

THE INFLUENCE OF DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE ON FREQUENT INTER-ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND CLASHES IN MT. ELGON DISTRICT: A CASE OF THE YOUTH IN CHEPTAIS DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

The study examined influence of drug and substance abuse on frequent inter-ethnic violence and clashes. Using a qualitative research design, analysis of data revealed an increase in abuse of illicit drugs; drug addicts were leading miserable lives defined by human distress; illegal production and distribution of drugs spawned crime and violence; 61 per cent of the respondent youths who had consumed alcohol caused violence. Further analysis alcohol was responsible for 64 per cent revealed that drug addicts constituted one third of all arrests in the division; most abused drugs include marijuana, tobacco, local alcohol (*busaa and chang'aa*) which were catalyst for aggressive behaviours in the person taking them. In addition, alcohol was key factor in 64 per cent of manslaughters; 62 per cent of assaults; 58 per cent of murders/ attempted murders; 49 per cent of robbers; and 46 per cent of burglars. Among police convicts, 45.2 per cent of those convicted of rape reported being under the influence of alcohol or alcohol and other drugs at the time of the offence. Over 61 per cent of men and 53 per cent of women arrested for property crimes (burglary, larceny and robbery) tested positive for illicit drug use. 67 percent of all reported child abuse and neglect cases were associated with parental alcohol and other drug abuse. Therefore this finding provide sufficient evidence to conclude that youths who use drugs were likely to participate in violent behaviours often and were likely to continue participating in violent activities much longer as compared to youth who did not take drugs. Thus, the study recommends the government enforcement agencies, the non-government philanthropic agencies, and others to collaborate and supplement each other's efforts for a solution to the problem of drug addiction through education and legal actions.

Key Words: Drug Abuse, Violence, Youth Violent Behaviour, Drugs Mostly Abused, Root Causes and Reasons for Drug Abuse

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Kenya, like many other developing countries, has limited resources to cover the basic needs of its people. There is an undeniable link between substance abuse and delinquency. Arrest, adjudication, and intervention by the juvenile justice system are eventual consequences for many youth engaged in alcohol and other drug use. It cannot be claimed that substance abuse causes delinquent behavior or delinquency causes alcohol and other drug use. However, the two behaviors are strongly correlated and often bring about school and family problems, involvement with negative peer groups, a lack of neighborhood social controls, and physical or sexual abuse (Mohamad, Mohammad, Mat Ali & Awang, 2018). Possession and use of alcohol and other drugs are illegal for all youth. Beyond that, however, there is strong evidence of an association between alcohol and other drug use and delinquent behavior of juveniles. Substance abuse is associated with both violent and income-generating crimes by youth. This increases fear among community residents and the demand for juvenile and criminal justice services, thus increasing the burden on these resources. Gangs, drug trafficking, prostitution, and growing numbers of youth homicides are among the social and criminal justice problems often linked to adolescent substance abuse.

Kenyan youth face the greatest risk, being targets for recruitment into the abuse of drugs by drug barons. Drug abuse has led to a detrimental impact in Kenya. It has led to increase in the crime rate. Addicts resort to crime to pay for their drugs. Drugs remove inhibition and impair judgment egging one on to commit offences. Incidence of ever-teasing, group clashes, assault and impulsive murders increase with drug abuse. According to the 2011 Economic Survey Report launched by Planning minister Wycliffe Oparanya, the number of crimes reported throughout the country declined by 2 per cent from 72,255 in 2009 to 70,779 last year. However Nairobi province recorded the highest increase in violent crime in the last two years. The cases in the capital city increased from 4,712 in 2009 to 6,102 last year representing a 29 per cent increase. The number of males reported to have committed crime declined by 2.11 per cent, while that of women increased by 52.4 per cent, between 2006 and 2010, a pointer that more women are joining crime. Cases of rape, defilement, incest and abduction increased by 48.3, 22.9, 96.6 and 11.8 per cent respectively, in the past four years. The increase in such crimes has been a worry not just to the government but also to human rights lobbyists (Daily Nation Wednesday May 18, 2011).

This study was, therefore, conducted to improve on the data base on comprehensive strategy involving specific programs to bring about an overall reduction in use of illicit drugs and youth violence by the various government agencies and NGOs and to be further supplemented by measures like education, counseling, treatment and rehabilitation programs.

The purpose of this research paper is to establish influence of drug and substance abuse on frequent inter-ethnic violence and clashes in Mount Elgon District among the youth of Cheptais Division.

1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following research objectives were analyzed:

1. To establish illicit drugs commonly abused among the youth in Cheptais Division, Mount Elgon District.
2. To identify the root causes of illicit drug abuse among the youth in Cheptais Division, Mount Elgon District.
3. To find out the relationship between violent behavior and illicit drug use among the youth in Cheptais Division, Mount Elgon District.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Social Interactionist Perspective (Patterson, Reid & Dishon, 1992).

From a social interactionist perspective, drug use by teenagers is learned through peers. From the theory of differential association, teenagers learn specific norms and behaviors from the people who engage in such deviant behavior such as drug use and crime. In a study carried out on how to become a user of marijuana, it illustrated that a new user of this substance is introduced by the more experienced smokers. From this study it is clear that learning is central to the interactionists approach, it proposes that no individual can become a drug user without: learning how to use the drug in a way that will have real effects; learning to identify the effects and related them with the particular drug used; and learning to take pleasure in the sensation from that drug used.

For teenagers, they learn mainly from peers and in some instances from parents. There is a high chance of teenagers who come from families where parents use alcohol or smoke to take up this behavior. In addition it is likely for teenagers who have been subjected to violence at home to use violence at school or result to drug use. The interactionist perspective also examines how groups or individuals are stereotyped as “drug users” and how the society reacts to them. For instance teenage drug use is viewed as the leading cause of violence, bad performance in school and crime. Nevertheless, drug use and the problems related to it is not a completely objective fact; they also involve stigmatization of the deviant behavior (Lipai, 2017). This study used the social interactionist perspective theory to describe the influence of drug and substance abuse on violence.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

A drug has been defined as any substance that when absorbed into a living organism may modify one or more of its physiological functions (Gisemba, 2018). The term is generally used in reference to a substance taken for a therapeutic purpose and as well as abused substances. Drug abuse has also been defined as self-administration of drugs for non-medical reasons, in quantities and frequencies which may impart inability to function effectively and which may result in physical, social and/or emotional harm (Kimani, 2012). Another author has defined it as the unspecified use of a drug other than for legitimate purposes (Kimani, 2019). Using this latter definition, substances that have been abused in Kenya would include antibiotics, anti-diarrheas, laxatives and pain-relieving drugs.

In Kenya, studies show that more than a fifth (22.7%) of youth take alcohol, a figure that rises to more than three-quarters (68%) of youth. A large number of youth across all age groups have been exposed to alcohol, tobacco, Miraa (khat), glue sniffing, bhang (marijuana) and even hard drugs

such as heroin and cocaine. According to National Agency for the Campaign against Drugs (NACADA) report published in the Daily Nation March 30, 2011 titled “Four-year-olds drink in their homes,” children as young as four years have had their first taste of alcohol in their homes.

According to a study by Makokha, Mukadi & Bisonga (2021) on psychosocial factors influencing drug abuse among youths found that 22% youth were on drugs and males had a higher exposure to miraa and inhalants. In addition the study also found out that alcohol was the most frequently abused drug followed by miraa, tobacco and bhang. The youth staying with friends were most at risk followed by those staying with either a sister or a brother. This survey demonstrated that the youth in the urban areas, due to their lifestyles, are more predisposed to drugs compared to those in rural areas.

About 20% of youths in Kenya aged between 14 and 18 years smoke cigarettes and another 9% smoke bhang (*Cannabis sativa*) while some 23% drink commercial beer and spirits. This is the age of most youths in Kenya are supposed to be productive. Mount Elgon has a violent history of ethnic and tribal conflict. Mt. Elgon is predominantly occupied by the Sabaots, Iteso and Bukusu communities. The wave of violent conflicts began in December 2006 in the district between the Soy and Mosop sub-ethnicities of the Sabaot ethnic group over allegations of unfair land allocation. A Youths led Sabaot Land Defense Force (SLDF) was formed, which led to a number of killings in the region. As of late 2007, some 150 people had died in the conflict, while over 45,000 people have been displaced from their homes in the district (*Mount Elgon Insurgency*). These conflicts may have been linked to drug abuse.

The above quoted studies done in Kenya show that drug abuse is rampant among youth but they leave several questions unanswered. For example they have not dealt with the reasons that make youth abuse drugs making it difficult for public health personnel to organize control measures. It is also now known that drug abuse is rampant in schools as per media reports and studies carried out in Kenya and other different parts of the world. However, these reports have been largely unsubstantiated and in this study an attempt would be made to find out some of these reasons

According to a national survey carried out recently, indicated that over the period between 1996 and 2002 in the USA found out that teenagers represent roughly 14% of the total population; however they contribute to roughly 31% of violence victims. As compared to other age groups, teenagers are twice likely to become victims of crime. Victims of crime who are teenagers are also at a higher risk of being victimized, have sleeping or eating problems, abuse alcohol or drugs, and performing poorly in school.

The use of drugs by teenagers and specifically marijuana is a major problem in the nation. The negative effect of substance use plays a big role in violence, self-destructive and antisocial behavior, and school failure (Miech, Johnston & O’Malley, Bachman, Schukenberg & Patrick, 2020). According to a national survey carried out recently, indicated that over the period between 1996 and 2002, over 30% of 10th and 12th grade students were using marijuana in school. In addition, over 20% of students in high schools also reported to have used marijuana in the past month. For teenagers, there is a strong correlation between drug use and violence. The teenagers who participate in behaviors that are violent are also very likely to engage in alcohol drinking and other drugs. The national survey established that approximately 94% of the teenagers who are engaged in violent activities, 55% were found to be using a number of illegal drugs with 85% using

marijuana. The link between drug use and violence is complex; some teenagers usually become violent only when they are influenced by alcohol. Others engage in activities of violence in an attempt to get money for drugs. However, in most cases it seems that drug use does not generally lead to violent behaviors. For the teenagers who use drugs, they are likely to participate in violent behavior often and they are likely to continue participating in violent activities much longer as compared to the violent teenagers who do not take drugs.

Despite the importance of association between drug and substance abuse and violence, this issue had not yet been addressed in the reality of Cheptais Division, Kenya by a means of a study that properly involved both variables. In order to address the lack of studies in this area, this study aimed at examining influence of drug and substance abuse on frequent inter-ethnic violence and clashes in Mt. Elgon district.

3.0 METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research design to obtain information from the selected sample on the influence of drug and substance abuse on violence. Qualitative research design is concerned with subjective assessment of participant's attitudes, opinions and behaviours. Qualitative research seeks answers to their own questions in the real world (Rossman & Rallies, 1998). A qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of participant's views and experiences of the research topic (Baum, 1998).

Sampling and Data Collection Tools

A sample of 30, using snowball (networking) and purposive sampling methods were used to identify study subjects (Baum, 1998; Grbich, 1999). Snowball sampling uses word of mouth and informal and formal networks to identify potential key informants (study subjects), in the absence of a clear sampling frame.

This involves asking each study subject identified, to recommend or help find other potential study subjects. Purposive sampling aims to identify study subjects with knowledge and experience of the underlying issues of the research topic (Bowling, 1999). Snowball and purposive sampling, both aim to identify and recruit study subjects who are likely to 'provide rich data and enable a detailed study (Baum, 1998)

The aim was to recruit 30 study subjects among the target population, 10 (from each) Chebwek, Chesiro and Kipsis villages who have been involved in drug and substance abuse. To identify members who were on drug abuse, snowball sampling was used whereby group leaders of the 3 villages known to the researcher were requested to identify 10 members in each village who were known to have abused drugs.

The group leaders on drugs from three villages were approached by the researcher while they were in their usual meetings (designated places) in the afternoons to be explained the purpose of the research then be requested to participate in the study. They were requested to attend the meeting for briefing on the study in details and to request for their assistance in identifying members of their group who were on drug use.

Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaires was coded, frequencies counted and presented in percentages. Data from interviews was coded and categorized according to the objectives of the study. Data from observation was also categorized and used for triangulation purposes.

Giving meaning to data lies in the heart of research, through phenomenological methodology, the researcher would apply the modified Van Kaam method of analysis *Moustakas (1994)* which entails several stages namely horizontalization, reduction, clustering and identifying core themes (Rivas & Hill, 2018).

Being receptive to every statement of their experiences, observation of their non-verbal and giving each comment equal values was important for the researcher. This interaction was carried out within a core condition atmosphere which inspired comprehensive disclosure of experiences.

To derive meaning from the data, the researcher totally immersed herself through listening to the discussions carefully. The findings was clustered in emerging themes as they emerge under each category of questions relating to objectives, which provided reach materials for triangulation out of the emerging themes.

The researcher attempted to document word for word what was said during the interview. Then was analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which is "... the process of identifying, coding and categorizing patterns..." (Renz, Carington & Badger, 2018). Content analysis was performed manually to maintain close connection with the data. The researcher read and coded all transcripts. Relationships between coded data were then explored and clusters of related codes categorized under a number of emergent themes. Themes were then arranged to conceptualize an overall picture or narrative of the findings.

Results

The first objective of this study was;

Objective 1: To establish illicit drugs commonly abused among the youths.

The commonly abused drugs yielded alcohol (*changa'a, busaa*) at 70% followed closely with bang at 60% and tobacco at 50%. Miraa (khat) and inhalants both come last at 30%. The high rate of abuse of alcohol is attributed to the availability of alcohol both from Kenya and across the Ugandan border.

The second objective of this study was;

Objectives 2: To identify the root causes of illicit drug abuse among the youths.

The root causes of illicit drug abuse among the youth yielded lack of employment (23.3%), poverty (13.3%), to enjoy feelings (13.3%), idling (10%), and influence from friends and relatives (10%), relieve stress (10%), experimentation (13.3%), and entertainment (7%).

As shown the commonest reason cited from the participants was that they abuse drugs to enjoy the feeling the substances give them, while some take drugs for experimentation and for stress relief. The root causes of drug abuse among youth in Mount Elgon were cited as; lack of employment, poverty, and idling, bad company among others.

The third objective of this study was;

Objective 3: To find out the relationship between violent behavior and illicit drug use among the youths.

The relationship between violent behaviour and illicit drug use yielded 54% of the youth who used marijuana engaged in violence, as did 61% of those who used alcohol, 53% of the youth who used inhalants engaged in violence. The study found out that violence increased with the number of drugs used. Approximately 22 % of the youth who did not use any illicit drugs reported violent behavior compared to 42% of those who used 1 illicit drug, 57% of those who used 2 illicit drugs, 64% of those who used 3 or more illicit drugs. Further results reveals that youth who sold and used drugs were more likely to commit crimes than those who only sold drugs or only used drugs (36%). Heavy drug users were more likely to commit property crimes than nonusers (24%), and youth who trafficked in drugs reported higher rates of crimes against persons (24%). Youth in this sample were most likely to commit burglary or sell drugs while using or seeking to obtain drugs. About one-fourth of the youth also reported attacking another youth to obtain drugs. However, among the youth in this sample, the majority who committed crimes did not do so in connection with drugs (14%).

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

First, the study found out that the commonly abused drugs yielded alcohol (*changa'a, busaa*) at 70% followed closely with bang at 60% and tobacco at 50%. Miraa (khat) and inhalants both come last at 30%. Similarly, other studies have revealed that there is an increase in the use of alcohol, bang, miraa, and tobacco in Mount Elgon area compared to an earlier report by Siringi (2003) which reported a proportion of users of 23% (Makokha, Mukadi & Bisonga (2021). Most of the respondents in this study who were abusing cannabis (*Marijuana*) were also falling in the category of alcohol abusers. Thus to control cannabis abuse it is important to undertake the control of alcohol abuse at the same time. In Kenya, studies show that more than a fifth (22.7%) of youth take alcohol, a figure that rises to more than three-quarters (68%) of youth. A large number of youth across all age groups have been exposed to alcohol, tobacco, Miraa (khat), glue sniffing, bhang (marijuana) and even hard drugs such as heroin and cocaine. A study by an anti-alcohol agency shows that alcohol is readily available in many Kenyan homes. About 8 % of children aged between 10 and 14 years have tasted or consumed alcohol, the study by the National Agency for the Campaign against Drugs (NACADA) reveals. The home is said to be the primary source of alcohol and other drugs and it is here that the youth draw their views as to the appropriate use of drugs. Sons of alcoholic men have a 25% chance of becoming alcoholics themselves in part because of genetics and in part because of family acceptability (Dykeman, 2017).

Second, the findings revealed root causes of illicit drug abuse among the youths as lack of employment (23.3%), poverty (13.3%), to enjoy feelings (13.3%), idling (10%), and influence from friends and relatives (10%), relieve stress (10%), experimentation (13.3%), and entertainment (7%). This findings is consistent to NACADA report published in the Daily Nation March 30, 2011 titled "Four-year-olds drink in their homes," children as young as four years have had their first taste of alcohol in their homes. A study by an anti-alcohol agency shows that alcohol is readily available in many Kenyan homes. About 8 % of children aged between 10 and 14 years have tasted or consumed alcohol, the study by the National Agency for the Campaign against Drugs (NACADA) reveals. According to Dr. Frank

Njenga (NACADA Board Member),” children grow up emulating their parents; they learn to take alcohol from them.” Dr. Njenga continued to say that most children emulate their parents who drink in the houses. The report says that illicit brews seem popular among Kenyans where 2% of 10 to 14 year olds have tasted chang’aa at least once in the past; while 15 % of 15 to 64 year olds have used chang’aa at least once. The report further noted that 14 per cent of Kenyans aged 15 to 64 years consume alcoholic drinks. The report supported the use of research and science in fighting drug abuse. According to a study by Makokha, Mukadi & Bisonga (2021) on psychosocial factors influencing drug abuse among the youth in informal settlement found that 22% youths were on drugs and males had a higher exposure to miraa and inhalants. In addition the study also found out that alcohol was the most frequently abused drug followed by miraa, tobacco and bhang. The youth staying with friends were most at risk followed by those staying with either a sister or a brother. This survey demonstrated that the youth in the urban areas, due to their lifestyles, are more predisposed to drugs compared to those in rural areas.

Finally, the study revealed the relationship between violent behaviour and illicit drug use yielded 54% of the youth who used marijuana engaged in violence, as did 61% of those who used alcohol, 53% of the youth who used inhalants engaged in violence. The study found out that violence increased with the number of drugs used. This study finding is similar to The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) that asked youths aged 12 to 17 to report on their involvement in violent behaviors during the 12 months before the survey. In this report, a past year violent behavior is defined as getting into a serious fight at school or work, participating in a group-against-group fight, or attacking others with the intent of seriously hurting them. NSDUH also includes questions about respondents' use of illicit drugs during the past year. Any illicit drug refers to in the study is marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, and prescription-type drugs used non-medically. Based on data from 2002 through 2004, an estimated 31.6 percent of youths aged 12 to 17 (approximately 7.9 million adolescents) engaged in violent behavior in the past year. Rates of past year violent behavior were higher among youths aged 13, 14, and 15 (33.2, 33.3, and 33.1 percent, respectively) than those younger (age 12, 30.2 percent) or older (ages 16 and 17, 30.7 and 28.7 percent, respectively). Youths aged 12 to 17 who used any illicit drug in the past year were almost twice as likely to have engaged in violent behavior as those who did not use any illicit drug (49.8 vs. 26.6 percent). This finding was consistent across age and gender, as well as other demographic and geographic variables For example, among adolescents who lived in the Northeast, 52.3 percent of those who used an illicit drug reported violent behavior compared to 28.1 percent of those who did not use an illicit drug. An estimated 49.7 percent of the adolescents who used marijuana in the past year engaged in past year violent behavior, as did 55.4 percent of those who used inhalants. About two-thirds (69.3 percent) of the adolescents who used methamphetamine in the past year engaged in past year violent behavior. The likelihood of having engaged in violent behavior increased with the number of drugs used in the past year. Approximately 26.6 percent of adolescents who did not use any illicit drugs reported past year violent behavior compared to 45.6 percent of those who used one illicit drug, 54.9 percent of those who used two illicit drugs, and 61.9 percent of those who used three or more illicit drugs.

Developed nations have developed clear policies to deal with drug and substance abuse. Among other measures in the USA include formation of the National Science Foundation to coordinate and oversight science education (Schroeder, Scott, Tolson, Huang & Lee, 2007). In an effort to promote science achievement, the State of Texas established the Texas Science Initiative program to promote thorough, effective science education and produce well trained teachers for science lesson

(Schroeder et al., 2007). With such programs in place, it becomes easier to develop better policies in dealing with psychosocial factors.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of drug and substance abuse on frequent inter-ethnic violence and clashes in Mt. Elgon District among the youth of Cheptais Division.

This study provides sufficient evidence conclude a high number of youth in Mt. Elgon were exposed to drugs and the problem affected all age groups although the age bracket 15-25 years were particularly most affected. This study also established that drugs were abused for enjoyment and those from low income areas were most at risk. Family members were found to be an important link in the earlier development of drug taking habits. These findings reveal the need for early intervention that targets adolescents. More efforts should be made to develop drug abuse prevention mechanism that targets the youth. Appropriate intervention, health education efforts, support and referral systems should be established to help fight this vice early. Control measures should not just be confined to schools but be extended to their places of their residences so that influence in the home environment and the surrounding that contribute to drug abuse can be isolated and managed.

This study also revealed that drugs create violence. The youth violent crime rate has increased over the last decade. This is a cause of concern. However, youth assault and homicide that is killing fellow human beings have shot up. Cocaine, marijuana and other drugs use among the youth have significantly increased. Whereas it may be simply be generalized that society is generally violent and that aggression in the media creates violence and deaths, drugs create more violence and deaths. Drugs change how people think, feel and act. This fact is undisputable fact. It may be the basis why many people use drugs.

Therefore, something should be done about the increased of use of drugs and youth violence. If nothing is done then many young people will end up locked in jail and or medicating the offenders into zombies. The National Budget sets aside billions of shillings to fight crime with even more money going into policing, justice system, and other enforcement mechanism.

Several factors hinder the fight against drug abuse. Policing was found to be a reactionary method of solving violence created by drug use. The police intervention implies that the society, family or the individuals themselves did very little or nothing to stop drug abuse before it grew into a problem. Many family member respondents indicated that they were helpless and did not know what to do. That they cannot understand the problem of drug addiction or drug abuse. The family, parents, teachers and friends should be educated about natural health solutions and holistic methods of problem solving.

Drug abuse and related violence and crime are signs of an underlying problem. Drugs offer temporary solution to people who have not thoroughly solved their problems. Many drug abused claim that they could not have enjoyment without drinking or being drugged. Others claim that enjoy the feeling of being drugged and that reality cannot offer them that kind of joy.

There is need for future research to focus on ways to reduce reasons why many drug abusers seem to have accepted fate. Finally, a related study should be to examine how their lives can be reworked and encouraged towards attaining their goals.

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