

Research Article

Social Meanings of Alcoholism among Alcoholics in Ndenderu Ward, Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract: Alcohol abuse is one of the major social problems affecting modern society. In dealing with the problem of alcoholism efforts have majorly focused on mitigating the factors leading to alcoholism. These efforts mostly take the etic perspective thus making alcoholics as passive actors. This study therefore investigated the social meanings of alcoholism from the emic perspective of alcoholics. In specific the study investigated the social meanings of alcoholism among alcoholics. This study was guided by the social construction theory and the interpretative phenomenological analysis theoretical framework. The study adopted an ethnographic design in which data was collected from eighteen respondents who were selected through snowball and purposive sampling techniques by virtue of their involvement in alcoholism. The study utilized in-depth interviews, key informants interviews and focused group discussions as methods of data collection. The data collected was transcribed *ad verbatim* and thematically analysed. The study found that alcoholism was constructed among alcoholics as medicine, courage booster, and a stress remover, entry into brotherhood and sisterhood groups and as a form of spirit. As a consequence, most of them adopted specific languages of communication, joined drinking groups, and developed a don't care attitude while others remain confused on either to stop or continue drinking as a way of overcoming the everyday structures imposed on alcoholism. In this regard the study concluded that in a bid to mitigate alcoholism it is important to first address the structural violence at the individual level that make the individual vulnerable to alcoholism and the need to incorporate the lived experiences of alcoholics in mitigating alcoholism.

Keywords: Alcoholism, Social meanings, Alcoholics.

Introduction to the study

After a beautiful, wonderful, but long Sunday service, hunger begun getting a better part of me. I could feel the persistent rumbling of my tummy. Everybody was speaking all the way of how warm the afternoon was. With the sun drawing its rays this day, indeed it was a blessing. "People are looking elegant and sharp." Commented Mr. Wanjohi a church elder. "Yes. Look at this young man. He is very presentable and admirable, I want my kids to take from him." Said Mwaura a senior church elder. I then walked hurriedly and as I was almost home, I noticed something unfamiliar at the threshold of our gate. It was Kanyua¹.

¹ Kanyua: A kikuyu name meaning a drinker. The name is symbolically used to refer to alcoholics. Kanyua is used to draw the picture of an alcoholic in our everyday society. His story, is too the foundation upon which the study is laid.

Kanyua, an intoxicated addict to liquor had been hated, rejected and viewed an outcast in the neighbourhood. He was the best village example of failure, he couldn't move any more. He was sleeping luxuriously in the ditch, arms spread out, like he was a king basking in the hot sun. However he wore a dark, stained t-shirt that was tattered. He looked old and weak, yet in his youth life.

“This boy has been rehabilitated long enough. Let the world take its course now”. Mr. Karanja detested as he passed away. In the same manner as if fashioned, men and women passed Kanyua as they despised him, without taking chance to even confirm if his heart was still beating. Time passed and minutes slowly turned to hours and as the evening chill crept in, Kanyua slowly sobered up. “One day, I pray, that Kanyua will be changed and live a better life.” I silently agonised, it was my hope as was of many, that our immediate society shall one day be free from alcoholism.

“Francis, please pick some garlic from mama mboga at the gate.” Mum requested. I hurried out and before I flung the gate open I heard a hoarse voice singing, in a rather chanting manner, as I went closer, I saw it was Kanyua.

He struggled to leave his ditch as he sang his famous song *wamunyota* by Gathe Wa Njeri:

1. Hee muthenya umwe, twaikarite thi, Tukirana tuhonoke nama tutige njohi Notwageria nama tukiremwo ii Gitumi ithuii tukoragwo nama twi Wamunyota.

Chorus

Wamunyota, Wamunyota bro, Wamunyota ciothe nonginya icarie gwa kunyotokera Wamunyota, Wamunyota bro ii Wamunyota ciothe no nginya icarie ha kunyotokeraaa Maheo kindu, Wamunyota inyotokee, maheo kindu Wamunyota inyotokee,

2. Oromundu nikoragwo atarirwo ndiramu ciake iria ekunyua nigetha ki ahonoke Na ngigeria nama kuhonoka ii ndiramu icio ataninite nourimuigwa irabuini
3. Mwendia nengera soda Naunengere kanuthu Kau ngundite njiguaga ndi hairi hairi
4. Mirika ikirirwo kindu, na ninii ngukurihira Nandukae kurio kiuria, ni ngukurihira Thayu nitwagire micii Tuwethaga irabuini.
5. Mwendia huranga mbombo, unjikirire kegi Na wihikehike mumero nama Urania kwania
6. Johi ino youmuthi arata ndihana teria ya ira Wona ngimithema kwi mundu ugukoma mutaro Namumenye mwagana murugi hau niho muiguaga ati niyekirworwo mai
7. Kuri mundu utangikunda njohi atari muhiki ikuhi, niagicarie muhiki, netere utuku ungire, mukingo ukorwo wa koma ndakae kwambukiswo.
8. Njohi ici nacio ni fani na ni mithemba maingi kuri utangikunda ya ithimo, endaga iria ngunike no hau haringanaga na uritu wa muhuko

1. One day we sat down, we decide to get saved and stop drinking, and when we tried we failed, because we are always thirsty.

Chorus

Thirsty one, thirsty one bro, Thirsty must look for a place to quench their thirst. Thirsty one thirst one bro let them be given something to quench their thirst ×2

2. Everyone one is assigned a certain number of drums, That he is supposed to drink before getting saved, If he tries to get saved before finishing his drums, You will find him hanging around bars.
3. Waiter give a soda, And also a half when I sip I always feel highly, highly.
4. Milka let them give you something, I will pay for you, Let no one ask you anything I will pay for you, we lack no peace at home, and we search for peace in the bars.
5. Waiter pump quickly and pour for me keg, And you quickly do it my throat is throbbing.

6. Today's beer is not like yesterday, If you find me avoiding it someone will sleep in the ditch, Understand that if you praise the brewer, It might be added some water.
7. There is someone who cannot take a beer without a lady, Let him look for a lady and wait until it is at night, So that HIV goes to sleep to avoid infection.
8. These beers are funny and many varieties, some people cannot take open ones, they only take the bottled one, but that one depends with the weight of their pocket.

As I listened to Kanyua the more I reflected on what exactly does it mean to be wamunyota? Does it have the same meaning as that of the society? Does Kanyua really constructs himself as wamunyota at individual level? Is there anything socially wrong to be wamunyota at a personal level? How does one deal with collective labelling as wamunyota at individual level?

As I reflected on these taken for granted questions the more it became clear that from the earliest records, alcohol use has been a social activity. However, both consumption and behavior have been subject to the various interpretations in time and space. These interpretations are influenced by each culture and transmitted through language in various socio-cultural contexts (Gutsfield, 1996).

According to Heath (1995), drinking is viewed as an important adjunct to sociability. It is seen as a relatively inexpensive and effective relaxant. In the United States, Canada, and Sweden, alcohol drinking is associated with personal relaxation and social values of sociability. Consequently, young people consume alcohol because to them it is not a drug but an enabler for them to be talkative, confident and socially at ease (Munyua, Nyaga, & Oundo, 2014).

The use of alcoholic drinks and mood-altering substances in Africa dates back to the pre-colonial period. Most of it was made from food crops such as palm oil, bananas, coconut and cash nuts. Alcohol was consumed during important rituals or for socialization and merry making. Among the Nandi in Kenya, alcohol consumption was done at the family level for celebrations or ceremonies like weddings, initiation and even during naming of children to symbolize blessings (Birech, 2013).

Traditionally, alcohol consumption was governed by social rules and norms. These rules and norms defined who, when and how alcohol was to be consumed (Akyeampong, 2010). These warded off alcohol abuse in the society. For example, children were not allowed to drink alcohol in most communities. In addition, in most societies in Sub Saharan Africa, alcohol consumption was constructed as a normative activity among men and deviant behavior among women. As a consequence, most women preferred to consume alcohol in private, especially at home to avoid being stigmatized (Mathenge, 2016).

However, with liberalization of alcoholic industry and diminishing role of traditional social control mechanism governing alcohol consumption, alcohol abuse is on the rise. This has created many social problems such as family breakups (Birech, *et al.*, 2013), a great contributor to rapid spread of HIV/AIDS as alcohol impairs the sense of judgment and self-control, thus increasing propensity towards risky behaviours (Courtney *et al.*, 2018) and one of the leading causes of mortality (NACADA, 2011). In dealing with the social problem of alcoholism, studies have focused on cause and effect of alcoholism (NACADA, 2010; Birech, 2013; Munyau *et al.*, 2014). Other studies have focused on preventive efforts (Otingi, 2013). However, most of these studies have dealt with the social problem of alcoholism from

an etic perspective. Consequently, most these studies do not consider the lived experiences of those involved in alcohol abuse. As a result, most of these studies do not account for why some individuals are more prone to alcohol abuse in specific contexts. Lack of this causal mechanism can, however, be established if people lived experiences especially those linked to social integration and social regulation are considered (Atran, 2006).

The Kenyan government has also been on the forefront in the fight against alcohol abuse through legislating laws governing the consumption of alcohol such as Alcohol Drinks Act 2010, popularly known as Mututho law. The assumption with this legal approach is that the structural factor which predisposes people to alcohol abuse can be cured legally. This representation or problematization of alcoholism as a legal entity has three interconnected effects: discursive effect (what is discussed and not discussed), the subjectification effect (how alcoholic individuals are thought about and how they think about themselves) and the lived effect.

However, the representation or problematization of alcoholism in terms of legalism does not consider these three interconnecting effects which are key in understanding why individuals become alcoholics even where there are legal deterrence mechanisms. This missing link can, however, be established by delving into everyday discourses which drive everyday life of alcoholics despite a legal mechanism, which acts as a deterrence. This can be done by uncovering the grounding precepts and assumptions that people take for granted and don't question and the meanings that drive everyday life in relation to alcoholism in specific contextual frameworks (Bacchi, 2010; Foucault (2006). Important to note is that focusing on lived experiences of alcoholic as a way of addressing the missing link between legalism and alcoholism should not be constructed as policy option. Rather it represents a bottom up understanding of alcoholism by considering the lived experiences of those individuals who are socially constructed as alcoholics. Consequently, guided by social construction ontology and interpretative phenomenological analysis approach, this study seeks to understand the lived experiences of socially constructed alcoholics in Kenya using the case of Kiambu County Ndenderu Ward.

The study problem

Alcoholism is one the most prevalent social problems affecting most societies (Barrows, 1991). In Kenya, the number and frequency of deaths resulting from consumption of adulterated alcoholic drinks have reached alarming levels. For example, 12 people died in Nairobi's Shauri Moyo Estate in April 2010, 5 in Thindigwa Kiambu County in July 2010, 23 in Kibera in August 2010 and 5 died in Laikipia in August 2010 (NACADA, 2011). This ever-increasing case of mortality due alcoholism has prompted political and religious leaders to take up a leading role in the fight against alcoholism (Kwambai and Kimutai, 2017). However, most of these efforts socially treat alcoholics as victims who are in need help from alcoholism without considering their lived experiences.

For example, in Kiambu County, Christine (2015) observes that the county government has been arresting alcoholics and forcibly taking them to rehabilitation centres. However, most to those taken to rehabilitation go back to drinking immediately they are released from these centres. This shows that efforts aimed at mitigating alcoholism have majorly not considered the views and understandings of the alcoholics themselves. Thus, guided by social construction ontology accompanied by the interpretative phenomenological analysis this study investigated the social meaning of alcoholism among alcoholics and how these meanings influence their everyday actions.

Objective of the study

The purpose of this study was to find out the social meanings of alcoholism among alcoholics in Ndenderu ward, Kiambu County, Kenya. The study was guided by the following research question: What are the social meanings of alcoholism among alcoholics?

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted two theories under the theoretical framework namely: Social Constructionist (Burr, 2003) and Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (Osborn, 2008). The rationale of using both theories was simply because the Social Construction ontology allowed the researcher to focus on the process of meaning formation on alcoholism among the alcoholics. On the other hand, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis allowed for the individual interpretations of the meaning and actions of the research participants. In so doing, both theories aided in gaining the much needed in-depth understanding.

Research Design

This study adopted the ethnographic research design. Ethnographic research is designed for the collection of qualitative because its goal is to write about groups of people in cultural context such as “language, rituals, economic and political structures, life stages, interactions and communication styles” (Creswell, 2008).

The ethnographic research design ensured a clear roadmap through which human activities were viewed. It was key in tracing an individual’s everyday realities within their diverse settings. The ethnographic research design was also efficient for the study as it allowed the researcher to collect first-hand information and hence build a deeper understanding of what the research target population does in their day-to-day life in their natural context.

Nature of the Study

The research adopted a qualitative study. This is as a result of the nature of the study, which aimed at focusing on details of the individual’s day to day lived experiences with alcoholism. In particular, the research aimed at understanding the social meanings of alcoholism among the alcoholics and how these social meanings informed their everyday social action in relation to alcoholism. Hence with the adoption of the qualitative research, the researcher was able to get the in-depth understandings of the social meanings of alcoholism among the alcoholic’s (Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

Target Population

The study target population were alcoholics in Ndenderu town, Kiambu County. Selection of participants for any particular study is the most important thing in research as it determines whether the study objectives would be attained (Masese, 2011). The selection of participants in quantitative research is done using objective procedures to avoid bias. Similarly, qualitative research requires selection of only those participants who can best and most broadly in form the research questions. In this study the main participants were alcoholics. This was due to the sole fact that they were considered to be the most knowledgeable in giving the much needed emic understandings of alcoholism. Similarly in most researches and interventions they are constructed as passive actors making them the most crucial part of the study which aimed at getting an emic understanding.

Sample size

It is difficult to the determine sample size in qualitative research as acknowledged by Bryman, Temple, Smith, and Osborn as cited in (Rosana, 2011). Qualitative research scholars

are mainly interested in gaining in-depth understanding of the social phenomenon rather than the generalization of the research findings. They hence advocate for the consideration of the diversities that exist within the study population when deciding the sample size of Smith and Osborn as cited in (Rosana, 2011). In this study, the researcher took into account diversities in selecting research participants. These diversities included but limited to age, gender, marital status, level of formal education and occupation. The final sample size of research participant's was determined by saturation.

Sampling and sample size

The ethnographic research designs largely adopted the following non-probability methods of sampling. The researcher adopted the snowball sampling technique. The snowball is a non-probability sampling technique that is vital as it utilizes existing social networks. In using the snowball sampling technique, the researcher realized some research participants especially the female respondent's refused to participate as a result of suspicion of the purpose of the study. This was largely due to the on-going crackdown on alcoholism in the area of study. With the blend of the snowball technique and non-participant observation and interview, the researcher selected respondents who were available and met the requirements of the research and were willing to participate.

Data Collection Procedures and Methods

In this study, the researcher adopted qualitative methods for data collection. This was pertinent due to the fact that qualitative research methods allow the researcher to go into the depth of the participant's experience, social processes and discourses. Qualitative methods focus primarily on the stories that people give the researcher, and it is from these stories that themes are illuminated and help to develop explanations about certain phenomena (Rosana, 2011). The methods of collecting data were in-depth interviewing, note-taking, FGDs and observation.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis includes data management. It is a long process that began right at the first step of designing research questions and continued to the end of this dissertation. From the onset of this dissertation, several analytical decisions were made, which include the choice of literature reviewed, the theory that guided this study, the methodology, and questions to ask and whom to ask. All these decisions took center stage in shaping the entire data analysis. While in the field collecting data, the researcher continued making some analysis through summarizing, coding, filing, observing patterns and themes that guided the rest of the data collection.

The entire data collection exercise took place from January to March 2018. The data collected from in-depth conversational interviews formed the research findings in this thesis. In data analysis, the researcher was interested in finding out the social meanings of alcoholism among alcoholics and to find out what informs these meaning formations in their everyday life. Similarly, he was interested in establishing how these social meanings of alcoholism and lived experiences influence their actions towards alcoholism. The data analysis relied heavily on the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as it allowed for the individual interpretations of the meaning and actions of the research participants. The information used for the analysis was obtained from the study final sample size that included eighteen participants. The size was arrived at after achievement of the point of saturation. At this point, no further information was generated upon further data collection. During the entire study, the researcher was involved in writing and note taking that reflected what the

respondents said and did. In this phase, the most important thing was transcribing the analytic ideas as explained by the research participant's (Lewis, 2015).

After transcribing, the researcher did coding, where he was interested in the identification of passages of texts on meaningful phenomena and applying labels to them that indicated they are examples of some thematic idea. The Coding in QDA process enabled me to quickly retrieve and gather all the texts and other data that was associated with some thematic ideas. At this stage, the researcher was involved in writing themes on the social meanings alcoholics hold on alcoholism. Thematic patterns that described how these meaning formations informed their everyday life were noted. Finally, the researcher recorded thematic concerns on how the lived experiences of the alcoholics influenced their actions towards alcoholism. The identified thematic concerns were then examined and the different cases compared to get the meanings of the topic of study (Lewis, 2015).

Content analysis was then conducted it involved in-depth analysis of the social meanings of alcoholism among alcoholics, what informs these meaning formations in their everyday life and how these social meanings of alcoholism and lived experiences influenced their actions towards alcoholism. This was done to determine the meaning, purpose, and effect of communications within the data collected (Lewis, 2015). The method allowed the researcher to analyse the *adverbatims* as explained by the respondents on the specific thematic areas. This was done with the aim of making clear the meanings as they were communicated by the research participants which was the core aim of the research study.

Interpretation of data was done from the perspective of the research participants. This was the core of the study as it enabled clear, in-depth emic understanding of the topic of the study. Of importance to at this stage was writing and coding which involved the descriptive summaries of what participants said and did and what was observed all through the data collection process.

Finally, the researcher organized the information by transcribing the notes and interviews. He then adopted the use of folders to gather materials that gave examples of similar themes or analytic ideas on the key areas of study. This information was then used to find out what the research participants were saying concerning the research questions.

Data and results

Social meanings of alcoholism

Alcoholism as a spirit

Alcoholism was seen as a form of spirit which was beyond the control of alcoholics. This spirit caused the alcoholics not to socially function or carry out any social role ascribed to them until they drink. Kariuki, a male respondent of twenty-eight years of age, who is a class eight dropout earning between three hundred and five hundred shillings a day narrates;

“..... alcoholism is a strong spiritual urge to drink, which must be satisfied by drinking. Failure to drink leads to very bad feelings, which make one fail to carry out any social role expected of him...in worst cases it even makes one feel like committing suicide to end the suffering. The urge is like a spirit that controls you in a manner that if you do not get the drink, you feel like a zombie!”

Njoroge, a male respondent aged fifty-six, separated, and with primary level of education, earning between five hundred to one thousand shillings a day also observed that:

“Alcoholism is like spirits that keep calling a person. I may want to stop taking it but the spirits are too strong and they make me keep drinking. The strength of these spirits is huge and their control is above the human brains. When they call I have to obey and drink so that I can settle with them.”

Njoroge, however, observed that the power of alcoholism as a spirit depends on the type of alcoholic drinks one takes. He explains:

“Young man, can't you see this alcohol is called wines and spirits. That means those who are not "Wamunyota" take wine while those who are Wamunyota take the strong spirit that has more control over them, that name spirit means spirits or control, hence you must drink to feel okay and settle the spirits. Actually those who take wine are not possessed by these spirits so much.”

A critical look at Njoroge's point of view reveals that those who take cheap alcoholic drinks are more likely to be “possessed by these spirits” than those who take costly drinks. This means the cost of alcoholic drinks is a factor in alcohol addiction. That the cheaper the alcoholic drink, the more it's likely to be abused.



Kamau a male aged 35 years, married with secondary level of education expounds further on alcoholism as a spirit:

“Alcoholism is a spirit which locks you up from doing anything meaningful in your everyday life.....It pulls you to drinking before you do anything... You cannot even eat, and it causes your body to shake. Without removing these spirits by drinking you are not a normal human being!”

Kamau whose leg was amputated after a car ran over his leg as a result of sleeping beside the road, when probed further said:

²Moonwalker alcohol brand; an alcoholic brand of a spirit mostly preferred by the alcoholics in the area of study. The writings in the brand indicate that it is a portable spirit. This is the spirit identified by the respondent to symbolize the great element of control. To the respondent it is the spirit that creates the Wamunyota concept.

“My brother, these spirits are bad, you see when my leg was amputated, I was admitted but my greatest problem was that in the hospital, I could not get the kanuthu³. This made me suffer so much I used to be saved whenever other Wamunyota would come with alcohol camouflaged in energy drinking bottle. Losing my leg was not a problem but doing without alcohol was!”

Similar views are also captured by Wairimu, a female respondent, aged 30 years who is separated and a class eight dropout

“Alcohol is like a possession or spirit or a curse that the only way out of it is to drink more. When I have not taken it I feel bad and not even a soda or food or anything can help me. I also feel angry and sad and all is not okay until I drink.”

Alcoholism as a family unit

To some alcoholics, alcoholism was seen as a family unit in that it provided a sense of belonging to those labelled as ‘Wamunyota’. They felt wanted and able to live a normal life especially when they are stigmatized and discriminated by those who are not alcoholics. Njogu 30 year’s male respondent with secondary level of education and separated narrates:

“I can say that alcoholism is a family unit in that you maintain close bonds with your friends with whom you drink. They are a family because they pass through similar situations of drinking and being subjected to labelling by the society around them... You see everyone, including you, want to be loved. Now, because the society and your family members hate and do not understand you most of the times you want to remain with your fellow Wamunyota since you will be happy and appreciated there.”

Kimani a married man aged 40 years with secondary education and earning between Kenya shilling 100 and 200 a day also shared Njogu’s experience:

“You know anyone who has gone through a situation understands it better than someone who has never experienced a similar situation. Similarly, someone who has gone through pain understands the essence of pain. Since the people in my family and society have never gone through what we go through, they hate and see us as evil... After all, the best friend and family are those who understand you and you go through the same issues. Wamunyota understands each other and can help each other so much and you feel comfortable with them as they are your brothers and family.”

Alcoholism as medicine

Some respondents strongly held the view that alcoholism is a form of medicine that one has to keep taking on a daily basis to have a normal lifestyle. As medicine, alcoholism blankets everyday social suffering which would otherwise make life meaningless. Ngethe, a divorcee and a primary school graduate aged 40 years earning less than Kenya shilling five hundred a day elucidates:

³ Kanuthu: Half a bottle of the alcohol drink used in removing the lock.

“Alcoholism is like medicine because when I have not taken it I am not okay. I feel sick, full of fear and I am always shaking. I also harbor bad feelings but when I take alcohol, I no longer feel bad and I am okay.”

A similar view is strongly held by Njuguna, a male with university education aged 36 years, married with no stable daily income, narrates:

“Alcoholism is medicine because when I have not taken it I cannot sleep, I feel afraid and I am shy. But when I take alcohol my whole body feels okay and I can even interact with other people confidently”.

Kanyi, a 30 year-old single male with primary level of education, and a daily income between Kenya shillings three and five hundred observed:

“When I have not taken alcohol I see things, I sometimes see snakes, I see insects and they are always coming to eat me. I also shake a lot and have no strength at all. But when I take my half and remove the lock I feel very okay. I can only say this thing to me is medicine as it makes me okay.”

Njoki shares Kanyi’s experiences, 35 years of age, single lady with secondary education with no stable daily income:

“When you have not taken the drink, you feel you are not okay and you have a lot of bad feeling. But when you take the drink you feel okay and full of life”.

Waithera a married lady aged 33 years also observed:

“Alcoholism to me is like medicine that cures my stress. In life I have so much stress from my husband who sometimes beats me and does not provide for the family.But when I drink it cures all these stress and I forget everything.....I find happiness”.

Alcoholism as a lock and key

To some alcoholics, alcoholism is constructed in form of the metaphor of a lock and key. As a lock, it locks the social pain and suffering of sobriety in an individual, and as a key it opens and realizes them.



The meaning is lived by Kuria, a single male aged thirty two years captures this:

"I must clear that sobriety is a lock since it makes me feel bad. I have to look for a "kanuthu" to clear it. Alcohol is a drug because when I am under the lock, I cannot sleep and I feel bad always. However, when I clear the lock (key), I feel reborn and good. I believe that alcohol is a drug that cures me of the ill feeling brought by the lock."

Similar sentiments were shared by Mr. Nyoike, a 30-year old man with secondary education:

"Kanuthu is the only key that removes the lock. When I am under the lock, I go through bad feelings that make me suffer a lot. The only way to free myself from this feeling is by taking Kanuthu".

Mr. Nyoike's construction of alcoholism as lock and key is best captured in the following interview with the researcher:

Researcher: *Where does the lock come from?*

Mr. Nyoike: *The 'lock' comes from yesterday's drink. To unlock it, one has to take a Kanuthu. This can be compared to a car, when the engine is off, one has to insert the key to bring the engine to life. The key ignites the engine, and it is the only thing that can turn the car on and off. Similarly, alcohol is the one that causes the lock, and it is the only thing that can clear the lock.*

Alcoholism as a courage booster and stress reliever

To some research participants, alcoholism is viewed as a courage booster. Mr. Thuo, a single man, and a primary school dropout with no stable daily income narrates:

"Alcoholism lifts my spirits high and I feel free to do everything but when I am not drunk, it's like I am in jail, and I am engulfed in a lot of fear. I cannot talk to people and I am equally shy. On the contrary, when I take the drink, I become bright and active."

As noted from Thuo's narrative, alcoholism enables him to deal with his social inadequacies in his personal life. This is because alcoholism blankets them all. This is captured by Wangeshi; a single lady aged 37, with secondary level of education and a daily earning of less than two hundred Kenya shillings:

"In this life, you face many issues. You may not have work or money and people despise and hate you for nothing. All these issues lead to stress. Once you conceive all these thoughts in your mind, you have to take some alcoholic drinks to free yourself and feel happy. Alcohol makes you forget your problems and offers peace in a way you can enjoy with your friends"

Kairu is a single man aged 20. He dropped out of school in Form two. He observed that alcoholism not only relieves stress, but it also boosts courage:

"Alcohol is a courage booster. This is because it enables one to work. Without alcohol, one is not able to work due to lack of strength and the accompanying stress. Once you take alcohol, energy and strength resume and one can work and move on with life. It becomes clear that for Wamunyota to work, they must drink"

Social Meanings of Alcoholism among Alcoholics and what influences the meanings in everyday life.

As a result of the global systems comes liberalization men who were retrenched and unemployed found themselves not able to meet their social-economic demands i.e. providing for their family basic needs. With this the men found it difficult in expressing their masculinity as in most cases women held much money hence exercised more power and control than the men. This was further aggravated by the effect of liberalization hence most men found themselves attracted to alcoholism as a coping strategy to the resultant structural violence subjected to them by the society.

In this study alcoholism was seen as a result of disintegration of the social fabric. In the area of study as a result of the regulations from law a key social institution there has been a serious crackdown on alcoholism. In the crackdown both alcoholics and those selling the second generation brews remain the major target. In a wider context alcoholics are seen as deviants who require help through rehabilitation process. However, among the alcoholics, alcoholism was not a social problem but a way of coping with every day structural violence. Consequently, to alcoholics, alcoholism was seen as medicine, as a family unit, as a lock and key, and as spirits. This definitions and understandings of alcoholism emanated from the social political and economic factors which hindered the alcoholics from meeting their expected life projects.

To alcoholics who viewed alcohol as medicine, were at most times faced by strong feelings of hangover and it is only in taking the alcohol that they would be cured of the feeling. To them the hangover was an event that prevented them from living a normal life hence it was only in taking alcohol that they achieved this desired state. Among alcoholics, alcohol was also seen as a form of a great spirit, to them the spirit was associated with great feelings of control and hence it is only in taking alcohol that the spirits would be settled. In everyday life alcoholics face many problems in trying to meet the expected standards of the society thus they became victims of crime victimization, wife separation, health problems, unemployment, stigmatization and labeling. This is so as there is disconnect between the expectations of the society and the alcoholics social meanings on alcoholism. Most of this social problems result from external process which the individual is vulnerable to e.g. they are expected to have employment, family and proper formal education. The collectivity imposes strain, which internally results to alcoholics resorting to alcohol as a way of seeking comfort.

Study recommendations

The study has great revelations as it lends itself to the research objective that seeks to find out the social meanings of alcoholism among alcoholics. Guided by the social construction ontology, the study clearly shows that behavior is guided by the meanings and it is the meanings that then produce the reality lived in our everyday society. Indeed from the study, the reality is both at individual level and at collective society level. It is hence pivotal for bodies such as NACADA, County Governments, and the NON Governmental organizations aimed at mitigating the problem of alcoholism be aimed at first solving the meanings held by alcoholics on alcoholism as an entry point in solution searching.

The way forward

Need to conduct a similar study in a different county. I.e. Kisumu, Mombasa or Uasin Gishu County. Are the meanings, lived experiences and coping strategies similar to those of the study area?

The need to conduct further studies on the emic understandings of other drug uses such as Bang and Cocaine. What meanings do the participants hold? What are their lived experiences and what copying strategies do they adopt?

For both cases is there a relationship between the meanings held and the resultant behavior?

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