

Substance use and academic performance among university youth students. A case study of Bulawayo Metropolitan Province

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived effects of drugs and substance use on academic performance among university youth students in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. This qualitative study employed the phenomenology research design. The research philosophy or set of beliefs that informed the conduct and writing of this research was constructivism/interpretive. Convenience and purposive sampling techniques were used. Interview guide was used as an instrument for data collection. Due to data saturation, 10 (Ten) participants were interviewed. Data was analyzed thematically. Findings of the study revealed that, the university students' abuse drugs like marijuana, mandrax mixture and substances like, alcohol, bronco cough syrup. The findings from this present study discovered that the major causes of substance use among university youth students include: home stressors, child headed families, lack of food, school fees, family background parental influence, frustrations at home, peer pressure, availability of money to buy the drugs and availability of drugs. The findings also revealed that the effects of drugs abuse are: poor academic performance in class, school dropout, bullying other students, lack of interest in studying, low concentration and stealing. The study recommends that there is a need for all universities to have Psychology and Counselling hubs manned by registered Psychologists and Counsellors to guide and give therapy to all university youths and the affected students. There is need for the government through Ministry of higher and tertiary education to introduce Psychology and Counselling programs in university curriculum to empower students with preventive strategies to reduce substance use. The study recommends organisation of awareness campaigns on substance use to the students and parents.

Key Words: Drug abuse, substance use, learning, youths, alcohol, marijuana, university students

I. INTRODUCTION

National Institute on Alcohol and Alcoholism (2005) observed that in United State of America about 25% of youths' experience difficulty in academics' activities due to substance use. Such challenges include earning low grades, missing lessons, poor performance on test and deteriorating in academic performance (Ryan, Hope, Scott, & Gregory, 2013; Sue, & Jim, 2009; Akanbi, Augustina, Theophilus, Muritala & Ajiboye, 2015). Alcohol and illicit drug use has been recognised as an increasing problem among youths in Botswana (Kabo & Keatletse, 2018 ; Ajala, 2012). The study which was conducted by Botswana Ministry of

Education and Skills Development reported that 37,5% of youths used alcohol and 13.2% used illicit drugs (Riva, Allen-Taylor, Schupmann, Mphele, Moshashane, & Lowenthal, 2018). The data which was analysed by Pelzer in 2009 which was collected from six countries Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, Swaziland, Namibia and Zimbabwe as measure of the Global School Based Health Survey stated that 6.6% of the youths abuse alcohol and 10.5% use illicit drugs (World Health Organisation, 2014; Dlamini & Makondo, 2017; Peltzer, Ramlahan, & Glikzman, 2006; Olawole-Isaac, Ogunidipe, Amoo, & Adeloye, 2018). Another study conducted in Swaziland reported that the prevalence of male youths who use drugs and alcohol was high (Dlamini & Makondo, 2017) the results from this study were congruent with those of the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use in 2017.

World Health Organisation (2004), Kavuthwa (2015), Adeyemo Florence, Beatrice, Okpala & Ogodo (2016) and Matutu & Mususa (2019) reported that even students who do not involve themselves in drugs end up being affected and suffer intellectually as they watch their peers not attending lessons and poor performance on examinations. In spite of the high prevalence rate of alcohol and other drugs use in Zimbabwe there is no qualitative study that was done on substance abuse and academic performance among youths of Bulawayo Central District, Zimbabwe. The majority of the studies are quantitative; hence this motivated the researcher to employ the qualitative approach so as to gather in-depth data about this phenomenon and its effects on academic performance among the youths of Bulawayo Central District so as to come up with possible intervention strategies to mitigate the above phenomenon.

Statement of the problem.

Persistence of alcohol and drug abuse by youths in Zimbabwe (Parry, 1998; Tsvetkova & Antonova, 2013; Matutu & Mususa, 2019) motivated this study to explore the effects of substance use on academic performance among university students in Bulawayo Metropolitan.

This study was guided by Bandura Albert's Social Learning Theory as a theoretical framework which believe that the effects of home environment, the past and childhood experiences are of paramount important when reporting the

cases of substance abuse and academic performance. According to the psychological perspectives of Bandura's Social Learning theory, parents or older family members who abuse alcohol or drugs can increase child's risk of engaging in drugs abuse problems, as they will be imitating their parents' behaviours (Bandura, 1977; National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014; Nida, 2020). This is evidenced by Bandura in his social learning theory that any behaviour from the child's models (parents, siblings and peers) can be consciously and unconsciously learnt through imitation and vicarious reinforcement.

Banduras' basic assumption is that people are not equipped with inherent behaviour repertoires except basic reflexes (Bandura, 1977). The assumptions of social learning are 1) observing others, people can learn by watching others or by imitating the right and wrong behaviours, 2) Learning might lead to a behaviour or it might not, 3) goal setting, the majority of the people set objectives and work on their objectives, 4) reinforcement and punishment, individuals have hopes on outcomes of behaviour (Plotnik, 2002).

In order to explore the effects of substance use on academic performance among youths in universities Bandura's Social Learning theory demands a better understanding of the youth's global social context that influence their alcohol and drug abuse. Therefore, modelling alcohol and drug abusers from the society as prescribed by the theoretical framework can be a recipe for the effects of substance abuse among university students in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. Bandura's Social Learning theoretical framework allowed the researcher of this study to make sense on the effects of substance abuse among university students. Thus, the framework helped this study to understand the effects of substance abuse among university students.

Drugs and substance abuse have long-lasting effects on the developing brain as it damages brain cells and may frustrate families, for example, positive peer relationships will be affected, and school performance will be affected too (Balsa, Homer, French & Weisner, 2009; Akanbi, Augustina, Theophilus, Muritala, Ajiboye, 2015; Sue & Jim, 2009). Substance abuse and its effect on youths' performance may lead to a decline in the overall academic performance of a school as a result schools may face declining retention rates and poor reputation (Kavutha, 2015; Muoti, 2014; World Health Organisation, 2014). The majority of the grown-ups who develop a substance use disorder report having started drug use in adolescence or young adulthood, therefore, it is vital to identify and establish intervention strategies for drug and substance use as soon as possible (Hennessy, Tanner-smith, Finch, Sathe, & Kugley, 2018; National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2013 & 2018). Substance use may influence youths to engage in risky behaviors like crime, violence, poor academic performance and prostitution where they end up contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases that can be damaging to their health (Chingarande & Guduza, 2011).

Internationally, it was reported that substance abuse has resulted to 2.5 million deaths each year and 320,000 youths between 15 to 35 die due to substance abuse resulting to 9% of that age (Sahu & Sahu, 2016; Nida, 2020). The majority of the families with a substance user had challenges in running the day to day activities of the household, as the little resources they have were diverted to substances rather than on basic needs (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2013 & 2018; Olawole-Isaac, Ogundipe, Amoo, & Adeloje, 2018). Hence, this leads to great psychological impact on the family, which in turn causes conflicts and destroys the family relationships. Leading to poor academic performance of youths.

Kabo & Keatletsetse (2018) and Muoti (2014) acknowledged that some of the reasons that upsurges the use of drugs and substances in university students are students who are given extra pocket money by their parents and the other reason is imitating their parents behaviours - who also engage in drugs abuse. The majority of the youths imitate the celebrities using chemicals on TV and in the movies (Ngesu & Njeru, 2014; Emmanuel, Valentine, Terna, Haruna, Terkuma, & Chinyere, 2017). People from marginalised places can turn to drugs and substance abuse as a coping mechanism to their pressures (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014 & 2018). A lot of crime activities are being experienced by the residents, malingering, school dropout and people living there turn to drug and substance abuse to cope with their stressors (Hennessy, Tanner-smith, Finch, Sathe, & Kugley, 2018; Riva, Allen-Taylor, Schupmann, Mphele, Moshashane & Lowenthal, 2018).

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of substance use among the university students?
2. How is the academic performance of university students affected by substance use?
3. Which are the intervention strategies to mitigate substance use among university students?

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative approach is to explore the effects of substance use on academic performance among university students in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in order to establish intervention strategies to mitigate substance use by youths.

III. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative approach was employed in this study. Qualitative research it is a situation whereby the researcher collects data from the participants in their natural settings (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The way in which people are being studied, understand and interpret their social reality is one of the central ideas of qualitative research (Bryman, 1988). The qualitative approach offers a holistic view within explained contexts. It answers the what, how, why questions and endures empathic impartiality whereby the researcher uses personal insight while taking a

non-judgmental stance (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). There are seven types of phenomenology. For the purpose of this study, the hermeneutic constitutive phenomenology was employed as the researcher aimed to interpret the internal structures which refer to the ways in which individuals engage in and understand the things which are located in their life worlds (Smith, 2009). Hermeneutical refers to the study of personal experience and requires a description or interpretation of the meanings of phenomena experienced by participants (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Dowling (2004) defined phenomenology as having its attention on a person's lived experiences and obtained commonalities and shared meanings. The study concentrated on the university students in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, age range from 18 years to 35 years those at school only. Convenience and purposive sampling technique was used in this present study. Interview guide was used as a data collection instrument. Ten (10) participants were interviewed and data was analysed thematically. The researcher valued all procedures of seeking permission and the ethical issues of informed consent, confidentiality and protection from harm were entirely observed.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of the research participants

Ten (10) youths participated in this present study. Out of the Ten (10) participants, Six (6) were male and four were female. Male participants out-numbered female participants and this concurs with the view of Dlamini and Makondo (2017) who reported that the prevalence of male youths who use drugs and alcohol was high. The highest age group with six participant's ranges from 18 to 25 years and the least group is that with four participants of 25 to 30 years of age. These findings are in line with (Olawole-Isaac, Ogundipe, Amoo & Adeyoye, 2018) who postulated that substance abuse by young people is on the rise and initiation of use is occurring at younger ages.

Substances abused by youths

The first interview question sought to find out the substances being abused by youths at schools. The majority of the participant's indicated that they use marijuana, alcohol, mixture of heroin, bronco cough syrup and mandrax mixture. The following excerpts confirm the above: *Participant 1* noted that "I only use marijuana". *Participant 4* had this to say "I mix bronco and alcohol within few minutes will be feeling good. *Participant 7* alluded that "Life is too short you have to enjoy it like everyone I drink alcohol and take marijuana and mix with bronco cough syrup". *Participant 8* had this to say "I use marijuana and alcohol but sometimes I mix bronco and mandrax mixture."

The above findings agree with the study which was conducted by Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development which reported that 37,5% of youths used alcohol and 13,2% used illicit drugs (Riva, Allen-Taylor, Schupmann, Mphela, Moshashane, & Lowenthal, 2018)

Causes of substance abuse among youths in Bulawayo Central District

The majority of the participants stated that family background, peer pressure, frustration, genetic factors, physical environment, culture and religious are the causes of drug and substance abuse among the youths. These factors are being confirmed by the following verbatim statements: *Participant 10* reported that "Family background can lead to the substance abuse I started taking alcohol and bronco due to family stressors as my grandmother is not well and no one is taking care of us hence I go out with my friend's and drink alcohol to forget about stressors". *Participant 3* highlighted that "My dad was always smoking and drinking alcohol, one-day I tasted and felt good, that's how I started to take these various substances." *Participant 2* mentioned that "Peer pressure can cause one to engage in substance abuse especially if you are easily influenced." *Participant 6* noted that "Due to education pressures, to easy that I take substances such as marijuana and alcohol to cope with these pressures".

The above findings are similar to Ngesu and Njeru (2014) who stated that how one relates with his/her peers affects their choices for example some they are easily influenced by the peers in taking drugs. The majority of the youths abuse drugs for pleasure, to make them happy and feel high. The majority of the youths imitate celebrities using these chemicals on TV and in the movies (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014&2018; Emmanuel, Valentine, Terna, Haruna, Terkuma, & Chinyere, 2017).

Effects of substance use on academic performance among university students

The above research question aimed to find from the participants the likely effects of drug abuse on students' participation in learning. The findings on the effects of drugs abuse on participation in learning among students in the schools are as follows school dropout, tense relationship with other students, lack of interest in studying, poor academic performance, theft and bullying. These findings are confirmed by the participants as below: *Participant 2* noted that "some of my classmates are no longer attending class lessons". *Participant 5* said "my relationship with other students has been doomed". *Participant 6* alluded that "sometimes I fail to concentrate on my school work due to the home pressures hence I feel good by taking marijuana". *Participant 10* noted that "I feel like not studying and am now worried as I am aspiring to be a PhD holder". *Participant 11* stated that "effects of substance abuse can lead to theft, bullying and being irresponsible."

The above findings show that substance use is often used in the schools and it has negatively impacted the academic performance of the students. These findings are in agreement with Kavutha (2015; Balsa, Homer, French & Weisner, 2009; Akanbi, Augustina, Theophilus, Muritala, Ajiboye, 2015; Sue & Jim, 2009) who postulated that drugs can have long-lasting effects on the developing brain as it damages brain cells and

may frustrate the family, positive peer relationships, work and school performance is affected. Substance abuse and its effect on youths' performance can lead to a decline in the overall academic performance of a school as a result schools may face declining retention rates and poor reputation.

V. CONCLUSION

The following conclusions were:

1. Alcohol, marijuana, mandrax mixture and bronco cough syrup were frequently abused drugs in universities as the majority of the participants stated.
2. The major causes of substance use among university youth students include: Home stressors, child headed families, lack of food, school fees, family background parental influence, frustrations at home, peer pressure, availability of money to buy the drugs and availability of drugs.
3. The effect of substance use on academic performance among university students is that, it caused dropping out, tense relationship with other students, lack of interest in studying, poor academic performance, theft, bullying and being irresponsible.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that:

1. There is a need for all universities to have Psychology and Counselling hubs manned by registered Psychologists and Counsellors to guide and give therapy to all youths and affected university students.
2. There is a need for the government through Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education to introduce Psychology and Counselling programs in university curriculum to empower youths with preventive strategies to reduce substance abuse.
3. Awareness campaigns on substance use to the students and parents should be organised.

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