



“Alcohol is life, it’s part of us”: Examining the Everyday Experiences of Alcohol Use in Botswana

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Abstract

Efforts to control and regulate alcohol has recently gained steam in Botswana. Inspired by a public health perspective, the government of Botswana has recently increased the alcohol tax levy, reduced the hours of operation for bars and increased penalties for alcohol-related offences to control alcohol-related harm. While these reforms have been central to policymaking, and caused some controversy, not much is known about the everyday experiences of alcohol consumers in Botswana. Drawing from semi-structured interviews (n=40) collected amongst drinkers over a five-year period, this paper examines the everyday use of alcohol in Botswana. The analysis demonstrates that alcohol use constitutes an important part of leisure and night-time economy (NTE) activities in Botswana. It is a functional social activity that is used by people to take time away from the routines and pressures of daily life. More importantly, it is pleasurable to people, enhances sociability, and partaken as a form of transaction between men and women in bars. There is need for policy makers to consider the embodied experiences of alcohol use when designing alcohol interventions in Botswana.

Keywords Alcohol consumption · Leisure · Culture · Sociability · Everyday Experience · Botswana

1 Introduction

Recent efforts in Botswana suggest that alcohol consumption is increasingly gaining the attention of policy makers, politicians, scholars, and the general public. The controversial alcohol reforms implemented by the government of Botswana in 2008 is perhaps the source of this attention. In 2008, the government of Botswana introduced a 30% alcohol tax levy, outlawed residential sales of alcohol, increased penalties for alcohol-related traffic offenses, and reduced trading hours for bars and other licensed

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premises. Additionally, a national alcohol policy was developed in 2010 to align with these reforms. The assumption underlying these measures was that alcohol consumption was a problem that needed to be controlled and regulated (Pitso & Obot, 2011; Sebeelo, 2020). There was a firm belief by the government of Botswana that an increase in the price of alcohol and a reduction in the hours of trade for bars and other licensed premises will result in less drinking. These interventions were controversial as they were implemented without any known nationally-representative empirical study. Sebeelo (2021) has recently suggested that these reforms were ‘direct political formations’ perhaps underscoring the influence of political authorities in the structuring of these policy measures. The alcohol industry and other alcohol stakeholders fought hard to oppose these reforms but the government went ahead and implemented them (Pitso & Obot, 2011). Whilst the general narrative was that these measures were meant to control alcohol use, it was unclear what motivated these reforms, the processes undertaken to formulate them and whether they considered the everyday experiences of alcohol use in Botswana.

In this paper, I examine the everyday experiences of alcohol use in Botswana. The objective is not to pathologize alcohol use like dominant approaches, but rather to investigate how drinkers experience alcohol, what motivates them and the subjective meanings they attach to their actions. I employ the word ‘drinkers’ to mean people who consume all types of alcoholic beverages. To my knowledge, there is no study that has investigated drinking patterns in Botswana, but some evidence suggests that beer is a popular form of beverage (WHO, 2018). However, many people drink beer, spirits, traditional brews, and wines as and when they are available. Since there is an emerging narrative that alcohol is a “problem” in Botswana, an investigation of the everyday experiences of alcohol use is needed to give an understanding of how drinkers experience alcohol. These embodied experiences are needed to guide alcohol interventions and other policy development practices in Botswana.

2 Background: Alcohol Use in Botswana

Efforts to deal with alcohol use in Botswana largely draws from a public health perspective that views alcohol as “problematic”. Despite these widely held views, there is a general paucity of alcohol research in Botswana. The few existing studies suggest that alcohol use is ingrained in the local culture. It has been used as a cultural artefact with specific meanings to the Tswana people for centuries (Molamu, 1989). Traditional sorghum beer, a popular alcoholic beverage is usually served in traditional ceremonies like weddings and funerals across many ethnic tribes in Botswana. Its use is therefore widespread in many cultural ceremonies in Botswana.

Alcohol use in Botswana has been understood along gender lines. Suggs (1996) points out that amongst Batswana, alcohol use was traditionally prepared by women and consumed by older men. These gendered experiences are tied to male power, authority, and patriarchy. Some research has suggested that drinking roles have been reversed in Botswana due to socio-economic changes brought about by the cash economy. Suggs (2001) highlights that in modern times, younger men and women consume alcohol to demonstrate their financial independence and full participation

in the wage labored cash economy. Recent qualitative research highlights that alcohol consumption is a reflexive social activity that changes as individuals goes through various stages of life. Sebeelo and Belgrave (2021) have recently concluded that drinkers in Botswana constantly negotiated their drinking self and “undergo multiple shifts in how they perceive, make sense, and internalize beer consumption from the point of contact in their respective families until they become adult drinkers” (p. 196). For example, the study points out that motherhood leads to a shift in drinking behaviors as women have to deal with being role models for their children. Alcohol use in this way is understood as a social commodity that shapes and is reshaped by individual experiences.

Whilst there are no studies that have specifically focused on alcohol use in leisure scenes in Botswana, some international research has suggested that alcohol use is an important part of leisure (Cheng et al., 2019; Hryhorczuk et al., 2019; Palmer et al., 2020; Robinson & Spracklen, 2019). Gusfield (1996) has long made us aware of the connection between alcohol and leisure in the United States. He ties drinking to the development of the modern and industrialized world that relates to the division of time. For Gusfield (1996), “leisure is a historical emergent category, dependent on the separation of work from home and thus from one period of day to another” (p. 58). Alcohol consumption therefore plays a critical role in the organization of time. Several studies have considered various acts of alcohol and drug use amongst youth in the night-time economy (NTE) (Eldridge & Roberts, 2008; Jayne et al., 2006; Measham & Moore, 2009; Rowe & Bavinton, 2011). This body of work attends to the varied experiences of alcohol use that include drunkenness, disorderliness, violence and transactional drinking by youth in leisure scenes. Thurnell-Read (2020) has recently identified alcohol use as a key contributor to sociability amongst pub goers in the United Kingdom (UK). His study concludes that pubs are sociable sites that “serve local communities in ways that may establish, maintain and protect social connection and interaction” (Thurnell-Read, 2020: 15). In leisure studies, some research attends to gender norms amongst drinkers in the NTE (Nicholls, 2019; Schwanen et al., 2012). Other studies consider heterosexual encounters like unwanted sexual attention and sexual liberalization for women (Filebon, 2016; Gunby et al., 2020; Sundari et al., 2020), and normalization of hyper-masculine expressions by men (Nicholls, 2017; Vaynman et al., 2020). These studies suggest that drinking norms are complex in leisure scenes across various contexts in the NTE. Moreover, gender norms are enacted differently by both men and women during the NTE. Despite this established body of work, much remains unknown about how drinkers in non-Western contexts experience alcohol in leisure scenes. For example, while some concern has been raised about “excessive” and “problematic” drinking, the contexts under which people experience alcohol in their everyday lives remains unclear.

This paper shifts focus to the context of Botswana, where there is an emerging narrative that alcohol is “problematic” and needs to be regulated. The idea of this paper was to consider alcohol drinkers and engage them on how they experience alcohol and the subjective meanings they attach to their actions. Through this article, I hope to offer unique but equally important insights into how drinkers in Botswana experience alcohol in their everyday lives and inform debates about alcohol

interventions and policy development practices. More importantly, I hope to add to the scant literature on alcohol use in leisure scenes not just in Botswana but in the continent of Africa.

3 Methods

In this study, I used data from the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Botswana between the years 2016 and 2020 focusing on 40 alcohol consumers (19–49 years). My objective was to understand alcohol policy development practices and how alcohol consumers experienced alcohol in their everyday lives. Data used in this study was obtained in two ways: from the ethnographic fieldwork in Botswana in 2016 and telephone interviews in 2020. Both sets of data complimented each other; the fieldwork used participant observation in bars while the telephone interviews focused more on alcohol policy development practises. For my ethnographic fieldwork, I travelled to Botswana in the summer of 2016 to collect data among alcohol consumers in bars and other licensed premises. I used semi-structured interviews and participant observation in bars around the capital city of Botswana, Gaborone. Going to bars allowed me to take part in ‘engaged listening’ (Forsy, 2010) of participant’s stories to understand how they experience alcohol. I interviewed 20 people, 12 males and 8 females who were recruited through purposive/referral sampling. Participants were mostly young adults and identified as the “working poor”. Males were interviewed in bars whilst females were interviewed in their homes and restaurants away from bars. The interviews lasted between 45 min to over 1 h 30 min. The findings were used for an MA Sociology thesis at the University of Miami in Spring 2017. The second data collection was undertaken between 2019 and 2020 for a doctoral dissertation in the same department where I examined alcohol policy processes in Botswana. These data were collected during the onset of COVID-19. My aim was to understand the alcohol policy development practices and their material representation. Data collection was carried out through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured telephone interviews where I also interviewed 20 alcohol drinkers: 11 men and 9 women. Participants in this cohort ranged from young adults to adults and mostly identified as middle class. Telephone interviews lasted for 45 min to 1 h on average. I used an interview guide to frame my interview process in both sets of data. I transcribed and coded all interviews verbatim.

Due to the volume of data amassed from both projects, I purposively selected data that aligned to how alcohol consumers experienced their drinking. Most of the data used in this study came from the ethnographic fieldwork in Botswana. Since both projects investigated alcohol use in Botswana, I selected data from questions such as, how do you go about drinking? What is your most important reason for drinking? What does alcohol mean to you? The responses to these questions were selected for further analysis.

To analyze selected data, I grouped data with similar themes. The aim was to synthesize information that had similar meanings and aligned to the everyday experiences of alcohol consumption in Botswana. This process was a form of thematic analysis where I identified themes within my data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). After

grouping the data, I coded them based on their themes and the emergent categories. At this stage, coding was free-flowing and close to the data (Charmaz, 2014). This was a meticulous process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) of constantly comparing the initial data with themes to ensure that I stay close to the data. After carefully studying the emergent themes and codes, I identified themes that were consistent across the data. These themes relate to alcohol as an important part of leisure activities in Botswana, where alcohol functions as a form of sociability, fun, dealing with stress, boredom, and plays a transactional role among men and women in bars. In the next section, I discuss each of these themes in detail with pseudonyms.

4 Findings

Findings suggest that alcohol consumption is an important part of leisure scenes in Botswana. Many people use alcohol to connect with others, take time away from their daily routines, and to deal with boredom. Bars and other licensed premises are central to the drinking experience in Botswana. For males, drinking alcohol in bars is an opportunity to "hook-up" with females especially if they accept alcohol from them. For females, drinking in bars is a delicate experience of being careful with how they go about their drinking. Overall, study findings suggest that drinking is an important part of the NTE and leisure and viewed as a "normal" part of everyday life in Botswana.

4.1 Drinking as Sociability

Drinking as sociability means that some drinkers use alcohol to connect with other drinkers. Drinking is therefore a social activity that acts as a "social glue" for many drinkers. In the quest for sociability and to connect with others, some participants "naturalized" alcohol use; that it is part of life and part of their identity. *Game (29, M)* stated that,

Alcohol is life, it's part of us. I don't think we can do without it. We cannot function without it.

This statement suggests that some drinkers place alcohol at the center of their identity. That is, they do not think about life where there is no alcohol. Stressing the importance of alcohol as a functional activity that gives him a "break" from everyday routines, *Bodi (39, M)* stated his motives for drinking,

I would say to socialize and meet friends on a Sunday afternoon. During the week for me its family time and then weekends I socialize with my friends over beer.

The above narrative speaks to the functionality of alcohol as an everyday experience. It demonstrates that alcohol use is embedded in the leisure experience by being an *only* weekend activity that is used to socialize and connect with friends. In

the words of Gusfield (1996), “alcohol has the symbolic meaning in the temporal organization of daily and weekly life” (p. 59) for many drinkers in Botswana. *Dread* (25, *M*) expressed similar sentiments that alcohol is a form of “time-out” to connect with other drinkers,

Well, others do it for entertainment and others just to socialize. I do it to refresh, meet people and for entertainment. Sometimes you meet people you haven’t met and seen in a long time and you get together and have fun.

“Refreshing” is a form of time-out. Drinkers work hard during the week, then take time off during the weekend to socialize with their friends over a drink. In this way, alcohol use ‘marks a transitory time and space’ (Lyons et al., 2014) between weekday activities and the weekend leisure time. *Makepe* (28, *M*) emphasized drinking as sociability by stating that it could also lead to new connections that might benefit one beyond bars and drinking sessions,

We drink for fun, and we can also socialize when we drink. I can tell you that sometimes you see a very quiet guy sitting quietly alone in a bar and you think nothing of him, but when you give him 2 beers he will start talking about serious things. We even help each other with solving problems.

The above narrative suggests that for drinkers, social exchanges are also an essential component of socializing in bars. Giving someone “2 beers” could be a form of exchange that performs endearment, but also provides benefits that extend beyond drinking practices. Alcohol therefore performs a social function, connects drinkers, and mostly importantly gives an opportunity for drinkers to “talk about serious things” as *Makepe* stated. In this respect, drinking is a functional and normal part of the everyday lives of people in Botswana.

4.2 Drinking for Fun and Happiness

Participant’s narratives suggest that over and above drinking to connect with other drinkers, alcohol also enhanced fun and happiness. Drinking for fun and happiness is inextricably bound with leisure scenes in Botswana. *Shatty* (22, *F*) related that she finds joy in drinking,

I do it for fun. It’s actually nice when there is music and people around.

As the above experience suggests, drinking is fun “when people are around”. This narrative points towards the centrality of alcohol use and fun in a social gathering. It also shows the utility of drinking as sociality. *Moj* (25, *M*) reported that drinking is all about fun and happiness. There is nothing else to it,

We drink for fun and for no other reason. No one can say they drink because the doctor prescribed them to do so.

Fun and happiness are central to alcohol use in leisure scenes. Drinking for fun is also equated to having a good time. As seen in *Shatty’s* narrative above, drinking

where there is music and other people suggest having a good time with other drinkers. *Lexy's* (20, *F*) remarked that drinking gets her in the mood to have fun,

After I have taken some drinks, I become confident. I get in the right mood and mix well with people especially in a party. I enjoy that.

In this experience, drinking alcohol is a confidence booster that is enjoyed as an everyday experience. Drinking becomes a confidence-enhancing activity that is undertaken whilst having fun. Other participants could not separate being drunk from having fun and happiness. Drinking is seen as inextricably bound with drunkenness, fun and happiness. *West* (31, *M*) stressed that,

People drink for happiness. For instance, if you hear someone saying they are drunk, it's all happiness, nothing else.

The embodiment of drinking as a fun and happiness-enhancing activity is prominent across the narratives of drinkers. As stated above, some drinkers do not see fun, happiness and drinking as mutually exclusive. Overall, this theme suggests that many people drink for fun and to be around other like-minded drinkers as they engage in leisure activities.

4.3 Drinking due to Lack of Entertainment and Stress

Over and above drinking as a social experience that brings joy and happiness, some drinkers stated that they drink alcohol because they had nothing to do. Drinking deals with boredom and the stress of doing nothing. *Tsogi* (27, *M*) captured this experience by stating that,

Batswana love alcohol. I also think alcohol brings happiness. When we drink, we are also able to come together as guys just to mingle. For me, this is important because there is no entertainment in Botswana. Without drinking, we don't have anywhere else to go or nothing to do.

The above experience shows that drinking is seen as a social activity, that bring people together, is a source of happiness and more importantly, people do it because they do not have alternative entertainment options. Drinking alcohol seals spaces created by lack of entertainment activities. Lack of entertainment is also linked with stress. For some drinkers, to live without drinking could mean having elevated stress levels. Some drinkers highlighted that they drink to deal with the stress caused by boredom. *Meno* (38, *M*) spoke about boredom and stress as motives for drinking,

I think we drink because we want to relax and get away from the stress of real life. It could be work, school or anything. I also think that because this is a boring country, we drink to fill in the blank spaces and deal with boredom.

Other participants expressed that drinking to relieve stress was a functional activity. Drinking is also seen as an activity that deals with the pressures of everyday life. *Killy* (35, *M*) pointed out that,

We drink to relieve stress. We spend the better part of the month working hard and we have a lot of stress at work and at home, so we drink to get away from all that.

Whilst drinking might play a functional role for some, others link it to social forces such as unemployment. Stress linked with unemployment is cited as one of the motives for drinking. *Riah (42, F)* stated that,

I drink because of the stress caused by the frustration of retrenchment at work. I end up coming here at the bar looking to “drug” myself so that when I get home, I just sleep without any thoughts in my mind.

Furthermore, *Toby (33, M)* adds,

Sometime when I am stressed, I drink. So, many people are unemployed and drink to relieve that stress.

Unemployment and boredom are mentioned as motives for drinking. Some drinkers stated that drinking especially in bars amongst friends could provide benefits such as dealing with a stressful partner. Drinking then becomes an activity where drinkers come together to assist each other with issues that extend beyond bar settings. *Lone (31, M)* stated that,

I sometimes drink to relieve stress. So, if I have problems with my girlfriend, I can come to the bar and see some guys here who will tell me how to deal with the situation. We do this over a bottle of beer. You see friends who drink are better than those who do not because people who don't drink are not open about their problems.

The above narrative shows that some drinkers find solace in drinking as they can connect with other drinkers, who might assist them to deal with stressful events. More importantly, it demonstrates the spatial and temporal aspects of alcohol use as critical to the drinking experience. Drinking in bars performs significant functions for drinkers to meet and seek each other out.

4.4 Drinking as Transactional

The experiences of drinkers in Botswana suggest that some engage in transactional drinking. These drinking transactions are varied, complex, and mainly occur in bars and other licensed premises. Some drinkers stated that consuming alcohol offers them some social benefits such as being around friends who “enjoy a drink or two”. The predominant form of transactional drinking in bars is between men and women. Drinker's narratives suggest that in Botswana, bars are “male spaces” where they frequently engage in transactional drinking in return for sexual favors from females. An exchange with *Meno (38, M)* suggests that sexual favors are expected when a man buys a woman beer. He narrated that,

Ladies love to go out whether they have money or not. They drink a lot because they don't have any expenses.

Interviewer: So, have you ever bought beer for a woman?

Response: Yes, a couple of times. I have also recently moved to my village near the city so when I am at bars people expect me to buy for them. But if there is a woman I like, I just volunteer to buy for them.

Interviewer: And what do they usually do?

Response: They take the beer and know that it is a sign that we are together for the night and we will leave together when the bar closes.

For men, transactional drinking is based on expectations of sexual favors. In the above experience, it is implicit that male power is also at play. By volunteering to buy female strangers alcohol in bars and expecting sexual favors in return, suggests heteronormativity and male power. *Glen (28, M)* takes this point further by suggesting that women come to bars without money to prostitute themselves for alcohol,

I always tell women that they sell their bodies, but they deny that. They think selling bodies means standing by the roadside with a mini skirt. What I am talking about here is indirect selling of their bodies because when I buy them alcohol, they know very well that we are together. If I hear excuses, then I can shift to the other person and "hassle" her. Another thing is that when I am with a woman, and I buy the first round and she doesn't buy the next one, then it implies that we are leaving together when the bar closes. If she buys the second round, then I might not leave with her because she bought her own drinks.

The expectation for sexual favors is seen as 'natural' for men who volunteer to buy women alcohol in bars. 'Hassling' women demonstrates the 'natural' expectation for men to seek sexual favors from women in bars. More importantly, round buying appears to be a significant marker of transactional drinking. As the above narrative suggest, if women take part in buying rounds of alcohol, then it might be a sign of financial independence that means they do not want any attention from males. Women drinkers had different expectations of transactional drinking in bars than men. Their experience suggests that drinking in bars is not safe, as they constantly have to be careful on how they go about their drinking. Furthermore, they reported frequent acts of harassment and being constantly subjected to unwanted sexual advances. *Shatty (22, F)* reported that she never accepts alcohol from male strangers because she knows they would expect sexual favors,

Men usually volunteer to buy you alcohol and after all that they want to go home with you.

Interviewer: So, when they volunteer to offer you alcohol, what do you do?

Response: Ahh..I never agree.

Interviewer: Never agree to what? Take the alcohol or go home with them?

Response: I never agree to take their alcohol because I know they will give me trouble after that.

For women, being in bars is a perilous experience of constantly dealing with expectations that comes with transactional drinking. As *Shatty* states above, the

best way to cushion themselves against “trouble” from male drinkers is to refuse to accept their offers for alcohol. However, *Nita (19, F)* reported that she accepts alcohol from men but always makes it clear that she is not leaving with them when bars close,

Interviewer: Has it ever happened that a man offered to buy you alcohol?

Response: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you take the alcohol?

Response: Yes, but I always make it very clear that I am not going with them after the bar closes.

Interviewer: How do they respond?

Response: They usually lose interest and leave especially if they see that you are with other male friends.

Katly (27, M) pointed out that sometimes sexual favors extend to men she knows and strangers,

Interviewer: Do men offer to buy you alcohol?

Response: Yes, especially the ones I know. The ones I don't know are a problem because they always want something after they buy us beer.

Interviewer: What exactly do they want?

Response: Sex. They always demand that we go with them after bars close. Even if you try to refund them, they refuse and insist that we go with them to their houses.

Interviewer: So, this happens to men that you know personally?

Response: Yes, almost all the time. But sometimes even those we know have that habit. Men tend to think that if they buy alcohol for you, then you are theirs and they are going to sleep with you. That is not how things should be.

Transacting through alcohol in bars is essentially a complex gendered activity where both men and women manage conflicting expectations. For men, volunteering to buy strangers alcohol comes with expectations of sexual favors in return. For women, such a process must be consensual, and an agreement must be reached beforehand so that they can make a choice about whether to accept alcohol or not. These experiences highlight that transactional drinking in bars has conflicting expectations for both men and women.

5 Discussion

This study demonstrates that alcohol consumption is an important part of the leisure scene in Botswana. It performs a social function amongst drinkers. To naturalize alcohol use, as “part of us” is to view it as an essential part of everyday life in Botswana. It is as Dietler (2006) suggests, an “embodied material culture; created specifically to be destroyed but destroyed through the transformative process of ingestion into the human body” (p. 232). It gives many people the ‘work-life balance’ by allowing them time out from their daily routines. It is also viewed as a source of

sociability, pleasure, fun and used transactionally by both men and women. These experiences are centered around bars, drinking outlets and other licensed premises.

Findings from the study align with existing studies that have noted the importance of alcohol use as a form of leisure and time-out (Emslie et al., 2015; Freitas et al., 2020; Karsten et al., 2015; Kuendig et al., 2008; MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969; Rolfe et al., 2009). In this study, time-out is not viewed as problematic but as necessary to "refresh" and take time away from the daily routines of life in Botswana. In this way, drinking sets "a clear boundary between work and non-work" (Health 1999: 63). Similar to Niland et al. (2013), participants in the current study narrated that alcohol consumption was a "pleasurable friendship practice" (p. 535). Drinking was not viewed in pathological terms but as something that is enjoyed by a group of friends to take time away from the pressures of daily life. Study findings demonstrate the need to locate alcohol experiences on the broader social and economic contexts of Botswana as a developing country. One of the poorest countries in the world in the 60's, Botswana has experienced tremendous economic growth over the past 50 years and is now considered an upper middle-income country with an estimated GDP per capita of about \$8000 by 2019 (World Bank, 2020). These social and economic changes have an impact on leisure activities that include alcohol consumption. Drinking alcohol could be used as a functional activity that relieves pressure from the everyday routines of such a fast-growing economy. Leisure and its associated activities are therefore critical in the normal order of things. As Gusfield (1996) states, "leisure is more than play. It is a discrete period set aside for play, a systematized way in which time is divided" (p. 80).

One of the important findings from the study was the linkage of drinking with lack of entertainment options, boredom, and unemployment. With limited entertainment spots, bars and other licensed premises become important spaces for socialization. This finding corroborates existing research on the spatial and temporal aspects of alcohol use (Gruenewald, 2007; Miller, 2019; Muir, 2012; Thurnell-Read, 2020). In this study, going to bars and other drinking places constitutes an important leisure activity that provide drinkers with an opportunity to interact and connect. This finding accentuates the 'spatial character of relations' (Duff, 2014) amongst drinkers in leisure scenes in Botswana. It is important to note that most participants in the study identified as the 'working poor', who usually drink in bars located in their neighborhoods. This means that drinking is patterned along existing networks of friends who live in the same neighborhood. In the words of Gusfield (1996), "interaction is not with a generalized "other" (p. 167) but with familiar people. The context of drinking in bars with familiar people has a significant bearing on motivations to drink. Additionally, even though Botswana has one of the fastest growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa, there are high levels of inequality with youth unemployment estimated to be around 20% in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). The high rates of idleness might result in drinking and the use of other substances to relief stress and deal with boredom. Whilst this study did not determine whether boredom resulted in heavy or binge drinking, Biolcati et al. (2016) have concluded that being prone to boredom led to binge drinking amongst Italian adolescents. Their study suggests that the stress that comes with boredom might lead some youth to abuse alcohol. Sharp et al. (2011) has reached similar conclusions amongst South African adolescents where

they found boredom to be highly associated with alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use. In the current study, participants linked boredom to social forces like unemployment and its associated effects like stress. This study suggests that bars and other licensed premises are central to drinking experiences in Botswana and should be considered in efforts to deal with alcohol-related “problems”. This is a critical finding given some existing work (see Duff & Moore, 2015; Shaw, 2014) on the affective nature of drinking spaces in Australia’s NTE and its linkage to alcohol-related problems.

The finding on drinking in bars and transactional sex accords with existing studies that have established heteronormative experiences in bar drinking (Ranganathan et al., 2017; Groes-Green, 2014; Jensen et al., 2019; Sheard, 2011; Underwood et al., 2011; Norris et al., 2009; de Visser and Smith, 2007; Watt et al., 2012). The NTE in Botswana situates transactional sexual experiences among men and women. Sexual and romantic pursuits occur in bars when people are out drinking in the night-time economy. Whilst existing studies have established that women use their female friends to deal with microaggressions in bars (see Graham et al., 2017; Maclean, 2016; Swann, 2021), the current study highlighted that women use their male friends to cushion themselves against unwanted sexual advances. The fact that males “lose interest when they see females with other male friends” as *Nita* stated, suggest that male friends provide some security for females in bar contexts in Botswana. This finding points to a complex pattern of male drinking in bars where some males are out looking for opportunities for sex whilst other males are actively protecting their female friends. This drinking dynamic presents a fertile ground for further research. More research might be leveraged to the dynamics of male drinking in bars in Botswana. The finding on round buying is novel and points to another complex gender dynamic based on alcohol procurement in NTE in Botswana. Round-buying is a delicate activity between men and women that signals whether women consent to sexual advances. While Riazi and MacLean (2016) found no gender differences and expectations on round buying, this study found out that women constantly negotiate the complex terrain of accepting/rejecting alcohol from men in bars as it might signal consent for sexual favors. For women drinking in bars and buying your own drinks might signal financial independence and in a way cushions women against sexual advances. For men, drinking in bars suggest male power and hypermasculinity. The concept of round-buying in bars and its affinity to sexual practices provide opportunities for further study. Whilst most of the participants in the study, especially from the fieldwork in Botswana, were the ‘working-poor’, more attention might be leveraged towards understanding gender norms in bar settings in Botswana.

6 Limitations

The study has some limitations. Participants used in this study were sampled in an urban area therefore caution must be exercised in generalizing the findings to other contexts. Drinkers in peri-urban and rural areas might have different experiences to those in urban areas. Most participants in the study identified as the ‘working-poor’, and frequently drink in bars. More affluent drinkers who do not frequent bars might experience alcohol in different ways than the findings illuminated in this study. Participants

in this study were not differentiated by the type of alcoholic beverage they consume due to lack of a population-level data on drinking patterns in Botswana. Future studies could differentiate between wine, beer, spirits and traditional homebrews to examine the nuanced and everyday drinking experiences amongst these strata of drinkers.

7 Conclusion

This paper has explored the everyday use of alcohol use amongst drinkers in Botswana. Rather than the normal enquiry of examining the effects or harm associated with alcohol use, this paper demonstrates the functional role of alcohol as a social activity. The study has identified alcohol use as a critical component of leisure that fosters sociability, fun, brings happiness to people and undertaken by drinkers due to limited entertainment options. Moreover, alcohol use is central to social transactions between men and women in bars in Botswana.

Findings of this study have several implications for policy development and practice in Botswana. First, the study suggests that alcohol use should be seen as an embodied practice that forms part of leisure activities in Botswana. It should be treated as a social activity that plays an important organizational role in the daily routines of life in Botswana. Second, efforts to understand alcohol use should investigate the social and cultural contexts of drinking. This implies going beyond simplistic notions of "problematic drinking" by understanding social forces such as unemployment and lack of entertainment as inextricably bound with alcohol use in Botswana. Third, bars and other licensed premises provide a fertile area for both researchers and policy makers to understand the complex dynamics of alcohol consumption in Botswana. As this paper has demonstrated, drinking mainly takes place in bars and efforts to understand the experience of drinking should acknowledge drinking in bar contexts. The spatial and temporal aspects of alcohol use provide a fertile ground for further research. Lastly, study findings suggest that alcohol development policy practices in Botswana should consider the embodied experiences of the everyday use of alcohol when designing alcohol interventions. This will allow for a more open and broader field of participation that might lead to different solutions for alcohol "problems".

Ethical Approval The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Miami (ID: 20160352) and the Health Research and Development Division (HRDD) in Gaborone, Botswana (HPDME 13/18/1 X (636)).

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