

## Factors associated with alcohol consumption among students in Divine Word University, Madang Province, Papua New Guinea

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### Abstract

This paper reports on a qualitative research into Divine Word University students' perception on alcohol consumption and the university's strict 'policy' on zero tolerance on alcohol consumption. It examined the participants' perception on the contributing factors of alcohol consumption among students, and identified the short and long-term effects of alcohol consumption on the students and the university. The research was conducted to identify these variables as well as provide possible alternatives and recommendations to improve the situation in the future. This was a purely qualitative study whereby data was collected using one-to-one semi-structured interview questions. The purposive sampling strategy was used to identify the participants. The study found that there are many internal and external factors that contribute to students' alcohol consumption, and the effects not only vary, but are also detrimental. The study also found a lack of proper and efficient implementation of the policy, and a general disagreement on both the policy itself, and the penalty that is imposed on students who breach the policy. The main challenge recognized is to identify a way forward that would be beneficial for both staff and students, without compromising the core values of the university.

### Introduction

According to a study done by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2016, the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking was the highest among 15-19-year-old males in PNG. Furthermore, alcohol use disorders and alcohol dependence was found to be more common in males than in females. Also discovered was that, in 2010, alcohol consumption among adults and young people, that is, 15+ year olds, was 34.6%. This is higher than the percentages in other Pacific island countries, except for New Zealand, Australia and Fiji (Ritchie & Roser, 2018).

Although the statistics in other countries show the shockingly detrimental impacts of alcohol consumption or excessive alcohol consumption among university students, it may not necessarily be the same for PNG. Additionally, the factors associated with alcohol consumption vary in each country, depending on their economic status, liquor laws and policies, culture, societal norms, and others. Alcohol consumption in PNG universities is not strictly prohibited, except for Divine Word University (DWU). DWU maintains a 'zero tolerance' on alcohol 'policy', meaning that the consumption or production of alcohol is prohibited on and off the university campus. This is classified as a *category D offence* under the *student disciplinary policy 2019*, and results in suspension and termination. It is important to note that the term 'policy' in this regard simply refers to a rule to guide behavior of students. So in this report, this 'policy' will be referred to as the 'agreement'.

Upon registration at the beginning of the academic year, students sign an agreement to "Zero tolerance" on alcohol in the university. However, even with this understanding, students still consume alcohol. The act itself, and the factors associated with it have caused many problems in DWU and in other institutions as well. To understand the phenomena in this unique context, the study probed into the following areas:

- binge drinking
- factors contributing to students' alcohol consumption
- university policy on alcohol use
- availability of alcohol on or around campus
- high-risk and socially disturbing behaviors related to alcohol consumption.

It is with high hopes that this study act as a catalyst, and contribute to the literature surrounding alcohol consumption among young people in higher learning institutions in PNG, the risks and contributing factors associated with heavy drinking, as well as policies or strategies that can be put in place to protect both students and their respective institutions.

**Key literature consulted**

Historically, people consumed alcohol in moderate amounts for relaxation and happiness, on special occasions and even for medicinal purposes. In the past and even today, alcohol plays a significant role in cultures in Asia, in some European countries and even in the Middle East. Overtime, alcohol consumption gradually diverted from its intended purpose, to a practice where the objective is to become intoxicated or drunk. This has also developed into a trend of “binge” drinking, which is to consume a large quantity of alcohol within a short amount of time.

Globally, alcohol is assumed to be the most commonly used and abused drug (Carvajal & Lema-Cabrera, 2015). It has become an issue in the global and national context, being linked to a number of negative outcomes (Ritchie & Roser, 2018), especially among university students (Wolkowicz, et al., 2019). The attention is now focused on a specific pattern of alcohol consumption known as binge drinking. Originally, binge drinking was a clinical term prescribed to those who were alcohol dependent (Institute of alcohol studies, 2005).

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2018) defines binge drinking as “a pattern of drinking that brings blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels to 0.08 g/dL. This typically occurs after 4 drinks for women and 5 drinks for men—in about 2 hours”. This is linked to a number of social, behavioural, psychological, academic and emotional risks to university and college students (Hallett, et al., 2011 & Wolkowicz et al., 2019). Studies show that in universities and colleges in Western countries, binge drinking is a male predominant behaviour (Hallett, et al., 2011 & Wolkowicz et al., 2019). Similarly, in PNG, statistics also show that in 2016, binge drinking was the highest among 15-19 years old males (WHO, 2016). Statistics and studies like this show that excessive alcohol consumption or binge drinking is gradually becoming an issue in PNG, especially among young people.

According to Turisi (2010, p.15-16), factors that contribute to alcohol consumption and binge drinking among university students include the following:

- to add to a celebration – students believe that drinking is the only way to celebrate a special occasion;
- to enhance sexuality – some students believe that drinking alcohol add to sexual experiences;
- to lower stress – students believe that alcohol helps reduce stress and worry;
- to express feelings easily – students believe that alcohol helps express feelings or talk with members of the opposite sex;
- under peer pressure – students are influenced by their friends or peers to drink;
- to fit in – students believe that to be part of a group, they have to do what everyone else is doing, even if it means to consume alcohol or binge drink;
- out of boredom - Some students get bored and turn to alcohol as a means of getting excitement out of their lives.

Siwale and Siziya (2019) categorizes the factors contributing to alcohol consumption into two groups; these are consumption factors and effect factors.

Consumption factors include socio-demographic factors, like age, residence, and education level; and attitude towards alcohol, which can be direct, through personal experience and reinforcement; or indirect, through social learning, observation and classical conditioning, parental monitoring, parental consumption of alcohol and amount of pocket money received by students. Effect factors include positive and negative effects. Whatever effect that is desired by the student influences the student to consume alcohol.

In PNG, according to Unage’s study on alcohol abuse in PNG (2011), the contributing factors towards alcohol consumption among young people include family background, education background or level, peer pressure, desire to impress friends, group affiliations, celebrations and other social events and the sole purpose of getting drunk. It is noted from Unage’s study, that negative consequences of alcohol consumption and binge drinking are generally known; however, this has almost no influence on the students’ attitude towards alcohol consumption. This is because students are motivated by the aforementioned factors more than anything else.

A study conducted at an Australian university indicated a range of negative consequences of alcohol consumption among the undergraduate students. “These include: social, physical and psychological harms to the student, for example, academic impairment, blackouts, injury, suicide, unintended sexual activity and sexual coercion; harm to other people including interpersonal and sexual violence; and costs to the institution such as property damage and student attrition” (Hallett et al., 2011, p.1). Hallett et al. (2011) further state that there are second-hand effects of people’s drinking on others such as assaults, sexual violence, impacts on studying, litter, noise and vandalism

experienced by the wider community. Durkin et al. (2005) also mentions that alcohol dependency or alcohol use disorder as well as death are disastrous consequences of alcohol consumption.

In PNG, alcohol use disorders and alcohol dependence were found to be more prevalent among males than females (WHO, 2016). Unage (2011) expressed that alcohol consumption can lead to “public disorder, domestic violence, rape, fist fights, road accidents, deaths, medical complications, psychological problems, loss of income, creating dependency burden, and many other problems and some even unimaginable” (p.9). Other issues associated with alcohol consumption include absenteeism and loss of productivity in studies, reduced quality of life, involvement in criminal activities, such as robbery or sexual assault. Unage (2011) further mentions that the estimated financial cost of alcohol related damage to infrastructure, loss of lives, injuries, and compensation for accidents on the state is approximately 78.5 million Kina, annually. This was stated by the then Acting Prime Minister Hon. Sam Abal, at the National Alcohol Abuse Symposium in 2011. Problems associated with alcohol consumption among university and college students include disturbing college programs and activities, damage college properties and personal belongings, and fight with other students or some members of the surrounding community (Unage, 2011). The greatest risk of alcohol consumption is death. In PNG, the death rates from alcohol use disorders in 2017 was 1.36%, which, compared to most Western countries is low, but when compared to Fiji, Solomon Islands and New Zealand, it is the highest (Ritchie & Roser, 2018).

### **Method**

This present paper is the outcome of a qualitative study, employing semi-structured one to one interviews, which involved 22 male and female, DWU students, both drinkers and non-drinkers. Non-drinkers are those who have never consumed alcohol or have chosen to stop consuming alcohol. These two groups were chosen because the study wanted to gather the perspectives of those who drink and those who do not. Most of the participants were chosen from year levels 3 & 4, because, since they are senior students and have been in DWU longer than others, the researcher regarded that they would be better informed to comment on the policy and students’ alcohol consumption among students. The participants were chosen using non-random, purposive sampling strategy. The participants were informed of the report, they gave their consent, and they were assured confidentiality.

The data was analysed using thematic data analysis method, whereby the audio recording was transcribed, coded, categorized, and thematically organized. These themes were then analysed, discussed, and later presented in this report.

### **Key findings and discussion**

#### ***Factors influencing students’ attitude towards alcohol consumption***

There is a mixed perception on what students think about alcohol consumption, but more so, a variety of factors that contribute towards students’ alcohol consumption. The majority of the participants talked about alcohol consumption as a stress reliever from schoolwork or family stress. Some reasons why students consume alcohol are:

- relaxation purposes
- relief from anxiety and depression
- to “blow off” steam or escape from their problems in their personal life, such as with their family or relationships.

As expressed by the following participants:

“I think another one would be, it's like an escape, some students turn to alcohol as an escape from their problems and worries. For a short period of time they get to forget all about their problems or whatever they're going through. When they drink, it's like a stress relief” (P5F).

“...other social issues like family problems at home, and I don't want to listen to those things and when I want to forget I go and consume alcohol. Not all the time but you know at certain times only. When situation arises” (P8M).

“Family problems, school fee problems; when they pay half and there's half remaining, and the family doesn't have money so, out of anger they go and drink. Some students’ relationship problems. Many students I know of it's because of family problems that they just go and drink” (P7F).

Apart from the aforementioned factors, some of the major influences of alcohol consumption among students stem from their social life and family. Peer pressure and influence was perhaps the most common response from the

participants when asked about why they would consume alcohol. Students who have peers, friends or course mates who drink are more susceptible to drink, than those who do not. Students mention the need to fit in and be a part of the group, so when friends drink, they do too. Some students do not drink at home, but do so in university, because of their group of friends. As stated clearly by a participant:

“...my friends, most of the people I hang out with, they all consume alcohol so like, we are all in the same category. Some, well, my friends think alcohol is a bad thing to drink, but then, we feel the urge to drink... My family forbid us from drinking” (P17F).

There is also a desire to feel grown or mature, that manifests in drinking behaviour and choices among students. This is proven through participating in activities such as alcohol consumption. It is a common practice to participate in activities like this to feel like a part of the group, and to also feel like an adult; consuming alcohol is regarded as a part of adulthood. As stated by P21F “My friends say it’s part of growing up. So, I take alcohol to be a ‘girl blo group’.”

A more concerning factor identified by the participants is the need to satisfy the urge to drink, which may indicate a drinking problem. A couple of participants expressed that alcohol is consumed because of the intoxicated feeling that it offers to the consumer. It is a habit that is gradually being developed among students: drinking alcohol to become intoxicated or ‘drunk’. While this is the case for some students, others drink for leisure and pleasure. Alcohol is consumed to have fun with friends, and to relax. It is also consumed to socialize freely and openly without feelings of social anxiety. This happens mostly during the weekends or after exams or major projects, when students just want to enjoy themselves and meet other people to socialize.

Peer influences aside, families also play a major role in students’ drinking behaviour. A major theme discussed among the participants is that students learn at home, and when they come to university, they bring those practices with them. Those, whose families condone drinking, consume alcohol, but it is not the same for everyone. Each individual students’ background influences their choices in terms of alcohol consumption.

In addition to that, students who have families, parents or relatives who send them allowance are able to afford alcohol, if they choose to. The factors of affordability and availability of alcohol are also important elements in students’ alcohol consumption. Allowance and the amount of allowance provided by parents and guardians play a vital role in whether students consume alcohol or not, how often and how much. The following participants express this:

“At gatherings or I drink when the situation arises, like when I do have money or somebody wants to sponsor or buy” (P15M).

“And then some students, for the boys, I saw that some students we come from different background families. Some of them they are in their payroll, their parents are wealthy so they keep on sending them money, so when they see that there are lot of money, they buy whatever necessary things they need to buy, and the left over money, they influence some other boys and they went out and consume alcohol.” (P8M).

“Every student on campus come from different backgrounds. Some are fortunate, some are unfortunate. Fortunate in terms of income. Some who can afford drink every weekend, but for some who are unfortunate, they drink at times or occasionally, whenever they have money” (P19M).

When they cannot afford store-bought alcohol, students resort to drinking ‘home-brewed’ alcohol such as ‘steam’ or ‘fire wara’. This type of alcohol is more affordable, and even preferred sometimes because of the high alcohol percentage it has. It is consumed for the affordability and because it intoxicates the consumer faster than store-bought alcohol.

### ***Students share parents’ perspective towards alcohol consumption***

Students were also asked about what their family and parents think about alcohol consumption. Majority of the students referred to their parents providing Christian beliefs and teachings against alcohol consumption, as justification for abstinence. Participants, whose parents drink, expressed that they are only allowed to drink after they complete their education, and become employed. While some parents simply, just discourage drinking, others express health concerns, and some others encourage responsible drinking for their children. As expressed by the following participants:

“They trust me because I’m a very responsible drinker. They encourage responsible drinking behaviour. We only drink at home. They don’t allow us out to look for alcohol in the night” (P11M).

“Only my dad drinks, but once in a while, and my brothers. But, my parents are okay with it, as long as we know how to, like the right time to consume alcohol and with the right people” (P5F).

There were a couple of participants who stated that their parents do not approve of females or girls/women drinking as it is perceived as a masculine behaviour or activity. Furthermore, participants also express parents' concern of alcohol consumption as a waste of money and an activity that can lead to situations where the family's reputation is tarnished in the community.

### ***Students' perspective towards alcohol consumption***

Regarding students' perspectives on alcohol consumption, majority of the participants strongly spoke out against alcohol consumption, as it is unhealthy, risky, a distraction and waste of money.

"Alcohol contains intoxicated substances, so when you consume alcohol, if you consume a lot, it's not good for your personal health. It will affect your reproductive system and also, respiratory system will not function well. So then it can cause diseases related to alcohol consumption. Because of this, I personally, don't want to consume it. It's for my own health" (P3M).

"I think it's just a waste. You waste money and you waste time. I don't think students should drink because we're here for school. We are supposed to be focused on academic work, achieving that academic excellence. Alcohol is just a distraction" (P12F).

Interestingly, there is a strong feeling among majority of the participants on alcohol consumption, however, they proceeded to make exceptions and justified these exceptions. For instance, while arguing that it is unhealthy for the body and mind, they encourage controlled and responsible drinking. Moreover, while recognizing it as a distraction from studies, they recommend setting priorities and improving time management skills.

More than half of the total number of students interviewed recognized binge drinking as a common practice among DWU students. While they acknowledge this, they also disapprove it, due to the negative health and financial effects of the practice on students. Additionally, it can lead to students developing an addiction to alcohol.

An overwhelming majority of the participants also expressed the possible benefits of alcohol consumption, which are:

- gaining confidence to socialize with others
- building network with other people
- learning how to drink responsibly.

Participants define responsible drinking as drinking outside of the campus and drinking not to get drunk or too intoxicated.

### ***Effects of alcohol consumption on DWU students***

Effects of alcohol consumption felt in the lives of students vary from their personal mental state to their academic work, relationships, and interactions with others. The major concerns that participants mention as effects of alcohol consumption are alcohol poisoning and alcohol addiction, which is a result of binge drinking; and, physical injury or harm to self, as some students, mostly male, tend to get violent and aggressive when intoxicated.

"First of all, rowdy behaviour. A few nights ago, there was a really big fight here on campus. Must have been Monday or Sunday night. Students were drinking and they started fighting. It was like a free throw. Everyone was just fighting each other. So alcohol causes rowdy behaviour in the students. Other students couldn't stop throwing up. He was afraid to go to the dean." (P11M).

Participants expressed concerns of other social disturbances such as:

- noise pollution, such as screaming, yelling, loud singing, loud music
- swearing at other students
- starting and picking fights and arguments with other students
- disrespecting DWU staff at the student dining hall
- assaulting other students
- disturbing students who are either, trying to sleep, complete an assessment or study for a test/exam/quiz.

Additionally, intoxicated students not only cause trouble on campus but also end up arguing and fighting with their own families and the outside community.

Along with the above-mentioned effects, students also experience adverse effects of alcohol consumption in their physical and mental health. Students express feelings of regret and nausea after consuming alcohol, loss of appetite, fatigue, headaches and, restless nights, resulting in a lack of proper rest.

Mentally, alcohol consumption tremendously affects their ability to recall and retain important information, focus in their schoolwork and reasoning ability. As shared by some students:

“Especially for us students because when we consume alcohol, it reduces our thinking capability, that we cannot memorize our information and, maybe some lecturers' notes or we cannot remember it well, when we consume a lot of alcohol. It basically reduces our thinking capability so I think consuming of alcohol is not best for us as students in here” (P8M).

“Losing memory. I forget quickly. Before when I meet a person for the first time after introductions I remember their name and next time I meet them somewhere, I would call them by names and all that. The same principles apply to my studies. But lately I'd say I find it a little difficult to understand things so I have to read over and over again about 3 or 4 times and then I would understand the concept of a topic or question” (P19M).

Alcohol consumption has also proven to have detrimental effects on the students' academic work/performance. Participants reveal that when students consume alcohol, they lose their focus, half-heartedly complete assessments and even put down assignments to consume alcohol. The lack of rest and sobriety needed to do academic work is diminished when students consume alcohol, and this shows in their academic performance. The following participants express this accurately:

“For the students, coz we have assignments and all that, when they drink, they go off track. They do not hand in their assignments and then it affects their grading and everything” (P12F).

“Since I came into DWU, I've seen students doing that, most of my friends. Most of the times they don't complete their assessment task without realizing that they have to stay 2-3 days to recover so it's not really good” (P13M).

“...in terms of our studies, consuming a lot of alcohol might affect your time and concentration out of your studies. You will not concentrate on your studies and as a result, many of our students tend to do badly in their studies or course” (P3M).

Managing finances and wise spending becomes a daily challenge for students who have developed the habit of consuming alcohol whenever they have money. For some students who receive allowance from their parents, consuming alcohol poses a challenge. Instead of purchasing the necessities, they buy alcohol and squander almost everything. As clarified by P21M, “Financially, when you're drunk you decided to spend whatever little money that your parents sent you. After that you are broke and you ask why did I do that?” To make matters worse, students who spend everything and have nothing left, borrow money from others, which leads to a habitual cycle of borrowing and squandering money. As P22F expresses, “...and take credit (dinau planti) and squandering money. And I've noticed that this is kind of like the start of gambling and other things.”

#### ***High-risk behaviours among DWU students***

High-risk behaviours also appear as a result or effect of alcohol consumption. Some high-risk behaviours conveyed by the participants include serious health risk, gender based violence (GBV) or abuse and harassment between couples in a romantic relationship, and damaging university's property. More specifically, high-risk behaviours among DWU students, associated with alcohol consumption, are:

- Violent behaviour
- Verbally abusive towards others, which leads to fights among themselves
- Risky activities such as climbing over the university's fence, and even walking out to settlements and other communities outside the campus, to look for alcohol.

The following participants assert the above behaviours:

“I'd say, being verbally abusive and also physically abusive... there was this time last year I remember, a boy was drunk at the boys' dorm and then he just, he started looking for fights among the other boys and then the director had to go over... He got the attention of everyone, he was really screaming and aggressive” (P5F).

“When they went out they're looking for trouble when they're outside. Last year I saw, one boy was consuming alcohol along the Banana Block and the people there they smashed him up and he was bleeding on his nose, his face. So, some of the high-risk are, when they're consuming alcohol they are not into the campus because they know that the policy is there so, to avoid the security, they're consuming alcohol in those settlement areas. And that's where they end up looking for trouble like fighting with the outside people, the settlement people, and even the police, when they catch them they even belt them up.” (P8M).

One commonly mentioned high-risk behaviour indicated by the participants is GBV/abuse and harassment among couples in romantic relationships. This not only occurs when students consume alcohol, but has also become a serious issue on campus, as more students enter into and remain in abusive relationships. Most often it is the male student who is abusive towards his girlfriend or partner, when he is intoxicated. As recognized by P10F:

“I think people should just stop consuming alcohol. I've seen a lot of, male students especially when they get drunk they beat up their girlfriends, bully them around the campus. Other students see it but they don't do anything. The authorities don't even know. So, drinking alcohol is not right on campus. Maybe they should just stop. Alcohol influence their mind to do things that is out of control”.

However, in general, female students become targets of harassment when some male students consume alcohol. This makes the campus quite unsafe for them to move around freely. As recalled by P2F:

“Last year, I heard some stories. There was an incident. Students were drinking and they went into the SVD, and the place was crowded. And so, one of the students, maybe he hold the other lady's bum or something. Because of that maybe they stopped the activity so. When students get drunk they can do things like, which they are not supposed to do, like holding female's body”.

Not only that; abuse and harassment occurs between students of the same gender, more specifically among male students.

Additionally, those who consume alcohol and become intoxicated vandalize the university's property such as their own dorm rooms, toilet, bathroom, ATM machine, university building infrastructures and even plants. The following participant shares his experience:

“Some of them they let out their frustrations on the dormitories. This year I had to get my lock fixed because the person who occupied my room last year was said to have been a person who liked to drink every weekend. And he broke all the stuff in the room so I had to fix all of them” (P11M).

### ***Students' drinking behaviour***

The drinking behaviour of students includes the frequency and length of alcohol consumption among students, students' alcohol preference and gender differences in drinking. According to a majority of the participants, generally, students consume alcohol every week. It has become apparent that students think they can consume alcohol without being caught; therefore, while being aware of the agreement, they consume alcohol. While some participants say that they consume alcohol occasionally or at special events, there is a general agreement among the majority that students consume alcohol every weekend, for the entire weekend. There are different groups every week, but the pattern remains the same. Some students can binge drink for up to a week or until they do not have money. Two participants share insights clearly below:

“It might not be the same students that consume every weekend. But every weekend there is at least a group of students who are drinking. They could drink all night. Sometimes students go out to buy more alcohol and come back in.” (P11M).

“From my experience, DWU students are known for drinking till daybreak and they can even drink until they don't have any cash left. That's what I see. Mostly male students, I don't know about female” (P15M).

However, the length of drinking episodes that students have depends on each student – it varies from 8 hours to a week. Participant 19M openly admitted to binge drinking, by saying that “Yes. We do practice it. I can drink beer for continuous days like, maximum would be, 5/7 days”. While this may be true for some students, it is not for others.

As opposed to what is seen now, a number of participants noticed a decrease in alcohol consumption among students this year (2020), as opposed to previous years. Prior to the introduction and implementation of the zero tolerance policy on alcohol, the situation was much worse. As indicated by P14M, “today it's not really a thing; people don't drink as much, unlike those years, 2015 and 16”.

While it is obvious that both male and female students consume alcohol, it is very evident that gender does make a huge difference. The points below are from the participants' observation:

- male students binge drink more than female students
- male students drink almost every weekend, as opposed to female students
- family believes that alcohol consumption is for men only
- male students openly consume alcohol, as opposed to female students.

Participants describe the agreement being effective for female students only. Even if the female students drink on campus, it still would be hard to tell, as described below:

“The boys, well, most of the boys in this school, most likely drink every weekend. They find a way, even when there's an alcohol ban. The boys, they find a way. But, for the girls, it's really hard to tell because they hide and drink in the dorm” (P4F).

For most students, the type of alcohol preferred is something that helps them become intoxicated quickly, and is affordable or cheap. This type of alcohol is mostly, either home-brewed, such as ‘steam’ or ‘fire-wara’ or store-bought, ‘hard stuff’, such as Captain Moresby, Warrior and/or Coffee Punch. The following participants openly discuss the type of alcohol preferred and the reasons why:

“So for the boys I've seen that if they drink particular hard stuff, and if the hard stuff are finished they go out to Gav Stoa to just get steam for K10... it's an easy buy out at Gav Stoa. So, if they can get it at that price, then it's gonna make them go the next day or if they finish it within the hour then they can continue... it's gonna take like 3-4 days for them drinking... from my own personal view I've seen boys drink that much. I've been down at Gav Stoa too and all the way to the other side so, I've seen that most of the boys they just drink every weekend. Almost every weekend. They don't just drink store-bought alcohol, all they go for is steam and home-brew. I've asked them why they go for just steam and homebrew, they say that 'this is 100% full alcohol'. So, they prefer the home-brew, rather than the store-bought alcohol. So they can get 10 containers and drink. It's normal to them” (P9F).

“Steam, 'fire wara'. Well, that's when they have no money and most of the time, we don't have money, so...” (P4F).

#### ***Students' perspective on the Zero Tolerance on alcohol agreement***

The participants displayed a mixed understanding of the agreement, and different perceptions of its implementation and effectiveness. While there is a consensus that the agreement is important to discipline students and maintain order within the institution, the participants emphasize the surprising lack of implementation and enforcement of it. Some participants view the agreement to only be effective if:

- students are seen being apprehended by the authorities and given a penalty of suspension and/or termination;
- no student on campus consumes alcohol at all.

The participants expressed feelings of disappointment and frustration at the lack of proper implementation and/or enforcement of the agreement. As expressed below:

“I don't think the policy is that effective because I've seen students drinking. But, this year from the policy itself, I don't think there's a strong upholding of the policy. I don't think the ones under the policy are doing a good job on upholding the policy because I've seen students still drinking even though there's already a policy put in place. So, the people upholding the policy should do a more better job in upholding that policy” (P9F).

“It's effective to those that they catch but some students get away with it because no one catches them” (P7F).

“And if students are drinking on campus, they should terminate them instead of the thing they do where sometimes the students get sent for community service at the mess, because they've been doing that so. Some of them are let off with warnings. They need to be more adamant about this policy” (P11M).

Most of the frustration stem from experiences with disrespectful and harmful behaviour of intoxicated students, as well as a lack of impartiality among the appropriate authorities in the institution, when dealing with intoxicated students. There are different factors that the participants believe contribute to a lack of proper enforcement of the agreement. Some of these are:

- weak security check at the main gates
- security staff compromising with the students – allowing them to bring in alcohol
- no regular checks in the dormitories by appropriate authorities
- practice of nepotism by the security guards, as well as staff responsible for implementing the policy
- lack of impartiality when dealing with intoxicated students
- lack of effective use of breathalysers
- concerned authorities are too lenient on students caught drinking
- lack of proper communication between University and students

- students threaten individuals in authority or those who are supposed to implement the policy.

Some of the participants' thoughts are shared below to support this:

"No. I don't think the policy is effective. Because like I said, even though they have signed these papers that give them authority to terminate students if they are found drinking on campus, they still let students off with warnings. The fight that we had on Sunday night, the dean came over and he just got all the boys to calm down and sent the boys to their dorms, and that's it. No talks about disciplinary hearing, nothing at all. So, I don't think the policy is effective. While the policy guidelines and laws are effective, the people enforcing it are not effective" (P11M).

"I think, from one point, some students caught are related to the person who is of interest, like our deans, as his wantoks, then he will try to do whatever he can to protect the interest of the particular students not to be terminated...The other is because of some threat. Some students used threatening words to the person in authority so, because of his own safety, he will try to make a decision that can go in line with the person who is caught drinking" (P3M).

"I'd say those ones who are violent when they are drunk... I don't know if the dean fear them or... I don't think the deans are doing a good job. I think that the application of the policy would be effective if they put someone who is strict. Because I don't think the deans are doing the job properly. They give a lot of chances to drunkards." (P17M).

While direct termination and suspension is the penalty for students who are caught drinking, some participants find it unfair and unreasonable for such consequences. For instance, P20M argues: "...from my point of view, I think it's a good policy, but the straight termination is not the right thing I think. Because in some way it affects the students." Other participants perceive the policy to be vital in helping students prioritize, such as P11M "I think it's okay... The reasons for it are also justified. And it also supports that first and foremost you are here to get an education. So you should concentrate on that first." Others argue that while the policy is important for students and DWU, being a Christian institution, it is equally important to consider the students as adults, as well as reconsider the penalty applied, and explore other possible options, rather than direct termination and/or suspension.

### ***Recommendations for improvement***

The participants also offered some recommendations of improvement, for the university to consider.

- Strict bag and ID checks at the main gates to avoid alcohol being smuggled into campus
- Routine dormitory checks by deans weekly, especially on the weekends
- Concerned authorities should be stricter in implementing the policy – no leniency and partiality
- Restrict drunk students from entering the campus
- Fully utilize breathalysers
- Create and encourage open dialogue with students to achieve common ground, and approach the situation with understanding, which includes some level of empathy
- Maintain professional interaction and relationship between staff and students.

Majority of the participants agreed that the university cannot prevent students from consuming alcohol, but it can control how, when and where they consume it to avoid further issues in the future. Hence, instead of a complete ban on alcohol consumption and strict penalty of termination and/or suspension, other suggestions to address the issues related to alcohol consumption are:

- Review the agreement to allow the students to consume alcohol outside of campus, so students are to enter the campus only when they are sober.
- Students should be given three warnings; if the student breaches the agreement three times, after two warnings, then they should be terminated.
- Students consuming alcohol on campus but, not disturbing anyone or causing problems on campus, should not be terminated, but rather be given penalties like community service.
- Counselling services should be made mandatory for students who are caught consuming alcohol more than once. This is to avoid the possibility of them developing an alcohol addiction or dependency.
- Remove students boarding privileges instead of direct termination or suspension.
- Introduce more recreational and academic activities for the students. This means more sporting activity funded and supported by the Administration and Student Services. Furthermore, activities like video

screening, movie nights, debates, educational talks, and educational activities should eventuate more frequently to keep students busy and distracted.

## Conclusion

To conclude, students' alcohol consumption and the negative behaviours associated with it seems to be a growing problem for DWU. Although an agreement is signed during registration at the beginning of the year, it is difficult to encourage students to abide by this agreement. It is even more challenging to implement the zero tolerance on alcohol agreement effectively. Although the negative effects of alcohol consumption on the lives of students outweighs the benefits, students still consume it anyway, and this puts the institution in a problematic situation.

After looking at the findings, DWU may choose to effectively implement the policy for every case of alcohol consumption, that is, direct termination or suspension. By doing so, the university may use those cases as examples to illustrate to other students the consequences of breaching the signed agreement. On the other hand, the university may decide to review the policy, and take into consideration the recommendations provided by the student participants or even through dialogue with the students themselves. The other alternative, perhaps a more agreeable substitute for termination or suspension, is to provide less harsh penalties to students who are 'first time offenders'. This can be clarified and defined properly in the university's alcohol and drugs consumption policy.

If a learning institution strives to achieve excellence in holistic education for their students, then it needs to be critical of the administration and management of student affairs. Hence, student disciplinary issues need to be carefully addressed by first identifying the underlying causes, the impact of these issues, and collaboratively develop feasible solutions that would be beneficial for all concerned parties.

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