



## **‘SHOW NO MERCY IN THE OTHER ROOM’: EXAMINING LOCAL ALCOHOLIC APHRODISIAC CONSUMPTION AMONG MALE YOUTH IN RURAL ABEOKUTA, SOUTHWEST NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*There has been a significant increase in the consumption and abuse of aphrodisiacs among youths worldwide, with serious health and societal implications. This paper investigates the consumption of local alcoholic aphrodisiacs and their health impacts on male youths in Abeokuta, Southwest Nigeria. Utilizing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 21 purposively sampled participants, the study finds that these young men consume the drinks primarily due to the belief that they enhance sexual performance, treat conditions like piles, provide consolation, and boost ego. Many are unaware of the substances' contents and associated health risks. The study also highlights the effects of government bans on these beverages. The paper emphasizes issues such as stereotyped masculinity, the sexualization of drinks, and the need for responsible drinking practices. It calls for a comprehensive approach by stakeholders, including the government, to develop informed, inclusive, and effective policies.*

**Keywords:** Youth, Africa, Nigeria, Alcohol, Aphrodisiac, Public policies,

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globally, alcohol is the most commonly consumed psychoactive substance, and it has played a significant role in many cultures for thousands of years, continuing even today (WHO, 2024). Alcoholic beverages are generally divided into three main categories based on their composition and source: beer, wine, and spirits (Arasi and Ajuwon, 2020). These beverages can have sweet, sour, or bitter flavors. The history of bitters dates back to 1824 when a German doctor, Johann Siegert, created Angostura as a stimulant for troops, helping them combat malaria and remain active (Parson, 2011; Smith, 2012). While the bitters gained some initial popularity, it was his son, Carlos C. Siegert, who, after studying abroad, expanded the business and brought it to wider success (Smith, 2012).

In 2019, alcohol consumption was responsible for 2.6 million deaths, with men accounting for two million and women for 0.6 million of these fatalities (WHO, 2024). The report also revealed that the highest alcohol-related death rates per 100,000 people were found in the WHO European and African Regions, with 52.9 and 52.2 deaths per 100,000 people, respectively. Younger individuals, particularly those aged 20–39, were disproportionately affected, with 13% of alcohol-related deaths occurring in this age group in 2019 (WHO, 2024). Efforts to reduce excessive alcohol consumption, particularly among the youth, have been hampered by the government's failure to implement a national policy to regulate alcohol production and consumption (Olufemi, 2022).

A recent innovation in alcohol packaging is the use of sachets and small-volume glass and Poly-Ethylene Terephthalate (PET) bottles. These options are not only inexpensive and



affordable but also highly portable, making them easy to carry discreetly. Sachet liquor, which comes in small, slim, and portable sachets, typically ranges in size from 30ml to 50ml and is usually sold for ₦150 to ₦200. Many of these branded sachet liquors are locally referred to by names such as 'Pelebe.' However, they now feature a variety of names that evoke humor and sexual innuendos, such as Kerewa (copulation), Baby Oku (sexy babe), Agbara (power), Bajinotu (bullet/firepower), Japata (tear the panties), and Babeje (destroy the place [vulva]).

While global studies on the consumption, abuse, and misuse of alcoholic beverages are on the rise (Amoah, 2022; WHO, 2024), there has been limited focus on the alcoholic content of sachets and their psychometric properties (Fatade et al., 2024). However, the intersection between alcoholic aphrodisiacs and health has not received adequate attention (Mensah et al., 2024). This article explores the cultural context that encourages the use of these aphrodisiacs, examines the motivations for their consumption, and critically evaluates the potential health risks they pose to young men in these communities. The research questions are: What drives the choice of these drinks, and why do male youths consume alcoholic aphrodisiacs? What are the health impacts on these young men? What role is the government playing in addressing the consumption of these local aphrodisiacs? What are the implications of government interventions? How effective have these efforts been, and what factors influence their success or failure? By exploring both the short- and long-term effects of these products, this study aims to bring attention to a significant but under-examined public health issue in the region.

### **Alcohol Consumption since pre-colonial Nigeria**

In many pre-colonial Nigerian societies, alcohol served a variety of roles, including cultural, social, and recreational purposes, as well as for healing (Ambler, 1987; Granville-Garcia et al., 2014; WHO, 2024). It was the only psychotropic substance widely accepted and even encouraged by society, making it easily accessible. Palm wine and other beverages brewed from trees, such as grain beer, were the most common alcoholic drinks known to the people. While these drinks were not specifically used as aphrodisiacs, they could be mixed with herbs and roots.

In these societies, there was a belief among men that women should be sexually satisfied, though women were discouraged from voicing dissatisfaction. It was considered taboo for a woman to complain about her husband's sexual performance, as such behavior would label her as promiscuous or unstable. Although a woman might confide in friends, her mother, or female relatives, such discussions were kept in strict confidence to avoid public exposure. This societal silence contributed to practices like female genital mutilation, as sex was viewed primarily as an act for male pleasure. The prevailing belief was that a man's satisfaction equated to the woman's as well.

The arrival of European missionaries and traders during the slave trade era introduced foreign spirits to Nigerian societies. These spirits were not only used for leisure but also played a role in promoting the slave trade. Local chiefs and slave raiders were provided with various types of alcoholic beverages as incentives to encourage them to capture more slaves (Smith, 2004).

With the advent of colonialism, Western practices, including alcohol distillation, were introduced to Nigeria, while local alcohol production was banned and labeled as illicit (Okonkwo, 2014). The British colonial government, driven by its imperialistic interests, promoted foreign distilled alcohol and regulated or diminished locally produced liquors (Heap, 2005; 2011). Imported spirits like gin and rum gained popularity, particularly in urban areas, and as local populations became addicted, they began distilling their own versions, such as *apetesi*, *ogogoro*, or *kai-kai*, to maintain the drinking culture introduced by European contact (Obot, 2000; Okonkwo, 2014). The trade in alcohol also became a means of generating revenue and asserting colonial superiority.

	1897	1898
	£	£
Beads	18,488	12,623
Bridge and railway materials	3,273	33,130
Building materials	18,049	22,621
Cotton goods	297,615	339,778
Haberdashery	16,404	14,429
Hardware	13,980	18,314
Kola nuts	21,190	23,052
Provision	9,028	10,539
Specio	69,505	148,820
Wines and spirits	69,476	79,769

**Figure 1:** Value of Importation into Lagos Colony in 1898

**Source:** Colonial Report- Annual (1899:7)

Figure 1 illustrates a rise in the expenditure on importing foreign alcohol, such as wines and spirits, into Colonial Lagos during 1897 and 1898. By 1914, Nigeria was reported to be importing over four million gallons of alcoholic beverages annually, primarily German Schnapps and Dutch gin. Additionally, alcohol became a significant revenue source during the colonial period. For example, in 1937, revenue from liquor licenses amounted to £6,796, making it the third highest source of revenue after motor vehicles and drivers (£85,330) and stamp duties (£12,598) (Colonial Reports- Annual, 1938:89-90).

After gaining independence, there were local efforts to create indigenous alcoholic beverages for the domestic market. These initiatives have persisted, despite the continued presence of imported alcoholic drinks. To boost sales, many producers have rebranded traditional alcoholic beverages as aphrodisiacs. These enhancements not only make the drinks more appealing but also more popular, thereby increasing revenue and attracting a diverse range of consumers across different genders, races, ethnicities, and social statuses. With globalization, greater freedom, cultural exchange, and the rise of new media, women's voices regarding intimate matters are now more audible. This newfound expression has led men to focus more on satisfying their partners. This shift is not limited to married couples but also includes adolescents and teenagers.

### From 'ordinary' Alcohol to Alcoholic Aphrodisiac

Aphrodisiacs have a deep-rooted history in pre-colonial Nigeria. Traditional healers and herbalists—known as Mallams among the Hausas, "babalawos" among the Yoruba, and "dibias" among the Igbo—employed a variety of plant-based substances such as herbs, roots, spices, and shrubs to address sexual dysfunction and enhance libido (Idris and Olawale, 2022). These remedies were typically administered as teas, infusions, or powdered forms (Thompson, 2021). While alcohol was not the main medium for these aphrodisiacs, it was sometimes used to preserve the herbs or boost their effectiveness. For instance, in northern Nigeria, Kanya Mata (meaning "Women's property or things") refers to a range of aphrodisiacs used by both men and women. This practice, which has been passed down through generations for over five centuries, aims to promote social stability by ensuring marital satisfaction and preventing extramarital affairs. However, with the advent of urbanization and modernization, there have been shifts in sexual norms and expectations.



By the 1980s and 1990s, the use of alcoholic aphrodisiacs had become increasingly common, especially in rural areas. This rise in popularity was driven by issues such as infertility, rising divorce rates, dissatisfaction in relationships, growing poverty, and a lack of access to or knowledge about Western medications like Viagra. Small-scale distillers and herbalists began mass-producing these mixtures, which were frequently sold in informal markets and bars. Popular products included “paraga” (herbal mixtures steeped in local gin) and other concoctions marketed with names suggesting virility, strength, and sexual prowess (Kayode, kayoed and Nwonuma, 2018). These aphrodisiacs were especially favored by young men looking to boost sexual performance amid evolving social dynamics, economic challenges, and Western influences on ideas of masculinity and sexuality. A few educated herbalists started to innovate by transforming their products into capsules and refined distilled drinks. Early notable producers included Prince Tunde Ayeni’s Yem Kem International and Fatai Oko Oloyun, who manufactured aphrodisiacs such as Energy 2000, Jigbi-jigbi, and Gbamu-gbamu in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> The use of celebrities like musicians and actors to promote these products further enhanced their appeal. Over time, the cost of these capsule products increased, leading to decreased consumer interest. In response, Ghana seized the opportunity to produce cheaper alcoholic aphrodisiacs for the Nigerian market (Kayode, et al 2018). This lucrative market attracted Nigerian producers, who then adapted and modernized their own offerings.

In recent years, the demand for alcoholic aphrodisiacs has surged due to the influence of social media and changing lifestyles. The global market for erectile dysfunction medications is expected to grow from US\$4.12 billion in 2023 to US\$4.17 billion in 2024 (Varun, 2024). Local brewers have capitalized on this trend by producing branded aphrodisiac mixtures, often promoted through aggressive advertising that claims to enhance sexual performance. These products are widely available in open markets, bus terminals, and local shops. The growing global interest in sex-related products is fueling a boom in the global sex industry. Additionally, there is a trend towards earlier sexual initiation, with more adolescents engaging in pre-marital and early sexual activity due to various factors such as delayed marriage age, media exposure, liberal environments, and peer pressures (Agha, 2009). Some women have even publicly discussed their sexual experiences and dissatisfaction, such as a Nigerian actress who highlighted her partner's performance issues to help others (Nwachukwum, 2019). As more women share their experiences, men are increasingly seeking solutions like alcoholic aphrodisiacs.

## METHODS

The Study adopts the field study and qualitative design. Data for the study were drawn from qualitative approach and collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources relied on participant observation and interviews. The interviews were key informant interview (KII) and in depth interview. The in-depth interview (IDI) with the youths while the KII was with health practitioners.

The study recruited 19 participants for the IDI and two medical and health personnel (a medical doctor and a matron) for the KII. The selection was based on random sampling of those at the joints. Three drinking joints were purposively selected where youth in Osara, gbonogun area of Odeda Local Government usually met. The investigator paid for the drinks or drank responsibly in order to gain the confidence of the participants. The question were asked and the participants gave their consent to take part in the study. The interview was recorded with a phone with the permission of the participants. Each interview took place at the respective joints and

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<sup>1</sup> Abass Obesere also aired jingles to advertise many of these products. (One of His songs, ki lon mu mi ta ponpon.....enegry 2000 was a rave in the 1990s.



lasted between seven and 15 minutes. The primary data was supported with secondary data. The secondary data include books, extant literature and journal articles.

The data was interpreted using thematically descriptive narration. Since the work does not involve human experiment, ethical approval was collected from the Department of Communication and General Studies Ethical Committee FUNAAB/CGNS/Alcohol/2024/7. The study took place from July to August 2024.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

What informs their choice and why do they consume Local Alcoholic Aphrodisiacs?

### 1. *Boosting Sexual Performance*

The study found that many youths use locally brewed aphrodisiacs for various purposes. This ranges from medical to sexual pleasuring. One IDI Ido says that he enjoys that the name depicts how potent it can be in destroying the female genitalia and that is why he takes these drinks in order to boost his performance in bed and that that while his girl has once praised his sexual prowess, his introduction to the drink by friends have further made him unmatched. One IDI Jay noted stated that

I use it because sometimes, if I want to sleep with my woman, I don't want her to complain that I don't know how to drill her very well. So I make use of all these local sachet aphrodisiacs depending on the amount on me before I make love to her.

Another IDI Dee said:

I lost one former babe because she complained that I was not good in bed. So since I got my new woman, I have been using these drinks before I start work. Although I have tried several natural fruits or leaves that I see on the internet and I hear from friends such as cucumber, carrot and tiger nut; they are not too potent like the alcoholic aphrodisiacs. When I use it and make love to my girl, she usually praise me and buy things for me. Man must show no mercy in the other room.

IDI Seyez said he tried using the alcoholic sachet aphrodisiacs on several occasions but that he did not see the difference between when he uses the drink from when he does not use it. He emphasised that he was moved by the names but also realised that anytime he was happy and have money, he usually last longer and especially if the girlfriend dresses in a very romantic way. IDI Shom said that women don't like people who perform lazily and he believes that one needs to make them scream or cry. He said his friend lost his girlfriend because he could not make her scream. And that is why he has been taking the drinks before having sex with his girl. In his words:

*Okunrin ti ko ba le no awo fun bi wakati kan, ko lo tun ara mu. Obirin ko nife okunrin ti o ya ole tabi okunrin ti ko le se dada. Won le ma so kan eniyan leti sugbon o man je edun okan won. Okunrin ni ise se gidi gan.*

A man who cannot smash the skin (vagina) for like one hour should go and prepare well. Women do not like men who are lazy or who cannot perform well. They may not say it in one's presence but it is always a pain to them if their men cannot satisfy them. Men have a lot of work to do.

IDI Dre noted that women do not like one-minute men. As he puts it:



Many good guys have lost their women as a result of their laziness in the other room. In that room, there is no gentleman. One must take charge and must take charge, be aggressive and destroy the vulva. It should be no mercy. That is what women loves.

## 2. Boosting Ego or Boldness:

Some of the male youths said they consume it to boost their egos or bold-up their looks. As IDI Afe says, "I take it whenever I want to confront a girl or whenever I want to face the crowd. I am a shy person but when I take these drinks, I can face anybody." Similarly, IDI Josh said

When I wanted to go and see one girl that I have been trying to woo in my area. Though I hear that she does not even listen to anybody that calls her by the road or tries to woo her. So one day when I was told that she was in a party, I went there with my friends and I quickly took the sachet drink to boost my ego and make me bold enough to face her. After I took it, I was able to face her. Though she did not agree to my proposal, at least I was not scared like I used to be.

IDI AY says that he just likes taking it anytime he is under stress and wants to wear a bold face or make his face look hard so that people will not take him for granted because of his baby-face. This was also shared by one IDI Kuku. To IDI Kuku, "I take it so that I can do what I may not do ordinarily."



## 3. Perceived Treatment of Piles and Other Ailments

Some of the male youths say that they take it for piles (*jedi*), constipation and other spine or bone cases. According to IDI Afisuru, "I take blackwood more often. But if I do not see that brand, I may go for other brand. I can take the sachet or plastic packaged drink. The reason I take it is because as I am, I do not visit the hospital. I can say since I was born and I am grown, I have never visited the hospital. What I do is to take it for constipation. Once I take it, I poop easily. And since one



knows the solution to his problem, I do not waste time to get it whenever I have constipation. Another IDI Bakene said he usually use it to treat pile and other nerves issue. He furthered that,

As a driver that drives for at least six times in a week, I take it to straighten my back bone. Whenever I want to embark on a long journey or drive, I like taking it as it makes my eye bright and alert. When I don't take it, I may fall asleep on the steering. So I take it to make me awake all through the driving.

IDI Baba Roqs stated that, "*Pupo ninu awa awako ko le se lai mu jedi, opa ehin ati bebe lo nitori ise ta n se je ise eyin. Ti a ko ba mu, o le ba eyin je, eyin de ni a fi n se ise ba le ile...*" Most of we drivers cannot do without taking these drinks because our work pertains to back. And the back is important for sexual pleasuring.

#### 4. For Work (Labourers)

It was also revealed that the consumption of the drinks aid the youths in hard labour or manual labour. IDI Rol said anytime he wanted to go and do any manual labour, he would take two or three depending on the duration of the work. He furthered that while some labourers take drugs or weed, he only prefers the drink. IDI Kha who works with his aged father in the bricklaying business put it thus

If we are working for a full day like from 8am to 6pm, I take it to make me do the job faster. It also helps to suppress body ailment or pain that is associated with our work. Sometimes we could be using our hands for like 8hours stretch and in the case of mixing or plastering, this affects the hand especially the shoulders. With the drink, we do not feel the pain.

Another respondent, IDI Jak noted that it is used to make hard work easier. He said this is so because after taking the drinks, in a twinkle of an eye, he will finish what on a good day, he would have spent like hours on. He contended that if he does not take it, he seemed to be slower and less effective in handling the tasks for the day.

#### 5. Fun and Influence

It was reported that many just take these drinks for fun. Some take it to try new bands and just because of the names. The names often make some of the youths to try it out. As IDI Gbe puts it "the more the name sounds funny or sexually devastating, the more they would like to try it out. And sometimes, we may follow our friends to joint just to catch fun." IDI Jaku said:

When we are down at home or over worrying, we go to the joints to enjoy and have fun. Sometimes, the sellers tell us about a new brand and because of the funny names, we just want to try it out. Even if some of us do not have girlfriends. In fact, sometimes if I have a quarrel with my girlfriend at home, I go to the joint to go and take all these drinks.

IDI Afisuru also said that most times if he does not get a job, he will just go and join his friends under a joint called "abe igi anu" to have fun and loosen up.

#### 6. When Down or Depressed and Affordability

IDI Dre said he takes it to loosen up and anytime he is depressed. IDI AYA stated that he usually takes it to calm down. And that he feels that they are all the same whether they bear sexually active names or brands or not, he just takes them to lighten his mood when moody or depressed. IDI Jak also stated that he takes it because he feels it is cheaper, affordable and accessible as it can be picked or bought at nearest shops, stalls or joints. He said that it is easier for them to relate with the sellers than the Big men at hospitals where you have to speak English, explain before they understand. He added, "it is easy to buy from many *abete* (joints) than all these chemists or pharmacy where one will need biro and pen to get what you need."

### Impact of Alcoholic Aphrodisiacs on Youth Health

The impact of alcoholic aphrodisiacs on the health of male youths in rural Abeokuta is multifaceted, affecting both their physical and mental well-being. These concoctions, often composed of potent herbal mixtures combined with alcohol, are believed to enhance sexual

prohess, but they come with significant risks. First, it affects physically. Regular consumption can lead to a range of health issues, including liver damage, cardiovascular problems, and sexual dysfunction. A report as early as 1895 on the adverse effect of excessive alcohol intake notes that:

It has been noticed, and proved as unalterable fact, that amongst the tribes that drink gin very excessively the following diseases are prevalent, Indigestion, Stricture, Diabetes, Nervous disorders, Bright's disease of the Kidneys resulting in apoplexy, convulsions or dropsy (Lagos Weekly Record, 1895:2)

Dr. James Omotehinse, a seasoned physician, warned of the hazards of many local herbs integral to these bitters, pointing out their exclusion from requisite lab testing and that numerous of such herbs, in their natural state, contain toxins that have pronounced detrimental effects on the liver (Nairametrics, 2023). Similarly, one Dr. Moses Olatubosun contended that there is a correlation between the spike in liver and kidney ailments and the influx of crudely concocted alcoholic mixtures and that The absence of lab validations for these concoctions makes consuming them a high-risk gamble (Nairametrics, 2023). The high alcohol content and unregulated nature of these aphrodisiacs increase the likelihood of addiction, which further exacerbates these health problems. As a KII (Doc) stated that, “addiction to these drinks may cause a problem for sexual performance in the future. By this, the victims may not be able to perform actively in sex without taking this concoctions”



**Source:** Taken by the researcher 2/August 2024

Moreover, the psychological effects cannot be overlooked. Dependence on these substances can lead to anxiety, depression, and a distorted sense of self-worth, as users may come to rely on them for sexual confidence. The use of alcohol (and other drugs) as aphrodisiacs also has other serious health implications such as erectile dysfunction, pain during sex, a lack of vaginal lubrication and the inability to attain orgasm. The societal pressures and cultural beliefs that drive young men towards these aphrodisiacs also contribute to their overall impact, creating a cycle of dependency that is difficult to break. Ultimately, the unchecked use of alcoholic aphrodisiacs poses a significant threat to the health and well-being of male youths in this region.

Third, abuse of these drinks may cause internal health crises. These include high blood pressure, high body temperature, dilated pupils, heavy sweating, paranoia, sleeplessness, loss





of appetite, fleeting euphoria, unpredictable behaviour, tremors, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, dry mouth, anxiety, depression, fatigue and exhibition of violent behaviours, seizures, respiratory or airway abnormalities, persistently elevated heart rate etc. (Brande, 2022). As the WHO (2024) states:

Alcohol consumption is found to play a causal role in more than 200 diseases, injuries and other health conditions. However, the global burden of disease and injuries caused by alcohol consumption can be quantified for only 31 health conditions on the basis of the available scientific evidence for the role of alcohol use in their development, occurrence and outcomes

Fourth, the addition of illegal substances in some of these drinks may cause social vices and immoral and criminal behaviour ranging from robbery, rape to killing. It can cause risky behaviours such as engaging in unprotected sex. KII Matron noted that the motive to satisfy one's partner after the use of these aphrodisiac may encourage the consumer to engage in risky sexual behaviors, including unprotected sex, which can increase the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies.

Fifth, the inclusion of some undisclosed ingredients which are unsafe and cause allergic to consumers may affect the consumers. Some aphrodisiac products may contain hidden or undisclosed ingredients that can be harmful to health. These may include prescription medications, unregulated herbal supplements, or other substances with potential side effects. For example, the Chief Executive Officer of Chigodson International Company Limited, Sunday Chibuike, producer of Japata Alcoholic Bitters, was arrested for allegedly using Indian hemp to produce the bitters at Ayobo, in the Ayobo-Ipaja LCDA of Alimosho LGA, where the factory is located. Some of these hidden ingredients can also cause allergy. Individuals may respond to certain aphrodisiac ingredients, leading to allergic reactions, including skin rashes, itching, swelling, or difficulty breathing.

Sixth, it can lead to non-communicable diseases. Harmful use of alcohol is linked with non-communicable diseases like cancer, liver diseases; infectious diseases like tuberculosis; injuries and accidents. At times, in the course of camaraderie, the consumers may share bottles of PET or sachet without minding the kind of ailments or diseases that the fellow consumer is carrying. Thereby this could increase the chances of diseases and even epidemic. One IDI Abe said that he noticed that one of his friends at the joint had cough but it was after he contracted it after sharing the same bottle with him that he realised that he had contracted the cough from him. He said he only thanked his Stars that the cough was not the threatening one like Tuberculosis (TB).

Finally, excessive intake of these drinks can cause death. This is because excessive intake may affect the heart while engaging in sexual activities and in some cases, the partner may mistake pain for ecstasy and thereby leading to sudden death. This death could come in through unconsciousness. A report observed that

It is dangerous to assume that an unconscious person will be fine by sleeping it off. One potential danger of alcohol overdose is choking on one's own vomit. Alcohol at very high levels can hinder signals in the brain that control automatic responses, such as the gag reflex. With no gag reflex, a person who drinks to the point of passing out is in danger of choking on their vomit and dying from a lack of oxygen (i.e., asphyxiation). Even if the person survives, an alcohol overdose like this can lead to long-lasting brain damage (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, nd).

Alcohol abuse is responsible for over 29% of deaths in Nigeria, including 50% of road traffic accidents. Nigeria is rated highest for years of life lost due to alcohol. It has been reported that Nigeria was ranked the 7<sup>th</sup> African nation with a high alcohol-attributable death, coming



closely behind Equatorial Guinea, Côte d' Ivoire, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and Burkina Faso (WHO, 2014a; 2014b; Food Safety 2024; . Alcohol-attributable deaths are deaths that would not have occurred if alcohol were not consumed in the population. As KII DOC contends that when there is too much pressure on the heart, this can lead to heart failure which is one of the reasons for death during sex.

### **Government response to Alcoholic Aphrodisiac Consumption**

Instead of focusing exclusively on alcoholic aphrodisiacs, the government chose to target alcohol packaged in sachets and PET bottles. This initiative began in December 2018 when a committee, including representatives from the Federal Ministry of Health, NAFDAC, the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, and the Association of Food, Beverages and Tobacco Employers, along with the Distillers and Blenders Association of Nigeria, examined the production, distribution, and consumption of locally distilled alcoholic drinks in sachets and PET bottles and their impact on public health. The committee recommended banning these products, but this recommendation was not implemented at the time.

In 2020, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) warned the public about the health risks associated with the reckless consumption of alcoholic beverages packaged in sachets and small glass and PET bottles. NAFDAC's Director-General, Christianah Adeyeye, highlighted the toxic and psychoactive nature of these products, cautioning that they could be harmful to consumers. She emphasized that:

Uncontrolled access and availability of high concentration alcohol in sachet and small volume PET or glass bottles has been put forward as a factor contributing to substance and alcohol abuse in Nigeria with its negative impact on the society. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that alcohol consumption contributes to 3 million deaths each year globally as well as to the disabilities and poor health of millions of people (Obokoh, 2020).

She added that the Federal Ministry of Health was concerned about the incidences of abuse in the country and that her ministry have begun a sensitisation campaign with manufacturers. She stated that one of the interventions agreed upon was that no new products in sachet and small volume PET or glass bottles above 30% alcohol by volume (ABV) will be registered by NAFDAC and thus manufacturers must reduce the production by 50 percent capacity prior to January 2022. She concluded that by 2023/2024, the ban will commence (Obokoh, 2020).

In February 2024, NAFDAC started the enforcement of a ban on alcohol sold in sachet or in less than 200ml PET Bottle, after a five -year moratorium that the then Honourable Minister of Health, Prof Isaac Folorunsho Adewole gave the manufacturers to phase out the two package types (NAFDAC, 2024). Prof Adeyeye noted that:

NAFDAC committed to ensuring that the validity of renewal of already registered alcoholic products in the affected category does not exceed the year 2024. NAFDAC is resolutely committed to the strict implementation of the regulations and regulatory measures towards safeguarding the health of Nigerians, particularly the vulnerable youth, against the dangers of reckless consumption of alcohol (Adejoro, 2024).

Shortly after the ban was enforced, the House Committee on Food and Drug Administration recommended that the ban be suspended. At that time, it was noted that NAFDAC would need to await a decision from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, as the Agency was implementing a ministerial directive. This led to several high-profile meetings between members of the House of Assembly and NAFDAC. Ultimately, the policy to ban the alcoholic drinks was lifted (NAFDAC, 2024).

### Has Government Interventions Been Effective?

Government interventions have not achieved the desired results, with several factors contributing to this failure, including the absence of a national policy on alcohol, unemployment, poverty, poor leadership, inadequate regulatory oversight by government agencies, poor drinking orientation or education, and corruption as well as male perception about sex. John Ichue, the secretary of the Distillers and Blenders Association of Nigeria (DIBAN), noted that while some members of his association are producing alcohol in sachets with NAFDAC's approval, many illicit products still flood the Nigerian market. He remarked:

Whatever alcohol you find in sachets from our members has NAFDAC approval. However, there are some illicit products not registered by NAFDAC that are competing with the regulated. We are working to ensure that some of the people working in the illicit segment are brought on board to be part and parcel of the regulated market (Olufemi, 2022).

Ichue also mentioned that while the membership of the distillers' group was previously 12, it has now grown to 24 with the inclusion of former illicit producers. He observed that "those producing without regulations have joined. What that means is that whatever products they are producing are in line with the best manufacturing practices." This highlights a lapse in the government's regulatory activities. Dumbili (2024) pointed out that poor regulatory policies contribute to unregulated alcohol marketing. In Nigeria, alcohol corporations increasingly employ aggressive marketing strategies, such as buy-two-get-one-free promotions, which make various brands of alcohol more available, accessible, and affordable. This contributes to the ongoing increase and continued abuse of alcohol among youths.

Pressure groups also expressed concerns about the potential loss of jobs. Following the announcement of the ban, members of the Distillers and Blenders Association of Nigeria protested at the Lagos office of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, opposing the prohibition on the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages in sachets (Adejoro, 2024). Additionally, the Food, Beverage, and Tobacco Senior Staff Association and the National Union of Food Beverages and Tobacco Employees rejected the ban, arguing that it would displace "over 500,000 breadwinners" and exacerbate the oversaturated Nigerian labor market (Yakubu and Idowu, 2024).



Figure 3: Workers Protesting at NAFDAC Office, Lagos over Ban



Source: <https://www.channelstv.com/2024/02/20/just-in-distillers-protest-sachet-alcohol-ban-at-nafdac-office/>

Other contributing factors include the involvement of celebrities in the production of alcoholic beverages, such as Odogwu Cubana and Portable, as well as corruption and lack of transparency within regulatory bodies. Poor leadership, consumer beliefs, peer pressure, and bad family values also play significant roles. Additionally, alcoholic beverages packaged in plastic bottles and sachets of less than 200ml are affordable and widely available across various retail outlets, including shops, supermarkets, roadside kiosks, and eateries in Nigeria. These factors contribute to their widespread consumption and abuse.

### **Implication of Government response to Alcoholic Aphrodisiacs on the Society**

While the government did well to regulate the consumption, the hastiness in the decision without carrying the stakeholders along almost led to a catastrophic situation where the manufacturers had threatened to downsize its workers. Also, apart from loss of jobs, there would also be increase in crime. IDI Afisuru said, if he does not take it at least once in a day, something can happen to him. As he puts it, “*ti n ba mu, nkan le se mi---*if I do not take it, something can happen to me”

Secondly, failure to take into cognisance the people who have become reliant on these drinks were never taken into consideration. Such non-inclusiveness may affect their mental and psychological wellbeing. Again, the sellers or markets or retailers who are mostly women may lose their jobs and sources of income and render them jobless or unemployed as they are available everywhere in rural and urban communities in Nigeria. By this some of these women may return back to the streets and become jobless. Returning to the street may make them engage in prostitutions and other social vices.

Finally, the ban may also lead to lack of investor confidence in the Nigerian market. A good number of the manufacturers may have borrowed monies from banks and financial markets to start the business. By placing a ban on the goods that earn them the highest income may lead to not only putting them out of business but may make them suicidal.

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings indicate that youth in a rural community in Abeokuta consume alcoholic aphrodisiacs for a variety of reasons, including and most importantly the desire to enhance sexual performance. Sexual performance is the primary motivation for youths seeking these local alcohol-based aphrodisiacs, often influenced by the product's branding. Some women have further impacted this trend by criticizing men who do not meet certain sexual expectations and challenging them to prove their stamina (Arogbonlo, 2024). Names that evoke themes of domination and sadomasochistic control are particularly favored. This aligns with the research of several scholars (Dumbili, 2016; Mensah et al., 2024). Mensah (2024) argues that alcohol is frequently used as a facilitator of sexual activity, a means to boost confidence in approaching the opposite sex, and a symbol of masculinity—often associated with the ability to have multiple partners, consume alcohol, and engage in promiscuous behavior. As Dumbili (2024) succinctly puts it:

Therefore, men strategically resorted to sexualised alcoholic bitters (and sometimes, other substances) to enact heterosexual masculinity, delay ejaculation, impress their girlfriends, and avoid shaming and negative social badges that could ruin their reputations. These sex-enhancing practices prop up heterosexualised norms of sexual conquest. Women's motivations and beverages for sex differed from men's. Drinking to boost confidence, lower sexual inhibitions to transgress heterosexual norms, ameliorate perceived pains of devirginisation, and maximise sexual pleasure and enjoyment motivated women's sexualised alcohol use.





Other factors are, to boost self-esteem, treat ailments like piles, cope with work-related stress, peer influence, and alleviate depression, as well as their affordability. The ability to do work has been supported with the findings of Kayode et al, (2018) who observe that based on alcohol expectancy theory, one of the reasons some adolescents use alcohol is their expectation that alcohol facilitates sexual drive, sexual effect and decreases sexual inhibitions.

Findings also reveal that alcoholic aphrodisiacs have various impacts on physical, psychological, and internal health, as well as on moral behavior, allergies, non-communicable diseases, and even mortality. Olaniran et al. (2022), in their study of aphrodisiac use among commercial bus drivers in Ile Ife, Nigeria, identified blood pressure (BP) and random blood sugar (RBS) as major health parameters significantly affected by these substances. Both BP and RBS are crucial indicators of health, and any disruptions to these vital signs can predispose individuals to various health issues. Amoa et al. (2022) further examined how alcohol consumption presents public health challenges and affects society.

Government responses to the issue have primarily involved enacting laws and policies with limited focus on rehabilitation programs. While the government has engaged with some stakeholders, many were not adequately involved in the process. The ban on certain types of alcoholic beverages, which are predominantly consumed by poorer populations, led to protests and threats of mass job losses. This underscores the need for more inclusive policies and a move away from elitist approaches that favor the wealthy and powerful at the expense of marginalized groups. Van Gent (2017) emphasizes the importance of inclusive policies for development, while Decker and Pouw (2022) advocate for policy directions and operational frameworks that promote more inclusive development. Transparent, evidence-based, and accessible policy-making that engages a broad range of citizens is crucial for effective governance.

Government efforts to address the issue through bans have been largely ineffective for several reasons. Besides the fact that the global alcoholic beverages market was valued at \$1.62 trillion in 2021 and is projected to reach \$2 trillion by 2031, growing at a CAGR of 2.2% (Allied Market Research, 2023), other contributing factors include widespread poverty, economic difficulties where many rely on inexpensive alcoholic drinks for survival, corruption, inadequate regulatory bodies, and the absence of a cohesive national policy on drugs and alcohol. In Nigeria, the issue of alcohol remains contentious due to inconsistent regulations: despite the northern regions profiting from alcohol taxation, they continue to impose bans and destroy alcoholic products within their territories.

These failures have significant implications for consumers, manufacturers, and society as a whole. They could lead to job losses, which are particularly impactful in a country with high unemployment rates. Banning such drinks might also remove a crucial survival resource for consumers struggling with economic hardships, and it could result in a loss of confidence among both consumers and investors. Dixon and Stillman (2009) argue that the closure of businesses has a profound effect on workers and their dependents. Therefore, policies must be carefully considered to mitigate the cascading effects. A holistic and well-rounded approach is essential to address the issue effectively.

## Conclusion

The consumption of alcoholic aphrodisiacs among young men in rural Abeokuta is shaped by various cultural, social, and economic factors. These substances are often believed to boost sexual performance and confidence, but they pose significant physical and psychological health risks. Government efforts to control alcohol consumption have been largely ineffective, hindered by poor enforcement and the socio-economic difficulties faced by these youths.

The study suggests several recommendations: providing thorough sex education and involving all relevant parties, including schools and social media, to promote responsible behavior



and prevent harmful practices. Establishing free addiction treatment centers is essential. Additionally, the government should develop inclusive policies, collaborate with distilling companies to enhance product safety, and engage local leaders in advocating for responsible drinking. Implementing a formal age-based identity system for regulating alcohol sales is also crucial. Improving the economy and showing political commitment are vital for addressing this issue, and a comprehensive national policy should be introduced. Nigeria could benefit from adopting the World Health Organization's recommended policy actions, which include high-impact strategies, advocacy, partnership, technical support, knowledge production, and resource mobilization.



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