BOTSWANA

Recorded adult per capita consumption (age 15+)

A survey conducted in 1986 among workers at different workplaces mainly in Setswana found that the rate of current abstainers was 50%. A greater proportion of male compared to female respondents stated that they were current drinkers.2

Alcohol abuse

According to data collected for the Botswana Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (BENDU) in 2003 from four treatment centres, alcohol remains the most common primary substance of abuse reported by patients, accounting for 84% of the 72 patients. Home brews are the most common type of alcohol used as they are easily available and affordable.3

Traditional alcoholic beverages

Nyola is a home-brewed concoction prepared from commercially produced sorghum powder. About 750 grams of beer powder is mixed with five litres of warm water and allowed to ferment overnight before consumption.4

Bojalwa (sorghum beer) and khadi are both home-brewed beer-like drinks that vary greatly in terms of taste, consistency and alcohol content depending on availability of ingredients and methods of fermentation. Indeed khadi could almost be described as a ‘designer alcohol’ often brewed to the consumer’s needs and tastes. It is
made from a base or ‘mash’ that can consist of a combination of any of the following ingredients: wild berries, wild pumpkins, wild roots, oranges, sorghum and maize. Yeast, black tobacco or other unspecified substances are sometimes added to this base to give it ‘strength’, and there have been rumours around Ghanzi of car battery acid also being added.\(^4\) Khadi has a higher alcohol content than bojalwa and has often been the particular subject of proclamations and laws throughout Botswana’s colonial and modern legislative history.\(^5\)

Proprietary brand-name alcohol is popular if money is available. Industrially produced sorghum beers like Chibuku or ‘Shake-shake’ and commercial beers like ‘Castle’ and ‘Lion’ are consumed, and around Ghanzi, ‘Clubman mint’, a cheap 23% alcohol mint punch sold in bottle stores is a favoured drink.\(^4\)

There are also a number of other local brews with a high alcohol content. The strongest, known as tho-tho-tho, is distilled from a sorghum concoction and can have an alcohol content of over 80% by volume. Others, which are brewed overnight from mostly yeast and sugar combinations, have such a high alcohol content that they go by ominous names such as o lala fa (you sleep right here), chechisa (hurry-up), laela mmago (say good bye to your mother), monna-tota (real man), motse o teng godimo (there is home in heaven), and so forth. Other less strong brews are made from wild fruits such as morula. They are, however, very seasonal.\(^6\)

It should be noted that one of the problems with home brews is that there is no quality control in their preparation and, concomitantly, no way of ascertaining their true alcohol content or assessing the true alcohol consumption of an individual drinking these brews over a period of time.\(^4\)

### Unrecorded alcohol consumption

The unrecorded alcohol consumption in Botswana is estimated to be 3.00 litres pure alcohol per capita for population older than 15 for the years after 1995 (estimated by a group of key alcohol experts).\(^1\)

### Morbidity, health and social problems from alcohol use

In terms of health-related consequences, it was claimed by medical staff in local government clinics that habitual drinkers among the Basarwa suffer from general self-neglect, particularly poor personal hygiene and a tendency to ‘forget’ to eat when drinking, which can lead to malnutrition. Physical side effects reported include pale skin, red eyes and weight loss with more serious cases developing symptoms of alcohol psychosis, particularly hallucinations and incoherence of thought.\(^4\)

So called, alcohol is seen as a contributing factor to an increasing number of traumatic events and injuries reported at health facilities. Many of the injuries are sustained in violent physical fights or attacks in which sticks, knives and spears are commonly used. Wife beating is also claimed to be a more regular occurrence as is the beating of children by adults, hitherto unknown among the Basarwa.\(^4\)

The economic consequences of habitual alcohol use are devastating and act as distinct barriers to any sense of development. Informants stated that since a significant proportion of household income was spent on liquor, less cash was available for food, clothing and other essential items. As one informant succinctly stated: ‘alcohol makes poor people poorer’. A person who is regularly under the influence of alcohol will have little motivation or interest in working, unless it is to obtain money to buy more alcohol. One particular problem is that a regular drinker can easily become economically tied and indebted to alcohol vendors who are only too pleased to provide alcohol ‘on credit’.\(^4\)

A variety of delinquent acts and criminal offences were also perceived by workers to be associated with excessive alcohol consumption. One respondent reported that poaching by the Basarwa was the result of alcohol-induced adventurism. Another indicated that it was not uncommon for male and female children to either withdraw or drop out from school after Standard 7 due to alcohol abuse and that some young girls in the Ghanzi squatter camp had prostituted themselves to buy alcohol.\(^4\)

Child neglect is an increasing problem when parents are intoxicated so early in the day that they are not able to prepare food for their children, even if there is food available. A concern is that some parents will sell food to buy alcohol while others will give alcohol to their children as a food substitute and to stave off hunger. Generally, the neglect of young children due to alcohol abuse means that these children are under-socialized as well as malnourished, leading to a refusal to attend school, begging and stealing for food, and other delinquent activities.\(^4\)

It has been noted that the fairly high prevalence of folate, thiamine and iron deficiency in the population of the Ghanzi and Ngamiland communities of western Botswana may be related in part to alcohol consumption. Alcohol-related violence was responsible for a substantial number of injuries to men, women and children. Alcohol is believed to contribute to spousal and child abuse, and is a major cause of social conflict.\(^7\)
In a mixed economy such as Botswana, it is argued that one reward for seasonal labour was drinking alcohol. When the work is done for the day, the labour force drinks. And, they acquire a taste for the drink of their employers – European style clear beers and wines. Farmers have long ago realized the increased profits to be gained by paying their workforce partially in “tots” of inexpensive wine. For the employers, it was cheap – cheaper than paying African labourers only in cash.8

Country background information

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<th>Total population 2003</th>
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<th>Life expectancy at birth (2002)</th>
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References