

DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Drug and substance abuse is a global problem driven by increased access to drugs, resulting in a growing number of users. The problem is particularly serious among young people, who are often targeted by drug traffickers. This situation negatively affects individuals, weakens economic productivity, and hinders social development. This study examined the effects of drug and substance abuse on the academic performance of secondary school students in Kiambu County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised of 303 secondary schools in Kiambu County, including head teachers, deans of studies, guidance and counseling teachers, other teaching staff, and students from Gatundu North Sub-County. Using simple random sampling, ten secondary schools were selected, consisting of seven public and three private schools drawn from different school categories. Data were collected through interviews with head teachers, deans of studies, and guidance and counseling teachers, as well as questionnaires administered to students. The collected data were cleaned, coded, and

analyzed. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and organized according to the study objectives, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. Findings were presented through narratives, tables, and charts. The study established that drug and substance abuse is prevalent among secondary school students in Kiambu County, with commonly abused substances including alcohol, tobacco, bhang, and khat. The major factors influencing substance use were peer pressure, easy access to drugs, family background, and media exposure. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education allocate resources for targeted prevention programs, strengthen peer mentorship and counseling services, and implement policies that support early identification and continuous assistance for students at risk of substance abuse to improve academic outcomes in Kiambu County.

Key Words: Drug And Substance Abuse Influence and Academic Achievement.

INTRODUCTION

The worldwide existence of drug and substance misuse among young people has developed into a major public health issue, which also negatively affects educational systems and their capacity to create future progress. Studies conducted throughout the world demonstrate that young people develop substance use disorders, which include alcohol and tobacco and cannabis and prescription drugs, and this condition results in decreased cognitive abilities and school attendance and academic achievement (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). The

problem affects high school students from all regions, which has led to worldwide efforts that seek to identify its main causes and decrease its impact. The United States has gathered extensive information about secondary school student drug and substance abuse, which shows that this problem causes serious harm to student academic performance. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2021, approximately 16.5% of high school students reported using marijuana in the past 30 days, while 8.1% engaged in binge drinking, which led to a 15% GPA decrease among students who experienced this (CDC, 2022). A study by Miech et al. (2020) analyzed data from the Monitoring the Future survey, revealing that adolescents who abused substances like opioids and stimulants exhibited a 15% higher dropout rate and poorer standardized test scores compared to non-users.

Currently, drug and substance abuse is more rampant in Kenya than ever before. According to NACADA (2023), the prevalence of drug and substance use remains high among young people, including students in secondary schools, universities, and tertiary institutions. NACADA (2023) observed that drug use has continued to spread at an alarming rate and has reached even remote areas of the country. Kenyan communities have used substances such as traditional alcohol for many years, particularly during cultural and social activities. However, substance use was previously regulated through strong social and cultural controls. Today, drug and substance abuse is associated with various social problems such as risky sexual behavior, gender-based violence, school dropout, crime, and mental health challenges. In the education sector, one of the most recognized effects of drug and substance abuse is poor academic performance, as affected students often experience reduced concentration, absenteeism, indiscipline, and low academic achievement.

Canada presents a similar scenario, where substance abuse among secondary school students has been linked to declining academic outcomes, supported by comprehensive national surveys. The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) reported in 2022 that 22% of students aged 15-19 had used cannabis in the past year, with 12% reporting alcohol misuse, correlating with a 16% drop in average grades (CCSA, 2022). Elton-Marshall et al. (2019) conducted research through the Canadian Student Tobacco Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CSTADS) which discovered that students who misused multiple substances including vaping and prescription medications showed 20 percent higher school absences and decreased motivation to study. The Public Health Agency of Canada (2023) conducted a study which showed that teenagers who used stimulant drugs experienced cognitive impairments that resulted in 15 percent reduced chances of finishing their secondary education (Public Health Agency of Canada 2023). The data demonstrates how substance abuse impacts educational success which leads to the Kenyan study evaluating drug misuse patterns and their related factors.

Secondary school students in India show increasing drug and substance abuse problems which affect their academic performance in urban areas during times of fast economic development. The

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2021) report indicated that 8.5% of adolescents aged 13-18 engaged in substance misuse, including tobacco and alcohol, which resulted in 10-15% academic performance decline according to board exam scores (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2021). A study by Ambekar et al. (2020) in the Indian Journal of Psychiatry analyzed data from over 10,000 students, revealing that cannabis and opioid abuse correlated with a 20% higher rate of school dropout and reduced cognitive abilities which affected memory and problem-solving skills essential for academics.

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) conducted a study in Nigeria which found that 14.3% of secondary school students misused codeine tramadol and marijuana according to their 2022 report. A study conducted by Adebayo et al. (2019) in the Nigerian Journal of Clinical Practice surveyed 2500 students and discovered that alcohol and stimulant abuse led to 18% decreased examination performance and increased behavioral problems which disrupted their learning process. Further, a study by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2024) regional office noted that Nigerian adolescents with substance dependence exhibited a 22% lower secondary school completion rate, attributed to impaired concentration and motivation (WHO, 2024).

As per the 2012 Rapid Situation Assessment on Drug and Substance Abuse in Kenya, 11.7% of youth aged between 15 and 24 consume alcohol, 6.2% use tobacco, 4.7% chew khat, and 1.5% smoke cannabis (Abur, 2014). Another research done by NACADA in the same year reported that 13.3% of the Kenyan population consumes alcohol, 9.1% use tobacco, 4.2% chew khat, 1% smoke bhang, and 0.1% use heroin. Abur (2014) adds that, with a 49% availability rate, bhang is the most readily available illicit drug, followed by cocaine. In Kenya, heroin continues to be the least accessible illicit substance.

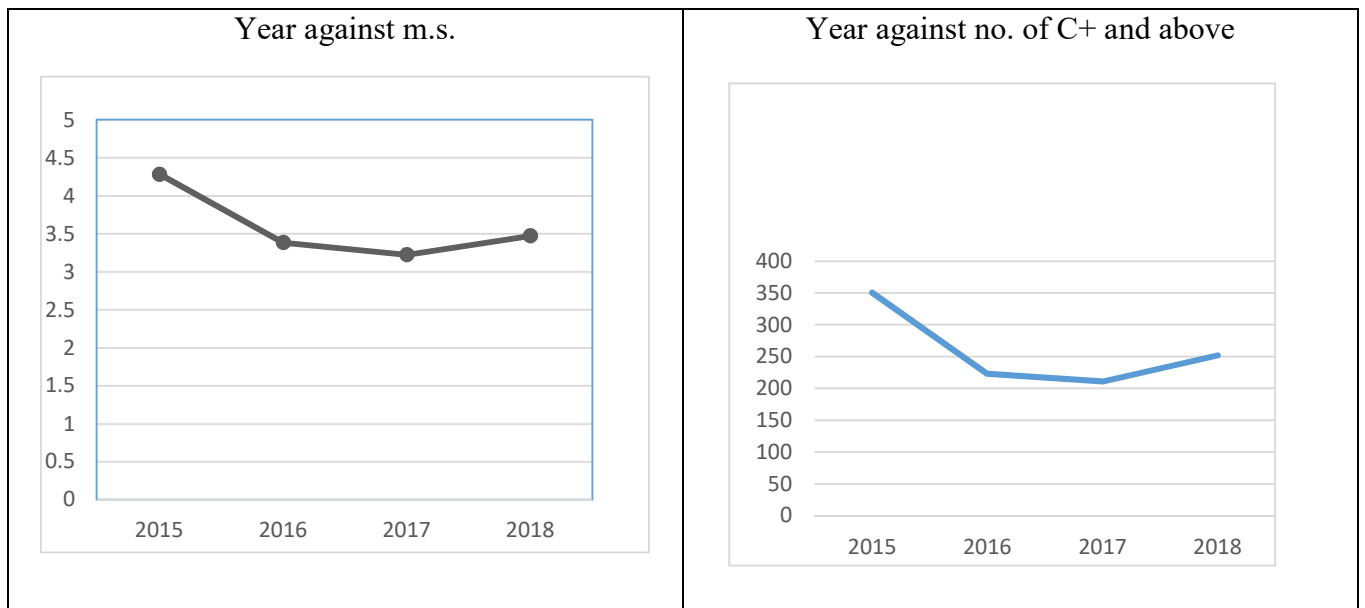
Abur (2014) avers that it can be argued psychologically that a good number student in secondary schools in Kenya, have tasted illegal drugs which is in itself a worrying behavior. Put differently, it can be maintained that secondary school students have been and continue to be socialized into drug and substance use. National examination performance in Kiambu County has been dismally creating a heated debate among public and county education officials trying to identify the main cause of persistent poor academic performance. In 2016, Academic giants that have long straddled the top charts in KCSE performance in Kiambu County suffered a shock following the dramatic release of KCSE results (Education Kiambu, 2016). Gatundu North is among the sub-counties in Kiambu that are performing poorly with over 60 percent of secondary school graduate scoring D+ and below on their secondary school certificate examinations (GESCI, 2017, par.8). In this background, this research sought to make certain the level to which drugs are being used and the effect of drug abuse on academic attainment especially in Gatundu North Sub-County, Kiambu County.

Statement of the Problem

Drug misuse among school-age adolescents continues to increase despite efforts by the government, NGOs, religious organizations, and other stakeholders to control substance and drug abuse (Okari, 2018). Public concern has grown due to the rising cases of riots, school fires, and other violent disruptions in secondary schools, with drug abuse frequently identified as a major contributing factor. Substance abuse undermines effective teaching and learning by reducing students’ motivation and negatively affecting their academic progress, thereby threatening the development of human capital needed for Kenya’s economic growth. Secondary schools in Gatundu North Sub-County, like many others in Kenya, face challenges such as low participation in learning activities, high absenteeism, increased dropout rates, and declining academic performance. One factor that may contribute to these challenges is drug and substance abuse. Although the region is largely agricultural, some individuals engage in the illegal sale of drugs, exposing school-going adolescents and youth to substance use at an early age. In response to the growing problem, the Kiambu County Commissioner directed teachers in Gatundu North Sub-County to conduct regular screening of students for drugs and alcohol as a strategy to curb substance abuse in schools (Ndungu, 2016). Teachers were also urged to remain vigilant as students had developed new methods of sneaking drugs into learning institutions (Ndungu, 2016).

Table 1.1: Academic performance of Gatundu North

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018
Mean Score	4.291	3.391	3.230	3.48
C+ and above	351	223	211	252



(Source: Gatundu North Education Office)

The research is justified by the fact that no prior study has attempted to evaluate the pervasiveness of substance and drug abuse in Kiambu County's secondary schools. This study's primary objective is to ascertain how drug and substance usage affects secondary school learners' academic achievement in Gatundu North, Kiambu County, Kenya. Due of their frequent drug experimentation, secondary school kids will be the study's primary emphasis. They are also presenting a serious problem for the Kenyan government because of their shifting demands and worldview. King'endo (2010: p4) reported that adolescents constitute the better part of the Kenyan population. This implied that there is a danger in Kenyan society if the drug abuse problem is allowed to escalate among secondary school students (King'endo, 2010: p4).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of drugs and substance abuse on the academic achievement of secondary school students in Kiambu County, Kenya. Specifically, the research aims to examine the extent to which substance use influences students' academic performance, identify the common types of substances abused, and understand the underlying factors contributing to substance abuse among students in the region. The findings are intended to inform stakeholders on effective interventions and policies to improve academic outcomes and address substance abuse among secondary school students.

Research Objectives

- i. To assess the extent of drug and substance misuse among secondary school students in Kiambu County.
- ii. To identify the factors contributing to drug and substance abuse among secondary school students in Kiambu County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section deliberates on an overview of the existing literature pertinent to the variables examined in this study. It presents theoretical review, empirical review, and conceptual framework adopted by the research.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The variables that contribute to drug addiction among secondary school children are the focus of this research. The theoretical framework found to be underpinning and appropriate to this study includes social cognitive theory and social control theory.

Social Cognitive Theory

This research was grounded in Social Cognitive Theory. This framework views drug use as a learned behaviour acquired through observation and experience. The theory states that by using basic learning principles, behaviours like drug usage may be changed. Learning consists of three

components which are behavioural elements and contextual elements and personal elements. Human behaviour consists of two fundamental components which include cognitive processes and emotional states according to Bandura (1997). The theory shows how people use their mental abilities to create their understanding of the world according to Bandura (2001). Human behaviour develops through two types of environmental influences which include social factors and physical elements. The social environment according to Bandura includes all the social influences which people experience from their friends and family and their education system. Consequently, students may adopt drug-using behaviours through interactions with drug users within their surroundings. The physical environment also provides the necessary infrastructure that facilitates learning behaviours (Moultrie et al., 2007: p.53).

The social cognitive theory states that people construct their personal world through their mental processes. The hypothesis states that social environments assist people to develop drug addictions while physical environments create a system for understanding human behavior. A person learns from observing others who develop drug addiction to substance abuse after they start using drugs. The situation represents a mental process which enables a person to create a mental picture of their surroundings that leads to certain behaviors. Bandura (2001) defines human nature as the ability to develop yourself through self-organization and self-regulation and self-reflection and goal-directed behavioral changes. The theory applies to drug and substance abuse problems because people use their mental skills to decide between drug use and drug abstention based on possible negative consequences.

The social cognitive theory provides the suitable theoretical basis for this study because it explains how people develop their drug use beliefs through their social interactions with role models and their parents and their friends. The theory maintains that people learn to use drugs as a behavior which they can unlearn or change through various learning methods. The model describes how people develop and keep their various behavioral patterns by showing both their emotional and mental aspects of their conduct. As Jane (2017, p.12) explains, social factors like peer pressure do influence whether students choose to start using drugs and these factors change according to new technological developments. Students who use drugs can achieve behavioral change through positive role models and refusal skills training programs.

Social Control Theory

Put forward by Travis Hirschi, social control theory, posits that drug use and other similarly deviant behaviors are occasioned by the absence of extant requirements that compel adherence to the norm. Social control theory, as opposed to the cultural interpretation of drug subcultures attracting people to use drugs, postulates that abuse is a result of conventional culture's inability to deter the person from drugs. This theory supposes that a deviation from norms should explain conformity with them rather than non-conformity. According to social control theorists, people are attached to conventional persons, structures, occupations, and thought systems. Once people invest

in such bonds, they do not expose their investments to any danger and that is by not getting involved in any conflict with the law. Drug abuse is included in the list of behaviours people attempt to avoid. If an individual has no such bonds or, at best, poor bonds, the risk associated with the deviant behaviour decreases in comparison to its benefits, and indulgence is made more enticing.

Hirschi's self-control theory was chosen because it helps in explaining why individuals abuse drugs. According to this theory, persons with low self-control have a high probability to start drinking alcohol, use marijuana, and misuse prescribed drugs (Ford and Blumenstein, 2013, p.56). Aligned with social control theory, the reason why youths and adolescents engage in drug abuse is often attributed to inadequate social regulation, which fails to prevent them from using drugs (Mohasoa & Mokoena, 2017: p.111). In a particular study, the majority of participants reported frequently being left alone at home because their guardians or parents were often busy or away due to demanding work commitments. This situation provided adolescents with the opportunity to experiment with or use drugs. The research indicates that teenage substance abuse increases when parents fail to supervise their children because this results in stronger peer pressure which leads to drug use. According to Mohasoa and Mokoena (2017: p.111) adolescents who experience insufficient parental guidance tend to develop difficulties in their relationships with their parents which leads them to use drugs. The study by Rice and Dolgin (2008) discovered that teenagers without parental emotional support show higher rates of marijuana and bhang and tobacco consumption.

Drug Abuse from Global and Regional Perspectives

Ongwae (2016) contends that drug abuse has existed for long in many societies and cultures. Plants like cannabis, coca, opium, etc. have been used as drugs for many years. For instance, priests have used cannabis in religious, doctors have prescribed opium for medical aims, while the general population has utilized caffeine and nicotine in a socially accepted manner. During colonization in America alcohol was not used as a drink but it was also used as a salient remedy for various health problems (Ongwae, 2016). The Incas, who inhabited the southern region of the Americas, used cocaine as a key element in their social and religious rituals. In the 1920s, immigrants from Mexico brought marijuana into the southwestern United States (Ongwae, 2016). Additionally, during the Vietnam War, many American soldiers began using heroin due to the readily available and inexpensive supply of high-purity heroin in Asia.

At mid-20th century, many countries throughout the world experienced widespread addiction problems. The combination of crime and public disorder and poverty problems led to higher rates of alcohol and illegal drug use (Ongwae, 2016). International drug usage patterns reveal that people have stopped following traditional theoretical frameworks, which have changed how societies view and understand drugs. According to Insider Monkey, an independent research organization, the United Kingdom leads in the number of individuals addicted to drugs (UCKG, 2016). The

Office of National Statistics report from 2014 to 2015 showed that one in twelve adults who were 16 to 59 years old in Wales and England had used illegal drugs during the previous year, which corresponds to about 2.8 million people in the UK (UCKG, 2016). UCKG (2016) identified powder cocaine and cannabis and ecstasy as the most commonly abused drugs in the United Kingdom.

Drug abuse in Africa affects both young people and older people from all social classes and among those who live in cities and those who live in rural areas (Ongwae, 2016). A research by Masenga (2017) looked into how drug consumption affected secondary school learners' academic attainment in Kishapu District, Tanzania. The research studied three main objectives which included discovering common drugs that students misuse and understanding reasons that students use drugs and evaluating how drug misuse impacted their educational performance. The study selected 100 students through random sampling from four public schools. Marijuana emerged as the most commonly consumed drug among students while peer pressure served as the main factor that drove students to use drugs. The study results demonstrated that drug abuse brought negative effects to students' academic performance because students who used drugs showed decreased school attendance which resulted in their academic performance dropping (Masenga, 2017).

Substance and Drugs Abuse Prevalence in Kenyan Schools

Ongwae (2016) argues that drug and substance misuse was not a significant issue in Kenya prior to the 1990s. During that time, young people did not show a strong connection to drug use because society tended to avoid discussing such matters (Ongwae, 2016). However, drug abuse among youth has since become a serious concern. According to a NACADA (2006) research, a significant portion of both students and non-students engaged in drug and substance misuse (Ongwae, 2016: p.13). Khat, tobacco, cannabis, tranquillizers, stimulants, cocaine, and alcohol are among the most often abused drugs in Kenyan secondary schools (Ongwae, 2016: p.13). According to Ongwae (2016: p.13), drug use for non-medical purposes is becoming more widely acknowledged as a serious social and public health concern in Kenya, both correctly and incorrectly. He further notes that drug abuse is a profound social challenge because it influence not only the users but also their families.

As per the NACADA (2012), children in elementary and secondary schools nationwide reported using a variety of narcotics, with lesser percentages of cocaine and heroin (2–3%), cigarettes and Bhang (4–20%), Kuber (6%) and Miraa/Khat (7–30%). Furthermore, according to NACADA (2012: p.71), the majority of people who called the free toll number 1192 for assistance with alcohol and drug problems were from Nairobi and Central Kenya. These regions were followed by Nyanza, Western, Eastern, and Coastal areas. The North-Eastern region was identified as the least affected. The survey results showed that different regions of Kenya had different patterns of substance abuse according to these findings: Western and Central Kenya showed the highest levels of alcohol consumption while Central Kenya showed the most tobacco use; Bhang usage reached

its highest point in Coastal and Western regions; Nyanza served as the primary location for Miraa/Khat use; and Coastal areas reported the highest rates of heroin and cocaine use.

Okari (2018) discovered the link between drug abuse and academic performance among secondary school students in the Masaba North Sub-County. The research study used a descriptive survey design to investigate 32 secondary schools. The selected institutions included twelve principals and twelve teachers who worked in guidance and counseling as main research participants. The area students most frequently abused substances which included bhang and alcohol together with tobacco products (Okari, 2018, p. 58). The research study discovered that peer pressure and family background and financial hardships created a high risk environment which led students to use drugs. The research found that high school students who abuse substances develop relationship problems with teachers and classmates which results in increased school dropout rates and absenteeism and decreased classroom attention and concentration together with health issues that include headaches and confusion and anxiety and sleep disturbances.

A study done in Komen (2014) on factors influencing drug use, students' awareness, intentions, and the occurrence of drug consumption among learners in secondary school. The research used a descriptive survey method for its study. The researcher collected data through interviews and questionnaires which they distributed to randomly selected students and teachers. According to Komen (2014) alcohol served as the primary drug used by secondary students in Uasin Gishu County because 32% of respondents admitted to consuming alcohol. The survey found that 16% of participants had used various substances including miraa bhang cocaine kuber and cigarettes. The research found that drug usage shows a link to drug-using friends and guardians. The study found that students who received more pocket money during term time tended to use drugs less frequently.

Causes of Substance and Drug Abuse

Kiambi (2018) carried out research to explore the element that affect students' substances and drug use in public secondary schools. The research sample encompassed both teachers and learners from these schools. According to Kiambi (2018: p.19), peer pressure shows an important role in motivating students to involve in substance and drug abuse. He found that the primary form of peer pressure involved friends who sell drugs and substances, followed by friends who themselves use drugs, and finally, friends who are aware of drug suppliers. Kiambi (2018: p.20) highlighted that the primary social pressure factor causing drug usage among learners in public secondary schools in Kiambu County is friends who are drug dealers. Peer pressure and drug misuse among students at these schools were shown to be statistically significantly correlated, according to the chi-square study results.

Furthermore, significant depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and victimization experiences have all been connected to drug misuse in teenagers and young adults. Kilpatrick et al. (2000)

examined the connection between family history of substance use, victimization experiences, and drug use. 4,023 teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 who were questioned over the phone made up the national probability sample used in their study (Kilpatrick et al., 2000: p.692). According to the results, teenagers who had witnessed violence or been the victims of sexual assault or physical were more likely to get addicted to drugs. Furthermore, adolescents were more likely to acquire a dependent if they had family members who struggled with drug use. Additionally, Spooner (1999: p. 453) observed that drug use was more common among those with a biological propensity for addiction and weak social ties. Increased drug usage was also linked to factors including low socioeconomic position and experiences of abuse or neglect.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a descriptive survey design. The descriptive survey design serves as the main research method which helps researcher identify and describe population trends and variations according to Loeb et al. The research method enables researcher to collect large volumes of information which they can use to perform complete investigations of their research findings.

The study population included all 303 secondary schools within Gatundu North Sub-county, along with their respective deans of studies, principals, guidance and counseling teachers, and students. Drug usage has had varying degrees of influence on all Kiambu County schools. Deans of Studies were requested to give data regarding the academic achievement of the educational institution, while principals were asked to share insights into the causes, challenges, and strategies related to drug abuse. Additionally, guiding and counseling instructors were discussing the level of drug use among students, along with its underlying causes and potential affects.

A Fisher-based approach was utilized to determine the sample size of 192 learners (Jung 2014). Because cluster or stratified sampling was used in this case rather than merely random sampling, the design effect used to modify the sample size is set at 2. Ten percent accuracy is the target. Data collection was carried out using questionnaires and interview schedules.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, specifically frequency distributions and percentages. Frequencies were used to show the number of responses in each category, while percentages were computed to present the proportion of respondents selecting particular responses. This enabled the study to summarize patterns of drug and substance abuse, contributing factors, and its effects on academic performance in a clear and interpretable form.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS

From the instruments collected, 182 out of 192 questionnaires which were distributed to learners achieved a response rate of 94.8%. Only 10 questionnaires (5.2%) were not returned. The two

groups of selected 18 principals and 18 teachers completed all interview schedules which resulted in complete involvement from both groups. Social science research considers a response rate of 94.8% to be exceptionally high. Bryman (2016) stated that a response rate of 50% is sufficient for reporting and analysis, 60% is good, and more than 70% is excellent. The obtained rate exceeds the recognized threshold because it ensures that data collection represents the target demographic. Data on demographic information indicated that on gender, male respondents 90 (49.5%) and female respondents 92 (50.5%) exist in almost equal proportions. The gender balance provides benefits because it allows researcher to conduct comparative studies while the research results show both demographic groups (Kassa & Desta, 2022). Data on age distribution indicated that 94 (51.6%) participants aged 16 to 18 years of the sample while 70 (38.5%) aged 13 to 15 years and 18 (9.9%) participants aged 19 to 21 years made up the remaining sample. Students at this stage of development demonstrate the ability to create their own identity because they experience strong peer pressure from 13 to 19 years according to research findings. Research indicates that learners between 15 and 19 years face higher risks from peer pressure because it can cause them to try drugs which will disrupt their ability to concentrate and remember information and perform academically (Muthoni & Karugu, 2022). Data on school category indicated that 62 (34.0%) attended mixed schools while 60 (33.0%) studied in girls' schools and 60 (33.0%) studied in boys' schools. The near-equal distribution enhances representativeness across different educational settings. Kibet and Oduor (2021) show that single-sex schools have stricter monitoring systems which decrease student drug exposure although they do not achieve total prevention. Data on the type of school indicated that 92 (50.5%) of participants attended day schools while 90 (49.5%) attended boarding schools. This balance in representation allows for meaningful analysis of how school type interacts with drug abuse and academic performance.

Extent of Drug and Substance Misuse

Substance abuse among adolescents remains a pressing public health concern which affects both global populations and secondary school students in Kenya. The early initiation and ongoing misuse of drugs and substances can have profound implications for the physical, psychological, and academic development of young people. The first objective of this study aimed to investigate the drug and substance abuse patterns which exist among secondary school students in Kiambu County. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Extent of Drug and Substance Misuse among Students

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Current use of substances	Yes	36	20.0
	No	146	80.0
First drug ever used (n = 36)	Alcohol	15	41.7
	Tobacco	10	27.8
	Bhang	6	16.7
	Miraa (khat)	5	13.9
Form of initial consumption (n = 36)	Alcohol (oral)	15	100.0*
	Tobacco (smoke)	10	100.0*
	Bhang (smoke)	6	100.0*
	Miraa (chew/oral)	5	100.0*
Frequency of drug use (n = 36)	Once a week	14	38.9
	Several times a week	12	33.3
	Daily	10	27.8
Amount consumed per session (n = 36)	Small/moderate	22	61.1
	High amounts	14	38.9
Present substances in use (multiple responses)	Alcohol	20	55.6
	Tobacco	14	38.9
	Bhang	8	22.2
	Miraa	6	16.7
	Kuber (sniff)	2	5.6
Occasions for substance use (n = 36)	Weekends/socializing	18	50.0
	After exams/stress	10	27.8
	Whenever accessible	8	22.2
Methods of administration (n = 36)	Oral	20	55.6
	Smoke	16	44.4
	Sniff	2	5.6
	Injection	0	0.0

*100% refers to proportion within that specific first-drug group.

Source: Field Data (2025)

The research results from Table 1 showed that 20% of the participants admitted to using drugs or substances at the present time. The most frequently used substances among participants were alcohol at 41.7% and tobacco at 27.8%. The research results from NACADA 2022 confirm that alcohol functions as the main entry point for adolescents in Kiambu County because of its social acceptance and easy availability. Ndeti (2021) explain that peer pressure together with social acceptance of moderate drinking leads to early drinking experiments. The second most used substance in this study reflects a pattern found in East African secondary schools where students use single-stick cigarettes because they are inexpensive and easy to obtain (Muthoni & Karugu, 2022). Early exposure to academic material results in two negative consequences according to Wambua 2023 which include permanent addiction and diminished academic performance.

All users who tried alcohol for the first time reported they consumed alcohol through drinking. The tobacco and bhang users both reported smoking, while miraa users showed their consumption through chewing. The speed at which psychoactive drugs enter the brain depends on their method of administration, which affects their potential to create addiction. UNODC (2023) noted that smoking allows for rapid absorption of nicotine, heightening dependency risks. The process of chewing miraa results in slow release of stimulant effects, which causes extended periods of wakefulness and breaks of concentration in educational environments (Mutua, 2021).

The findings above are echoed with those of teacher who identified alcohol, tobacco, bhang (cannabis), and khat (miraa) as the most commonly used substances among students. The community found alcohol to be the most common drink because people could easily access it and because it received social approval. Youths have started to treat cannabis use as their normal way of consuming it. The findings match Muthoni and Karugu (2022) results which showed that alcohol remains the most used substance by Kenyan adolescents because of its low price and cultural acceptance whereas cannabis use has become fashionable among peer groups. UNODC (2021) warns that early cannabis use leads to decreased cognitive abilities which results in students having academic difficulties.

About 61.1% of users consumed substances at least several times per week, with 27.8% reporting daily use. The researcher discovered that students who used drugs more often spent less time at school and achieved lower academic results (Onyango & Oloo, 2019). NACADA's 2022 data shows that students tend to develop habitual drug use because they face environmental situations which include spending time with peers who use drugs. Omwenga (2023) conducted a study which demonstrated that daily student drug use results in exam performance decline because it disrupts their ability to consolidate memories.

A significant proportion (38.9%) reported high-volume consumption per session, which aggravates acute intoxication effects that include drowsiness and cognitive impairment (WHO, 2021). Mugisha (2020) showed that adolescents who engage in heavy episodic drinking experience neurodevelopmental disruptions which impair their ability to solve problems and retain essential academic knowledge.

Alcohol stayed the most common substance used by 55.6% of people while tobacco use reached 38.9% and bhang use reached 22.2% of the population. The presence of kuber (5.6%) a smokeless tobacco product presents a serious risk because its nicotine content reaches dangerous levels (Mutie 2020). The substances studied in the research cause students to lose their ability to concentrate and participate in class activities which results in negative effects on their academic success throughout their educational career (Johnston 2019).

Half of the respondents indicated weekend or socializing contexts for use, suggesting peer-centered consumption patterns. The finding supports Simatwa's (2014) research which discovered unstructured leisure time functions as a major predictor for people starting to use drugs. The study found that 27.8% of participants used substances after exams or during stressful times which indicates that they practiced self-medication. The researcher claimed that self-medication practices developed by students lead to the establishment of harmful coping methods.

The primary method of drug use was oral intake which accounted for 55.6% of cases while smoking followed with a 44.4% share. School populations show typical patterns of drug use which exclude injection drug use because injectable substances are not available to them (UNODC, 2023). The existing smoking rates create a risk that people will develop addiction to more dangerous drugs (Mwangi, 2022).

Additionally, the survey aimed to explore the learners' ultimate results for the final three terms in 2024. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2 Final-Term Academic Results

Exam	A-	B+	B	C+	C	D+	D	D-	E
2024 (Term 1)	4	8	12	15	30	20	14	10	9
2024 (Term 2)	3	6	10	13	28	25	18	12	12
2024 (Term 3)	2	5	8	10	25	30	20	15	12

Source: Field Data (2025)

The analysis of the final-term academic results across the three terms in 2024 shows that academic performance for students who use drugs has decreased during the evaluation period. The first term recorded 4 students who achieved top grades of A which decreased to 3 students in the second term and further dropped to 2 students in the third term. The number of students who achieved B+ grades started at 8 in Term 1 and decreased to 6 in Term 2 before dropping to 5 in Term 3. The same pattern exists for all grade categories which show major decreases in higher grades and a matching rise in lower performance categories.

The most significant observation shows that student assessment results between A and C grade ranges have decreased over time while D+ grade and D grade and D- grade results have increased. For instance, students with D+ grades increased from 20 in Term 1 to 25 in Term 2, and further to 30 in Term 3, indicating a growing number of students experiencing academic difficulties. The number of students who received D grades and lower grades showed an upward trend because D grades increased from 14 to 18 and 20, while D- grades rose from 10 to 12 and 15 during the three terms. The consistent increase in lower grades shows that students perform worse academically as time goes by.

The existing research shows that substance misuse results in cognitive impairment which hinders the ability to concentrate and the ability to maintain motivation, both of which serve as essential

requirements for academic achievement (Kessler, 2020; WHO, 2021). Substance use results in memory impairment and shortened attention spans, which leads to increased fatigue and results in academic performance declines, according to Ndetei's research in 2021. The results show that students who use drugs and substances will experience academic decline because these substances have harmful effects on their academic performance and learning ability (Onyango & Oloo, 2019). The principal stated that students most commonly use alcohol and cigarettes and miraa (khat) as their preferred substances. The principal observed that social gatherings and weekend events serve as the initial drinking times for people who consume alcohol while people can access cigarettes because of their low cost and widespread distribution. The local cultivation of miraa makes it a common substance used by people in the area.

The principals further explained that there has been an increase in the use of prescription drugs which students access through informal methods. The substances raise particular concerns because they have the potential to create dependency while they also produce major cognitive impairments in students. The principal emphasized the need for targeted awareness campaigns to address the dangers associated with these substances.

One of the teacher noted:

“Students' academic performance at school has suffered because of drug abuse. Drug-using students display three main problems which include they cannot concentrate and they do not attend school regularly and their academic performance drops. The teacher noticed that students who used drugs or had substance abuse problems struggled to remember things and finish their work and join class discussions. The pattern has led to decreased academic success which affects most students who have been exposed to drugs for a long time”. (T001)

The research outcomes uncovered that drug and substance abuse problems exist as a major challenge for secondary school students who attend schools in Kiambu County. The study results indicate that drug misuse exists as a widespread problem because many students in the study showed at least occasional use of substances.

Another teacher noted:

“The teacher explained that drug abuse impacts students because it creates mental health problems which result in increased anxiety and depression and behavioral issues that hinder academic progress. The teacher explained that early intervention with ongoing counseling would help students who need support to regain their focus and improve their school work. The students face educational challenges because they lack necessary support which makes them vulnerable to dropping out and failing their national exams such as the K.C.S.E.” (T002)

The results established that drug and substance abuse exists as a widespread problem throughout Kiambu County which needs ongoing attention from educational institutions and their associated stakeholders.

Factors Contributing to Drug and Substance Abuse

Table 3 Consumption of Drug and Substance Among Students

Drug Type	Not Consumed (Freq / %)	Fairly Often (Freq / %)	Often (Freq / %)	Very Often (Freq / %)
Tobacco	92 (50.5%)	46 (25.3%)	28 (15.4%)	16 (8.8%)
Alcohol	85 (46.7%)	51 (28.0%)	29 (15.9%)	17 (9.3%)
Bhang	111 (61.0%)	37 (20.3%)	20 (11.0%)	14 (7.7%)
Kuber	126 (69.2%)	28 (15.4%)	16 (8.8%)	12 (6.6%)
Miraa (Khat)	97 (53.3%)	45 (24.7%)	25 (13.7%)	15 (8.2%)

Source: Field Data (2025)

The study aimed to identify the reasons why Kiambu County secondary school students engage in drug and substance misuse. Secondary school students develop drug and substance abuse problems because of multiple social factors and family influences and economic conditions and environmental factors. Schools need to have drug use statistics which show both current rates and historical patterns because this information helps them create effective prevention and treatment programs. The results appear in Table 3.

Table 2 displays the different substance usage patterns which secondary school students from Kiambu County exhibit. The results show that students at the schools demonstrate tobacco use which occurs with moderate frequency since 49.5% of students said they had seen tobacco use at their schools during either common or frequent or very frequent times while 50.5% said students did not use tobacco at their schools. Alcohol shows a similar pattern, with 53.3% indicating it is consumed to varying degrees, while 46.7% reported it is not consumed. The study discovered that 39.0% of people surveyed used bhang at different times while 61.0% of the group showed no signs of using the substance. The study found that 30.8% of people used kuber while 69.2% of them did not use the drug. The study found that 46.7% of participants reported miraa (Khat) consumption at schools while 53.3% reported evidence of non-consumption.

The research shows that learners mostly use alcohol and tobacco products which match the findings of Ngesu, Ndiku, and Masese (2012) who discovered that Kenyan secondary school students primarily abuse alcohol and tobacco and khat because these substances remain cheap and easy to find and people accept them in their culture. The high rates of alcohol and tobacco use among people match Kerachio's (2023) study which found that school students most commonly abuse drugs because of peer pressure and family problems and drug availability. The study results from Atwoli et al. (2011) demonstrate that urban environments experience higher rates of substance consumption because students have easier access and they see more media content which promotes drug use and they have greater spending power.

Research shows that four main factors the school environment which includes peer pressure and substance availability together with academic demands and insufficient guidance support systems. Family-related challenges which include parental neglect and domestic violence and parental substance abuse create outside school environments which make students more likely to use drugs (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). The developmental stage of adolescents makes them vulnerable to two main factors which are their natural curiosity and their desire to receive approval from their peers (WHO, 2021).

Moreover, the study proposed to identify the reasons behind drug use among secondary school students in Kiambu County in Kenya. Tabulation 3 delineates the results.

Table 3 Factors Contributing to Drug Usage among Learners

Aspects	Very Influential (Freq / %)	Influential (Freq / %)	Moderately Influential (Freq / %)	Not Influential (Freq / %)
Peer influence	96 (52.7%)	52 (28.6%)	24 (13.2%)	10 (5.5%)
Ease of access to drugs & money	82 (45.1%)	61 (33.5%)	28 (15.4%)	11 (6.0%)
Parental substance abuse	79 (43.4%)	58 (31.9%)	29 (15.9%)	16 (8.8%)
Poor academic results	61 (33.5%)	65 (35.7%)	39 (21.4%)	17 (9.3%)
Domestic tensions	74 (40.7%)	63 (34.6%)	31 (17.0%)	14 (7.7%)
Exposure to mass media	58 (31.9%)	61 (33.5%)	41 (22.5%)	22 (12.1%)

Source: Field Data (2025)

Peer influence is the most significant factor influencing drug use among students, according to Table 3, with over half of respondents (52.7%) describing it as extremely influential and another 28.6% considering it influential. This indicates that more than 80% of students are persuaded to use drugs by their friends. This result is consistent with that of Kerachio (2023), who discovered that peer approval of drug use and connections with deviant peers greatly raise students' risk of substance misuse.

Easy access to medications and the funds to buy them is the second most important issue, rated as extremely significant by 45.1% and influential by 33.5%, for a total of 78.6%. This bolsters the claim made by Ngesu, Ndiku, and Masese (2012) that drug availability and cost in the vicinity of schools are important factors in encouraging substance misuse.

Another significant influence was parental drug addiction, which was rated as extremely influential by 43.4% and influential by 31.9%. These findings are consistent with those of Musyoka, Mutua, and Kiilu (2020), who stressed that children are more likely to experiment when their parents model substance use.

Poor academic performance (69.2%) and marital conflicts (75.3% combined for extremely influential and influential) are other significant causes. According to Otieno and Ofulla's (2009) findings on stress-related substance use among Kenyan adolescents, domestic stressors, such as disputes or stress at home, have been associated with increased drug use as a coping mechanism. Finally, 31.9% of respondents rated mass media exposure as extremely influential, and 33.5% rated it as influential. This result validates the claims made by Oloo, Wanjiku, and Mugo (2019) that learners' attitudes and actions are influenced by glamorised depictions of drug use in the media.

From the interview, one principal noted that;

“Peer pressure serves as a major reason why students develop substance abuse problems. Many students succumb to peer influence, especially in environments where drug use is normalized or seen as a way to cope with academic or social pressures. The principal explained that family problems including neglect and insufficient supervision and parental drug abuse create conditions that lead students to try drugs.” (P001)

The studies discovered various elements that lead to substance addiction problems. The research showed that peer pressure proved to be the main factor which affected student behavior. The research showed that students mentioned two main reasons for their behavior which included family problems and their need to fit in with others. The research results show that students develop substance abuse problems through a complex interaction of social elements and family dynamics and personal traits.

Further, another principal stated;

“People use drugs because they experience both boredom and need to fit in with others. Students seeking to fit in or escape from personal challenges often turn to substances as an escape mechanism. The principal emphasized that schools should address these fundamental problems through counseling services and mentorship programs and by involving parents in student development”. (P002)

The outcomes show that easy accessibility of drugs within surrounding communities, especially in peri-urban areas of Kiambu County, was also identified as a major risk factor. The study found that academic pressure together with stress and curiosity and the need to handle emotional difficulties functioned as personal triggers for academic performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study established that drug and substance abuse is a significant and widespread challenge affecting secondary school students across Kiambu County. The findings revealed that many learners engage in the use of substances such as alcohol, bhang, cigarettes, and other harder drugs, with the problem affecting both rural and urban schools. The prevalence of substance use across different school categories indicates that drug abuse is not isolated but a systemic issue that requires coordinated action from school administrators, parents, and the wider community.

The study further concluded that drug and substance abuse among students is largely driven by peer pressure, easy access to drugs from local dealers, weak enforcement of regulations, and inadequate parental supervision. Family-related challenges such as parental substance use, unstable home environments, and socioeconomic stress also contribute significantly to students' involvement in drug use as a coping mechanism. These factors collectively increase students' vulnerability to substance abuse.

Recommendation of the Study

Based on the results and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are made:

- i. The Ministry should create and execute a standardized guidance and counselling framework which will provide special support for drug and substance abuse problems in educational institutions. The organization needs to establish training programs which will prepare and send certified counsellors to every secondary school located in Kiambu County. The life skills curriculum needs to include drug and substance abuse education as a mandatory requirement which should begin at lower secondary levels to provide students with information about the dangerous effects and lasting consequences of substance use.
- ii. The Ministry should coordinate with the National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA), public health officials, and law enforcement to carry out regular awareness campaigns and school-based outreach programs. The Ministry needs to establish and enforce strict regulations that prohibit all drug sales and distribution activities within areas that are located close to school facilities while local authorities must conduct ongoing checks to confirm their compliance with these regulations.
- iii. Every educational institution needs to develop a documented drug and substance abuse policy which defines its methods for preventing substance abuse and describes its procedures for handling violations. Schools should enhance security to prevent the entry of drugs into the school environment, including installing CCTV where possible and working closely with local security agencies.
- iv. Teachers should receive training to recognize initial indicators of drug use, which include alterations in student behavior and academic work and their attendance patterns, so that they can guide students toward appropriate counseling services. Teachers must include

practical case studies and classroom discussions about substance abuse hazards into their teaching of life skills and biology and social studies content.

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