

**RISK FACTORS LEADING TO THE PREVALENCE OF  
DRUGS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG SECONDARY  
SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NZAUI SUB-COUNTY MAKUENI  
COUNTY, KENYA**

<sup>1</sup>\*Paul M. Muthoka & <sup>2</sup>Dr. Margaret Mwenje

<sup>1</sup>\*Kenyatta University

<sup>2</sup>Pan Africa Christian University

<sup>1</sup>\*Corresponding author's e-mail: [pmuthoka2001@gmail.com](mailto:pmuthoka2001@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Co-authors email: [margaretmwenje@gmail.com](mailto:margaretmwenje@gmail.com)

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the Study:** This study sought to investigate risk factors leading to the prevalence of drugs and substance abuse among secondary school students in Nzau district Makueni County, Kenya.

**Problem Statement:** The problem of drug and substance abuse in Kenya has been linked to rising cases of school unrest in secondary schools. Several fatal incidents in secondary schools have been documented in which were associated with drug and substance abuse.

**Research Methodology** The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The target population for the study was form one to form four students, school counselors, teachers, deputy principals and the District Education Officer. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules.

**Results:** The findings revealed that peer pressure, availability of drugs and a student's family are the factors that promote drug abuse in secondary school students within Nzau district, Makueni County. The availability of drugs is one of the leading factors toward drug abuse among students.

**Conclusion:** The study concluded that peer pressure, availability of drugs and a student's family are the factors that promote drug abuse in secondary school students.

**Recommendation:** The government should seriously control the sale of such substances with the view of preventing school students from accessing them.

**Keywords:** *Risk factors, prevalence, drugs and substance abuse, secondary school students*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Drug and Substance Abuse (DSA) among the secondary school students has several effects. They affect the brain which results in major decline in the functions carried out by the brain (Sternberg, 2003). Drug and substance abuse affect the students' concentration span and boredom sets in much faster than non-drugs and substance abusers. It also leads to absenteeism from school resulting into one taking too long to complete studies. According to Louw (2001) most of the psychoactive drugs and substances affect the decision making process of the students, creative thinking and the development of the necessary life and social skills. They also interfere with the awareness of an individual's unique potential and interest thus affecting their career development. The effects of drug and substance abuse are universal everywhere among secondary school students and even in Kenya.

Substance abuse among high school students is a global problem (Sternberg, 2003). Winger (2004) points that drug and substance abuse increase with the students' age with a prevalence rate of 19.6% between the ages of 18-20 years with marijuana being the most commonly abused substance followed by tobacco. Even though the type of drugs and substances abused in Kenyan secondary schools may differ, the prevalence of different types of drugs and substances may be similar in Kenyan secondary schools as it is in American high schools. This creates the need for this study where by the researcher will try to find out if the same drugs are abused in secondary schools in Nzau District in Makueni County.

According to Oshodi (2009), drug and substance abuse is becoming increasingly widespread in many African countries. In Nigeria industrialization and increased exposure to western life has contributed to the prevalence of drugs and substance abuse among secondary school students, with alcohol and tobacco acting as "gateway drugs" to the use of other substances like cocaine, heroine, amphetamine, inhalants and hallucinogens (Oshodi 2009). Alcohol, hypnotics, tobacco and psychostimulants are the commonly abused substances in Nigerian secondary schools with varying prevalence rates found for both overall and specific substance use (Fatoye, 2002). Oshodi (2009) further observes that the average Nigerian secondary school students are being maimed, sentenced to a life of delinquency, insanity, street walking and prematurely to their graves by the abuse of drugs and substances.

In Kenya, a number of research reports and law enforcement reports indicate that in the last few years, Kenya has had to deal with an increase in the drug and substance abuse problem among secondary school students. Drug and substance abuse among the youth in secondary schools has endangered their lives, lowered their performance and destroyed properties within Kenyan secondary schools (Gikonyo, 2005). Gikonyo (2005) also notes that drug and substance abuse among secondary school students is fast spreading to rural secondary schools especially Central, Western, Nyanza and Eastern provinces. Nzau District secondary schools being rural schools and in Eastern province may not be an exemption thus creating the need for this study.

### **1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Drug and substance abuse among secondary school students is a major public health problem and has been linked to such adverse consequences as suicide, delinquency, criminal behaviours, and psychological difficulties (NACADA, 2007). Since DSA have cognitive effects to the abusers (Gillis, 1996) such as lack of concentration in academic work and memory loss, this can translate to poor academic performance in secondary schools thus creating the need for this study.

The problem of drug and substance abuse in Kenya has been linked to rising cases of school unrest in secondary schools. Several fatal incidents in secondary schools have been documented in which DSA has been linked with them (NACADA, 2002). Some of these

incidents include the Kyanguli secondary school incident in which 58 students perished in a night inferno, S.T Kizito secondary school in which 19 girls lost their lives. Nzau District being one of the recently created districts requires an investigation on the risk factors leading to the prevalence of drugs and substance abuse among secondary school students for the development of early and effective prevention programmes. Scanty information is available on risk factors leading to the prevalence of drugs and substance abuse among secondary school in Nzau District, Makueni County thus creating the need for this study. It is in this context that the current study was carried to bridge this gap and add to the existing body of knowledge.

## **1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study sought to investigate risk factors leading to the prevalence of drugs and substance abuse among secondary school students in Nzau district Makueni County, Kenya.

## **2.1 THEORETICAL REVIEW**

The peer group learning theory was used to guide this study. Peer group learning theory was developed by Pasche in 1970 when he stated that drug abuse is learned and is subject to habit strengths which increase through repetition and reward by peers. Factors like fear of consequences and moral reservations may reduce the tendency of abusing drugs and substances. However, incentives such as curiosity and desire for peer group approval will interact with these factors so that the potential drug and substance abuser resolves the approval avoidance conflict in favour of abusing drugs. Pasche (1970) further observed that the first experience with drugs for some youth may be initiated through socialization. Others abuse drugs in order to get some physical pleasure such as feeling high and strong. The act of abusing drugs and substances is likely to be reinforced whenever the habit is repeated and rewarded through appreciation by peers.

It therefore follows that drug and substance abuse is more likely to be initiated and be prevalent through peer group interaction. The continued drug and substance abuse is also important in maintaining one's group membership. The social and physical encouragement in the peer group acts as a positive reinforcement for drug and substance abuse. Most of the students in secondary schools are within the same age brackets. They are also in different years of study. This situation suggests that most secondary school students may depend upon their peers for direction in order to find their place in the school. For a new student to fit into school's routine and programmes, he/she may need to follow those who have already mastered it. It is possible to suggest that through this process of being initiated into secondary school life, students may also be introduced into the behaviours of their peers which may include abusing drugs and substances in order to gain acceptance within the peer group.

Moreover, students of certain established behaviours will look for others who have the same practices. Through this process of socialization, new students may be initiated into drug and substance abuse while those who are already drug and substance abusers will find peers through whom their behaviours will be sustained and accepted. Pasche's theory clearly shows that there are various factors that can lead to the prevalence of drug and substance abuse by secondary school students and it is upon this theoretical framework that this study was based.

## **2.2 EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

One of the risk factors of DSA among secondary school students is peer pressure. According to the United Nations (2005), drug and substance abusers in high schools like other people seek approval for their behavior from their peers whom they attempt to convince to join them in their habit as a way of seeking acceptance. Whether peer pressure has a positive or negative impact depends on the quality of the peer group. Unfortunately, the same peer pressure that acts to keep a group within an accepted code of behavior can also push a susceptible individual

down the wrong path. A study carried out by Mutumi (2013) in Embu secondary schools indicated that the majority of drug users had friends who used drugs. Masese, Joseph and Ngesu (2012) argues that peer pressure influences high school students to use substances under the false impression that some drugs stimulate appetite for food, increase strength and give wisdom as well as courage to face life.

Family and socialization is another risk factor to DSA among secondary school students. A survey report released by NACADA in Kenya in 2004 says that, young people between 10 and 24 years whose parents use or sell alcohol and other drugs are likely to abuse these substances. At times, youth including secondary school students who sell drugs on behalf of their parents are themselves exposed to drugs and substance abuse in due course. Children learn from watching and imitating what adults say and do. As they grow they are likely to pick up both positive and negative habits from their parents. Katushabe (2010) asserts that the environment in which children grow up plays a great role in shaping their character. It is difficult for parents to sensitize their children about the dangers of drugs and substance abuse when they spend long hours imbibing in the company of the very people whose character they are expected to mould.

Another risk factor associated with drug and substance abuse by secondary school students is pressure to perform. Parents and other members of the family place high value on success in school and the competition can often be tough. Secondary school students studying for examinations therefore report the use of central nervous stimulants to keep them awake and alert and this may lead to dependence on these substances (Kombo, 2005).

Kombo (2005) further indicates that the type of schooling has an influence on drug and substance abuse among students. According to him, experimentation with common drugs and substances was more frequently reported by Kenyan high school students who have attended day schools rather than boarding schools. The reasons given were that boarding school learners are more closely monitored, while day school students are often more exposed to drug and substance abuse as they move to and from school daily. According to Masese, Joseph and Ngesu (2012) some students from rich families abuse drugs and substances because they can afford them while some from poor families due to frustrations abuse cheap drugs such as alcohol. In addition, frustrations arising from lack of school fees and other basic needs may lead students to abuse drugs and substances based on the false believe that DSA will make one forget the problems.

Easily availability of drugs and substances is another risk factor to DSA among secondary school students. A report by NACADA (2008) identified the major sources of drugs and substances used in schools by the students as follows: 52.9% reported that alcohol used in schools was sourced from their homes, 48.1% was sourced from, friends while 38.1% was bought from fellow student; 49.9% reported that cigarettes used in schools were sourced from homes, 46.2% sourced from friends, 40.7% bought from a kiosk/ shop near school and 37.1% bought from fellow students; 47.2% reported that bhang used in schools was largely sourced from their homes, 46.2% sourced from friends and 39.5% bought from fellow students; 45.4% reported that miraa used in schools was largely sourced from their homes, 44.9% was sourced from friends while 34.1% bought from their fellow students.

### **3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research design for this study was a descriptive survey. The target population for the study was form one to form four students, school counselors, teachers, deputy principals and the District Education Officer. The study had a sample size of 225 respondents who were selected using stratified sampling technique. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The collected primary data was analyzed using notes

and tables. Qualitative data was evaluated, classified into logical thematic themes based on the research objectives and then coded.

**4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**4.1 Background profiles of the respondents**

The results on background profiles related to the respondents are summarized and presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Background Profiles of the respondents**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Students	Male	111	49.3
	Female	114	50.7
	Total	225	100
Teachers	Male	7	40
	Female	11	60
	Total	18	100
Class	Form One	57	25.3
	Form Two	55	24.4
	Form Three	55	24.4
	Form Four	58	25.8
	Total	225	100
Age	14	31	13.8
	15	43	19.1
	16	41	18.2
	17	53	23.6
	18	54	24
	19	3	1.3
	Total	225	100

As shown in Table 1, the sample of students comprised 111 males (49.3%) and 114 females (50.7%) making a total of 225 students. The researcher split the sample into nearly equal number of male and female respondents in order to make the sample more representatives of the two genders. Results also show that 11 of the teachers who took part in the study were female while seven were male. There were four more female teachers than male teachers in the sample because in general, most of the guidance and counseling teachers in Kenyan secondary schools are female. This however did not in any way affect the validity of the teachers’ sample.

Further, there were 57 Form Ones, 55 Form Twos and Form Threes and 58 Form Fours in the sample. The researcher sampled nearly equal number of students from each form in order to get a more representative sample. Additionally, the three oldest students were 19 years old while the youngest were 14 years old. The researcher included students from different age brackets to make the sample more representatives of secondary school students in typical Kenyan schools.

**4.2 Risk factors leading to the prevalence of drugs and substance abuse among secondary school students**

The researcher sought to establish whether students who abused drugs had friends who also abused drugs since peer pressure is one of the known factors contributing to drug abuse. Table 2 shows the proportion of students abusing drugs who had friends also abusing drugs

**Table 2: Students with Friends who Abuse Drugs**

	No friends who use drugs		Have friends who use drugs	
	F	%	F	%
Non drug abusers	73	69.5	37	30.8
Drug abusers	32	30.5	83	69.2
Total	105	100	120	100

According to results presented in Table 2, 69.5% of students whose friends do not abuse drugs also abuse no drugs. On the other hand, 69.2% of students whose friends abuse drugs also abused drugs. This suggests that there is a tendency by students who abuse drugs to associate with peers who share the habit.

Besides, the researcher investigated whether students who abuse drugs share the same drugs with their friends and whether friends encourage each other's' drug taking behavior. Table 3 showed the proportion of students abusing drugs who share the substances with their friends.

**Table 3: Proportion of Drug Abusing Students who Share Drugs with Friends**

	Frequency	Percentage
Do not share drugs with friends	27	23.5
Share drugs with friends	88	76.5
Total	115	100

The study found that 76.5% of students who abused drugs shared the same substances with their friends as presented in Table 3. This is also indicative of the fact that peers influence each other's' drug taking behaviors. The respondents who abused drugs were asked whether their friends encouraged them to use the drugs. Their responses were as shown in Table 4

**Table 4: Did Friends Encourage Drug Abuse**

	Do not abuse drugs		Abuse drugs		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
	Friends do not encourage them to use drugs	82	70.7	34	29.3	116
Friends encourage them to use drugs	28	25.7	81	74.3	109	100

An examination of Table 4 reveals that 74.3% of students whose friends encourage drug taking also engage in the behavior. In contrast, only 29.3% of students whose friends did not encourage drug taking behaviors abused the drugs.

The respondents who were abusing drugs were asked to give the reasons why they did so. Table 5 is a summary of the reasons given by the respondents.

**Table 5: Reasons behind Students Abusing Drugs**

Reason	Frequency	Percentage of students abusing drug who gave the reason
To be accepted by friends	79	69
Curiosity	62	54
Relax and have fun	67	58
Celebrations like wedding parties	48	42
To relieve stress	44	38
Cultural traditions	23	20
To increase intelligence	17	15

Results from Table 5 shows that majority of students who abused drugs, that is 69%, did so in order to be accepted by their friends. The second most important reason for using drugs was to relax and have fun, cited by 54% of the respondents who abused drugs. These two reasons are closely interlinked because most students relax and have fun in the company for their friends.

The study revealed that peer pressure was an important contributor to the drug taking habit. The study has revealed that students who abuse drugs tend to have friends with the same habit and on top of that, they tend to share the same substances between themselves. Studies by Mutumi (2013) and Masibo, Mndeme and Nsimba (2013) found that a strong relationship existed between a student’s tendency to abuse drugs and his or her association with peers who also abused drugs. The current study has affirmed the link between abusing drugs and having friends who abuse them.

This study also confirms Pasche’s Peer Learning Theory (Pasche 1970) which says that drug abuse is a learned behavior which is strengthened by reinforcement in the form of peer approval. This study has found that students encourage one another to use drugs and nearly two thirds of students who abuse drugs do so to gain acceptance from their friends.

**Family and Socialization**

The researcher investigated whether the family background of a student had any role in causing drug abuse. Respondents were asked whether any member of their family used drugs and the responses are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6: Did any Family Member Use Drugs**

	Do not abuse drugs		Abuse drugs		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
No family member used drugs	52	59.1	36	40.9	88	100
A family member used drugs	58	42.3	73	57.7	137	100

As presented in Table 6, 59.1% of respondents from homes where no family members use drugs do not abuse drugs. On the other hand, 57.7% of respondents from homes where a family member used drugs also abuse drugs. The current study has established that students from homes in which a parent abused drugs are more likely to abuse drugs compared to students who came from families where no one abused drugs. Katushabe (2010) points out that student can learn the habit of abusing drugs by observing their parents’ behavior.

### Availability of drugs

The researcher sought to find out whether students found it easy or difficult to access drugs and whether ease of availability determined tendency to abuse drugs. Respondents were asked to say whether getting drugs was easy or difficult. Table 7 shows the responses categorized by the type of school the respondent came from

**Table 7: Are Drugs Easy to Get?**

	Type of school							
	Day mixed		Boarding boys		Boarding girls		Boarding mixed	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Drugs are difficult to get	22	29.3	17	42.5	28	70.0	35	50.0
Drugs are easy to get	53	70.7	23	57.5	12	30.0	35	50.0
Total	75	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	70	100.0

Table 7 reveals that students in day school find accessing drugs very easy with 70.7% of them saying that drugs are easily available. In boys' boarding school, 57.5% of students found accessing drugs easy while in girls' boarding school, only 30% of the students had easy access to drugs. In mixed boarding schools, an equal number of students found it easy and difficult to access drugs.

Table 8 shows the number of students abusing drugs who thought accessing drugs was easy.

**Table 8: Students Abusing Drugs Who Said Accessing Drugs Was Easy**

	Drugs are difficult to get		Drugs are easy to get	
	F	%	F	%
Not abusing drugs	74	72.5	36	29.3
Abusing drugs	28	27.5	87	70.7
Total	102	100.0	123	100.0

As table 8 shows, 70.7% of the respondents who said drugs were easy to access abused drugs. In contrast, only 27.5% of the students who said accessing drugs was difficult abused drugs. This finding suggests that students with easy access to drugs are more likely to abuse them compared to students who do not have easy access to drugs.

### 5.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concluded that peer pressure, availability of drugs and a student's family are the factors that promote drug abuse in secondary school students.

### 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, availability of drugs is one of the leading factors toward drug abuse among students. This is despite having laws such as the famous *Mututho Law* governing sale of alcohol, most of the students abusing drugs still manage to access alcohol. It is clear that the well-intended law has failed to combat rampant abuse of alcohol and should be repealed to make it more stringent. Further, drugs like cigarettes and *miraa* are legal and there is no law governing their use apart from government policies declaring certain areas 'no smoking' zones. As such, students can easily access these drugs. The government should seriously control the sale of such substances with the view of preventing school students from accessing them.



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