

# **‘Drink Responsibly’, Die Irresponsibly? The Menace of Inadequate Government Policies to Regulate Alcohol Misuse in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

Alcohol consumption is a common practice in both rural and urban societies in Nigeria. An estimate of about two billion people worldwide consumes alcohol with one-third of these consumers likely to suffer alcohol-related disorder. In 2000, alcohol-related ailments, accidents, violence and suicide led to 1.8 million deaths worldwide while in 2002, it was estimated to have caused 2.3 million premature deaths. In sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria is one of the most affected by alcohol-related deaths and morbidities due in part, to lack of comprehensive government policies and unrestricted marketing and promotions that have normalised alcohol misuse and encouraged new norms of alcohol consumption among youths. Annually, Nigeria loses many lives through road traffic accidents, and one of the causal factors is alcohol misuse. In light of the above, the paper theoretically explores the changing pattern of alcohol consumption in Nigeria with its attendant consequences, reveals the huge problems posed by alcohol misuse due to non-intensive warning message and unrestricted advertising. It concludes that urgent anti-alcohol misuse policy and campaign that will deter the rising misuse should commence with effective information dissemination through the design of posters and warning labels that have source, intensity and appear on all alcohol beverages.

**KEY WORDS:** Alcohol-related disorder, Nigeria, Alcohol misuse, Marketing, Government policy, Warning message

## 1. Introduction

Alcohol consumption has been present in all human societies for more than ten thousand years (Smart, 2007) but its excess consumption has not been without any consequence. In the Biblical Old Testament, alcohol abuse was recorded to have attracted physical, psychological, social, religious and economic effects (Seller, 1985: 69) while in the same vein attracted severe punitive measures in the New Testament (Seller, 1987). An estimate of two billion people throughout the globe consumes alcohol and one-third of these consumers according to WHO (2004) are likely to suffer alcohol-related disorder because alcohol is one of the major determinants of morbidity and mortality (Girish, Kavita, Guruaj & Benegal, 2010).

In 2000, alcohol-related ailments, accidents, violence and suicide led to 1.8 million deaths round the world (WHO, 2002) while in 2002, it was estimated to have caused 2.3million premature deaths globally and in addition accounted for 4.4 per cent of global illnesses (WHO, 2008). In the same vein, it accounted for over 3.7 per cent of global annual mortality and 4.6 per cent of disability in 2004 (Rehm *et al.*, 2009). Alcohol is no ordinary commodity but a drug (Gureje *et al.*, 2007) that can be depended upon. It is the “only major dependence-producing psychoactive substance causing substantial harm to health, and globally it is the most often used psychoactive substance” (Anderson, Chisholm & Fuhr, 2009: 2243).

The consequences of misuse are severe and therefore, the above figure can be considered a gross under-representation of global cost of alcohol use and misuse. This in part is because many alcohol-related problems are not recorded in some low income countries due to cultural constraints. On the other hand, because alcohol-related problems have economic, health and social costs on the users directly, while at the same time have social, psychological and economic second-hand effects on non-users (Rehm, *et al.*, 2004), of which some of the effects may be unrecorded especially in developing countries. For example, alcohol abuse among parents has been linked to poor academic performance of children (Klingermann & Gmel, 2001). Alcohol abuse has both short and long term effects. It is replete in the literature that increase in alcohol consumption is directly proportional to an increased harm, injuries and death of those who depend on the psychoactive drug (Anderson *et al.*, 2009). Presently, diseases that are traceable to alcohol consumption according to Lopez *et al.* (2006) are on the increase and the most affected are the low income countries. Though moderate alcohol use may not be bad in itself, but the negative impact especially when misused outweighs the benefits.

Alcohol use among pregnant women has been linked to birth defect (WHO, 2004). It is one of the causal factors of cancer, cardiovascular disease, liver cirrhosis, depression, crime, homicide, suicide, HIV/AIDS through risky sexual behaviours, failure to fulfil role obligation and absenteeism from school or work (Rehm *et al.*, 2006; Fisher *et al.*, 2007; Gureje *et al.*, 2007; Kalichman *et al.*, 2007; Lonroth *et al.*, 2008; Roche *et al.*, 2008; WHO, 2004).

In light of the foregoing, many governments and non-governmental organizations are making concerted efforts to reduce, if not eradicate alcohol misuse and its related consequences worldwide by formulating policies and providing useful and intensive information so that people can beware of the dangers therein in excess consumption. Various ways this has been done include setting the standard measurement for the definition of responsible drinks, effective public health policy through legislation that mandates alcohol products to carry warning messages (Kalsher, Clarke & Wogalter, 1993), making sure alcohol products bear the alcohol by volume (ABV) content on the labels, designing posters to complement textual warnings (Fenaughty & MacKinnon, 1993), using more than one message and rotating warning messages periodically (Argo & Main, 2004) so as to ensure efficacy of the information provided etc. In line with this, most governments ensure that the source of the warning messages is known by the consumers and also use catchy headings to attract attention. For example, in USA, the warning has a heading that reads: GOVERNMENT WARNING:... While that of Arizona (a state in USA) has its own heading as WARNING... (Fenaughty & MacKinnon, 1993). In Nigeria, the seemingly warning message is a two-word phrase that reads *Drink Responsibly*. The source of this

message is unknown, to whom it is meant ambiguous and it does not appear on products labels. Where it appears on billboards advertisement, the placement is always inconspicuous and the intensity or relevance is left to posterity to judge.

From the foregoing, this paper explores the changing pattern of alcohol consumption in Nigeria that is traceable to the non-regulation of consumption with its attendant consequences, examines the huge problems posed by alcohol misuse in Nigeria and argues that there is no warning message in Nigeria to avert the dangers of misuse because the existing message has no basis and source, no intensity and does not appear on product labels or sells point. It also documents that the policy makers are not serious to reduce alcohol- related problems in Nigeria because there is no definition or implementation of *standard drinks* but rather are hypocritical. It concludes that as a matter of urgency, anti-alcohol campaign should commence by defining *responsible drink* and commence effective information dissemination through the design and use of posters and warning labels that have source, intensity and appear on all alcohol beverages and sales points. The article is divided into four sections. The first section is the introduction, the second deals with the changing pattern of alcohol consumptions which is followed by the examination of 'drink responsibly' as a warning message and then the conclusion.

## **2. Changing Pattern of Alcohol Consumption and its Consequences in Nigeria**

Wine, beer, cider, mead, spirit and other fermented alcoholic beverages have been consumed in nearly all human societies for thousands of years. In traditional African society, these and other alcoholic beverages such as palm wine, "burukutu", non-industrial beer, etc. were consumed for pleasure soon after they were brewed, distilled or tapped locally (Odejide *et al.*, 1987; Odejide and Odejide, 1999; Odejide, 2006). They were used to entertain guest, used for settling disputes, served as a kernel for religious rituals and a requirement for a marriage rites to be consummated.

Though there were no written rules prohibiting females and adolescents from drinking in the traditional Nigerian society (Odejide, 2006), alcohol consumption was a central characteristic of male adults, and plays a major role in socio-economic, political and religious relationships as well as a conduit for social cohesion (Oshodin, 1995). These functions inter alia, encouraged its usage. In the modern day Nigeria, alcohol beverages produced and consumed include: pito, burukutu, which has 3-6 per cent alcohol content and often fermented from guinea-corn especially in the northern Nigeria. Others are native gin (spirit) locally called Ogogoro, Kai-Kai (Korieh, 2003), Akpuru-Achia, or Sapele water, distilled from palm wine through prolonged fermentation (Bennett *et al.*, 1998) and palm wine that is whitish in colour (tapped from oil palm tree or raffia palm) in the south (Obot, 2000). There also exists the local and industrial beer which is invariably the most popular (Jernigan & Obot, 2006) among the youths.

Production and consumption of these alcoholic beverages in the modern Nigeria is on the increase (Chikere and Mayowa, 2011) and the volume is highly unrecorded due to illegal and local productions (Jernigan & Obot, 2006), and also the paucity of data on the legal production. World Health Organization (2004) ranked Nigeria and two other countries in the sub-Saharan African among the thirty nations with highest per capita consumption level of alcohol worldwide. The 2009 report revealed no decline in consumption; the report shows that Nigeria consumed 10.57 litres per head of population (one of the highest in African) even higher than USA with 8.6 litres. This is in agreement with the findings of Gureje *et al.* (2007:7) that alcohol is the most commonly used drug and that 'heavy episodic drinking, rather than moderate drinking is common among users of alcohol in Nigeria'.

In the traditional Nigerian society, reasons for drinking varied depending on the community, but mainly for pleasure as earlier noted (see Odejide and Odejide, 1999), for elixir or healing. Some of these reasons still exist till date while others have emerged. The new drinking norms that have evolved

are: drinking competition among males and even females, where bar owners, breweries or distillers' representatives set out prize especially for the fastest drinker or the winner is judged based on the number of drinks s/he can take and hold without any sign of intoxication. The scenario produced precarious result lately yet nothing serious is being done by the policy makers. For example, a 28 year old man (named Azeez Mauideen) collapsed and died in a drinking competition in Lagos in February, 2012 (Bekkybabe, 2012). It was reported that he drank two bottles of brandy before his demise. Another new norm is that seen among Kegite club (a fraternity) whose members use palm wine as 'holy water'. At a glance through their Anthem, it will be so clear that alcohol abuse will be eminent because he who is teetotal is an infidel. The anthem reads: *'Imbibe, imbibe in majesty, Holy water is good for you, Holy water from Kegite tree that makes us happy everyday'* (Kegites Club International, 2008) and this *holy water* is palm wine. From the foregoing, it becomes more problematic to quantify the magnitude of problems likely to result from alcohol misuse in Nigeria because of these emergent norms.

In addition, many Nigerians who claim to be abstainers (due to religion) drink alcohol in deception. In the bid to cure ailments, many who seek traditional healing, drink local gin, beer or stout mixed with herbs (Oshodi & Aina, 2007; Arikpo, Eja & Enyi-Ido, 2010). Oluwadiya and Akinola (2012) in a study entitled: Taking alcohol in deception: an analysis of ethanol concentration of "paraga" an alcohol herbal mixture in Nigeria, discovered that this substance that has alcohol by volume (ABV) ranging from 1.2 to 20.84% is mostly sold in commercial motor parks or near the parks. This arguably suggests that drivers are the main target and may be responsible for the frequent road traffic accidents in Nigeria. It is no longer news that secret cult groups that have been terrorising many citadels of learning in Nigeria do not carry out their inhumane acts without first of all 'getting high' with alcohol. The female cult members abuse this substance so as to be courageous to carry out their nefarious act of raping boys. Replete in the literature is the fact that they abuse not just alcohol but other drugs (Dosunmu & Erhabor, 2008; Egbochuku, 2009).

In fact, among developing countries of the world, Nigeria is one of the most affected by alcohol-related deaths and morbidities (WHO, 2004). Room and Selin (2005) analysis of drinking problems in eight developing countries (Nigeria inclusive) by gender and guilt, in agreement with Gureje *et al.* (2007), ranked Nigerian men as having the rate of drinking that exceeded other countries studied. Among female drinkers, Nigeria ranked second with 8.9 per cent following Uganda with 10.7, but with same 'problems score rate' with men. This does not just mean that consumption between both genders is high, it denotes a corresponding high rate of alcohol-related problems among them even though males are likely to report alcohol related problem more than females (Gureje, *et al.*, 2007). The authors presented it this way: *'even on a base of current drinkers, women reported fewer problems than men from their own drinking in all samples except Nigeria, where the rates among drinkers were equal'* (Room & Selin, 2005:218). The result lends credence to the findings of Adelaka, Abiodun, Imoukhome-Obayan, Oni & Ogunermi (1993) that Nigerian women are no longer teetotalers (as they were in traditional society) and also in agreement with Uwaoma, Madukwe, Ugokwe-Ossai and Uhiara (2011) findings. This implies that Nigerian women are 'catching up' with their male counterparts in alcohol consumption, and supports a popular maxim among Nigerian women that 'anything a man can do, a woman can do it better'.

Annually in Nigeria, many lives are lost through road traffic accidents, and one of the causal factors is alcohol misuse (Aworemi, Adegoke and Olabode, 2010). WHO (2009) revealed that in 2006, Nigeria had 4679 fatal accidents. In 2007, the country recorded 8,477 traffic accidents and this led to 17, 794 injuries while 4673 died (WHO, 2009). The report revealed that Nigeria does not have any budgetary provision to curb the menace. It was also revealed that Nigeria ranked third out of the ten countries with highest deaths due to road accident. Though the poor road condition is a major contributor, but the fact remains that alcohol use and misuse have a fat share in the precarious condition because alcohol impairs the ability to be sober which is a prerequisite for driving and

tantamount to safe journey (Pratte, 1998; Bekibele *et al.*, 2007; Nzegwu *et al.*, 2011; Ohakwe *et al.*, 2011). Global Action on Harmful Drinking indicated that 10 to 15 per cent of these crashes are linked to alcohol misuse among drivers and this lend credence to Oluwadiya and Akinola (2012) findings on the sale of 'Paraga' (native alcohol mixture with up to 20% ABV) in commercial motor parks.

Many countries worldwide have many anti-alcohol laws and mechanism in order to reduce deaths and injuries, but Nigeria relies on 'drink responsibly', campaign that has no efficacy. Presently, the police do not have any effective equipment for conducting Random Breath Testing (RBT) to detect drink- driving and the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) is equally helpless. PEOPLES DAILY (2011) reported that the FRSC in its campaign was collaborating with the breweries to ensure 'responsible drinking for motorists'. This undeniably has produced little or no meaningful effect in controlling how much motorist drink because the breweries do not sell directly to the motorists on one hand, and there is no law that bars sales agents from selling to a legally qualified buyer no matter the quantity. Hence the sales agents run their businesses based on the profit they make, they will readily sell to whoever can pay for their products. Another point is the relativity of the word 'responsible drinking' because Nigeria does not define alcohol by volume limit (WHO, 2004). A glass of alcoholic beverages may be responsible drinking for a beginner but may not be for the matured drinker (PEOPLES DAILY, 2011).

There are other myriad consequences of alcohol misuse in Nigeria as summarised by Professor Balus and Rimfat:

*"Students who engage in substance abuse suffer from brain damage, liver damage, hypertension, excessive heartbeat, and chronic bleeding. Similarly, these students stand the risk of being wayward in their behaviour with resultant effects of increased rate of health hazards through sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as Gonorrhoea, ...AIDS"* (Bulus and Rimfat, 2001:116).

Other problems are partner's abuse or violence (Brisibe *et al.*, 2012), alcohol dependence (Olisah *et al.*, 2009), fighting or disturbance of public peace (Ibiwoye and Adeleke, 2011), flirting among female users (Uwaoma *et al.*, 2011), social stigma due to alcoholism, suicide (Anumonye, Omoniwa & Adaranijo, 1977) and child sexual abuse (Olley, 2008). Others include family disruption, work place problems (WHO Global Alcohol Database, 2004), occupational problems and mental illness (Obot, 1990).

In light of the foregoing, it would have been expected that a responsible government should promulgate intensive laws to curb this menace as it is done in many other countries like USA, UK, France etc. but the reverse seems the case in Nigeria where there is no serious campaign or action channelled toward alcohol misuse.

### **3. 'Drink responsibly' and alcohol misuse in Nigeria**

Prior to the commercialization of alcohol production and consumption in Africa, alcoholic beverages were consumed almost at the spot of production, and where trade in alcohol existed at all, it was on a very low scale (Willis, 2002). But this trend was altered in Western Africa following the influx of European slave traders and their 'trade spirit' in fifteen century (Olorunfemi, 1984). Despite the fact that alcohol beverages were not new to the inhabitants of the place now called Nigeria, the influence of the Western traders popularised the liquor sales and abuse due to the importation, sale and distribution of liquor or trade spirit (Olorunfemi, 1984; Olukoju, 1991). This trend was sustained during colonial era and beyond and led to the establishment of the first breweries (Nigerian Brewery limited now NB plc.) in Nigeria as far back as 1946 with its first brew in 1949 in Lagos (Oshodin, 1995; Obot, 2000). Presently, the number of functional breweries is over fifteen.

Through lack of will-power, corruption, inadequate or outright non-existence of intensive policy, Nigerian Government and agencies (past and present) have contributed to alcohol abuse in Nigeria by failing to properly regulate some of the activities of these alcohol producers and check the new norms of alcohol consumption. To determine 'responsible drink' in any country, *standard drink* has to be defined and enforced. In UK, standard value of unit of alcohol is 7.8grams and men and women's responsible drinks per week are 21 and 14 standard drinks respectively. In line with this, pregnant women or those who are likely to get pregnant are strongly advised not to drink at all (Jarvis, 2012). Responsible drink is consuming not more than 4units for men and 3units for women per day. In USA standard value of unit of alcohol is 14 grams or 17.7ml. Alcoholic containers carry alcohol by volume (ABV) on their labels and this helps the consumers to be informed appropriately on what responsible consumption means. In Nigeria, there is no definition of standard drinks; alcohol bottles and cans do not bear alcohol by volume content nor is there any limit set for judging responsible drink. Therefore, there is no basis for knowing responsible drink because it has not been defined or enforced by the government.

Studies have shown that for any warning message to have an impact, the source of that message, its intensity and credibility must be ensured (Andrews, 1995). In Nigeria, the source of the message that reads: *drink responsibly* is unknown to many people because it is never mentioned unlike what obtains in tobacco advertising that reads: 'The Federal Ministry of Health warns that smokers are liable to die young' or tobacco smoking is dangerous to health'. This is at variance with what obtains in other parts of the globe. In USA, the two warning messages have the heading that reads: 'GOVERNMENT WARNING': The Surgeon General.... The consumers are by this, informed that the Government has deemed it fit to let them know the implications of alcohol use and misuse.

Researches have shown that the placement of warning message at the front of product label, the use of coloured pictorials or posters (Fenaughty & MacKinnon, 1993; Loeber *et al.*, 2011) and the conspicuous arrangement of the texts enhance recall ability of the consumers (Barlow & Wogalter, 1991; Laughery *et al.*, 1993; Andrews, 1995). Hammond *et al.* (2004) reported that the use of pictorial warning labels has great impact because it creates fear or psychological effect on cigarette smokers. In Nigeria at present, only Guinness Extra Stout out of over 50 products carries the *drink responsibly* message on its bottles and this is very difficult to notice due to its inconspicuousness.

It is replete in the literature that warning messages that suggest specific severe outcome are more effective in deterring risky behaviour (Andrews, 1995). Beltramini (1988) findings show that cigarette warning with severe risk outcome such as cancer, heart disease, etc. are more believed than those that are advisory or suggestive such as 'quit smoking'. Such severe warning does not exist in Nigeria. Therefore, it becomes difficult to situate the impact of 'drink responsibly' on the campaign to reduce alcohol abuse which is on the rise (Chikere and Mayowa, 2011) among Nigerian youths attributable to the naivety of the seemingly warning message.

Warning labels have two main roles and they are: to deter unsafe behaviours among consumers and to encourage right behaviours as the target group utilizes the product (Wogalter, Kalsher & Racicot, 1993). 'Drink responsibly' does not in any way express any of these objectives and nothing meaningful is being done about it by the policy makers. Another problem with this 'drink responsibly' is the issue of measurement. There is no standardised measurement for alcohol both in content, container and size in Nigeria. Presently, there is no standard measure of unit of alcohol on bottles or cans as found in developed nations like UK, France and USA. Therefore, it becomes more problematic to situate the meaning of 'responsibly drink' because the standard for definition of responsible drink is not specified from the onset. Kalsher *et al.* (1993) noted that body weight determines Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) and this is difficult to determine in Nigeria because no information relating to such is available. In one of the major reviews of available literature, Isidore Obot described the situation this way:

*“A typical Nigerian beer is sold in 60-cl bottle. One popular beverage- Guinness Extra Stout –is sold in both this size and a bottle of half the size. Some brewers of regular beer have, at some point, experimented with the small bottle size with little success. Having been used to 60-cl unit of beer, most consumers responded negatively to this ‘innovation’. Traditional beverages are served in different types of containers,...The size of calabash used in selling burukutu ranges from 450 ml to about 3 l, while palm wine is often sold in the old beer bottles. Locally produced gin is sold in bottles but serving size is similar to the serving size of other liquors. Of course what is standard in one bar may be different from the standard size of another bar” (Obot, 2000:178).*

This scenario further makes it difficult to determine what responsible drinking is all about. For example, a person who drank five bottles of 60-cl Guinness Extra Stout (*with 5.1 per cent volume alcohol content*) may consider himself as a responsible drinker than the other who drank six bottles of the smaller size of the same product due to the number of the bottles drunk.

Another worrisome fact is that the country has over 250 languages and is bedevilled by high rate of illiteracy. Nigeria is one of the nine countries with the highest level of illiteracy in the world. Many people do not understand English except the local languages. With these facts at hand, it becomes extremely difficult to determine what *‘drink responsibly’* means to the illiterate consumers who do not understand English except the local language or dialect. With a keen perusal of the bottles and cans of these alcoholic products, one can easily decipher clearly that none but one bears the message- *drink responsibly* on the labels but without a translation of it to the local languages. One would assume that the regulatory bodies are not serious with the issues of alcohol misuse because of the revenue they derive from alcohol manufacturers through tax. Obot (2002:6) asserted that the two major brewers (NB Plc and Guinness Plc) often boast of their contributions to the economy, in particular, through the taxes they pay into government coffers and this goes with the saying: he who pays the piper calls the tune.

It is also believed that the use of posters is better than textual messages because the latter is more difficult to understand (Argo and Main, 2004). The two-word *drink responsibly* may not be efficacious to the educated consumers because it is textual and lacked readability (because of not being salient on billboards), believability and applicability in the context of warning message. Internationally, warning messages on labels and posters have been found to be one of the effective means of educating the consumers of alcohol (and other products) on the dangers therein (Fenaughty & MacKinnon, 1993; De Carlo, 1997; Argo & Main, 2004; Anderson, 2009). In 1989, the US government made it compulsory for all alcoholic beverages to bear the warning message on their labels (ALCOHOL HEALTHWATCH, 2003). The two warning messages that exist are: GOVERNMENT WARNING: According to *‘Surgeon General Women should not drink alcohol beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of baby defects’* and *‘Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery and may cause health problems’* (DE Carlo, 1997: 448; ALCOHOL HEALTHWATCH, 2003:8).

Though warning labels may not correspond to behavioural change in a short term, it has been discovered that severe, intensive and appropriate warning messages from a ‘trusted source’ (Andrews, 1995) have a long-term impact on consumers and a conduit for attitudinal change. This in part is because labels serve as a reminder of ‘already known hazards’ to current alcohol users (Kaskutas & Greenfield, 1992:12), and on other hand, a channel to encourage abstinence and discourage early initiation.

In Canada, it is legal for all liquor containers to bear the message that reads: *“drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause birth defects”* (ALCOHOL HEALTHWATCH, 2003:8). In December, 2000, Canada became the first country to adopt the rotational message on labels and Brazil followed suit in January, 2001 (Argo & Main, 2004). In 2007, the UK Government reached an agreement with

'alcohol industry' to express "on voluntary basis the alcohol content in terms of unit" (Farke, 2011). Presently, alcoholic beverages carry alcohol unit by volume and health warning such as: 'know your Limits', 'enjoy responsibly or drink responsibly' including the Chief Medical Officer's warning on pregnancy and subsequently, a website has been created ([www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)) to inform the populace on what they need to know about alcohol (Department of Health, 2008; Farke, 2011).

In Denmark since 1995, the Danish Brewers' Association voluntarily agreed to label alcohol containers with the unit of alcohol content while it became mandatory in France and Russia in 2007 for the warning messages to be included on labels of alcoholic beverages. In 2006, the German Brewers' Association created three logos to educate the populace on the danger of alcohol. The first bears the age limit, the second specifies that people should not drink and drive, while the third talks about responsible drinking (Farke, 2011).

In South Africa in 2002, the Health Ministry made attempt to see that alcoholic beverages bear health warning but this never came to fruition till 2007 and full implementation took effect in 2009 that required all alcoholic beverages to bear at least one out of the 'seven' warning messages (Parry, 2010); similar regulations exist in Zimbabwe. The list remains endless. Therefore, if countries like USA, UK, Germany, France, Russian, South Africa, etc. with high literacy level and standard medical facilities and services will set standard definition of responsible drink and implement intensive warning messages, Nigerian government has no reason whatsoever to remain adamant to the menace of the rising alcoholism due to non-intensive health policies and campaign.

In Nigeria, the amount of alcohol production and consumption has remained unrecorded. This in part is because the brewers do not give accurate information of the volume of production in order to avert tax. On the other hand, there are many local and illegal brewers and distillers who do not keep records of their activities nor know the volume of ethanol content on their final products (WHO, 2011). This makes it even more difficult to determine the rate of harm done to alcohol users because the knowledge of how much alcohol consumed is sine qua non for accurate evaluation of positive or negative impact of consumption (Smart, 2007).

Furthermore, alcohol is a commodity marketed with almost no restriction in the country. On a visit to motor parks in the morning, one will readily see drivers '*washing their mouths*' with either sachet spirit, the herbal alcohol mixture or bottles of beer so as to get ready for the day's journey. Alcohol marketing, advertising and promotions are on alarming rates in Nigeria. Almost all round the year, brewers and distillers engage in aggressive marketing and promotions (WHO, 2011). During this period, they paste promotional posters strategically and offer free drinks uncontrollably to 'whosoever' (minors inclusive) comes to redemption centres having crown cork(s) with the winning seal.

They also sponsor many events that youthfulness is always a criterion for entry of which some of the events are *Star Quest*, *Star Trek* and *Guilder Ultimate Search* etc. Foreign and local musicians are also sponsored to perform and promote their products (Obot and Ibanga 2002; Jernigan and Obot, 2006). In these events, entry is free and drinks are offered freely or at a very low price (Jernigan and Obot, 2006) to the youths who are the main target. Some of these events are held in government facilities like stadia, theatres and arcades. This makes the hue and cry about 'responsible drinking' hypocritical in part because Government and brewers know that alcohol is highly abused in these events, but are careless because of economic interest and therefore, leaving the malaise of alcohol abuse in the country on the increase. On the other hand, a subsidiary of government agency is busy giving awards to breweries for effective advertising.

Another related fact is that there is no means of identifying minors in the country due to the failed 'National ID Project' (Nwobu, 2011). Oshodin (1995:219) asserted that 'in Nigeria, it is possible to see a five-year-old child purchasing alcohol for his parents or other elders'. Presently,

minors don't just purchase it for adults; they now drink it with finesse in clubs, bars, and even use it to wash down meals in restaurants as well as gamble with it.

Available data from studies done in Nigeria linked alcohol initiation to familial influence (Adelekan, Abiodun, Imoukhhome-Obayan *et al.*, 1993; Olley, 2008); this may not be unconnected to the fact that alcohol is culturally regarded as a common commodity used for pleasure and a kernel for social relationships in many parts of the country (Odejide and Odejide, 1999; Odejide, 2006) but the consequences of misuse is not taken into account and the government is still slumbering.

Presently in Nigeria, there is no legal framework that mandates the producers to stipulate the unit of alcohol content on bottles/cans or to inscribe the seemingly warning message on product labels, nor is there law to ensure that bar owners and other sellers do not sell to minors or known alcoholics. The brewers rely more on self-regulation which has been discovered to be highly ineffective (Jones, Hall & Munro, 2008) in reducing alcoholism in different parts of the world. Therefore, as Anderson *et al.* (2009:2234) opined, 'if more stringent alcohol policies are not put in place, global alcohol-related harm is likely to continue to increase' of which Nigeria is a major contributor.

#### 4. Conclusion

For responsible drink to be adhered to, it must be defined and enforced appropriately. Therefore, the government should define it and set standard measurement for responsible drinks for men and women. Research findings have shown that the use of salient posters, pictorials and interchangeable messages on cigarette are effective in changing behaviour (Argo & Main, 2004; Hammond *et al.*, 2004; Borland *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, urgent steps should be taken to legislate on that so that alcohol labels in Nigeria can carry effective warning message (in local languages) on bottles and cans because labels are reliable channel of information that alcohol is not an ordinary product (Anderson *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, Kaskutas and Greenfield (1992) have argued that unidirectional strategy (one message) is not always effective. Therefore, as these brewers are found of innovating new Ads and promotional messages, they should be mandated to inscribe and rotate anti-alcohol warning messages on their products, rather than the perpetuation of the non-intensive and naive niche called *drink-responsibly*.

The textual message should be complemented by posters because it further extends the information on the text (Fenaughty & MacKinnon, 1993) and all sales points should conspicuously paste it around the environment. For this to work there should be proper legislation to ensure adherence by all. This message should include the source of the message like what obtains in America, Canada, South Africa and other parts of the world. Hence there is no effective legal mechanism of blood limit concentration or the random breath-test by the Federal Road Safety Commission and the Police, it becomes imperative that community-based programme and other policies aimed at checking drink-driving such as ban of sale of alcohol on parks should be adopted because similar project has led to the reduction in traffic accidents (Anderson, *et al.*, 2009). The government should immediately equip the police and other road agencies so as to randomly check drivers breathe at checkpoints rather than the collection of 20 Naira bribes they normally do. The government should as a matter of urgency implement the issuance of identity cards to all adult citizens so as to checkmate the sale of alcohol to minors because research findings have shown correlations between effective implementation of minimum purchasing age and reduced alcohol-related injuries and death.

The regulatory authority should directly increase the price of alcohol in the country. Evidence has shown that rise in price of different commodities affect consumption and alcohol may not be an exception (Anderson *et al.*, 2009). Wagenaar, Salois and Komor (2009) revealed that price affects heavy drinking while Pan, Fang and Malaga (2006:977) asserted that '*consumption of beer, wine, wine cooler and other beverages in China are responsive to income and price changes*'. In South Africa, Charles Parry and colleagues linked increase tax to have effects on alcohol consumption (Parry, Myers & Thiede, 2003). Therefore, gradual increase in alcohol price which is a step in the right direction will

definitely be effective in order to reduce the availability of alcohol and the burden of alcohol-related harm, because it is very effective in the long run (Gallet, 2007).

More so, the government should clamp down on all illegal brewers and distillers of alcoholic beverages such as ogogoro, burukutu etc. in the country because their activities encourage misuse and its consequences. This is because illegal alcohol is always cheaper, easy to access and drunk in high volume (they are not taxed), and on the other hand are produced in unhealthy environments (Anderson *et al.*, 2009; WHO, 2011). Alcohol advertising, marketing and promotion should be properly regulated in the country. This in part is because the free drinks the breweries offer encourage minors and the youths encourage misuse of alcohol uncontrollably. On the other hand they are targeted at the youth who are the future hope of the country. Lastly, the new norm of alcohol gambling should be fought against by arresting and prosecuting the perpetrators while their venues confiscated by the state so as to deter future occurrence. Until meaningful actions are taken, people will keep ‘drinking responsibly and dying irresponsibly’.

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