

THE HABIT IS MORE PROMINENT AMONG THE POOR AND LESS EDUCATED

By John Masaba

A new report has raised concern over a shifting alcohol consumption pattern in Uganda, revealing that more women are turning to alcohol in what experts describe as a growing public health and social crisis.

While men still account for higher overall consumption, the report warns that the health and social consequences for women are becoming increasingly severe, with some regions now recording drinking levels among women that match or even exceed those of men.

The findings are contained in a draft *Uganda Alcohol Status Report 2026*, which was released on Friday at Fairway Hotel during a validation workshop attended by officials from the Ministry of Health, civil society representatives and members of the public.

Alcohol is particularly harmful during pregnancy and breastfeeding, as it can cause lifelong disorders, including irreversible physical and cognitive disabilities, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

High alcohol consumption among women has also been linked to accelerated liver damage, an increased risk of breast cancer, among other health complications.

KARAMOJA TAKES LEAD

Findings show that up to 62% of women in Karamoja were consuming alcohol, compared to 71.7% of men in the same region. In some areas, including Teso, Lango,

HEALTH CONCERN AS MORE WOMEN TURN TO ALCOHOL



Kigezi and Ankole, women were found to consume alcohol daily at levels comparable to or higher than those of men.

Lead researcher Francis Nsanga, while presenting the findings, noted that the trend is more pronounced among poorer and less educated women.

"The poorer the household, the higher the likelihood of alcohol consumption," the report noted, also linking increased consumption levels to limited education and social vulnerability.

The study also highlighted the widespread consumption of unrecorded and locally brewed alcohol, warning that official statistics may significantly



A drunk woman being aided by colleagues

BETWEEN THE LINES

Heavy Episodic Drinking – consuming at least 60 grammes of pure alcohol on a single occasion – was reported as a growing concern among current drinkers (both male and female).

undermine the true scale of alcohol use in Uganda.

The report referenced

global estimates showing alcohol was responsible for about 2.6 million deaths in 2019, alongside hundreds of thousands of disability-adjusted life years lost in Uganda.

The study was conducted between December 2025 and May 2026, aimed at establishing the status of alcohol consumption in Uganda, including prevailing trends and their social impact on the population. It examined patterns of consumption where drinking is most prevalent, and the resulting effects on communities, as well as the broader harm to the country.

CALL FOR BALANCED ACTION

Responding to the findings, Richard Baguma, the co-ordinator at the Uganda Health Communication Alliance, said while rising alcohol consumption among women is a dire concern, heavy drinking among men should not be overlooked.

"The Uganda Bureau of Statistics show that more than a quarter of men in this country drink alcohol on a daily basis," Baguma said, adding that scientific data remains critical in shaping interventions.

He called for targeted measures to reduce alcohol consumption, particularly in high-burden areas.

"If you look at the poverty statistics and the areas that consume alcohol the most, you will find they are also the poorest. There is a

GLOBAL OUTLOOK

In 2023, the World Health Organisation (WHO) ranked Uganda as number one in Africa and fifth globally for per capita alcohol consumption.

According to WHO, an average Ugandan consumes 12.21 litres of pure alcohol per year, which is nearly double the African regional average of 6.3 litres and significantly higher than the global average of 6.18 litres.

Men in Uganda consume substantially more than women, averaging 19.93 litres annually, compared to 4.88 litres for women.

direct correlation between alcohol consumption and poverty," he said.

Baguma also expressed concern over rising alcohol use among young people, crediting this to weak regulations.

"This is particularly worrying because Uganda has a very young population and alcohol can create serious social and economic problems. What we do not yet fully understand is its broader impact on households, communities and the economy," he said.

He called for urgent

interventions, including intense community awareness campaigns and faster passage of the Alcohol Bill.

FAMILY NEGLIGENCE

Prudence Mpalwe, the General Secretary of the Uganda Alcohol Policy Alliance, said the trend threatens family stability through weakening women's traditional giving role.

"If women in some regions are taking alcohol, who is taking care of children? Who is guiding and role modelling them? We fear many homes are going to disintegrate," she said.

Lucy Otto, the Commissioner for Family Affairs at the Gender Ministry, said the situation is already affecting households.

"Children are going into depression and getting mental health problems because of their parents taking alcohol. We have also seen increased partner violence and violence against children," she said.

Otto said they were working with the Ministry of Health and other agencies to align interventions and strengthen community-level responses.

"We are also looking at holding dialogues with families, local leaders and developing by-laws and district ordinances," she said.

DISEASE BURDEN, SOLUTIONS

The acting Assistant Commissioner for Mental Health and Control of Substance Abuse at the Ministry of Health, Dr Hafsa Sentongo Lukwata, warned that alcohol use among women poses broader health risks, particularly during pregnancy.

"If a mother consumes alcohol during pregnancy, the child may face developmental challenges, including impaired brain function," she revealed.

Lukwata said alcohol is linked to more than 200 diseases, including non-communicable illnesses, such as hypertension, diabetes and cancers, adding that alcohol use is contributing to mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety and addiction, while also affecting productivity, yet treatment facilities are already overwhelmed.

On policy response, she called for stricter regulations in line with WHO recommendations, including limiting alcohol availability.

Lukwata also called for tighter controls on alcohol advertising, packaging and pricing, including higher taxes to reduce affordability, noting that the money paid is very little compared to the harm caused to the country.



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1	PRIDE/SUPLS /2026 /00485	Supply, Implementation, Integration and Support of an Omnichannel Switching Platform.	8,000,000	200,000	25 th May 2026 at 11:00am	18 th June 2026 at 11:00am

2. The Bidding document(s) shall be inspected and issued at The Procurement and Disposal Unit, Pride Bank Ltd, Victoria office Park, Block B, Ground Floor, Plot 6-9, Ben Kiwanuka Okot Close, Bukoto, P.O Box 7566 Kampala - Uganda from 8:00am to 4:30pm.

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