



Effect of Licensing Policies on Regulation of Illicit Brews Trade in Meru County Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed at investigating the influence of licensing regulations, enforcement regulations, adherence to regulatory requirements and sociocultural effect on regulation of illicit brew trade within Meru County. The study employed the availability theory by Eric Single. It utilized a descriptive research design, with a target population of 349 participants drawn from 38 urban centers in Meru West Sub County. To create a representative sample of illicit brew traders, 10% of the target population was used, resulting in 35 alcohol traders. A multistage cluster sampling technique was applied to select five towns from three wards in Meru West Sub County, with a snowballing approach used to choose seven alcohol traders from each of these sampled towns, resulting in a total of 35 participants. Key informants for interviews included a member of the County Licensing Committee, the sub-county Commissioner, two Chiefs, four assistant Chiefs, and two police officers within the study region, selected purposively. Data collection involved the use of questionnaires and interview guides, with both research instruments undergoing validation and reliability testing. A pilot study was conducted in a town excluded from the main study. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in the form of percentages, frequency tables, bar graphs, and pie charts. Qualitative data underwent content analysis. The research findings indicated that the issuance of licenses has played a significant role in regulating alcohol trade in the county. As a result of these findings, it is recommended that the County government should embark on public education regarding the implementation of successful enforcement strategies for illicit brew regulation. Proper evaluation of licensing policies should be carried out to ensure their effectiveness in illicit brew trade regulation. Additionally, the government should conduct periodic audits of alcohol businesses to ensure compliance with the necessary policies, thereby facilitating successful illicit brew policy regulations.

INTRODUCTION

Evidence suggests that human cultures had been aware of and making use of alcoholic drinks for a significant number of centuries at this point (Birech et al, 2013; Wang et al, 2021). According to Freeman and Perry (2006), who based their argument on various biblical instances and ancient. The use of fermented drinks like as wine, beer, cedar, mead, and others has been prevalent in virtually all human communities for thousands of years. These beverages were often drunk shortly after they were brewed locally, and they were seldom traded (WHO, 2012). In many civilizations, people used alcohol for a variety of reasons, including as a meal, a medication, as a mood adjuster, and for intoxicating purposes. Alcohol had a significant role in the religious and cultural practices of other nations (Witkiewitz, McCallion, & Kirouac, 2016). Alcohol still has several beneficial uses in the contemporary world. Wine is an essential component of many cultural rites, including weddings, circumcisions, and peace negotiations, and it is used for sacraments in the Roman Catholic religion. Traditional surgeons also utilize wine as an anesthetic during surgical procedures (Witkiewitz, et al, 2016).

Alcohol, despite the fact that it has many positive applications for civilizations, has become the drug that is misused the most around the globe (Farhoudian, 2021). Therefore, there have been efforts made to reduce the negative effects of alcohol by standardizing the industry, regulating businesses, and instituting consumption restrictions. This resulted in the legalization of certain types of alcohol while others were made illegal due to the circumstances under which they were produced, the amount of alcohol contained inside them, the packaging, and the procedures for obtaining a license. According to the World Health Organization (2011), the banning of illegal brews goes back to the years between 1919 and 1933. This was done owing to the bad consequences that came along with the drinking of illicit brews.

Surrogate alcohol, artisanal spirits, and counterfeit versions of industrially manufactured alcoholic drinks are all quite common in the nations that were a part of the Soviet Union in the past. Their usage is also deeply ingrained in the history of the region (Probst et al, 2020; Shield & Rehm, 2021). As a part of the culture in the northern region of Peru, moms may occasionally give their children traditional home-brewed drinks, which may or may not include alcohol (Bloomfield, 2020). Recent developments, on the other hand, point to the fact that this kind of manufactured alcohol is gradually making its way into mass manufacturing in several nations.

In rural areas of China, the traditionally homemade liquor known as baijiu is now manufactured in tiny factories that can be found in almost every town (Lee et al, 2020). Although it is legal to produce and consume homemade alcohol in many other countries, an estimated fifty percent of the alcohol that is consumed in India is illicitly produced, including home brewed liquor (Furr-Holden et al, 2019; Jones et al, 2015). This is in contrast to the situation

in India, where producing and consuming homemade alcohol is legal. A significant amount of alcohol that has not been registered is smuggled over borders in the countries of Finland, Sweden, and other northern European nations (Pantani et al, 2020). Unrecorded alcohol may include dangerous substances such as methanol, which might lead to poisoning and even death. This is a worry in addition to the fact that its availability is not controlled and that, on average, it is sold at a cheaper price per unit than ethanol (Green et al, 2020).

Although African society has always had strict social structures and regulations in place to control and define who can drink alcohol, when it can be consumed, and why, alcohol consumption has always been an integral part of African culture, rituals, tradition, and customs. This has been the case since the beginning of time (Heather, 2017).

The chang'aa probation Act, which was enacted in 1980 to combat methanol poisoning, was a direct result of the city's economic development in 1978. The legislation outlawed chang'aa in all its forms: production, distribution, distribution, consumption, and ownership. Any kind of traditional beverage or spirit was defined as chang'aa under the Act. No one is allowed to produce, distribute, sell, use, or even be in possession of Chang'aa, according to the law. However, illegal alcohol was always available, since it was mostly produced in remote locations that lacked police presence or, if patrolled, served bribed clients or the execution policemen themselves.

One positive step toward decentralization and public engagement with policy concerns is the devolution of liquor license powers (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Kelly et al. (2015) claim that the high legal requirements set by the various laws and regulations make it impossible for illegal brewers to compete. It is almost hard for a local brewer to get the necessary permits, licenses, and approvals from the Kenya Revenue Authority, health authorities, and zoning authorities at a cost of roughly Ksh. 40, 000. The gap was left when responsibility for the role was transferred to the county administration. According to Mututho (2014), issuing liquor licenses is seen as a way for county governments to earn more money. Prior attempts to limit alcohol sales outlets were undermined by this. Counties may be found where the number of bars exceeds the number of schools. In most cases, this hinders government efforts and demoralizes law enforcers in their battle against the alcohol issue.

President Uhuru Kenyatta issued a decree in July 2015 ordering the closure of all illicit alcohol businesses in central Kenya and the arrest of their owners (Muregi, 2017). The growing number of deaths blamed on illicit brews prompted the government to issue this rule (Muregi, 2017). Legal brand makers such as Keroche Breweries subsequently filed an injunction request with the High court, challenging the government's order to destroy illicit alcohol. They claimed the order violated the constitution. According to Article 135 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, presidential directions must be in writing (Okoth, 2016), and this was deemed to be insufficient by the court. The court also found that the Respondents' actions were unreasonable since they ignored the fact that the Petitioner's company and goods are legitimate and have been issued valid licenses by the same authority that is attempting to revoke them. The court found the respondents' actions to be irrational.

According to what was mentioned by the deputy presidents Rigathi Gachagua in the Daily Nation (2023, April 15), the amount of alcohol misuse episodes are still encountered in many counties in the Mount Kenya area. This is the case even though tough rules have been introduced on the manufacturing, commerce, and consumption of alcohol. Meru County is one of the counties in Kenya that has a high incidence of people drinking illegal brews. According to Gitari, Chaka, and Godrick's (2020) findings, Meru County is inundated with an extensive variety of illegal beverages, each of which is negatively impacting the lives of the locals. According to the article that was published in the Daily Nation on December 9th, 2022, the people of Nyaki East, which is located in Meru County, are concerned about the presence of harmful alcohols in the area and have requested that the president take action. Rogue merchants, some of whom produce their booze at night and transfer it to establishments referred to as "drinking dens," are said to be the ones responsible for brewing the illicit beverages and distributing them to the local pubs, as stated by the locals. The drinking of alcohol is now an ongoing activity for the younger generation. Some of the locals will spend the night "drowning" themselves at the local bar. Due to the fact that a considerable percentage of young people in Meru County do not have jobs, the local economy is struggling as a consequence.

Statement of the problem

The prohibition of traditional beers in Kenya dates back to the country's colonial era. In order to maintain control over their labor, colonial authorities prohibited the manufacturing and consumption of traditional beers, also known as illegal brews, with the exception of ceremonial occasions. (Kihuria, 2014; Gikonyo, 2017). During that time, only white people could drink beer from bottles. As a direct consequence of this, the proliferation of illegal dens that brewed, distributed, and sold traditional alcohol to Africans who lacked the financial means to purchase bottled beer occurred (Kihuria, 2014). Although there were no written regulations regulating traditional brew in Kenya when the country was under colonial rule, in 1903 British settlers established the Legislative Council in order to domesticate British colonial legislation. Consumption of alcoholic beverages for the requirements of the local colony was included (Mututho, 2014). The manufacture and drinking of traditional brews, particularly those that were intended for ceremonial reasons, were severely limited as a result of the new regulation. As a consequence of this, an illicit alcohol trade flourished in Kenya's underground.

Alcohol is often drunk in social settings with the intention of enjoying oneself (Griswold et al, 2018). On the other hand, the issue is that the manufacture of illegal brew is a prevalent activity in Kenya (Muregi, 2017). One of the things that has contributed to a rise in production is the fact that legal alcoholic drinks are subject to high taxes, which makes them costly for individuals who are living in low-income situations (Muregi, 2017) As a direct consequence of this, Kenyans, particularly those living in rural regions such as Imenti south sub county, have no choice but to consume the poisonous concoction. Even in countries with well-established legal systems, the manufacture of illegal brew is widespread (Hecklé, 2019).

Numerous reports indicate that, in spite of existing laws regulating liquor, illegal brews continue to pervade the nation, and the number of fatalities attributed to alcohol consumption is rising. Highlighting the gravity of the situation, on June 29, 2020, the then-Interior Principal Secretary Karanja

Kibicho spearheaded a government operation to destroy illicit brews in Keria, located in Meru County (Standard Digital, 2020, June 29th). During this operation, a chief and seven assistant chiefs were dismissed for permitting the production and consumption of illicit brews within their jurisdictions. On that same day, government officers also participated in the destruction of illicit brews. This is a significant situation that demands for an inquiry to be conducted in order to discover why the trade of illegal brews continues to increase despite the fact that the battle against them is becoming more intense with time. The study sought to explore effects of Alcohol Control Policies on regulation of illicit brews trade in Meru County. The study focused on licensing, enforcement, conformity and socio-cultural factors on trade of illicit brews in Meru County.

Research Objective

The study examined the effect of licensing policies on regulation of illicit brews trade in Meru County

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical literature review

Availability Theory

Epidemiological research has played an important role in understanding the impact that various legislative and administrative bodies have on the regulation of alcohol consumption. This has been a persistent area of study over the years, with Loxley et al. (2004) referencing a plethora of investigations that link state-level alcohol intake to a spectrum of health and societal challenges faced by the community. Central to this area of study is the theory of alcohol availability.

In 1988, Single articulated an early version of availability theory, highlighting three interconnected yet distinct propositions that shaped the understanding of the relationship between alcohol availability and consumption at the time. Single's first proposition posited that an expansion in societal accessibility to alcohol would correspondingly drive a rise in the total mean consumption by residents (Single, 1988). The second facet of this theory posited that this increased mean consumption would, in turn, lead to a higher incidence of heavy drinking within the population. Lastly, it was argued that heavy drinking, characterized by its detrimental health and social implications, would consequently augment the number of heavy drinkers in the population (Single, 1988).

Since Single's foundational contributions, the theory has evolved, particularly through the work of Stockwell and Gruenewald (2004). They redefined the core idea of availability theory by considering how changes in availability might uniquely influence different demographic or societal groups, and further factoring in other determinants of drinking behavior. They highlighted the nuanced relationship between alcohol availability and consumption, arguing that greater accessibility leads to an increase in the mean intake only when it results in a reduction of real price, encompassing both the actual retail price and convenience costs. Furthermore, they postulated that the manner in which alcohol is consumed, such as social drinking versus solitary drinking or pub versus home drinking, is influenced by high availability and subsequently affects alcohol-related issues within the community (Single, 1988).

In a departure from earlier interpretations, Stockwell and Gruenewald (2004) concluded that mere availability of alcohol does not automatically lead to increased consumption. Rather, it is the confluence of greater availability with changes in the full price of alcohol that will result in increased intake. They argued that only strategies aimed at reducing availability in ways that influence the comprehensive factors determining the full price of alcohol would be effective in curtailing consumption (Chikritzhs et al., 2007).

Empirical Literature

Alcohol Licensing and regulation of illicit brews trade

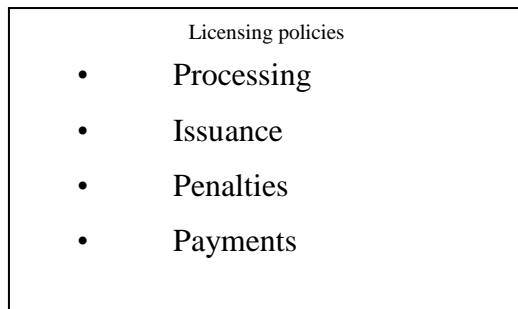
In Kenya, the sale of alcoholic beverages requires a license, just like any other kind of company. The term "licensing" refers to a kind of contract between businesses in which one party offers the other the legal right to produce and sell a product for a fee. Doherty and Roche (2003) state that license fees are typically a modest proportion of sales. By acquiring a license, a company may have a leg up on the competition by using established channels of manufacturing, distribution, and promotion. Only legitimate merchants are allowed in the market once licensing is in place, and dishonest ones are discouraged (Chikritzhs et al., 2007). The licensee is authorized to control the distribution of the licensed goods or services. For instance, licensing programs limit black market activity to protect consumers from potentially dangerous vendors and goods. In this approach, licensing is crucial for controlling the circulation and promotion of illegal goods and services that are harmful to people's physical, mental, and social environments.

The licensing of alcoholic beverages is handled by a variety of different departments and organizations across the globe. In the United States, for instance, different states issue different kinds of licenses because of the variations between them. The details of a license are determined by the laws of the jurisdictions in which it will be used. The Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) oversees the sale and distribution of alcoholic beverages in the state (Oregon, 2018). Liquor service hours, locations, methods, and potential patrons are all broad categories addressed by these statutes. According to Triangle Accounting (2018), it is typical practice in American bars and restaurants to impose limitations on the number of drinks a single patron may purchase at a time. Wagenaar et al. (2000) conducted a survey asking for public opinion on the varying laws and regulations between states and found that the vast majority of respondents supported licensing. There was a lot of support for licensing and restrictions on the promotion and sale of alcoholic beverages, as well as the prohibition of alcohol in many public settings.

The Meru County Drinks Control Bill of 2014 (Kamau, 2014) establishes a system of licenses for the sale and distribution of alcoholic beverages within the county. There are many types of licenses that are required in order to legally sell alcohol, import alcohol, or produce alcohol, all of which must adhere to the Act's requirements. However, without a license given by the Act, no one in Meru County may produce, manufacture, or sell alcoholic beverages. All citizens of Meru are entitled to apply for any kind of license under the law. The application will be reviewed by the County Liquor Licensing Committee and the Sub-County Liquor Licensing Advisory Committee. The county Liquor licensing committee should award the license to the applicant after the required payment has been received and the sub-county advisory committee has determined that the applicant is qualified. If the application is denied, the petitioner will get a letter explaining why from the sub-county advisory committee. The committee considers a variety of issues, including proximity to the school and the general upkeep of the building, before issuing a license to do business there. The Act regulates the alcohol industry by making it illegal for any licensed firm or individual to manufacture, store, or sell alcohol to anybody under the legal drinking age.

Conceptual Framework

Independent variable



Dependent variable

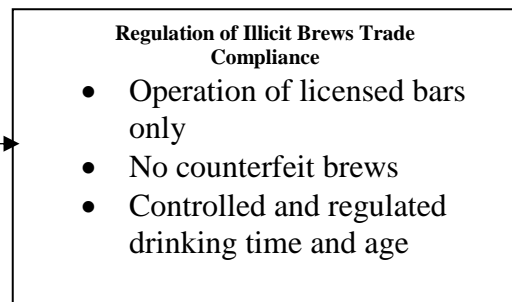


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design. This choice is supported by Kombo and Tromp (2006), who highlight that a descriptive research design is particularly suitable when the aim is to provide an in-depth description of a phenomenon. This research design was particularly conducive for gathering and analyzing the perspectives, opinions, and attitudes of participants concerning the factors influencing the regulation of illicit brew trade in Meru County.

Target Population

The scope of this study encompassed alcohol traders situated within Meru County. The target population comprised these alcohol traders. Within Meru County, there exists a sum total of 349 alcohol traders. These traders are spread across 38 distinct urban centers, encompassing all sub-counties within the county. The primary focus was on sub-counties that exhibit a notable prevalence of alcohol trade, as indicated by the statistics provided by NACADA in 2022.

Table 1 Target population for the study

| Sub county | Number of urban centers | Alcohol traders |
|----------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Imenti South | 9 | 93 |
| Imenti Central | 17 | 90 |
| Imenti North | 12 | 166 |
| Total | 38 | 349 |

Source: Meru County development integrated plan 2018 - 2022

Data Analysis Techniques and Procedures

Rate of Response

Table 3 Rate of Response

| Response | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Returned | 32 | 91.4% |
| Unreturned | 3 | 8.6% |
| Total | 35 | 100 |

Source: Researcher (2023)

Based on the research's chosen sample, 35 questionnaires were distributed to the 35 participants selected for the study. However, as indicated in the table, 32 of these surveys were completed and included in the study, while 3 surveys were not returned. This resulted in a response rate of 91.4%, aligning with the guideline proposed by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), which suggests that a 75% response rate is acceptable for research purposes.

Respondents Gender

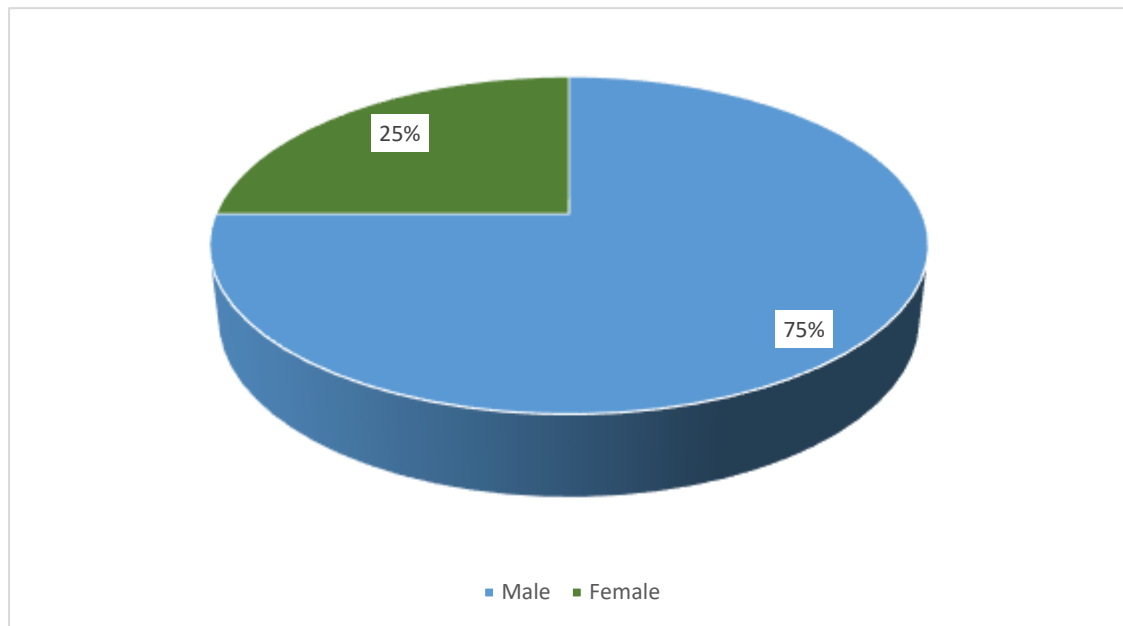


Figure 2: Respondents Gender

Source: Researcher (2023)

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of respondents by gender. The data indicates that 75% of the participants were male, while the remaining 25% were female. Consequently, it is evident that individuals of both genders possess knowledge regarding policy regulations related to alcohol trade in Meru County. This revelation highlights that both males and females are impacted by these policy regulations, underscoring the significance of their input in the research. It can be inferred that the research remains unbiased in terms of gender representation. These findings align with Romito and Grassi's (2007) research, which argues that alcohol affects both men and women, emphasizing the universal impact of policy regulations on alcohol trade.

Age of respondents

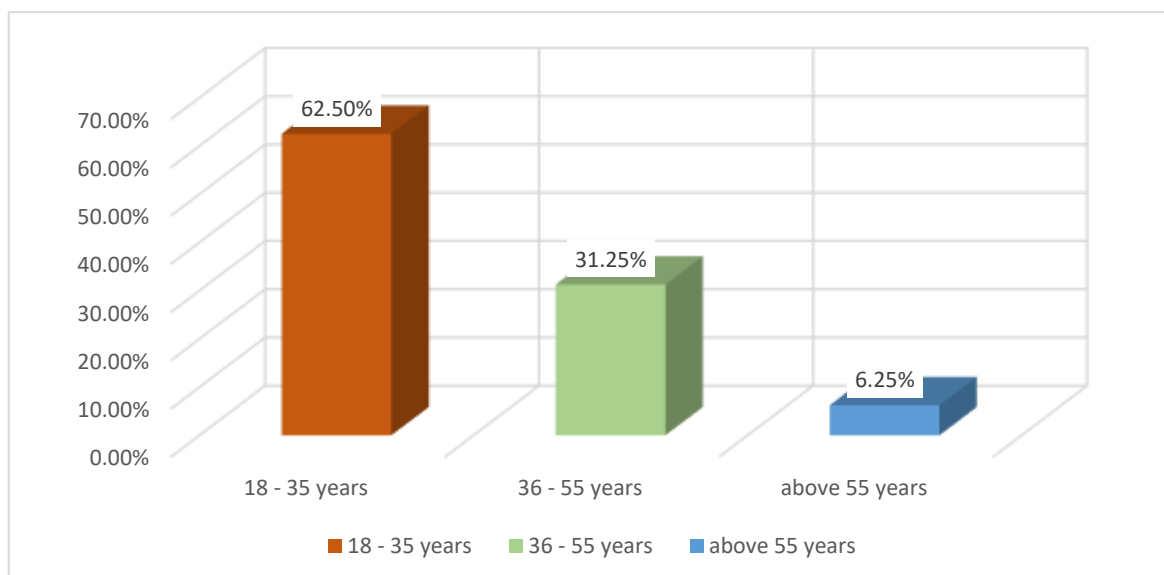


Figure 3: Age of Respondents

Source: Researcher (2023)

In Figure 3, data regarding the ages of the respondents is depicted. The figure illustrates that 62.5% fell within the 18-35 age range, 31.25% were in the 36-55 age group, and 6.25% were aged 55 and above. These findings suggest that a significant majority of the respondents, specifically 62.5%, belonged

to the 18-35 age category. This implies that any policy regulations governing alcohol trade in Meru County would have the most substantial impact on individuals in the 18-35 age bracket. However, it's worth noting that Piacentini and Banister (2009) contradicts these findings, indicating that alcohol consumption is primarily a matter of personal choice, and individuals of any age can become involved in it, especially in the absence of stringent usage regulations.

Level of education

The respondents were requested to indicate their highest level of education, Table illustrates the educational backgrounds of the participants.

Table 6 Level of education

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Valid | Primary education | 11 | 34.4 |
| | Secondary education | 15 | 46.9 |
| | College education | 4 | 12.5 |
| | University education | 2 | 6.3 |
| | Total | 32 | 100 |

Source: Researcher (2023)

As per the data presented in table 6 the highest percentage of respondents, 46.9%, had completed secondary education, while 34.4% had finished primary education. Additionally, 12.5% had pursued college education, and 6.3% had attained a university level of education. This suggests that a significant portion of the participants were well-educated, implying a substantial understanding of policy regulations concerning alcohol trade in Meru County. These results align with Elder et al.'s (2002) assertion that respondents with relevant experience in the study area are more likely to provide high-quality responses, aiding in addressing research inquiries. Therefore, the literacy of the majority of participants facilitated effective responses to the research questions.

Licensing Policies on Regulation of Illicit Brews Trade

The study sought to examine the effect of licensing policies on regulation of illicit brews trade in Meru County. The responses were as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Licensing Policies

| Statements | N | SA % | A % | N % | D % | SD % | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|----|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|------|-------------------|
| Regulations of alcohol trade works properly | 32 | 28.1 | 40.6 | 12.5 | 18.8 | 0.0 | 3.7 | 1.198 |
| Majority of liquor outlets are licensed | 32 | 21.9 | 37.5 | 21.9 | 21.9 | 15.6 | 3.6 | 1.103 |
| County government agencies are effective in licensing of liquor industry. | 32 | 18.8 | 25.0 | 31.3 | 15.6 | 15.6 | 3.3 | 1.224 |
| Issuing of licenses limits has helped as far as regulation of alcohol trade is concerned. | 32 | 21.9 | 43.8 | 28.1 | 6.3 | 0.0 | 3.8 | .859 |
| Licensing has reduced manufacturing, distribution, and sale of alcohol trade | 32 | 12.5 | 25.0 | 34.4 | 18.8 | 9.5 | 3.12 | 1.157 |
| Enactment of alcohol licensing laws has reduced number of illicit brews | 32 | 18.8 | 50 | 12.5 | 12.5 | 6.3 | 3.6 | 1.129 |
| Majority of public are aware of licensing policies | 32 | 56.3 | 31.3 | 9.4 | 3.1 | 0.0 | 4.4 | .798 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 32 | | | | | | | |

Source: Researcher (2023)

Table 9 presents findings regarding the effectiveness of alcohol trade regulations in alignment with county requirements and policies. The study aimed to assess whether the regulation of alcohol trade in Meru County aligns with the established policies. The findings reveal that a significant portion of respondents, 40.6%, expressed agreement with this proposition, and 28.1% indicated strong agreement with the notion that alcohol trade regulations function effectively. On the other hand, 12.5% of respondents remained neutral in their stance, while 18.8% disagreed with the effectiveness of these regulations. The data demonstrates that a substantial majority, totaling 68.7% of respondents, support the idea that alcohol trade regulations are functioning as intended, with a mean score of 3.7188 and a standard deviation of 1.19770. Nevertheless, the 12.5% of neutral responses suggest that there may be areas where alcohol consumption and regulations are not in sync, highlighting the need for a closer examination to ensure effective policy implementation. These findings are in alignment with the conclusions drawn by Moore et al. (2010), emphasizing the pivotal role of the licensing system in regulating alcohol trade and enhancing the capabilities of regulatory agencies in this context.

The inquiry into whether the majority of alcohol retailers possess valid licenses was a pertinent aspect of this research, as it aimed to shed light on compliance with licensing regulations in Meru County. The survey results reveal that 59.4% of the respondents agreed that most liquor outlets hold

licenses, while 21.9% expressed neutrality on this issue. Additionally, 18.7% disagreed with the notion that the majority of liquor outlets are licensed. These findings suggest that a significant proportion of liquor outlets in Meru County are indeed licensed, and it is apparent that a majority of the survey participants possess knowledge about the licensing regulations in the area.

However, the fact that 21.9% of respondents were neutral on the licensing status of liquor outlets indicates that some individuals may lack information regarding licensing regulations in Meru County. This observation is further supported by the statistical analysis, which includes a mean of 3.6 and a standard deviation of 1.103. These outcomes align with the findings of a study conducted by Chikritzhs et al. (2007), which similarly concluded that the majority of alcohol traders opt for licensing as a means to operate within the confines of the law and prevent the entry of harmful products into the market.

Backed up by interview with member of county alcohol licensing committee on alcohol trade licensing he noted that, “*Upon the grant of a licence through payment of prescribed fee, then the alcohol trade is deemed to be operating legally*”. This therefore, shows that licensing has been effective in Meru County since most of the alcohol outlets are licensed.

On effectiveness of county government agencies in the licensing of the liquor industry. The findings revealed that 43.8% of respondents believed that county government agencies are proficient in regulating the liquor industry, while 31.3% expressed a neutral stance, and 25% disagreed with the efficacy of county government agencies in this regard. The mean value of 3.3 indicates that the majority of respondents are uncertain about the effectiveness of county government agencies in liquor licensing, with a standard deviation of 1.224. This is further supported by a case in Oregon, where the Oregon Liquor Commission (OLCC) has encountered challenges in regulating alcohol consumption and trade (Oregon, 2019). Consequently, it is advisable for Meru County agencies to instill confidence in their ability to manage and oversee the liquor trade.

The study further assessed the efficacy of the licensing process in Meru County. The findings demonstrated that 59.4% of the respondents agreed on the effectiveness of the licensing process, while 18.8% remained neutral, and 21.9% disagreed. With a mean score of 3.5 and a standard deviation of 1.164, it was evident that the licensing process for alcohol trade in Meru County is effective. This efficiency plays a crucial role in regulating alcohol trade in the region.

These results align with a study conducted by Wagenaar et al. (2000), indicating public support for licensing policies. Proper implementation procedures were highlighted as essential for effectiveness. Additionally, an interview with a chief in Nkuene ward supported the research findings. He mentioned instances “*there were cases where applicants were denied licenses due to non-compliance with health and safety regulations outlined in the alcohol control acts of 2010 and 2014*”. The study emphasized the importance of adhering strictly to the law as the foundation for the licensing process. Deviation from legal standards should never be tolerated to maintain the effectiveness of the licensing system.

The results, indicating a standard deviation of 1.1570 and a mean of 3.1250, suggest that participants were uncertain about the effect of licensing on alcohol trade in Meru County. Notably, previous research by Njenga (2015) highlighted that licensing aims to decrease the number of bars and liquor outlets, promoting accountability. However, this study's findings indicate respondents' uncertainty, possibly influenced by factors such as ineffective implementation of licensing procedures and corruption, as noted by Lutta (2016).

Regarding whether the implementation of alcohol licensing laws has had an impact on the reduction of illicit alcohol production. This information is crucial as it informs us about the effectiveness of alcohol licensing laws in decreasing the prevalence of illicit brews in Meru County.

The data reveals that a significant majority of respondents, amounting to 68.8%, expressed agreement with the notion that the enactment of alcohol licensing laws has resulted in a reduction of illicit brews in Meru County, as indicated by a mean score of 3.6250. On the other hand, 12.5% of respondents remained neutral, while 18.8% disagreed with the idea that alcohol licensing laws have had a positive effect in curtailing illicit brews in the county.

Consequently, these findings suggest that policies and regulations, such as the implementation of alcohol licensing laws, have effectively contributed to the reduction of illicit brews in Meru County. This aligns with the results of a similar study conducted by Duailibi et al. in Brazil in 2010, which also emphasized the importance of implementing significant laws and policies to regulate the alcohol trade.

Regarding licensing policies and public awareness, the statement aims to assess the extent of public awareness regarding licensing policies in Meru County. According to the results, an overwhelming 87.6% of the respondents, with an average score of 4.4, agreed that the majority of the public is aware of these policies. Only 9.4% of respondents remained neutral, and a mere 3.1% disagreed with the statement. The low standard deviation of 0.798 indicates that respondents generally had similar responses, further supporting the notion that the public is well-informed about the policies governing alcohol trade in Meru County. This perspective is reinforced by the research of Munene (2018), which found that the Meru County alcohol licensing board banned the production and trade of second-generation liquor, ensuring that all bars and factories operating in the area possess valid licenses. This underscores the fact that a significant portion of the public in Meru County is indeed well-informed about the alcohol licensing policies in place.

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