



Drugs Abused by Secondary School Students in Garissa County: Types and Sources

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ABSTRACT

Despite efforts put in place to mitigate drug abuse menace in schools by the government, parents, teachers, and religious leaders, the problem still persists (Kisaka, 2018). Schools in Garissa County are ready market for drugs and chief target by drug peddlers. This problem continues to bother stakeholders and has caused heated debate on how students access such drugs and what can be done to curb it. Thus, this paper endeavoured to investigate the types and sources of drugs abused by students in secondary schools in Garissa County with an aim of suggesting possible ways of minimizing drug abuse menace. The target population was 4,734 and comprised of all teachers, students and head teachers. From this target population, a sample of 897 consisting of 13 head teachers, 104 teachers, and 780 students was selected. The data was gathered by use of questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussions. Descriptive statistics and thematic analyses were adopted in reporting results of the research that led to this paper. It was found that khat (80.2%), cigarettes (76.2%), and marijuana (53.9%), are the most abused drugs among the students. It was revealed that these drugs were supplied by drug peddlers, peers, touts, school workers, and shopkeepers at the local markets. Therefore, urgent measures should be put in place in order to combat drug abuse practice; or else student's future is likely to be blurred. According to the author, stepping up the school awareness campaigns against the vice of drug abuse is key in mitigating the menace.

Keywords: Drug, Drug Abuse, Drug Peddlers, Khat, Student, Garissa, ASAL.

INTRODUCTION

Making of alcoholic beverages, on one hand, has existed as far back as 10,000 B.C. (NACADA, 2007). Its use in form of beer and wine was rampant particularly in early Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations dating to more than 6,000 years ago (Katz & Voigt, 1986, pp. 23-34; Newman, 2000, pp. 730-737; Vallee, 1998, pp. 62-67). Evidently, the Egyptian papyrus dating back to 1700 B.C. contains numerous references to alcoholic beverages and strict regulations for their use.

Although the exact origins of the *opium poppy* plant remain unclear, archeological evidence from Neolithic sites in Switzerland suggest that it was cultivated in this region more than 6,000 years ago (Booth, 1996). The plant probably originated from Central Asia. Evidence from archeological sites in China reveals that its cultivation and use dates back to at least 6,000 years (Peters & Nahas, 1999, pp. 3-7).

In Western countries, drug abuse is a common phenomenon among the youth in general and students in particular. For instance, in America, by the age of eighteen, almost 12 percent of all young people are illicit drug users (NIDA, 2015). Some of these adolescents are in high schools. The commonly abused drugs by high school seniors include alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, cocaine and amphetamines (CASA, 2018; Curran, 2007; Neinstein, 2003). In the



United Kingdom, the principal drugs of abuse among the youth in schools are alcohol and tobacco. Other drugs abused by students are inhalants, stimulants, opiates, cocaine, cannabis, hallucinogens, tranquillizers, and sedatives (Chassin & Prost, 2002; DARE, UK, 2017; Neinstein, 2003).

Africa is no exception because students in schools are similarly abusing drugs. In Zambia, drug abuse has been a recent and serious problem (Drug Enforcement Commission, 2017; Harworth, 1983). The commonly abused drugs by students include cannabis, alcohol, inhalants, cocaine and heroin (Drug Enforcement Commission, 2007; Harworth, 1983). Cannabis is also widely grown - notable in rural areas - and hence could easily reach the students. In Kenya, a variety of drugs are available in schools to be abused by students. They are mainly alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, miraa and inhalants like glue (Kombo, 2005; Kiiru, 2004; NACADA, 2016).

Miraa in Kenya is widely cultivated in Meru, Embu and Tharaka Nithi Counties. Cannabis is widely grown in Mount Kenya and Kakamega forests (MoH, 2003; NACADA, 2007; Nyambe, 1979). Drug peddlers smuggle these drugs into schools giving school-going children access. Again, they may get these drugs from shoemakers, school workers, hospitals, parents, touts, teachers and local brewers (NACADA, 2016).

The infiltration of drugs into Kenyan schools has raised concern among the stakeholders in the education sector and the government. These stakeholders have devised and implemented ways of intervention though they have not been very successful because the vice is deep rooted in schools and among the youngsters. The government, through the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), has employed Guidance and Counselling teachers to guide students through expected conduct in school and even at their homes. Workshops for students and even parents have been organized and religious leaders have counselled students on how to live drug-free lives. However, drug abuse continues to be a serious and persistent phenomenon in Kenya regardless of such efforts tailored to minimizing the menace in schools (Kisaka, 2018).

This paper therefore, endeavoured to establish the sources and types of drugs abused in Garissa County. The guiding objectives were: to find out the types of drugs abused by students; and identify the sources of drugs abused by students in secondary schools in Garissa County.

METHODOLOGY

A population of 4734 comprising of head teachers, teachers and students was targeted. All the 13 secondary schools in the County were used in the study. The student population in the sampled schools was first stratified into classes of form one (1), two (2), three (3), and four (4). Then students per every class were arranged according to their serial numbers or admission numbers in their class registers starting from smallest number to the highest. Then by dividing the total population of students per class with 15, the sampling interval (for instance k) was obtained for selection of one student to the next by use of systematic random sampling. Then every Kth (sampling interval) student from the admission register in the class on the list was selected. Thus, from each class, fifteen (15) students were randomly selected by systematic random sampling and every school provided sixty (60) students to be used in the study, and hence making a total of student sample size to be seven hundred and



eighty (780) in the County. Using school records, eight longest serving teachers were selected to participate in the study per school but they should have worked for a minimum experience of one (1) year in that particular school. Out of the 13 schools a total sample size 104 teachers, was arrived at to participate in the study. Since 13 schools were used in the study, a total of 13 head teachers participated in the study. Therefore, a total sample of 897 was drawn from the target population of 4,734. It consisted of 13 head teachers, 104 teachers, and 780 students. Data was collected by use of questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussions. Quantitative data was analyzed through simple descriptive statistics including percentages, and tables. Qualitative data was analyzed by thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was analyzed as per the answers obtained from the respondents during the data collection stage and presented thematically as follows:

Drugs abused by students

Students, teachers and head teachers were asked to give the different types of drugs abused by students in their respective schools. Table 1 shows responses.

Table 1: Types of drugs abused by learners

Types of drugs	Students		Teachers		Head teachers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Khat (Miraa)	614	80.2	102	98	13	100
Cigarettes	584	76.2	74	71	13	100
Bhang	413	53.9	67	64	13	100
Alcohol	314	41.0	43	41	-	-
Sleeping pills	245	32.0	-	-	-	-
Glue	202	26.4	-	-	-	-
Mandrax	141	18.4	-	-	-	-
Petrol	101	13.2	-	-	-	-
Cocaine	97	12.7	-	-	-	-

Source: Field Data (2017)

Miraa (khat)

The abuse of khat (miraa) was supported by 80.2% of students, 98% of teachers, and all the head teachers. This is indicative of its rampant use among the students in secondary schools in Garissa County. This could be because Garissa County is proximal to the areas where miraa is grown i.e. Meru and Maua regions. Khat is found in the shopping centres neighbouring the schools and are sold in shops, kiosks and openly on the streets. Miraa is a highly perishable plant. Therefore, it must reach the market earlier for it to be consumed within 48 hours from the time of picking. It is within these 48 hours that psychoactive characteristic is still effective (Durrant, 2003, p. 133). As a result, the vehicles transporting miraa from Meru and Maua are driven very fast.

It was also observed that khat was chewed (mixed with sugar, chewing gums and sweets) by adult Somali people although they never encourage their school going youngsters to use it. The argument for their use, during FGDs, is the need to stay awake as they endeavoured to work for a livelihood as miraa causes loss of sleep (Durrant, 2003, p. 133; MoH, 2003, p.



11; NACADA, 2007; DARE, UK, 2017; DARE, US, 2017). Garissa County is an Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL). As such, people rely on business and livestock keeping for a living. They, therefore, trade in livestock as well as other commodities like foodstuffs and to ensure sustainable profits, they do business until late in the night and wake up early in the morning.

Despite the unrestricted use of miraa by adult Somalis, school- going children are prohibited from chewing this drug. The deviant students who use miraa ensure top secrecy to avoid being noted by their parents, relatives, teachers and colleague students. However, mature youths especially those who have completed O-level, usually use miraa like any other adult without restriction.

Cigarettes, Bhang and Other Drugs

Improved road transport network between Garissa County and other parts of the country has eased the flow of goods and services in and out of the county. With good transport system, drugs like cigarettes and bhang have infiltrated into the business stream within the county. In support of this observation, 76.2% of students, 71% of teachers, and all head teachers agreed to the proposition that cigarette is used, whereas 53.9% of students, 64% of teachers and all head teachers agreed that bhang is used as well. Cigarettes are socially accepted drugs. Consequently, they are sold openly in shops, canteens, bars and kiosks. Cigarette-smoking parents and adults even send children to buy cigarettes for them from these shops. This leads to early exposure of the children to the drug.

Through FGDs, the abuse of bhang is attributed to the fact that students are aware of its brain-stimulating and relaxing effects. When faced with challenges, they tend to seek the intervention of bhang so that they feel good and happy and forget about their problems.

It was also revealed that students have various ways of possessing and hiding drugs within their schools. They also had different and secretive ways of abusing these drugs causing no alarm at the school's administration. They would hide these drugs in fingernails and mix them with food and tea during break and mealtime.

Other drugs noted were alcohol, sleeping pills, glue, mandrax, petrol and cocaine.

Possible sources of drugs in schools

Having known the kind of drugs that the students were abusing in schools, it was necessary of establish the possible sources from where the drugs emanated from. Respondents were therefore asked to give possible avenues through which drugs got into schools and possibly into the pockets of the learners. Their responses are recorded in Table 2.



Table 2: sources of Drugs

Sources of drugs	Students		Teachers		Head teachers	
Sources of drugs	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Drug peddlers	744	97.1	66	63.5	13	100
Peers	692	90.3	87	83.7	-	-
Shopkeepers/ local market	540	70.5	99	95.2	13	100
Touts	505	65.9	-	-	-	-
School workers	497	64.9	26	25	-	-
Local brewers	369	48.2	12	11.5	-	-
Shoemakers	292	38.1	-	-	-	-
Parents	121	15.8	23	22.1	10	76.9
Chemists/ pharmacists	96	12.5	24	23.1	-	-
Street boys	183	23.9	-	-	-	-
School dropouts	107	14.0	-	-	-	-
Bars	71	09.3	38	36.5	-	-
Community members	-	-	96	92.3	13	100

Source: Field Data (2017)

In Garissa County, students are not confined in schools throughout their learning period. One of the reasons is that there are occasional water shortages in schools which make it necessary to allow students to get out of the compound in search of it. As a result, students get exposed to a variety of sources of drugs. In addition, with the dry climate, a proper live fence system like use of kei apples around the schools cannot easily be developed. The temporary fences erected are constantly pulled down by community members so that they bypass the school compound to their various destinations. Such outlets act as a gateway for students to leave the compound and access drugs. They are also used by drug peddlers to enter the schools and supply drugs.

Drug peddlers

Majority (97.1%) of the students, 63.5% of teachers and all head teachers attributed drug supply to peddlers. This is because drug peddlers view schools as providing easy market for their drugs (Kombo, 2004). Most drug-using students get drugs from drug peddlers and sell them to their colleagues hence increasing the rate of abusing drugs among students. The drug peddlers start by giving students these drugs free of charge in order to introduce them into the vice. Once the new students are hooked, they then start buying and selling drugs to others. They later introduce their friends into the drug peddling business. Drug-peddling is an illegal business which is carried out with top secrecy. Drug peddlers would meet their targeted students in secret as aided by poor fence system that allows them to sneak out of school easily especially at night. Drug peddlers too can sneak into the school compound through the illegal outlets (branded 'panya routes') in the poor fencing system. The drug peddlers are also very secretive and use all forms of lies to conceal their identity. Sometimes, they enter the schools pretending to be relatives to the students, but their main aim is in fact to propagate of the drug peddling business.



In some cases, the students in drug peddling business also forge sickness so that they are permitted to go for treatment out of school and eventually meet their counterparts. They also like absenting themselves from class and school with or without permission, so that they can get drugs from drug peddlers (97.1%) and bring them to school. Through interviews in the study, students maintain the secrecy in the ordeal, by nicknaming the drugs they smuggle. For instance, they refer to miraa (80.2%) by names like 'chewing leaves', or 'sticks', 'the Meru cash crop', and 'Meru leaves or sticks'. Cigarettes (76.2%) are referred as 'ugoro', 'tamboo' or 'chavez'. 'Brown sugar' refers to cocaine (12.7%) while 'chemsha bongo' is the nickname for bhang (53.9%).

Other Sources of Drugs

Through the study, it was established that social and legal drugs like miraa, and cigarettes were sold openly in shops which are supplied by drug peddlers. Thus, drug peddlers would get or purchase these drugs from their sources and then sell to students who abuse them secretly in a bid to keep the school's administration far from realizing.

Ethnicity of drug sellers on markets also serves to maintain the secrecy of abusing drugs by students. It was revealed by this study that students nick-name kiosks or even shops which sell miraa and other social drugs like cigarettes, owned by Meru young men, as Meru shops or kiosks. These shops and kiosks operate continuously for nearly 24 hours. These Meru young men are there specifically for business and nearly all of them also chew miraa or smoke cigarettes. Therefore, Somali students know that if they go to buy drugs from such kiosks or shops, they will neither be reported to their parents nor the school administration. Thus, to uphold their secrecy, the Somali students easily target kiosks or shops owned by Meru young men for their drug supply. They avoid shops or kiosks owned by fellow Somalis even if they have similar drugs.

It was also noted that students buy drugs secretly through use of touts and even school workers. Many touts were mentioned by the respondents as drug dealers. They operate in town near schools from where they can avail drugs to students with a lot of secrecy such that teachers and head teachers cannot sense their dealings.

In Garissa County, most school workers stay out of school compound which gives them a chance to get drugs outside the school compound and bring them into the school. School workers and especially the subordinate staff are members of the community hosting the schools. This means that community members also play a role in distribution and availing drugs for students. This paper revealed that 92.3% of teachers and 100% of head teachers mentioned the community members as sources of drugs for students. Further, 70.5% of the students, 95.2% of the teachers and 100% of the head teachers mentioned shopkeepers/the local market as sources of drugs for abuse by students in schools. Apparently, all are members of the community.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that head teachers did not acknowledge subordinate staff and fellow students (peers) as possible sources of drugs. This affirms the secrecy under which drug peddling and consumption operate.

Previous studies conducted by Chomba (2004) and Kimanthi (2003) concurred with the findings presented in this paper as they found out that the location of the school determined the sources of drugs which students abused. These studies further revealed that students get



drugs to abuse from homes, neighbourhood, shoemakers, school workers, parents, touts, and local brewers who are within the reach of the students.

Noteworthy is the revelation that students, teachers and head teachers are not totally in agreement about sources of drugs to students. For instance, it was clear that teachers and head teachers were not aware that school workers (64.9%) and touts (65.9%) were other sources of drugs to student. With such ignorance of the top management, the school workers within the school will continue to supply drugs to students in secret and eventually limit the possibility of minimizing this vice within the schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study findings, the following recommendations are made to address the problem of drug and substance abuse in schools in Kenya.

Policy-Making and reforms

Under this section, the author has given recommendation for policy and reforms by the appropriate participants.

Kenya Government policy

Evidently, the abuse of miraa and cigarettes is due to poor government policy in Kenya. Such drugs are legal and therefore are abused by adults or community members even in presence of children. In fact, in its extreme, the government has gone forward to advocate for smoking zones in work environments and social places. As a result, many school-going children start abusing them too. Parents are the immediate role models for their children who emulate every action they do. As such, children tend to use miraa and cigarette too. The author therefore recommends that the Kenyan government should ban the planting, trading and abuse of these drugs. Again, the government must not shy off from the problem but put regulatory measures concerning the control and use of drugs by adults just like in Tanzania where miraa has been banned by the Drugs and Control Board in that country.

Further, to support the finding on legality of miraa and cigarette, media advertises such drugs with minimum restrictions. Such media include television, radios and social media platforms. With the current technology, students can get access to these media. Thus, they get exposed to drugs and tend to develop the mentality that the drugs in question are not harmful. The government should, therefore, censor all advertisement in the media to make sure they do not promote drug abuse amongst youngsters.

School custodial care

Due to poor fencing system in schools in Garissa County as revealed, students who abuse drugs can easily leave the school compounds to look for drugs and meet their counterparts. The government should, therefore, increase funds allocated to schools in ASAL lands to enable them erect proper and efficient school fencing systems. This is helpful in confining students within the school compound and keeping off strangers from accessing the school compound as well.

Relief from other subsistence problems

As revealed, the scarcity of water in schools in Garissa County is another chance that enhanced drug abuse among the students. This also could apply to other Arid and Semi-arid



Lands (ASALs). Water scarcity and related challenges is a chance for students to be frequently allowed to leave school in search of water and, as a result, exposed them to drugs and drug peddlers. The government should, therefore, look into the problem of frequent water shortages in schools. There is need for immediate intervention by the government to ensure that natural and essential resource like water is availed for students at all costs. For instance, boreholes should be dug at schools as a supplement. Furthermore, as a policy, the government through relevant authorities must ensure proper clean water supply before the schools are allowed to be operational.

Drug education

More emphasis should be put on drug education. The Ministry of Education should put more emphasis on drug education during in-service trainings so as to increase their capacity to intervene through guiding and counseling, and running drug awareness campaigns in schools. Through proper guiding and counseling, and drug awareness campaigns, the students are taught of the dangers of drug abuse. Again, officials from NACADA may be invited to sensitize both the teacher counselors and the students on all issues concerning drug trafficking and abuse and their health implications. Consequently, they will understand why they should shun the habit of drug abuse. Drug education must also be part of the school curriculum at all levels of learning whether pre-school, primary, secondary or tertiary. The government has an obligation to educate all children irrespective of their social, economic or religious backgrounds of the dangers of drugs. This will make all children be aware of the dangers of drug abuse and hence shun the habit.

Practice at School and Local level

Further, the author gives recommendation for management at school level as presented in this section.

Strictness of the school administration

The school administration should become stricter and vigilant in curtailing drug use among secondary school students. The school administration should make it clear to students that their schools are drug-free zones. The students in school should always be inspected to make sure that they do not possess drugs at any time. Visitors to schools should also be vetted to prevent drug peddlers from entering the schools in the name of being parents or family siblings. Any student or outsider found within the school in possession of drugs must face dire consequences for their actions so that they become a lesson to other students.

Sensitization programmes for communities surrounding schools

The community should be enlightened on the dangers of drugs through occasions like PTA (Parents and Teachers Associations) meetings and other ceremonies in schools. Through this, the community is enabled to role model the students. The community members aware of such a role will not abuse drugs openly when children are watching. They will also educate their children about the dangers of drug abuse and even report cases of students abusing drugs to the school administration.

Combined effort in fight against drug abuse

All stakeholders should be involved in coming up with workable solutions of minimizing drug abuse among students. This will make the fight against drug abuse more successful. All teachers, religious leaders, health officers, parents and guardians and even non-governmental organizations should work hard to fight and minimize this vice in schools.



Rehabilitation services

Many secondary school students were already addicted to the abuse of drugs. The government should come up with ways of assisting such students to leave the habit. The government should, therefore, set up more rehabilitation centres to assist such students abandon the vice and lead normal lives. This is because of the increasing number of drug addicted students in schools in particular and society in general. Such rehabilitation centres should be well-funded by the government so that they have enough facilities, resources and personnel to cater for the welfare of the drug addicts.

Strict punishments to offenders

Individuals who supply or sell drugs to school children should be severely punished. Legislation should be put in place for such individuals to serve long terms in jail or pay very heavy fines once convicted. Furthermore, students found involving in drug and substance abuse should also face tough and heavy punishments like long suspensions and even school expulsions.

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