

EDITORIALS

LOCAL GIN(OGOGORO): THE NEW NIGERIAN KILLER

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Gin is defined as a strong colourless beverage made by distilling or redistilling rye or other grain spirits and adding juniper berries and sometimes other flavourings such as anise, caraway seeds or angelica root¹.

Different countries have specific additives and the alcoholic strength of the gin being produced, and the various drinks have been properly classified in some countries². The use of gin dates back in history with its earliest origins in the middle east where it was mainly used as a herbal medicine and it has gone through a lot of changes in different continents to become a commercially sold alcoholic beverage today^{3,4}.

The origin of the Nigerian local gin is not fully known. It is brewed in different communities having varied names such as ogogoro, akpeteshie, agbakara amongst others⁵. It is usually distilled from juice extracts from the raffia palm trees, boiled to form steam and allowed to condense forming the gin for consumption⁶. Local gin has been studied as a possible histological fixative but results were not conclusive⁷.

In recent months, there has been media reports of unexplained deaths in communities of Rivers and Ondo States of Nigeria which has been linked to the consumption of local gin(ogogoro). The number of deaths has not been fully established but reports are ranging from sixty to hundred people. All the deceased were said to have consumed local gin with similar methods of production but from different sources⁸.

In reality, deaths from local gin consumption are not new. A report from the British Broadcasting Corporation in 2008 showed that hundreds die yearly from consumption of improperly brewed local gin and most of the deaths are not reported.⁹

A lot of investigations are still on going into the

recent deaths attributed to ogogoro consumption. However the obvious problems are already evident. There is no established quality control protocol for evaluating the constituents of the local gin. The deleterious effects on the human body have also not been looked into.

It is possible that the recent upsurge in deaths may be due to new additive which was aimed to make consumers more intoxicated or a flaw in the distillation process which caused a lethal toxin to be incorporated into the drink. These are however all speculations.

The Federal government of Nigeria have gone ahead to place a ban on consumption of ogogoro¹⁰. This is a welcome development however there is no adequate machinery on ground to enforce the ban. Considering the fact that local gin is widely consumed, the ideal target will be for research to be carried out into the entire production process of the local gin and quality controls be put in place to defeat this new killer in the Nigerian population

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