

Full Length Research Paper

Policy Brief on National Survey on Alcohol and Drug Abuse among Secondary School Students in Kenya

Kirwa Lelei^{*}, John Muteti¹, Victor Okioma¹ and Adrian Njenga¹

^{*} National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA), Kenya

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Executive Summary

This survey on alcohol and substance abuse in Kenyan secondary schools contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the impact of alcohol and drug abuse in the country as a whole and the education sector. The school environment is a critical point of interaction between the students and society. The survey showed that the age of onset to alcohol and drug use marks the period of transition from primary school to secondary schools. The age between 13 to 15 years presents the most critical period for the students in secondary schools to initiate alcohol and drug use. The students are likely to initiate prescription drugs and inhalants at the age of 13 years; 14 years are likely to be initiated to alcohol, khat/miraa, tobacco and heroin; and 14.5 years to 15 years initiation of cocaine and bhang respectively. The National Campaign Against Drug Abuse Authority (NACADA Authority) is mandated to undertake quality research on alcohol and drugs use to guide policy and programming in the country.

Introduction

The Government of Kenya recognizes the threat of alcohol and drug abuse to all sectors of the economy. The types of drugs available in the market have increased overtime while channels of communication and distribution have expanded giving drug merchants an ever-increased access to a wider market. In response, it has enacted a legal and institutional framework within which the problem of alcohol dependency and drugs abuse can be addressed.

The negative impact of alcohol and substance abuse is reflected in the immediate and long-term effects that individuals, families, and society suffer. These effects include death, as has been documented by the Kenyan media, and psychological instability. Alcohol and drugs use also leads to poor academic outcomes on the part of students. As a result of these, the Authority undertook a national survey on Alcohol and Drug use among students in secondary schools to bring out the

^{*}Corresponding Author: Kirwa Lelei, Directorate of Research and Policy Development,

current trends of alcohol and drug abuse among students in secondary schools. The objectives of the survey were to: determine the perceptions of students on alcohol and drug abuse; determine the prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse among secondary school students in Kenya; document the risk factors associated with initiation and continuation of ADA among students in secondary schools; document the protective factors for ADA among students in secondary schools; document the current strategies put in place to address ADA in secondary schools; determine the role, gaps and opportunities for using guidance and counselling teachers in ADA prevention, control and management; and recommend effective strategies of ADA prevention, control and management in secondary schools.

The survey will contribute to the on-going debate regarding student perceptions, attitudes, prevalence and risk factors in relation to use alcohol and other substances. It also presents information on the school environment in which alcohol and drugs use behaviours occur. The findings will support the Authority to design effective evidence based strategies to reach out to this key target population.

Findings

The following is the summary of the findings of the study:

- * Secondary schools in Kenya are not drug free environments;
- * Environments around schools were reported to be a major source for drugs being used in schools e.g., alcohol selling outlets (bars) and local brew dens near schools;
- * The home environment is a major risk for initiation of drugs by students;
- * The age between 13 and 15 years present the most critical period for the students in secondary schools to initiate substance abuse. This age marks the period of transition from primary school to secondary schools;
- * The guidance and counselling teachers are not equipped to deal with alcohol and drug abuse issues during their training. This is further complicated by the issue work overload as a result of teaching other subjects in schools;
- * There is a higher likelihood of using drugs and substances of abuse in schools attended by male only students e.g., boys boarding or boys day;
- * There is a higher likelihood of using drugs and substances of abuse among students in Form 3 or Form 4; and
- * There is a higher likelihood of using drugs and substances of abuse among schools in Lower.

Lifetime/ ever use of drugs and substances of abuse

Students were asked if they have used drugs and substance abuse in a lifetime. The responses were as follows:

- * 23.4% (508,132) of secondary school students have ever used alcohol in their lifetime;
- * 17.0% (369,155) of secondary school students have ever used khat/ miraa in their lifetime;
- * 16.1% (349,613) of secondary school students have ever used prescription drugs in their lifetime;
- * 14.5% (314,869) of secondary school students have ever used tobacco in their lifetime;
- * 7.5% (162,863) of secondary school students have ever used bhang/ cannabis in their lifetime;

- * 2.3% (49,945) of secondary school students have ever used inhalants e.g. glue and petrol in their lifetime;
- * 1.2% (26,058) of secondary school students have ever used heroin in their lifetime; and
- * 1.1% (23,887) of secondary school students have ever used cocaine in their lifetime.

Current use of drugs and substances of abuse

Students were asked if they currently use drugs and substance of abuse. The responses were as follows:

- * 3.8% (82,517) of secondary school students are currently using alcohol in their lifetime;
- * 3.6% (78,175) of secondary school students are currently using khat/ miraa in their lifetime;
- * 2.6% (56,459) of secondary school students are currently using prescription drugs in their lifetime;
- * 2.5% (54,288) of secondary school students are currently using tobacco in their lifetime;
- * 1.8% (39,087) of secondary school students are currently using bhang/ cannabis in their lifetime;
- * 0.6% (13,029) of secondary school students are currently using inhalants e.g. glue and petrol in their lifetime;
- * 0.2% (4,343) of secondary school students are currently using heroin in their lifetime; and
- * 0.2% (4,343) of secondary school students are currently using cocaine in their lifetime.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the survey findings, the following policy recommendations are made:

- * The Authority in collaboration with other stakeholders should develop a curriculum on drugs and substances use that also encompasses the other aspects of life skills training;
- * The Authority in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should support in the provision of the relevant training to guidance and counselling teachers to empower them to deal with the emerging challenges of alcohol and drug abuse;
- * The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Teachers Services Commission (TSC) and KICD should address the issue of overloading guidance and counselling teachers in order to improve the quality of the services that they provide;
- * Strict controls and enforcement of legislations on access to prescription drugs by the Pharmacy and Poisons Board should be enhanced;
- * The Authority in collaboration with other stakeholders should support secondary schools to come up with school-based drugs and substances of abuse policies that holistically address the aspects of promoting free drug environments within the school; early identification of students with drugs and substances of abuse problems; focus on extracurricular activities; and evidence based preventive strategies of dealing with cases of drugs and substance abuse in schools.