
CULTURAL NORMS AS A SOCIAL DETERMINANT OF ALCOHOLISM AMONG YOUTHS IN MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

^{1*} Kitavi Tom Kyalo & ² Heather Kipchumba, PhD

^{1*} Department of Public Policy and Administration, Kenyatta University, Kenya

² Lecturer, Department of Public Policy and Administration, Kenyatta University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Alcoholism among youths remains a significant public health and social concern in Makueni County, Kenya, despite the presence of regulatory frameworks and intervention programs aimed at controlling alcohol consumption. Cultural practices, beliefs, and social expectations continue to shape drinking behavior, particularly through the normalization of alcohol use during ceremonies, social events, and community gatherings. The aim was to establish how cultural norms influence alcoholism among youths, with a specific focus on social acceptance of alcohol use, traditional beliefs, peer influence, and cultural expectations. The study examined the role of cultural norms as a key social determinant shaping alcohol consumption behavior among youths. The study employed a descriptive research design targeting youths aged between 15 and 35 years residing in Makueni County. Simple random sampling was used to select 398 respondents from the target population. Data were collected using structured questionnaires. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to gather data from youth respondents, along with interview guides developed for key informants. The instruments were reviewed for content validity and pretested to ensure clarity and reliability. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to provide deeper insights into cultural beliefs and social influences on alcohol consumption. The findings revealed that cultural norms have a positive and significant influence on alcoholism among youths, with practices such as alcohol consumption during social events, peer pressure, and social acceptance contributing to increased drinking behavior. The results further showed that cultural norms explain a substantial proportion of variation in alcohol consumption among youths. Strengthening community sensitization, promoting culturally responsive interventions, and enhancing youth awareness programs were identified as key measures necessary to reduce alcohol abuse and improve youth well-being.

Keywords: Cultural Norms: Z13, Alcoholism: I12, Youth Behavior: J13, Social Determinants: I14, Substance Abuse: I18

INTRODUCTION

The issue of alcoholism has continued to raise serious concerns in terms of public health and welfare, covering drinking patterns that have adverse consequences on the health status, conduct, and general well-being of individuals, especially youths. Within the current social framework, cultural aspects have become a key determinant of individual behavior, including alcohol drinking practices and perceptions. This study specifically focuses on alcoholism, which can be defined in terms of the frequency of alcohol intake, acceptability of alcoholic behavior, and its impacts on the well-being of youths (Griswold et al., 2018; Rehm & Shield, 2019).

Globally, research has proven that there exist numerous impacts of alcohol consumption practices on the health of people and socio-economic growth and development. Annually, there are thousands of deaths from alcohol intake globally, and this practice contributes immensely to the disease burden of different societies (Griswold et al., 2018). The US and several European countries have recorded high consumption levels of alcohol and cases of alcohol use disorders. Such practices have continued to pose serious health challenges in these countries due to the high level of alcohol exposure (Manthey et al., 2019; Shield et al., 2020).

Conversely, in countries like Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, and Kenya, there have been consistent challenges associated with rising rates of alcohol consumption among youths. Social norms and cultural norms have made it acceptable behavior to consume alcohol in many communities, since this practice is common in many societies across the world. Alcohol abuse and alcohol consumption have continued to be major problems in African countries because of inadequate policy implementation and ineffective control strategies in many places in Africa (Ferreira-Borges et al., 2019; Jernigan & Trangenstein, 2020). The influence of social norms and expectations on alcohol abuse behavior has been evidenced in recent studies (Pedersen et al., 2018).

Alcohol abuse among youths in Kenya has remained a serious issue despite various interventions from regulatory authorities such as National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse. Peer drinking behavior has been cited as one of the factors that encourage youths to drink alcohol, especially when exposed to an environment where alcohol abuse takes place (Davoren et al., 2016). Cultural norms that encourage consumption of alcohol during ceremonies, parties, and community gatherings have played a major role in influencing alcohol abuse behavior among youth populations.

The case in Makueni County is no different from what is being experienced nationally, with youths consuming large amounts of alcohol. The cultural acceptance of alcohol consumption, together with peer pressure and the ready availability of illegal brews, keeps driving youths to consume alcohol. In spite of the efforts by the government to discourage the vice through policies and sensitization, cultural factors have made it difficult for efforts geared towards minimizing alcohol abuse to bear fruit.

The present research represents an important inquiry into cultural factors as a significant variable in determining alcoholism among youths in Makueni County, Kenya. The study will explore the impact of cultural beliefs and practices on the behavior of youths in the region.

Statement of the Problem

Youth alcoholism still persists as a major public health and social problem in Kenya, especially in rural counties such as Makueni, regardless of various interventions being employed to curb alcohol intake. The county is experiencing continued increases in the number of youths abusing alcohol through early initiation and risky patterns that come with negative effects such as psychological disturbances, low productivity, and social issues (Kavita et al., 2024; Wekori, 2024). The Makueni County, which is mainly rural and culturally oriented due to its nature of interactions among members of society, provides a setting that promotes drinking habits since such actions occur during social gatherings, ceremonies, and interactions. Literature has revealed

that social and cultural settings contribute considerably towards developing drinking patterns and promoting alcohol abuse among youths (Room et al., 2021).

Institutes such as NACADA have tried to solve the problem of alcohol abuse through the enactment of regulations and other policies, as well as public awareness programs, yet the situation worsens. Current measures have been facing many limitations, such as a lack of implementation at a community level and the persistent social acceptability of alcohol use by youths.

Other studies have also explored some of the major determinants of alcohol use, such as peer pressure, economic circumstances, and the manner in which the law is enforced. Nevertheless, little empirical analysis has been carried out concerning the importance of cultural norms in explaining the development of alcoholism among youths, especially in rural areas such as Makueni County. Many other empirical analyses have been conducted in other contexts or where several variables are considered without focusing on the influence of cultural norms on alcohol use behavior despite the body of literature indicating that cultural norms do influence youth drinking (Kuntsche et al., 2021). There is therefore a gap in context and empirical analysis about the significance of cultural norms in facilitating youth alcoholism.

This research was therefore conducted to explore the influence of cultural norms on alcoholism among youths in Makueni County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This part highlights existing empirical evidence, theories, and the conceptual framework for the study. It emphasizes the application of digitalization in public administration and its impact on service delivery. This review also points out some of the existing gaps in knowledge to justify the current study.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory forms the basis for this research. According to Bandura (1977), the theory asserts that individuals learn through observation, modeling, and imitation in a social setting. Behavior learned is acquired through observation of individuals in the environment, as well as the interpretation of the consequences of certain behavior. In the case of alcohol consumption, Social Learning Theory explains the process by which young people are able to adopt drinking habits when in an environment where alcohol consumption is seen as normal behavior.

This occurs in a cultural setting characterized by rituals, social events, family parties, amongst others, where youth repeatedly interact and hence are able to adopt behavior from society. When youths observe respectable members of society consuming alcohol without any adverse effects, there is increased likelihood of youths imitating their behavior hence causing alcoholism among youths.

Evidence from empirical research backs up this theoretical framework. Individuals who are subjected to permissive attitudes toward drinking in their environment are inclined toward drinking and risky drinking behavior (Vashishtha et al., 2020). The same can be said about the impact of alcohol on social learning behavior that is rooted in the culture of the individual (Pennay et al., 2020). In this particular study, Social Learning Theory is used to describe how cultural practices in Makueni County and the attitudes surrounding drinking during ceremonies, social gatherings, and other social activities affect the drinking behavior of youths.

Empirical Review

Alcoholism

Rehm et al., (2019) have analyzed the burden of global alcohol use based on comparative risk assessment and epidemiological modeling in various countries. The study concluded that alcohol use has been a significant

cause of mortality and has emerged as one of the top risk factors for non-communicable diseases and injury. The results of the study indicated the high health burden of alcohol use at a global level. However, this study was a globally-based analysis and lacked information specific to rural populations like Makueni County.

Carvalho, Heilig, Perez, Probst, and Rehm (2019) have conducted an analysis of alcohol use disorders from a clinical and epidemiological point of view by reviewing global data. The study concluded that alcohol use disorders have been linked with serious psychiatric comorbidities like depression and anxiety and contribute to high morbidity and early mortality in the population. This study demonstrated the association of alcohol use and psychiatric disorders. Nonetheless, it was a generalized study based on an international perspective.

Koob (2021) conducted a review of experimental and clinical research aimed at analyzing the neural biological processes associated with AUD. This review revealed that continuous use of alcohol altered the brain circuits responsible for reward, stress, and cognitive functioning in the prefrontal cortex and basal ganglia, leading to obsessive drinking behavior. Nevertheless, Koob's research primarily emphasized clinical and laboratory data while overlooking the practical aspects of life in communities such as Makueni County.

Cultural Norms

Dempsey et al. (2018) assessed the impact of normative beliefs on behavioral outcomes through a critical evaluation of existing literature. According to the study, individuals' behavior was greatly determined by their shared expectations and perceptions of societal acceptance in their social settings. In addition, the study noted that if some behaviors were considered socially acceptable in one's culture, then individuals would be inclined to adopt them. Nonetheless, the study only focused on students in the developed world and might fail to apply in rural cultural environments like Makueni County.

Bicchieri & Dimant (2019) assessed the effects of norms on behavior through theoretical and empirical investigations. From the research, it was established that people were likely to engage in those behaviors that were highly prevalent and socially accepted in their social settings. In addition, norms were upheld due to shared beliefs and expectations and the anticipation of social approval or disapproval. However, the study used a broad perspective and could not give specific insights regarding how cultural norms worked in rural settings.

Farrow, Grolleau, and Ibanez (2017) carried out a literature review study of the role that norms play in shaping behavior by examining various empirical data from diverse scenarios. Their work reveals how both descriptive and injunctive norms play significant roles in influencing individuals' decisions via various channels like conformity and social pressure. However, the study was mainly focused on environmental behavior and global aspects, which reduces its relevance to local rural cultures.

Tankard and Paluck (2020) carried out an experimental and survey-based study of how perceptions of norms affected people's behavior and social change. In the process, they revealed how much individual decisions depended on individuals' perception of what other people in their social groups believed was right and acceptable to do. Moreover, the study indicated how significant the role of collective beliefs was in influencing behavior. However, the study was based mainly on experiments rather than real-life cultural situations.

Identified Gaps

Empirical research in existing literature shows that excessive use of alcohol is one of the major health problems across the globe, which is responsible for increased mortality rate, incidence of non-communicable diseases, and mental illnesses. Research carried out in different global and clinical settings shows that alcohol intake leads to the development of mental disorders, neurobiological changes, and other health hazards (Rehm et al., 2019; Carvalho et al., 2019; Koob, 2021). Overall, research presented in the literature shows that alcohol use affects an individual's health and behavioral outcomes adversely. In addition, according to studies

carried out about cultural norms, individuals' behaviors depend on their shared beliefs and expectations and the acceptance of their conduct in society (Bicchieri & Dimant, 2019; Tankard & Paluck, 2020).

Nevertheless, the literature presented above is mostly dedicated to general settings in the field, global trends, and clinical implications, whereas rural areas have been ignored to a large extent. In particular, researchers do not present context-specific information regarding cultural norms and behavior, and the way in which they affect the level of alcohol consumption and the development of drinking habits among the rural population and youths in particular.

In an African setting and specifically Kenya, very little empirical work exists on alcohol abuse in rural areas, with most of the literature focusing on alcohol abuse in urban environments or at the national level. This means that there is little empirical data on how culture influences youth alcohol abuse in rural counties like Makueni.

Further, a number of the existing literature relies solely on experimental and quantitative methods, with few works adopting a qualitative perspective to investigate the socio-cultural dynamics involved in the abuse of alcohol. Also, there is a paucity of literature on how alcoholism and cultural factors work together as co-factors in influencing youth alcohol abuse. These gaps in literature call for further investigation into how youth alcohol abuse is influenced by co-factors.

There is therefore need for empirical research that focuses on cultural factors in influencing youth alcohol abuse in Makueni County.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design since it was suitable for examining the impact of cultural norms in causing alcoholism amongst youths in Makueni County, Kenya, within a real-life environment. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009), descriptive research design involves systematic collection and analysis of data in order to describe the relationships between variables without manipulating them. With such a design, both qualitative and quantitative data could be collected in order to establish the nature of the relationship that exists between cultural norms and alcohol drinking amongst youths.

The target population comprised 94,000 individuals who were selected from the youths within the age bracket of 15 – 35 years and key informants such as assistant county commissioners, chiefs, NACADA officials, community police personnel, and counsellors in Makueni County. Based on Yamane's (1967) formula at 95% confidence level, the sample size was estimated to be 398 youths. The key informants were 20 in number, bringing the total sample size to 418 individuals. A multi-stage sampling design was used, where stratified sampling involved stratifying the respondents according to sub-county, sex, and level of education, whereas simple random sampling was used to select youth respondents, while purposive sampling was used for key informants.

Data collection utilized semi-structured questionnaires distributed to the youth participants, as well as interview guides for key informants. Research instruments were verified by experts, whereas a pilot study involving 10% (40) of the total number of respondents was carried out in Kitui County, which had similar attributes to those of Makueni County, to ensure validity. Cronbach's alpha values were greater than 0.70, indicating the reliability of the research instrument. Quantitative data were coded and analyzed with the help of SPSS Version 26. Data were summarized with the aid of descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while the correlation and regression were performed to establish the relationship between variables. Qualitative data generated from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis to enrich the results of the quantitative analysis.

The relationship between cultural norms and alcoholism among youths in Makueni County was statistically represented by the regression equation below:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots [\text{Equation 1}]$$

Where:

- Y = Alcoholism (dependent variable)
- X_1 = Cultural Norms (independent variable)
- β_0 = Constant
- β_1 = Coefficient measuring the effect of cultural norms
- ε = Error term

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research examined the influence of cultural norms on alcoholism amongst young people in Makueni County, Kenya. The respondents were required to rate their level of agreement on different statements on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree).

Cultural Norms and Alcoholism among Youth

The study was conducted to investigate the influence of cultural practices on alcohol abuse among adolescents in Makueni County in Kenya. The respondents were required to provide their perception concerning whether alcohol consumption is normal during social-cultural activities; the cultural traditions of recommending the consumption of alcohol; cultural acceptance of drinking among youth during ceremonies; lack of discouragement of overconsumption of alcohol; and social pressure that encourages one to drink to fit in with culture. The findings are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Cultural Norms and Alcoholism among Youth

Statement	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
In my community, alcohol consumption is considered a normal part of social and cultural events	18 (4.6%)	39 (10.0%)	58 (14.9%)	184 (47.3%)	90 (23.1%)	3.74	1.03
Traditional beliefs and practices encourage alcohol use among youths	22 (5.7%)	41 (10.5%)	62 (15.9%)	176 (45.2%)	88 (22.6%)	3.69	1.06
It is culturally acceptable for young people to drink alcohol during ceremonies and family gatherings	20 (5.1%)	36 (9.3%)	55 (14.1%)	186 (47.8%)	92 (23.7%)	3.76	1.02
Cultural norms in my area do not discourage excessive alcohol consumption	24 (6.2%)	44 (11.3%)	63 (16.2%)	172 (44.2%)	86 (22.1%)	3.65	1.08
I feel pressure to consume alcohol in order to fit in with cultural expectations or traditions	27 (6.9%)	46 (11.8%)	67 (17.2%)	165 (42.4%)	84 (21.6%)	3.60	1.11
Overall Mean						3.69	1.06

Source: Researcher, 2026

The results reveal that 18 (4.6%), 39 (10.0%), 58 (14.9%), 184 (47.3%), and 90 (23.1%) strongly disagreed, disagreed, were neutral, agreed, and strongly agreed that drinking alcohol is a normal practice during social and cultural events, respectively. It can be observed that a high percentage of the sample (70.4%) agreed and strongly agreed regarding the perception that alcohol consumption is a normal practice. Only 14.6% disagree with this perception, reflecting very little opposition towards alcohol consumption in the context of social

activities. With an average of 3.74 ($\bar{x} = 3.74$) and a standard deviation of 1.03 ($\sigma = 1.03$), the mean reflects an agreement with high variation. This implies that drinking alcohol is firmly practiced as a social behavior. Lees et al., (2020) have noted the importance of social environment and social norms on adolescent alcohol behavior.

With regard to tradition, 22 (5.7%) strongly disagree, 41 (10.5%) disagree, 62 (15.9%) are neutral, 176 (45.2%) agree, and 88 (22.6%) strongly agree that these practices promote alcohol consumption among youths. In total, 67.8% of the respondents agree, while only 16.2% disagree with the statement. This shows that cultural practices significantly contribute to youth alcohol consumption. These findings are further supported by the average rating ($\bar{x} = 3.69$) and standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.06$). This finding is in agreement with Morojele et al., (2019), who state that cultural practices and social environments significantly influence alcohol consumption practices among youths in Africa.

In terms of whether drinking at ceremonies and family get-togethers is culturally acceptable for young people, 20 (5.1%) strongly disagree, 36 (9.3%) disagree, 55 (14.1%) are neutral, 186 (47.8%) agree, and 92 (23.7%) strongly agree. A total of 71.5% of the participants agree that cultural ceremonies significantly expose youths to alcohol consumption practices. Disagreement only stands at 14.4%, which shows low levels of opposition to this cultural norm. The average rating ($\bar{x} = 3.76$) and standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.02$) show a high level of agreement with relatively consistent responses. This finding corresponds with Jernigan et al. (2020), whose study revealed that alcohol exposure in family and social surroundings enhances the risk for adolescents' alcohol consumption behavior.

Regarding whether cultural norms prevent excessive alcohol intake, there were 24 (6.2%) strongly disagree, 44 (11.3%) disagree, 63 (16.2%) neutral, 172 (44.2%) agree, and 86 (22.1%) strongly agree that cultural norms are not discouraging excessive drinking. In total, 66.3% agree while 17.5% disagree, indicating that the cultural systems may not be working effectively to control the excessive alcohol use among youths. Mean ($\bar{x} = 3.65$) and standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.08$) indicate moderately agreeing statements with slightly high variation compared to other questions. These results align with the study conducted by Babor et al., (2020). They found out that permissive cultures and ineffective control measures lead to alcohol abuse.

Lastly, on whether youths experience pressure to drink alcohol to fit within cultural expectations, 27 (6.9%) strongly disagree, 46 (11.8%) disagree, 67 (17.2%) neutral, 165 (42.4%) agree, and 84 (21.6%) strongly agree. Generally, 64.0% agree while 18.7% disagree, demonstrating that social pressure plays an important role in youths' alcohol consumption. Mean ($\bar{x} = 3.60$) and standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.11$) indicate moderately agreeing statements with relatively high variation. This finding resonates with Pedersen et al., (2019), who identified peer influence and social expectations as key drivers of adolescent drinking behavior.

The mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.69$) and standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.06$) in the aggregate for all statements show that the cultural norms have a significant effect on youth alcoholism in Makueni County. The agreement found across all statements reveals that the cultural practices, ceremonies, and expectations normalize the act of drinking alcohol, thus increasing its consumption by the youths. This result is consistent with what is stated by the World Health Organization (2021) about cultural acceptability being a key factor in youth alcohol consumption worldwide.

The qualitative findings further explain the results presented. Thematic analysis identified three major themes, which include social acceptance of alcohol consumption, alcohol exposure by way of community activities, and rising worries about excessive drinking among youths. The respondents observed that alcohol consumption is widely acceptable socially within Kibwezi Sub-county, particularly within occasions such as ceremonies, family events, and community gatherings. It was further observed that youths are exposed to alcohol and influenced by the social acceptability of drinking within these social settings. Respondents further identified that excessive drinking by youths is on the rise within the region. This explains the level of

agreement witnessed in the quantitative data. The findings are consistent with those by Morojele *et al.*, (2021), where cultural acceptance affects alcohol consumption by youths.

Additionally, there were concerns raised about peer pressure and social expectations. Thematic analysis identified three major themes, which include social pressures, conformity to social norms, and the need for social belonging. Respondents reported that the youths feel the need to drink to conform socially. For example, some participants reported that youths feel social pressure to drink, while others reported that youths drink to avoid being considered different. These observations explain the trends that have been noted from the quantitative results. These results are similar to those by Measham & Brain (2020) on how social pressure greatly affects youth drinking patterns.

In addition, the role of cultural norms in shaping youth drinking behavior was further clarified by key informant interviews. Through thematic analysis, three major themes emerged from the interviews. These are the accessibility of alcohol, normalization of alcohol use, and cultural norms. The informants pointed out that alcohol was always available during social functions, thus increasing youth exposure and normalizing alcohol use. In addition, alcohol consumption was identified as one of the activities associated with social celebrations, potentially forcing youths to engage in such behaviors. This helps to clarify the results obtained from the quantitative study. These findings are consistent with Morojele *et al.*, (2021), who found that cultural norms shape alcohol consumption among young people.

Alcoholism among Youths

The independent variable in this research study included alcoholism among youth in Makueni County. The study considered variables like use of alcohol to cope with stress, peer pressure towards drinking behavior, the influence of unemployment and no source of income on drinking alcohol, negative effects of alcohol use, and the availability of community programs. The answers were captured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). The results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Alcoholism among Youths

Statement	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
People often consume alcohol to cope with stress or personal problems	24 (6.2%)	38 (9.8%)	55 (14.1%)	176 (45.2%)	96 (24.7%)	3.72	1.05
Alcohol consumption is common and socially acceptable among my peers	21 (5.4%)	42 (10.8%)	60 (15.4%)	171 (44.0%)	95 (24.4%)	3.71	1.03
I believe unemployment or lack of income contributes to alcohol consumption	18 (4.6%)	29 (7.5%)	48 (12.3%)	186 (47.8%)	108 (27.8%)	3.87	1.01
I have experienced negative consequences, e.g., health issues or poor work performance due to alcohol consumption	32 (8.2%)	44 (11.3%)	69 (17.7%)	160 (41.1%)	84 (21.6%)	3.56	1.11
There are limited community programs or resources available to help youths struggling with alcohol addiction in my area	26 (6.7%)	39 (10.0%)	63 (16.2%)	172 (44.2%)	89 (22.9%)	3.66	1.07
Overall Mean						3.70	1.05

Source: Researcher, 2026

The analysis shows that there were 24 (6.2%) strong disagreements, 38 (9.8%) disagreements, 55 (14.1%) neutrals, 176 (45.2%) agreements, and 96 (24.7%) strong agreements that youths consume alcohol to cope with their stress or personal issues. The data presented above suggests that there is a high number of people who belong to agreement (agree and strongly agree) which is 69.9%. Disagreement was reported by only 16.0% of participants, and it is considered relatively low. The average score ($\bar{x} = 3.72$) and standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.05$) suggest that there is an agreement about this perception. These results correspond to those provided by Patrick et al., (2022), where it is emphasized that alcohol use by youths was highly associated with their stress-related coping behaviors.

As for whether alcohol use is common and socially accepted behavior among peers, 21 (5.4%) strongly disagreed, 42 (10.8%) disagreed, 60 (15.4%) were neutral, 171 (44.0%) agreed, and 95 (24.4%) strongly agreed with the idea. It can be concluded that peer influence plays an important role in this context since 68.4% of respondents have agreed, and 16.2% disagreed with this idea. The average score ($\bar{x} = 3.71$) and standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.03$) confirm the observation presented above. This finding resonates with studies showing that peer environments strongly shape adolescent drinking behavior (Liu et al., 2023).

Regarding the contribution of unemployment or lack of money towards alcohol intake among youths, 18 (4.6%) strongly disagreed, 29 (7.5%) disagreed, 48 (12.3%) were neutral, 186 (47.8%) agreed, and 108 (27.8%) strongly agreed. A total of 75.6% agreed that economic difficulties contribute to alcohol usage, which means that economic problems are significant determinants of alcohol usage among youths. Only 12.1% of the participants disagreed, meaning that there is minimal disagreement concerning this statement. The mean value ($\bar{x} = 3.87$) and standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.01$) show agreement and consistent responses among participants. The results are similar to those in research, whereby socio-economic disparity increases risky behaviors related to alcohol consumption by youth and teenagers (Turyasiima et al., 2025).

Concerning the statement that alcohol usage causes negative outcomes, including health and poor job performance among others, 32 (8.2%) strongly disagreed, 44 (11.3%) disagreed, 69 (17.7%) were neutral, 160 (41.1%) agreed, and 84 (21.6%) strongly agreed. In total, 62.7% of the respondents agreed, and 19.5% disagreed. It means that although many youths consume alcohol, they recognize that alcohol leads to negative outcomes. The mean value ($\bar{x} = 3.56$) and standard deviation ($\sigma = 1.11$) depict moderate agreement with relatively varying values. These findings are consistent with research showing that adolescents recognize alcohol-related harms, including health and functional consequences (Lees et al., 2020).

Regarding the question of limited community programs or resources to aid youth affected by alcohol abuse, 26 participants (6.7%) strongly disagreed, 39 (10.0%) disagreed, 63 (16.2%) were neutral, 172 (44.2%) agreed, and 89 (22.9%) strongly agreed. Overall, 67.1% of the participants agreed with this statement while 16.7% disagreed. From this, it can be concluded that the respondents perceive a limited number of community programs designed to assist youths affected by alcohol abuse. The mean score ($\bar{x}=3.66$) and standard deviation ($\sigma=1.07$) further show that the respondents mostly agree, but there is some degree of variance.

Respondents' mean scores ($\bar{x}=3.70$) and standard deviation ($\sigma=1.05$) suggest a strong agreement that stress, peer pressure, economical hardships, and lack of proper support system cause youths to consume alcohol in Makueni County. It is worth noting that all the statements received relatively high agreements from the participants, and the conclusion can be drawn that youths are affected by alcohol due to various social and economical factors. This conclusion is consistent with Caluzzi et al., (2021), who argue that young people's alcohol consumption behavior is caused by social and socio-cultural factors.

Further explanation of the findings from the qualitative analysis includes the identification of three key themes that include social drinking behaviors, normalization of alcohol usage, and adverse outcomes. The youths were said to engage in alcohol use in social settings as well as leisurely in the presence of friends. Participants mentioned that alcohol usage has been normalized among the youth due to its regularity in specific social

settings. Nonetheless, the heavy use of alcohol caused poor academic or work performance, ill-health, and strained relationships. These findings provide an explanation for the numerical data above. Indeed, the findings align with the World Health Organization (2023), where youth drinking behaviors are determined by the social setting.

Further explanation of the findings through the qualitative approach involves the identification of three themes that include unemployment, financial pressure, and alcohol use. The participants agreed that the lack of finances created stress among the youth, resulting in some of them using alcohol. For example, the youths who are unemployed end up getting into drinking spaces. Further explanation for these findings is offered in the above. This finding is supported by Peltzer and Pengpid (2018), who found that economic vulnerability increases alcohol use among young adults.

Qualitative findings further explain the influence of peer dynamics. The thematic analysis identified three key themes including peer pressure, social influence, and desire for belonging. The respondents mentioned that many youths start drinking because of their friends and in the attempt to belong. According to one participant, some youths start drinking alcohol to prevent themselves from being left out. This explains the results obtained through the quantitative analysis. This finding confirms the results obtained by Liu et al., (2023) regarding the effects of peer drinking on adolescent drinking behavior.

The cultural practices also play an important role in explaining the drinking behavior among young people. The thematic analysis identified three key themes that include the presence of alcohol, cultural acceptability, and social events. According to the respondents, alcohol is widely used at ceremonies, which increases the access of youths to alcohol. These participants reported that it helps youths normalize their drinking habits. This explanation is consistent with the results of the quantitative analysis. These findings coincide with the research done by Manthey et al., (2019).

Multiple Regression Analysis

This section presents a summary of the regression analysis results that reveal the relationship between cultural practices and alcoholism among youth in Makueni County. The section discusses the model fit, significance, and magnitude of the relationship with interpretations of each table supported by empirical evidence.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.642	0.412	0.408	0.521

Source: Researcher, 2026

The $R^2 = 0.412$ obtained from the model suggests that cultural norms account for 41.2% of the variation in the phenomenon of alcoholism in youth. The significance of this percentage lies in the fact that behavioral outcomes can be explained due to various causes such as peers, economic status, and environment. Indeed, the findings presented in this paper support those of Tarrant et al. (2019) that perceived social and behavioral norms in drinking environments were significant predictors of increased alcohol intake in young individuals. In the same vein, Morojele et al. (2021) indicated that both social and contextual factors, including norms and environments, affect adolescent alcohol consumption.

Analysis of Variance

ANOVA was employed to test whether the regression model provides a better fit than a null model with no predictors.

Table 4: ANOVA for Cultural Norms and Alcoholism

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	36.842	1	36.842	52.761	0.000
Residual	52.158	396	0.132		
Total	89.000	397			

Source: Researcher, 2026

The results were statistically significant ($F=52.761$, $p<.001$), suggesting that cultural norms can accurately predict alcoholism in adolescents. The result lends credence to the assertion that the social and cultural environment is central to determining alcohol consumption behaviors. The results are in line with those provided by Tiongson and Jernigan (2025), who have proven that institutions and social environments, as well as norms, significantly determine alcohol consumption behavior. On the other hand, Kilian et al., (2020) note that while cultural factors play an important part in determining alcohol consumption behaviors, other social and environmental factors are also important.

Regression Coefficients

Coefficients quantify the direction and magnitude of the predictor's effect on alcoholism among youths.

Table 5: Regression Coefficient for Cultural Norms

Predictor	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
Constant	0.512	0.214	–	2.392	0.017
Cultural Norms	0.364	0.050	0.642	7.264	0.000

Source: Researcher, 2026

The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.642$, $p < .001$) implies that an increment by one standard deviation in cultural norms leads to an increment of 0.642 standard deviation in youth alcoholism. This shows that cultural norms significantly determine drinking habits. This finding agrees with Caluzzi et al., (2021), which showed that cultural and social factors play a critical role in shaping the drinking behaviors and expectations of young people. Additionally, Manthey et al., (2019) indicated that societal and cultural factors significantly determine alcohol consumption habits.

Regression equation model:

$$Y = 0.512 + 0.364X_1 + \varepsilon \dots \dots \dots \text{[Equation 2]}$$

FINDINGS

Discussion of Findings

The study sought to investigate the influence of cultural norms on alcoholism among youths in Makueni County, Kenya. The results of the study clearly show that cultural norms are integral parts of social practice that have a substantial impact on alcohol consumption among youths. It was evident from the respondents' responses that youths consume alcohol because alcohol consumption is socially and culturally normalized, and it is socially encouraged and accepted. According to the responses, social practices and interactions are critical factors in youth drinking behaviors, thus contributing to the normalization of alcohol consumption among youths. Such a result is not out of line since other studies have shown that cultural settings and social norms substantially impact alcohol consumption among youths (Debele et al., 2023; Getliff & Barker, 2025).

The regression and correlation analysis demonstrated the existence of a high level of statistically significant positive correlation between cultural norms and alcoholism among young adults ($r = 0.642$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the higher the degree of cultural acceptance of alcohol consumption, the greater the incidence of alcoholism among young individuals. The obtained results also indicate that cultural norms account for about 41.2% of

variability among individuals' alcoholism ($R^2 = 0.412$). It means that roughly 41.2% of differences in drinking patterns among young people can be explained by cultural norms. At the same time, the remaining 58.8% of variability still needs to be explained and may be determined by other variables such as peers' impact, financial well-being, and psychology of young people. These results are consistent with the existing literature since social and cultural norms have been found to be crucial for adolescent alcohol use (Rehm et al., 2019).

The coefficients of the regression were also found to show that there is a statistically significant positive influence of cultural norms on alcoholism among youth ($B = 0.364$, $\beta = 0.642$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms the hypothesis that a greater cultural acceptance of drinking alcohol causes more youths to consume alcohol. This indicates that cultural norms are one of the major predictors of alcoholism in the region. The findings corroborate previous studies suggesting that culture and societal expectations are critical determinants for adolescents' alcohol consumption (Kilian et al., 2021).

The qualitative data also reinforced the findings from the quantitative analysis by showing that the intake of alcohol is highly normalized in society, especially when there are celebrations, family parties, and social functions. The respondents noted that regular access to alcohol during these occasions exposes individuals to alcohol intake and makes drinking appear normal to the youths. Moreover, the respondents noted that the aspect of peer influence and conformity was key, given that many youths take alcohol to gain approval from others and comply with social norms. Also, some of the issues identified by the respondents as difficulties include the social acceptability of drinking, the lack of discouragement on the high intake of alcohol, and limited community-based intervention measures. These findings align with previous research on African settings that demonstrate that social and environmental factors strongly impact alcohol consumption patterns among the youth (Francis et al., 2019).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results reveal that cultural norms positively affect the prevalence of alcoholism among youths in Makueni County. In particular, cultural norms play an important part in creating social conditions favorable to drinking alcohol by normalizing its consumption through cultural events, social ceremonies, and other activities. In this way, young people become more exposed to alcohol use and develop habits associated with alcoholism. Another important contribution made by culture to youth alcoholism is related to social acceptance of drinking in combination with peer pressure and conformity. It should be noted that cultural norms not only facilitate alcohol consumption among youths but, in certain cases, also do not limit alcohol consumption, thus forming conditions favorable for problematic patterns. Besides, along with culture, other contributing factors to youth alcoholism, such as economic problems, peer pressure, and insufficient programs aimed at combating youth alcoholism, also contribute to the problem.

The study recommends that interventions be developed to address the negative cultural values that encourage the consumption of alcohol. The community education campaigns that seek to sensitize people about the dangers of alcohol consumption, especially during social and cultural gatherings, must be strengthened. Leaders in the community, such as elders, must be involved in advocating for behavior change and reducing the consumption of alcohol in the communities where they live. The study also calls for the design of culturally appropriate interventions that recognize the importance of culture in influencing behavior while promoting healthy behavior during social gatherings and celebrations. Youth empowerment initiatives must be improved to sensitize youth about the negative impacts of alcohol consumption.

In addition to this, it is important to tackle issues that lead to alcohol abuse, such as unemployment and financial pressure amongst young people. This can be done by ensuring that young people are empowered and offered employment opportunities. Lastly, the government needs to consider culture when implementing strategies for reducing alcohol abuse. This can be done by ensuring that there is strong community support, access to rehab services, and enforcement of existing laws regarding alcohol abuse.

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