

Perspectives of coaches on alcohol consumption among student-athletes in Kenya and strategies for control

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Abstract: Numerous studies have been conducted on alcohol and sports among student athletes focusing on the causes, consequence, and intervention measures. However, information is scarce about the perspectives of coaches on alcohol consumption among student athletes. This study examined knowledge and perspectives of coaches on alcohol use among student athletes. Sixty coaches (N=60) were purposively selected from public universities in Kenya. A self-reported questionnaire was used to collect data. Findings indicate coaches to have lengthy experience in coaching and they were aware of alcohol consumption among student athletes. Student athletes consumed more alcohol off-season than during season. Senior students consumed more alcohol than the other students. Coaches lacked support of administrators in enforcing anti-alcohol policies. Education, counseling and benching the players were the commonly used intervention measures by coaches.

Keywords: Alcohol; Coaches; Consumption; Perspectives; Student-athlete

1. Introduction

1.1 Text

Numerous studies on alcohol and sports show alcohol consumption during college sports events to be high. A lot of reasons have been found to explain this including readily available alcohol, sports sponsorships by alcohol companies and advertisements^[1], socialization, and a part of the culture during major sports events. Alongside excessive alcohol consumption are the related social problems and consequences which include loss of lives, fights, property damage, and unprotected sexual relationships^[2-4]. These problems pose the greatest challenge to schools, with some schools trying to find solutions to the problem. Among the studies conducted on the sports and alcohol is the role of idols and friend in influencing fan and athletes to consume alcohol^[5] differences in the consumption between athletes, and non-athletes^[6] male and female^[7] fraternity groups, and upperclassmen versus lower classmen^[3] Prevalence and intervention measures^[8].

Generally, alcohol consumption behaviors have been found as commonly occurring at the stadiums and the surrounding areas during sport. A number of reasons promoting this include: cultural practices and social beliefs that allow alcohol consumption during sport, the readily available alcohol at the sales stands/store plus available beer that is brought to the venues by the fans for tailgating purposes^[4]. In the United States (US), studies reveal that the tailgating culture of football seems to encourage more drinking and binging parties when compared with other sports^[9]. A study by^[4] s showed that while schools acknowledged alcohol consumption to be a menace and wished to control it, larger schools were unlikely to prohibit alcohol consumption than smaller or private schools; which has left researchers wondering if efforts to reduce alcohol consumption on campus have failed^[10].

Comparative studies on the amount of consumption by different students indicate that males were more likely to

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binge than females^[11,12], sports fans tended to drink more than the athletes, and that student-athletes were more prone to alcohol drinking than non-athletes^[6] which suggested a close link between alcohol and sports. Also, upper classmen were found to consume more than lower classmen; older students drank more than the younger ones, and that Caucasians consumed more alcohol than other racial groups^[11].

In their study of 249 college freshmen^[13] found that students consumed an average of 5.07 drinks per weekend, former high school athletes 4.19 and non-athlete students 3.5 drinks per weekend. This study placed the athletes at a higher rate than non-athletes. Additionally, ^[14]reported that between 1989 and 2005, the number of student-athletes who reported drinking 10 or more drinks in one sitting during the past 12 months significantly increased terming it as problematic drinking. In fact^[11] study showed excessive alcohol consumption among college students with 50% indicating consuming alcohol during game day. Additionally, the study showed that 1 in 5 students reported to drink for five or more hours, with the average drinks being 7.2 with 28% for tailgates. These researchers concluded that lack of control policies allowed for more drinking at sports events among college students. Also, ^[3]noted that frequent consumers of alcohol were unlikely to try and control the problem, which seemed to be further enhanced by sponsorship from companies allowing for easily available beer at sports events.

Exposure to alcohol consumption begins at different ages, with adolescent stage seeming to be the time when most start consuming alcohol^[15] and it increases with age, climaxing at college level. Studies on alcohol consumption revealed that 78% of high school students as having at least one drink in their lifetime, almost 50% as having more than one drink in 30 days, and 29.9% having more than five drinks^[16]. In their study, ^[17]noted that consumption of alcohol among college students to be very high- citing the new-found-freedom associated with college life as the main reason. They also pointed out that alcohol consumption began at a surprisingly young age of 11 years in some cases.

Although alcohol consumption at the sport events seems to be a norm allowing for excessive consumption, a lot of schools and colleges have identified it as a problem whose consequences have resulted in loss of lives, property damage and other negative consequences^[3,4,11,18], hence need to develop strategies to curb the problem. A number of schools, colleges and community clubs have developed compliance policies to prevent underage drinking and related vices^[19,20]. In addition to implementation of policies on alcohol use and abuse, other interventions measures proposed include restricting sponsorships and advertising at sports venues, restricting alcohol sales on game days, and not allowing fans to enter stadiums at half times as they were likely to bring in alcohol^[11]. Also, sport, media, and role models^[16] as well as education have effectively been used to deter youths from substance abuse.

Despite various researchers propose varied intervention measures to contain the problem, very little is known of the school efforts to control or ban alcohol consumption on their premises. In one study, ^[21]examined the effects of eliminating alcohol in a college stadium at one of the large schools in the US. Despite the opposition to the school administrations' decision to ban alcohol citing less supports from fans, positive effects such as reduced incidents of insecurity and improved crowd behavior during game days were realized after the two year ban. The most notable effect was that the fan base remained the same and did not reduce as had been expected.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Majority of the studies in this area have focused on the athletes and their fans, as well as examining school policies and the efforts that are being made to control alcohol consumption. One critical area that has been overlooked in the alcohol and sports studies is the role and perceptions of coaches. Given the amount of time spent with athletes, coaches greatly influence the physical, social and to some extent moral development of athletes, and often are regarded as the role models to athletes. In fact^[22] notes that:

“...coaches have daily contact with their athletes, are often held in high regard by their athletes, and have the potential to serve as positive role models. Many student athletes may also be more willing to listen to their coaches' advice and guidance than that of their teachers and principals” (p.74).

It is therefore important to determine the coaches' perspectives on alcohol in sports and their roles in controlling the consumption of alcohol among college athletes. Although schools have developed and implemented of policies to

reduce alcohol consumption in sport, the close and long-term relationship forged between coaches and the athlete places coaches in a unique position that would allow them to help enforce these policies which could result in reduced alcohol consumption among student-athletes. The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of coaches in Kenya and their strategies for controlling alcohol consumption among student-athletes.

2. Methods

2.1 Context

The study involved selected coaches in universities in Kenya. Kenya is a country located on the eastern side of Africa and is known for its long distance running. According to the Commission for University Education^[23] records, there were 31 Public universities, 6 public constituent colleges, 18 Chartered Private universities, 5 private university constituent colleges, and 14 universities with letter of Interim Authority. Sixty participants were purposively selected from seven public universities in Kenya. Participants included coaches of various sports such as soccer, basketball, rugby among others.

2.2 Materials and Procedures

A survey research design was used to study perspectives of coaches and their strategies for controlling alcohol consumption among student athletes. Self-reported questionnaires were mailed to selected coaches. Sixty (60) questionnaires were completed with two (2) incomplete questionnaires excluded from data analysis. Results of this study are based on fifty eight (58) questionnaires. A questionnaire was used to capture perceptions and knowledge of coaches on alcohol consumption habits among student athletes including access and reasons for alcohol consumption, within-groups comparisons, alcohol policy, and remedial measures on alcohol consumption among university student athletes. Data were analyzed descriptively by obtaining percentages.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Information

Sixty (60) coaches from public universities in Kenya participated in the study. The results presented are based on 58 questionnaires. Table 1 provides demographic information of coaches. Results show that there were more male coaches (58.6%) than female coaches (41.4%), a trend that has been observed in various sports around the world. This could be the result of the gender role of socialization which considers sports as a male domain hence the dominance of males in coaching.

Results in Table 1 (demographic information of coaches) showed that 13.8% of the participants coached soccer, 12.1% coached rugby, and 10.3% coached netball, handball, hockey, and track and field. Less than 10% of the participants coached other sports including swimming, softball, volleyball, basketball and cricket. Research shows that team sports encourage socialization among athlete, hence the higher chances of peer influence^[24]. Results show that 62.1 % of the coaches had more than ten years of coaching experience, with only 37.9% having less than ten years of coaching experience.

1	Demographic information		
Gender	F	M	Total
	41.38% (24)	58.62% (34)	100% (58)
Coaching/ training/ teaching experience in number of years	Below 10 Years	10 Years and Above	Total
	37.93% (22)	62.06% (36)	100% (58)

Table 1. Demographic information of Coaches

3.2 Student -Athletes' Alcohol Consumption Habits

The lengthy coaching experience was an indication of a better understanding of the student- athlete and thus coaches were able to provide a clear perspective on the issue of alcohol use among student athletes. Also, the lengthy experience in coaching provides them with opportunity to handle student athlete’s issues effectively.

We sought to determine the coaches’ knowledge of the students’ alcohol consumption habits. The results in Table 2 below shows that coaches perceived majority of students to have started consuming alcohol before matriculating to college. Results indicated that 6.9%, 29.3% and 51.7 % of the students started taking alcohol while in primary school, high school and college respectively. The tremendous increase in alcohol consumption in college could be attributed to the legal alcohol consumption age of 18 years in Kenya, which makes it possible for all college students to consume alcohol. Majority of Kenyan students join the university/ collage at age 18. The most surprising finding was that majority of the students started consuming alcohol prior the legal age. According to the social ecology model, alcohol consumption is influenced by peer pressure and socialization into drinking by the family. In this particular case, interpersonal factors, self-concept among individual athletes as well as policy issues seemed to have tremendously influenced the consumption habits. Coaches pointed out that they occasionally came across student athletes consuming alcohol (34.5%) on a weekly/ monthly basis. Also, it was reported that majority of the students (93.1%) take alcohol whenever sports competitions are held outside the campus. This may be because of the freedom students are exposed to when they are away from their school.

Coaches also indicated that 31.0% and 58.6% of student athlete’s consumed alcohol when off season, and immediately following the end of a competition respectively, with only 3.4% and 6.9% consuming alcohol during the season and pre-season times respectively. This may be due to the strict rules on alcohol consumption enforced by coaches during the competition season hence the low consumption of alcohol, which is good for the sports development.

How often have you come across your athletes using alcohol?	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	None
	6.89% (04)	34.48% (20)	34.48% (20)	24.13% (14)
When do your student-athletes consume alcohol	Out of Training/ Competition	During Training	Pre-Competition	Post - Competition
	31.03% (18)	3.44% (2)	6.89% (4)	58.62% (34)
Events where Alcohol consumption is more likely to take place	Sports events at Campus	Sports events outside of Campus		
	6.89% (4)	93.10% (54)		

Table 2. Frequency of the student-athletes’ consumption of alcohol

3.3 Comparison of Alcohol Consumption among Student-Athletes

Previous studies show differences in the levels of alcohol between genders, affiliations, types of sports, year of study, as well as athletes and non-athletes. In this study (Table 3 within-group comparisons), coaches indicated that male athletes were likely consume more alcohol (69.0%) compared to female athletes (5.2%). Also, third year (juniors) students were likely to consume more alcohol (34.5%) than first year (freshmen) (17.2%), second year (sophomores) (24.1%) and fourth year (seniors) (20.7%) students. Coaches also indicated that team sports were more likely to have more (69.0%) of the student athletes consuming alcohol than individual sports. Coaches also indicated that they were not involved in influencing university student athletes to consume alcohol (72.4%).

Comparison by						
Gender	Male	Female	Both genders			
	68.97% (40)	5.17% (03)	25.86% (15)			
Year of Study	1 st Year	2 nd Year	3 rd Year	4 th Year	Graduate	
	17.24% (10)	24.13% (14)	34.48% (20)	20.68% (12)	3.44% (02)	
Sports Discipline	Track & Field (Athletics)	Swimming	Racket / Board Games	Ball Games	Total	
	3.44% (02)	3.44% (02)	24.13% (14)	68.97% (40)		

Table 3. Within-groups alcohol consumption levels

3.4 Alcohol Policy in Universities

Policies are important in ensuring order in any organization. This study sought to determine whether universities had policies on alcohol on campus. Table 4 shows the response of coaches on alcohol policy on campus. Majority (57.0%) of the coaches indicated that policies existed in their institutions as indicated by the responses from 74.1% coaches that alcohol sale or advertisements were prohibited during sports events in universities. Also, 70.7% of the coaches indicated that they are concerned about alcohol consumption among student-athletes, which resonates with the previous studies showing alcohol consumption as a problem that had college administrators constantly worried and attempting to find solutions.

	Yes	No	Total
Do you have an alcohol policy in your team/ university that prohibits or limits beer sales on the Campus?	56.89% (33)	43.10% (25)	100%
Is alcohol sale allowed during sports events in your University?	25.86% (15)	74.13% (43)	100%
Are alcohol / beer selling companies advertisement and sales allowed during sports events in your University?	20.68% (12)	79.13% (46)	100%
Are you worried about the extent of alcohol consumption among student athletes?	70.68% (41)	29.31% (17)	100%

Table 4. Alcohol policy on campus

3.5 Intervention Measures on Alcohol Consumption among Student-Athletes

Because universities were said to have anti-alcohol policies, coaches indicated that they used these policies as a basis for enforcing non-alcohol policies in their teams. One of the disciplinary measures applied was to suspended intoxicated athletes from the team. The coaches also indicated that they educated, advised, and counseled student athletes on the negative effects of alcohol. Surprisingly, although a good number of student athletes have been found to consume alcohol on a regular basis, 65.5% of the coaches reported that they had never experienced dropouts from their teams due to alcohol use and abuse. This seems to suggest that the alcohol consumption may not be extreme or that there was lack of strict enforcement of policies.

The study also found that 69% of the coaches reported that none of the student athletes had ever approached the coaches seeking help to quit alcohol. This may suggest that student athletes did not perceive excessive consumption of

alcohol as a problem; rather it seemed to be an acceptable practice within the larger society. Majority of coaches (72.4%) acknowledged that alcohol consumption among student athletes could be an indicator of drug use and abuse later on in sports which has curtailed professional careers of some great athletes around the world.

On the strategies used to control alcohol consumption, most of the coaches indicated that they provided advice on alcohol management among the athletes during training. Also, those found to consume alcohol in excess received counseling and in extreme cases rehabilitation, which was quite rare. Additionally, all the coaches pointed out that alcohol use among student athletes was raising concerns among coaches and trainers. The coaches also specified that alcohol consumption among student athletes need to be discouraged because of its negative effect to both the athletes and sports.

4. Discussion

The study examined the perspectives of coaches on the use of alcohol in sports among student-athletes in Kenya. Because student-athletes spend a lot of time in the company of coaches, it was important to determine coaches' perspectives on this subject and how they handled issues related to alcohol consumption among student-athletes. Coaches serve as mentors and role models thus athletes were more likely to confide in them. The social ecological model^[24] identified personal, interpersonal, community organizational and policy issues as being critical in understanding the causes, motivations and possibly strategies that could be used to control alcohol use and abuse.

Within-groups comparisons according to coaches showed senior college students consumed more alcohol when compared to freshmen or lower level student, with males consuming more alcohol than females. This finding supports previous studies which found seniors to consume more alcohol than freshmen, male students to consume more alcohol than female students, and fraternity member to consume more alcohol than the non-fraternity students^[11,18]. Previous studies also show team sports athletes to consume more alcohol when compared with those in individual sports^[3,4], resulting in exposure of athletes to risky lifestyles^[25]. Interpersonal factors such as the need to comply and fit in within particular groups seem to influence this type of behavior.

Regardless of the high penalties set by the Kenya's Alcoholic Drinks Control Act of 2009^[26], people still consumed alcohol in excess. Asked whether they influenced athletes drinking behavior, coaches indicated that their relationship with the athletes was strictly professional, requiring them to be positive role models, mentors, authoritative and respectful figures to student athletes. Coaches revealed that a number of college students were introduced to alcohol at a very young age while still in primary (middle school) school by the family. This trend was seen to increase with age such that by the time they matriculated to college, a number of them were consuming alcohol in excessive amounts. This finding is consistent with trends around the world where alcohol consumption among college students is high with adolescence as a stage when they are initiated to drinking^[17,18]. Generally, people are socialized by groups and environments that they interact with and these also serve as the greatest influencers of one's character either positively or negatively.

In the face of the negative consequences of alcohol consumption, various colleges were continuously making efforts to contain the problem. In this study, coaches listed various strategies that they used to control the problem. Some of the strategies developed by coaches to help contain drinking habits among athletes included suspension from the team. Guidance and counseling, as well education on the dangers of alcohol were also strategies used by the coaches to control alcohol consumption. Research also shows education, peer mentoring and referral training as effective in controlling the use of alcohol among students^[27].

Researchers have identified different strategies that have been used including enforcement of alcohol-free environments in college stadiums^[21], suspending students from the team, and subsequent loss of scholarships. Other researchers also suggest the ban on sponsorship of sports events by beer companies. At the community levels, the sale of alcohol to underage is discouraged with dire consequences to anyone found to violate the law such as loss of business license^[16,19,28]. Coaches suggested the need for strict enforcement of the policies. The need to establish drug and alcohol programs for athletes as was being done by the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA)^[29] in the United

States of America, where life skills are taught could help.

Although policies to provide checks and balances within institutions or organizations have been put in place, implementation challenges existed. For example, while all coaches indicated that universities had policies targeting control of alcohol consumption, the implementation of these policies proved challenging as they seemed to have been left to the coaches to enforce without any support from the management. Furthermore, coaches indicated that were only able to control the athlete's behavior during team practice or when they have tournaments. It is clear that successful implementation and enforcement of policies requires the support of administration and other stakeholders. The case of alcohol sales ban at the Folsom field during the football matches demonstrates ways in which the administrators and other stakeholders successfully implemented and enforced the ban^[21]. Although there was a lot of opposition to the ban policy at first, the overall impact of the alcohol-free policy turned out to be positive.

Unlike the U.S. athletes whose scholarship opportunities could be withdrawn for not conforming to the set rules or eligibility standards, the lack of scholarships for student-athletes in Kenya means that there were no dire consequences for alcohol consumption, other than being benched by the coach. Additionally, the lack of support from the management renders existing policies in Kenya's universities ineffective. Studies show that lack of policy or enforcement of policy on alcohol consumption drinking to be common^[4], which seemed to be the case in Kenya's colleges. There is adequate evidence to support the theory that implementation and enforcement of policy to reduce excessive alcohol consumption, results in a safer sport environment^[21]. It was clear that coaches required support from administrators. Some of the policies allowing for college students (18years and over) to drink are considered as the greatest obstacle to enforcement of these policies.

5. Conclusion

Findings of this study indicate that there is need for more research on the perspectives coaches on alcohol use among student- athletes. Because this study was limited to coaches from public universities in Kenya, there is need to conduct a similar study on coaches from private universities where a number of student-athletes are on athletic scholarships. Coaches perceive alcohol consumption by student-athletes as a problem which if left unattended, would likely culminate in drug use and abuse and later the use of performance enhancing drugs in sports. The literature review in this area indicated lack of research on coaches' perspectives on the use of alcohol among student-athletes, which is in spite of the amount of time spent with the athletes. It is also clear that while the majority of the studies have been conducted in the developed countries, the problem of alcohol consumption among student- athletes transcends all nations around the world hence the need for more research in developing nations.

It was also clear that while policies exist in most schools, enforcement remains a challenge. The acceptable cultural and religious practices associated that are used to promote the use of alcohol as part of the sport culture, makes it harder to implement and enforce policies aimed at control consumption of alcohol at sports venues. At a community level, coaches and parents should be more involved in engaging the athletes in the dialogue about alcohol use and abuse. We also suggest that more research be conducted on the coaches from around the world to determine how they deal with alcohol use among their athletes. It would be crucial to determine how coaches are trained to deal with alcohol use and abuse among student-athletes. Findings of this study are only applicable to the specific universities and colleges in Kenya, hence the need for more comprehensive research in this area. The main limitation of this study is that the results were based on the coaches' knowledge and perspectives on alcohol consumption habits of student athletes. It would be important to conduct a study with student-athletes about their alcohol consumption habits.

Author Contributions

JM M'mbaha designed the study, developed questionnaires, revised the manuscript, analyzed data and interpreted results. HM Bulinda identified participants, collected data, analyzed data and interpreted results.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest

Appendix

Questionnaire

There have been reported cases of alcohol use leading athletes to use performance enhancing drugs. This questionnaire is to help the researcher find out the extent of alcohol use among University / College student-athletes and how this problem can be controlled.

	Personal information.			
	Gender	F	M	Total
	Coaching/ training/ teaching experience in number of years	Below 10 Years	10 Years and Above	Total

		Primary School	High School	Collage/ University	Not Sure
	At what stage of schooling did majority of your student athletes start taking alcohol				
		One	Two - Three	More than Five	Not Sure
	How much alcohol do student athletes under you take per sitting?				
		Daily	Weekly	Monthly	None
	How often have you come across your athletes using alcohol?				

		Sports events at Campus	Sports events outside of Campus	
	Alcohol consumption is more likely to take place during			
		Male	Female	Both Male and Female
	Who consumes more alcohol based on gender?			

		Track and Field Athletics	Swimming	Racket sports / Board Games	Team Sports
	Which sports discipline(s) has most student-athletes consuming alcohol?				
		Out of Training/ Competition	During Training	Pre-Competition	Post - Competition
	When are student- athletes				

likely to consume alcohol				
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	1 st Years	2 nd Years	3 rd Years	4 th Years	Post Graduate
Who consumes more alcohol based on the year of study?					
			25 %	50 %	75 %
From your own assessment, approximately what percentage of student athletes consume alcohol?					
			Yes	Not Sure	No
Do any of the coaching/ training/ teaching staff influence student athletes to consume alcohol?					

	Yes	No
Are you worried about the extent of alcohol consumption among student athletes?		
Does your university or team have a policy that prohibits or limits beer sales on the Campus?		
If yes, what does it state?		
Is alcohol sale allowed during sports events in your University?		
Are alcohol / beer selling companies advertisement and sales allowed during University sports events?		
Have you ever experienced dropout from your team due to alcohol use		
Have your student athletes ever approached you with the desire to quit alcohol consumption		
Do you think alcohol consumption among student athletes can be an indicator of drug use in sports later?		
What remedial measures have you taken / are taking to control alcohol use among student athletes		
What other comments do you have regarding alcohol consumption among student-athletes		

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