
**DRUG ABUSE AND YOUTHS' BEHAVIOUR IN PAKWACH TOWN COUNCIL PAKWACH DISTRICT,
WESTNILE NORTHERN UGANDA****1 Ocakacon Abara Godfrey, 2 Sekiswa Peter, 3 John Otim William****1, 2, 3 Metropolitan International University****ABSTRACT**

This study was about the extent, to which drug abuse has affected the life of young people in Pakwach District. The case study was Puvungu Central ward, Pakwach Town council. The study was guided by three objectives namely; to assess the relationship between drug abuse and youth behaviours, to assess the effect of drug abuse on the youth in Pakwach town council and to identify the cause of drug abuse by the youths of Pakwach Town Council. The study focused on how youths are increasingly becoming addicted to drugs and the relationship between drug abuse and youths' behavior. The study was descriptive and analytical with both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A total population of 100 were involved which included men and women, youths and elders who responded positively, Data was collected using questionnaire, interview guide and observation. Findings revealed that drug abuse accelerates the problem of crimes among the youths in Pakwach Town council. According to 36% of the respondent's crime and drugs are related in several ways, first, illicit production, manufacture, distribution or possession of drugs may constitute a crime. The government should impose strict laws on drug abuse in order to reduce this rampant increase in school dropouts.

Key words: drug abuse and youths' behaviour**Background of the Study**

According to Goodge (2003), drugs are substances that other than those required for the conservation of normal health modify how certain processes within the body of the organism when consumed (Mercy et al., 2023). On the other hand, in the field of medicine, drugs are considered to be elements that have curative or preventative capabilities against diseases. According to UNODC, (2019), In 2017, an estimated 271 million people or 55% of the global population aged between 15 – 64 has used drugs in the previous year while 35 million people are estimated to be suffering from drug use disorders (Lucky et al., 2023). In addition, there were 585,000 deaths and 42 million years of 'healthy' life lost as a result of the use of drugs. Worldwide, there were an estimated 188 million past year users of cannabis in 2017, corresponding to 3.8% of the global population aged 14 – 64 (Christopher et al., 2022). There is an increasing demand for cannabis use disorders and associated health conditions in high and middle income countries and there has been an increased attention to the public health aspect of Cannabis use and related disorders in international drug policy dialogues (John et al., 2023).

Traditionally coca leaves have been chewed by people in the Andean countries of South America for thousands of years. The main alkaloid of the cocoa leave, cocaine was isolated relatively recently in about 1860. Cocaine was then used in patient medicines, beverages and 'tonics' in developed countries in Europe, North America and in Australia until the early 1990s and it is now widely available as an illicit recreational drug (Isaac et al., 2023).

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The World Health Organization's global status report on Alcohol, 2004 stated that Uganda had one of the highest alcohol and substance abuse rates in the world. With majority of Uganda's populations being youths below the 24 years, the quality of youth productivity is relatively low compared to other regional statistics exhibiting high rates of youth unemployment and majority of the youth labor force is located in urban centers with low rates of job creation (Godfrey et al., 2023). Most youths are commonly found in the cohorts of illicit drug abuse which is on the increase partly because of circumstances that are due to factors beyond their control including poverty and unemployment (Godfrey et al., 2023). Ironically though drug abuse is known by the police but the laws are so lenient that when they got arrested, the sentences are very small, hence killing the efforts to control drug abuse. This also leaves the police wondering whether the community knows the effect that those drugs have on the socioeconomic development of youths and the community in general (Nelson & Christopher, 2022).

Problem Statement

Community leaders in many areas in Pakwach district are worried about the over increasing incidences of drug abuse in their areas as reported by WEST NILE WEB (Mercy et al., 2023), the Pakwach DPC warned community during community policing exercise in Alwi Sub-county Pakwach District on the increasing rate of violence attributed from drug abuse by youth. According to social surveys conducted by the Human Rights Watch (Flavia et al., 2023), hundreds of youth are engaged in smoking and other drug abuses. And if drastic efforts are not taken, the situation will worsen. Despite the fact that Pakwach district is relatively a rural setting the increasing growth in number of slums with rise in population due to influx in rural urban migration as a result of oil activities, especially Pakwach Town is infiltrated by bhangy smoking youth (Niyonzima, 2023). Drug abuse has become a pastime among 75% of the youth and students, thus spurring crime across the district. Murder, rape, Theft and robbery have ravaged the different parts of the district which are related to drug abuse. Despite the attempts made by the NGOs and government bodies like the Police and the Ministry of Health at large to reduce drug trafficking and abuse in the country and more especially in Pakwach Town council which carries the highest percentage that is 37% of the district's population (Lucky et al., 2023). The crime rate is instead increasing at a faster rate and remained a humanity threat not only to people's lives but also their socio-economic wellbeing and it is upon this background that the researcher would like to explore deep on how the vice can be ended. Thus, this study will aim at exploring the extent to which drug abuse has affected the development of youths in Pakwach Town council, Pakwach District and thus the findings will help the community in sensitizing the public more especially the youth on the dangers of drug abuse and how they can change from the vice and live more meaningful life.

Objective of the study

1. To assess the relationship between drug abuse and youth behavior
2. To assess the effect of drug abuse on the youth in Pakwach town council
3. To identify the causes of drug abuse by the youths of Pakwach town council

Methodology**Received: 13.10.2023****Accepted: 15.10.2023****Published on: 30.10.2023**

Research Design

The study was descriptive and analytical in nature. It utilized qualitative methods of data collection. The qualitative methods were emphasized because it revealed real and practical experiences necessary that provided a more profound understanding and analysis of all related aspects. It aimed at covering the relationship between drug abuse and the socio-economic development of youths in Pakwach Town council, Pakwach District. The research was conducted at a single time in point through focus group discussions using the qualitative method. Weber (1996) supports the technique since it extends far beyond simple word frequency counts.

Study population.

The study covered both men and women especially the youths and the elders. The elders were interviewed to know their perception about the drugs abused by the youths and commended on how the drugs have affected the youths socially and economically. The women of the married abusing drugs were also interviewed to get their experiences and how they do cope with their husband's drug behavior and domestic violence. The targeted populations interviewed were 100 people men and women both youth, women and elders.

Study sample**Sample size.**

Since the study population of 100 people were quite big, part of it were examined so as to obtain enough information in terms of how different people perceive the situation and the sizes were as follows: Ten people already using drugs of abuse were interviewed, fourteen key informants, sixteen community members, ten men using drugs and ten women who abuse also or are wives of the men taking drugs bringing a total of 60 respondents. This sample size was selected because, Sutton and David (2004), state that a sample size should not be less than 30. Beyond basic description it would be difficult for the researcher to undertake more complex statistical analysis, as most of these analyses require a minimum sample of 30.

Data collection instruments**Interview guide**

This method applied to the local leaders within the area and the elderly basically to solicit their views on drug abuse among the youths and its effect. According to Mugenda (1999), this instrument allows flexibility in asking questions as questions initially posed but important to the study are brought forward, the tool is also convenient to the respondents and to the researcher as it takes less time in collecting needed information, it allows researcher time to translate in the local language especially to the elderly who may not feel comfortable with using English.

Questionnaires

Self-administered set of questions were distributed to local people and youths. The obtained information using this method was general on the subject matter. The purpose of this tool or instrument was to give respondents an opportunity to reveal their perceptions, experiences, opinions on the subject of the study in more detailed manner. Under this method, questionnaires were distributed to the respondents who could read and write that enabled them

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filled in their personal responses to the questions and also questions were translated to those who could not write and read. Therefore, the researcher used a questionnaire tool that enabled the researcher obtain more information from the field.

Data analysis

Data was coded and interpreted inform of tables, charts, frequencies and percentages using SPSS (Nelson et al., 2022).

Results

The extent of youth involvement in drug abuse in Puvungu central cell, Pakwach Town council, Pakwach district

Table 2: The extent of youth involvement in drug abuse in Puvungu central Ward, Pakwach Town council

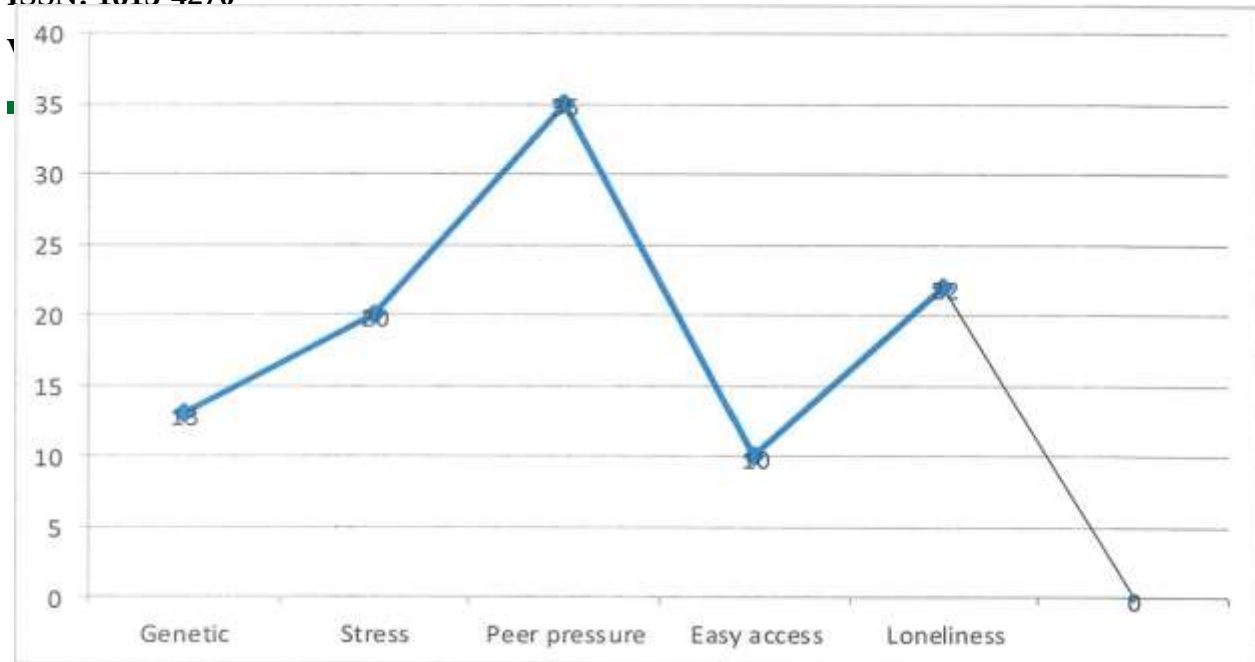
Response	Frequency	Percentages
Very high extent	20	33
High extent	2	37
Low extent	10	17
Very Low extent	8	13
Total	60	100

Source: Primary data, 2021

In the above table it can be clearly seen that, 33% (20) of the respondents noted that the level of the youths' involvement in drug abuse was very high in Puvungu ward, Pakwach Town council. The respondents noted that many youths are involved in drug consumptions like alcohol, marijuana and other illicit drugs. On the other hand, majority 37% (22) of the respondents noted that drug consumption among the youths of Puvungu ward, Town council was high and not very high as said by the 33%(20) of the people. Only 17% (10) of the respondents said that level of drug consumption among the youths is low and the other 13% (8) of the respondents said that the level of drug consumption among the youths in the Parish was very low (Godfrey et al., 2023). Given the figures of the findings, majority of the 37% (22) of the respondents noted the drug consumption level among the youths was high.

The causes of drug abuse among the youth in Puvungu central ward, Pakwach Town council

Figure 1: Showing the main causes of drug abuse among youth in Pakwach Town, Pakwach District



Source: Primary data, 2016

The findings in the figure above shows the major causes of drug abuse as revealed by the respondents. The respondents noted that drug abuse was because of genetic or inheritance because they were all a product of their parents. About 13% (8) of the respondents said that if your parents had addiction struggles, chances were more susceptible to addiction. That was why drug abuse was more common in some families than in others. They said that if someone's parents smoked, chances are good your child to smoke as well the same applies to alcohol consumption and this is why drug abuse can be caused one generation to pass it on to the next in the whole of Pakwach Town council. In addition, 20% (12) of the respondents noted that stress is yet another cause of drug abuse in Puvungu central ward, Pakwach Town Council. The respondents here noted that sometimes youths needed some help coping with life. Everyday life becomes a struggle and simple things became too much to handle. Drugs were used to deal with it. In the case of addiction, we were not talking about the use of medication, under the care and observation of a doctor. Youths who had been clinically diagnosed with stress could lead a very good life. We're talking here about people who just needed to escape. Their drug of choice facilitates that escape.

In addition to the above, peer pressure was noted as the major cause of drug abuse among the youths in Puvungu central, Pakwach town council Only 35% (21) of the respondents noted that individuals are all bound to have relationships, and sometimes those relationships caused many to give in something that would otherwise be avoided in order to maintain the relationship. In most cases, it was noted that this begins as a social action, to take the drugs to be part of the group, to be accepted (Faridah et al., 2023).

It was further noted that easy access to drugs was yet another factor fueling the problem of drug abuse in Pakwach Town council with 10% (6). The respondents said that;

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"If one wants to get drugs, you won't have to look far because they are everywhere in the Sub-County, high school students being the main suppliers. Drug abuse caused people to sell drugs to the most vulnerable population, particularly, youths' (Faridah et al., 2023).

Loneliness was also mentioned by 22% (13) of the respondents as another cause of drug abuse in Puvungu central ward, Pakwach town council. The respondents said that the youths want to feel good physically and emotionally. Sometimes drugs are the substitution for a healthy life experience given the peer groups they associate with. The person in pain and they wanted to numb the pain.

Table 2: Impact of drug abuse on the Youth behavior in Puvungu central ward, Pakwach Town Council.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Health problems	8	14
Crime increase	22	36
School dropout	8	14
Easy spread of diseases	6	10
Family breakdown	16	26
Total	60	100

Source: Primary data, 2021

Findings in Table 2 show that 14% of the respondents noted that youths are facing health problems associated to consumption of drugs. Respondents said that the commonest addictive drugs included tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and cocaine. All of these substances have several important characteristics in common as they change the function of the human brain and have an impact on behavior. High doses of many of these drugs are more dangerous as they could cause immediate life-threatening health problems such as heart attack, respiratory failure, cancer, Tuberculosis among others. These findings are in line with those of Dave (2004) when he conducted research on drug abuse, its effects and prices, found that 2-4% of all cancer cases were related to alcohol and more especially, Upper digestive tract cancers were the most common, hitting the throat, mouth, larynx, and pharynx.

Additionally, findings further revealed that drug abuse accelerates the problem of crimes among the youths in Pakwach Town council. According to 36% of the respondent's crime and drugs are related in several ways, first, illicit production, manufacture, distribution or possession of drugs may constitute a crime. Secondly, drugs might increase the likelihood of other, non-drug crimes occurring. Thirdly, drugs may be used to make money, with subsequent money-laundering. And lastly, drugs may be closely linked to other major problems, such as the illegal use of guns, various forms of violence and terrorism. The age group with the highest frequency of drug use was often 18- 35 years, although wide variations might exist in different villages.

Majority (14%) of the respondents said that drug abuse has caused many youths drop out of schools in Puvungu central ward Pakwach Town council. They said that first of all abusing drugs is an antisocial behavior prohibited in schools so many students caught with drugs especially in secondly schools have been given complete expulsion yet seeking counseling, treatment and rehabilitation for problems related to alcohol and drug abuse in the entire district of Pakwach is very rare and when got its extremely expensive. The problem of school dropout is expected to cause worse effects among the youths like unemployment, illiteracy and even further crime increase (Oliver et al., 2023).

Easy spread of HIV/AIDS was also mentioned by 10% of the respondents as another effect of drug abuse among the youths of Pakwach town council. The research found that the use of drugs had been compounded by the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and the youths were the most trapped. There were beliefs among some groups that the use of drugs such as cocaine provided self-cure and lowers the risk of the spread of HIV in the body. Experience and work with slum youth had shown that significant proportions of young people abusing drugs were at a high risk of engaging in commercial sex involving multiple partners due to drug consumption.

Similarly, 26% of the respondents noted that family breakdown is yet another effect of drug abuse among the youths of Puvungu central ward particularly from the two cells of Wanglei and Lubiri. The respondents noted that drug abuse is currently linked to many harmful consequences for the individual like family problems such as child abuse, broken homes, marital problems/ divorce. Alcohol dependents are more frequently divorced than others, spouses and children of alcohol dependents, persons had relatively high rates of physical, emotional and psychosomatic illnesses.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the major cause of drug abuse within the area was peer pressure as indicated by 35% of the respondents, loneliness and stress were said to be other factors contributing to drug abuse by 22% and 20% respectively. The respondents said that the youths want to feel good physically and emotionally. Sometimes drugs are the substitution for a healthy life experience. And in most cases, it was noted that in the name of wanting to "feel cool". The person needs to have fun and escape the stress and feelings lonely, for a short while, the drug took them away and they felt "better." Youths confirmed this when they said that it began as a social action, to take the drugs to be a part of the group, to be accepted. It was not just teenagers, as peer pressure took so many different forms. There was social etiquette, for example, to take a drink during a party.

Recommendation

The government should impose strict laws on drug abuse in order to reduce this rampant increase in school dropouts.

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