



# Exploring the relevancy of random and scheduled alcohol breathalyser testing in high-risk jobs within safety-sensitive work settings



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**Orientation:** Workplace testing is seen as a viable method in monitoring alcohol intoxication in the workplace. This article explored lived experiences of random and scheduled alcohol breathalyser testing to gain insights into meaning and understanding of the phenomenon under study.

**Research purpose:** Random and scheduled testing are preferred techniques of assessing intoxication in the workplace. This article set to gain insights into whether behaviour can have an influence on the effectiveness of random and scheduled testing. The information can contribute to the ongoing debate on the efficacy of workplace testing and lays groundwork for future studies.

**Motivation for the study:** Emergent data seem to suggest that the success of workplace testing in preventing alcohol and substance use in the workplace is indecisive.

**Research approach/design and method:** A qualitative method was employed to collect data from eight alcohol-consuming individuals who performed jobs considered safety-sensitive through semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed through the application of an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

**Main findings:** Findings revealed incidents of alcohol intoxication within the workplace in spite of random and scheduled testing in place. There seems to be a disregard for rules that prohibit intoxication in the workplace. Money bribes seem to enable cheating on testing in the workplace. Behaviour undercuts the goal of an alcohol-free workplace.

**Practical implications:** Behaviour stemming from on-site intoxication and cheating on alcohol tests hinders on the goal of attaining an alcohol-free workplace.

**Contribution/value-add:** The analysis of behaviour could contribute to the ongoing debate regarding the efficacy of workplace testing.

**Keywords:** alcohol-free workplace; cheating on alcohol tests; high-risk jobs; on-site intoxication; random and scheduled testing safety-sensitive; alcohol breathalyser testing; cheating on alcohol test; safety-sensitive environment.

## Introduction

A definition of a healthy workplace has changed overtime to include health and wellness of individuals at work. According to World Health Organization (WHO), a healthy workplace is a space where individuals work together to achieve a vision for good health and well-being of workers (Burton, 2010). Old models of workspaces excluded health and wellness aspects and tended to focus wholly on the physical environment such as the building or office space. On the contrary, modern workspaces seem to take a holistic approach of the working environment by recognising health aspects such as well-being, lifestyle, social integration, organisational values and culture (Burton, 2010). Other workspaces have gone as far as including safety as a priority of a working environment (i.e. safety-sensitive). Safety-sensitive work settings involve working groups that engage in high-risk and safety-related job functions (Smook, Ubbink, Ryke, & Strydom, 2017). These jobs comprise tasks that are likely to have a bearing on health and safety of all workers, for example an engineer in a chemical plant. For that reason, such workspaces tend to prohibit alcohol consumption and other substances because of concerns for safety in the workplace (Hartwell, Steele, Park, & Rodman, 1998). It is therefore common for such workspaces to implement alcohol and drug testing on employees to mitigate work-related risks caused by substance use (Cook, 2014; Olbina, Hinze, & Arduengo, 2011; Swartz, 2004). Workers also value the importance of safety in the workplace and tend to denounce any on-site alcohol consumption

behaviour of their co-workers (Olbina et al., 2011). Despite this, incidents of intoxication seem to prevail in safety-sensitive working environments. This article explored lived experiences of alcohol-consuming individuals who perform jobs considered high-risk and exposed to random and scheduled testing in safety-sensitive settings to gain insights on behaviour under study.

## Research purpose and objectives

An alcohol- and drug-free workplace is seen to contribute to sustainability and profitability of the workplace (Olbina et al., 2011). To achieve this, organisations rely on workplace testing to lower intoxication in the workplace (Carpenter, 2007). However, data have emerged indicating that the interpretation that workplace testing is effective in preventing alcohol consumption remains inconclusive (Pidd & Roche, 2014). This article explored, as a first step, lived experiences of alcohol-consuming individuals performing safety-sensitive jobs to gain better insight that can contribute towards the ongoing discourse regarding the workplace testing. By focussing on behaviour, it is possible to gain understanding of whether it can influence the effectiveness of random and scheduled testing techniques. The behavioural insights can therefore contribute to the debate on the usefulness of alcohol testing and its relevancy in the workplace.

## Literature

Studies in Canada and the United States of America have found that work-related incidents (including fatalities and accidents) in the workplace are associated with alcohol consumption (Swartz, 2004; Olbina et al., 2011; Wuebker, 1986). According to Wuebker (1986), safety-related incidents in the workplace were linked directly to mistakes made by workers than machines. Thus, a single mistake by an employee because of alcohol consumption at work is likely to put the lives of other employees at risk, especially if those workers perform critical safety job functions (Marques, Jesus, Olea, Vairinhos, & Jacinto, 2014). Another study that evaluated the effect of blood alcohol concentration (BAC) laws for driving a motor vehicle in Canada has established that alcohol can impair cognitive functioning, hampering the individual's ability to monitor ongoing interferences in the environment (Blais, Bellavance, Marcil, & Carnis, 2015). Compatibly, nearly 5% of work-related injuries within the transport industry have been attributed to alcohol consumption during working hours (Greenberg, Hamilton, & Toscano, 1999). These insights are a cause for concern because certain jobs considered high-risk within safety-sensitive work settings can involve operating a motor vehicle (i.e. forklift, truck or an ambulance). Alcohol can therefore heighten the worker's risk of causing an accident in the workplace, particularly when that worker performs a high-risk job (Swartz, 2004). It is posited that between 1990 and 2013, the view has been that workplace testing was an effective strategy in preventing substance use or improving safety in the workplace (Pidd & Roche, 2014). For that reason, organisations tend to rely on testing to mitigate

work-related risks because of concerns for safety stemming from intoxicated workers in the workplace (Cook, 2014; Olbina et al., 2011; Swartz, 2004).

Organisations tend to adopt a combination of workplace testing policies and applicable legislation to monitor and manage alcohol consumption in the workplace (Blais et al., 2015). In South Africa, *Occupational Health Safety Act* (OHSA) plays a pivotal role in safeguarding health and safety of workers whose jobs are carried out in dangerous working conditions (*Occupational Health and Safety Act* 85 of 1993). In addition, Section 10 of the *OHS Act*, item (1–3), provides guidelines for dealing with intoxication by barring the intoxicated person(s) from entering the workplace (*Occupational Health and Safety Act* 85 of 1993). Most workplaces in safety-sensitive industries (i.e. manufacturing, chemical, transport and mining) adhere to OHSA. To illustrate, the mining industry places the burden of safety in the workplace on its companies; however, workers also accept individual responsibility for their safety by adhering to safety regulation in the workplace (*The Mine Health and Safety Act* No 29, 1996). In instances where workers are found to be intoxicated in the workplace, Schedule 8 of the Code of Good Practice for Dismissal embedded in the *Labour Relations Act* No 66 of 1995 sets guidelines for employers wishing to exercise their right to discipline workers for intoxication by following a fair procedure (*Occupational Health and Safety Act* of 1993, 1993). The workplace policies and regulations are communicated to workers through pre-employment processes, training and induction and employee assistance programmes (Hartwell et al., 1998; Johns, 2016; Phifer, 2016).

Another study in South Africa has found that although alcohol consumption is a major problem, the challenge is that most researches on alcohol consumption and its impact in South Africa have had difficulty in characterising the extent and distribution at the societal level of alcohol-related harm because of data constraints (Fontes Marx, London, Harker Burnhams, & Ataguba, 2019). Compatibly, the extent to which companies in South Africa utilise workplace testing appear to be unrecorded apart from the vast information on suppliers of breathalyser instruments, which suggest a market demand for workplace testing. However, the South African Labour Guide has reported that 20% – 25% of injuries in the workplace involved employees under the influence of alcohol (Rhys, 2021). For that reason, random testing within the South African context is perceived to lower incidence of workers abusing alcohol in the workplace (Carpenter, 2007). Random testing is a procedure that involves testing everyone or a particular group of employees unannounced without following regular testing schedule (Phifer, 2016). As a result of unpredictable testing schedule, random testing has become a preferred technique of testing in the workplace because workers would not be aware of the testing schedule (Marques et al., 2014; Phifer, 2016). Studies have also shown that random testing has a significant preventive effect on workers' alcohol consumption patterns, thereby highlighting the positive influence on safety within the workplace (Carpenter, 2007; Cook, 2014; Marques et al., 2014; Phifer, 2016; Workman,

2012). Another common testing procedure is scheduled testing, which takes place daily on-site upon arrival and before workers commence work (Phifer, 2016). Scheduled testing is compulsory and known to employees as part of routine work procedures (Marques et al., 2014; Phifer, 2016). According to Workman (2012), this testing procedure is likely to influence employee's alcohol consumption patterns because testing is routine and known (Workman, 2012). Local and international studies seem to indicate that random and scheduled testing are common and preferred techniques of monitoring and managing intoxication in the workplace (Carpenter, 2007; Cook, 2014; Marques et al., 2014; Phifer, 2016; Workman, 2012).

Then again, there is an indication that organisations aspire to the idea of a drug-free workplace, which strengthens the business case for workplace testing. For example, a drug-free workplace is perceived to lower the rates of employee absence, decrease the rates of employee compensation claims, improve safety performance and enhance productivity (Olbina et al., 2011; Phifer, 2016). Employers' organisation Drug and Alcohol Testing Industry Association (DATIA) in the United States of America also offers workplace grants to its members on condition that they pledge commitment to drug-free workplaces (Phifer, 2016). A drug-free working environment is therefore perceived to have positive influence on sustainability and profitability of a workplace (Olbina et al., 2011).

A study in Australia has conducted a systematic qualitative review of relevant research articles published between January 1990 and January 2013 concerning the efficacy of drug (and alcohol) testing as a workplace strategy (Pidd & Roche, 2014). The review has revealed that the efficacy of workplace testing in preventing substance use or improving safety in the workplace is questionable (Pidd & Roche, 2014). The review examined in earlier studies between 2009 and 2013 found limitations in those studies because their focus was on a single industry (transport) and single occupation (drivers) (Pidd & Roche, 2014). The findings could therefore not be generalised to other industries or occupations (Pidd & Roche, 2014). Furthermore, the studies under that period of review revealed the data to be unsatisfactory to conclude that workplace testing could prevent substance use or injuries (Pidd & Roche, 2014). This review by Pidd and Roche (2014) is perceived to be the broadest and most methodical qualitative approach undertaken thus far in reviewing the efficacy of workplace testing.

Although not proposed as the panacea to this contentious debate, this article argues against an avoidable mistake of swiftly removing what seems to work in the process of getting rid of problematic behaviour in the workplace. Although the efficacy of workplace testing remains uncertain, its place in the workplace remains relevant especially because South Africa is battling with substance abuse as both an individual and societal problem. In addition, the WHO found that out of the 48 countries in the African region, South Africa had the highest per capita alcohol consumption (Vellios & Walbeek, 2018). Correspondingly, South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU) has

established that alcohol is the most commonly abused substance in South Africa (Sutherland & Ericson, 2010). Thus, three out of four persons in the workplace are likely to be alcohol users (Fourie, 2017). This article assessed human behaviour and whether behaviour has an influence on the effectiveness of random and scheduled testing.

By exploring the lived experiences of alcohol-consuming individuals performing jobs considered high-risk within safety-sensitive where intoxication is barred can offer fresh insight towards the debate under study. According to Bandura (1999), behaviour is the outcome of the interaction of three factors: the individual, the environment and the behaviour itself. In principle, the way individuals interpret the results of their personal behaviour changes their environment and their personal factors, which in turn changes behaviour (Pajares, 2002). Thus, the environment influences how an individual thinks and feels, which in turn influences his or her behaviour. The interaction between these factors can therefore offer understanding of behaviour. This article adopted this theoretical approach to gain insights into behaviour.

## Research Design

### Research approach

This article adopted an interpretivist qualitative approach, which enabled detailed discussions with the research participants in exploring to gain understanding of their lives and what was occurring in their lives as seen by them (Gough & Lyons, 2016). The qualitative approach was appropriate in streamlining lived experiences and preserving the true essence of individuals' accounts as told by them and contributed in developing and strengthening multiple understandings and capturing the essence of meaning from individuals' viewpoints (Thanh, Thi, & Thanh, 2015). The qualitative approach was therefore deemed fit to seize the first-hand insights of the phenomenon under investigation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012).

### Research strategy

Face-to-face interviews were a strategic move to seize in-depth insights from research participants on the topic. A maximum of an hour-long interview with each participant yielded detailed accounts of the worldview of participants as seen by them. The human contact enabled the participants to reflect on what is occurring in their lives, which enabled the researcher to capture true essence of lived experiences. This contact with research participants offered a window to a side of humanity (Thanh et al., 2015).

### Research method

The study is exploratory in nature and seeks to gain new understanding into a topic under study (Mayer, 2015). This article aimed to contribute towards the ongoing debate and to lay groundwork for future studies as opposed to articulating concluding proof under the topic at hand (Mayer, 2015). The exploratory method was deemed fit in accordance with the aims and objectives of the study.



## Research setting

The data were collected within the Johannesburg and Midvaal area, South Africa. The identified areas are located close to industrial sites that house various companies considered to be safety-sensitive (i.e. manufacturing, chemical, steel and mining).

## Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Mr Vusi Mthimkhulu of this article is a postgraduate student at the University of South Africa in Pretoria. Mr Hugo Denton van der Walt is an academic staff member at the Institute for Open and Distance Learning (IODL), University of South Africa in Pretoria. The first researcher collected the data, analysed and interpreted it, whilst the second researcher oversaw the process and assisted in interpreting and structuring the research-reporting process. Furthermore, the second researcher assisted with the application for permission from the university's Ethics Committee.

## Research participants and sampling

The sample consisted of eight male individuals between the ages of 32 and 60 years. The individuals highlighted that they were prone to consuming alcohol outside working hours and performed tasks at work deemed safety-sensitive; thus, they were frequently exposed to random and scheduled alcohol testing procedures. A purposive snowball sampling technique was employed, which involved asking those who have already been approached to refer other individuals (within the similar inclusion criteria set out by the researcher) who may be interested in taking part in a study (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012).

## Data collection

The interviews were conducted through the application of a face-to-face and semi-structured process that was applied by the researcher through an interview guide. This approach allowed capturing the dialogue real time in three different languages preferred by individuals under study (i.e. IsiZulu, Sesotho and English). An interview guide consisted of 19 questions divided into 5 sections (i.e. Part A – E). The structure of questions included 7 closed questions and 12 open-ended questions. The open-ended questions encouraged the participants to deliver detailed information under the discussion and allowed the researcher to pursue meaning. The closed questions included prompts to encourage engagement and bolster the conversation, which is consistent with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to assist with the flow of an interview process (Smith et al., 2012). The questions were formulated with consideration of behaviour as the outcome of the interaction of three factors: the individual, the environment and the behaviour itself (Bandura, 1999; Pajares, 2002). The interviews were conducted for an hour and were recorded by using an electronic recorder to capture true accounts (verbatim) of individuals' lived experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon under study (Smith et al., 2012). Interviews

were later translated and transcribed to English for the data analysis processes (Smith et al., 2012).

## Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

The study ensured scientific rigour through the application of measures ensuring trustworthiness within the qualitative approach. These components were inclusive of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005).

### Credibility

This study achieved credibility through constant interaction between the authors of this article on coding methods to ensure that the themes were efficiently drawn from raw data and represented the experiences and perceptions of the sample. In addition, the second researcher is a trained in Archiv für Technik, Lebenswelt und Alltagssprache (ATLAS.ti) software coding processes.

### Transferability

In this study, transferability was achieved through the interpreted analysis of the data from ATLAS.ti. The raw data and the printed transcripts are available for audit or further research purposes (within the limits of ethical consideration discussed in the consent form). The availability of the coding methods in analysing data to deduce meaning also provides a basis to which other researchers could make their own conclusions about the findings of the study.

### Dependability

The transcribed interviews, field notes, reflective notes from the notebook and the codebook can be available on request in the event of an audit trial, thus ensuring dependability.

### Confirmability

In this study, the substantiation of field notes, interpretative notes from the codebook, the coding process followed and the appendices to the study are kept in a safe place for audit purposes.

## Data analysis

The data were analysed by employing an IPA, also known as Hermeneutic Phenomenology (Smith et al., 2012). Hermeneutics is concerned with the appreciation of language in interpreting messages that simplify the experiences and perceptions of the world as seen and experienced by the individuals as opposed to controlled methods that seek to offer neutral validation of the world (Malterud, 2016). In addition, IPA is deemed appropriate to study a range of psychological topics, thus fitting for data analysis processes (Smith et al., 2012). The analysis process therefore involved identifying patterns between emergent themes from data and developing them into superordinate and subordinate themes through the use of ATLAS.ti software. The themes belonging together were clustered and reduced into meaning according

to the lived experiences and perceptions of the individuals under discussion. The collated codes and themes were further cross-checked and discussed until a consensus was reached.

## Reporting style

The topic under study identified four major themes. These themes focussed on the aspects of behaviour in accordance with literature under study. The findings were reported according to the themes, with each finding supported by direct quotations from the individuals under study.

## Ethical considerations

The individuals who took part in the discussion were given information sheets and consent forms that specified the purpose and aims of the research including the right to participate or withdraw from the research (voluntarily), privacy and confidentiality of information, limitation of anonymity and risks to potential harm. The information sheets and consent forms were discussed in detail prior to individuals signing consent to take part in research. The authors applied for permission from the Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa (UNISA), Department of Psychology (Ref. No: PERC-17401). Individuals' names were replaced with pseudo names (i.e. P1–P8) to protect identities and ensure anonymity.

## Results

Four themes emerged during data analysis, namely (1) awareness of workplace testing policies and procedures, (2) interaction with working environment, (3) perceived control of behaviour and (4) meaning of lived experiences. The themes are discussed in detail in the next section.

### Awareness of workplace testing policies and procedures

The focus of this particular theme was to capture individuals' knowledge, awareness and understanding of workplace policies and procedures that monitored intoxication in the workplace. The emphasis on policies and testing techniques was to seize insights into individual's alertness to the working environment that prohibited intoxication when onsite. Individuals emphasised knowledge of workplace policies and procedures. This corresponded with literature that organisations tend to communicate policies and procedures through workplace practices such as pre-employment processes, training, induction and employee assistance programmes (Cook, 2014; Hartwell et al., 1998; Johns, 2016; Phifer, 2016). The individuals were therefore not only familiar with workplace testing practices, but they also were continually aware of their existence and the penalties thereof. The following extracts have reference to awareness:

'Yes, we know about it, it was communicated, we consented and then we signed, you will be disciplined coming to work being under the influence of liquor.' (P2, Male, Union representative)

'It's a rule they read you when they hired you because we work with dangerous things.' (P8, Male, Machine operator)

'It's even there in induction, it's rule number one because it falls under min. Even if you are about 18 metres away from the gate, you should be sober.' (P4, Male, Welder)

Random and scheduled testing were emphasised as common in the workplace, which concurred with the view that random and scheduled testing were predominant forms of testing in the workplace (Cook, 2014; Marques et al., 2014; Phifer, 2016; Workman, 2012). The individuals also revealed that testing for alcohol intensified on Mondays and Fridays, perhaps because of the closeness of these particular days to weekends when alcohol abuse is to be expected. This practice points to the gravity of the problem of intoxication in the workplace. The following excerpts indicated this practice:

'It was random, especially on Mondays and Fridays.' (P2, Male, Union representative)

'Testing is usually performed every day before they conduct their work, but more efficiently on Mondays and Fridays.' (P1, Male, Policy enforcer)

'They did a random test, but now they test every day, especially on Mondays, and if they are suspicious that people are under the influence of alcohol.' (P7, Male, Loading inspector)

The data showed awareness of penalties if found intoxicated in the workplace. The data agreed with studies that organisations followed a procedural approach in dealing with penalties for intoxication in the workplace (Cook, 2014; Department of Labour of South Africa, 1993; Olbina et al., 2011). It is however not clear whether this lenient approach is effective in deterring intoxication in the workplace:

'The first time it's a warning, second time it will be a serious warning, third time it will be a dismissal.' (P2, Male, Union representative)

'They send you home and that means you are being dismissed from work.' (P3, Male, Chemical transport officer)

'And tomorrow they find the very same percentage in you, now you should go to hearing; they dismiss you because that means you are not determined.' (P6, Male, Rigger)

### Interaction with working environment

Under this theme, the focus was on how workers interacted with the working environment that prohibited intoxication in the workplace. By emphasising interaction with working environment that prohibited intoxication, it was possible to gain insights into individuals' thoughts and interpretations, which could provide insights on behaviour. According to Social Cognitive Learning, behaviour can be viewed as the outcome of the interaction amongst the individual, environment and behaviour (Pajares, 2002). Data highlighted drunkenness onsite and money enabling intoxication in the workplace in spite of policies and procedures in place. The individuals' actions under this theme interpreted the interaction amongst individuals, environment and behaviour as posited by Bandura (1999) and Pajares (2002). The following excerpts highlight this practice:

'Employees come in with alcohol and get it in with lunchbox or bags. He takes it somewhere cleverly as if he's drinking a cold drink; meanwhile he's doing his things [*getting drunk on-site*].' (P8, Male, Machine operator)

'When they've tested you and find that you are wrong you give them [*security personnel*] "*coca cola*" [*street name for money*] and you get in. R40 you get in.' (P4, Male, Welder)

'People will come to work drunk, you will just observe the behaviour when a person is doing something wrong.' (P1, Male, Policy enforcer)

'There was a day that we were going to lunch with this thing called sleeve (a brown article bag), mostly we put in plates [*food containers*], but on that day we've put in alcohol in them and sat at the back and began drinking inside the company.' (P4, Male, Welder)

Data revealed inconsistencies in workplace testing, which corresponded with literature that testing devices tend to react to all members of the alcohol family such as medicine and yeast (Workman, 2012). However, individuals seem to exploit this flaw in workplace testing procedures even when intoxicated from alcohol. This behaviour corresponded with a study that found high incidents of cheating on alcohol tests in the workplace (Olbina et al., 2011). The following excerpts indicated this practice:

'There was a day when it [*breathalyser*] made orange, I said I took a cough medicine and that I just ate fat cakes which have yeast; they said I should get in. I was drunk, I entered at work drunk.' (P4, Male, Welder)

'Worcester sauce reduces that alcohol. Others say you must chew a newspaper, others say eat 123 [*not willing to disclose the method*]. You know there's something called a hangover, it's yesterday's [*alcohol*] you're not drunk.' (P6, Male, Rigger)

'There's a time I was drunk, I felt drunk, but when I blew it made three colours, red orange and green. Green gives you a pass, orange it's either you took a medication like borstol, alcophyllex and they have alcohol. Red means you are drunk.' (P4, Male, Welder)

## Perceived control of behaviour

This theme focussed on individuals' beliefs regarding workplace testing in accordance with their own understanding of what was occurring in their lives. Beliefs are perceived as a channel to psychological functioning of an individual (Roddenberry, 2007). The individuals emphasised that the absence of testing would lead to abandoned self-control of behaviour and work-related incidents in the workplace. This insight concurred with the view that work-related incidents in the workplace tend to be associated with alcohol consumption (Blais et al., 2015; Olbina et al., 2011; Swartz, 2004). The following data extracts point to these beliefs:

'If you are not tested, there is nothing that will prove that I am under the influence.' (P1, Male, Policy enforcer)

'There would have been so many accidents because the only person who is not drinking is the manager. So if you were not tested, you wouldn't have been able to control yourself.' (P7, Male, Loading inspector)

'It helped me a lot because I ended up being a drunk to a point where I never thought I could stop drinking; I stopped drinking, because of this testing thing.' (P6, Male, Rigger)

The data also highlighted incidents of excessive intoxication, especially during off duty periods. Individuals believed that when they were free from work demands they could engage in alcohol drinking without consideration for time and limit. This behaviour is consistent with the view that alcohol is the most common and leading substance of abuse in the context of South Africa (Sutherland & Ericson, 2010). Quotations from data point to this behaviour:

'When I am at home relaxing, isn't it that I am not at work, I don't have a limit, and I drink up until I feel that I am fine.' (P7, Male, Loading inspector)

'You drink and in the morning, you will still be drunk.' (P8, Male, Machine operator)

'Trust me you can drink until 06:00 and still go to work; you know that there is nothing that will test me.' (P1, Male, Policy enforcer)

## Meaning of lived experiences

The emphasis of this particular theme was to capture how individuals make sense of what is occurring in their life from their point of view. As with the IPA approach, the way in which individuals describe what is occurring in their lives as seen by them can illuminate how they experience and perceive a particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2012). Individuals highlighted not only feelings of regret of past behaviour but also appreciation of the present moment where alcohol consumption seemed manageable, thus suggesting a behavioural change over time. The expressed sentiments were compatible with a view that awareness is an experience of oneself as being subject to past, present and future events (Arp, 2007). The individuals' change in behaviour is thus congruent with psychological functioning as determination to change one's circumstances (Roddenberry, 2007). The following extracts are individuals' reflections on the topic at hand:

'Sometimes you come in the factory whilst still young, you see nothing wrong, even if they dismiss you, you can apply elsewhere, but when I sit and look at things, we were doing nonsense.' (P4, Male, Welder)

'When I think about my own situation, it was bad. You have to tell yourself one thing that you are no longer a young person. Step by step you must be a man, you have to change and behave like a grown-up man. I no longer do that, coming to work under the influence of liquor.' (P7, Male, Loading inspector)

'My boss, before sending me home, said to me ... do you see that you are playing with your children's bread [*livelihood*]?' (P6, Male, Rigger)

The results have shown that the individuals were aware of policies and procedures that barred intoxication in the workplace; however, they entered the workplace intoxicated thereby undermining these measures in place. The interaction between the individuals and the working environment that barred intoxication yielded insights into onsite behaviour that undermined workplace policies and procedures related to workplace testing; in addition, money enabled this behaviour. Although there is an indication of technical flaws in workplace testing such as failure to sufficiently distinguish between alcohol and yeast or medication, individuals deliberately



manipulated this situation even when intoxicated with alcohol. The results revealed that drinking of alcohol is excessive in the absence of monitoring mechanism found in the workplace, that is random and or scheduled testing; thus, pointing to abandoned control in behaviour and impulsivity when alcohol is involved. The results showed that when individuals reflected on past experiences, individuals could conceive of abusing alcohol and getting intoxicated in the workplace as a cause for concern; however, this realisation seemed not imaginable at the time individuals contravened workplace policies and procedures. Overall, the results have revealed the aspects of behaviour that are concerning in the light of the efforts to monitor and manage intoxication in the workplace.

## Discussion

The aim of this article was not to provide an answer to the ongoing debate on the effectiveness of workplace testing but set to explore insights into behaviour and its influence on the effectiveness of workplace testing. In so doing, the article examined the lived experiences of alcohol-consuming individuals performing jobs deemed to be high-risk within safety-sensitive. Whilst the efficacy of workplace testing in deterring alcohol use remains inconclusive, this article has shown that behaviour plays a role in destabilising the efforts towards monitoring and managing intoxication in the workplace. Three outcomes related to behaviour were established. Firstly, the seeming disregard for workplace policies and procedures in spite of the possibility of dismissal from the workplace because of intoxication. Workers risk entering work settings considered to be safety-sensitive to perform high-risk tasks whilst intoxicated in spite of the policies and procedures in place. This behaviour is a cause for concern. Secondly, the behaviour of entering safety-sensitive work settings intoxicated demonstrates how individuals under study interact with their working environment, which prohibits this behaviour. Moreover, such behaviour is problematic, as the incidents of cheating on alcohol tests tend to be high especially in work settings considered to be safety-sensitive (Olbina et al., 2011). Thirdly, the excessive consumption of alcohol off duty without consideration of limit provided a glimpse on the problem of substance abuse on and off the workplace. In addition, the data under this study have revealed that individuals believed that the absence of workplace testing could lead to a total loss of control is concerning. This insight concerning the incidents of intoxication that go undetected in the workplace is curious because undetected alcohol and drug use in the workplace is perceived to cost employers approximately 25% of the workers' salaries (Fourie, 2017).

The outcomes of this study point to behaviour as having an influence in the attainment of an alcohol-free workplace by weakening the effectiveness of random and scheduled testing techniques. Whilst testing techniques have reported apparent gaps (i.e. inconsistent in the outcome of testing results), individuals' behaviour seem to play a major role in widening those gaps. Behaviour should therefore be taken into consideration in the debate regarding the efficacy of workplace testing.

## Limitations and recommendations

The sample was male-dominant and consisted of individuals with shop floor, engineering and safety working backgrounds within the chemical and mining industries despite gender not being an emphasis of this article. This limitation in the study could be because of safety-sensitive industries dominated by men. The snowballing sampling technique was employed to attract a diverse and representative sample of research participants interested in taking part in the study; however, it was not possible to attract a representative sample. The article focussed exclusively on random and scheduled testing as dominant forms of testing in the workplace, which excluded other forms of testing that may have contributed to the strength of the debate. Future research can therefore endeavour to close this gap by adopting a holistic approach in exploring various forms of workplace testing techniques and the contribution they could make on the debate. The study is based on the data collected from the Johannesburg and Midvaal area, which is a limitation. The results of the study could not be generalised.

## Conclusion

Based on the results indicative within this study, the behaviour of alcohol-consuming individuals seems to play a role in the interfering workplace testing in the workplace. Literature shows that random testing is perceived to be effective because workers are not aware of the testing schedule, although it is known and workers are permitted entry to workplace once soberness is determined (Cook, 2014; Marques et al., 2014; Phifer, 2016; Workman, 2012). However, the outcome of this study has shown that workers still enter the workplace intoxicated. This insight points to this behaviour as more problematic in spite of the drawbacks in testing techniques such as inconsistent readings (Workman, 2012). At best, individuals seem to exploit these flaws in workplace testing techniques to remain on-site whilst intoxicated and earn a daily wage. Organisations should therefore strengthen their monitoring mechanisms of intoxication on-site to deal with changing behaviour of workers in the workplace. As with shortcomings to any tools of trade, the inability of testing techniques to give reliable results consistently should not provide a gap that workers can exploit to their benefit.

The bribes that enable intoxicated workers to enter dangerous work settings are indicative of impairment of cognitive functioning (Blais et al., 2015). Thus, safety is compromised both by workers and those in charge of monitoring their behaviour at the point of entry to the workplace. This insight interprets this behaviour as the outcome of the interaction amongst the individual, the environment and the behaviour itself specified in the literature (Bandura, 1999; Pajares, 2002). Corrupt behaviour can be challenging to overcome if the corruptor (intoxicated workers) and the corrupted (safety personnel)

work in unison to undermine the restriction of alcohol in the workplace. However, surveillance technology could assist in addressing the problem by removing those complicit in corrupt behaviour in the workplace. The footage can play a pivotal role as corroborating evidence during hearings regarding contravention of rules in the workplace.

The excessive consumption of alcohol off-duty without consideration of limit is indicative of alcohol as a substance commonly abused in South Africa (Sutherland & Ericson, 2010). Whilst organisations monitor and manage the problem of intoxication in the workplace, it is important to take into consideration the extent of the problem in society. Thus, the removal of workers found to be intoxicated in the workplace may be a temporary solution to a bigger problem when workers are returned to their communities, where the abuse of alcohol appears widespread.

This article has provided insights into challenges facing organisations in their efforts to monitor and manage human behaviour in the workplace, which tend to frustrate those efforts. For that reason, random and scheduled testing seem relevant in the context of South Africa in the light of behavioural insights gained in this article. Ongoing research in this area of study is vital in contributing to workplace mechanisms to restrict intoxication in the workplace.

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### Data availability

The data for this particular study are restricted to accessibility on granting permission from the University of South Africa. Special permission should be granted from the institution to gain access to data.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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