using descriptive statistics including mean, mode, percentages and cross tabulations, which, according to (Nachmias & Nachmias, 2006) enable researchers to summarize and organize data in an effective and meaningful way. Data was also analyzed using inferential statistics (correlation coefficient, regression analysis and ANOVA). Qualitative data from in-depth interviews with administrators and focus group discussions with the students was transcribed and coded as per the emerging themes, based on the outlined study objectives and the research questions. Key themes were then isolated and merged with the quantitative data to further explain the phenomena emerging from the research study.

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Response Rate

The study had a sample of 384 respondents who were surveyed using a structured questionnaire. A response rate of 70.6% (271 respondents) was achieved and the data used for analysis. This therefore makes the study appropriate to make conclusions and recommendations since according to Creswell (2005) and Kingslay (2012) a response rate of 30-60% in a study is adequate for making conclusions and recommendations.

4.2 Interpersonal Communication Context

The study sought to establish the influence of interpersonal communication context on alcohol consumption among students in government tertiary colleges in Kenya. Interpersonal communication context was measured using: physical communication context, social and cultural communication context, and psychological communication context. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they used the interpersonal communication contexts. The results are as summarized on Table 1. The findings are in line with those by Jeeyun, Hyunjin, Sudarshan, and Lee (2019) who established that physical communication context and social communication context play an essential role in influencing behavior. According to Guest, Namey, and McKenna (2017), communication context tells what importance should be placed on the shared information, the assumptions to draw and the meaning of what is being communicated. These aspects are crucial in shaping how one perceives the information, and reacts through behaving in a certain manner. Based on the communication context embraced, students are most likely to change their behavior, such as beginning to consume alcohol. According to Diep, Tan, Knibbe, and De Vries (2016), the social status of the peers is learned through the type of information that the students share. This interpersonal communication context in turn influences the behavior of the students, thus they embrace diverse ways of perceiving things, including alcohol consumption (Archiopoli, Ginossar, Wilcox, Avila, Hill & Oetzel, 2016).

Table 1: Descriptive Results on Interpersonal Communication Context

| Statements | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|--|------|-----------|
| The information shared when communicating with my friends at school is different from what is shared when I am in other places e.g. home | 3.58 | 1.53 |
| The communication with my mates differ based on time of the day (e.g. what you share at daytime is not what you share during the night) | 3.95 | 1.09 |
| There are times we often discuss about alcohol consumption and other related behaviour than others | 3.91 | 1.03 |
| My classmates/friends have varied social status/classes in the society | 3.19 | 1.54 |
| My behaviour is a times influenced by the social status/class of my friends/classmates | 3.71 | 1.40 |
| I am often convinced by friends who have certain roles and responsibilities in the institution to adopt particular behaviours | 3.78 | 1.04 |
| We have varied cultural beliefs and practices among the group of friends I communicate with | 3.38 | 1.52 |
| I observe the cultures of my close friends to ensure I do not offend them during our interaction | 3.26 | 1.39 |
| My behaviour has previously been influenced by the cultural practices of my friends whom I spend most of the time with | 3.77 | 1.07 |
| My personality and values are depicted when communicating with by mates | 3.86 | 1.03 |
| My behaviour is influenced by the characteristics of my friends that I hang out with | 3.53 | 1.07 |
| I observe the needs and desires of my friends/classmates and sometimes ted to copy | 3.49 | 1.11 |

The findings from the key informants' interviews revealed that the communication context had a hand in the alcohol consumption among students. Most of the interviewees indicated that the students would drink in diverse settings, including when in groups and even in isolated places. They further commented that physical environments were the most supportive contexts of alcohol consumption. According to one of Counselors, students often like sharing information in physical contexts where they can practice whatever they are communicating about.

The informants were also asked to state the reasons that the students gave for consuming alcohol, and any measures that the institution was taking to reduce the influence of communication context on alcoholic consumption. The respondents indicated that one of the major reason that the encountered was the need to get rid of stress and the urge to party with friends and peers.

The findings concur with those by Ramsoomar and Morojele (2012) who stated that interpersonal communication context has direct influence on alcohol consumption among teenagers. According to Steele, Ding, and Ross (2019), in scenarios where the context of communication allows the individuals to experiment, there are increased chances of the behavior of an individual being influenced. Further, West, Hall, and Prier (2012) allude that the cultural and physical/environmental contexts of communication streamline the discussions and topics discussed, thus they can easily influence the behavior of an individual, including influencing them to consume alcohol.

4.3 Alcohol Consumption

The study sought to establish the respondents' opinions on alcohol consumption. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with specific statements addressing alcohol consumption in terms of high levels of consumption, medium consumption levels and low consumption levels. The finding as shown on Table 2 portray that majority of the respondents agreed that they frequently consumed alcohol (Mean = 3.77; standard deviation = 1.23). The respondents further agreed that they never consumed alcohol but would wish to try someday (Mean = 3.87; standard deviation = 1.23). The respondents agreed that they frequently took small amount of alcohol (Mean = 3.80; standard deviation = 1.20). They further agreed that they took alcohol because their friends were also taking (Mean = 3.68; standard deviation = 1.15) but disagreed that they had set limits on the amount of alcohol they can take at a go.

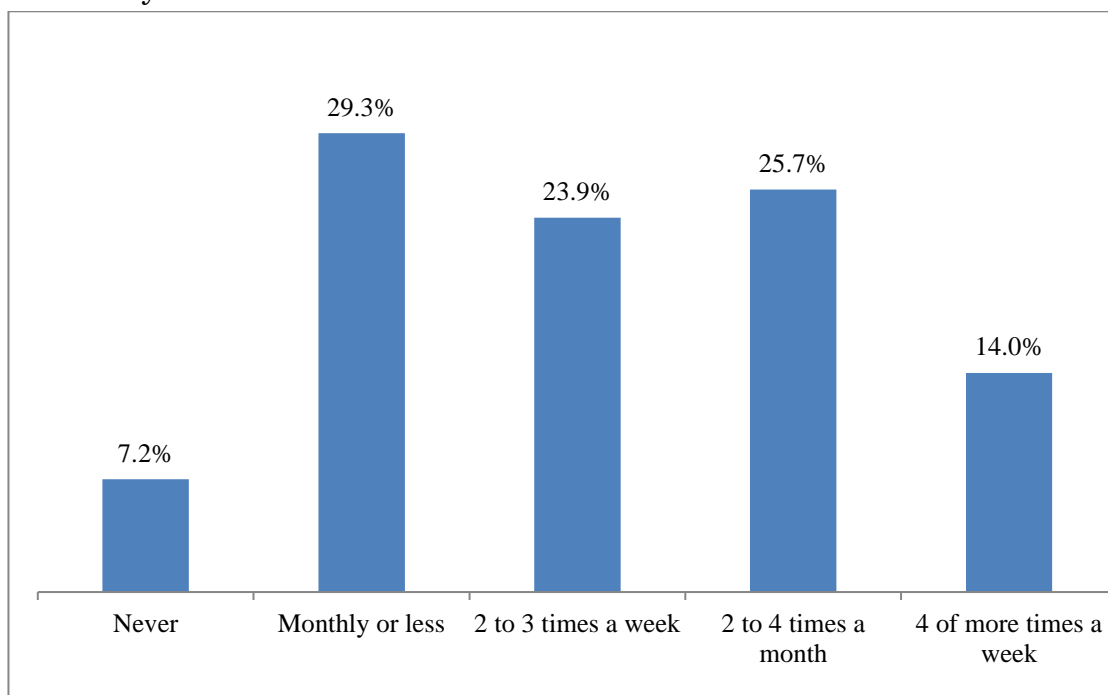
The findings imply that alcohol consumption among college students is rampant and on the rise, as majority of the respondents agreed that they were frequent consumers of alcohol. According to Bazrafshan, Akbari, Rahmati, and Ghadakpour (2017), alcohol consumption among college students remains to be one of the factors that have continued affected the educational output and the success of the students in courses they undertake. This is seconded by Banerjee et al. (2015) who argued that as the number of university and college students involved in alcohol consumption continues to surge, and so has been the rise in the number of dropouts and failure to complete within the set timelines.

Table 2: Descriptive Results on Alcohol Consumption

| Statements | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|------|-----------|
| I frequently consume alcohol | 3.77 | 1.23 |
| I have never taken alcohol but would wish to try someday | 3.87 | 1.23 |
| I take small amount of alcohol but frequently | 3.80 | 1.20 |
| I take alcohol because my friends are also taking | 3.68 | 1.15 |
| I have set limits on the amount of alcohol I can take at a go | 2.25 | 1.56 |

Frequency of Alcohol Consumption

The respondents were further asked to indicate the number of times they consumed alcohol. As the findings on Figure 2 portray, 29.3% of the respondents indicated that they took alcohol either monthly or sometimes in more than a month, 23.9% indicated that they took alcohol between 2 to 3 times a week, 25.7% indicated that they consumed alcohol between 2 and 4 times a month, 14% consumed alcohol 4 or more times a week, while 7.2% of the respondents indicated that they never consumed alcohol at all.

**Figure 4.4: Frequency of Alcohol Consumption**

Number of Drinks Per Sitting

The study further sought to establish the number of drinks those that consumed alcohol took in a sitting. As the findings on Figure 4.5 portray, majority of the respondents (55.9%) indicated that they consumed 5 or more drinks per sitting, 13.1% consumed 1 drink per sitting, 11.3% consumed 2 drinks, 7.7% consumed 3 drinks while 5% of the respondents consumed 4 drinks per sitting.

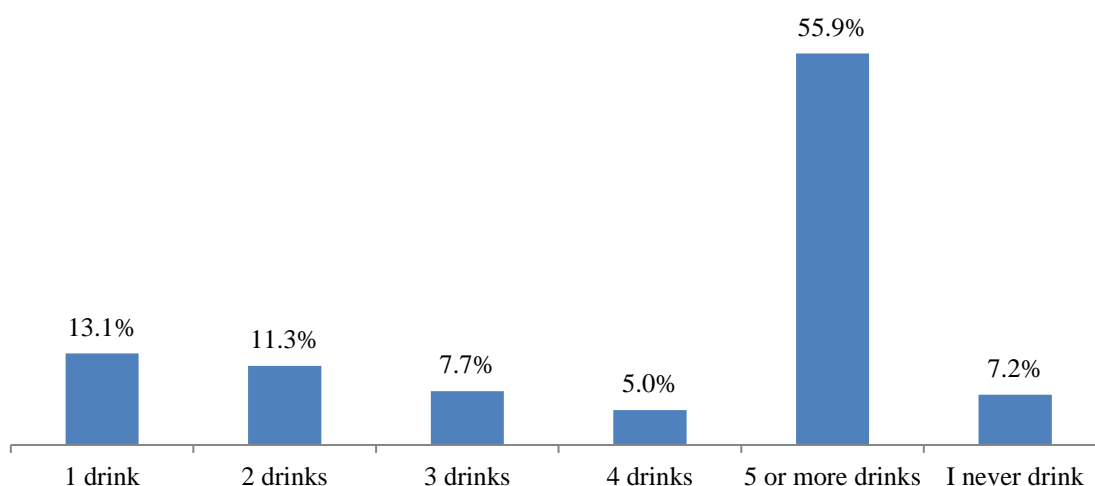


Figure 4: Number of Drinks Per Sitting

4.4 Correlation between Interpersonal Communication Context and Alcohol Consumption

The Pearson correlation coefficient for the interpersonal communication context and alcohol consumption among medical college students was 0.683. The significance level (P-values) was $0.000 < 0.05$. This is an indication that there is a strong and significant positive correlation between interpersonal communication context and alcohol consumption among medical college students in Kenya. Thus, with increase in interpersonal communication context, the alcohol consumption among medical college students will increase.

Table 3: Correlation Results for Interpersonal Communication Context

| | | Alcohol Consumption | Interpersonal Communication Context |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Alcohol Consumption | Pearson Correlation | 1 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | |
| | N | 271 | |
| Interpersonal Communication Context | Pearson Correlation | .683** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 271 | 271 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

The study's hypothesis was that there is not significant relationship between Interpersonal Communication Context and Alcohol Consumption. The proposed model for the variable was as shown:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1$$

From the results on Table 4 below, the R-square (R^2) was 0.467, an indication that a variability of 46.7% in alcohol consumption among college students could be explained by a unit change in Interpersonal Communication Context. The F-calculated value from the ANOVA analysis was 235.631 significant at a p-value of 0.000 implying that the variable Interpersonal Communication Context was significant and the model could statistically significantly predict the relationship between Interpersonal Communication Context and Alcohol Consumption.

The coefficient results revealed that the β for the Interpersonal Communication Context was 0.616 thus the new model becoming $Y = 1.186 + 0.616X_2$. This implies that a unit change in Interpersonal Communication Context could explain up to 61.6% change in the Alcohol Consumption. The P-value for the variable was $0.000 < 0.05$, an indication that Interpersonal Communication Context had a positive and significant influence on Alcohol Consumption.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 1.186 | .151 | | 7.851 | .000 |
| 1 Interpersonal Communication Context | .616 | .040 | .683 | 15.350 | .000 |
| F-Statistic | 235.631 | | | | |
| R-Square | .467 | | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Alcohol Consumption

The inferential results revealed that interpersonal communication context has a significant influence on alcohol consumption among college students in Kenya. This is an indication that through increased interpersonal communication context, there will be a significant change in alcohol consumption behavior among college students (Ezeah, Ogechi, Ohia, & Celestine, 2020). The findings further revealed that the demographic factors significantly moderated the relationship between interpersonal communication context and alcohol consumption among students in government tertiary colleges in Kenya.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that the interpersonal communication context had a significant influence on the alcohol consumption among students in government tertiary colleges in Kenya. The context of the shared information such as the physique of information (when it is shared physically and the grounds of sharing the information are physically motivated) determined the extent to which the information regarding alcohol consumption was shared. Moreover, the social and cultural contexts determined the extent to which the communicators are able to share alcohol related information, thus influencing the alcohol consumption.

The institutional management in government tertiary colleges in Kenya should be on the forefront of enhancing a communication context where the culture, social and psychological aspects of the students' environment is geared towards positive interactions that do not promote alcohol and abuse. The management should be supportive by providing guidance and counselling as well as seminars to students to avoid interpersonal communication contexts that encourage alcohol consumption. It is also the duty of the students to responsibly choose the interpersonal communication contexts that are not influencing them to unacceptable behaviors such as alcohol consumption.

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