Beliefs and consumption of alcoholic beverages among lactating women in São Tomé e Príncipe

Introduction
The first 1000 days in a child’s life are an important window to optimize their development and growth(1). Alcohol consumption by lactating women during this period can lead to adverse effects on children’s health(2,3). In São Tomé and Príncipe, this consumption is high(4) and there are many beliefs about the benefits of alcohol in women in the postpartum period and in the children’s development(5). For these reasons it becomes very relevant to study the consumption of alcoholic beverages (AB) among lactating women in this country.

Aim
The aim of this study was to identify the perception about AB and to characterize their consumption among lactating women, and to relate this consumption with socio-demographic characteristics.

Results
- Sample of 138 lactating women aged between 17 and 48 years old.
- Sweet palm wine consumed almost daily by 10.1% of the women.
- Beer and Wine.

Most common beliefs

- Alcohol returns blood to the woman after delivery. 37.7%
- Sweet palm wine is good for increase breast milk supply. 39.1%
- The “contra” protects the baby from witchcraft. 46.4%

Beer consumption was higher in the North West (median = 4, \( p = 0.001 \)) and Central East (median = 4, \( p = 0.013 \)) when compared to the South (median = 2). Beliefs on the benefits of alcohol in postpartum period were more prevalent among North West women (56.4% vs. 37.7% total, \( p = 0.010 \)).

Women who denied that “cacharamba” was bad for children but recognized that sweet palm wine had deleterious effects were older (mean = 28, SD = 7) than those who had the opposite opinion (mean = 26, SD = 6) or who stated they didn’t know (mean = 23, SD = 3, \( p = 0.025 \)). Those who believed that palm wine would help milk production had lower education level (\( p = 0.041 \)).

Conclusion
- There is a high consumption of AB among lactating women and strong beliefs about the benefits of these drinks.
- The shortfall of big differences among study variables also reveals the requirement for an overall intervention.
- These results highlight the importance of further studies on this subject as well as an urgent need for intervention to solve this Public Health problem.

References