

A case report on alcohol and crime in the Transkei region of South Africa

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Abstract

Background: Alcohol and crime are two-in-one, inseparable from each other as most of the crime in South Africa is carried out under the influence of alcohol. Many deaths as well in South Africa are attributed to alcohol consumption but, despite that, alcohol is available everywhere in country.

Objective: To highlight the problem of alcohol and crime in the Transkei region of South Africa.

Method: This case study is based on the case report histories which were obtained from the Mthatha Forensic Pathology Laboratory.

Results: These are ten cases that provide examples of alcohol related deaths. All these deaths were caused by stabbing (except one) where the perpetrator or victim or both were intoxicated. The primary underlying cause of these fight was either money or girlfriends. The history, culture and circumstances of these deaths are discussed in this manuscript.

Conclusion: Alcohol is a major cause of crime in the Transkei region of South Africa.

Keywords: *crime, alcohol, stabbing, and death.*

Introduction

The global burden of alcohol related deaths and disability was between 1.6% and 9.2% of the population in the year 2000.¹ This was high in developing countries and low in the developed world. The total disability adjusted life years accounted for 4.5 billion years lost.¹ South Africa is a high mortality country. A preliminary estimate of the total burden of alcohol related crime in South Africa is 6-7%, ranking it third after unsafe sex and interpersonal violence.² The amount of alcohol consumption per capita in South Africa is the highest in the world.³ Roughly, one in four males and one in ten adult females experience symptoms of alcohol problems in this country. The burden of alcohol mortality and trauma

is extremely high, with just under half of all non-natural deaths in 2002 related to alcohol consumption. The blood alcohol concentrations are greater or equal to 0.05g/100 ml and were found in up to two-thirds of all cases tested annually at trauma units in three cities between 1999 and 2001.⁴

Both quantitative and qualitative studies conducted among adolescents and young adults in Gauteng Province between 2002 and 2003 point to strong links between drinking and engagement in risky sexual behaviours. Specifically, frequency of alcohol use, the quantities consumed, and problem drinking are associated significantly with the number of sexual partners a person has had and engagement in sex that was later regretted.⁵ Almost one in five HIV

patients studied at a large infectious disease clinic in Cape Town in 2003 met criteria for an alcohol use disorder. These patients were more likely to have symptomatic HIV infection.⁶

In one of the small towns with a population of less than 7 000 people, there were 64 known illegal outlets for the sale of alcohol. It is confirmed by the police that over 90% of crimes in this place were related to alcohol abuse. The alcohol is often purchased with social grant money and, as the illegal shebeen owners were also micro-lenders, many were, in fact, paying huge interest on their alcohol consumption. In line with data elsewhere in the country, the connection between alcohol abuse and victimization was clear.⁷ Alcohol makes people very vulnerable; young girls, for example, become vulnerable to rape as a result of getting drunk, very often in illegal shebeens where underage drinking is allowed. ⁷The purpose of this article is to highlight the problem of alcohol and crime in the Transkei region of South Africa.

Case Histories

Case No. 1

LM, a 32-year-old male, was stabbed to death on 20/07/2000 in the evening. He was stabbed by three people at Polla Park where they lived together. They had a quarrel and stabbed him. The killers had alcohol and were drunk, and they met on the way to the deceased who was doing business selling fruit in a tuckshop. All the perpetrators were unemployed. The victim was an ex-mineworker, and his mother is a housewife. He had four siblings, three of whom were dead.

Case No. 2.

ZM, a male of 19 years, was attending a party at a festival on the campus of the University of Transkei. It was during night on 29/04/2001. He was intervening on behalf of someone when another person turned to

him and stabbed him. He was brought to casualty and died there. A stab wound on the right ventricle was seen through the 3rd intercostal space on the left side. His father had previously died from a stroke, and his mother is a clerk in the Department of Education.

Case No. 3

BN, a 20-year-old male, was in the tavern (place of selling liquor). He was hired by a certain father to look after his cattle/sheep. He met his friend in a liquor shop as he went to buy liquor. His friend became hostile, started fighting stabbed his friend. The deceased died in Qunu at 12H00. His father had previously died in a mining accident and his mother is employed.

Case No. 4

SB, a 26-year-old male, died from a stab wound in a shebeen. He had a quarrel with his friend and was stabbed by him. They were both drunk at 16H00 on Friday in Ngcengane location in Umtata Magisterial area. The deceased was not educated and was a builder in the locality where he schooled until Grade 4. The culprit was also uneducated and unemployed. They were quarrelling about liquor. Police arrested the culprit and bail was paid for him. The father of the deceased died due to a stroke. He used to be a dipping man and worked in a gold mine for ten years. He was discharged and didn't come home so they went to fetch him as they don't know why he wanted to remain there. He didn't have any money as whatever money he earned he spent there. After about five years he died at home. He was sick and was coughing and used to drink alcohol. The mother of deceased is alive and is a housewife. The deceased was helping the family with work as he was the eldest son.

Case No. 5

TM, a 20-year-old male, was stabbed to death on 16/9/00 and he died on the spot. Since he was stabbed

by a known person, the culprit was arrested. He was stabbed in Palo location in Ngqeleni in a witch doctor's ceremony where they slaughter goats and cattle and brew liquor to drink. The deceased went to his mother's home where there was a party. He was stabbed by his cousin under the influence of alcohol. They were quarrelling about a girl who belonged to the accused. The father of the deceased was not working. Previously he was working in Cape Town as a labourer for a carpenter. He also worked in a gold mine for 16 years and came back from the mines in 1966. He was working underground as a foreman. He used a spade to lift stones. He became sick after leaving mines and was diagnosed with TB and he was treated in Tygerburg Hospital. He used to live in hostel and there were 20 people in one room. He is now a pensioner. The deceased's brother was shot dead in Umtata in 1995 when he intervened during a robbery, and one of his sisters died early. He leaves behind six sisters, two of whom are working in Cape Town, one is married, two are in school and one is a mentally retarded sister.

Case No. 6

LR, a 33-year-old male was drinking in a sheeben along with a friend. Both were injured but he died. It happened on Wednesday 31st January 2001 in Bongeeni location in Umtata. It was about 24H00 (midnight) to the early hours of Thursday on 01-02-2001. After stabbing him his attackers threw him in somebody's garden. The body was found on Thursday at 2h00 (01-02-2001). The Headman informed the family and the cousin of the deceased identified him. The deceased was working as a part-timer in Telkom. He was a labourer. He was unmarried and had three children with his girlfriend. He left his mother when he was two years old and was brought up by some relative's mother somewhere in Johannesburg. His mother has never seen him since then. He was brought to casualty as dead.

Case No. 7.

AM, a 23-year-old male, died on Saturday 27 August 2000 in the morning. He was with a friend who friend left him in his place to go with a girlfriend. When friend returned in the morning at about 5H00 he found him in the bed dead with blood. There was a gun near him. The house was closed but not locked. They had been drinking in the night. They are suspicion as they had had some quarrel with a Zulu person two weeks ago in a shebeen. They called him "Ngingin." After checking on the computer, the police said that the gun was a stolen gun from Durban. Andile did not have a gun. There was also a problem in the area (Zimane) among men in the location. There were two groups who were quarrelling. Andile helped his father in his job like plastering, painting, etc. Andile wrote Grade 12 twice about four years back and then stopped studying. He had quarreled with the Zimbane men.

Case No. 8

SQM, a 61-year-old of male, was involved in a fight between a father and son. All of them were drunk. There was no ceremony. The fight took place at the home of the father and the son. It is a locality in the Umata area called Kaplani. The deceased was on a pension doing nothing. Previously he was working in a firm making cardboard. He left five children and wife, all of whom do nothing. After being stabbed three times, he died on the spot and the culprit ran away. Now he has been arrested and the police took him away to the police station.

Case No. 9

A 21-year male was stabbed on Christmas day. He was on a street in a location Umtata at 15H00. He was drunk (25/12/2000). He was taken to hospital and died on the way to hospital at about 16H00. He was a student in Grade 11 at school.

Case No. 10

SG, a 22-year-old male, was stabbed by three men at the municipality tip in Simpane on 8/05/2001 at 17H00. There was a quarrel between the deceased and the three people. All three were drunk, except the deceased. He died on the spot and was taken to funeral parlour. The deceased did not have a house and lived in a shack. His father was died in motor vehicle accident, and his mother was drowned in a river. He had three siblings; two were alive but unemployed.

Discussion

The association between alcohol and crime is widely prevalent, under researched and therefore is not documented in the literature. It is very closely link with culture as anyone is allowed to drink and anywhere. It is written in bottle stores: Alcohol is not for sale to persons under 18 years, but this regulation is not implemented. A lot of school children are in the habit of drinking alcohol, according to a study carried out with rural school children in South Africa.⁸ Alcohol is freely available even on the side of roads. Ladies selling fruit are also have alcohol for sale, especially at taxi stands. The nights are more difficult in this region as many people are found drunk. The cases described in this report are based on ten case studies, but this is just the tip of an iceberg. Alcohol is the mother or father of crime. Criminals, before committing robberies and murders, generally consume alcohol. Most of the quarrels and killings are associated with some kind of alcohol use by one or other or both people involved at times. Transkei was a former black homeland which was merge with South Africa, when the country got independence. People are poor and living on very limited resources.

The families are fragmented as a large number of children do not know the name of their father. Fathers also do not know where their children are living. The burden of bringing up children is on the mother or

on grandmothers. Mother are either single mothers or divorced. Mothers are feeding their children from social grants. Alcohol consumption is very high, and it is the cause of family violence.⁹ People are roaming the streets at night drunk. The lives of the people have no meaning as they are taking risks every day. This is the reason a lot of people die unnaturally. An autopsy study carried out by the author between 1993 and 2015 showed there were 26 855 unnatural deaths, and of these 5205 (20%) were caused by stabbing.¹⁰ It is very common to see drunk people on the roads and sometimes killed by motor vehicles. One will find people quarrelling over small things. There is a culture among Xhosa people to carry a knife with them, and therefore it is a readily available weapon to use. It is dangerous when a person is drunk. They kill or get killed by someone. This is also a reason why the majority criminals will not be traced. It often becomes a case of an unknown man killed by another unknown man. Alcohol is contributor to a high number of homicides. A record of 12618 (5%) autopsies on victims of homicide between 1993 and 2015 were studied and showed the average murder rate was 85 per 100 000 of the South African population, which is the highest in the world.¹¹

There is a trend of using alcohol for celebrations such as when matric results are published or at circumcision ceremonies or even sometimes when a child passes Garde 10 in school. People always try to find an occasion to drink alcohol. It is a very common practice, especially at Christmas, although even long before Christmas they start celebrating Christmas with a braai party with alcohol. Xhosa people also have the custom of attending funerals which is a very good custom to pay last respects to a dead person. They fly from far away to attend the funeral services. Xhosa people take life very philosophically and therefore they enjoy it by taking alcohol. They do not believe much in tomorrow. This is a reason they spent their money very fast. This also comes from the apartheid

era when they could have got killed at any time by the ruthless regimen of apartheid practitioners.

Conclusion

Alcohol is a major cause of crime in the Transkei region of South Africa. It leads to a high number of premature deaths. Alcohol is imbibed in their culture, but this must change. The availability of alcohol must be reduced, so that many lives could be saved. It would also prevent economic losses in the country. If one calculates the total cost of the consumption of alcohol, is astronomically higher than the benefits.

Ethical Issue

The author has ethical permission for collecting data and publication (approved project No. 4114/1999) from the Ethics Committee of the university, South Africa. The contents in this article, especially that related to the culture of the people, is based on the author's own experience. It may not be correct. However, it is highlighted for good intentions in this article.

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