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Factors Influencing the Formation of Social Capital and the Eradication of Illicit Brews in Embu County

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Abstract:

This study explores the factors influencing the formation of social capital and the eradication of illicit brews in Embu County in Kenya. The production and consumption of illicit brew undermines social cohesion and public health. Using a mixed-method approach, the research involved both qualitative and quantitative data collection, employing a cross-sectional survey design. Data was gathered from 370 respondents selected through stratified random sampling, along with Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The study revealed that social capital is significantly influenced by frequent neighborly interactions, participation in community groups, and shared values. Trust, reciprocity, and community engagement were identified as key motivators for forming social capital. The study concludes that strong social networks, coupled with trust and collective community action, are essential in combating illicit brew production and consumption. Based on the findings, the study recommends:

- *Strengthening community participation through local organizations to enhance trust and mutual support, and*
- *Fostering partnerships between local authorities and community groups to create sustainable interventions against illicit brew activities.*

Keywords: Social capital, illicit brews, eradication, community engagement

1. Introduction

The persistent issue of illicit brew consumption in Embu County, Kenya, poses significant public health and social challenges, as these unregulated alcoholic beverages result in severe health complications and contribute to social instability. Despite legislative efforts, such as the Alcoholic Drinks Control Act of 2010 and various community interventions, the prevalence of illicit brews remains high, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas. This study focuses on the factors influencing the formation of social capital networks of relationships, trust, and cooperation and its critical role in the eradication of illicit brews. Social capital, recognized for its ability to foster collective action, is key to mobilizing communities to address shared challenges, such as illicit brew production and consumption. However, challenges such as weak community engagement, low levels of trust, and inconsistent collaboration among local groups hinder these efforts. By exploring how social capital can be effectively developed and leveraged, this research aims to provide insights into strategies that can enhance collective action against illicit brews, improving both community cohesion and public health outcomes.

2. Literature Review

Glaeser (2001) defines social capital as a community resource that helps tackle economic challenges, like providing public goods or building trust between people. This involves social qualities an individual possesses, such as charisma, contacts, and linguistic skills, which enhance their interactions with others. Dhesi (2001) adds that investing in social capital is an ongoing process, with people always deciding how much effort to put into developing social skills and connections. Various factors, like an individual's discount rate, mobility, time cost, occupational returns, depreciation, and life stage, influence this investment. A study by Churchill, Hayward, Smyth, and Trong-Anh Trin (2023) suggests that social capital formation depends on social networks. Their findings emphasize the role of social capital in accessing resources within the network, fostering the exchange of information and knowledge. Ziersch, Walsh, and Due (2023) further explain that collaboration is significant in the corporate context, where shared visions and values contribute to social capital. This,

in turn, helps establish strategic alliances and networks, especially in large multinational organizations (Senanayake et al., 2023).

Baycan and Öner (2023) elaborate on measuring social capital using tie strength, encompassing bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital, like strong ties, is seen in networks where people share common interests. On the other hand, bridging social capital, associated with weaker ties, connects people across diverse social groups. Both contribute to organizational performance by promoting information exchange, knowledge acquisition, and innovation. Azad and Pritchard's (2023) study on social capital during a crisis in Bangladesh highlights bonding social capital, seen in relationships with family members. This plays a crucial role in rural communities, especially in coping with disasters like floods. The study shows how immediate family and in-laws become central for individuals in adapting to such situations. The example of seeking help from a friend in a neighbouring village also reflects bonding social capital. Li and Chen (2023) assert that Bridging Social Capital, an outward-looking form of social capital, becomes particularly crucial during and after a disaster. The scholars allude that bridging social capital is manifested in relationships with neighbours, friends, and even local officials. For instance, in their study, they observed a friend from an adjacent village helping with a boat, underscoring the importance of bridging social capital (Li & Chen, 2023). Azad and Pritchard (2023) explain that such relationships enable access to resources and support beyond the immediate family circle, facilitating collective efforts for coping with floods. The interconnectedness of households through bridging social capital contributes to community revitalization and survival during and after a disaster.

Heidari, Salimi, and Mehrvarz (2023) discuss the interaction between bonding and bridging social capital, emphasizing their complementary roles. Bonding social capital forms the core support system within immediate family structures, while bridging social capital acts as a mechanism that extends the network of assistance. The interdependence of these two forms of social capital reinforces adaptive capacities by providing a multi-layered support system for individuals and households facing challenges. In the context of community development, Godoy et al. (2007) identify two types of social capital: community-enhancing and community-neutral. Community-enhancing social capital, characterized by interactions and resources contributing to the well-being of the entire community, involves collaborative efforts, shared values, and networks fostering unity and cooperation (Achmad, Nurwati, Fedryansyah, & Sumadinata, 2023). The formation of community-enhancing social capital often involves strong social ties, trust, and reciprocity among community members, promoting resilience and facilitating collaborative initiatives for the common good (Bao, Li, & Zhao, 2023).

On the other hand, community-neutral social capital is centered around resources and skills benefiting individuals rather than the community (Godoy et al., 2007). This type of social capital is associated with personal development, education, and acquiring specific skills that enhance an individual's ability to succeed in various endeavours, such as securing employment (Begg, 2023). While community-neutral social capital can contribute to personal success and economic mobility, its benefits may not directly translate into the broader community's advancement, focusing more on empowering individuals to pursue personal goals (Kiboro, 2018). Murphy (2023) emphasizes that social capital, as a community-level resource, can be used to solve common economic problems and create trust between individuals. Social capital is a valuable resource accumulated over time through intentional investment in relationships and networks. According to Alexander (2023), the government can influence social capital investment through policy tools like homeownership, community permanence, and education. However, caution must be exercised to avoid unintended consequences.

Bao, Li, and Zhao (2023) highlight the importance of the expected duration of an asset in influencing social capital formation. Individuals expecting to stay in a community for a longer period are more likely to invest in social capital, considering the time needed to reap benefits. Homeownership also plays a role, as homeowners are more likely to invest in social capital, given their vested interest in community quality (Alexander, 2023). Additionally, Rahayu, Mukaromah, and Mulyanto (2023) observe that social skills and education influence social capital formation, with individuals in socially engaging occupations and higher education levels more likely to invest. Churchill, Hayward, Smyth, and Trong-Anh Trin (2023) provide insights into the relationship between education and social capital, suggesting that education reflects a greater orientation towards the future and higher discount factors. They propose that interacting socially may be more pleasant for prestigious individuals, and education plays a role in learning social skills within the setting of schools.

In the context of the formation of social capital within communities, Alexander (2023) discusses the significance of understanding the factors influencing individual-level investment in social capital. While the effects of social capital have been extensively studied, the causes of its formation have received less attention. Brogan and Dooley (2023) propose an individual-level model considering factors such as time horizons, homeownership, occupation, and ethnic heterogeneity. The model suggests that individuals with shorter time horizons, homeowners, those in social occupations, and those living in more homogenous communities are more likely to invest in social capital. Enock, Atukunda, and Mukibi (2023) in Nigeria concur that individuals with higher mobility or closer to death are less likely to invest in social capital. Homeownership is linked to social capital investment due to its connection to community quality, and occupations requiring social interaction are associated with stronger social capital investment. Surucu-Balci and Balci (2023) explore the impact of state actions on social capital formation, finding that ethnic heterogeneity negatively correlates with group membership, potentially hindering social capital development. Alexander (2023) posits that discrimination and prejudice may make it challenging for people from different backgrounds to form social connections, and ethnic heterogeneity may complicate coordination and cooperation on social projects.

Churchill, Hayward, Smyth, and Trong-Anh Trin (2023) delve into the nuanced formation of social capital in a North Indian village community, contextualizing its dynamics within the village's historical evolution. Social capital, recognized as a resource with dual potential, is explored for its facilitating and constraining roles in social action. The investigation examines the influence of macro-structural changes on social capital formation, revealing a dynamic

interplay of opposing pressures, both strengthening bonds and posing challenges within the community. Lu, Chui, and Lum (2023) explore the relationship between formal and informal institutions on the formation of social capital in China. The study reveals that both formal and informal institutions significantly impact collective action within the community. Conflicting dynamics between these institutions could impede cohesive endeavours, while aligning them purposefully could unlock synergistic potential, channelling social energy towards holistic development.

Empirical evidence supports the crucial role of social capital formation in community development, particularly in addressing issues like illicit brew consumption and drug addiction (Alexander, 2023; Begg, 2023). According to Churchill et al. (2023), fostering strong social connections, trust, and cooperation among community members through social capital can empower communities to effectively tackle these challenges. Achmad, Nurwati, Fedryansyah, and Sumadinata (2023) emphasize that social capital formation is an invaluable asset in community development, enabling communities to address the challenges of illicit brew consumption and drug addiction, promote rehabilitation, and create a healthier, more resilient society.

2.1. Objective of the Study

To identify the factors that influence the formation of social capital on the eradication of illicit brews in Embu County.

2.2. Research Methods

This study was conducted in Embu County, Kenya, a region known for its agricultural economy. The study site is in the central region of Kenya, covering an area of 2,555.9 square kilometers with a population of 608,599 people, distributed across five sub-counties: Embu East, Embu North, Embu West, Mbeere South, and Mbeere North. The study adopted a mixed method approach, which includes qualitative and quantitative approaches. A cross-sectional survey research design was employed to gather data at a single point in time, making it suitable for studying attitudes, behaviors, and demographic characteristics. The target population comprised adult residents of Embu County. Using Slovin's formula, the sample size was determined to be 370 respondents, with stratified random sampling ensuring proportional representation from each sub-county. The sample allocation was based on population size, resulting in sample sizes of 82 for Embu East, 50 for Embu North, 80 for Embu West, 103 for Mbeere South, and 69 for Mbeere North. Purposive sampling was applied for Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

Data collection instruments included a structured questionnaire, KII guide, and FGD guide. The structured questionnaire gathered quantitative data on social networks, norms, and government support. KIIs targeted six key informants, such as government officials and community leaders, while FGDs involved mixed-gender youth, men and women, focusing on those most affected by illicit brews. The data collection process was carefully structured: questionnaires were administered to the general population, KIIs were conducted through semi-structured interviews, and FGDs facilitated dynamic group discussions. Both thematic analysis and descriptive statistics were used for data analysis, ensuring comprehensive insights into the community's social capital and government interventions against illicit brews.

3. Findings and Discussions

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	18-25	50	13.5
	26-35	101	27.3
	36-45	91	24.6
	46-55	95	25.7
	56 and above	33	8.9
	Total	370	100.0
Gender	Male	181	48.9
	Female	189	51.1
	Total	370	100.0
Education Level	None	8	2.2
	Primary	47	12.7
	Secondary	88	23.8
	Tertiary	123	33.2
	University	104	28.1
	Total	370	100.0
Occupation	Students	28	7.6
	Employed	139	37.6
	Self-employed	105	28.4
	Unemployed	88	23.8
	Retired	10	2.7
	Total	370	100.0

Table 1: Demographic Information
(Field Data, 2024)

The demographic data reveals a diverse and well-balanced sample population. The age of the respondents is spread across various groups, with the majority falling between the ages of 26-35 years (27.3%), closely followed by those aged 46-55 years (25.7%) and 36-45 years (24.6%). Gender distribution is nearly equal, with a slight majority of females (51.1%) compared to males (48.9%), ensuring balanced gender representation in the study. Regarding education, most respondents have higher levels of education, with tertiary education being the most common (33.2%) and university degrees also well-represented (28.1%). This suggests that the respondents are generally well-educated, which could influence their awareness and attitudes towards the study's focus on illicit brew consumption. In terms of occupation, the largest group is employed (37.6%), followed by self-employed individuals (28.4%) and unemployed respondents (23.8%). The broad distribution across various occupational categories highlights the varied economic backgrounds of the respondents, potentially shaping their engagement with community initiatives and perspectives on issues like illicit brew consumption.

3.1. Factors Influencing the Formation of Social Capital

The main objective of the study was to establish factors that influence the formation of social capital on the eradication of illicit brews in Embu County. To establish this, the study first sought to find out if there were elements of social capital. Therefore, the respondents were asked to state how often they interact with their neighbours, whether they participate in community groups or local organizations, the types of groups they participate in, their motivation to participate, trust in the community, and factors that are important in the formation of social capital.

3.2. Communal Participation and Social Capital Formation

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Daily	238	64.3
	Weekly	74	20.0
	Monthly	18	4.9
	Rarely	39	10.5
	Never	1	.3
	Total	370	100.0

Table 2: Interaction with Neighbors (Field Data, 2024)

The data shown in table 2 indicates that a significant majority of respondents, 64.3%, interact with their neighbors daily, while 20% do so weekly, 4.9% monthly, 10.5% rarely, and only 0.3% never interact with their neighbors. These interactions are crucial in the formation of social capital, which is defined as the networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Kiboro, 2018). In addition, Murphy (2024) affirmed that frequent social interactions among community members enhance social capital by fostering trust and reciprocity among community members. This is particularly significant in the context of eradicating illicit brew, as strong social networks can lead to collective action against such activities. For instance, communities that interact daily are more likely to engage in neighborhood watch programs and report illegal activities, thereby reducing the prevalence of illicit brew (Reuter, 2021). Therefore, the frequency of neighborly interactions directly contributes to the formation of social capital, which in turn plays a pivotal role in combating illicit activities.

Other questions were asked to indicate if they participate in the in-community groups or local organizations. Figure 1 indicates the number of respondents who participate.

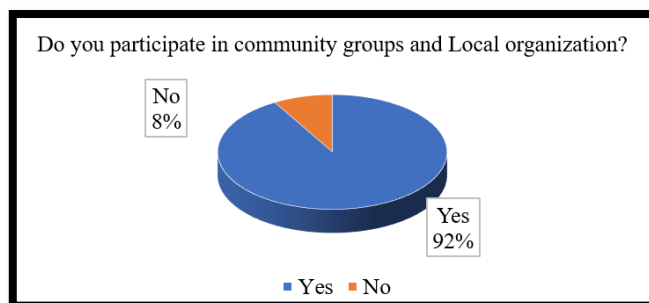


Figure 1: Community Participation (Field Data, 2024)

The study revealed that 92% (339) of respondents participate in community groups or local organizations, while 8% (31) do not. This high level of participation suggests a strong presence of social capital within the community. Murphy (2023) states that social capital, fostered through community engagement, enhances trust, cooperation, and collective action. This is significant in the context of eradicating illicit brew, as social capital can facilitate community-led initiatives and peer monitoring, reducing the prevalence of such activities (Edland-Gryt, 2021). Additionally, Reuter

(2021) emphasizes that social capital, through networks and relationships, can exert social control, discouraging illicit behaviors. Therefore, the high participation rate in community groups is a crucial factor in building social capital, which in turn plays a pivotal role in combating illicit brew activities within the community. Further, the study sought to determine the types of groups the respondents participate in.

Groups	Responses	
	N	Percent
Religious Groups	199	29.3%
Social Clubs	110	16.2%
Self-Help Groups	188	27.6%
Cooperative Societies	101	14.9%
Sports Clubs	82	12.1%
Total	680	100.0%
a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.		

Table 3: Type of Groups
(Field Data, 2024)

The study revealed that respondents participate in various social groups. Table 3 shows that religious groups (29.3%) and self-help groups (27.6%) are the most popular among participants, followed by social clubs (16.2%), cooperative societies (14.9%), and sports clubs (12.1%). These findings suggest that individuals are more inclined to join groups that offer emotional support, shared values, and practical assistance. This study affirms a study done by Goodhand et al. (2020), who found that social capital is significantly influenced by factors such as trust and shared values. For instance, religious groups often foster a sense of trust and shared values, which are crucial for building social capital. Similarly, self-help groups provide practical assistance and emotional support, enhancing reciprocity and mutual aid among members.

The formation of social capital through these groups is significant in the eradication of illicit brew. Studies have shown that communities with elevated levels of social capital are better equipped to mobilize resources and support for initiatives aimed at reducing illicit activities. For example, a study by Shrestha and Raj (2021) found that social capital played a pivotal role in controlling the production and sale of illicit brews in rural Nepal. This is because strong social networks facilitate information sharing and collective action, making it easier to enforce regulations and promote alternative livelihoods. This was echoed in an interview, as one respondent stated, "CMA helped in talking to the youths where they meet and share family issues." (Respondent Z, 2024)

In an interview and a focused group discussion, both revealed that the formation of social capital is driven by the collective actions of community members, often through organized groups. These groups, including church organizations like CMA and KAMA, play a pivotal role in combating the issue of illicit brews in Embu County. The discussion highlighted that local groups frequently organize to destroy illicit brew production facilities, report brewers to authorities, and confront sellers. These community-based initiatives foster unity and a shared purpose, which enhances the social capital needed to eradicate illicit brews. One participant noted, "Demolishing houses of the brewers, leading operations to where brews are." (Respondent A, 2024)

3.3. Factors Motivating Social Capital Formation

To understand the factors that motivate social capital formation, the participants were asked to indicate what motivate them to participate in community and local groups. Table 4 indicates the factors that motivate individuals to participate in community activities.

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
	Social Connection	176	24.4%	48.6%
	Mutual Support	155	21.5%	42.8%
	Shared Interest	180	25.0%	49.7%
	Community Development	209	29.0%	57.7%
Total		720	100.0%	198.9%
a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.				

Table 4: What Motivates You to Participate in Community Activities
(Field Data, 2024)

The study revealed that community development (29.0%) is the most significant motivator for participation in community activities, followed by shared interest (25.0%), social connection (24.4%), and mutual support (21.5%). These findings align with the factors influencing the formation of social capital, as identified by Aldridge, Halpern et al. (2002), which include social norms, values, trust, and social networks. This suggests that community development is a critical motivator because it fosters a sense of purpose and collective efficacy, which are essential for building social

capital. Shared interests and social connections contribute to the formation of social networks, which are foundational elements of social capital. Mutual support enhances trust and reciprocity, further strengthening social bonds. The significance of these findings in the context of eradicating illicit brew is profound.

In addition, the interview revealed that social capital plays a pivotal role in community-based interventions aimed at reducing the consumption of illicit brews. By leveraging the motivations of community development, shared interests, social connections, and mutual support, communities create robust support systems that discourage the production and consumption of illicit brews. This study affirmed that social capital not only addresses the immediate issue but also fosters long-term resilience and social cohesion, which are essential for sustainable community development. For instance, Villalonga-Olives et al. (2018) highlight that social capital interventions in public health can significantly improve health outcomes by fostering structural changes within communities. Similarly, Flores et al. (2018) emphasize the mental health benefits of social capital interventions, noting that strong social networks can lower the risk of mental health issues. Furthermore, Coll-Planas et al. (2017) found that social capital interventions targeting older adults can enhance their health and well-being by promoting social engagement and reducing isolation.

In addition, to determine the level of trust among the community, participants were asked to rate the level of trust among the community in their area. The data in table 4 on community trust levels reveals a spectrum of perceptions among members, with the majority rating trust as moderate (53.2%), followed by high (25.7%), and very high (10.0%). A smaller proportion of respondents rated trust as low (8.1%) or very low (3.0%). These findings suggest that while a sizable portion of the community experiences moderate to high levels of trust, there is still a notable segment with lower trust levels. This aligns with the study by Villalonga-Olives et al. (2022), which emphasizes the importance of trust in community networks. For instance, Villalonga-Olives, Wind and Kawachi (2018) argue that social capital interventions should aim to improve health outcomes by enhancing trust and social cohesion within communities.

	N	%
Very low	11	3.0%
Low	30	8.1%
Moderate	197	53.2%
High	95	25.7%
Very high	37	10.0%

*Table 5: Trust among Community Members in Your Area
(Field Data, 2024)*

Cunningham and Fraser (2021) show that social capital, which encompasses trust, networks, and norms, plays a crucial role in community cohesion and collective action. Factors influencing the formation of social capital include social interactions, shared values, and community engagement. High levels of social capital are associated with enhanced cooperation and reduced prevalence of illicit activities, such as the brewing and consumption of illicit alcohol (Hawe & Shiell, 2000). The moderate to high trust levels observed in this community could, thus, be leveraged to foster social capital, which in turn can aid in the eradication of illicit brew by promoting collective monitoring and community-driven interventions. This underscores the significance of trust and social capital in addressing social issues and enhancing community well-being.

In addition, the focused group discussion with the youths revealed that trust and cooperation among community members are essential in the eradication of illicit brews. For instance, the youth explained that they organized protests and reported brewers to local authorities, showcasing the role of social capital in promoting accountability and transparency. Further, in an interview, the respondents emphasized that without trust and mutual support, efforts to combat illicit alcohol would be significantly undermined. Cooperation, particularly in activities such as protesting illicit brewers, has often led to short-term successes. However, these efforts are sometimes weakened by the mobility of brewers who relocate to new areas to continue their business.

The participants were also asked to rate the importance of the following items in forming the social capital. The response was based on a Likert scale (1 = Very Unimportant to 5 = Very Important).

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Deviation
Trust	151	42	67	37	73	3.3324	1.72665
Reciprocity	151	42	67	37	73	2.5649	1.56602
Social Network	111	41	56	54	108	3.0189	1.62206
Community Engagement	98	17	35	67	153	3.4324	1.66163
Shared Values	126	30	67	55	92	2.8838	1.60622

*Table 6: Importance of Forming Social Capital
(Field Data, 2024)*

The analysis of the data reveals several insights into the perceived importance of various items in forming social capital. Trust, with a mean score of 3.3324 and a standard deviation of 1.72665, indicates a moderate level of importance among participants, suggesting that while trust is valued, there is considerable variability in its perceived significance. However, this contrasts with Pilkington and Sharifullina (2009), who suggest that in some contexts, trust may be less critical due to other overriding factors such as economic conditions. Reciprocity, scoring a mean of 2.5649 and a standard

deviation of 1.56602, is perceived as less important, reflecting a lower consensus on its role in social capital formation. The social network item, with a mean of 3.0189 and a standard deviation of 1.62206, also shows moderate importance but with notable variability, indicating differing views on the value of social networks. Community engagement, which has the highest mean score of 3.4324 and a standard deviation of 1.66163, is considered the most important factor, highlighting its critical role in fostering social capital. Finally, shared values, with a mean of 2.8838 and a standard deviation of 1.60622, suggest a moderate level of importance, though opinions on its significance vary. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of social capital and the varying degrees of importance attributed to its components by different individuals.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study addressed the problem of illicit brew consumption in Embu County by examining the role of the formation of social capital in mitigating its effects. The findings indicate that the formation of social capital, manifested through trust, social networks, and community engagement, plays a critical role in fostering collective action against illicit brews. Communities with higher levels of social interaction and participation in local organizations are better equipped to combat illicit activities. The study further highlights the importance of trust, shared values, and mutual support as fundamental elements that underpin social capital formation. The eradication of illicit brews is not solely a legal or enforcement issue but also a social one, where community cohesion and strong interpersonal networks can significantly curb the production and sale of these harmful substances. The study concludes that enhancing social capital through community-led initiatives and fostering a culture of trust and cooperation are key to creating a resilient and self-sustaining community capable of addressing the challenges of illicit brews. As such, local governments should prioritize building social capital as part of broader community development and public health strategies to ensure long-term success in eradicating illicit brews. Based on the findings, the study recommends:

- Strengthening community participation through local organizations to enhance trust and mutual support, and
- Fostering partnerships between local authorities and community groups to create sustainable interventions against illicit brew activities

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