Research Article

Factors Influencing Drug and Substance Abuse among Secondary School Students in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study was premised on factors that influence secondary school students' participation in drug and substance abuse activities. In this context for data generation, analysis, and discussion, was guided by a framework comprised of the phenomenology and qualitative approach. For this study thirty students and six class teachers from one secondary school in Zimbabwe were purposively and conveniently sampled as sources of information for the issue under investigation respectively. Document analysis, focus group discussion, and personal interview were employed to generate data, which was later analyzed according to emerging themes. From the study, it was revealed that secondary school students were abusing a variety of drugs, and substances such as ganja cakes, among others. It was also noted that students at the secondary school under investigation were driven into drug and substance abuse activities due to peer pressure among others. With the aim to mitigate prevalence of drug and substance abuse amongst the students at selected secondary schools, it was advocated that peer counseling, establishing rehabilitation centers, the introduction of stiff disciplinary measures, and awareness campaigns. Therefore, it can be concluded that secondary school students' participation in drug and substance abuse, within the school premises was largely influenced by multiple factors. It is in this context that the researchers recommend that in selected secondary school coaching of students secondary school students, teachers, and parents/guardians on the execution of peer counseling strategy to ease off secondary school students' participation in anti-social demeanors needs be reinforced.

Keywords: Drug and substance abuse; factor; secondary school; student

1. Introduction

Education plays a critical role in advancing economic agenda of Zimbabwe (Tshabalala et al., 2015). Consequently, when citizens are literate, they will contribute to all spheres of country (Eneh & Nkamnebe, 2011). Education raises awareness to "be engaged as thoughtful citizens and to become meaningfully involved in the change process as co-responsible thinkers, actors, and leaders" (Masanja, 2010:9). It is difficult in present-day society to address the issue of national development without recourse to drug and substance abuse amongst the youth. It is in this context that the drug

and substance abuse by secondary school students in Zimbabwe's basic education system is a great cause of concern. Therefore, this has become a national concern, given its impacts on education, future leadership, innovations, and human resources (Mpofu, 2011). In this case, secondary school students are particularly at risk given that they are in their formative years of education, career development, social skills, and identity formation (Akanbi et al., 2015).

Some of the secondary school students engage in drugs due to peer pressure (Bandason & Rusakaniko, 2010). In this context, most students in secondary schools are in the age range of 13-20 a time of experimentation, exploration, curiosity, and identity search (Olugbenga-Bello et. al., 2009). As a result, students expose themselves to risks such as academic failure due to drug use. (Sue et al., 2009). Engaging in risk-taking behavior helps secondary students to shape their identities, try out their new decision-making skills, and gain peer acceptance, and respect (Portnoy et al., 2014). The alarming evidence of the prevalence of drug and substance abuse, their effects, and consequences among secondary students (Chege et al., 2017; Nkoma & Bhumure, 2014). This has been a cause for concern for all stakeholders in education to mount strategies to equip secondary school students with the knowledge, and ways of living without use of drugs (Oliha, 2014).

It is in this context that Zimbabwe's school authorities made guidance, and counselling a key component of secondary school teaching-learning through the Director's Circulars 23/2005 and 2/2006 (Chidarikire et al., 2021; Gudyanga et al., 2019). Thus, in most secondary schools the power of guidance and counseling was noted through the teachers' involvement in community programs targeted at reducing drug, and substance abuse both within the school premises and in the community at large (Chireshe, 2013; 2012). Despite the existence of this as a strategy to fight this vice in the community at large, the number of secondary school students participating in drug and substance abuse is considerably high.

However, scholars in Zimbabwe (Badza, 2005; Gunda & Mbwirire, 2020; Moyo, 2020; Nkala, 2014) have in their studies focused on the relevance of guidance and counseling in primary schools. There seems to be a dearth of empirical research on factors influencing students in high-density secondary schools into drug, and substance abuse. It is in this context that this sought to gain insight from the secondary students' perspective into the issue under investigation guided by the following question: What factors influence students in high-density secondary school to participate in drug, and substance abuse? This, therefore, is a gap that needs to be filled from the secondary school students' perspective. It is against this background that in the section the researchers discuss in detail the methodology that guided the data generation, analysis and discussion.

2. Methodology

In this section the researchers outlined the roadmap that was employed in data generation, analysis and discussion. The following sub-sections enabled the researchers to come up with a strategy that enabled them to explore the patterns, and trends pertaining to the issue at the centre of the investigation.

2.1 Design

In this study interpretivist paradigm, and qualitative approach guided the generation, and analysis of the participants' beliefs and lived experiences (Mareva, 2014; Mertens, 2015; Pilarska, 2021). In this study, the researchers looked at reality in its multiplicity and subjective; therefore, there is no one reality that is being observed or interpretation of a one event (Creswell, 2014; Hancock et al., 2009; Merriam, 2009; Polit & Beck, 2012). This called for the researchers to view and inductively interpret the actions in the context in which they occur through the participants' eyes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gay et al., 2011).

2.2 Participants

For this study the researchers considered the sample as comprising members from whom relevant information was derived. Hence, in generating data purposive sampling was employed to select 30 students that is 15 male and 15 female students aged between 16 - 19 years. Thus, this sampling technique endorsed the researchers to use participants who had vital information concerning the issue at the centre of the investigation (Cooper & Schindler, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). With the view to triangulate data generated from the selected students, two female and four male class teachers with teaching experience ranging between 5 - 15 years were conveniently selected due to their proximity during the time the researchers were generating data. This was against the background that institutions were operating under the WHO (World Health Organization), Ministry of Health and Child Care, and Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's restrictions in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak (Makombe, 2021). These provided standard operations procedures that limited the number of both students and teachers to be at each school at a given time.

2.3 Methods

In sourcing data, the researchers were the chief tools aided by document analysis, personal interviews, and focus group discussions (Konyana & Motalenyane, 2022). This called for the collaboration between the researchers and the selected participants through a clearly defined interface in a natural setting with the view to gain insight into the issue under investigation (Ridder 2017; Tshelane 2013). Hence, the use of these selected methods allowed for a methodical data sourcing and triangulation. Thus, the researchers had the opportunity to check the data sourced from the selected participants against information derived from other sources such as policy documents.

2.4 Data Generation

Permission to gain into the school under investigation was sought and granted by the responsible authority. Thereafter, the researchers organized a meeting with the school administration, and the targeted participants with the view to clarify the purpose of the study. After explaining the nature, and purpose of the study in a comprehensible manner participants consented in writing to engage in the data sourcing process. Secondary school students and class teachers' participation in this study was voluntary. They were given the assurance that their responses will be kept confidential (Olonisakin et al., 2021). In this study data was sourced from the selected participants during their spare time so as to minimize disturbances to teaching and learning activities.

2.5 Data Analysis

In this study data generation, processing, analysis, and discussion were considered intertwined, the researchers took data analysis, and discussion as an ongoing, and iterative process (Chimbi & Jita, 2021; Creswell, 2009). This called for the researchers to employ the interpretive analysis model to interrogate data sourced from the participants and consulted literature. Thus, the researchers looked across all the sourced data and categorized it according to themes (Creswell, 2012; 2010). This enabled the researchers to come up with a frame that answers to the issue under investigation (Chikuvadze et al., 2022). In the next section researchers analyse, and discuss the sourced data.

3. Findings and Discussion

The study was informed by the socio-ecological systems and symbolic interactionist perspective, which focus on how secondary students get unwanted behaviours through one – on- one interaction

(Carter & Fuller, 2015; Muwanzi & Mafumbate, 2018). Thus, secondary students' development by socialization (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; 1979). This interaction enabled the researchers to gain insight into the factors that influence students to participate in drug and substance abuse within the secondary school environment. This called for the researchers to analyse the sourced data through the interpretive analysis under the following themes: (1) Secondary school students' drug and substance choices, (2) factors driving secondary school students into drug and substance abuse, and (3) strategies used in overcoming drug and abuse. Each of these themes and the evidence for them is presented below.

3.1   Theme 1: Secondary School Students' Drug and Substance Choices

In this section secondary school students' drug and substance choices are discussed. In this regard one participant highlighted that:

> Because of pressure at home, and pressure at school, most students resort to what we call "Benzos" or "Xanax", just to calm down a bit. And it's there in the streets! Marijuana and bronco are part of every day's meal for students (Focus Group Discussion Participant 10)

In support one of the class teachers responded:

> Students' drug and substance of choice is very wide and unlimited in their world! Mostly, students abuse glue, alcohol, bronco, tobacco marijuana, and gutkar. Besides, they also take energy drinks such as red bull, dragon, and switch; inhalants such as aerosols and solvents; depressants such as benzodiazepines or valium for composure as they say (Class Teacher D)

The responses above reflect the same theme when students are said to be embarking on marijuana, bronco, and sedatives or depressants. According to Mhizha (2010:7) "drugs serve as an escape mechanism for coping with stress, school, and personal problems". However, the above responses also reveal that marijuana is one of the most commonly abused drugs by students followed by sedatives or depressants, inhalants such as glue, and mutoriro. This also concurs with Drazdowski et al (2022); Kahuthia-Gathu et al (2013), which showed that teenagers in Zimbabwe abuse psychoactive substances which include marijuana, tobacco, mutoriro, amphetamines, among others. In agreement with the above one class teacher during an interview revealed:

> Besides taking all these other known drugs and substances they also take inhalants such as aerosols, gasoline, solvents butyl nitrates, etc. (Class Teacher E)

Another participant had this to say:

> Students are abusing a variety of drugs and substances that include the following: maragadu, mangemba, and dombo 'crystal meth' (Interviewee 20)

The researchers noted that marijuana was the most abused drug because of its easy accessibility in the streets and hideouts. The researchers also observed that the affordability of marijuana and its ability to achieve intoxication is higher than that of other drugs; hence, it was more popular than any other drugs and substances abused by secondary school students. According to Guwira (2017:2) "drug abuse has become an issue that needs serious intervention since non-medical prescription drugs are on the rise on the streets, with marijuana and synthetic marijuana, prescription and over-the-counter medications, tranquilizers, and sedatives continue being the drugs most abused by youths."

3.2   Theme 2: Factors Driving Secondary School Students into Drug and Substance Abuse

In this section factors driving secondary school students into drug and substance abuse are

presented, analysed, and discussed. In this context one of the participants highlighted that:

> *Peer pressure and stress management, sometimes play a major part in the abuse of these drugs by secondary school students. They (secondary school students) tend to get used to drug and substance abuse bit by bit until they become hard-core addicts (Focus Group Discussion Participant 8)*

In addition, one participant highlighted:

> *Learners tend to imitate others out of curiosity and experimentation and end up being into abuse of drugs and substances (Interviewee 30).*

On a plain note, the participant was saying curiosity followed by experimentation has dominated the secondary school students' minds, hence, the need or wish to feel the same as others have pushed these secondary school students to abuse drugs and substances.

Furthermore, a class teacher noted:

> *Well-up parents/guardians contribute more by giving too much pocket money to these students, which is then misdirected into drug and substance abuse. Peer pressure is also one major issue not to look down upon (Class Teacher B).*

The secondary school students' responses are in tandem with the theoretical explanation that persons "create and maintain society through face-to-face, repeated, and meaningful interactions" (Ngesu et al., 2008:2). The response by the class teacher above also emboldened the issue of peer pressure as one of the factors driving these secondary school students into drug and substance abuse. This concurs with Belenko and Dembo (2003); Gotsang et al (2017:1) who proclaimed "that there was no single reason why people use drugs and substances but usually, several things act in combination such as to fit in/feel part of a group, forgetting problems, escape reality, loosening up, to be rebellious, curiosity, out of boredom, feeling more sociable, among others." Thus, these secondary school students in nature can succumb to drug and substance abuse due to various push and pull factors.

In this regard one participant also highlighted that:

> *Our backgrounds are different; those from rich families are the ones who bring new things here. Codeine, cocaine, and this famous 'Gutkar' were introduced by them. And I even learned to abuse such drugs and substances through them (Interviewee 25).*

Another class teacher noted that:

> *Everything is centred on imitation, and secondary school students grow by copying. It becomes only a problem if the role model is a bad figure with outlandish behavior. However, among students now, there is the most influential type, especially the ones from influential families are too hyper-active naturally and when they start abusing drugs and substances, they seem to take the world into their pockets (Class Teacher C).*

In the same vein one of the class teachers highlighted that:

> *The underprivileged secondary school students are left with no choice but just to stick and follow commands from their self-styled bosses. Denial is a reflection of trying to be a social misfit or self-embarrassment within the friendship groups. Still, on imitation, certain students have bad role models at home (Class Teacher F).*

In support one of the class teachers had this to say:

> *Parents or guardians sometimes abuse drugs or alcohol or both in front of their kids or send them to beer halls to purchase alcohol or cannabis in certain hideouts. Sellers just give them because they now*

know them, you see! (Class Teacher A).

From the participants' contributions the researchers noted that there were several motives behind the secondary school students' participation in drug and substance abuse.

In this regard, one of the participants highlighted that:

Students who abuse drugs and substances is that they assume they do make them get feel high, reserved, well-composed, and even intelligent, yet it's not (Focus Group Discussion Participant 1)

In addition, one of the secondary school students had this to say:

Some students enjoy going out more often, to the pubs and bars scouting for their favourite musicians. Dominating activities these include smoking ganja, mutoriro just to mention a few (Interviewee 16).

Another participant had this to say:

Due to peer pressure students end up being sucked up into the evils of this community such as being forced into drug and substance abuse by friends (Interviewee 29).

In the same vein one of the participants highlighted that:

It's important crucial to acknowledge that at there are functions such pool parties that are happening in communities without age restrictions. Such functions are characterized by all sorts of awful behaviour such as drug and substance abuse, among others (Interviewee 3).

Another participant noted that:

In this community drugs and substances are readily availability. This makes them easily accessible to the secondary students (Interviewee 15).

In line with the above opinion a participant highlighted that:

In this community secondary students can easily access marijuana, bronco, stimulants, and energy drinks. It's believed in our circles that these drugs and substances are good for boosting one's morale, brevity, etc. (Interviewee 10).

From the participants' contributions it can be acknowledged that the students and school problems are a function of the pattern of interaction between the secondary students, and their environment. In this context there are commonalities in inhalants and stimulants that the secondary school students were taking and the motive for indulging in drug and substance abuse. This concurs with Manguvo et al (2011); Ssewanyana et al (2020); Yusuf (2010) who reiterated that drugs were inexpensive and were readily available on the streets, making them relatively easy for secondary school students to be involved in drug and substance abuse. This concurs with Huba and Bentler (2010); Lochman (2012); National Institute on Drug Abuse (2018); who advanced that the perceived impact of drug and substance use one's physical and mental being can be one of the factors driving secondary school students into drug and substance abuse be it in schools or community. In the same vein, Muchena and Makotamo (2017:4) asserted "that most secondary students are influenced into drug and substance abuse by their peers at parties or recreational activities." It is in this context that the researchers bring forward the notion that the community and the secondary schools are interrelated systems. In this case students through their interactions their community system dynamics to the school environment (Berihun, 2015; Cross & Papadopoulos, 2003). Thus, this provides secondary school students with the platform to learn various practices such as drug and substance abuse, among others (Marlatt, 2004).

3.3   Theme 3: Strategies Used in Overcoming Drug and Substance Abuse by Secondary School Students

This section focuses on some of the strategies that can be used in overcoming drug and substance abuse by the secondary school students at the school under investigation. In this context one participant during a face-to-face interview highlighted that:

> Routine guidance and counselling sessions between teachers and students at this school leave a lot to be desired. There is only one teacher who specialised in guidance and counselling at university, so it's difficult for her to supervise the implementation of the MoPSE [Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education] Director's Circulars 23/2005 and 2/2006 guidelines by class teachers (Class Teacher A).

In the same vein another participant noted that:

> Due to our limited knowledge and skills in guidance and counselling as class teachers we mostly use punishments on those students found abusing drugs and substances or found misbehaving as a result of drug and substance abuse. But it's far away from solving this dilemma according to my thinking (Class Teacher D)

A participant from the focus group discussion sessions reiterated that:

> Our [school] head is very strict on issues to do with student indiscipline. Quite a good number of students have either been suspended or expelled from school. However, considering the population here, many students do their transgressions unnoticed. Hence the school or must devise new tough measures to quench this ongoing social evil (Focus Group Participant 3).

In support one of the participants highlighted that:

> I hope that guidance and counselling be at the centre of both family and the school in the quest to fight against drug and substance abuse by secondary school students (Interviewee 26).

From the participants' perspective, active guidance and counselling can be one of the strategies that can be used to deal with drug and substance abuse by secondary students. This concurs with Winters et al (2018) who advocate for the inclusion of parents and guardians in the programmes concerning the rehabilitation of secondary school students involved in drug and substance abuse. In this regard, one participant noted that:

> The Ministry [of Primary and Secondary Education], schools, as well as parents, underrate the issue of active guidance and counselling). They believe in instant justice by inflicting pain unto those found on the wrong side of the law; so giving them punishments, taking them to court for jail sentences, yet it's not. So guidance and counselling must be practiced and must be compulsorily done from elementary levels, and more so, in teachers' colleges must be rigorously done as a stand-alone discipline course (Class Teacher F).

In support one participant highlighted that:

> Punishments, dismissals, and suspensions are all good measures to reduce this drug dilemma, but to me, it's insufficient, because as youngsters we also need some different coaching styles or a word from the corporate world, and such world must be trained to handle young peoples' concerns. Those from families and schools must take a rest because they always label us negatively especially when one fraternizes with bad company (Class Teacher A).

In this instance guidance and counselling has to start at an elementary stage to nurse a good culture from the grassroots level as reflected by one of the above participants. However, one participant complained of being neglected, and this makes the right to be heard a major concern.

Therefore, guidance, counselling; active awareness campaigns; and peer education both by the school and family were identified as some of the ways to reduce drug abuse by secondary school students. Thus, one participant revealed that:

> *Guidance and counselling are not conclusive in the total mitigation of this drug and substance abuse dilemma. However, hospitals and rehabilitation centres must be prepared to pay visits to schools or communities to conduct on-site lessons on drug and substance abuse (Interviewee 13).*

In support of the above one participant highlighted that:

> *Besides organizing educational tours to rehabilitation centres, schools can use drama, films, and poems to educate secondary students both in school and outside on the ills of drug and substance abuse. In addition, stiffer penalties should apply to those peddling drugs and substances to secondary school students (Interviewee 21).*

Further one of the participants noted that:

> *To keep the momentum in the fight against drug and substance abuse awareness campaigns must be routinely done at the school as well as in the community. This keeps students well informed about the ills indulging in drug and substance abuse (Focus Group Discussion Participant 5).*

From the above, the researchers noted that the fight against drug and substance abuse by secondary school students was multi-pronged in its approach. In this regard, Rigotti et al (1997); Maseko et al (2014:4) acknowledged "that the need for the enforcement of laws that monitor the selling of drugs and substances can limit the accessibility of these to secondary school students in school". In addition, Khan (2007:2) highlighted that "the fight against drug and substance abuse needed the involvement of both the school and the community at large was crucial in the fight against drug and substance by secondary school students." As a result, there is need for a collective effort to deal with drug abuse among secondary school students.

4. Conclusion

Data sourced from the selected participants revealed that at the school under investigation secondary school students were influenced to participate in drug abuse because of the availability of drugs and substances, curiosity, and peer pressure, among others. In response to this bad menace, the participants proposed strategies such as carrying out awareness campaigns in schools, and stiffer penalties to be endorsed by the courts on drug and substance peddlers, among others. It is in this context that the researchers concluded that secondary school students' participation in drug and substance abuse, within the school premises was largely influenced by multiple factors. From this conclusion, researchers recommend that active guidance and counseling be considered as part of the broader drug and substance abuse management strategy within the school environment and in the community at large.

5. Acknowledgments

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