The consequences of consuming alcoholic beverages are enormous. There are health related complications, both severe and chronic conditions that are linked to excessive alcohol consumption. Heavy consumers of alcohol are more likely to indulge in social vices due to cognitive impairment and students who engage in high alcohol intake are more likely to perform poorly in their academics. Against these backdrops, this study investigated awareness and perception of the health risks associated with alcohol consumption among students. This was with a view to understanding the state of knowledge and perception of health risks associated with consumption of alcohol among students of selected tertiary institution in Kwara State, Nigeria.

The study was conducted among students of public tertiary institutions in Kwara State Nigeria using a cross sectional research design that consisted of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data was generated through a survey with 400 respondents selected through a proportionate sampling design from Kwara State College of Education University of Ilorin, Federal Polytechnic, Offa and Kwara State College of Education, Oro. The qualitative evidence was captured through 10 in-depth interviews (IDI) using a snowball sampling technique to recruit students who are heavy consumers of alcohol. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 22 and presented based on frequency distribution, chi-square and multiple regression. A thematic qualitative approach was adopted in analyzing the qualitative data. Evidence from both data sources was presented in a complementary manner where feasible.

The results showed that loneliness was the leading factor responsible for alcohol consumption that motivated students to consume alcoholic drinks. The results showed that approximately one-third (34.9%) of the students had positive perception towards alcohol consumption while 21% had adequate knowledge of health risks associated with alcohol consumption. The chi-square analysis results showed that frequency of alcohol consumption on daily (χ2=65.7, p<0.05), weekly (χ2=78.8, p<0.05) and monthly (χ2=133.5, p<0.05) basis were significantly associated with knowledge of health risks associated with alcohol consumption among students. Students’ perception about alcohol consumption and knowledge of risks associated with alcohol consumption were significantly associated (χ2=389.8, p<0.05). The multiple regression results showed that frequency of alcohol consumption and students’ perception of alcohol consumption contributed 10% to the extent of their knowledge on the health risks associated with alcohol consumption. Results of the qualitative study revealed that students were of the view that moderate consumption of alcohol was needful with no negative health implications arising from it.

The study concluded that students’ awareness and perception of the health risks that are associated with consumption of alcohol in public tertiary institution influenced their consumption of alcohol.