

## **Determinants of Alcohol Consumption among Tertiary education Students in Port Harcourt**

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**Abstract:** Alcohol is a known substance in the society and readily abused. The consumption of alcohol has continued to increase among students in various institutions of learning across the world. This research work was carried out to ascertain the determinants and possible effects of alcohol consumption among tertiary education students. This is a cross-sectional study involving 121 students (39 males and 82 females) with ages <20years, 20-35years and >35years in first and second year of their studies. The study shows that students <20years consumed more alcohol (57.9%), followed by >35years (50%) and the students between 20-35years consumed less alcohol (48.2%). The study also shows that males (74.3%) consumed more alcohol than females (42.6%). Most respondents consumed alcohol to increase sexual libido and performance as well as reading and understanding. There was no marked variation in percentage alcohol consumption between first and second year students in this study, though a little higher in second year students. 62.81% of our respondents were willing to quit alcohol consumption while 13.22% were unwilling and 23.97% were null respondents. Enlightenment carried out by the school management on the effects of alcohol was the major reason for quitting. There is a statistical significance ( $p < 0.05$ ) for students that take alcohol and those who do not.

**Key words:** Determinants, Alcohol, Consumption, Students.

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### **I. Introduction**

Alcohol is popular and more available in our immediate environment. Availability of alcohol without regulations by the authority in place has made it possible or exposes students to engage the consumption of alcohol. Alcohol drinking was earlier reserved for special occasions and it was mainly consumed by male adults of the family. Women and Youths were culturally restrained from drinking. In recent time, alcohol consumption in Nigeria has witnessed striking changes led by development of socio-political events and economic downturn. Consumption is no longer exclusively ruled by customs and traditions or for special occasions. Youths who were previously restricted from alcohol intake by social norms now consume at will. Harrel et al., 2007<sup>1</sup> found that male students reported significantly higher alcohol intakes than their female peers, a result mirrored in other studies.

Age of first alcohol consumption was significantly lower in students than staff and may be seen in the context of a generational shift towards earlier alcohol consumption.<sup>2</sup> This is consistent with some other report linking early onset drinking with increased risk of developing later alcohol use disorders.<sup>3,4</sup> It is well documented that depression, anxiety and alcohol misuse often occur together.<sup>5</sup> Alcohol may be used to help cope with depression and anxiety disorders and may worsen these disorders.<sup>6,7</sup> Brenner et al., 1999<sup>8</sup> found that students who had considered suicide were at increased odds of using tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs. The associations between psychological distress and risky drinking and negative consequences of alcohol consumption in students point to the need for interventions for alcohol misuse that aim to improve overall mental health literacy and promote more effective means of coping with psychological distress.<sup>9</sup> A recent US three-year multi-site study found that social norms marketing campaigns can be an effective component of campus efforts to reduce heavy drinking among first-year students, especially if implemented when students arrive on campus.<sup>10</sup> Some evidence suggests that focusing on events typically associated with high alcohol consumption, such as 21<sup>st</sup> birthday parties and holidays, may also be beneficial.<sup>11,12,13</sup> Online interventions may have a role to play, with evidence supporting the effectiveness of personalized feedback interventions for alcohol misuse in tertiary education students.<sup>14,15,16</sup>

Kypri et al., 2009<sup>16</sup> in a review investigating the consequences of alcohol misuse noted that gender differences in relation to the adverse consequences of alcohol consumption were also beginning to decrease. The University environment exposes the students to alcohol use and abuse due to several reasons. For many students, the University experience is their first time away from their families and parents which in turn prevent use of rules or curfews.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, students struggle to keep control of their lifestyle because there are no authority figures to watch over their decision making.<sup>17</sup> This new found freedom and a sense of invulnerability and a strong desire for exploration can lead to the development of alcohol use and abuse.<sup>18</sup> Researchers have also found that University students are amongst the highest percentile for binge drinking due to the increases in stress level from school and academia.<sup>19</sup> Australian National Health Surveys have shown that levels of risky drinking in those aged 18-24 years have increased since 1995.<sup>20</sup> Alcohol is the greatest single contributor to college students' illness and death in the US.<sup>21</sup> In a study of over 2500 New Zealand University students, 81% of students drank in the previous four weeks, 37% reported one or more binge episodes in the last week, and 68% drank to hazardous levels.<sup>16</sup> Environmental influence is another determinant in alcohol consumption because these alcohols are available and accessible within the school and its environs. Most times students get alcohol free from neighbors and friends. Alcohol manufacturers and the media who advertise different brand of alcohol tend to lure students to engage in alcohol consumption. Psychology is another major cause of alcohol consumption among students of the college. Some students engaged in alcohol consumption following death of loved ones (father, mother, brother, sister, and guidance) as a way of regaining their lost mood. Some of them are stranded after the death of their sponsor and guidance leaving them with no option than to join the group of alcohol consumption. Students also engage in alcohol consumption with the belief to have a sense of calmness, happiness and to forget their problems and indeed reinstate their sense of well – being. Exams failure, stress, heart break, sexual performance are all contributing factors to students engaging in consuming large quantities of alcohol to console them. Socialization is one of the factors that bring or expose students to certain social vices including alcoholism. Some students drink alcohol in the name of socialization. In course of socializing, students become addicted to alcohol. Confidence in the midst of people is another cause of students engaging in alcohol consumption because it gives them morale and take away fear and shame while standing before crowd. Some students combine both schooling and working therefore become addicted at their place of work. Culture, religion, family, and peers influence students' character with respect to alcohol consumption. Also being a neophyte in school or starting school or getting new job or entering into a new environment are fertile ground to engage in alcohol consumption practices. Academic performance is one of the reasons some students engaged in alcohol consumption because they believe that alcohol will stimulate them to read and understand without falling into sleep easily while reading. Most students assimilate under the influence of alcohol leading to the consumption of large quantities of alcohol.

However the aim of this study is to determine the categories of students involved, identify the determinants and examine the effects of alcohol consumption on students.

## **II. Material and methods**

A cross-sectional study was carried out among students of Rivers State College of Health Science and Technology, Port Harcourt and lasted for a period of four weeks. Participants were year 1 and year 2 students. 121 students (39 males and 82 females) with ages: < 20, 20-35, and > 35 years were recruited for the study. Well structured questionnaires were administered to the students. Each student had one questionnaire to fill appropriately and independently after instructions were given to them by the researchers. Statistical analysis of data was done using Microsoft Excel. P value < 0.05 was considered significant for data.

## **III. Results**

A total of 121 students, 32.2% (39/121) males and 67.8% (82/121) females participated in the study. The participant's ages were: < 20 years, 47.12% (57/121); 20-35 years, 44.63% (54/121) and > 35 years, 8.26% (10/121). 52.9% (64/121) of the respondents consumed alcohol while 47.1% (57/121) of the respondents did not consume alcohol. However, out of the total number of respondents, 62.81% (76/121) were willing to quit alcohol consumption, 13.22% (16/121) wants to continue alcohol consumption and with a null response of 23.97% (29/121). Among our respondents, 74.4% (67/90) of students said their academic performance was good before onset of alcohol consumption while 25.6% (23/90) said their academic performance before onset of alcohol consumption was poor. Also after some periods of alcohol consumption, 72.3% (60/83) reported poor academic performance while 27.7% (23/83) maintained good academic performance (Table 1). The data (Table 2) also reveals that alcohol intake was higher, 57.9% (33/57) in ages less than 20 years, followed by those greater than 35 years, 50% (5/10) and least in those between 20-35 years, 48.1% (26/54). Among the male respondents, 74.36% (29/39) consumed alcohol while 25.64% (10/39) did not. Also for the female gender, 42.68% (35/82) consumed alcohol while 57.32% (47/82) did not. Thus alcohol consumption in our study was highest among male respondents (Table 3). Data collected from the various class distribution show that among

year one students, 45.5% (20/44) of males and 54.5% (24/44) of females consumed alcohol. Statistical analysis at P value < 0.05 is significant both for students who took alcohol and for those who did not take alcohol. Mean value for those who took alcohol and those who did not is 32 and 28 respectively.

**Table no 1: Academic Performance with Alcohol intake**

Outcome	Before Intake		After Intake	
	N	%	N	%
Good	43	76.7 (43/121)	18	33.3 (18/121)
Poor	13	23.3 (13/121)	36	66.7 (36/121)

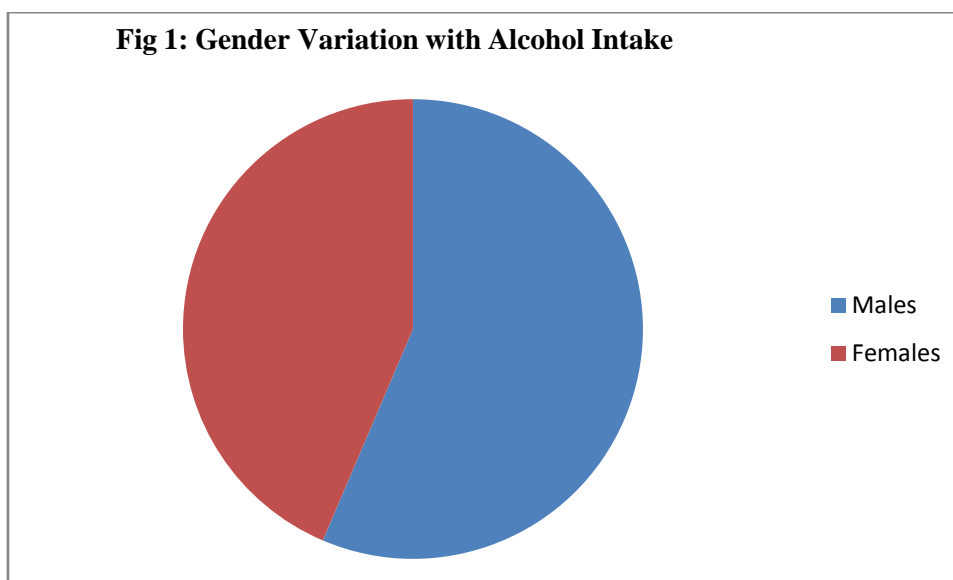
N= number of respondents, %= percentage, Null response= 11 (9.1%)

**Table no 2: Percentage Alcohol Intake by Age**

Age (Years)	N	Students who take Alcohol		Students who don't take Alcohol	
		N	%	N	%
< 20	57	33	57.9	24	42.1
20 – 35	54	26	48.1	28	51.9
>35	10	05	50	05	50

N=Number of respondents, %=percentage

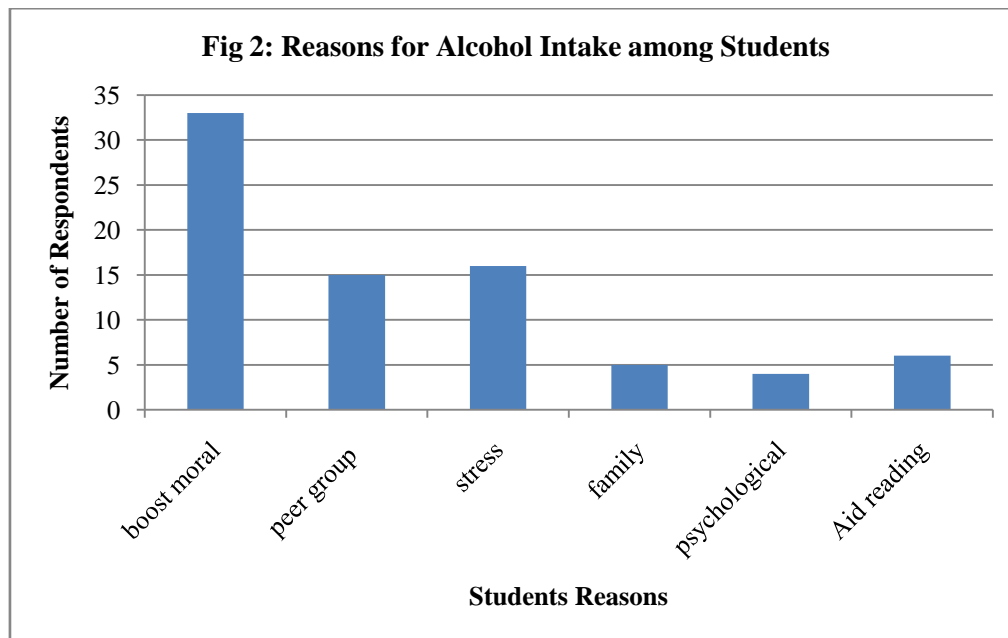
**Fig 1: Gender Variation with Alcohol Intake**



**Table no 3: Alcohol Intake by Class level**

Class level	N	Number of students who take Alcohol		P value (<0.05)	Number of students who do not take Alcohol		P value (<0.05)
		N	%		N	%	
100 (Year 1)	84	44	52.4	<0.002*	40	47.6	<0.001*
200 (Year 2)	37	21	56.8		16	43.2	
		Mean= 32			Mean= 28		

N=number of students, %=percentage, \*= significant



#### IV. Discussion

Alcohol is one of the common and most available substance in the society and is easily abused leading to several pathology of body's systems. Parental upbringing plays a crucial role in inculcating good core values in children. Family is the first agent of socialization where the students are expected to be guided. Alcohol consumption is high among students because most of them are not under the watch of their parents or guidance. In our study, the total number of respondents who took alcohol was 52.9% (64/121), which was higher than the number of respondents who did not consume alcohol, 47.1% (57/121). This is in consent with many other studies especially that of Dias et al., 2011<sup>22</sup>, where prevalence of alcohol drinking in the population studied was 65.6%. The study by Lorente et al., 2003<sup>19</sup> revealed a higher percentile for binge drinking among University students. This however could justify the reason for having most respondents in our study take alcohol. Most probably the undergraduate life with its attendant freedom from parental guide as well as having stronger peer group influence encourages the adoption of liquor intake.<sup>17, 18, 23, 24</sup> There is also a gender variation with alcohol intake. For instance, male students in our study consumed more alcohol (74.36%) than their female counterparts (42.68%). This agrees with Reavley et al., 2010<sup>14</sup> who reported that students in tertiary education particularly males, have relatively high levels of risky alcohol consumption. In same vein, Harrell et al., 2007<sup>1</sup> documented that males consumed more alcohol than females. Again Dias et al., 2011<sup>22</sup> reported a marked gender difference with consumption rate of 85.5% among males and 53.3% among females. Most literatures reviewed in the course of this work show positive inclination towards the male gender with respect to alcohol consumption. However this study did not show if reasons for consumption are gender specific. Though the generality of society may consider alcohol intake more male-friendly and this belief is translated from one culture to another and from one generation to another.<sup>25, 26, 27</sup> In another study on gender and alcohol consumption, Richard et al., 2009<sup>28</sup> studied 35 countries and reported drinking and high volume drinking more in men than women. In same study, they reported that lifetime abstention from alcohol was consistently more in women. Also Margaret et al., 1999<sup>29</sup> documented higher alcohol intake in men, with women more likely to report drink problems. Hence this present research is in tandem with many other works on gender variation with alcohol. Alcohol intake in our study was noted to be higher in year two (56.8%) than in year one (52.4%) students. This is at variance with the study by Dejong et al., 2006<sup>10</sup> who documented higher intake among first year students. A logical sense could affirm that first year students are more likely to consume more alcohol than older students especially buttressing on their first time separation from parents. However, this could be different with culture and place. For instance, in a common Nigerian setting, first year students are more inclined to doing more serious academic work than their peers. They are as well more likely to take their studies more seriously so as to impress their friends and guardians. This passion however fades with longer stay on campus, influenced by campus distractions. Thus finding higher intake of alcohol among year two students in this present study is not weird.

Our study also revealed a higher percentage of alcohol intakes in students less than 20 years (57.9%), followed by those greater than 35 years (50%) and least in those between 20 and 35 years (48.1%). This is in consent with Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004-2005,<sup>20</sup> which documented that risky drinking in those aged 18-24 years has increased since 1995. Another study by Roche et al., 2007<sup>2</sup> reported lower age with first alcohol intake as higher among students than staff. Yong et al., 2017<sup>30</sup> also reported that younger persons are

associated with a higher likelihood of consuming alcohol. Some other studies documented that older persons are less likely to consume alcohol than younger individuals.<sup>31, 32, 33</sup> On the contrary, Dias et al., 2011<sup>22</sup> reported high intake drinkers among those between 40 and 59 years, compared to those between 18 and 39 years. Some of these studies though documented that high alcohol intake was common with high income earners, smokers, well educated, and urban dwellers.<sup>30, 32</sup> This present study shares both opinions; having high intakes in the youngest and oldest groups. Those who are less than 20 have far greater percentage of those who take alcohol. The reasons may not be far-fetched. Juvenile delinquencies and experimentation of a new social life on campus are attributes common with this age group, and could be the reason for having more alcohol intake.

This study also investigated the effect of alcohol intake on the academic performances of students and discovered a quite interesting fact. 76.7% of our respondents had good academic performances before onset of alcohol intake and only 33.3% still maintained good performances after some periods of alcohol intake. Sharp and abrupt decline was observed in the academic performances after alcohol intake. Also 23.3% of our respondents had poor academic performances before alcohol intake and 66.7% had poor performances after some periods of intake. Again there was an increase in poor academic performances after alcohol intake. This therefore implies that alcohol intake or addiction decreases the academic performance of students. Most of the respondents however take alcohol in order to boost their moral while a few of them take it to aid their reading. It is also obvious from this study that alcohol may not have actually aided reading or comprehension, but rather has contributed the negative factor to their studies. It is in fact a setback for those who aim at academic success. Grossman, 1972,<sup>31</sup> in his study noted that older individuals tend to face a higher risk of illnesses than younger individuals, and are consequently more devoted to avoid unhealthy behaviour, hence their low alcohol intake.<sup>34</sup> It is therefore imperative that alcohol would affect reading and health of the students, contributing to poor performances. This study agrees with Hingson et al., 2001<sup>21</sup> who reported that alcohol is the greatest single contributor to college students' illness and death in the United States. Few of our respondents also take alcohol for psychological reasons and to boost their libido. This could explain some of the social vices common on University campuses. However our study did not delve into investigating on these issues.

The study shows that 62.81% of students are willing to quit alcohol consumption while 13.22% are willing to continue alcohol consumption. The primary reason for quitting was due to school authority campaign on the adverse effects of alcohol and drug abuse.

## V. Conclusion

Alcohol consumption among students is on the increase and this is because of the many vices young people are exposed to on campus. There was a significant gender variation with alcohol consumption as demonstrated from our data, which is in no way at variance with other literatures. However to curb this current trend, frequent and deliberate campaigns on the negative effects of alcohol consumption could yield positive results. This has been demonstrated in our study. Students in particular should know that alcohol rather than aiding learning is a negative contributor to academic success. It could as well lead to chronic addiction even for short term consumers, which is detrimental to health and mental prowess.

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