

The Dynamics of Intoxicant/Drug Consumption in Contemporary Uganda: A Case Study of Urban Kampala

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This article discusses the dynamics of taking intoxicants in modern Uganda. Being a developing country, Uganda is facing several challenges that range from globalization, cultural changes coupled with the modern forces of science and technology and influence from the developed world. One of such challenges is the consumption of intoxicants. While intoxicants are illegal, nevertheless, in most cases arrested drug users are not punished accordingly. This creates a contradiction. The aim of the study was to identify the commonest intoxicants taken in Uganda; factors leading to intoxication; negative and positive impacts of intoxicants on the health, social and the economy of the people involved in taking it. The study involved young people from Kampala urban areas. A descriptive survey was employed during data collection. Interviews, semi-structured and close ended questionnaires were used. Since the drug abusers are hunted by the law enforcers, the snow balling technique was adopted during field research. The study indicates that the commonest abused drugs are; alcohol, Mira, cannabis, caffeine and nicotine. This research has discussed the first three in details. The commonest drug abusers are; mainly the youth, street children, musicians and students; the employed and the unemployed. Finally, the research has established that intoxicants have advantages and disadvantages.

Key Words: Uganda , intoxicant, drug consumption


Introduction

Webster's dictionary defines intoxicants as something (such as an alcoholic drink) that causes people to become excited or confused and less able to control what they say or do: an intoxicating substance (intoxicants. 2015. In Merriam-Webster.com). Yet the business dictionary defines intoxicants as a general substance which when taken into a body by one mean or another produces a condition of diminished mental and physical ability, hyper excitability, or stupefaction (intoxicants. Business Dictionary.com). Generally, the term intoxicants refers to all chemicals that affect or alter the body chemistry of human beings and animals. Many of these intoxicants are drugs. These drugs are frequently abused. This is known as drug abuse. Drug abuse is a situation where an individual or society uses medicine in a manner which is not prescribed by medical practitioners. Drugs can terminate life, for instance, the use of drugs for abortion.

In the Ugandan society, drug abuse can also be interpreted as the non-medical use of a drug that interferes with health and productive life. Any

drug can be abused including medications prescribed by a doctor or other substances like alcohol. For example, if a doctor prescribes a particular course of treatment for a patient, say twelve tablets of malarquine to be taken in three days and a patient takes all of them in two days, the patient will hence abuse the drug. Another category of abusers are those who do not bother to consult a medical person but just buys a drug and takes it, this is very common in Uganda. The commonest type of drug abuse is the consumption of non-medical drugs such as heroin, marijuana, cocaine or alcohol to achieve the desired effect. This study covers a wide range of intoxicants including alcohol (which is legal in Uganda) and the illegal drugs. In this article the term drugs is used synonymously with intoxicants.

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Methodology

The study employed a qualitative descriptive survey and used interviews, as well as closed ended questionnaires. The study focused on the urban areas of Kampala. A purposive sampling and selection was done, 300 people participated in the study, 200 youths, 100 non students and 100 university students. Also law makers and enforcers such as the police and local councils participated in the study and mainly they narrated their experiences with drug abusers and the law. Medical staffs were also involved to give their experience of dealing with drug addicts and the kind of treatments administered to them. It was difficult to get a required sample of drug users for interviews and questionnaires (Griffiths et.al., 1993; Coomber, 1997).

The researcher therefore used a snowballing technique since it is a criminal offence to take drugs in Uganda. With reference to the above, none of them would openly admit being drug users (Biernacki et.al., 1981; Atkinson, & Flint, 2001; Browne, 2005). The study followed research ethics to keep participants identify and information confidential and used pseudonyms in the report (Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, (Eds.). 2012); Marx, 2001).

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data and respondents are quoted verbatim in the report (Attride, 2001).

Data indicated that while drugs consumption is illegal in Uganda, nevertheless, there is evidence that it is widely spreading and increasing even to the rural areas. This implies that drugs usage is not about to be wiped out. Instead, the study suggests that drug legislation needs to be revised to ensure that drug users are listened to and drugs need official regulation.

Drugs in Uganda

The study also indicates that a variety of drugs are available in Uganda, some are locally grown yet others are imported from the neighboring countries. The sale of these drugs is legal but available data shows that drug dealers exist and conduct business in the urban areas of Kampala.

Types of drugs

(i) **Ordinary drugs that fight against diseases;** the antibiotics. These are mainly sold in open places like pharmacies and drug shops. They are also found in hospitals. Some of these are sold in ordinary shops and are used for first aid.

(ii) **Intoxicating drugs:** Something (such as an alcoholic drink/ substance) that causes people to become excited or confused and less able to control what they say or do (intoxicating. 2015. In Merriam-Webster.com). Intoxicating drugs include: *Stimulants:* these affect the nervous system. They stimulate the brain and central nervous system. Such drugs cause feeling of extra energy and arteries. The effect is usually short lived and they can have a reverse effect on the consumer. Beverages also have the same effect. *Sedatives:* they have a soothing or calming effect on the body's activities. *Tranquilizers:* they are used to lessen anxiety.

Abused Drugs

At the international level, the drugs that are majorly abused include:

Amphetamines: This group of drugs comes in many forms, from prescription medications like methylphenidate (Ritalin, Concerta) and dextroamphetamine and amphetamine (adder all) to illegally manufactured drugs like methamphetamine ("meth"). Over dose of any of these substances can result in seizure and death.

Anabolic steroids: A group of substances abused by body builders and other athletes. This group of drugs can lead to terrible psychological effects like aggression and paranoia, as well as devastating long term physical effects like infertility and organ failure.

Caffeine: While it is consumed by many, coffee, tea and soda drinkers, when consumed in excess, this substance can produce palpitations, insomnia, tremors and significant anxiety.

Cannabis in Uganda

Cannabis is commonly known marijuana; the scientific name for (THC). In addition to the negative effects, the drug itself can produce serious effects like, infertility, and paranoia. The fact that it is commonly mixed ("cut") with other substances, so drug dealers can make more money by selling the diluted substance or expose the user to more addictive drugs associated with those added substances. Examples of ingredients that marijuana is commonly cut with include baby powder, oregano, embalming fluid, PCP, opiates and cocaine.

Cocaine: A drug that tends to stimulate the nervous system. Cocaine can be snorted in powder form, smoked when in the form of rocks (crack cocaine), or injected when made into a liquid.

Ecstasy: Also called MDMA to denote its chemical composition (methylenedioxy, methamphetamine), this drug tends to create a sense of euphoria and an expansive love or desire to nurture others. In over dose, it can increase body temperature to the point of being fatal.

Hallucinogens: Examples include LSD and mescaline, as well as the so-called naturally occurring hallucinogens like certain mushrooms; these drugs can be dangerous in their ability to alter the perceptions of the user. For example a person who is intoxicated with a hallucinogen may perceive danger where there is none and to think that situations that are truly dangerous are not. Those misperceptions can result in dangerous behaviors (like jumping out of a window because the individual thinks they are riding on an elephant that can fly).

Inhalants: one of the most commonly abused groups of substances due to its accessibility; inhalants are usually contained in household cleaners like ammonia, bleach and other substances that emit fumes. Brain damage, even to the point of death, can result from using an inhalant just once or over the course of time, depending on the individual.

Nicotine: Addictive substance found in cigarettes, nicotine is actually one of the most habit-forming substances that exist. In fact, nicotine addiction is often compared to the intense addictiveness associated with opiates like heroin.

Opiates: This group is also called narcotics and includes drugs like heroin, codeine, vicodin, Percocet and percodan. These groups of substances sharply decrease the functioning of the nervous system. The lethality of opiates is often the result of the abuser having to use increasingly higher amounts to achieve the same level of intoxication, ultimately to the point that the dose needed to get high is the same as the dose that is lethal for that individual by halting the person's breathing (respiratory arrest).

Phencyclidine: commonly referred to as PCP, this drug can cause the user to feel extremely paranoid, become quite aggressive and to have an un usual amount of physical strength. This can make the individual quite dangerous to others.

Sedative, hypnotic or anti-anxiety drugs: As these substances quell or depress the nervous system, they can cause death by respiratory arrest of the person who either uses these drugs or who mixes one or more of these drugs with another nervous system depressant drug (like alcohol and an opiate). Others are; Club drugs (Ketamine and

Rohypnol), MDMA (Ecstasy or Molly), Synthetic Cathinones (Bath Salts)

Commonly Abused Drugs in Uganda

The drugs and substances mostly available in Uganda include; *Marijuana (Cannabis)*, marijuana, Mira, shisha, kuber and alcohol. However, alcohol has significance cultural attachments that are discussed later in this article.

Marijuana (Cannabis)

As noted earlier, marijuana is taken by many Ugandans and mostly the youth. The particular marijuana taken in Uganda falls in the categories of 'cannabis sativa' which produces narcotic drugs like cannabis herbal (thrashed leaves mixed with seeds), cannabis resin (thrashed) and cannabis oil. Major consumers of marijuana are the idle youth, street children, casual laborers and students; university students inclusive. Of recent, popular musicians (Big Eyes' blog, 2015; Omax, 2015), the working class and unemployed elite have jumped to the bandwagon. It is also on demand across the border where dubious dealers abound. People take marijuana in cold conditions for warmth to activate or alter the state of mind and for crime related purposes. Medical and traditional purposes are the least important reasons why it is consumed.

Availability of Marijuana in Uganda

The youth in Kampala have several terminologies for marijuana that disguise it; it is called pot, grass, weed and Mary Jane (espn news 6th September 2014). While consumption and growth of Marijuana is illegal, data from the study indicates that Marijuana is clandestinely grown by the local people. A police officer stated that,

These drugs are grown here; our investigations reveal that different people grow marijuana, some even on the top of their houses, and others in their gardens. When they are found they claim it is grown for veterinary purposes (as a curative drug for animals and poultry) (A police officer).

In Uganda, Marijuana is smoked in forms of dried leaves, stems, seeds and or flowers.

Some drug users import Marijuana from neighborhood but most of the Uganda users find the imported ones very expensive. Uganda is also key route for drug traffickers. The study shows that Ugandans have been arrested and executed for trafficking drugs, for instance, two Ugandans, Omar Ddamulira and Andrew Ham Ngobi

had earlier in May and June 2004 been executed in Guandong Province, China after being convicted of drug trafficking offences. The two men and 21 other Ugandans had been convicted of drug trafficking related offences and sentenced to death in China (Kagenda, 2014).

Effects of Marijuana

A psychiatrist from the National Mental Hospital at Butabika near Kampala in Uganda says marijuana has an active ingredient called tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) which has a disastrous effect on the brain. It causes a disease called hallucinogen, which causes false-hood in the mind. It is this disorganized mind which describes one's actions and behavior in the long run (Koob, et.al, 1994). For instance, in Uganda,

Records indicate that 8% of the mental illnesses registered in Butabika Hospital are related to marijuana. Drug abusers constitute 20 per cent of patients admitted to Butabika usually as a result of severe mental illness (Psychiatrist-Field respondent).

A related study by medical experts reported that at any given time, there are at least 140 people admitted at Butabika hospital over drug abuse, most of them youth between 18 and 25 years (Uganda Harm Reduction Network, 2013). Research from elsewhere also indicates that drug consumption can immensely affect one's health (Arief & Friedman, 1973).

A separate study in Kampala found that 22 per cent of students used and abused drugs; alcohol, marijuana, and khat (mairungi) being the most abused respectively (Uganda Harm Reduction Network, 2013). This is in agreement with the current findings which indicate that 20% of the total male students from Secondary schools and from Makerere and Kyambogo Universities admitted having smoked marijuana. Other studies have reported that high school students are involved in drug abuse (Adler & Lotecka, 1973). Marijuana is an addictive drug and once addicted to it, a lot of the substance has to be consumed so as to derive satisfaction. By use of snowballing method, drug consumers were asked if it was easy to stop taking drugs if they wished. Of the 200 close ended questionnaires administered to drug consumers, all the 100 who admitted to be long consumers answered no. Once addicted to it, the abuser has a tendency to feel tough and strong; thus committing criminal offenses like rape, defilement, murder and robbery.

Their hearts pump very fast and they are anxious and tensed up. They begin to see strange things due to the development of schizophrenic illness. They behave strangely, are socially withdrawn, prefer isolation and have a bad chronic cigarette smell.

Marijuana affects the intestines leading to constipation and destroys the reproductive system leading to impotence. The heart is also damaged resulting in heart failure. The tar in it, as in tobacco, causes chest infection resulting in cancer of the lungs.

It may further lead to schizophrenia, suicide and violence. It further causes hallucinogen (falsehood of the mind) leading to road and job related accidents. Again it damages the body tissues which sometimes make administration of medical drugs difficult and a patient may never recover. Among students, it lowers IQ (Intelligent Quotient) leading to loss of quality education and leads to poor performance in schools, while encouraging idleness. It also causes anxiety which leads to prostitution, rape, defilement, spread of diseases like AIDS and other crimes like robbery and murder. It affects the progress by wasting money on unproductive ventures/activities like promiscuity and illegal trade hence no taxes can be got from them.

Marijuana increases government expenditure on medicine and civil personnel who are involved in redressing the abnormalities caused by accidents.

Mira

"Mira" (*Catha adalis* Forssk) is in the family of calastraceae and is widely used throughout Africa. It is referred with different names depending on the areas, for instance, it is known as *Muiningi* (Somali), *mairungi* (Gikuyu & Uganda), (Mt. Elgon), *Muhulu* (Hehe), *Waifo* (Mbulu) *Olmera* (Masai), *Tumayot* (Pokot), *Mutabungwa* (Runyankore), *Kitandwe* (Mlanje of Malawi) *Khat* (Arabic) and *Ikwa* (Nyika).

Mira is the most common drug in Uganda. While it's described to be an intoxicant, it is a plant that is least understood. Some people consider it a mysterious plant yet others declare it a social evil in spite of its economic importance. While some admitted that it intoxicates others said it has no intoxicating elements. Such contention has made it problematic for legislators to decide whether it is illegal or not. In this case, it is sold openly in Kampala suburbs. Although most Ugandans know that Mira (khat), Shisha, and Kuba are dangerous drugs, the law is silent

on them and the authorities cannot prosecute people for consuming them (Kagenda, 2014).

Origins of 'Mira' and Its Traditional Uses

Availability of Mira/Khat

The Mira plant was brought in Uganda from Kenya where it was treated an important in society. In traditional Kenyan societies, Mira was valued as;

(i) An elders' delicacy. Mira was considered as a delicacy for elders. Mira was considered a mysterious plant as it was believed to prolong life of the aged who are highly respected in society. In this case, whoever, brought a flush of 'Mira' to an elder was not only listened to but served with special foods and care.

We therefore, find that "Mira" was traditionally looked at as a food for old people, especially people who had daughters; these were more entitled to chewing "Mira". Those who chewed "Mira" were not only feared but also respected. This was particularly true during 'Buntaani' age group which had banned the chewing of 'Mira' by the youth. It is the same age group that coined a proverb that "a curd is good for an elder when warming in his hut". This however, encouraged the elders to spend much time chewing the plant before the meals were ready. They also chewed the plant while waiting for roasting meat to get ready because it would be a shameful act for an elder to be seen salivating while waiting for an appetizing meal. 'Mira' was also useful when food was scarce. The elders found it a past time in chewing it and let children and the mothers eat the little food that was available.

(ii) In marriage ceremonies. 'Mira' was also used in marriage (*Uthoni*). The Kuruku generation compared the tender and smooth branch lets of Mira to the tender thighs of a teenage girl. "The elders therefore directed that Mira should be a symbol for their daughters." Any young man who wanted to get someone's daughter in marriage had to bring a special flush (ncolo) containing eight Mira branch lets, collected from the black 'Mira' (Kilaa Kira Kiiru) and it had to be picked by specialists. If the suitors flush was accepted by the girls' father, the act symbolized acceptance of the suitor into the family as an in-law. It served exactly the same purpose as local brew among the Baganda of Uganda. An uncircumcised girl -mukenya could be given away in marriage after the suitor had brought eight bundles of (ncolo) of Mira on eight different occa-

sions. But for the circumcised girl (ngutu), payment of eight flushes of 'Mira' only counted for one ram; she could never be married by men bringing eight bundles of 'Mira'. It is however important to stress that the leaves and branch lets used in the marriage discussion had to be selected and choicest ones.

In addition, the bringing of 'Mira' marked the opening of the marriage negotiations. It was an official and public indicator that the girl was being engaged need to the suitor. The father of the girl would chew the branch lets as a sign of approval of the marriage partner but if he refused it, the reverse was true. This practice still prevails among the Meru of Igembe and Tigania because 'Mira' conveys marriage respect and establishes a bridge between families' hither strangers.

(iii) *For reconciliation purposes.* Whenever two young persons were in conflict, or if a person misbehaved before the elders by disrespecting them, 'Mira' was used to reconcile the two parties. According to Meru custom, the offering of Mira was a means of expressing an apology. The person who committed an offense against another person or indeed against the elders had to be given a bundle (flush) of 'Mira' to the aggrieved party so that the wrong may be forgiven and atonement of wrought. In case of an offense against the elders, one had to apologize by giving flushes of 'Mira' and if one wanted redress before the council of members, he too had to bring a certain amount of the plant leaves.

(iv) Circumcision. It was also used during circumcision. To ask for circumcision, the initiates would take 'Mira' to the governing age group and ask for a circumciser. The leaders of the ruling age group would pass it on to the council of elders and if the council accepted it, this would mark the beginning of the preparations prior to the night of circumcision. Without the 'Mira' the Nthaka The (governing age group) would never consider it necessary to hold the circumcision ceremony regardless of how old the initiates were. This is because the presenting 'Mira' was a sign of reverence to the elders and it was a sure way of opening dialogue and yet the most polite way of asking for something. However, in the Kenyan traditional societies, 'Mira' was known for destroying a person's teeth and it was feared that young men whose teeth were stained by the plant would miss marrying beautiful girls of their choice. Naturally, girls prefer marrying a smart man who has maintained his body clean. 'Mira' was therefore considered unsuitable for any young person aspiring to marry a

descent and pretty girl. Young men dreaded missing to marry a girl of their choice and feared losing sexual virility through chewing 'Mira'. These beliefs whether based on fact or fiction, discouraged young men from involving themselves in the 'Mira' growing and chewing.

Mira' in Uganda

According to oral sources, the Somali people who traveled from Kenya to Uganda are the one who introduced the use of Mira in the 1980s.

The Somali drivers who passed through Uganda on their way to neighboring countries like Rwanda, Burundi and D.R Congo, chewed 'Mira' to remain awake. On the other hand, some wanted to keep themselves occupied while waiting for food to cook. Others chewed it as a suitable alternative to alcohol. The Ugandans copied the habit of chewing 'Mira' from long distance drivers. Eventually the need and the use of 'Mira' grew and they started planting it.

The planting of 'Mira' spread from districts near Kampala where the Somali community had homes. Wakiso is one of the districts where Mira growing spread to other districts like Masaka. It is grown along the main road where the Somali passed. Mira growing spread to other districts in Uganda. Presently, Mira is grown in many districts of Uganda though on small scale plantations. These include; Mpigi, Masaka, Butambala, Mityana, Kalungu, Mubende, Jinja and many others.

In Uganda, 'Mira' chewing is not for old like among the Meru but for the youth. An old person in Uganda rarely takes it. There are no rituals connected to 'Mira' growing or chewing in Uganda as in Kenya among the Meru. It is specifically used to keep the youth awake and to give them energy. A number of the youth in Uganda today are addicted to taking it. However, it is grown on plantations by the old and the young for commercial reasons. According to the current research, 'Mira', despite the fact that it is grown by both the lay people and religious leaders, most ordinary people view users with mistrust and despise.

Current Uses of 'Mira' in Uganda

Though it is clear from the previous sub-sections that 'Mira' was useful in the traditional Meru society as food during famine, in rites of circumcision, marriage and reconciliation, 'Mira' is grown for commercial purposes in Uganda. On the for other hand, even though the use of 'Mira'

among the Meru of Kenya is dated as early as the seventeenth century, it had not been widely used in Uganda as of recent as 1980.

Outside Uganda that is in Kenya; the uses include the following; it is dried for timber and used as firewood and leaves of the plant for making beverage and animal feeds. In Uganda, the dry timber is used for firewood but this looks insignificant since the gardens are very small. The main use of Mira is for commercial reasons. It supplements income of Ugandans from the main cash crops like coffee, cotton, tobacco, tea and other economic activities. It also employs a big number of people in the country. According to most informants, the money earned finds the farmer in the garden without much toil as in the case of coffee. 'Mira' employs farmers who grow it, those who pick it, the traders who buy it, and traders who sell it in 'the Kisenyi' part of Kampala. Money obtained from its sale has been used in educating people, starting shops, building houses, buying clothes and food for families.

In Uganda, it is chewed by the rich and the poor, young but rarely the old, illiterate but never the literate. According to the research, very few women (they were the Somali by origin) chewed 'Mira'. The Mira' chewing communities included all tribes living in Uganda, non citizens inclusive i.e., the Somalis, Borans, Turkana and Arabs. Modest and rarely mentioned groups have been the Europeans, Americans and Indians. This is in accordance with the 'Mira' growers in Kiti (Kalungu District) and in Nakawuka, Wakiso district.

Social Attitudes to 'Miraa' Chewing

'Mira' has evoked criticism from people of all works of life. The community leaders and parents in Uganda discourage the taking of Mira. The Central government has not come out with a stand concerning the growing and consumption of 'Mira'. Possibly the number of growers is very insignificant and the effects have not been researched on by the central government. Secondly, 'Mira' growing and chewing is a new phenomenon in the country. However, Uganda's neighbor, Kenya, through the parliament had passed legislation against it in 1948.

'Mira' has been accused by leaders in Uganda of causing symptoms similar to those caused by bhang (cannabis sativa), alcohol, tobacco and on top of it all of affecting sexual virility. No medical research has proved this but woman married to husbands who habitually chew the Mira complain of their husbands' di-

minished virility and decline in potency. *'Mira'* has also been known to cause sleeplessness, diarrhea and stomach cramps. It is said to diminish appetite for food and contributing to malnutrition, tuberculosis, hepatitis, and indirectly to sexually transmitted diseases. Its effect on teeth is however more obvious since it stains them and they often decay. According to this research, it appears that *'Mira'* is not an addictive drug, but its users tend to become emotionally dependent on it. There are no withdrawing symptoms when a person stops chewing it but he may fall into a deep sleep, perhaps due to the long of period of sleeplessness. That is why many of my female respondents complained that *'Mira'* makes their husbands impotent.

Effects of *'Mira'*

'Mira', according to this research has a wide range of effects. Many users complained of effect on the Central Nervous System, moods, sleep patterns, the digestive system as well as the heart and blood supply systems. Because it is a stimulant, it is chewed by drivers and watchmen to maintain the state of wakefulness. One has to continually chew it because it is readily metabolized and eliminated by the body.

In the initial stage, the chewers of *'Mira'* experience a burst of energy, mental alertness and euphoria but when the level comes down, there's a letdown. The users experience depression which the Somalis refer to as *'gaddiro'*. During depression, the users feel tired and they are easily irritated and have reduced ability at making proper judgment. In essence, it diminishes mental acuity. Prolonged usage also creates mental fatigue which can easily lead to accidents. Yet among the youth in urban areas of Kampala, it is common to find the chewer absolutely exhausted which is a manifestation of apathy. P.J Greenway notes that, two cases of insanity and one of poisoning due to excessive *'Mira'* chewing were observed in Kenya. It has also been found that the users complain of stomach problems, pain in the abdomen due to ulcers and constipation caused by the acidic tams. Ulceration of the mouth has also been known among heavy users. To avoid this, the heavy chewers continually drink water and other beverages to reduce the ulcerating effect. While yet others regularly use laxatives at least once a week to clear bowel system.

Lack of appetite has been another concomitant factor. This state was often intentionally

introduced among drivers of trailers who travel long distances.

Surprisingly, several consumers of *'Mira'* in Kampala use it to kill appetite when a plateful of nutritious food costs less than a bundle of *'Mira'*. No medical proof has been reached whether *'Mira'* contributes to the spread of chest infections but the environment in which the chewing is done can favor cross-infections through coughs and sneezing. Often chewing takes place in doors and fires are kept going. At times, ventilation is poor. This kind of environment might be responsible for the influenza, tuberculosis and other common chest infections that have been associated with chewing *'Mira'*. The hazards surrounding *'Mira'* chewing led to the banning of *'Mira'* in Somalia by the 1983 presidential decree.

With regard to *'Mira'* as a sexual stimulant, it may briefly relieve a person of inhibition, the relief is transitory. Fatigue soon sets in as the initial effect wears off quickly. None the less, those who grow it and those who peddle it only point to its transitory benefits and would argue that people consume more and more of their crop. And so the struggle against *'Mira'* chewing is far from over in spite of public education through media.

Factors that lead to Drug Abuse

Until recently, intoxicants particularly drugs were internationally illegal. However, in the recent times, there are arguments for drug liberalization and consequently, some countries such as Portugal has liberalized drug laws.

While intoxicants are not desirable for human consumption, the libertarians who argue for drug liberalization contend that strict laws and policies on drugs have failed. Firstly, drug abuse is on the increase, secondly, the laws and policies on drugs are not sustainable, thirdly, by not legalizing the drug trade, the quality of the drugs cannot be screened, which could result in fatalities due to added compounds, and fourthly, there's also a huge loss of income from not taxing the drug trade (Anomie, & Go, 2004).

Further, human rights advocates contend that, failure to legalize drug use violates the rights of the aspirants to use drugs. Subsequently, they have proposed an additional article on the UDHR, art. 31 to state that: "Everyone has the right to use psychotropic substances of one's own choice" (Van, 1999; Aramrattana, 2005; Wolfe, 2010). However, the stand of the government of Uganda is clear against drugs as stated in the Penal code under the Food and Drugs

Act, Cap 278 Laws of Uganda, the sale of food or drugs that are unfit for human consumption is prohibited. In addition, Section 2 (1) thereof provides for an offence to sell, offer, expose or advertise for sale or have in his or her possession for the purpose of sale any drug injuriously affected in its quality constitution or potency by means of any operations described in subsection (2) (Penal code Act, 2014). To implement legislation against drugs in Uganda, the government instituted the Anti-Drug and Alcohol Abuse Movement (ADDAM) and its major aim is to combat drug abuse.

However, such efforts are criticized, for instance, responses from the participants, argue that their right to drug use is denied and they face discrimination.

Mwana obusajja bwa kayihura bututuza-laawa nga ate essada likola fiti” meaning The Ugandan police inconvenience us who use drugs, yet drugs are beneficial to our lives (Ricky-field respondent).

Consequently, data from this research indicates that irrespective of such legislation against the use of drugs in Uganda, drugs are still widely used even in remote rural areas. The reasons for the increased use of drugs include:

Peer influence: Majority of drug abusers pick up the habit from peer groups. This is mainly in schools and other social settings. The group that a person moves with influences a person's behaviors (Dielman, et.al, 1987). This can result from copying habits or due to pressure from peers as narrated by one university student, I take drugs so that I can fit in my group. All my group mates consume drugs. It can be tricky for me if I do not behave in the same way as my group mates (Darrious, field respondent).

Curiosity: Peer influence is coupled with curiosity. Young people take drugs out of curiosity (Boys, 2001). They would wish to enjoy what others benefit from it. In the long run, they become addicted to it. On the other hand, when some youths see policemen chasing drug abusers, they feel they are being denied something delicious. For instance, University students were asked, ‘Have you ever used drugs other than those prescribed for medical reasons?’ Out of the 100 male respondents to this question, 80% admitted they have at least used drugs once. Students claimed they wanted to know how their friends felt like after taking drugs as Cain stated,

I see as if my friend Gordon feels good after taking drugs, he looks to have more energy and more determined. He goes to the stage to rap, and each time he raps, the fans clap for him. I

was attracted to find out (Cain, field respondent).

Stress in life: Many people who experience big problems find themselves using drugs in order to release the stress. Stress has been defined as a state of mental tension and worry caused by problems in your life, work (Stress. 2015. In Merriam-Webster.com). Most respondents stated that taking drugs after experiencing severe problems. However, while some of such drugs are the wild type such as mira that are sold on black markets, many of such drugs are found in the shelves of pharmacies, they include varying sedatives. One youth was asked what causes him stress that eventually forces him to resort to drugs for relaxation. He explained that,

You know my parents were highly expectant of me after my degree. They hoped I would get a job and improve on their financial status. For three years now, I have not got a job and thus I cannot fulfill my parent's expectations, such life is very stressful (Johnson-field respondent).

When people fail to live up to the expectation of the expectations of society and of their own, they suffer from stress and anxiety (Scholastic, (2007). Besides, the government of Uganda has not developed structures to assist such desperate youth.

Nature of the job: One's occupation influences the food and drugs one takes. Many people who work with security organizations like guards, soldiers, watchmen, heavy traffic drivers, sportsmen and others use drugs and drink alcohol. This is because of the cold environment in which they operate. On the other hand, they feel it is drugs that can keep them awake, increase alertness, excitement, energy, talkativeness, decreased appetite and difficulty in sleeping (Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN), 2013). For instance, one participant stated that,

I need to work for long hours in order to write reports that are demanded by my boss, I thus need to keep awake most of the night. So a pharmacist advised that Ritalin is good and indeed it helps me (Rukia, field respondent).

Action, courage and confidence: Similarly, data shows that some people are shy, timid and do not have confidence in themselves. They feel they can only talk or perform good work when they are under drug influence. One hilarious thing I discovered when I interacted with a young man during interview was that he confessed that consumption of strong liquor gave him courage to approach females that he would otherwise be scared and shy to approach. At another incidence, a young doctor claimed to gain

courage to operate patients after taking drugs. Whether the operations done after taking drugs are successful is outside the scope of the study. This research recommends a study on the positive or negative effects of drugs with particular reference to such claims.

Drugs are cheap in Uganda: While most of the abused drugs are hoarded and sold on black-market, the consumers find them readily available and cheap. According to the police narcotics section, marijuana is mainly grown in Wakiso, Mukono, Luweero, Kalangala, Masaka, Bushenyi, Kyenjojo, Iganga, Busia and Bugiri districts (Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN), 2013).

“At only Shs 300 (\$0.1) a stick, marijuana is easily available, making it the commonest drug in Uganda; even cops use it,” In Kampala, 30 hand-rolled marijuana cigarettes cost about Shs 10,000 (\$ 3) and it is less in rural areas (Police officer, field respondent).

Habitual: Many people feel that they cannot do without drugs. They keep on taking drugs from time to time. These are people who have picked up a habit of taking pain killer drugs before any sleep; such drugs include Diazepam to induce sleep, others take Ritalin, to be able to work for long hours, others include Panadol (Paracetamol) and aspro. People use drugs to eliminate even a slightest discomfort. Others become habitual drug consumers of marijuana, Mira and other narcotics that they simply cannot stop taking them. These have been referred to as persons with Opioid dependency; they tend to develop regular patterns of compulsive drug abuse (Frenk, & Dar, 2002).

Alcohol

While Scholars such as McAlister, et.al (1980) categorized alcohol as a drug. Research indicates that in Uganda alcohol is categorized as a beverage and not a drug. This is a paradox because alcohol is legal. Besides, alcohol has traditional significance which might make it difficult to enact laws that regulate its consumption. Alcohol has different types from mild to strong such wines, beers and spirits. Just like the drugs described above, the effects depends on the type and amount of alcohol consumed. Generally, one effect of alcohol is alcoholism which results from taking too much alcohol and eventually becoming an addict.

Causes of Taking Alcohol

Just as drugs, many people drink to be sociable. These drink occasionally to relax at the end of tiring day. Businessmen drink at lunches, dinners and meetings to please their clients. Many teenagers as well as adults drink in order to be accepted among their peers. Some drink because they enjoy the intoxicating effects of alcohol. Alcohol acts as a partial and total aesthetic on the brain, depending on the amount of blood. Moderate amounts help to reduce shyness and feelings of restraint and relax nervous tensions.

Some people drink because they are dependent drinkers. These drink everyday and depend on alcohol more than they will admit. To these, having to do without alcohol is difficult and unpleasant experience, though they may argue vehemently that they can stop it without difficulty. Such people become alcoholic; they lose control over it. One drop leads to another.

Young people see movie and television stars drink and advertise alcoholic products which seem like the obvious normal accompaniment to having fun. People drink to gain relief from difficult situations or escape from facing reality. It is important to note that alcohol is highly important in traditional African societies as described below.

Importance of Alcohol in Uganda

Alcohol is associated with traditional religious and cultural rituals and ceremonies (Room, & Mäkelä, 2000). Firstly, local brew is also used to in marriage negotiations in all tribes in Uganda. For instance, among the Baganda, a young man, who wants to get some one's daughter in marriage, has to bring special calabashes of alcohol at the following functions: “*Ekiggula lujji*,” (the opening of marriage negotiations): This ritual is an official and public indicator that a girl is being engaged to the suitor (Tugume, 2003). The father of the girl takes a sip as a sign of approval of the marriage partner but if he refuses, the reverse is true. It is clear that the man is not accepted into the family. Local brew conveys marriage respect and establishes a bridge between families heather to strangers. When the in-law asks for beer, it is a sharp step ahead indicating that at least the beer being asked is for allowing them to take their daughter. The people who carry the calabashes of beer have to taste it from a container from a pumpkin (*endeku*) and give it to the brother's in-law. Before the in-law starts to drink the beer that is offered to him, he looks at the aunt and asks her; “*Omwenge nnywe?*” meaning, *should I take the beer?* When asking this, it is a way of

making sure whether the aunt (representative of the bride to be) is really determined to marry the man. Other people around are also offered a drink.

Beer is also offered among the final presents to the parents before the wedding — “*Kaasuze Katya*.” On the day when the bride departs from her parents’ home, a calabash of beer called ‘*Kaasuze Katya*’ is taken to the bride’s parents. ‘*Kasuze katya*’ originates from the word *okusula* which means sleep or dwell. *Kasuze katya* literally meant “how did she sleep?” The village mates sip on this beer to symbolize that they are taking it in respect of the health of the child whose life they always inquired about on birth.

Secondly, alcohol is used for reconciliation among the Baganda. Whenever two groups of people are in conflict or if a person misbehaves before elders or parents, alcohol (in this case local brew) is used to reconcile the two parties. According to the *Baganda*, offering of a calabash of local brew is a means of expressing an apology. The person who committed an offense against another person or indeed elders, has to give a calabash of local brew to the aggrieved party so that the wrong may be forgiven and atonement of the wrought. In case of an offense against the elders, one has to give a “he goat” which is served to the elders together with local brew.

Thirdly, alcohol is drunk during last funeral rights. On this night, victory over death is celebrated. Local brew is served to the heir on installation. The heir and co-wife the lubuga are given a guard of local brew. Each is warned to entertain visitors and serve them with local brew. This implies that it was very much cherished.

Fourthly, the income generated is used in paying for education, buying food and clothes and paying the employees’ wages, houses, building social institutions like churches.

Finally, alcohol is used for various purposes apart from the above; it is used for medicine and some products are used to manufacture other by-products. Alcohol also supplies calories to the body. It therefore promotes a healthy body.

Effects of Alcohol

Alcohol has negative effects to drunkards such as malnutrition that may lead to a medical condition such as cirrhosis of the liver. After a long period of alcohol use, damage can occur in form of neuropathy or delirium tremens. Delirium tremens is marked by the hallucinations, severe tremor, insomnia and great exhaustion.

Extreme cases of long lasting alcoholism may cause permanent brain damage and mental illness requiring confinement in a psychiatric hospital. Another direct effect of alcohol is on the heart muscle. Death related to alcohol has been reported several times on mass media. It ranks fourth in America after heart disease, cancer and mental diseases.

Alcohol has also brought immorality in society. A number of homes have broken down where drunkard heads of families have neglected their families. Many have lost jobs; some students have lost their academic career due to alcoholism. On the other hand, many drunkards have lost lives under the influence of alcohol. Some drunkards have been arrested because of rape; some have stolen to buy alcohol, while drunkard drivers have caused fatal accidents.

Conclusion

The study indicates that the taking of intoxicants is on increase in Uganda in spite of the efforts put in by the law enforcement officers. The current enforcement of the drug legislation is weak and is easily compromised. Further, data from participants show that while drug abuse should not be tolerated, not all actions of drug consumption and dealings have negative effects. For instance, dealing in drugs can open opportunities for international trade. Further, once drug consumption is liberalized, they will have an opportunity to enjoy purified drugs and this lessens the problem of taking anything available in form of drugs as it is today. It is therefore paramount that government puts a new legislation in place that liberalizes drugs and intoxicants to avoid clandestine actions of drug dealers that lead to drug abuse and crime.

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