

The Effects of Cultural Practices and Substance Abuse among Male Students at One South African College Campus

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ABSTRACT At tertiary institutions, where there are hostels, it is common for male students to cohabit and express their hegemonic masculinity. Guided by Broidy and Agnew's Gender Role Strain Theory, which is based on the idea that cultural norms influence male patriarchal attitudes, this paper investigated the effects of cultural practices and substance abuse among male students at one South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College Campus. In a descriptive, qualitative approach, ten Xhosa-speaking traditionally circumcised males (aged, 18-26 years) volunteered to be interviewed. To pursue trustworthiness, this study applied Lincoln and Guba's principles. Findings reveal that substance abuse is an underlying reason for male students to practice unsafe sex although some demonstrated positive self-esteem. Furthermore, the participants attributed their socially acceptable behaviour to authoritative parents and constructive peers. This study, therefore recommends that higher education institutions improve security and offer psycho-educational programmes to reduce drug use.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, in countries such as China, the United States (Li et al. 2017), India (Rani et al. 2019) and Thailand (Sateemae et al. 2017), studies conducted at tertiary institutions, namely; universities and colleges, revealed that male students who use drugs have patriarchal tendencies and are reluctant to accept that intoxication facilitates rape. Drug abuse amongst college students is viewed as an expression of hegemonic masculinity and has been found to contribute towards deterioration in societal norms, sexual values and ideals, especially among males (Liu and Chai 2020; Obi et al. 2017). Male students have linked reports of consumption of alcohol and drugs, such as Indian hemp, cocaine and marijuana or dagga on many campuses, to burglary, robbery and rape (Olaleye and Ezeokoli 2016; Snipes and Benotsch 2013). In social gatherings at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, Oshiname et al. (2013) found that male students deliberately poured Valium (diazepam) in females' drinks to drug them. Valium is a drug that causes blurred vision, impairs memory and increases hypersomni (Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies 2008). Consequently, if they are not arrested for criminal acts, they are most likely to belong to gangs or drop out before the completion of their diplomas or degrees (Tas-

gin and Morash 2016). Similarly, in Kenyan universities and colleges, Tuwei (2014) found that drug abuse amongst male students affected their academic performance negatively as they skipped classes and failed to submit their assignments when under the influence of alcohol.

There is agreement among scholars that such behaviour is reinforced by hegemonic masculinity, which, in most cases stems from planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991) that might be learned from unscrupulous role models in their respective environments (Bandura 2002; Kheswa et al. 2017). Because of socialization, an uneven number of male youth tend to engage in risky sexual behaviour to validate their manhood by having multiple sexual partners, not practicing unsafe sex and engaging in intimate partner violence especially when under the influence of such substances (Brear and Bessarab 2012; Kheswa and Van Eeden 2018; Morojele et al. 2016). In culturally embedded societies, Kheswa et al. (2014) and Naidu and Khumalo (2016) found that traditional male circumcision also becomes a precipitating factor for male youth to drink alcohol and use drugs. The removal of the foreskin "prepuce" is a traditional practice in many tribes in Kenya (Hudson et al. 2018), Zambia (Kachimba et al. 2017), Zimbabwe (Shumba and Lubombo 2017) and among the isiXhosa-speaking people in South Africa (Ntozini and Abdullahi 2018). Even in India, the records of traditional male circumcision, termed "*khatna*" or "*sunnat*" (Sahay et al. 2014) can be traced

back to the sixth Egyptian era (Aggleton 2007) and it is a social and religious act which culminates in a boy's integration into the society to be granted respected by other community members (Gottert 2014).

However, once African adolescent males have undergone traditional circumcision even at the age of sixteen, they are regarded as men and it is deemed acceptable for them to drink alcohol and have multiple sexual partners (Jewkes and Morrell 2017; Ntombana 2011). Bernstein et al. (2012) argued that since they have been granted their cultural rights or "izimfanelo" in the isiXhosa language, very often they are left unsupervised by their parents, have access to pornography and are likely to engage in aggressive sexual behaviour. In a study conducted in Swaziland, females who were in cohabitation and involved with traditionally circumcised males, showed evidence of physical abuse such as bruises as a result of being beaten with weapons, held at gun-point and being chased out of the shared- university residence (Brear and Bessarab 2012). Thus, Connell (2005) argued that the configuration of gender practice (for example, legitimate of patriarchy, drug and sexual abuse) by male youth is socially constructed. Foucauldian post-structuralism and postmodernism approaches also agree that masculinity is a discursive construction and sexual coercion of women, instigation of violence and involvement in criminal behaviour, which is largely learnt and influences men to dominate (Johansson 2016).

In contrast, Naidu and Khumalo (2016) found that at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, traditionally circumcised male students equated the sexual pleasure that they derived condom uses within monogamous relationships with how they felt before initiation. The reason for such socially acceptable behaviours have been found to be reinforced by the transmission of cultural knowledge and skills, which forms part the sex-education received from scrupulous mentors while at the initiation schools (World Health Organization 2009). During guidance, sexual reserve or positive sexual health is emphasized while the inappropriateness of promiscuity after reintegration into society is discouraged (Kheswa et al. 2014). Similarly, in Matatiele, Eastern Cape, South Africa, Zulu (2016) found that among the Hlubi people, the majority of the traditionally cir-

cumcised males had advanced to tertiary institutions, have families and still cherish the moral precepts with which they were raised. Drawing from self-efficacy, a construct by Bandura (2012) who pioneered the Social Cognitive Theory, one may attribute their competences in achieving educational goals to authoritative parents (Baumrind 2013; Ratelle et al. 2013), their sense of purpose, personal growth (Nell 2014) and mastery of the environment (Van Zyl and Rothman 2012). Frankl (1992) in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, states that individuals who have self-efficacy tend to have positive self-esteem, democratic parental attitudes, optimism and conscientiousness as opposed to neuroticism, languishing and aggression.

Previous studies attempted to address multiple forms of challenges faced by tertiary students such as alcohol and drug abuse (Bernstein and Chemaly 2016; Kheswa and Hoho 2017), HIV/AIDS transmission (Pillay and Wassenaar 2017), homophobia (Milani 2013) and sexual violence against women (de Villiers 2016; Gordon and Collins 2013). However, there is paucity of research on cultural practices and drug abuse amongst male students at the Training Technical Vocational Educational and Training Colleges, in the Eastern Cape. TVET Colleges in South Africa are institutions that provide education and training to individuals who attain at least Grade 10 educational qualification to pursue career-focused education and training such as technical courses or business studies (Maharasa 2013).

Research Questions

Against this background, this research intends to answer the following questions:

- (i) How does culture influence anti-social behaviour among male students in colleges?
- (ii) What are the effects of substance abuse on the academic performance of male college students?

Theoretical Framework

Gender Role Strain Theory

Gender Role Strain theory by Brody and Agnew (1997) guides this study and it is based on the idea that male patriarchal attitudes are influ-

enced by cultural norms. By culture, Jalilian et al. (2015) refer to values, norms, beliefs and traditions shared within a particular society that may be characterized by risk-taking behaviour especially among college students. Graves et al. (2017), state that socialization within a particular society may reinforce such cultural principles in most cases, by adaptation to learnt attitudes and beliefs of their role models and/or peers. The influence of identification with mostly patriarchal attitude adopted by college male students may be that:

- ◆ Males should believe that risk taking is an expression of hegemonic masculinity and as a result they may have casual sexual relationships and not practice safe sex;
- ◆ Males should indulge in alcohol use and violate the right of their partners;
- ◆ Condom use is not regarded as obligatory and partner's opinions are ignored (Dumbili and Williams 2017; Notole and Kheswa 2017).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

The research design is an overall plan that forms the basis for the selection of participants, data collection and analysis (Welman et al. 2015) and entails a detailed plan, according to which research is undertaken as determined by the research problem and research questions (Babbie 2015). In this study, a descriptive, contextual qualitative approach was employed in a focus group interview comprising ten isiXhosa-speaking traditionally circumcised males (aged, 18-26 years) at one TVET College in Alice, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The use of the chosen research design was essential in discussing the subjective realities of the participants' cultural practices, which help produce knowledge that could specifically be utilized in bringing about change. Punch (2013) contends that contextual research aims at obtaining a deeper understanding of the participants as it comprises exploration of their relationship with their social physical, geographical, cultural and historical or aesthetic setting.

Sampling and Sample

Sampling refers to comprehensive strategies for coming up with a sample, which shows the

type of sample used, the list of units from which the sample is chosen, the number of units required and the specific method of choosing them (Marlow and Boone 2011). To meet the objectives of this study, non-probability, purposive sampling was used. According to Welman et al. (2015), purposive sampling is a procedure in which the researcher chooses participants according to the same characteristics and experiences shared about a specific topic of interest. For the selection of the ten participants, the researchers cooperated with the designated Head of Department, to identify male students with disciplinary cases ranging from drug use and rape to criminal charges.

Trustworthiness

To pursue trustworthiness, four criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba were followed, namely, credibility, confirmability dependability and transferability. Credibility strives for objectivity (de Vos et al. 2011) hence, the researchers' sample was purposive. In this regard, Houghton et al. (2013) advised the researchers not to show bias by making their research findings to suit their objectives. To achieve confirmability, the researchers ensured that the responses given by the respondents were reported in detail. Furthermore, to maintain dependability, the results of the research should strive for consistency even if they could be repeated (Houghton et al. 2013). By transferability, Finfgeld-Connett (2010) suggested that the researchers relate the results of research in one situation to other similar situations. To achieve this, the researchers matched the research findings to those reported in previous studies.

Ethical Consideration

To safeguard the human dignity of the participants, the college principal gave consent through writing a letter authorizing the researchers to explore the effects of cultural practices and drug abuse on the male students enrolled at one TVET South African Campus. The participants were assured of anonymity, confidentiality and they were asked to use pseudonyms (not their real names) during the interview as suggested by Babbie (2015). It is important to note that after the HOD provided a list of male students involved in

drug abuse, he did not take part in identifying the participants. Acknowledging the sensitivity of the topic, researchers conducted the interview in one of the offices designated by the college principal and none of the lecturers or other students was aware of the participation of the respondents.

The participants also gave their informed consent to be tape recorded during the interview. Interestingly, this research was conducted on the afternoon of 16 September 2018, while other students had extra-curricular activities. All respondents participated voluntarily and none of them withdrew at any point during the research study. After the focus group interview, which lasted for approximately one hour, two of the three researchers, a professional counsellor and a registered social worker, debriefed all ten participants to minimize psychological harm. As suggested by Johnson-Russell and Bailey (2010), the reason for debriefing participants is to guarantee that they do not experience regrets.

FINDINGS

After applying axial and open coding to analyze data, this study identified seven themes. Open coding refers to what is generally accepted as the first level of coding (descriptive level), the conceptualization and categorization of data (Babbie 2015). Text chunks relate to the concepts, which are given labels and grouped into categories (de Vos et al. 2011). The researchers used individual, in-depth interviews, which were tape-recorded, transcribed and interpreted. As the interviews were conducted in IsiXhosa to achieve the objectives of the study and to identify the suitable themes, the transcripts were translated into English. Axial coding involves specifying a category (phenomenon) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it. The context in which it is embedded; the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled, managed, carried out and the consequences of those strategies. The aim of axial coding is to integrate codes around the axes of central categories (Creswell and Zhang 2009).

Lack of Security on Campus

The first theme relates to lack of security on campus. When asked to explain why they use drugs, four of the participants mentioned the

amount of freedom they had on campus, as the security officers are not diligent searching their bags. Below are some of the extracts;

“The security is not tight in our dormitories, even our friends from the villages organize girls and they would spend the whole weekend with us, having booze.” [Sbu, aged 20]

“The majority of the guys here push life by selling drugs and that is how I got hooked.” [Zweli, aged 18]

“There is always entertainment in Alice. If it is not here on campus, we visit Fort Hare University or go to Disco Tavern to get guys who will buy us tik from the foreigners and come back to our rooms.” [Lindani, aged 22]

Patriarchal Attitudes

It is clear that the participants have been influenced by culture, which has led them to lack sexual values. For example, when asked to explain how they preserve the moral teachings learned from their community, patriarchal attitudes emerged from three participants.

“Here at the Lovedale, to be respected by your peers, you should be violent and smoke dagga so that it may be easy for you to win girls. Dagga gives me power to approach any girl that I lust after.” [Sbu, aged 20]

“You must be tough as a man and slap a girl when she refuses to sleep with you especially if you have spent for her- buying her wines and food.” [Melusi, aged 24]

“We can't be controlled by women. Even in circumcision school, I was encouraged to be aggressive and make sure that I overpower girls when they suggest condoms during sex.” [Mzo, aged 21]

Violent Behaviour

The participants were further asked to explain how they behave once they are under the influence of drugs. With no feelings of remorse, three of the participants boldly mentioned sexually coercing girls and violating the rights of others.

“I lose control when I am drunk and end up forcing my girlfriend to have sex with me.” [Aya, aged 21]

“I get courage to attack a fellow student that I see with my girlfriend when I have smoked dagga.” [Mandla, aged 17]

“Once we are under the influence of drugs, we cause chaos in the dormitories and we ensure that we take girls by force.” [Melusi, aged, 24]

Imprisonment

With respect to the question: *“What would be the ultimate end or consequences of violating the rights of others?”* Two of the participants in the focus group interview, Aya and Mzo, revealed that they had served their sentences for robbery and rape.

They highlighted that life in prison was harsh and that there were no educational programmes to rehabilitate them. These are their responses:

“Jail becomes the end result of the bad behaviour especially if you have raped a girl who knows her rights.” [Aya]

Mzo, with a hoarse voice, stated: *“I am fully aware that it is against the law to beat a girl or fight especially when high on drugs. But how do you expect me to respect women, when my own father abuses women?”*

Positive Role Models

Contrary to the bleak responses from the participants, it was clear that there are male students who attribute their socially acceptable behaviour to their supportive parents and constructive peers. They emphasized that their parents instilled self-discipline and manners. For example, Veli (aged, 16) who was a newly graduated initiate, mentioned that despite being exposed to a dysfunctional environment characterized by lack of commitment from his fellow students, his internal locus of control stemmed from his parents and teachings received from the mountain *“entabeni”*, initiation school. He was quoted as follows *“My father always ensures that I visit home every fortnight and I go to church.”*

On one hand, Khehla, aged 19 said *“Being surrounded by older brothers here at the college who guide me, helped me a lot to refrain from using drugs because I have been losing concentration and nearly dropped out.”*

Educational Aspirations

Asking them about their future goals and the significance of advancing their studies elicited

mixed responses. There were those who expressed optimism although drug abuse hinder them from getting good grades. Melusi stated that he needed to quit smoking dagga because he had been failing repeatedly and changing courses while Lindani expressed the following: *“The majority of the guys who started with me, 3 years ago, are employed and have qualified as artisans because they never joined gangs nor conformed to the sub-culture of drinking alcohol and smoking weed.”*

Surprisingly, Zweli agreed that he would like to see himself complete his Engineering course, N4 provided he stopped being influenced by friends. His stepmother supports him financially. Furthermore, Vusi, aged 19, who had been quiet for almost the entire discussion, mentioned that they had the potential to succeed, but their own lack of respect for their lecturers undermines them.

He said: *“Guys, we should change from the way we behave when we are drunk and stop harassing even our female lecturers because we have been to traditional school. To be honest, we disgrace our culture by not being the men we have been encouraged to become by our parents.”*

Psychological Services

This final theme illustrated the need for psychological services on campus for male students who abuse drugs. When the participants were asked to suggest the best possible way to restore their dignity and prevent them from gender-based violence, they responded as follows; *“There is no even one single social worker or nurse on campus to assist us when we are faced with substance abuse.”* [Lindani]

“There should be at least psychologists to help us deal with issues that affect our studies.” [Mandla]

DISCUSSION

This research has highlighted a multiplicity of sources of socially unacceptable behaviour of male students rooted in a context of culture, gender inequality and poverty. For example, it is clear that when parents or caregivers provide inadequate emotional and financial support, male youth may be vulnerable to drug-dealers, who, manipulate them to lose focus on their studies and adopt anti-social behaviour such as violence. This

brings to mind Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, which posits that insecure attachment to primary caregivers may push children to the periphery where they seek a safety net in the wrong places as a means to cover their emotional emptiness.

Because their experiences emerge from micro-dynamics of survival in a society characterized by male dominance, they feel empowered by being known as having multiple sexual partners, who should remain subservient. This is reflected in their bullying their girlfriends and forcing those they meet in the shebeens to have sex with them. From this finding, it is clear that they do not practice safe sex and the questions are; whether they know their HIV status and why traditional male circumcision is touted as a barrier against HIV infection.

Confirming these findings, Chanda et al. (2014) found that a disproportionate number of male youth at one college in Lusaka, Zambia, were reported to have contracted sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis, chlamydia as well as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). This is because they assumed that traditional male circumcision validated their sexual prowess and prevented infection, thus, they sexually coerced their female partners and did not use condoms.

Based on this finding, there is a need for psycho-educational programmes for male youths at the colleges because they lack sex-education and they are most likely to rob themselves of a good future because they make ill-informed decisions around sexuality based on the learned behaviour from their role models who traditionally circumcised them (Zulu 2016).

There is a strong confirmation that an environment lacking in positive role models may be a fertile ground for lawlessness, murder and emotional abuse. No wonder Mzo lacked remorse for beating his girlfriend(s) because he claimed he witnessed his own father abusing women. Because rape is forbidden in South Africa, Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (South Africa 2007), makes it a criminal offence and a violation of human rights. It could therefore be speculated that the majority of male students who have such patriarchal tendencies are likely to be arrested should their victims report them. Furthermore, with so many prisoners becoming more dangerous

owing to overcrowding in prisons and gang-fights (Du Preez et al. 2015; Moore and Mokhele 2017), the crime rate will continue to escalate because rehabilitation programmes are inadequate. This is the result of a shortage of qualified psychologists and social workers at correctional centres (Bezuidenhout and Booyens 2018; du Plessis and Lombard 2018).

Bandura's (2012) social learning theory attests to this behaviour because the effects of modeling in a culturally-embedded environment instill patriarchy. The reason for their bravery in violating the rights of others contradicts the way they have been groomed. They do not demonstrate maturity and responsibility in the society. It became evident that the influence of alcohol and drugs impairs their judgement as they attack girls and vandalize the dormitories. However, this would have been prevented had the college hired trained security officers who patrol both gates and had management had rules and a policy prohibiting drugs and alcohol on the college premises. Though during the interview there was no mention of the murder cases reported on campus during social gatherings especially at night, there is a possibility that these may have occurred since the participants admitted to going to Alice town and the University of Fort Hare to entertain themselves and not being searched on their return to the college.

Finally, regarding their educational aspirations, participants who mentioned their parents and fellow constructive peers as sources of motivation, appeared much more focused and demonstrated positive self-esteem, need for achievement and prosocial behaviour as compared to those who kept on failing courses because of disrespect towards their lecturers. Finally, the participants mentioned the need for the government to provide their college with professional services from social workers, nurses and/or psychologists because drug use is rife on campus.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored how cultural practices and drug abuse among male students at the college pose a risk to their health. It is a reality that majority of male students living in residences take advantage of fellow students especially when they have drunk alcohol exorbitantly. Owing to lack of

security systems and monitoring by wardens, intimate partner violence and influx of drugs in the dormitories aggravate sexually assaults and emotional abuse of the female students. There is a possibility that male students might contract STIs and HIV as research shows that teachings from unscrupulous mentors at the mountain school “*ulwaluko or lebollo*” tend to discourage sexual health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the objectives of this research have been met, there are limitations. Firstly, the study involved a small number of participants who shared the same cultural background. To overcome the high incidence of criminal behaviour at the colleges, there should be stricter security and programmes aimed at alleviating gender-based violence because of an influx of drugs. For future research, this study recommends a quantitative study, which will comprise both genders to give their perceptions and attitudes towards sexual assaults on campus.

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