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INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF PEER, FAMILY, AND SCHOOL FACTORS ON ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN LUSAKA'S AFFLUENT SCHOOLS

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Abstract: This study investigates the influence of peer, family, and school factors on alcohol consumption among students in high-cost schools in Lusaka, Zambia. With the rising concerns about adolescent substance abuse, particularly alcohol, understanding the socio-environmental factors that contribute to such behavior is crucial. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, to collect data from students, parents, and school administrators. Results indicate that peer influence, parental attitudes towards alcohol, and the school environment play significant roles in shaping students' drinking behaviors. Peer pressure emerged as the most prominent factor, with students in social circles where alcohol use is normalized showing higher consumption rates. Parental permissiveness and the lack of structured school programs to address substance use were also identified as key contributors. The findings suggest that targeted interventions, focusing on peer education, parental guidance, and comprehensive school policies, are essential in mitigating alcohol use among students. This study highlights the need for a multi-dimensional approach to addressing adolescent alcohol consumption, one that involves families, schools, and peers in the prevention and intervention process.

Key words: Alcohol consumption, peer influence, family factors, school environment, adolescent behavior, Lusaka, high-cost schools, substance abuse prevention, Zambia, school policies.

INTRODUCTION

Alcohol consumption among adolescents remains a significant public health concern globally, with various factors influencing the initiation and patterns of use. In Zambia, this issue has become more pronounced, particularly among students in urban areas where access to alcohol and social pressures are high. Lusaka, the capital city, is home to several high-cost schools, which often attract students from affluent families. While much attention has been given to alcohol use in lower-income communities, the dynamics within high-cost schools have received less focus despite the prevalence of risky behaviors among students in these settings.

Adolescents in Lusaka's affluent schools are exposed to a unique set of influences that may contribute to their alcohol consumption. Peer pressure is one of the most powerful social forces in adolescent development, often shaping attitudes and behaviors, including the initiation and continued use of alcohol. At the same time, family attitudes and parental practices can either act as protective or risk factors, depending on the level of parental control, monitoring, and permissiveness around alcohol use. The school environment, including the presence or absence of substance abuse prevention programs, also plays a critical role in influencing students'

RESEARCH ARTICLE

attitudes towards drinking and their alcohol-related behaviors.

Despite the potential impact of these factors, there is limited research focusing specifically on how peer, family, and school influences intersect to shape alcohol consumption among students in Lusaka's high-cost schools. Understanding these influences is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies tailored to the needs of this particular demographic. The objective of this study is to examine how peer influence, family dynamics, and school policies or practices contribute to alcohol consumption among students in high-cost schools in Lusaka. By identifying key factors that promote or deter alcohol use, the study aims to provide insights that can inform public health initiatives, school policies, and parental guidance, ultimately contributing to the reduction of alcohol-related harm among adolescents in this socio-economic setting.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach to investigate the influence of peer, family, and school factors on alcohol consumption among students in high-cost schools in Lusaka, Zambia. The use of both quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the various factors at play and helped triangulate the findings for greater validity.

Sampling and Participants:

The study was conducted in four high-cost schools in Lusaka, which were selected based on their status as private institutions serving middle to upper-class families. A total of 400 students from grades 9 to 12 (ages 14–18) participated in the quantitative phase of the study. The students were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across gender, grade levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds within the

high-cost school category. Additionally, 40 parents and 20 school administrators or counselors were invited to participate in the qualitative phase of the study to provide in-depth insights into family and school factors.

Data Collection:

In the quantitative phase, data were collected through structured questionnaires designed to assess students' alcohol consumption patterns and their perceptions of peer, family, and school influences. The survey included questions about frequency and types of alcohol consumption, peer group norms regarding drinking, family attitudes toward alcohol, and the presence or absence of alcohol education or prevention programs in school. The students were also asked to rate how strongly they felt each of these factors influenced their own drinking behavior on a scale from 1 to 5.

For the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of parents and school staff. These interviews explored deeper questions about parental attitudes and practices regarding alcohol, as well as how schools address alcohol use among students. School administrators were asked about the presence of alcohol-related policies and the effectiveness of any prevention programs in place.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in alcohol consumption and to assess the relationship between peer, family, and school factors and drinking behavior. Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of associations between these factors and alcohol use. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes related to family and school influences, as well as peer group dynamics. The interviews were transcribed

RESEARCH ARTICLE

and coded, with key themes such as parental permissiveness, peer pressure, and school interventions emerging from the analysis.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review boards, and informed consent was acquired from all participants, including parents for students under the age of 18. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout the study, with all participants being informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Data were stored securely and only used for research purposes.

This methodology enabled the collection of rich, multi-dimensional data that provide a holistic understanding of the factors influencing alcohol consumption among students in Lusaka's high-cost schools. Through the combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study sought to draw conclusions about the relative weight of peer influence, family dynamics, and school policies in shaping adolescent drinking behaviors.

RESULTS

The results of the study revealed several key findings regarding the influence of peer, family, and school factors on alcohol consumption among students in high-cost schools in Lusaka.

Peer Influence: The study found that peer pressure was the most significant factor influencing alcohol consumption among students. Approximately 65% of respondents reported that they consumed alcohol due to peer influence, with a high correlation ($r = 0.72$) between peer drinking behaviors and students' own alcohol use. Students who associated with peers who regularly consumed alcohol were more likely to adopt similar behaviors. Peer groups where alcohol consumption was normalized were identified as primary

contributors to the initiation and continuation of drinking.

Family Factors: Family dynamics played an influential role, though to a lesser extent compared to peer influence. Among the students surveyed, 40% reported that their parents were permissive or indifferent toward alcohol use, with some even providing alcohol during family gatherings. In contrast, students with stricter or more involved parents showed lower rates of alcohol consumption. Correlation analysis showed a moderate relationship ($r = 0.56$) between permissive parental attitudes and increased alcohol use in students.

School Environment: The role of the school environment in shaping drinking behaviors was also significant. While most schools had some form of alcohol prevention programs, only 30% of students reported active participation in these programs, and the overall effectiveness was questioned by 60% of the respondents. Additionally, the study found that schools with stronger alcohol policies and more comprehensive education on substance abuse had lower rates of alcohol consumption among students. However, students often felt that these programs were either not engaging or insufficiently enforced.

DISCUSSION

The findings underscore the complex interplay between peer, family, and school influences in shaping alcohol consumption behaviors among students. Peer influence emerged as the most dominant factor, supporting existing research on the role of peer pressure in adolescent substance use. This finding is particularly relevant for Lusaka's high-cost schools, where social dynamics often include access to alcohol through peer groups that view drinking as a symbol of social status or maturity.

Family influence, though important, appeared to be less consistent across households. The permissive attitudes of

RESEARCH ARTICLE

some parents, particularly in affluent households where alcohol is often present in social settings, seem to facilitate alcohol consumption among adolescents. On the other hand, stricter parental controls and open communication about alcohol appeared to serve as protective factors against underage drinking. These findings suggest that family attitudes and behaviors towards alcohol must be addressed in any intervention or prevention strategy.

The school environment, although important, was less influential than peer and family factors. Many students expressed a lack of engagement with existing alcohol prevention programs, suggesting that these initiatives may not be sufficiently appealing or relevant to the students' lived experiences. Schools that implemented clear, enforced policies on substance use, alongside active prevention education, saw better outcomes in reducing alcohol consumption. However, it is clear that schools need to adopt more engaging and comprehensive strategies to reach students effectively.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role that peer influence, family attitudes, and school policies play in determining alcohol consumption behaviors among students in Lusaka's high-cost schools. Peer pressure emerged as the strongest factor, closely followed by family dynamics. While schools have some impact, the current strategies and programs are often insufficient or inadequately enforced to make a significant difference.

To address alcohol consumption effectively among students, a multi-dimensional approach is necessary. Interventions should focus on enhancing peer education programs, engaging parents in substance use prevention, and improving the quality and enforcement of school-based alcohol education and policies. Additionally, schools should work to create an

environment where alcohol consumption is not normalized, and students feel empowered to resist peer pressure. Given the prominence of peer influence in shaping behavior, peer-led initiatives may offer a particularly valuable approach to tackling alcohol use among adolescents.

Further research is recommended to explore the specific effectiveness of peer-led programs, parental involvement strategies, and school policies, especially in the context of high-cost schools in urban settings like Lusaka. By understanding these complex factors and their interactions, policymakers and educators can better address adolescent alcohol consumption and work towards creating healthier, safer school environments.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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