



**PSYCHOSOCIAL STUDY ON THE PREVALENCE OF
MISCONCEPTION TOWARDS ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AND
BEHAVIOUR IN AN ESTATE COMMUNITY:
WITH REFERENCE TO PITAKANDA ESTATE, MATALE**

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Alcohol consumption and related behaviours are prevalent in the Pitakanda Estate, Elkaduwa Plantation, leading to numerous social issues due to widespread misconceptions. Many community members make excuses and adopt maladaptive behaviours and norms that favour alcohol consumption, which have become blindly accepted over time. This alcohol consumption has become a part of their culture and daily life, with people believing in the misconceptions built around this behaviour rather than scientific rationale, largely due to the community's socio-economic background and low education levels. People's perceptions of alcohol consumption and behaviour differ based on social modernization, subjective opinions or experiences, cultural background, social norms, social status, vulnerability, and societal misconceptions regarding alcohol use. These perceptions often overshadow the scientifically proven rationale behind alcohol consumption and the unfavourable behaviours associated with it, eventually leading to social problems such as domestic violence, child abuse, addiction, suicide, and poverty within the community. The primary objective of this study was to examine the perceptions of people towards alcohol consumption and behaviour in the Pitakanda Estate, Elkaduwa Plantation, and to identify the differences between scientific facts and mythological beliefs regarding alcohol use and behaviour. To achieve this, a mixed methodology was utilised, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data through questionnaires, key informant interviews, and case studies. An exploratory research design was employed, with snowball and expert sampling techniques used to select respondents for the study. Quantitative data were analysed using Excel sheets and tabulation methods, while qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The major findings revealed that misconceptions about alcohol use and behaviour are leading to family disputes and dysfunction within the community. There is a significant difference between the scientific effects of alcohol and the mythological effects that the community believes. These myths, perpetuated by the alcohol industry and political influences over time, conceal the social issues that emerge from alcohol use, which the community fails to recognize at a glance. Addressing these myths and educating the community on the scientific facts about alcohol consumption is crucial for resolving these social issues and improving overall community well-being.

Keywords: psychosocial, prevalence, misconception, alcohol consumption, behaviour, estate, community

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1. Introduction

This psychosocial study explores the prevalence of cultural myths and perceptions surrounding alcohol consumption and behaviour in the Pitakanda Estate community in Matale. It highlights the gap between societal misconceptions and scientific explanations, emphasizing how these differing views contribute to broader social challenges such as family dysfunction, domestic violence, and community stigma. By investigating the underlying mythology and social attitudes, the study seeks to distinguish between misconceptions and scientific facts, offering insights into how these perceptions shape behavioural norms in estate communities.

2. Literature Review

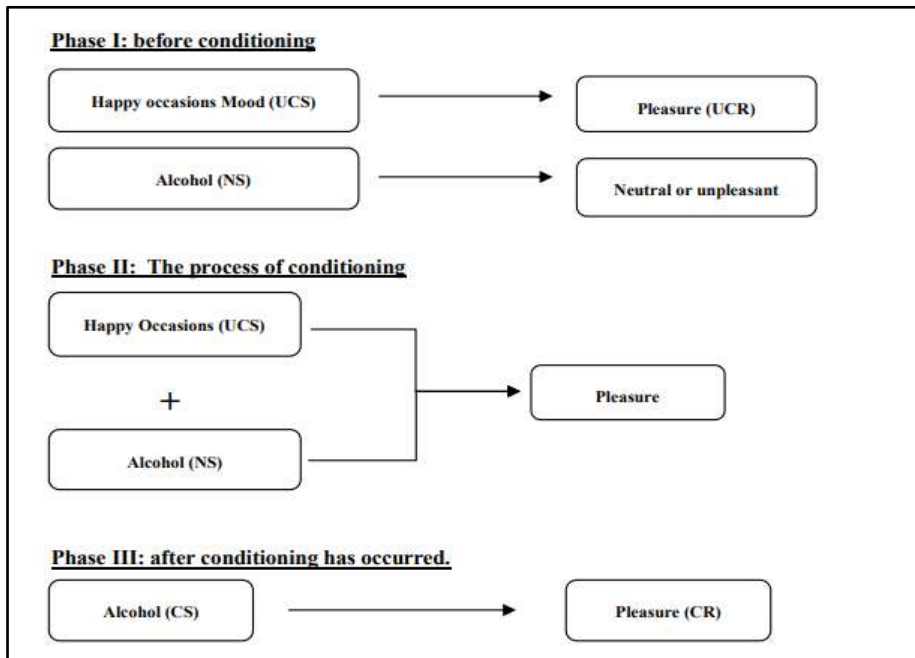
Nanayakkara emphasizes alcohol's physiological and psychological impacts, including its effects on blood-alcohol concentration, brain chemistry, and behaviour. Ethanol, a central nervous system depressant, affects *Gamma - Amino Butyric Acid* (GABA) and *glutamate* receptors, causing sedation and drowsiness, and its metabolism in the liver can lead to nausea and flushing. Cultural and societal contexts significantly influence drinking behaviours, with Vaillant, E.G. noting alcohol's role in reducing tension and inhibitions. However, behaviour changes vary by individual and context, with some using alcohol for relaxation and others for social dominance, as observed in Sri Lankan practices by Dr. Jayasundara (2018) and studies by Baklien and Samarasinghe (2003).

Dr. Jayasundara (2018) further explores the psychological complexities of alcohol consumption, linking excessive intake to memory paradoxes, such as regret and amnesia, and identifying its dual role in alleviating depressive symptoms while fostering dependence. Mental health disorders are common among alcohol consumers, as alcohol often exacerbates rather than resolves underlying issues. Prior research, including work by Vaillant and Dr. Jayasundara, connects alcohol use to anxiety management and relaxation, while Baklien and Samarasinghe (2003) emphasize its association with dominance behaviours. These findings raise ambiguous questions about the interplay between alcohol, personality traits, and societal norms, underscoring the influence of social contexts in shaping behaviours that extend beyond the chemical effects of alcohol. Drawing on prior research, this study explores the under-examined perspective of alcohol consumers' potential



victimization and unawareness of their exploitation, aiming to provide innovative insights into these issues.

This theoretical framework explores how social learning, operant conditioning, and classical conditioning theories explain alcohol consumption behaviour. Social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura, suggests that drinking behaviours are influenced by observing and imitating others, reinforced by social norms and anticipated effects. Operant conditioning theory, as described by Prasadarao and Mishra (1994), posits that drinking behaviour is maintained through selective



reinforcement and can be modified by altering positive reinforcers. Classical conditioning theory explains that alcohol cravings are triggered by conditioned stimuli associated with drinking. Nanayakkara, S ("How the Alcohol Experience Becomes Positive") highlights that alcohol use becomes associated with feelings of joy and relaxation through classical conditioning, where learned associations between alcohol and pleasurable experiences reinforce continued consumption.

Figure 2.8.6 1. Application of the Classical Conditioning Process to Alcohol Use
 Source: Adapted from Nanayakkara, S. (n.d.). How the Alcohol Experience Become Positive?

3. Methodology

The research was conducted in Pitakanda Estate, Elkaduwa Plantation, focusing on the Pitakanda and Dambalagala Divisions. It employed an exploratory design using mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative). The sample size was 32, selected through non-probability sampling techniques (expert and snowball



sampling), including 11 males, 13 females, and 8 key informants. Data were collected using questionnaires, key informant interviews, and case studies. Quantitative data were analysed using Excel, frequency tables, and charts, while qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis of interviews and open-ended responses.

4. Results and Discussion

The study aimed to examine perceptions of alcohol consumption and behaviour in the Pitakanda Estate Division of Elkaduwa Plantation, uncovering a range of misconceptions and societal impacts associated with its prevalence. It found that while the community generally viewed alcohol consumption as harmful to health, family, and community development, there was also a tendency to stigmatize alcohol users, reinforcing negative behaviours and making it more difficult for individuals to overcome addiction. A significant gap was identified between scientific facts and mythological beliefs, with many community members attributing extreme behaviours, such as aggressiveness and memory loss, solely to alcohol consumption without understanding the underlying chemical effects on the brain. Cultural and social factors, including religious festivals, gender stereotypes, and patriarchal norms, reinforced these misconceptions, allowing alcohol use to be excused or normalized. Such beliefs contributed to family dysfunction and domestic violence, with 40% of women respondents reporting violence due to their partner's alcohol use. The study also highlighted the influence of political actors and alcohol companies in perpetuating these myths, indirectly promoting the illegal brewing and sale of alcohol, particularly Kasippu and toddy, in the estate community.

The findings reveal that alcohol consumption and related behaviours in the Pitakanda Estate Division are shaped by a complex interplay of psychological and socio-cultural factors, often intertwined with deep-rooted misconceptions. Psychologically, respondents reported using alcohol as a means of stress relief, social interaction, and self-medication for anxiety, with many holdings learned expectations of euphoria or aggression based on childhood observations and community norms. The application of Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Pavlov's Classical Conditioning illustrates how behaviours are modelled, internalized, and reinforced through family, peers, media, and repeated associations between drinking and social or emotional outcomes. Personality traits also influenced alcohol-related behaviour, with some individuals using drinking as a socially sanctioned outlet for suppressed behaviours, enabled by community tolerance and myths about alcohol's effects. Defence mechanisms such as denial, displacement, and rationalization were evident, allowing individuals to shift blame for deviant behaviour onto alcohol.

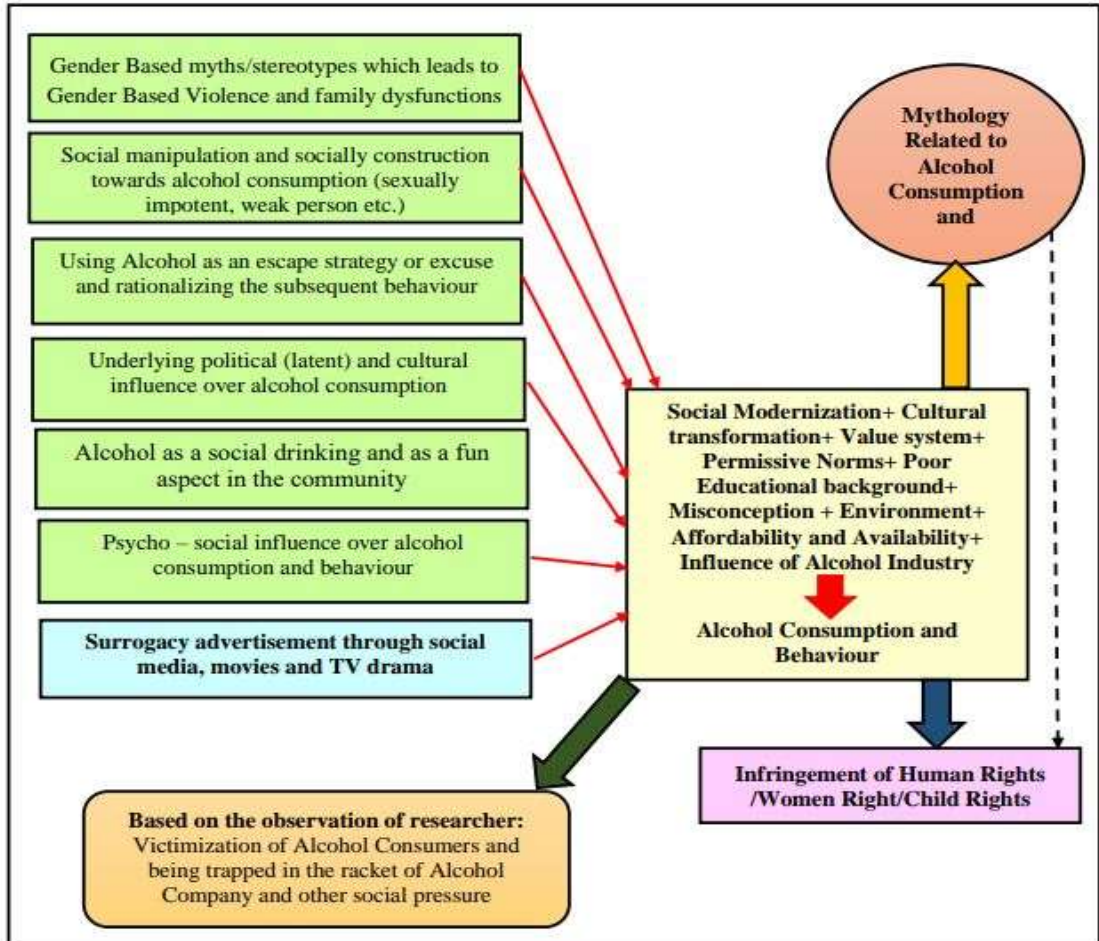
Socio-culturally, poverty, debt cycles, patriarchal domination, and gender stereotypes were significant drivers, with alcohol use serving both as an escape from financial stress and as a tool for asserting masculinity within households. Cultural and religious events were sometimes used as socially accepted occasions



for drinking, masking underlying social control dynamics. While most community members, especially women, perceived alcohol consumption as harmful and sought its eradication, a pattern of stigma and labelling towards drinkers was also observed, paradoxically reinforcing consumption by alienating individuals attempting to quit. Moreover, misconceptions about alcohol's effects, fuelled by low literacy, socio-economic constraints, and entrenched cultural norms, often overshadow scientific understanding of its physiological and neurological impacts. Hence, these findings demonstrate that addressing alcohol misuse in the community requires confronting not only the direct health impacts but also the layered psychological conditioning, cultural acceptance, and mythologies that sustain it.

As a whole, the research identified deep-rooted mythology surrounding alcohol use as a significant factor contributing to the social problems faced by the estate community, including family disputes, rights violations, and the growth of illegal alcohol businesses.

Figure 5.1. 1. outline of the research finding



5. Limitations

The study faced several constraints, including limited access to respondents due to the COVID-19 restrictions, difficulties in scheduling interviews with key informants, and challenges in obtaining estate management approval amid concerns about media exposure. Additionally, minor indirect political threats and respondent reluctance, due to fears of repercussions when discussing alcohol-related issues, further impacted data collection.

6. Conclusion

This research examines how misconceptions about alcohol consumption contribute to negative behaviours and societal issues, such as domestic violence and family dysfunction. It highlights the role of illegal alcohol selling, indirect promotion, and the influence of alcohol companies in perpetuating these myths. To alleviate the mythology related to alcohol consumption and behaviour in the community, the



researcher recommends viewing alcohol users empathetically as victims alongside their family members, rather than labelling and stigmatising them, and developing a Training of Trainers (TOT) program for community leaders and youth in the plantation sector will debunk myths and encourage active promotion of an alcohol-free environment. Implementing these recommendations could significantly reduce misconceptions and improve the overall well-being of the community.

7. Acknowledgement

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