Belief Systems Justifying Consumption and Trade of Illicit Alcohol in Busia County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The abuse of alcohol globally is a major factor as a causation to both health and social challenges that individuals and communities face. The study aimed at identifying the reasons that support the trade and consumption of illicit brew (chang'aa) in Busia County in western Kenya. This study was guided by the Alcohol Expectancy Theory which explains how belief systems lead to degree of alcohol consumption behaviors. This study used qualitative non-probability sampling techniques to recruit chang'aa distributors, vendors, police officers, producers and consumers. 41 participants were selected using convenient and snowballing techniques. The criterion for selection was either one was a producer, distributor, vendor, consumer or police officers who had intricate knowledge of the illicit trade and allowed it to continue under their watch. Chang'aa addicts were identified in situ in chang'aa selling points using Alcohol Use Disorder Identification tool where a score of over 16 qualified one as to be selected. Focused group discussions were used to collect data. The recorded FGD were then transcribed, coded and analysis done using thematic and contextual analysis. The recurrent patterns were grouped into themes and compiled as the findings of the study. The results showed that the reasons promoting the trade and consumption of chang'aa were affordability, economic growth and livelihood sustenance, promotes humility and social equity, improves health outcomes, facilitates friendship formation, mental creativity and courage. The study recommends undertaking public health education on the dangers of illicit brews, developing mechanisms for monitoring trade and consumption of chang'aa effectively and develop alternative livelihood options for residents of Busia County.

Keywords: Illicit brew; Livelihood sustenance, Affordability; Belief systems; Alcohol trade and consumption

INTRODUCTION

The abuse of alcohol is a fundamental public health concern globally. In relation to this, the World Health Organization (WHO) has established that harmful consumption is a great factor to disease burden, injuries and mental health disorders (WHO 2024). Additionally, it contributes social problems like broken families, higher rates of divorce cases as well as playing a significant role in causing premature deaths. This can happen when intoxicated individuals get involved in road and machine accidents due to their indulgence with alcohol abuse (Chikritzhs & Livingston, 2021; WHO, 2024). Worldwide, many governments have engaged in serious anti-alcohol use campaigns which has increased the level of awareness of the grave outcomes of harmful alcohol consumption. Yet, despite these campaigns, alcohol consumption is on the rise almost in all the countries particularly in developing countries. The WHO and other researchers have become aware of the fact that the prevalence of economic challenges, cultural tolerance of alcohol, and where there is a scarcity of recreational avenues the chances of alcohol abuse is likely to increase (Burton et al., 2026; WHO, 2024)

From the African dimension, especially sub-Saharan Africa, the abuse of alcohol is a significant factor in the adverse outcomes defined by its role in development of health challenges, economic and social problems at the individual, micro, mezzo, and macro levels (Ekeke & John, 2023). There is a robust production, distribution, and trading in illicit alcohol in many African countries which happens through informal networks (Ekeke & John, 2023). This is despite the presence of legislation, policies and rules that are intended to control the production, distribution, and consumption of alcohol products in these countries (Okumu, 2025). While production of traditional brews has been a common feature of African cultural practices since time in memorial, these brews had a socio-religious functions beyond the intoxication of people.

The traditional brews had a function in religious ceremonies such as connecting the living to the living dead, cleansing purposes or enhancing traditional cultural practices like the way the Tiriki people in Kenya do with *busaa* when undertaking the *Ishikong'o* ceremony when during the seclusion of circumcised boys. Other functions of alcohol was to project cultural identity like Yvone Chaka Chaka did her song *Umqomboti* from South Africa, where it is shown to be used responsibly for recreation after a day's work (Hlangwani et al., 2020). In a nutshell, traditional brews played an active role in the social, cultural, religious and communal way of life (Sebeelo, 2021)

The sustainability of the trade in illicit alcohol in the East African region shows no sign of slowing down but increasing year in year out. Scholars in the three east African countries have observed that the illicit alcohol remain widespread in use because of accessibility, affordability and the fact that local communities have a very high acceptance of their local brews. Secondly, the fact that many livelihoods depend on the illicit alcohol trade means that the economic appeal of trade and use of these illicit alcohol drinks do not deter their consumption but encourage it the more (Adebiyi et al., 2024). Many common citizens do view these illicit alcohol drinks as viable alternatives that are affordable than when they use the approved commercially produced brands certified as safe by the government.

Within Kenya, the most commonly used illicit alcoholic drink is the *Chang'aa*. There are high restrictions on its use and it is practically illegal to engage in its production, distribution, and sale. Its use is heavily targeted as costly to individuals in terms of health campaigns where there have been serious cases of people losing their lives, eye sights and suffering serious organ problems, but according to NACADA, its use is escalating in the country. Reports show that *Chang'aa* is the abused alcoholic drink in the Kenya government interventions particularly in the western Kenya region where Busia County falls under (NACADA, 2023). There is a serious disparity between the legal sanctions that the government tries to enforce to eliminate trade in *Chang'aa,* with the ever increasing usage of the illicit brew and trade as well as raising awareness on the health dangers related to its use. The country is still witnessing annual increases in the proportionate of the country's total population consuming the brew (Kamenderi et al., 2019; NACADA, 2023)

This study was conducted in Busia town due to its unique position as a cross-border town. According to Busia County government, the county has a thriving informal economy and with well-established trade networks between different counties and Uganda (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). What this study observes is that despite the increased awareness of the health risks of consuming *Chang'aa,* the people of Busia County are persistent in their consumption of the drink. Anecdotal evidence shows that Busia is a main producer of *Chang'aa* alongside Kakamega County which are sold in other parts of the country including Nairobi. In as much as there are legal sanctions on the consumption, production, and trading in the illicit brew, together with the health awareness messages disseminated to the public informing them of its risks, remains clear that there is a need to understand the underlying reasoning, perceptions, opinions, and attitudes that are used by the residents of Busia County to justify the continued consumption of *Chang'aa* if culturally responsive interventions are to formulated and implemented to contain the problem.

There are statutory provisions that seek to bar the trade in *Chang'aa* by targeting the production and distribution of the brew through the operationalization of Alcoholic Drinks Control Act, 2010. The consumption of *Chang'aa* in a technical sense is not illegal, but the sensitization campaigns warning the public about the health risks of the brew is intended to stop demand of the drink through campaigns initiated by NACADA. Historically, *Chang'aa* production has featured prominently among the residents of the county of the economic benefit, and with production continuously producing the drink, it means it is a respond to a demand that is present in Busia County. The contradictory position of communities demonstrating awareness of the health implications, legal sanctions and adverse social effects of consuming and trading in the illicit brew, they still exploit its economic, social and recreational value which only continues to propagate its use and trade

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by the Alcohol Expectancy Theory (AET) that was formulated by M.S Goldman, S. A.

Brown, B. A. Christiansen in their treatise *"Expectancy theory: Thinking about drinking"* (M. Goldman et al., 1987) They further refined their ideas in gelling the AET theory later in 1999 (M. S. Goldman et al., 1987, 1999). These scholars posited that the function of belief systems that an individual hold defines the extent of their indulgence with its consumption. What many studies do observe is that the alcohol dependency increases when individuals associate the perceived benefits of alcohol consumption as outweighing the risks involved, otherwise they will disengage from alcohol consumption ('Health Risks and Benefits of Alcohol Consumption', 2000; Ringborg, 1998; Stockwell et al., 2016). These positive beliefs in the outcomes of alcohol consumption may encourage avoidance of adopting health behaviors that lead to reduction of their susceptibility to bio-physio-social dangers associated with alcohol chronic alcohol dependence.

The use of the theory in guiding the study was justified by the fact that it connects how individuals' behaviors are shaped by what they hold as valid and true, concerning how alcohol provides beneficial outcomes in the long term (Magri et al., 2025), leads to alcohol dependency, affecting their mental and physical health wellbeing (CDC, 2025; Ringborg, 1998). It helped understand the contradiction between prolonged anti-*Chang'aa* health campaigns and legal sanctions and restrictions aimed at curtailing its use and yet witnesses a continued increase in its production, distribution, and consumption in the country over the recent years. The theory relates the perceived benefits to continued assumption that helps cement beliefs to outcomes and circumventing health warnings and campaigns informing the general public of harmful social, health and psychological use of *Chang'aa* in Busia County as well as in other parts of Kenya that witness sustained consumption of the illicit brew.

Many researchers worldwide have concluded that alcohol dependence is not based on physiological factors alone but addiction is also constructed on psycho-social belief systems that operate in an individual's life. The AET gives this study the theoretical lenses to connect how a person uses alcohol for social purposes, business pursuits, economic and livelihood outcome, as a stress reliever and enhanced social interactions (Brown & Jones, 2022). These helps explain why the related positive outcomes as believed by individuals may actually mask the dangers the consumers, producers and distributors may be facing in terms of health and legal consequences of their engagements in with *Chang'aa.*

Researchers have established that there is a high correlation between the belief that alcohol accrues benefits to the networks of producers, distributors, and consumers. Those who are consumers and have high value for its perceived positive outcomes in terms of recreation, coping mechanism to stress, and emotional relief have a higher propensity to engage in harmful alcohol consumption despite being aware of the grave dangers posed on their health and mental wellbeing by alcohol (Stamates et al., 2024). It is important to note that social learning processes of observing and experiential learning have a significant role in the way potential users are encouraged to take up the behavior of alcohol consumption as beneficial, while other observe the benefits accruing to the producers and distributors and pick up the trade.

On the African continent, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, alcohol consumption constitutes a major function over and above the recreation purposes (Mager, 2010; Willis, 2002). In many of the countries like South Africa, Cameroun, Kenya, and Tanzania, research findings have demonstrated that traditional or informal alcoholic drinks have serious social functions in ceremonies such as funerals, weddings, circumcision rites and religious functions (Ekeke & John, 2023; Muzingili et al., 2025; Subbo, 1999). Furthermore, it has importance in enhancing social cohesion, conflict resolution and for livelihoods. Economic challenges further sideline the urban poor and rural folks from consuming mainstream commercially produced alcoholic beverages which alienates more people further from consuming safe alcoholic beverages that are approved by the governments (Gitatui et al., 2019). Anecdotal evidence from music shows the value of alcohol in the African social context such as for recreation, relaxation, and social interactions, as depicted in Nonini's's song *Furahiday* and Yvone Chaka Chaka's song *Umqobothi* (Chaka, 1987; Nonini & Nameless, 2003), from Kenya and South Africa respectively.

Many researchers have observed the way individuals may justify their consumption in alcohol on claims of the advantages they accrue from the social dimension (Fairbairn & Sayette, 2014). This involves claims related to establishing and fortifying friendships, as a coping mechanism to deal with stress and other challenges they

face in life and to have a sense of higher acceptance in various groups. Others claim that it gives them a social identity and a sense of belonging (Bragard et al., 2024; Smit et al., 2015), but cumulatively, such perceptions inhibit the effectiveness of public health messages in achieving the desired behavior changes in the consumers. In Kenya, illicit alcohol remains a persistent challenge despite regulatory efforts. NACADA reports indicate that affordability, accessibility, and social acceptance contribute significantly to alcohol consumption (NACADA, 2023). Studies conducted in Western Kenya reveal that illicit brews are frequently preferred because they are cheaper than commercially produced alternatives that are government certified as safe for human consumption in local communities (Masinde, 2014).

Scholars studying alcohol addiction and trade concur that economic dependence on alcohol trade leads to aversion of anti-alcohol interventions especially people who benefit from the trade (Kipchumba et al., 2022; Le et al., 2023). The households whose livelihoods are dependent on illicit alcohol trade value their alcohol-related crafts as important sources of income which is more pronounced in regions where unemployment and poverty rates are high in the community (Nguuri & Karanja, 2024; Opondo, 2024)

The Kenyan media has repeatedly given accounts of people getting maimed or dying from the consumption of illicit alcohol, while scholarly research outputs provide the grim picture of alcohol-related damage in terms of both the physical health and mental wellbeing of the affected individuals and their families. Despite this, there is a paucity of research outputs examining the belief systems that community members use to justify the unrelenting consumption and trade in *Chang'aa* within Busia County. This study identified this gap and is a response to addressing this void in existing knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Busia County of western Kenya and used qualitative phenomenological research design. This design was appropriate for the study because it explored the lived experiences, attitudes, opinions and perceptions of the participants on their justification of *Chang'aa* consumption and their engagement in its production, distribution, and trade for economic gains. The target population were *Chang'aa* consumers, producers, traders, and distributors as well as community leaders, Busia County residents familiar with the intricacies of the illict trade in *Chang'aa,* and community elders.

The population of *chang'aa* producers, distributors and vendors as well as the consumers in Busia county is still remains undocumented. Due this, the study used convenient sampling to identify the consumers and snowballing sampling was then used thereafter to trace other consumers, the traders, distributors and retailers of the brew. The aim was not to get a representative sample as expected but to explore the ideas, opinions, attitudes, and perspectives of the selected respondents in identification of the reasons that make them engage in the illicit production, trade and consumption of illicit alcohol. The *chang'aa* consumers were specifically people who self-reported as dependent on alcohol and used it as a first choice regularly.

The researchers also engaged some of the consumers in the illicit dens before they got intoxicated which also helped capture the ideas and perspectives of the retail vendors. They were the ones who were used to identify traders who sold it to them while they in turn were used to identify distributors and producers who actively engaged in replenishing their supplies. The study collected data through two Focused Group Discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews along the border regions of Kenya and Uganda in Busia County. The study conveniently selected respondents who demonstrated having a very good understanding of the illicit *Chang'aa* trade, were either producers, traders, police officers and consumers, or as community leaders and elders in areas where many of the families relied on the illicit trade for their livelihood.

A total of 3 FGDs covering 7 *chang'aa* producers, 5 distributors, 5 retailers, 4 four police officers, 6 community leaders and elders, and 14 consumers were recruited as respondents on 'as where is' basis, or in-situ. Focused group discussion was used for data collection, where addicts were identified through the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) tool where a score of over 16 qualified an alcohol consumer to be recruited into the study. The FGD transcripts were coded and recurrent patterns grouped according to specific themes using thematic analysis to analyze the data. Key recurring themes regarding the beliefs and reasons for

engaging in the illicit *Chang'aa* trade and consumption were identified and presented as findings of the study as follows in the next section

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chang'aa as an Affordable Source of Recreation

Participants consistently described *Chang'aa* as the cheapest form of entertainment available. Many reported that limited income prevented them from accessing alternative recreational activities. Consequently, *Chang'aa* was viewed as an affordable means of relaxation and enjoyment, which can be safely combined with other drugs such as khat or marijuana. This shows that the co-use of other substances alongside marijuana use. This may be one reason why they engage in *chang'aa* consumption by alluding to the ability of the brew to be co-administered with other drugs as a means of recreation and relaxation.

It is also an open fact that economic challenges increase the brews appeal as a cheap alternative to many of its consumers especially on the basis that it is a potent brew and less expensive than mainstream beverages sold by licensed manufacturers. This is captured in the following statements

1. *If a buy cheap whiskey at a cost of about KSH 800, I can get the equivalent of the same in 3 bottles of chang'aa at a far lesser cost. It is cost effective*
2. *You can mix marijuana and chang'aa safely, enjoy a bit of khat, get high and go home with savings*

Chang'aa Promotes Humility and Social Equality

Chang'aa is a cheap drink. The fact that it is cheap allows many people to partake in its consumption jointly with others because of its affordability. The participants argued that consumption of the brew encourages equality and you may even find a very poor man buying a drink for a wealthy guy. They argued that the price of *chang'aa* allows for dissolution of social class and hierarchies. While some argue that *chang'aa* promotes humility, what the study observed was some violent engagement during consumptions especially when the consumers had differences of opinion occasionally. This throws the claim that it leads to humility into disarray.

However, despite that, some participants argued that the brew constructs a social environment that dissolves social distinctions. The participants argued that the brew allows them to overcome social boundaries and engage more freely with one another as equals regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds. For many, when they indulge in *chang'aa* consumption as peers, it generates a sense of identity and belonging to the groups they identify with and gives them a sense of purpose. The following statements capture the issue clearly. Consumption of the brew in groups of people who know each other gives them a sense of collective identity as epitomized in the following statements.

4. Boss, you stay calm and enjoy your drink, you are with friends who are like a family, why worry?

5. You see that guy in that tree shade? His father is a former government minister enjoying the drink with the cobbler's son. Is that social class or dissolution of social boundaries?

Chang'aa Trade Supports Inter-County Economic Activities

According to the participants, *Chang'aa* is a very important economic lifeline for many households within Busia County. They argued that despite the trade being illegal, Busia County exports the brew to other counties which creates auxiliary jobs for distributors, wholesalers and retailers engaged in its trade. The participants claimed that it could be highly possible that the trade volume in Busia may have surpassed what Kakamega County has been producing in terms of volume in production quantities.

Some of the participants, who were professionals in other areas, stated that their engagement in the production of *Chang'aa* offered them more returns than their career earnings in other fields of employment where they are

permanent and pensionable employees. What is evident from some of the responses is that the *Chang'aa* trade is not confined to Busia county alone but its economic ripple effects transcend other counties where they export the brew. This is captured by the following statements

> *6. I do not think teachers make more money than what I do. Given a choice to retire or to venture full time in Chang'aa production, I will elect the Chang'aa business.*
>
> *7. We do export our brew to Nairobi and Nakuru, they trust Chang'aa from Busia more than what Kandara in Murang's can deliver to Nairobi in terms of quality*

The informal but illegal *Chang'aa* trade in Busia County has a significant impact in the rural economies of Busia County and household income levels in the region. The trade has led to creation of employment and business opportunities and helped spur rural growth within Busia county and offering sustainable livelihood outcomes for many families. The economic benefits that are accruing from the *Chang'aa* illicit trade may contribute to the development of tolerance toward the illegal trade which reinforces AET (Subbo, 1999; Willis, 2002).

Chang'aa **as a Source of Livelihood**

Many of the participants expressed the view that *Chang'aa* had played critical role in uplifting their way of life because of increased income. Some stated that it was the backbone of the parents' economic survival that allowed them to educate them which would not have been possible in the absence of indulging in its trade (Okumu, 2025). One participant was asked if law enforcement agents deterred their involvement in the production and distribution of the brew and he humorously replied "they are our external employees with no productive input but highly needed." This statement clearly shows that there is a lot of corruption involved in the trade to the level that it is better to bribe the police than to obey the law and continue their engagement in the illegal trade.

Some of the participants stated that the *Chang'aa* trade is also part of the reason why the Uganda side of Busia Town, Sofia, attracts many Kenyans to cross the border to go and consume *waragi,* the Ugandan version of *Chang'aa,* where it is not strictly regulated like in Kenya. To them this is lost business opportunities and simply means the cottage industries that would have expanded on the Kenyan side of the border have indirectly transferred business to Ugandan side of Busia Town. Some of the participants were of the view it is easy to be a cross-border transporter of *Chang'aa* and smuggle to Kenya than be a producer and be harassed on a daily basis by policemen soliciting for bribes on the Kenyan side. The informal nature of the *Chang'aa* industry in Busia is playing a critical role in shaping the economy of the town, because it is evident that there are many distilleries operating in the open on the Ugandan side of no-man's land while in Kenya they have to conceal their production facilities as much as possible. The participants also noted that areas that have been synonymous with *chang'aa* production have also had other businesses coming up such as eateries (Okumu, 2025).

> *8. This is work like any other, only problem is that the government does not want to acknowledge it helps sustain rural families economically*
>
> *9. Busia (County) can be rich by simply exporting chang'aa to other counties in Kenya. Our brew is safe and good*
>
> *10. If I do not train my children on how to produce and trade in chang'aa, how will they fend for themselves as you can see jobs are becoming more scarce each year?*

The participants observed many long distance cross-border drivers also prefer to stay near these areas because of cheap accommodation and food. The following statements capture that statement. The findings of the study are congruent with other studies that do demonstrate that Kakamega County is also a lead source of *chang'aa* from western Kenya (Kipchumba et al., 2022). The study by Kipchumba et al. (2022) demonstrated that some households engage in the illicit trade of alcohol out of necessity for economic survival, and people are pushed

into it due to the high levels of unemployment among the rural folks in Kenya because it becomes a livelihood strategy for these people. The results of this study reflect other scholarly research outputs that show unemployment, poverty and economic hardships have increased household reliance on the illicit *chang'aa* trade not only in Busia but in many other counties in Kenya (Opondo, 2024).

Belief that *Chang'aa* Improves Health

What was evident but a surprise finding in this study was that *chang'aa* has medicinal value and these makes it essential for the consumers to use in disease prevention. Some of the participants alleged that they consumed *chang'aa* as a remedy for common cold and flu, Further, they averred that it offers them an escape route from physical pain after hard day's work, and it had the potential of energizing them to put more efforts in the work they do. A few of the participants expressed the idea that it relieves them of stress and acts a protective barrier against infections such as diarrhea and typhoid. Some of them claimed they used alcohol to suppress sneezing fits which meant that they saw in alcohol antihistamine properties that were of medical value to the participants. Some of the respondents were very categorical that *Chang'aa* induced sleep is a good way of preventing others from contacting flu from an individual. One participant was of the view that consumption of concentrated *Chang'aa* was good in dealing with Covid-19, expressing belief that it played a role in reducing transmission rates of Covid-19 among its consumers in western Kenya.

Some of the participants stated that "*dawa ya moto ni moto"* (the medication of fire is fire), in reference to the way treatment of alcohol-induced hangover should be treated. They argued that when they have a serious hangover after a spell of heavy binge drinking, they lack appetite, have severe headaches and may become easily irritable. To counter, they engage in limited consumption of alcohol so that they can be able to eat and regain balanced emotions. Some of the statements that capture justifying chang'aa use for medicinal purposes are as follows.

> *10. People who consume chang'aa regularly such thrice a week are never susceptible to typhoid. Many diarrheal diseases are prevented with chang'aa consumption*
>
> *11. We had many people dying of Covid-19 pandemic in Europe than in Africa, reason is very simple. Traditional drinks are portent in killing germs and viruses. My grandfather is still alive and he uses chang'aa. What does it tell you when you compare with his peers in Italy and the USA?*

The dangers of believing that alcohol has health benefits may lead to the issue of its consumers developing a less realistic appreciation of their susceptibility to long term effects of *Chang'aa* consumption. Many studies have documented how people develop wrong belief systems of the harm that alcohol can cause to their health. This is a very negative aspect because the belief system that one holds determines a lot on how they will respond to *Chang'aa* consumption when it is really clear that they place their lives at risk (NACADA, 2023). These beliefs help in enforcing the misconceptions of alcohol's advantages in relation to health as positive while in reality it adversely affects their health outcomes (Tsai et al., 2023; Visontay et al., 2024)

***Chang'aa* Facilitates Friendship Formation and Maintenance**

The study established that the participants viewed *Chang'aa* as a strong agent of socialization and even some were clearly expressing the idea that it has no cheaper equal but makes everyone equal by eliminating socio-cultural and economic statuses and hierarchies between its consumers. Many of the *Chang'aa* traders and consumers interviewed were of the view this is clearly evident on the Ugandan side of Busia Town, where everybody mixes freely, people with cars, people with bicycles and motorcycles and pedestrians, professionals, people from the informal sector all converge and share the drink. In Kenya, according to the participants, these differences are clear because the system in Kenya illegitimates *Chang'aa* consumption which is not the case in Uganda. They argue the spirit of social unity and identity as traditionally was in pre-colonial African societies is pushed forward through the consumption of *Chang'aa*, but this open environment to its use as seen in Kenya denies Kenyans the social benefits of the brew.

11. Chang'aa helps in creating relationships and ensures that strong bonds remain sometimes even for a lifetime

12. Sometimes when you feel burdened, just go to a chang'aa den, you will meet people with more problems than you do and you discover they are just coping fine, and you learn from their stories to survive.

Alcohol is used to create and sustain friendship relations. Many of the participants stated they do get a lot of business through joining others in social events and consuming alcohol. According to them, Busia County has good business because of the mantra "*Business will find you in a Chang'aa den, but you will have to go look for it when you are in the office*." The insinuation here is that good and productive relationships are facilitated by engaging in alcohol consumption. Secondly, according to the participants, *Chang'aa* helps a man convince a lady of his dreams to marry him. What these finding show is that the participants' attitudes towards *Chang'aa*-induced social gatherings are critical points where interactions flourish, people get psychosocial support, exchange ideas and secure business deals as well as build relationships (Ramirez et al., 2023; Schmid, 2023).

When one looks at this result, these findings is congruent with the findings of other scholars like Schmid et al. (2023) and Ramirez (2023), the studies point out to the fact that where the perceived social benefits that are related to *Chang'aa* consumption are considered to be highly beneficial, they end up spurring the illicit brew's consumers, producers, and distributors to promote its use especially when consumers, as the primary focus of health messaging and awareness campaigns, are of the belief that the social and economic benefits far outweigh the risks that they are aware of.

Chang'aa Increases Mental Creativity and Engagement in Hazardous Tasks

One of the clear findings was that *Chang'aa* improves people's thinking power and makes them creative with ideas. Many of the respondents stated that people require alcohol to think. What many of the respondents believed that when they want to engage in tasks that require a lot of cognitive efforts, alcohol provides the power to think critically. When it comes to activities that are emotionally draining, like digging graves, burying the dead, or removing carcasses from roads of animals that are rotting and of foul stench, the respondents stated that alcohol gives the courage to face their challenge or mask the reality until they have accomplished. According to them, *Chang'aa* is the best option because it is readily available, and cheap to procure unlike conventional drinks that government approved and licensed producers offer on the market.

13. You can imagine the smell of a rotting dog in the open, at some point, someone must remove it and bury by the roadside. Boss, chang'aa works magic in suppressing the smell.

14. Imagine digging the grave of somebody who was murdered, you don't know if evil spirits will follow you. You take courage in chang'aa and dig that grave and bury the dead

What these finding shows is that the expectation of the consumers in being able to undertake difficult and emotionally draining tasks is facilitated by alcohol consumption, and preference is for *Chang'aa* which is readily available and affordable (Sayette, 2017). The significance of this finding is that it validates the prevailing belief amongst the respondents that chang'aa confers to them the mental protection and motivation to engage in difficult tasks, which enhances the belief that *chang'aa* is beneficial for motivation (Bryceson, 2002; Fromme, 2001; Yin et al., 2023)

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show that the support for the consumption and trade in illicit *chang'aa* beverage is sustained by the beliefs that people hold that support the behaviors. The participants cited the availability and ease of accessibility and low costs of purchases as key factors that appealed them into consuming the illicit liquor. Furthermore, the findings of the study point out that the trade in *chang'aa* is beneficial as a viable alternative for supporting families get sustainable livelihoods. This shows why discouraging the consumption

of the drink is difficult and law enforcement agencies find it difficult to eradicate the trade or stop the consumption of the beverage. *Chang'aa* is also used as a recreational drink and its accessibility makes it easier to co-use with other drugs such marijuana and khat. Participants expressed the idea that the affordability of the drink makes it affordable. The drink is also perceived as a contributor to enhancing social equality and sustain friendships amongst the consumers. Despite the harmful effects of the brew, many participants were of the view that it promotes good health and can used to treated diarrheal diseases like typhoid and dysentery. Finally, the respondents were of the view that *chang'aa* trade encourages inter-county trade and they speculated that the trade in *chang'aa* has a potential of revolutionizing trade in the country. The findings of the study show that AET anticipated positive outcomes increase the expectations of the benefits of *chang'aa* which results in people adopting risky alcohol consumption behaviors because of the cultural, social and economic beliefs that encourage its use and consumption.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that there is need to conduct further research to identify interventions that deal with socioeconomic factors that promote illicit alcohol consumption within the local communities of Busia County, Secondly, there is a need for policy and decision-makers to understand the sociocultural and economic realities of the local communities that sustain the illicit trade and consumption of *chang'aa* in Busia County. By considering the economic and sociocultural factors promoting the trade and consumption of illicit alcohol, they will be able to develop new working strategies that offer viable alternatives for supporting the livelihoods and drive them away from depending the unlawful illicit trade

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest to declare

ETHICAL DECLARATION

AI (ChatGPT) was used to condense the paper from 15,850 words to less than 7,000 words

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