A PAPER PRESENTED TO KENYA ASSOCIATION OF
PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLORS AT SAFARI PARK HOTEL

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ABSTRACT

Drugs and substance abuse is one of the major problems affecting secondary school students. This problem impacts negatively on the academic, social psychological and physical development among the abusers. This study was aimed at establishing the perception of public secondary school students on drugs and substance abuse and how their perception would influence their behaviour towards drug abuse. Perception involves psychological process that allows students to attain meaning to information and then exhibit certain behaviour. Drug abuse is a major global problem. In Muranga South District students are dropping out from schools due to this menace. Survey research design was used in the study. The study was carried out in Murang’a South District, Central Province. The district had 89 public secondary schools with a total population of 27,859 students. The female students were 13,456 and male were 14,273, from this accessible population the sample size was 379 students. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 schools and stratified random sampling to select the sample size of the student respondents. A representative sample was randomly selected from form two and three classes. A questionnaire was used to get information from the student respondents and an interview schedule was used for the teacher counsellors. The questionnaire and interview schedule were self administered to ensure confidentiality. Piloting was done for the purpose of establishing the reliability and the construct validity of the instruments. Reliability was tested using the Cronbach alpha method, and was established at alpha 0.7. The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The representation was done through frequencies, percentages and t-test. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16 was used in data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that perception of the students on drugs and substance abuse contributed considerably to their behaviour towards drugs and substance abuse. This perception was formed through their immediate environment that is peers, parents, Media and neighbours. The study recommends that parents, schools, the government should address the issue of drugs and substance abuse at all levels of child development. This is because perception starts to be formed at a very early age. This should be through counseling and drugs awareness centers in the country. Media should be used to address the same issues due to its influence on the youth.
INTRODUCTION

Drugs and substance abuse is a problem that has raised concern all over the world. Drugs abused affect people at all levels of development, they are also introduced at very early age of between 10-14 years. Drug abuse has a negative impact on the education of secondary school students. The overall health of the abuser is affected negative. The behaviour also predisposes the abuser to crime and HIV/AIDS. The abuse of drugs has become a national hazard because when the education of a nation is negatively affected due to the abuse, the future is not certain in areas of leadership, innovations and human resources and Kenya will face this problem unless if the issue of drug abused in secondary schools is addressed as an emergency. Secondary school students are particularly affected because they are in their formative years in terms of education, career development, social skills and identity formation. Reports from the- education officials in Murang’a South District indicate that the students are particularly abusing alcohol and tobacco related products at a rate which is causing concern to teachers and the community around the schools. Other students have been found to be abusing cannabis during study time. Drug abuse appears to be well entrenched behaviour among secondary schools students. In the shopping centre’s students who have dropped from school due to drug abuse are found idling and also get involved in some form of criminal activities. Despite NACADA and other groups’ interventions, abuse is on the increase; with over 30% of students abusing various types of drugs. It was therefore important to establish the student’s perception and drugs and substance abuse and how this perception influences their behaviour towards the abuse. It was vital that their perception on drug abuse was established in order to justify key strategies in curbing this problem and reducing the level of drugs and substance- abuse among the secondary school students in Murang’a district.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed at achieving the following objectives:

i. To determine the perception that secondary school students have on drugs and substance abuse in Murang’a South District.

ii. To establish the types of drugs and substances abused by students in Murang’a South District.

iii. To determine the effect of drugs and substance abuse on the behaviour of students.

iv. To establish whether the perception of students on drugs and substance abuse influence them to abuse drugs or not.
v. To determine if there is any gender difference in the students perception on drugs and substance abuse.

**Significance of the Study**

Drugs and substance abuse has many negative consequences within the abuser; some of these consequences are biological, psychological, sociological and even legal. Such complexity demands a clear understanding of the student’s perception on drugs and substance abuse. The findings have shown the kind of perception that secondary school students have on drug abuse. This is important when setting the strategies to be used against drugs and substance abuse. The findings may also be very useful to guardians, mentors, education providers, health providers and spiritual leaders in dealing with the thoughts and emotions that shape behaviour, so that the students can learn assertive skills and say no to drug abuse. Findings could also be a source of knowledge to scholars in related areas. In addition, it could form a basis on which other researchers can make a reference.

**Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The study was conducted in Murang’a south district, Kenya. The research was focused on establishing the perception of the students on drugs and substance abuse and its effects on their behaviour towards drugs.

The major limitation was the secrecy involved in the issues of drug abuse. To be able to get the necessary information the researcher assured the respondents of confidentiality on all the information given. The perception of drugs and substance abuse in the district could have varied with other parts of the country due to socio-economic status, cultural orientations, general level of education and geographical region.

**The Concept of Drugs and Substance Abuse**

A drug is any substance which when introduced into the body will alter the normal biological and psychological functioning of the body especially the central nervous system (Escandon & Galvez, 2006). The term ‘drug’ in general sense will include all the substances that will alter the brain functions and create dependence. Different drugs and substances abused produce adverse negative effects within the body.

W.H.O. (2003) defines drug abuse as the self administration of any in a manner that diverts from approved medical or social patterns within a given culture. Drugs abused, that impact on psyche of the individual are normally referred to as psychoactive substances. The definition
includes both legal and illegal drugs and substances. The legal or licit drugs and substances are socially accepted and their use does not constitute any criminal offence or breaking the laws of the state and Some of the legal drugs and substances in Kenya include alcohol, khat, and cigarettes. Illegal drugs and substances are socially rejected their use, possession, or sale constitutes a criminal offence. Drug abuse among the students is dominated by legal drugs and substances like tobacco, khat and alcohol. Among the illegal ones common examples are cannabis, ecstasy, heroine, mandrax and lysergic acid diethylamide (NACADA, 2004).

Prescription and over the counter drugs are also abused. They are abused when a person continues to use them without any given medical condition and proper prescription. Some of these prescription drugs could be mood elevators, pain killers or antidepressants. Since these types of drugs have addictive effect, users tend to abuse them after recovery. Prescription drugs include pain killers with codeine, phenobaritone, valium, piriton and sleep control drugs. Some students who would want to read throughout the night use the sleep control drugs. The sleep control drugs are supposed to be used by persons suffering from drowsiness or have a problem staying alert. Medical professionals are also known to abuse prescription drugs because of their availability in their places of work (Witters, Venturelli & Glen, 1992). Students from such families tend to copy their parents behaviour.

A study by Rew (2005) states that these psychoactive substances produce in the consumer effects of feeling surplus energy, euphoria, stimulation, depression, relaxation, hallucinations, a temporary feeling of well being, drowsiness and sleepiness. They characteristically cause physical or physiological addiction to the consumer. Due to toxicity and addictiveness, drugs and substance abuse implies slow suicide. They poison and degenerate the vital body organs causing diseases like liver cirrhosis, kidney failure and heart attack. Addiction becomes obvious when the subject continues taking drugs in order to carry out daily duties. This makes the problem of drugs and substance abuse in the society complex and requires a lot of attention. Drugs abuse among students from the western countries is alarming (Portner, 1998). United States is the foremost market in the world. This being a country that sets standards for other countries, showed remarked increase in the abuse of marijuana. It has also influenced the students from other countries to copy their behaviour. Films and magazine show thrilling pictures of the people on drug abuse. This kind of information can be deceiving to the viewers, making them vulnerable to drugs abuse. The issue of concern is that
these are the most favourite shows for students in secondary schools. A lot of music and the wording thereof are all in favour of these drugs and substances abused.

A report by NACADA (2007) observed that drugs and substance abused both licit and illicit are forming a sub-culture in Kenya among the students. This is a big challenge to the Kenyan society and immediate attention is necessary. Drugs abused attack the brain, which is the center of all the vital human functions. When a drug is abused it causes brain injury, alterations within the central nervous systems are produced, at times irreversible ones. When psychoactive substances destroy several thousand neurons, the consequences are fatal. Some students have died through overdose of drugs.

**Types of Drugs and Substance Abused by Students**

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2000) alcohol is the most abused psychoactive drug in the United States. About 90% of the students use it before they leave high school. In Kenya a report by NACADA (2008) indicated that alcohol is the most commonly abused drug by about 61% of the population. The same report indicated that 40.9% of the students were abusing alcohol in Nairobi Province and 26.3% in Central Province. These percentages indicate that students are abusing drugs and it is important to address this issue with the seriousness it deserves. Perkinson (2002) explains that alcohol is basically a central nervous system depressant and dulls the brain making learning a difficult task. When students get to the behaviour of abusing alcohol their reasoning get impaired and education becomes of less priority in the student’s life. A survey by NACADA (2004) indicates 35% of the students from Central Province were abusing tobacco related products. The availability of tobacco products is prevalent within the province. Only to be made readily available to the consumers. A Research that was done in Australia revealed that bhang smoking leads to trying other harder drugs due to its reinforcing influence. In central province a study by NACADA (2004) showed 5.3% of the students were abusing bhang.
Physiological Effects of Drugs and Substance Abuse

Drugs and substance abused have varied physiological effects. There are adverse consequences like insomnia, prolonged loss of appetite, increased body temperature, greater risk of hepatitis and HIV/AIDS infection (Perkinson, 2002). Overdose of some drugs abused can lead to sudden death. Some of these drugs abused cause various forms of cancers, ulcers and brain damage. A study by Winger, Wood and Hofmann (2004) came up with various physiological effects such as accelerated heart beat, speeding in the peripheral circulation of the blood, alteration of blood pressure, breathing rate and other body functions normally decline. A drug like cannabis affects hormonal and the productive system, the regular use of cannabis by males reduces their level of testosterone, the male sexual hormone and the amount of sperm cells in male as consumption increases. Drugs abuse contributes to the formation of uric acid which accelerates conditions like arthritis, gout, osteoporosis, heart attack especially for people with coronary hypertensive problems. A student who gets any of these physiological effects will find it difficult to continue with normal learning due to frequent absenteeism from school.

Effects of Drug Abuse on Academic, Social Skills and Career Development

Drugs abused affect the brain, this results in major decline in the functions carried out by the brain (Sternberg, 2003). Drugs affect the students concentration span, which is drastically reduced and boredom sets in must faster than for non drugs and substance abusers. The student will lose interest in school work including extra curriculum activities. Due to this in school work there’s absenteeism in school resulting into one taking too long to complete studies. Most of the psychoactive drugs affect the decision making process of the students, creative thinking and the development of the necessary life and social skills are stunted. They also interfere with the awareness of an individual’s unique potential and interest thus affecting their career development (Louw, 2001). Core values to live by such as honesty, tolerance, peace, responsibility are lacking, this affects their social skills development. Since most of the students are in their adolescence stage of development if they engage in drug abuse they also lose their identity.

Drugs/Substance Abuse and Self Concept

Self concept refers to the way an individual perceives himself or herself in a variety of
areas for example academically, physically, socially (Luow, 2001). Core values that self evaluation is dependent on the person with whom one compares him/her with. Low self esteem leads to redefinition of self concept and this leads the student to indulge in escapist behaviour especially drugs and substance abuse in order to cope. A study by Merki (1993) postulates that when the students are feeling bad about themselves or they are feeling unworthy, unloved and rejected, they turn to drugs and substance abuse. For when they are high nothing bothers or hurts them psychologically. Loss of control and breakdown of close relationships may lead to feelings of self doubt, poor self esteem, guilt anxiety and sadness all leading to drugs and substance abuse for escape. The students are affected more because they are in their adolescence stage of development. During this stage identity formation is important and self concept plays a major role (Erikson, 1974).

Addiction is developed when students self fulfilling prophecies reinforce their insecure self concept and the influence of peers and media becomes too strong for the abuser. Drugs and substance abuse takes center stage of a person’s life. They become the social and emotional focus at the expense of other interests and activities. This gradually leads to social, emotional and physical problems. As the health deteriorates the person has feelings of guilt, despair and helplessness.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by social cognitive learning theory by Albert Bandura (1986). According to this theory behaviour is determined by the persons thought processes, the environment and behaviour itself. This means that individuals determine their own behaviour while being influenced by the environmental factors and their own behaviour.

The social cognitive learning theory perspective emphasizes social cognition and not simply coping. Bandura’s social cognitive learning theory tends to focus more on cognitive expectances, vicarious learning and self regulations as explanatory mechanism of drugs and substance abuser. For example individuals who believe that alcohol will make them more attractive, less inhibited better lovers and more fun to be around, will be more prone to use alcohol. Bandura (1986) contends that behaviour is largely regulated by cognitive factors such as perception of an issue and the pattern within the environment. Social cognitive theory emphasizes the role of observational learning with regard to the presence and influence of models. Seligman (1984) linked learnt helplessness and pessimism to pathological behaviour patterns such as drugs and substance abuse. Social cognitive learning theory postulates that
role modelling does not only affects behaviours but that it also leads to the development of thoughts and emotions that shape behaviour. Students who get engaged in the behaviour of drugs and substance abuse, they have most likely learnt the behaviour from their environment. These students have decided to get into the behaviour of drugs and substance abuse more often than not out of choice.

**Conceptual Framework**

The figure below shows how perception of drugs has an effect on whether to abuse or not abuse drugs. There are various intervening variables that have an effect on both the behaviour and perception.

**Research Design**

Survey research design was used in this study. The variables under study were not manipulated. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) survey research design seeks to obtain information that discloses existing phenomenon by asking individuals students about their perception, attitude, and behaviour or beliefs. The study was focused on establishing the existing perception on drugs and substance abuse and the influence this perception has towards behaviour on drug abuse.

**Location of the Study**

The study was carried out in public secondary schools in Murang’a south district in the central part of Kenya. The main Nyeri, Embu and Meru highway passes through the district
making it to be very accessible. The district comprises of four divisions Maragua, Kigumo, Makuyu and Kandara. The area is an agricultural region with large coffee estates. All the divisions experience the same kind of lifestyle. The area is hilly and the majority of the people are peasant farmers. Perception of drugs and substance abuse by secondary school students and its influence on behaviour towards drugs will be generalized to the whole district.

**Population of the Study**

The target population of the study was all the public secondary school students in Murang’a-South District. The District has 89 public secondary school with 27871 students among them boys are 14413 and girls 13458. The schools are categorized into mixed day schools, mixed boarding, mixed boarding/day schools, girls boarding and boys boarding. The accessible population was from form 2 and 3 students. Form I and 4 class were left out the former on account of being too new in the schools, the later due to candidacy in national examination.

The table below shows the distribution of the accessible secondary school students in Murang’a South District.

**Distribution of the accessible secondary school students in Murang’a South District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of schools</th>
<th>No of schools</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys Boarding</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2899</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls Boarding</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3847</td>
<td>3847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>7970</td>
<td>6740</td>
<td>13155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed day</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>1439</td>
<td>3301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed boarding</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1682</td>
<td>1426</td>
<td>3108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed boarding/day</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>14413</td>
<td>13458</td>
<td>27871</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrumentation**

The required data was collected by the use of a student’s questionnaire and also an interview schedule for teacher counselors in the selected schools. The student’s questionnaires were used to obtain information on the age, gender, class, category of the school, and establish the perception of drugs abuse. The sets of questions in the questionnaire were designed to help determine the perception of the secondary school students on drug and substance abuse and
how it affects their behaviour towards drug abuse. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Each section had simple straightforward statements with clear instructions on how to fill in. Section B consisted of statements that were coupled with a five-point Likert scale. The scores ranged from 1-5, and the respondents ticked in the desired box regarding their view on drugs and substance abuse. Perception was best checked on this type of scale. (Grobler, 2003) postulates that perception is best analyzed using the linker scales which necessitated it to be a method of choice.

**Validity and Reliability of the Instruments**

Validity of a questionnaire refers to the extent to which it measures what it claims to measure (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Validity refers to the extent to which the scores and the conclusions based on these scores can be used for the intended purpose of the questionnaire. In other words, validity is the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of the data actually represents the phenomena under the study. In this study, face validity and content validity of the instruments were considered. To improve face validity of the instruments, a pilot study was conducted in four public secondary schools in Thika district. This was to ensure that there was no contamination during the administration of the instrument in the research region. The piloted questionnaire was scrutinized to identify items that seemed unclear or ambiguous to the students. Such items were reviewed and reworded, thereby improving the face validity of the instrument. According to Borg and Gall (1989), content validity of an instrument is improved through expert judgment.

The researcher established the reliability of the instrument by using of Cronbach alpha method. This method was appropriate since it involved a single administration of the instrument therefore it yielded greater internal consistency. Reliability coefficient was established at 0.7. This was after piloting the instruments and modifying some of the items.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher started the study after seeking and obtaining permission from National Council of Science and Technology to conduct research from the various public secondary schools in Murang’a South District. The researcher then contacted the District Education Officer to be allowed to carry out the research in the district. The sampled schools were visited and the principals informed about the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents. Confidentiality was observed and assured to the respondents because the topic of research was very sensitive in the schools. The questionnaires were self-administered.
to the student’s respondents. Thereafter use the interview schedule on the teacher counselors after explaining to them the purpose of the study. The questionnaires were collected for data analysis, conclusion and recommendation on the study.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected was organized, tabulated and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used and the presentation was done using graphs as a summary. The gender difference on perception of drugs abuse was be analyzed by use oft-test at 0.05 level of significance. Perception of the students on drug and substance abuse and its effect on behaviour towards drugs was done See use of means. The computer program the statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 16 for windows was used to assist in data analysis. Analysis of data was important in explaining the variables of study. The data from the interview schedule for the teacher counselors was also be analyzed using descriptive statistics.

**Results and Findings**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perception of the secondary school students on drugs and substance abuse and it effect on their behaviour towards the abuse. Based on the study objectives the following findings were established.

The study established that 116 (31.4%) of the students respondents had a positive perception on drug abuse. Teacher counselors also reported that student’s use drugs like *khat* “miraa” during examination time so that they can keep awake and study for long hours. On the other hand, 222 (60.0%) of the students respondents had a negative perception on drugs and substance abuse. This means that majority of the students were aware of the dangers of drug abuse but the minority cannot be ignored, because they also have an influence on other students. Another 8.6% of the student’s respondents had a neutral perception on drugs abuse, meaning they were not aware of the perception they held about the behaviour of drug abuse. Six (60%) of the teacher counselors reported that students who have been going for counseling on drugs abuse had a positive perception about the abuse. The teacher counselors also reported that peer influence was playing a major role in the perception that students hold about drug abuse.
On the rate of drug abuse among students, the study established that 125 (33.8%) of the students participants were abusing drugs and 245 (66.2%) were not abusing. All the teacher counsellors agreed that there was a certain level of drug abuse in their schools.

The teacher counsellors reported that alcohol and cigarettes were the drugs mostly abused together with others like miraa and bhang. The teacher counsellors and the student respondents agreed that there is laziness and lack of concentration among the students abusing drugs. Other effects of drug abuse included poor relationship with others, lack of interest in studies, absenteeism, withdrawal and indiscipline.

T-test analysis results indicated that there was a significant difference, at $p<0.05$, between boys and girls in their perceptions about drugs. Specifically, boys obtained lower drugs perception mean scores than girls, indicating that boys had higher proclivity for drug abuse than girls.

The following are therefore the key findings of this study.

i. A significant percentage of Secondary school students have a positive perception on drug and substance abuse, this perception has been formed mainly from their immediate environment.

ii. The types of drugs and substance mostly abused by secondary school students include alcohol cigarettes, khat or “miraa” and bhang but alcohol was the most commonly abused drug.

iii. The effects of drug abuse on the student’s behaviour included laziness and lack of concentration, poor relationship with others, lack of interest in school work, absenteeism from school, withdrawal and indiscipline.

iv. The study found out that perception of the students on drugs abuse contribute to their behaviour towards drug abuse majority of those who had positive perception were drug abusers this was 30%.

v. There was a significant gender difference boys were more on drugs and substances abuse than girls, however the percentage of the girls abusing drugs and substances was on the increase.
Conclusions

(i) Perception on drugs abuse exists among secondary school, most of the students have a negative perception on drug abuse, but the 31.4% of the abusers have a positive perception and cognitive restructuring program is necessary.

(ii) The drugs which were readily available, legal and cultural accepted were the most abused; they included alcohol, cigarettes and khat.

(iii) The effects of drugs abuse on the student’s behaviour were detrimental to their academic progress and their interpersonal relationships.

(iv) Perception that students hold about drug abuse determines to a very large extent whether they will abuse drugs or not.

(v) The boys were more inclined to drug abuse than girls although the girls were quickly catching up with the boys.

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations in the effort of trying to curb the problem of drug and substance abuse.

i. It is important to address the issue of drugs and substance abuse from a cognitive level where information is given on the dangers of the drugs and substances abused. Assertive training is important so that students can make choice from an informed point of view.

ii. There is need for more awareness among the students about drugs and substance abuse by the schools and media. Media should be used to address the issue of drugs and substance abuse because of its great influence on the youth.

iii. Drugs and substance abuse counselling centres need to be established in more places by the government to address the problem.

iv. Those students who are already trapped in the behaviour of drug abuse, cognitive restructuring is necessary through giving the correct information about drugs abused and empowering them on the right decision making process.

v. Parents require information on how to be good role models and the right values should be held by the family members.

vi. The government should enforce laws to regulate the production and consumption of the local brews which seem to be the bases where students learn the behaviour of alcohol abuse.
vii. All teacher counselors should undergo professional training in guidance counseling so that they can be able to deal with complex issues that relate to the behaviour of drug and substance abuse.

**Suggestions for further research**

From the suggestions already given the following are areas for further research:

(i) Factors influencing the effectiveness of the information given on drugs and substance abuse to the students.

(ii) Family systems role in curbing drug and substance abuse.

(iii) Relationship between the type of personality and drugs abusing behaviours.
REFERENCES


