



FACT SHEET: Public Health Implications of Harmful Consumption of Illicit Alcohol in Zambia

Key Findings and Recommendation

Background

Harmful use of alcohol is one of the four modifiable behavioural risk factors of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) besides tobacco use, physical inactivity, and an unhealthy diet (WHO, 2023). While 21.7% of Zambian adults were reported to be current alcohol drinkers in 2017, the true extent of illicit alcohol consumption remains unknown due to limited research and underreporting in this illegal market. This research sought to address this knowledge gap by outlining the public health impacts of harmful illicit alcohol consumption in Zambia.

Objective

The aim of this study was to determine the public health impacts of harmful consumption of illicit alcohol in Zambia.

Methodology

This was a cross-sectional Mixed-Methods Research (MMR) design including quantitative and qualitative methods. The study was conducted in three urban cities in Zambia including Livingstone, Lusaka, and Ndola. Illicit alcohol was defined as all the alcoholic beverages -- distilled or fermented -- that exist outside legal framework in Zambia. Using structured questionnaires and biochemical methods, the types, quantities, and different alcoholic contents (ABV%) of both illicit and licit alcohol consumed in selected urban settings in Zambia were examined. Public health risk implications based on factors such as hygiene and sanitation in production and retail of illicit alcohol consumed were also considered. Lastly, the at-risk population of illicit alcohol consumption and the factors contributing to this were investigated using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Highlights:

Prevalence:

- 71% of patrons consumed illicit alcohol within the past week.

Demographics:

- Patrons: Mostly self-employed males aged 18-44 with high school education.
- Producers: Primarily divorced/separated women with primary school education.

Health Consequences:

- 72% initiated alcohol consumption before age 19.
- 19% visited the hospital due to a drinking incident.
- Over 53% failed to function normally due to drinking.

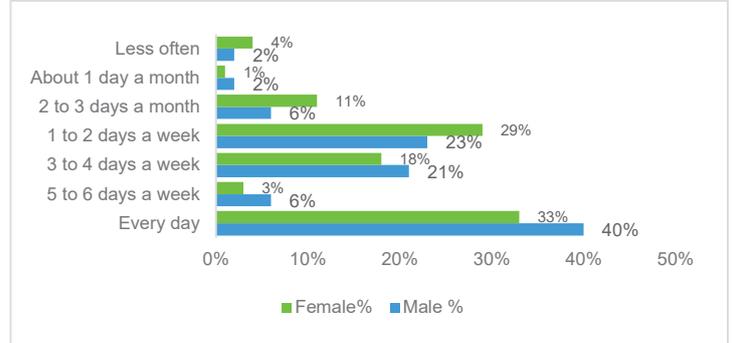


Figure 1 Frequency of illicit alcohol consumption

Production:

- 72% of spirit distillers produce 20-100 liters/day (600-3000 liters/month).
- 68% of Lusaka producers lack access to toilets.
- 63% of Lusaka producers lack access to water supply.

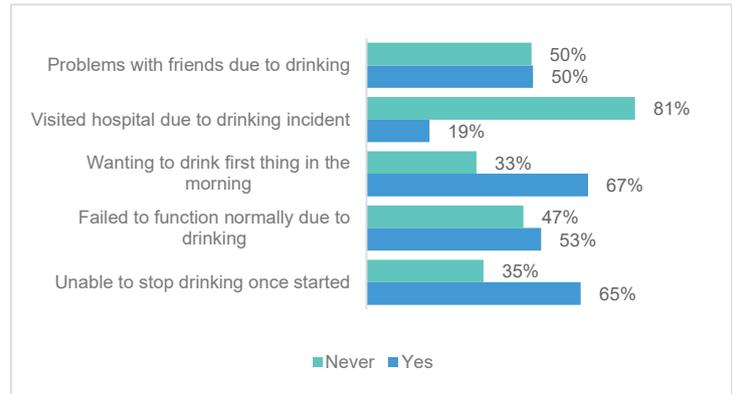


Figure 2 Health and social consequences of illicit alcohol consumption

Predictors of illicit alcohol use:

- Male sex
- Non-government employment
- Early age of alcohol initiation
- Frequent alcohol consumption
- Hazardous alcohol drinking patterns

Conclusion & Recommendations

Illicit alcohol consumption is high in Zambia, especially among self-employed males aged 18-44 with high school education and has serious health and social consequences. We recommend implementing policies to: tackle low-cost, high ABV illicit spirits, close the gap in price between illicit and licit alcohol, promote support to female entrepreneurs to move into compliant/licit industries or the formal sector, and targeted interventions to reduce illicit alcohol consumption among at-risk populations.