

Drug And Substance Abuse And Their Impact On The Health Of Street Children: A Case Study Of Central Division Kisoro Municipality, Kisoro District

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Abstract

This research study investigated “Drug and substance abuse on the health of street children in Central Division Kisoro Municipality Kisoro District. The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which drug and substance abuse has affected the health of street children in Kisoro Municipality. The study focused on three objectives which included; to find out the effects of drug and substance abuse on the health of street children, to find out the factors leading to drug and substance abuse among street children and finally to find out the drugs commonly abused by street children in Central division Kisoro District Kisoro Municipality. The study employed descriptive research design where both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection was used (Questionnaires and interview guide). Collected data was analyzed thematically using tables in form of frequencies and percentages and some graphs. The study found out that the drug and substance abuse had a lot of effects on the health of street children. The effects discovered out of the study included; suicidal thoughts, mental illnesses, depression, verbal abuses, loss of weight and appetite, prolonged illnesses, fights among others. The study furthermore discovered some factors leading to drug abuse which included; idleness, culture, peer influence, mass media, examination pressure and religion. And among the drugs abused include Cannabis, tobacco, Opiates, Nicotine, Cocaine, Marijuana among others. The study therefore recommended that parents should provide enough parental guidance to their children and also encouraging them to attend youth religious camps. The government should also put strict laws regarding drug abuse and alcoholism especially to children as well as taking children practicing drug abuse and alcoholism to rehabilitation centres where they can receive counseling and guidance to reshape their lives hence becoming responsible citizens of the nation

Keywords: Drug, Substance Abuse and Street Children

Background of the study

Drug abuse is perceived as the excessive, maladaptive, or addictive use of drugs for nonmedical purposes (MacLean et al., 2012). It is a condition of emotional and sometimes physical effects characterized by a compulsion to constantly take drugs in order to experience its mental effects. Drug abuse has produced dependence both physically and psychologically, and dependence leads to mental, emotional, biological or physical, social and economic instability. Thus, these effects of drug abuse on individuals formed the basis for these cumulative effects on society (Kandel, 2005). Research of several international organizations; shows that illicit drug use is fast becoming a global problem that needs to be addressed (Poulin C. et al. (1997), probably due to the influence of popular culture, drug abuse among youth has become an acute problem (Rashid et al., 2023 In Kenya, recent studies in schools around Kampala showed that 62 percent of secondary school students consume alcohol (Seth & Ntirandekura, 2022), while 15 percent of

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students use marijuana, and another seven percent reported using other addictive substances. Ugandan research shows that at least 70 percent drug addicts allegedly combine the toxic substances they use, the confessions of students interviewed by Daily monitor Uganda, July 3, 2013 about drug abuse is alarming and if the trend continues as it is, it could become more difficult to deal with in the future (Anthony et al., 2023). Currently, a survey (Global School based students Health Survey, 2013) conducted among youth aged 13-28 shows that at least the percentage of substance use has increased from 12.8% to 33.5% and in this group at least 12% drank one drink. containing alcohol on one or more days in the last 30 days (GSBS, 2013).

The Ministry of Health (MOR, 2005) reported that several types of substances (drugs) were susceptible to abuse by street children. These drugs ranged from the most common to the less expensive. Such drugs included: Heroin, Cigarettes, Alcohol, Caffeine, Marijuana, Hydrocarbons, Cocaine and Crack. The dangers of drug abuse have been defined as "a state of periodic or chronic drug intoxication that is harmful to the individual and society." The main sign of drug addiction was an irresistible desire to take drugs in any way. Physical dependence became apparent when the drug intake was reduced or stopped, leading to withdrawal, which resulted in a very distressing experience. Psychological dependence occurred when the abuser relied on the drug to induce a sense of well-being.

When drugs were first invented/discovered or manufactured, they were of course for legitimate purposes such as medical, religious or scientific use (Ninsiima et al., 2023). The abuse began with various experiments with diverted use and money-making efforts. Although the concept of prevention is relatively modern, the history of drug abuse is widespread throughout human civilization. Humans are aware of the ill effects of drug abuse and have tried to curb or limit drug abuse since the very beginning almost every religion in its earliest form prohibits or discourages the use of intoxicating substances. In sub-Saharan Africa, several types of substances are susceptible to abuse by street children. These drugs range from the most common to the cheapest. Such medications include; Heroin, cigarettes, alcohol, caffeine, marijuana, carbohydrates, cocaine and crack. It has been found that the main sign of drug addiction is an irresistible desire to take drugs in any way. Physical dependence has manifested itself when drug intake is reduced or stopped, leading to withdrawal syndrome, resulting in a very stressful experience (WHO, 2012).

Especially in East Africa and Uganda, alcohol is considered to be the most abused substance, followed by marijuana (Njaga), tobacco in third place and Kart (Mairungi), heroin, cocaine and fuel sniffing in last place (Lisa, 2013). The majority of Uganda's population is young people and the quality of youth productivity is relatively low compared to other regional statistics compared to the high youth unemployment rate which further causes them to go to the streets to survive (Nelson & Christopher, 2022).

Problem statement

Community leaders in many areas in Kisoro district, especially the municipality, are worried about the out of control cases of drug and substance abuse by street children in their areas. According to social surveys (Flavia et al., 2023), hundreds of street children are involved in smoking and abuse of illegal substances, which seriously affect their health.

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And unless drastic efforts are made, the situation will worsen. Despite the fact that Kisoro District is a relatively rural setting, the slums across the commercial centers are dominated by young bhang smokers (Rashid et al., 2023). Drug abuse has become a pastime for these redundant street kids, fueling crime across the country. Murders, rapes and robberies have ravaged various parts of the district related to drug abuse. Despite the efforts of non-governmental organizations and government bodies such as the police and the Ministry of Health to generally reduce drug trafficking and abuse in the country, their number is growing faster and remains a human threat not only to people's lives but also to their health (Christopher et al., 2022). So it is against this background that the researcher seeks to find out the relationship between drug and substance abuse and the health of street children in Kisoro District Kisoro Municipality.

Specific objectives

1. To find out the effects of drug and substance abuse on the health of street children in Kisoro District Central Division Kisoro Municipality
2. To find out factors leading to drug and substance abuse among street children in Kisoro municipality Central Division
3. To find out types of drugs and substance commonly abused by street children in Kisoro district Kisoro Municipality

Methodology

The study was descriptive and analytical in nature. It utilized qualitative methods of data collection. The qualitative methods was emphasized because it reveals real and practical experiences necessary in providing a more profound understanding and analysis of all related aspects. It aims at covering the relationship between drug abuse and health of street children in Kisoro district Kisoro Municipality. Kisoro district is located in south western Uganda lying between longitudes 29° 35' and 29 50 East and latitudes 1° 44 and 1°23" South. Kisoro municipality is one of the three divisions of Kisoro district from Northern and Southern Division. The primary population under study was street children because they are the target. The study also involved men and women since they are the parents of these street children, local leaders was also involved not forgetting municipality leadership, counselors, opinion leaders, elders and church leaders. This helped to get a broad and diverse ideas on the topic under investigation.

Table 1. Target population

Type of population	Target population
Street children	30
Local leaders(LC1s, LC11s and LC111	9
Municipal leaders	10
Counselors	05
Opinion leaders	04
Elders	10

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Church leaders	10
Total	78

A sample is part of the target population that has been procedurally selected as a representative of the whole population of the study (Cronbach 1951). In this case, the sample size of the study was 52 respondents as categorized in the table below.

Table 2. Sample size determination

Type of respondents	Population	Sample size	Sampling Technique
Street children	40	20	Random sampling
Local leaders(LC1s, LC11s and LC111	9	9	Purposive sampling
Municipal leaders	10	10	Purposive sampling
Counselors	05	02	Purposive sampling
Opinion leaders	06	01	Purposive sampling
Elders	20	05	Purposive sampling
Church leaders	10	05	Random sampling
Total	100	52	

Source: Adopted from K.V & D.W. Morgan (1970). Determining Sample Size for Research Activities. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 30.608.

Self-administered set of questions was distributed to all categories mentioned above as a researchers sample size. The obtained information using this method was general on the subject matter. This instrument is preferred in that it allows respondents ample time, to think and probably give accurate information. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (1994), this is the best way of getting first-hand information, which represents the right thinking of respondents without any bias. The study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the data. The study specifically used thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive analysis for quantitative data. In the survey design, data collected through questionnaires was basically in form of frequency counts. Hence the data for each research question was calculated into percentages for analysis and interpretation and use of tables and charts was utilized because, according to Mugenda (2003) and Sarantakos (1998), they help in summarizing large quantities of data while making the report reader friendly. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data using SPSS & STATA (Nelson et al., 2022).

Results

Table 3. Drug and substance abuse leads to prolonged illness which is the major effects on children's health

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	50	98

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Agree	02	03
Not sure	00	00
Disagree	00	00
Strongly disagree	00	00
Total	52	100

Source: Primary data (2023)

The study revealed that 98% of the respondents agreed and the remaining small percentage of 3% also agreed. The study finding show that majority of the respondents strongly agreed with that statement that drug abuse lead to the prolonged illness. This is in relation to the findings of to Mughera (2008) the long term effect term effects drugs and alcohol are associated with cancer. Alcohol contains ethanol and that there is strong scientific evidence which shows that ethanol can cause cancer in humans (MacLean et al., 2012).

Table 4. Causes mental health problems such as depression, developmental lags, apathy, withdrawal, and other psychosocial dysfunctions

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	50	99
Agree	00	00
Not sure	00	00
Disagree	00	00
Strongly disagree	00	00
Total	52	100

Source: Primary data (2023)

The study findings revealed that all the respondents strongly agreed that drug and substance abuse leads to mental health problems such as depression, developmental lags, apathy, withdrawal, and other psychosocial dysfunctions. This was represented by 99% of all respondents. This was in relation to (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992), mental health problems such as depression, developmental lags, apathy, withdrawal, and other psychosocial dysfunctions frequently are linked to substance abuse among street children. Substance-abusing children are at higher risk than nonusers for mental health problems, including depression, conduct problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and suicide (Emmanuel et al., 2023). Marijuana use, which is prevalent among street children and youth, has been shown to interfere with short-term memory, learning, and psychomotor skills. Motivation and psychosexual/emotional development also may be influenced.

Table 5. Substance use also increases risk for infectious disease like cancer, HIV/AIDs, heart diseases etc.

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Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	30	58
Agree	20	38
Not sure	02	04
Disagree	00	00
Strongly disagree	00	00
Total	52	100

Source: Primary data (2023)

The study revealed that the majority of respondents strongly agreed that substance and drug abuse increases the risks of infectious diseases. It was represented by 58% followed by 38% who also agreed with the statement and finally very few of the respondents were not sure represented by 4%. This implies that, majority of the respondents clearly understood the concept under study. To put more light on what respondents shared, all their contribution were in line with Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992) which stated that, Substance use also increases risk for infectious disease. Drug and needle sharing practices can lead to infection of HIV, hepatitis C (HCV), and other blood-borne pathogens. Injection drug users (IDUs) are the highest risk group for acquiring HCV; approximately 70 to 80 percent of new HCV cases in the US each year are among IDUs. Similarly, injection drug use, both directly and indirectly, is a significant contributor to the spread of HIV. More than one-third of AIDS cases in the US are due to IDUs, people who have sex with IDUs, and children born to mothers who have contracted HIV through drug use practices. HIV and HCV infection rates specifically among crack cocaine users is also accounted for by sharing of pipes among users with open mouth sores, increased risky sexual behavior, and sex work (i.e., trading sex for crack or money). Similarly, methamphetamine use, whether injected, snorted, or smoked, is associated with increased risk for HIV and other STDs, particularly among men who have sex with men. Regardless of sexual orientation, however, sexual risk practices such as reduced condom use, being high during sex, and having multiple sexual partners is prevalent among methamphetamine users.

Causes of drug and substance abuse among street children in Kisoro Municipality Kisoro District Uganda

To achieve this objective, the respondents were asked the Causes of drug and substance abuse among street children. These are presented as follows:

Table 6: Have you ever been involved in drug and substance abuse?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	20	38
No	32	62

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Total	52	100
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Source: Field data (2023)

The table above indicates that 38% of the respondents agreed that they have ever been involved in drug and substance abuse and the remaining 40% of the respondents have never. This implies that majority of the individuals had at least been victims of drug and substance abuse.

Table 7: If yes, are you aware of the major causes of drug and substance abuse among street children?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	40	77
No	12	23
Total	52	100

Source: Field Data (2023)

The study results revealed that 77% of the respondents agreed that they were aware of the major causes of drug and substance abuse among street children and the remaining 23% were not aware. This implies that most people were aware and knew the most common causes of drug and substance abuse among street children in Kisoro District.

Table 8: Results on the causes of drug and substance abuse among street children in Kisoro District Kisoro Municipality

Causes of drug abuse	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Peer pressure	14	27
Family background	05	10
Availability of variety substances	03	06
Depression and stress	09	17
Social class membership	04	08
Family networks	07	13
Home environment	10	19
Total	52	100

The table above indicates that 27% of the respondents said that one of the major cause of drug abuse among children is due to peer pressure followed by home environment on 19%, depression and stress which got a percentage of 17%, family networks on 13%, family background on 10%, social class membership represented by 08% and finally availability of variety of substances to children on 06%. This indicates that, peer pressure or influence from friends is a leading factor for the involvement of drug and substance abuse among street children in Kisoro District Kisoro Municipality. According to the United Nations (1992:15), drug users, like other people seek approval for their behavior from their peers whom they attempt to convince to join them in their habit as a way of seeking acceptance. Whether peer pressure has a positive or negative impact depends on the quality of the peer group. Unfortunately, the same peer

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pressure that acts to keep a group within an accepted code of behavior can also push a susceptible individual down the wrong path. A study carried out by Kariuki (1988:85) in Kampala indicated that the majority of drug users had friends who used drugs.

Drug and substance commonly abused by street children in Kisoro Municipality

Table 9. Drugs commonly abused by street children

Drugs commonly abused by street children	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Alcohol beverage like beer and musururu	30	58
Tobacco	10	19
Marijuana	05	10
Cocaine	00	00
Heroin	00	00
Cannabis	00	00
Petrol	07	13
Total	52	100

Source: Field data (2023)

The study findings revealed that the commonly drug and substance abused by street children is Alcohol beverages like beer and local breweries (umusururu) represented by 58%. The second common abused substance by street children is Tobacco as indicated with the second highest percentage of 19%, followed by petrol from vehicles on 13% and finally marijuana on 10%. This was in line with the submission of research by Nutrition and fitness findings that shows that there are some alcohol beverage types that are low in alcohol content like beer. Beer is made from barley and has an alcohol content of about 3 — 8%. Distinctive alcoholic beverages differ in terms of their aging process like beer that under goes a process of short fermentation lasts for about a week. According to the respondents this is because alcohol is cheap and easily accessed by street children anywhere anyhow.

Conclusion

The study concludes that there are many effects that drug and substance has on the health of children. From the field, the researcher found some of the effects which include but not limited to; prolonged illness, physical injuries, and mental health problems like depression, lung cancer, heart diseases, and body weakness among others. This was in line with Mugerera (2008 who stated that, the long term effect term effects drugs and alcohol are associated with cancer. Alcohol contains ethanol and that there is strong scientific evidence which shows that ethanol can cause cancer in humans. The risk of getting cancer varies according to the types of cancer. About 5% of all cancers are linked to excessive drinking. Some cancers are more closely linked to types for instance about 5% of all cancers are linked to heavy alcohol drinking and this is cancer of the liver which is one of the commonest cancers in Uganda.

Recommendations

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In line with the main findings of the study and suggestions that were given by the respondents. The recommendations below are suggested for the policy makers, parents and children themselves.

The government should put in place initiatives targeting the engagement of children to overcome idleness among children. This is because they need to be adequately supported with human and financial resources, but without reducing resources from women's programmes. In addition, more information and research on children and drug abuse are needed to lead to identification, cost effective practices and frameworks.

Strengthening and putting in place strict laws drug and alcohol abuse to people below 18 years, taking children to rehabilitate centers those who abuse drugs and alcohol counselling them and lastly they should stick to God.

According to tables 13 and 10, it was seen that peer influence with 333 (62%) respondents were saying it was one of the main cause of drug and alcohol abuse. It was recommended that parents should provide enough parental guidance to their children and also encouraging them to attend youth Christian camps.

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