

Understanding excessive salt and alcohol consumption drivers: a qualitative socio-ecological study in Ghana

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“the perception and the mentality is that ‘Oh, we will all die, so whatever you do, you will die, so it doesn't really matter what you eat’”

INTRODUCTION

- Harmful use of alcohol and excessive salt consumption are widely recognised as **modifiable risk factors** for non-communicable diseases.
- Effective control measures require a comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive these behaviours.

This study uses the **socio-ecological model** to qualitatively explore stakeholder perspectives on the influences and **drivers of unhealthy alcohol and salt consumption** in Ghana.

METHODS

- Step 1** • Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 purposively sampled stakeholders in Ghana between October and December 2023.
- Step 2** • The study focused on key stakeholder organisations, including those from health, policy, and educational sectors.
- Step 3** • After familiarisation with the interview transcripts, initial codes were generated and thematically analysed using NVIVO 14.
- Step 4** • Emerging themes were then mapped onto the corresponding levels of influence within the socio-ecological model.

FINDINGS

Harmful alcohol use	Excessive salt intake
Lack of knowledge about harm	Disregard for health risks
Alcohol addiction	Unawareness of recommended daily salt intake
Use as anti-depressant	
Peer pressure	Prioritising taste
Cheap and affordable alcohol	Salt use for food preservation
Unemployment	More consumption of fast foods
Celebrity influence	Cultural delicacies rich in salt
Excessive promotion via media	Lack of nutrition labelling policies
Inadequate regulation of alcohol and food-related industries	

SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF BEHAVIOUR

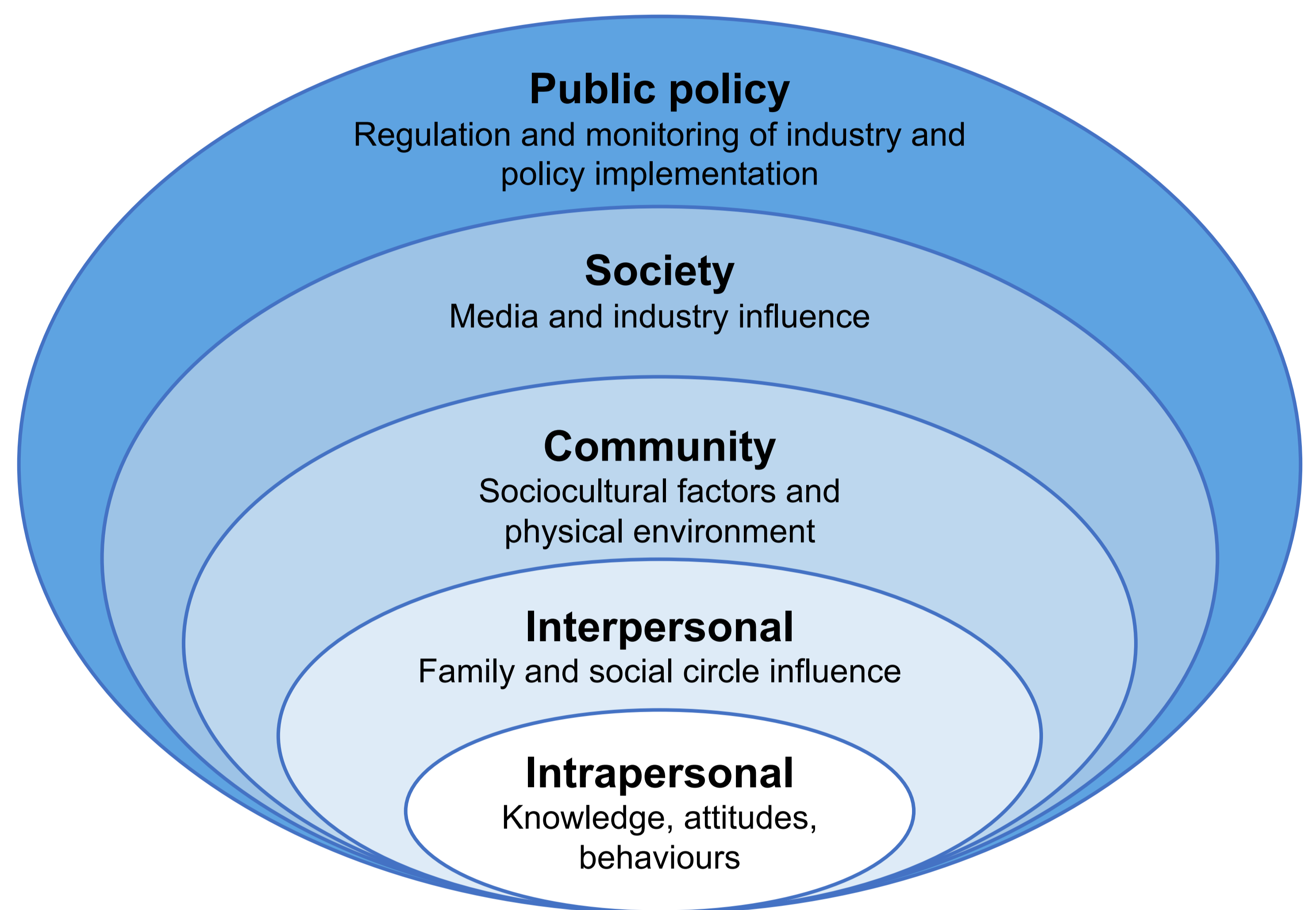


Figure: The five levels of the socio-ecological framework addressing the drivers of excessive salt and alcohol consumption

CONCLUSIONS

- This study identified **various influences** across the five levels of the **socio-ecological model**, highlighting the drivers of excessive alcohol and salt consumption.
- It reveals that intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, societal, and policy-level factors significantly contribute to unhealthy consumption behaviours among the Ghanaian population.
- At the societal and policy levels, **inadequate regulation of the alcohol industry** shapes the physical environment, promoting harmful alcohol use.
- This underscores that **unhealthy consumption patterns are not solely individual choices** but are strongly shaped by broader societal and political contexts.
- Addressing these behaviours requires a **multi-level approach** that incorporates all relevant factors.
- Such an approach will be **essential for creating effective public health strategies** to reduce the risks associated with excessive alcohol and salt consumption and for sustaining healthy behaviours over time, ultimately achieving widespread impact.

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