

## Causes of Drug Abuse among Secondary School Students in Kericho District, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the causes of drug abuse among secondary school students in Kericho District. In this study, a questionnaire and an interview schedule were used as research instruments. The questionnaire targeted secondary school headteachers, teachers and students. The interview schedule was formulated for headteachers only. Using questionnaires administered to headteachers, teachers, and students, and interviews with headteachers, the study gathered data from a stratified sample of 20 headteachers, 101 teachers, and 300 students. Stratified and systematic random sampling selected respondents from 60 schools (56 public, 4 private). Findings revealed that key causes of drug abuse include idleness, mass media influence, peer influence, frustrations, and lack of parental care. Additional factors identified were easy access to drugs through school workers, peddlers, and local markets, as well as adolescent vulnerabilities like emotional instability. The study concludes that these multifaceted causes drive drug abuse, necessitating comprehensive interventions. Recommendations include enhancing guidance and counselling, increasing parental involvement, and regulating drug availability near schools. This study provides a foundation for addressing the root causes of drug abuse, promoting improved discipline and learning environments in Kericho District schools.

**Key terms:** Abuse, addiction, behaviour, drug, drug abuse.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Makinde (1987), and Gitonga (1999), the adolescent stage is a delicate period when boys and girls are faced with special needs and problems. When the needs of this age are not adequately provided for, problems of indecision, uncertainty, reading disabilities, conflicts and instability may surface, and individuals can easily resort to drug abuse and alcoholism. Daily Nation (2002) stated that students in secondary schools are being looked after by a population of about 43,000 teachers and their success lie entirely on them. Although many parents have blamed teachers for the irresponsible behaviour of their children, they should bear in mind that they have a key role to play in enforcing discipline and better learning behaviour for better academic performance among students in schools. The behaviour formation and behaviour modification among the students are largely influenced by peer pressure and role modelling provided by other students and teachers.

What began as a means of relaxation evolved in time into a problem of dependence and abuse. Lord (1984) stated that over the past two decades, the use of illegal drugs and misuse of therapeutic drugs has spread at an unprecedented rate and has reached every part of the globe. No nation has been spared from the devastating problem caused by drug abuse. A drug is any chemical substance, natural or synthetic, that affects bodily functions, mood, perceptions, or consciousness, while drug abuse refers to the non-medical use of psychoactive drugs in quantities that alter psychological states, causing harm. Abuse denotes pathological use of a substance impairing social or occupational functioning, and addiction involves habitual or frequent drug use, with or without dependence. Behaviour encompasses reactions such as facial expressions, speech, physical actions, and lack of concentration among students.

This study aims to determine the causes of drug abuse among secondary school students in Kericho District, identifying factors like peer influence and accessibility to inform targeted interventions. The findings will guide the Ministry of Education, NACADA, headteachers, and parents in addressing these causes, strengthening discipline, and fostering safer learning

environments, contributing to effective educational management in Kericho District.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Causes of Drug Abuse in Schools

Makinde (1987) stated that students in secondary schools have many problems. These are students with problems like alcoholism and drug abuse. Rono (1989) asserted that many students in secondary schools indulge in drug abuse due to a lack of parental love and care. In Meru Central District, there are rampant cases of school dropouts, frequent strikes, truancy due to alcoholism and drug abuse (Gitonga, 1999). Aduda (Daily Nation, 1995) reported that increasing school strikes and poor performance are caused by drug abuse and alcoholism, while Mloma (2001) conceded that many school-going children are from poverty-stricken families. Many of these children who indulge in drug abuse come from countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Countries of the world that participated in the World's Educational Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, brought forward drug abuse and alcoholism as destructive hazards to education. They are committed to improving all aspects of quality education in schools by ensuring excellence of all learners so that recognition and measurable teaching outcomes are achieved (UNICEF, 2001). Ngatiari (1999) reported that Kenyan secondary schools have undergone a crucial time when an escalating wave of violence amongst the students has resulted in turning against each other by burning themselves and destroying school property. Ngatiari added that touts have taken control over the quelling of student riots, as happened in Eldoret juice, which had an intoxicating effect. The same paper claimed that police maintained that there were more bhang flowers and smokers today than there ever were, and blamed the unemployment in the cities for the spread of drug abuse.

A drug like hemp grows wildly in Nyanza Province and Western Province, especially in the Kakamega area. Musyoka (1999) reported on the indiscipline of students in schools, which is often accompanied by demonstrations, wanton destruction of property, and withdrawal of participation in school programmes. He

added that in 1998, about 50 per cent of the Central Province population aged between 10 and 24 years, mostly boys, had tried drug-related substances during their school lives. According to Musyoka, the most abused drugs were cocaine, cannabis sativa (bhang), miraa, heroin, amphetamine, mechaqualone, marijuana, hashish, mandrax, roche 5 and changaa, among others.

Bentel and Cornacchia (1973) categorised drugs into depressants, medical drugs, stimulants, hallucinogens and volatile substances. Nowlis (1975) and Moses (1974) listed illegal drugs such as bhang (cannabis sativa), heroin, cocaine, mandrax and opium to be in existence in high schools. Smith (1990), and Gannon (1971) reported volatile substances, for example, alcohol, to be widely used by students in various countries. Substances like alcohol, solvents like petrol and glue produce intoxication, dizziness and distortion in speech. Welch and Wild (1988) reported that abuse of alcohol is a major problem in society, and especially in the learning institutions at present.

Ngatiari further reported that teachers have been blamed for getting involved in dangerous drug peddling. Rebellion against students in secondary schools, whether against themselves or against the administration, has been a common occurrence since time immemorial. Newspaper headlines with both comic and tragic connotations, and the mass media in general, are full of news about strikes and sit-ins. Although schools have put in place a set of rules and regulations aimed at enforcing behaviour patterns in order to attain the desired objectives, students have been aware that any breach of such rules and regulations will lead to disciplinary action from the school authorities. This disciplinary action is aimed at reforming and deterring others from similar indiscipline problems. Today, however, the picture is that total disorder, demonstration, destruction of property, sadly murder and display of hysteria have ironically become popular among students. Students are becoming helpless and are rejecting the existing values through open rebellion.

Njamu (2001) stated major causes of drug abuse as the gradual emergence of status-ridden, "super-loving

parents who will not stoop to the indignity of punishment for their "super-class children, the concomitant reduction of the age-old dignity and power of teachers and headteachers, the weak collaborative spirit between teachers and parents in many secondary schools, the subordinate staff status restricted mandate of Board of Governors in the disciplinary field and the persistent, outdated belief in meeting irrelevant and culturally resented forms of punishment, for example, canning.

Munavu (2000) stated that most of the disciplinary problems encountered in learning institutions are rooted in actions or inactions of some of the education stakeholders. Munavu blamed the lack of good conduct in schools on drug abuse, which is caused by the style in which educational institutions are managed, the manner in which teachers perceive and express their roles in modelling and monitoring, and the degree to which students participate in defining the learning environment and participating in the discipline process. Munavu added that misbehaviour is caused by the way in which students have been raised and parented, the degree to which students have been exposed and disposed to influence by their peers or by the global culture, the extent to which society defines its cultural norms and values and the degree to which the sense of hopelessness and despair in the contemporary society have permeated the learning process.

Pudo (1998) revealed more causes of drug abuse in secondary schools, such as peer groups' influence, which is curiosity arising from conforming to group behaviour (age mates and friends), who motivate others to take drugs. Midigo (2002) conceded that young people are curious and like having fun. Therefore, some take drugs as a discovery of their effects. In addition, other youth take drugs to produce thrills that they could not experience in their normal state. He added that peer pressure plays a big role in luring young people into drug abuse. The more peers talk about drugs, the more the person is tempted to try to see whether what is being said is true. Mass media influence through advertisements in radio, television sets, newspapers, and magazines on beer, cigarettes, and spirits encourages the youth to indulge

in drug abuse. Pudo (1998) conceded that children who come from homes where parents take drugs tend to imitate the behaviour of their parents by engaging in taking illegal drugs. Midigo (2002) conceded that attitudes of parents toward tobacco, alcohol and other drugs play a major role in children's behaviour. Young people learn from what they see by imitating what their parents, teachers and people in the community do. Parent neglect, separation or divorce of a spouse may lead children to resort to drug abuse.

Some parents peddle drugs to make ends meet and maintain their psychological state, leaving their children unattended, which gives them room to indulge in drug abuse and end up destroying their lives. Emotional problems portrayed by students who feel inadequate in the classroom and those of reserved nature (introverts) who cannot easily make friends, or even those who come from unstable backgrounds, would always tend to start on drug indulgence (Glant, 1997). Availability of illegal drugs through cheap and local suppliers encourages students, parents and teachers to indulge in drug abuse (Smith, 1990). According to Midigo (2002), Nyasimi (2001), Odawo (2001) and Mugambi (2002), most drugs are readily available in our society. Bhang is grown in secret places in our country, and particularly in schools. In addition, different types of alcohol are available in bars, kiosks, and villages that surround schools. Overprotection of students by their parents when they were young stirs up a tendency to engage in drug abuse when they grow up. Many of the students were not corrected while misbehaving during their formative years. Some students find school rules enforced on them to be too harsh for them to bear, and hence they rebel and resort to drugs.

Idleness and boredom due to a lack of relevant leisure activities lead some students to take drugs as a leisure activity for passing the time. According to Nation Reporter and Correspondent (2002), students who have access to a lot of money are tempted to buy illegal drugs. Some abuse these drugs because they think they make people brave or fearless. Many spiritually hungry people resort to drugs so as to fill that gap in their hearts (Canada Commission of Inquiry, 1970; Abdool, 1990). Environmental factors

affect children and expose them to drug taking. There are slums where illicit brews like 'changaa' are openly brewed and taken freely as normal drinks (Rono, 1995). Other cases of drug addiction come as a result of political and economic greed. Greed for wealth by drug traffickers makes them sell drugs, which causes social devastation (Goldberg & Hoffmeister, 1972; Bourne, 1989).

High hardness of school administrators, harsh treatment, lack of freedom on the side of students, and failure to have students' grievances listened to are said to be causes of drug abuse (East African Standard, 1901). Personal problems have been noted as a severe problem for the school management and can have a destructive effect on students. These personal problems can lead one to take illegal drugs (Hotmann, 1983).

According to Mburu (2002), Waihenya (2002) and Mutuma (2002), some advertisements encourage young people to take drugs. When popular commentators are used to advertise on TV or radio, teens believe that drugs must be the norm in society. According to Midigo (2002), Mwangira (2001), Thuku (1998), and Baraza (2002), frustration makes students take drugs in order to escape the reality of life. Some of them are trying to relieve themselves from pain. Most of these young people feel hopeless in life. This hopelessness can lead them to physical and emotional illness. To the youth, drugs may offer a powerful feeling. Due to the high rise of cases of drug abuse in the country, especially in secondary schools, parents, teachers, and the churches in the society should strive to combat the destructive habit. Parents should realise that the way a child is brought up is very important. Children who are brought up positively and in religious homes are mostly active in resisting drug abuse.

Muchiri (2002), Siringi (1999), Kamau (2002) and Ruto (2002) reported that students who perform well in schools are likely not to enter the drug world. This is because they are mostly busy and their minds are occupied by something worthwhile. Many of the students who take drugs are those who are idle. Therefore, young people in schools and the community should involve themselves in positive

activities such as drama, sports, music, church activities, reading good books and magazines to avoid being lured into drugs in their idleness.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilised an ex-post facto design to explore the causes of drug abuse among secondary school students in Kericho District, as this design suits educational research where variables like behaviour cannot be manipulated (Kerlinger, 1973; Kothari, 1985). The target population comprised 60 secondary schools (56 public, 4 private), with 12,500 students and 785 teachers, including 60 headteachers (49 male, 11 female) (District Education Statistics Office, Kericho). Stratified random sampling categorised schools into single-sex, mixed-day, and mixed-boarding, followed by systematic random sampling, selecting every fifth case to ensure proportional representation (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). The sample included 20 headteachers, 101 teachers, and 300 students, reduced from the planned 30 headteachers and 120 teachers due to scheduling conflicts with mock examinations.

Data were collected using questionnaires with open-ended and Likert-scale items for headteachers, teachers, and students, and face-to-face interviews with headteachers to capture in-depth insights on causes of drug abuse (Gitonga, 1999). A pilot study in four schools (one headteacher, four teachers, ten students per school) validated instruments, achieving a reliability coefficient of 0.89 via the split-half technique (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999; Nachmias & Nachmias, 1976). Validity was ensured through expert review by a university head of department and pilot study refinements, omitting vague items to enhance clarity. The researcher obtained a research permit from the Ministry of Education, informed the District Commissioner, and personally administered questionnaires, ensuring confidentiality. Data analysis involved coding responses, using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means), and narrative reporting for open-ended items, with findings compared to the literature.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of Table 1 vividly revealed the major causes of drug abuse as experienced by headteachers.

**Table 1: Experienced Major Causes of Drug Abuse in Schools**

Dichotomy label of major cases	Name	Pct of		Pct of Cases
		Count	Response	
Bad company of a student	Q11A	17	29.8	85.0
Availability of drugs	Q11E	14	24.6	70.0
Curiosity	Q11D	12	21.1	60.0
Frustration	Q11C	11	19.3	55.0
Pressure of work	Q11B	3	5.3	15.0
Total responses		57	100.0	285.0

The results of Table 1 showed that bad company of students (85.0%), availability of drugs (70.0%), curiosity (60.0%) and frustration (55.0%) were the leading causes of drug abuse among the students in secondary schools in Kericho District. The majority of contributors to the literature review, for example, Pudo (1998), and Mwangira (2001), cited these causes of drug abuse as at the forefront. Many young people face strong influence from friends who are already participating in drug-taking. They would always want to emulate their peers, which automatically arouses curiosity. They cheat themselves that the best solution

to frustration is the consumption of drugs availed by peddlers, vendors and school workers. Some of the discovered causes of reported cases are revealed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Causes of Reported Cases in Schools**

Dichotomy label	Name	Count	Pct of Responses	Pct of Cases
Poor family background	Q10A	11	34.4	64.75
Poverty/financial problems	Q10B	10	31.3	58.8
Peer group influence	Q10C	8	25.0	47.1
Poor school administration	Q10E	2	6.3	11.8
Excess Pocket money	Q10D	1	3.1	5.9
Total responses		32	100.0	188.2

Table 2 cited that poor family background (64.7%), poverty (58.8%), which was caused by financial constraints and peer groups influence (47.1%), as referred to in Table 1, were the leading causes of reported cases, especially in the literature review. The results in Table 2 also suggested poor school administration (11.8%) and excess pocket money (5.9%)

that parents give to their children when going to school were cited as major causes of drug abuse.

Table 3 displays factors which make students indulge in drugs, as the statistical data by the teacher respondents shows.

**Table 3: Factors that Influence Students to Engage in Drug Abuse**

Dichotomy label of factors	Name	Count	Pct of Responses	Pct of Cases
Peer influence	Q16D	80	50.3	84.2
Curiosity	Q16C	36	22.6	37.9
Availability of drugs	Q16B	25	15.7	26.3
Excess pocket money	Q16A	18	11.3	18.9
Total responses		159	100.0	167.4

The dichotomy label of peer influence (84.2%) has been proven with 80 counts in Table 3 as a leading factor that makes students engage in drug abuse (refer to Table 4). Curiosity (37.9%) with 36 counts reveals that this factor is also a means of drug abuse. Twenty-five counts of teachers mentioned the

availability of drugs (26.3%) and excess pocket money (18.9%) as other factors that lead students to indulge in drug-taking. The contributors added that frustration and stress were active factors of concern, as this practice has become a menace to learning in schools.

**Table 4: Means by which Students Get Access to Drugs in Schools**

Dichotomy label of means	Name	Pct of		Pct of
		Count	Responses	Cases
Through friends	Q14B	72	38.9	84.7
Through drug peddlers	Q14A	35	18.9	41.2
From nearby kiosks	Q14E	35	18.9	41.2
From bushes/forest around	Q14F	17	9.2	20.0
Through parents	Q14C	13	7.0	15.3
Through school workers	Q14D	13	7.0	15.3
school				
Total responses		185	100.0	217.6

Table 4 shows that the majority of the teacher respondents noted that the leading way in which students access hard drugs at school was through friends (84.7%). The literature review and the headteachers' responses supported the fact that drug abuse indulgence is caused by peer influence. The table showed a count of 72 teachers out of 101 to have blamed peer influence (84.7%) as a main cause of access. Other ways of access to drugs, as portrayed by

counts of responses, were: drug peddlers, traffickers, vendors (41.2%), school farms, bushes and forests around the schools (20.0%), parents who partake of the same drugs (15.3%) and school workers (15.3%).

Bad habits have been largely blamed on peer pressure and the environment. It was also noted, as revealed in Table 5, that some teachers participate in drug taking.

**Table 5: Teaching Staff Abusing Drugs**

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	13	65.0
Yes	6	30.0
Total	19	95.0
Missing System	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0

Table 5 reveals that the majority of headteachers (65%) stated that their teaching staff had not been found abusing drugs. A few headteachers (30%) accepted the fact that some teachers participated in drug abuse. The result of the majority concurs with Griffith and Malcolm, who conceded in the reviewed literature that teachers must be ready to provide a role model. Teachers should live by what they teach the students and not the concept of "do as I say and not as I do". They should live an exemplary life that is worthy of their service to the students.

According to the Teachers Service Commission Code of Regulations for Teachers (Olembo et al., 1992), it was well stated that any *gross misconduct* of a registered teacher is punishable. It expects a high level of conduct by teachers. This was supported by the report on the National Educational Objectives and Policies (Republic of Kenya, 1976), which stated that all teachers should be role models to their students.

The idea that illegal drugs were available to students by vendors and peddlers in and around the learning institutions was revealed in Table 6.

**Table 6: Drug Vending and Pending is an Illegal Business**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	11	55.0
Strongly agree	4	20.0
Undecided	2	10.0
Disagree	2	10.0
Strongly Disagree	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0

In Table 6, the frequency of headteachers' respondents who agreed that students get access to illegal drugs through vendors and peddlers was 55 per cent. The data findings on Table 6 revealed that a sizeable proportion of headteachers (20%) strongly agreed that illegal drugs were available in schools by drug peddlers. This has necessitated the National Agency for the Campaign Against Drug Abuse

(NACADA) to arrest this situation by enforcing the vendors to face the laws of the country using police, provincial administration, Immigration and Customs Department (Munya, 2002).

As earlier cited in Table 5, the statement that follows in Table 7 suggests that some support staff were agents of bad behaviour.

**Table 7: Support Staff as Agents of Bad Behaviour**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	10	50.0
Disagree	6	30.0
undecided	3	15.0
Strongly agree	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0

The information given in Table 7 indicated that the majority of headteachers (50%) agreed that the support staff in secondary schools were agents of bad behaviour. They colluded with the students in obtaining the unwanted drugs in school. This was in support of Nyasimi (2001) as explained in the reviewed literature. The Board of Governors should at all times be vigilant when employing a support staff. It could be advisable to know their background and that they should be of sound character. Table 7 evaluates the respondents' views on the role of provincial administration in the prevention of drug abuse.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** This study confirmed that drug abuse significantly influences secondary school students' learning behaviour in Kericho District, with 93.2 per cent of respondents acknowledging the presence of drugs like tobacco (72.2%), alcohol (67.8%), and bhang (23.3%) in schools. Key causes include idleness (1.96%), peer influence (85%), frustration (55%), curiosity (60%),

family background (64.7%), and excess pocket money (5.9%), with drugs accessed through friends (84.7%), peddlers (41.2%), school workers (15.3%), and some teachers (31.6%). These factors contribute to indiscipline, property destruction, and academic decline, as evidenced by incidents like the Kabianga High School arson (Daily Nation, 2002). The availability of drugs, compounded by inadequate sensitisation of headteachers and teachers, exacerbates the issue, undermining the educational environment.

**Recommendations:** To address these causes, schools should intensify guidance and counselling programs, supported by headteachers and students, to mitigate peer influence and emotional stressors. Parents must actively guide their children. NACADA should enhance public education to reduce drug demand, while schools must regulate visitors and monitor drug sources like peddlers and workers. Community-based outreach and early detection programs are essential for identifying at-risk students, complemented by

psychosocial interventions and counselling to support rehabilitation. Headteachers should update their management skills to address modern challenges, ensuring a disciplined learning environment. These measures, involving stakeholders like parents, police, and religious organisations, aim to eliminate drug abuse and foster positive student behaviour in Kericho District.

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