

VOLUME: 5 / ISSUE: 1 / 2025



Dzimbahwe Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

DZIMBAHWE JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

2025

VOLUME 5

ISSUE 1

EDITORIAL PAGE

Editor-in-Chief	Prof V. Z. Nyawo (Management)
Co-Editors	Dr B. Lantern (Content) Dr T. Moyo (Language)
Text Formatier	Dr C. P Mudzengi (Structure)

Consulting Editors

Prof M. Manyanga	GZU
Prof J. Mufunda	GZU
Prof B. Chazovachii	GZU
Dr X. Poshiwa	GZU
Prof P Gwirayi	GZU
Dr L. Chapungu	UNISA
Dr I. Nyambiya	GZU
Dr T. Maravanyika	GZU
Dr H. Hogo	GZU
Dr. U. Saidi	MSU

Advisory Board

Prof M. Musengi	GZU
Prof G. Pwiti	UP

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed in the journal are those of the authors, and not necessarily the Editorial Board or publisher. The journal does not guarantee the appropriateness, for any purpose, of any method, product, process or device described or identified in an article. Ultimate responsibility in interpretation of published material lies with the authors concerned. Neither the Editorial Board nor the publishers can accept any liability whatsoever in respect of a claim for damages arising from any publication.

Publisher

Great Zimbabwe University
Off Old Great Zimbabwe Monument Road
P. O. Box 1235
Masvingo
Zimbabwe

Contact details

Telephone: +263 392 266841
E-mail: dzimbahwe@gzu.ac.zw
Journal URL: www.gzuscholar.gzu.ac.zw
Website: www.gzu.ac.zw

ISSN: 2518-4334 (Print)

eISSN: TBA (Electronic)

Table of Contents

Introduction – Prof V. Z. Nyawo.....	6
Drug and substance abuse, and language in the Zimbabwean Courts: An analysis of the <i>S v Kagoro and Another</i> (244 of 2024) [2024] ZWHHC 244 (14 June 2024) case Musavengana Machaya	10
Technological Consequences of Drug and Substance Abuse in the 4th industrial revolution in Higher Institutions of Higher learning	
Richard Chingovo, Admore Mashoko and Belinda Diya	26
Challenges in managing Drug and Substance abuse in schools. A Case of Five Secondary Schools in Masvingo District-Zimbabwe Denias Muzenda	53
A step in the right direction: The role of religion in the eradication of Drug and Substance Abuse Nozipho Ndebele and Mthokozisi Mahlangu	79
Developing a comprehensive framework for addressing Drug and Substance Abuse in Masvingo: A Collaborative University Stakeholder Approach Pride Mkandatsama, Aron Gonye, Beula Goroba and Admore Mashoko	98
Zimbabwean WhatsApp Content Creators’ Radar in Mitigating Drug and Substance Abuse: An Aristotelian’s Rhetorical Triangle Approach to Persuasion Beatrice Lantern.....	116
An assessment of the impact of Drug and Substance Abuse government intervention strategies. A case of 5 selected secondary schools in Harare North District Denias Muzenda.....	149
Indexing the Misery of Drug and Substance Abuse among Students in Higher and Tertiary Institutions of Masvingo Province Prince Chimonero and Cuthbert Pisirai.....	179
A Critical Evaluation of Punitive and Rehabilitative Approaches in Addressing Drug and Substance Abuse in Zimbabwe’s Criminal Justice System Douglas Musebenzi	196

Small-Livestock Vocational Training as a Strategy for Drug and Substance Abuse Prevention to Vulnerable Youths in Zimbabwe

Jameson Madzana.....224

The relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse among youths in Mucheke A suburb, Masvingo Province

Gonye Aron, Mashokoh Admore, Beula Goroba and Pride Mkandatsama.....248

INTRODUCTION

Prof V. Z. Nyawo

The theme for this Dzimbabwe Vol. 5, No. 1 is DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE. A call for papers was issued in February 2025 that attracted 25 papers and 11 were accepted for publication. All the papers in this volume observe that Drug and Substance Abuse (DSA) is a growing threat to public health, security, economic growth, and social stability internationally and regionally including in Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Multisectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan (MDSAP), 2024-2030, p12).

There is a running agreement in the papers that not only are youths involved in hazardous drug and substance abuse activities, but individuals of all ages, from as young as 10 to senior citizens, who succumb to the temptation, are also swept up in the pernicious circle of drug and substance abuse. Globally, concerted efforts to address drug and substance abuse are evident through the work of various organisations; like WHO, UNESCO, Council of Europe, and the International Union for Child Welfare; yet despite these efforts, the issue remains a pressing and ongoing concern. A pertinent example is the WHO, which has been working towards drug abuse prevention since 1965. Nevertheless, it has increasingly faced challenges in enforcing international controls due to the advent of advanced technologies that have transformed the world into a global village. Since then, there has been an increase in the variety of drugs and due to technology-enabled efficiency drugs abused are accessible anytime, anywhere, and by anyone in need. The commonly abused substances are cannabis/marijuana/mbanje, crystal meth/ mutoriro, broncleer, cocaine, and heroin among others. In recent times, the illicit drug landscape has evolved, with the emergence of new and complex drug combinations such as 'nyaope' posing significant health risks.

The World Drug Report (2023) vouches that the estimated number of DSA users grew from 240 million in 2011 to 296 million in 2021 (5.8 % of the global population aged 15-64). These alarming figures and the problems noted above that come with drug abuse require immediate attention from individuals, communities, and governments to address this dire situation. Given the severity and complexity of drug and substance abuse, scholars are invited to submit well-researched articles that raise awareness, promote prevention, improve access to treatment and support services, and foster community engagement and partnerships to address the root causes of substance abuse, among other factors. Submitted articles may discuss but not limited to the following:

- Drug and Substance Abuse in communities, and academic institutions
- Drug and Substance Abuse, and the media
- Drug and Substance Abuse, and drug trafficking
- Drug and Substance Abuse, and religion
- Drug and Substance Abuse, and violence

- Drug and Substance Abuse, and unemployment/informal sector
 - Drug and Substance Abuse, and commerce
 - Drug and Substance Abuse, and Development [innovation, industrialisation and beyond]
 - Drug and Substance Abuse, and Sustainable Development Goals
 - Drug and Substance Abuse, and language
 - Drug and Substance Abuse, and government interventions [statutory and regulatory bodies, prevention, treatment (rehabilitation centres), law enforcement and international cooperation to counter the impact of drug problem and beyond]
 - Drug and Substance Abuse, and the future of humanity
- Drug and Substance Abuse, and slashed WHO funding

Machaya, in an article titled ‘Drug and substance abuse, and language in the Zimbabwean Courts: An analysis of the *S v Kagoro and Another* (244 of 2024) [2024] ZWHHC 244 (14 June 2024) case,’ quotes Section 6 of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe which recognizes 16 languages as official in Zimbabwe. He notes that these languages are Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, sign language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa. He observes that although these are the officially recognized languages, there is ‘street lingo’ which is often used by the youths in different parts of the country and this language has also found its way into the courts of law. Interpreters, judges and prosecutors have, in most cases, struggled to understand this language. The main cause of this is that, the young people in Zimbabwe mostly under the influence of drugs and other substances are prepared to adulterate official languages to suit their tastes and times. This article asserts that in many criminal trials the ‘youths’ are non-conformists to the official languages yet their evidence usually given in street lingo may be vital for the resolution of cases in court.

Chigovo, Mashoko and Diya, in ‘Technological consequences of drug and substance abuse in the 4th industrial revolution in institutions of Higher learning’ observe that drug and substance abuse have intensified into a universal disaster with philosophical and complex influences on current culture. This research examines the technological consequences of widespread drug and substance abuse within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in higher education, focusing on two state colleges in Gwanda in Matabeleland South. The study aims to contribute to the discourse on the intersection of technology and substance abuse in academic settings.

Muzenda, in Challenges in managing ‘Drug and Substance abuse in schools: A case of five Secondary Schools in Masvingo District-Zimbabwe,’ assesses the challenges in managing drug and substance abuse in five secondary schools in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe. Drug and substance abuse is a pervasive global problem affecting individuals, families, schools and communities. In the Sub-Saharan context, leaders face significant challenges in managing this scourge, particularly among adolescents in schools. The challenge negatively affects school management, teachers and parents.

Ndebele and Mahlangu, in 'A step in the right direction: The role of religion in the eradication of Drug and Substance Abuse,' quote Maraire and Chethiyar, (2020) who say that Drug abuse is a problem that has devastated the world, especially the younger generation. Drug and Substance Abuse have been a persisting issue in all communities despite the continuous efforts to eradicate it. Religion generally has a way of influencing its member's minds, attitudes and conduct because it mandates certain dos and don'ts insofar as its beliefs are concerned. DSA adversely affects the health, education and prospective positive future of the youth and it therefore, calls for urgent attention from all stakeholders. This study was undertaken to establish the role played or that can potentially be played by religion in drug eradication.

Mkandatsama, Gonye, Goroba and Mashoko, in 'Developing a comprehensive framework for addressing Drug and Substance Abuse in Masvingo: A collaborative university stakeholder approach,' agree that Drug and substance abuse remains a major challenge among unemployed youth. The study examined the intervention role of various university departments to combat drug and substance abuse among unemployed youths in Masvingo Urban, Masvingo Province.

Lantern, in 'Zimbabwean WhatsApp Content Creators' Radar in Mitigating Drug and Substance Abuse: An Aristotelian's Rhetorical Triangle Approach to Persuasion' argues that Drug and substance abuse has become a pressing concern in Zimbabwe and the world at large, affecting not only individuals but also communities, healthcare systems, and economies. Despite the growing outcry, the number of users continues to rise, exacerbated by emerging drug combinations. The rapid spread of drug and substance abuse, facilitated by technology, has not been matched by effective media discourses to mitigate the issue. While information on drug and substance abuse is available in media spaces, it is often limited and inadequate. This article argues that since we are living mostly in a smartphone messaging world, digital artists can play a crucial role in preventing drug and substance abuse by creating and sharing targeted media content, particularly in Zimbabwean indigenous languages, on WhatsApp.

Muzenda, in 'An assessment of the impact of Drug and Substance Abuse government intervention strategies: A case of 5 selected secondary schools in Harare North Province,' assesses the impact of drug and substance abuse government intervention strategies in 5 selected secondary schools in Harare North District. Drug and substance abuse is a pervasive global issue affecting individuals, families, schools and communities worldwide. In the Sub-Saharan African context, and Zimbabwe in particular, the leaders face significant challenges in managing drug and substance abuse, particularly among adolescents in schools. The study is significant to school management, teachers and parents at large.

Chimonero and Pisirai, in 'Indexing the Misery of Drug and Substance Abuse among Students in Higher and Tertiary Institutions of Masvingo Province,' note that Drug and substance use have putative cognitive enhancing impact despite their profound global public health threats and associated risks. This study explores the impact of drug and substance abuse among students in Higher and Tertiary Learning Institutions of Masvingo Province. High rates of drug misuse among young adults prompted this study to be conducted.

Musebenzi, in 'A Critical Evaluation of Punitive and Rehabilitative Approaches in Addressing Drug and Substance Abuse in Zimbabwe's Criminal Justice System' observes that Zimbabwe has witnessed

an increase in drug and substance abuse and this prompted the criminal justice system to have a response that is grounded primarily on criminalisation and incarceration of the drug and substance abusers. Note should be taken however that although, recent policy measures acknowledge rehabilitation, it remains skeptical whether Zimbabwe's legal and institutional framework shifted significantly away from the punitive control mechanism to rehabilitation-oriented justice system. This article addresses the central question of whether Zimbabwe's criminal justice system operates predominantly as a mechanism of rehabilitation or retaliation in responding to drug and substance abuse.

Madzana in 'Small-Livestock Vocational Training as a Strategy for Drug and Substance Abuse Prevention to Vulnerable Youths in Zimbabwe,' notes that Zimbabwean youth face a growing crisis of drug and substance abuse (DSA), driven by economic hardship, unemployment, and weakened social supports. Through a mixed-methods study Madzana evaluated the efficacy of a six-month small-livestock vocational training program focusing on poultry (broiler and layers) and rabbit production training as a preventive intervention for at-risk youths (aged 15–25) in high-density urban and peri-urban communities of Masvingo Province. The program combined hands-on animal husbandry, enterprise management, financial literacy, and life-skills mentoring, co-designed and delivered in partnership with local NGOs, AGRITEX officers, and community leaders.

Gonye Aron, Mashokoh Admore, Beula Goroba and Pride Mkandatsama in 'The relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse among youths in Mucheke A suburb, Masvingo Province,' explored the relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse among youths in Mucheke A Suburb, Masvingo Province. The study was triggered by a high rise in drug and substance abuse among the unemployed youths in the post Covid 19 era. The study was guided by the Social Disorganization theory. Findings revealed that drug and substance abuse was common among unemployed youths. Findings also noted that youths engaged in drugs and substance abuse as a coping strategy for stress, anxiety and depression.

Drug and substance abuse, and language in the Zimbabwean Courts: An analysis of the

***S v Kagoro and Another* (244 of 2024) [2024] ZWHHC 244 (14 June 2024) case**

Machaya Musavengana 

Great Zimbabwe University, Herbert Chitepo Law School

ORCID: 0009-0006-0010-3271

***Corresponding Author:** Musavengana Machaya, mmachaya@gzu.ac.zw

Abstract

Section 6 of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe recognizes 16 languages as official in Zimbabwe. These languages are Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, sign language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa. Although these are the officially recognized languages, there is ‘street lingo’ which is often used by the youths in different parts of the country. In Zimbabwe ‘street lingo’ is usually introduced and developed by drug and substance abusers, musicians and also school children. This language has also found its way into the courts of law. Interpreters, judges and prosecutors have, in most cases, struggled to understand this language. The main cause of this is that, the young people in Zimbabwe mostly under the influence of drugs and other substances are prepared to adulterate official languages to suit their tastes and times. In many criminal trials the ‘youths’ are non-conformists to the official languages yet their evidence usually given in street lingo may be vital for the resolution of cases in court. In the case of *S v Kagoro and Another* (244 of 2024) [2024] ZWHHC 244 (14 June 2024), one of the state’s key witnesses was a boy aged about seventeen years. He chose to testify in Shona. Unfortunately, his Shona was so dominated by street lingo that the court interpreter could hardly understand it. Despite repeated admonishments to stick to proper Shona, the boy found himself frequently drifting into the comfort of his colloquialism and geekspeak, resorting for instance to phrases such as ‘*ngezha ikabva yajamuka*’. The court noted that to promote fair trial, the interpreters must learn and

understand the street lingo used by many youths. The main purpose of this paper is to give an analysis of the case of *S v Kagoro and Another* (244 of 2024) [2024] ZWHHC 244, focusing on how the street lingo usually influenced by drug abuse, has affected criminal trials in Zimbabwe.

Key words; Drug Abuse, Constitution, street lingo, translation, language and law.

Introduction

This article focuses on how drug and substances abuse have affected the use of languages in Zimbabwe. It is grounded on the idea that, through the use of drugs and other related substances there are new languages which have emerged. Local languages such as Shona and Ndebele have been infiltrated by street words. New names have been given to places, food, clothes and words that are used in day to day communication have been tilted and adulterated to meet the interests of the *Gen Z* or the youths. The courts have not been spared of this dilemma. Notably, languages play a fundamental role in our courts specifically in upholding the right to fair trial. Due to infiltration of local languages by street lingo, judges, magistrates, court interpreters and other court officials have been facing challenges in interpreting the languages created and developed under the influence of drugs. One key example of this dilemma is the case of *S v Kagoro and Another* 244 of (2024) ZWHHC. The main focus of this paper shall be to give a critical analysis on the effects of drug and substance abuse on official languages. It shall focus in how our courts have grappled with dealing with street lingo in handling criminal cases.

General background on the effects of drug abuse in Zimbabwe.

The negative effects of drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe are profound, far-reaching, and deeply unsettling as they affect the very fabric of society. Expert findings highlight that substance abuse has led to a dramatic surge in mental health crises, with approximately 60%

of institutional psychiatric admissions now tied to drug-related conditions, especially among the youth (Chidume and Mugambiwa, 2024). In their study, Chidume and Mugambiwa (2024) also further observed that drug abuse is a critical driver of escalating gang violence in schools, increased incidences of gender-based and other violent crimes, and a worrying rise in suicide attempts (40%) which are linked to substance abuse.

In addition to the above, the issue of drug and substance abuse has acted as a catalyst for the breakdown of families, erosion of human potential, and the proliferation of drug-related crimes, threatening public order and economic stability (Maraire and Chethiyar, 2020). Compounded by high youth unemployment and endemic poverty, substance abuse not only reduces individual productivity but entrenches a vicious cycle of marginalization and disadvantage, particularly impacting vulnerable and marginalized groups. The nation's lack of effective rehabilitation services, inadequate treatment infrastructure, and the pervasive availability of substances, including methamphetamine, marijuana, and illicit alcohol, have exacerbated the crisis. As a result, Zimbabwe risks losing an entire generation to this epidemic unless vigorous preventive, legal, and rehabilitative frameworks are urgently enforced to uphold public health, social order, and the rule of law (Chibamu, 2024).

These far-reaching consequences of drug abuse have also infiltrated the linguistic landscapes. Local languages such as Shona and Ndebele have been dominated and mixed with street lingo. Under the influence of drugs, street lingo has emerged as a new language in Zimbabwe. Places, food, fashion trends and general communications have been developed into new names with different meanings around the country. In most cases these names and the infiltrated local languages have been preferred by the young generation. They use the street lingo in their day to day communications in areas such as schools, churches and also the courts. When they are called to courts as litigants, accused persons or witnesses, interpreters and other court officials fail to understand what they will be saying.

The failure to understand the languages being used by litigants, accused persons or witnesses in court has a negative impact on the right to fair trial which is protected under Section 69 and also Section 70(1)(j) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Act No 20 of 2013. A typical example of this dilemma was shown in the case of *S v Kagoro and Another* (244 of 2024) [2024] ZWHHC 244 (14 June 2024).

***S v Kagoro and Another* (244 of 2024) [2024] ZWHHC 244 (14 June 2024) case background**

The case of *S v Kagoro and Another* (244 of 2024) [2024] ZWHHC 244 (14 June 2024) is a criminal case in which the two eldest sons, Eric and Brian Kagoro, were convicted of murdering their father, Zivanai Kagoro, in Marondera. The two accused persons were arraigned before the court facing a charge of murder as defined in s 47(1) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [*Chapter 9:23*] hereinafter referred to as the criminal code . The allegations by the State were that on 19 June 2022 and at Plot 116, Nyagambe Farm, Marondera the accused persons unlawful and with intent to kill or realizing that there was a real risk or possibility that their conduct may cause death but continuing to engage in that conduct despite their realisation of the risk or possibility, caused the death of Zivanai Kagoro who was their father, by tripping him to the ground and strangling him (*S v Kagoro and Another* 244 of (2024) ZWHHC at 2). The assault resulted in the deceased sustaining mortal injuries. The main reason for this was that, the accused persons who are brothers accused their father of favoritism toward their younger sibling, leading to a violent altercation in which they assaulted, throttled, and fatally injured him.

Although this was a murder case, the issue of languages to be used in court was one of the key issues which the court had to deal with. Notably, one of the key witnesses was a boy aged 17 years who chose to testify in Shona. He chose to testify in Shona and his version of Shona was so dominated by street lingo to the extent that the court interpreter could hardly understand it.

Although the court tried to redirect the key witness to use proper Shona, he found himself drifting back to the comfort of his colloquialism and geekspeak (*S v Kagoro and Another* 244 of (2024) ZWHHC at 1). He used words such as ‘*ngezha ikabva yajamuka*’. The court struggled to understand the meaning of these words. In light of this, the court noted that, the rate at which the transformation of indigenous is undergoing is unrestrained. Although the evidence by the witnesses might be vital for the resolution of cases in court, the youngsters are non-conformist to the use of official languages.

Ruling of the Court.

In terms of the dilution of official languages by the youths, the court highlighted that the language barrier must be broken. It also noted that, court interpreters must therefore find a way of bridging the gap instead of expecting today’s generation to bend backwards. The court then concluded that, the only way out of this dilemma is for court interpreters to learn the jargon and integrate it into the formal languages before interpreting into the official court language (*S v Kagoro and Another* 244 of (2024) ZWHHC at 1).

On the murder charge, the court found the defense by the accused persons to be palpably false, and the prosecution was deemed to have proven their case beyond reasonable doubt. (*S v Kagoro and Another* 244 of (2024) ZWHHC at 15). Therefore, the two accused persons were found guilty of murder in terms of Section 47(1) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23].

Constitutional protection of languages in Courts.

Languages play a fundamental role in the day –to- day operations of our judicial system. In this context, they help litigants, accused persons, witnesses, judges, interpreters, observers and other court officials to understand proceedings in courts. To this end official languages are

given recognition by the Constitution. Section 6 of the Constitution recognizes 16 languages as official languages. These languages are, Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndaou, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, Sign Language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa. Notably, street lingo is not one of the officially recognized languages (Section 6 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013).

Section 6(2) of the Constitution also states that, ‘an act of parliament may prescribe other languages as officially recognized languages and may prescribe languages of record’. In line with this section, the central issue is; whether or not street lingo must be recognized as an officially recognized language or a language of record? The answer to this question is in affirmative. With the growing trend of street lingo and its popularity amongst the youths in Zimbabwe, it must be recognized as an official language or a language of record. Although this can be done, there might be difficulties in standardizing the language since names of things vary from one place to the other.

Section 6(3)(a) and (b) of the Constitution mandates the state and all institutions and agencies of government at every level to treat equitably all the officially recognized languages and to take into account the language preferences of people affected by governmental measures or communications. Section 6(4) also states that, the State must promote and advance the use of all languages used in Zimbabwe, including Sign Language and create conditions for the development of these languages.

Notably, Section 6(4) puts a positive obligation on the State to promote and advance the use of all languages used in Zimbabwe. Street lingo is a language which is used on a day –to- day basis in Zimbabwe. One way to promote this language in our courts is to ensure that court officials familiarize themselves with this language.

In relation to courts, although pertaining to accused persons, Section 69(2) of the Constitution states that; ‘in the determination of civil rights and obligations, every person has a right to a fair, speedy and public hearing within a reasonable time before an independent and impartial court, tribunal or other forum established by law’. The right to fair trial in this case also denotes the right for one to have proceedings being conducted in language he or she understands. This right is also protected under Section 70(1)(J) of the Constitution which states that, ‘any person accused of an offence has the following rights, to have the proceedings of the trial interpreted into a language that they understand’.

A critical analysis of the *S v Kagoro and Another* 244 of (2024) ZWHHC case; focusing on the use of languages within the Zimbabwean courts.

The case of *S v Kagoro* stands as a stark reminder of both the judicial duty to adhere to statutory sentencing guidelines and to investigate aggravating circumstances, as well as the enduring complexities of language use in Zimbabwe’s multilingual courtrooms. The case underscores the importance of procedural fairness in both how justice is meted out and how it is communicated and understood by all the parties involved, particularly in cases with serious personal and social consequences.

The rampant abuse of drugs and substances in Zimbabwe, particularly among the youth, has engendered not only profound physical and societal repercussions but has also significantly transformed the linguistic dynamics within courtroom settings (Chidume and Mugambiwa, 2024). Additionally, the emergence of street lingo infused by drug-influenced slang, idiomatic expressions, and coded vernacular presents formidable challenges for the older generations of court officials, who often lack familiarity with this evolving mode of communication (Chidume and Mugambiwa 2024).

Furthermore, in their study, Chidume and Mugambiwa (2024) provide another key observation that as a result, of linguistic complexities, substantive difficulties in criminal proceedings are rapidly increasing, especially those involving young defendants or witnesses, with the attendant risks that crucial meanings may be obscured, evidentiary statements misapprehended, or, in the gravest cases, inaccurately recorded in the judicial record.

To further support the above submissions, in the landmark case of *S v Kagoro*, Justice Mutevedzi incisively underscored the imperative for court interpreters and members of the judiciary to acquire fluency in such street vernacular, thereby facilitating clearer understanding and bridging these essential communicative gaps within the administration of justice (*S v Kagoro and Another* 244 of (2024) ZWHHC at 1).

This issue is a microcosm of a much broader socio-legal dilemma which revolves around drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe. Authors such as, Svongoro and Kadenge (2015) in their study, have agreed that the issue of drug and substance abuse has pervasively found its way in the courtroom discourse as signified by coded speech and the adoption of subcultural verbal registers which, if this linguistic evolution remains unaddressed, it poses a substantial risk of compromising the integrity of judicial proceedings. Svongoro and Kadenge (2015), also highlighted that, misinterpretations arising from such discourse may result in the denial of the accused's right to a fair trial and obstruct the court's pursuit of factual truth.

Moreover, the complexities inherent in translating or interpreting this complex and vexing street lingo can give rise to significant misunderstandings concerning the accused's intent, mental state, or culpability particularly where the language serves to obscure admissions, denials, or the contextual nuances of the alleged criminal conduct. In essence, the case of *S v Kagoro* irradiates how the spread of drug-influenced street lingo into Zimbabwean criminal trials poses serious challenges to due process, highlighting an urgent need for judicial,

legislative, and professional adaptation to allow effective communication, procedural justice, and the safeguarding of the rights of all parties in the legal system. (Olodun, 2024).

Indeed, it is pertinent to underscore that street lingo has significantly affected criminal trials in Zimbabwean courts by introducing communication challenges that muddle the judicial process and potentially impact fair trial rights (Svongoro, 2017). More importantly, the case of *S v Kagoro and Another* (2024), aptly captures this instance where a key teenage witness chose to testify in Shona language which was heavily infused with modern street slang phrases and colloquialisms shaped by youth culture and often influenced by drug abuse. The court interpreter struggled to adequately translate the testimony, requiring clarification and explanation of terms such as “*ngezha ikabva yajamuka*,” which simply referred to the father’s anger but was difficult to render for legal record-keeping and understanding by the court.

Justice Mutevedzi, who presided over the case, highlighted the urgent need for court interpreters to familiarize themselves with evolving street lingo to ensure accurate testimony translation and uphold procedural fairness (*State v Kagoro and Another* 2024). This linguistic transformation reflects wide-ranging sociolinguistic changes where indigenous languages, including Shona and Ndebele, are increasingly mixed with slang and colloquial expressions by younger generations, particularly those impacted by the drug culture prevalent among Zimbabwean youth. Such slang often includes idioms, coded terms, and vernacular forms that may not be comprehensible to traditional court officials, lawyers, or judges who lack exposure to this evolving language (Chidume and Mugambiwa, 2024).

In this light, one can agree that, the rise of street lingo risks misinterpretation or distortion of evidence, which can adversely affect the accuracy of witness statements, the accuracy of court records, and more importantly, the fairness of criminal trials (Olodun, 2024). In addition, beyond the case of *S v Kagoro*, Zimbabwean courts face systemic problems due to language

barriers. English is the official language of record, but most witnesses provide testimony or statements in local languages or vernacular, which the police or interpreters translate into English. Frequently, inconsistencies often arise due to inadequate translation skills or unfamiliarity with idiomatic expressions, exacerbated when witnesses speak a blend of indigenous languages and street slang (Svongoro & Mutangadura 2012).

Quite a number of cases have been reported where police officers altered witness statements during recording, or interpreters struggled with translating youth vernacular, raising concerns about potential travesty of justice (Svongoro et al, 2012). Therefore, there is need for reforms which includes specialized training for court interpreters to understand and interpret contemporary street lingo and vernacular more effectively. This adaptation is necessary to bridge generational and cultural communication gaps in courts and to ensure testimonies by young witnesses or accused persons are accurately and fairly represented. Failure to address these challenges risks marginalizing youth voices in legal processes and jeopardizing the judiciary's role in delivering impartial and equitable justice.

Additionally, the pervasive influence of street lingo, shaped significantly by social factors like drug abuse, within Zimbabwean criminal trials presents a serious challenge to the administration of justice. The case of *S v Kagoro* exemplifies the impact of this linguistic evolution on court processes and underscores the urgent necessity for judicial and linguistic reforms. Such adaptations are essential to protect the rights of fair trial and to preserve the integrity and legitimacy of Zimbabwe's criminal justice system (Mugari and Mukaro et al, 2015)

On the use of languages in courts, Judge Chitakunye has also shared his view on the importance of understanding and effectively translating street lingo to avoid misinterpretations that could affect the trial's outcome. He opined that, 'language is constantly evolving, and it is crucial

that our court interpreters stay up-to-date with these changes' (Olodun, 2024). Failure to do so can lead to significant misunderstandings, especially in cases where the testimony of young witnesses is critical.

Taking cognizance of the above, the learned Judge's remarks mirror a growing concern of the generational language rift and the necessity for the legal system to familiarize with these changes. In a broad linguistic nation like Zimbabwe, where various languages and dialects are spoken, the skill to meticulously translate testimonies in court cases is not only essential but obligatory for the proper and effective administration of justice. In this regard, court interpreters play a key role in ensuring that non-English-speaking witnesses and defendants are fairly represented and understood. Nonetheless, the unprecedented evolution of language among younger generation, accelerated by social media and popular culture, poses new challenges. Traditional training for interpreters may not adequately cover the nuances of modern slang, leading to potential lacunas in understanding.

This issue is not unique to Zimbabwe. Courts worldwide are grappling with similar challenges as they encounter witnesses and defendants who use contemporary slang and vernacular. Therefore, the push for interpreters to stay current with evolving language trends is becoming increasingly relevant in a global context. (Olodun, 2024)

In response to Judge Chitakunye's call, the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) of Zimbabwe is considering implementing regular training sessions for court interpreters. These sessions would focus on contemporary slang, street language, and other modern linguistic trends. The goal is to equip interpreters with the necessary tools to accurately convey testimonies, regardless of the witness's age or linguistic style (Olodun, 2024).

An official from the Judicial Service Commission as cited in, Olodun, (2024), observed that, 'the language used by our younger generation is rich and vibrant, but it can be perplexing for

those who are not familiar with it'. Additionally, legal experts and linguists have praised the judge's initiative, noting that it highlights an important aspect of courtroom communication that is often overlooked. The integrity of the judicial process depends on accurate and clear communication (Madondo in Olodun, 2024). Madondo further noted that, 'by acknowledging the importance of understanding modern slang, the judiciary is taking a significant step towards ensuring that justice is served fairly and accurately'. (Olodun,2024).

As Zimbabwe continues to modernize and its youth population grows, the need for effective communication within the judicial system will become even more critical. The integration of contemporary language training for court interpreters can be seen as a proactive measure to bridge the generational language gap and uphold the standards of justice (Chidume and Mugambiwa, 2024).

Measures which can be taken to resolve the problems caused by use of street lingo in court proceedings

To resolve the challenges caused by the use of street lingo by witnesses in court cases, Zimbabwean courts must adopt wide-ranging strategies that address both immediate linguistic barriers and the underlying systemic factors contributing to miscommunication. Justice Mutevedzi, highlighted the urgency of this need, particularly as cases like *S v Kagoro and Another* exposed practical challenges when witnesses testified using contemporary slang, idioms, and coded expressions unfamiliar to older court officials and interpreters.

Specialized training for Court Interpreters

Courts should implement specialized training programs to equip interpreters with knowledge of the evolving street lingo, especially slang and coded vernacular associated with youth culture and drug abuse. There must be Continuous professional development, including workshops,

immersion sessions, and collaboration with linguists and community stakeholders which will help interpreters stay updated on linguistic trends.

Curriculum development and formal certification

There is a clear need for a national curriculum and formal certification for court interpreters, emphasizing both linguistic proficiency and cultural competence. Such programs would address the lack of a standardized interpreter qualification process, which has contributed to inconsistent quality and reputational concerns within Zimbabwe's justice system.

Recruitment and utilization of diverse interpreters

Actively recruiting younger interpreters or those with firsthand experience of street vernacular can bridge generational language gaps. The courts can also create a register of community-based language consultants who assist in high-stakes cases involving especially complex or contemporary slang.

Use of reference databases and collaborative lexicons

Developing a dynamic, court-endorsed lexicon of street slang and coded phrases, regularly updated in consultation with youth focus groups and linguists, would provide interpreters and judicial officers with a resource to consult during trials. This helps standardize translation of highly localized or rapidly-evolving terms.

Enhanced judicial awareness and judicial guidance

Judges, Magistrates, Prosecutors and Court Interpreters should receive orientation on youth linguistic trends to guide them during cross examination and clarify ambiguities that may arise

in testimony. Judicial guidance, such as allowing supplementary clarification during proceedings, can help to ensure proper context is captured on the record.

Cross-disciplinary collaboration

Courts should coordinate with sociolinguists, educators, and civil society to proactively monitor language evolution among youth. Input from these sectors can inform court practices on interpretation, improve the accuracy of translations, and provide insight on broader cultural trends affecting language in legal contexts.

Policy and institutional reform

At the institutional level, integrating interpreter performance oversight, supporting pre-service and in-service training, and enacting policies requiring up to date interpreter qualifications would solidify these improvements.

These measures, when implemented effectively, would help mitigate the risks of lost meaning, misinterpreted evidence, and unfair proceedings inherent in cases involving street lingo. Ultimately, such reforms are integral to upholding constitutional guarantees for fair trial rights and linguistic accessibility in Zimbabwean courts.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, the rampant crisis of drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe has not only overwhelmed individuals and communities but has also overpoweringly influenced the linguistic landscape of the courts system. The intrusion of drug-influenced street lingo which is marked by slang, coded expressions, and youth vernacular has emerged as a formidable challenge within criminal proceedings, complicating the accurate interpretation of evidence and threatening the fundamental right to a fair trial. The case of *S v Kagoro and Another*

demonstrates these complications, as the judiciary contended with interpreting testimony steeped in street slang, exposing generational and cultural divides that jeopardize judicial clarity and procedural justice. As language in the courts continues to evolve in tandem with social shifts, Zimbabwe's justice system must urgently adapt by investing in interpreter training and judicial awareness, ensuring that all participants regardless of age or social background are understood. Such efforts are integral to safeguarding both the integrity of court proceedings and the broader legitimacy of the criminal justice system in the face of a rapidly changing linguistic and social terrain.

REFERENCES

Chidume M and Mugambiwa S, (2024) 'Breaking the chains: exploring the socio-economic ripple effects of drug and substance use among youths in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe' available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14659891.2024.2407628>.

Ndlovu E (2024) 'The open court principle in Zimbabwe: A language rights perspective' *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 42(2): 150–163

Maraire, T., & Chethiyar, S. D. (2020) 'Drug and substance abuse problem by the Zimbabwean youth: A psychological perspective' *Practitioner Research* 41-59.

Olodun M (2024) 'Judge Urges Court Interpreters to Learn Street Lingo as Key Gen Z Witness Testifies Bridging the Generational Language Gap in Legal Proceedings' available at <https://zimadvocate.com/2024/07/01/judge-urges-court-interpreters-to-learn-street-lingo-as-key-gen-z-witness-testifies/>.

Svongoro P & Kadenge M (2015) 'From language to society: An analysis of interpreting quality and the linguistic rights of the accused in selected Zimbabwean courtrooms' *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 47-62.

Svongoro. P, Mutangadura. J, Gonzo L etal (2012) 'Language and the legal process: A linguistic analysis of courtroom discourse involving selected cases of alleged rape in Mutare, Zimbabwe' *South African Journal of African Languages* 117-128.

Svongoro., P (2017) 'Court interpreting in Zimbabwe: A descriptive study of consecutively interpreted rape trials in Regional Magistrates' Court (University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg).

State v Kagoro and Another 244 of (2024) ZWHHC.

Technological Consequences of Drug and Substance Abuse in the 4th industrial revolution in Higher Institutions of Higher learning

Chingovo Richard ¹, Mashokoh Admore ² and Diya Belinda ³

1. Part-Time Lecturer - Zimbabwe Open University Matabeleland South Region
chingovor@zou.ac.zw or chingovorichard@gmail.com | ORCID: 0009-0008-0238-2096

2 Assistant Librarian - Great Zimbabwe University
amashokoh@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0008-0744-2916

3. Assistant Librarian, Digital Support - Great Zimbabwe University
bdiya@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0009-0408-329X

***Corresponding Author:** Chingovo Richard chingovor@zou.ac.zw

Abstract

Drug and substance abuse has intensified into a universal disaster with philosophical and complex influences on current culture. This research paper examines the technological consequences of widespread drug and substance abuse within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in higher education, focusing on two state colleges in Gwanda in Matabeleland South. The study aims to contribute to the discourse on the intersection of technology and substance abuse in academic settings. This research applied Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, which posits that individuals learn behaviours through the observation and imitation of others within their social environment. This qualitative research design explore how the integration of advanced technologies, such as AI and digital platforms, interacts with the challenges posed by substance abuse among students. The study employed surveys and interviews to identify the impact of substance abuse on academic performance, technological engagement, and overall student well-being. Furthermore, the study explores potential interventions and technological solutions that could alleviate these challenges, stressing the role of educational institutions in fostering a healthier, more productive learning atmosphere. Initial findings suggest a significant correlation between substance misuse and decreased academic productivity, impaired technological adoption, and heightened mental health issues. The students who engage in drug and substance abuse demonstrate a marked decline in their ability to effectively utilise digital learning tools. This decline affects their academic performance and also limits their engagement with innovative educational resources that are critical in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It is recommended that colleges implement comprehensive support programs that integrate

technology literacy with substance abuse prevention and intervention strategies. These programs include workshops on healthy coping mechanisms and training sessions that enhance students' skills in using digital tools.

Key words; Societal, Technological Consequences, Widespread, Drug and Substance Abuse, 4th industrial revolution.

Introduction

Drug and Substance abuse has been a persistent social issue; however, the 4th industrial revolution presents new dynamics due to rapid technological innovation and global socio-economic shifts. The intersection of drug and substance abuse with technology notably the rise of synthetic drugs, online drug markets, and digital rehabilitation tools creates complex new challenges and opportunities. This study seeks to understand how the growing prevalence of drug and substance abuse affects societal structures and technological progress and what this means for the future development of humanity.

The rapid technological innovation characterizing the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has transformed almost every aspect of human life from communication and industry to healthcare and social interaction. However, alongside these advances, a persistent social problem drug and substance abuse has evolved in complex and technologically mediated ways. The integration of digital platforms, synthetic drug production methods, and online drug markets has redefined how drugs are produced, distributed, and consumed. Despite the growing body of research on drug abuse, limited attention has been given to how emerging technologies intensify or mitigate its impact within local and global contexts. Existing studies often address health or socio-economic effects, yet few explore how technological innovation both contributes to and combats this issue. This gap in understanding the technological dimensions of substance abuse from digital drug trafficking to AI-driven recovery tools obscures the broader societal implications of this problem in the era of 4IR.

Background to the study

The 4th industrial revolution has witnessed unprecedented advancements in technology, globalization, and societal transformation (Kabir, 2019). Despite these developments, drug and substance abuse has become a significant public health and social issue, especially in

institutions of higher learning. Universities and colleges, traditionally seen as centers of intellectual and personal development, are increasingly grappling with the complex consequences of widespread substance use among students. Andersson, (2025) pointed out that, drug and substance abuse among young adults in higher education settings is not a new phenomenon. Modern societal pressures, such as academic stress, social expectations, mental health challenges, and greater access to legal and illegal substances, have intensified the problem of substance abuse. The normalization of alcohol, prescription drug misuse, cannabis, and synthetic drugs is transforming campus cultures and influencing student behaviour, necessitating urgent attention.

Technological advancements have further complicated the landscape. Social media platforms, online pharmacies, and darkened marketplaces have made acquiring a variety of substances easier than ever before. Moreover, digital communication has facilitated the spread of drug culture, glamorizing substance use and diminishing perceptions of risk among impressionable student populations. The societal impacts of widespread drug and substance abuse in higher education are profound. Paul et al., (2024) pointed out that, academic performance often declines, leading to increased dropout rates and diminished future prospects for affected students. Mental health crises, including anxiety, depression, and suicide, are exacerbated by substance misuse. Furthermore, the ripple effects extend beyond individual students, affecting families, institutions, and broader communities through increased healthcare costs, loss of productivity, and social instability.

Pincus et al, (2016) expressed that, institutions face challenges in adapting to technology by using surveillance systems, data analysis tools, and digital mental health interventions to address substance abuse. However, ethical concerns about privacy and effectiveness remain. . Aggarwal, et al. 2023) purported that, emerging technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence (AI) offer both promising interventions and new risks in the context of substance use behaviours. Given the intertwining societal and technological dimensions of this issue, it is critical to investigate the consequences of widespread drug and substance abuse within higher education. Understanding these impacts holistically will inform the development of more effective prevention strategies, policy interventions, and support systems, ensuring that institutions of higher learning can fulfil their mission of fostering healthy, capable, and innovative future leaders.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the technological consequences of drug and substance abuse within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, analysing how digitalization, automation, and virtual interaction influence its patterns and societal impacts.

Statement of the Problem

The prevalence of drug and substance abuse in higher education institutions has emerged as a critical issue, especially within the context of the 4th Industrial Revolution. Kickbusch (2021) propound that this era is characterised by rapid technological advancements and changing societal norms, which both improve and alleviate substance abuse problems. Despite the potential for technology to offer innovative solutions, the negative impacts of substance misuse such as diminished academic performance, increased dropout rates and impaired social interactions pose significant challenges for educational institutions. Moreover, the interplay between societal pressures and technological influences complicates the landscape, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of how these factors contribute to the ongoing crisis. Therefore, this research seeks to address the critical gap by investigating how widespread drug and substance abuse impacts both societal structures and technological advancement. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the long-term implications for humanity if current trends persist, and to propose strategic, technology-driven solutions to mitigate these risks and promote a healthier, more sustainable future.

Objectives

- To ascertain how has technology in the Fourth Industrial Revolution transformed the patterns and accessibility of drug and substance abuse?
- To determine technological factors contributing to the proliferation of synthetic drugs and online drug markets?
- To find how emerging technologies can be leveraged to prevent, monitor substance abuse?

Significance of the study

This study is significant as it addresses the urgent challenge of drug and substance abuse in higher education, a pressing issue that affects academic performance, mental health, and social

cohesion among students. In this regard, by exploring the societal and technological impacts within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the research provides valuable insights into how modern technological advancements can both contribute to and mitigate substance abuse. The findings will be instrumental for policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals in developing targeted interventions and support systems. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the broader discourse on the role of technology in shaping student well-being and success, ultimately fostering healthier and more productive academic environments.

Scope

This research will examine the technological consequences of drug and substance abuse among students in higher education institutions during the Fourth Industrial Revolution, with a specific focus on two state colleges in Gwanda. The study will investigate how digital technologies and 4IR tools (such as smartphones, social media, online platforms, and digital learning systems) interact with student drug use to influence academic engagement, patterns of technology use, digital learning participation, and exposure to online drug-related content.

Limitations

While this study aims to provide valuable insights into the impacts of drug and substance abuse in higher education, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the focus on only two state colleges in Gwanda may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other institutions or regions, as different cultural and socioeconomic contexts can significantly influence substance abuse patterns. Eventually, the reliance on self-reported data from students may lead to biases, as individuals might underreport or misrepresent their substance use behaviours. Furthermore, the rapidly evolving nature of technology can make it challenging to capture the full scope of its impact on substance abuse, potentially limiting the study's relevance over time. Despite these limitations, the research will contribute meaningful insights to the ongoing discourse surrounding substance abuse in higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Substance abuse and its impact on technological innovation and workforce dynamics

Substance abuse is a significant issue that manifests in various sectors, affecting technological innovation and the dynamics of the global workforce. Societies strive to leverage advancements in technology for increased productivity and economic growth, the repercussions of substance

abuse undermine these efforts, creating a complex interplay between addiction and workplace performance.

Impact on Performance

One of the most immediate effects of substance abuse on the student performance is a decline in work rate. Bouchrika (2024) expressed that, learners struggling with addiction often face challenges such as absenteeism, reduced educational performance and an inability to meet deadlines. This decline lead to increased operational costs for businesses, as they may need to hire temporary workers or invest in training new employees to fill gaps left by those affected by substance abuse. Moreover, the cognitive impairments associated with substance use can hinder creativity and problem-solving abilities, stifling innovation in workplaces that rely heavily on collaboration and intellectual contributions.

Economic Outcomes

The broader economic implications of substance abuse are significant. The loss of productivity due to addiction translates into substantial economic costs for businesses and society at large. According to Chen et al., (2023, Huang and Yongquan, 2025) revealed that, the economic burden of substance abuse includes healthcare expenses, lost earnings, and increased criminal justice costs. For employers, these costs can manifest in higher insurance premiums, productivity losses, and potential legal liabilities. As a result, organizations may struggle to maintain competitiveness in an increasingly globalized market, where efficiency and innovation are paramount.

Influence on Technological Innovation

Substance abuse also affects technological innovation indirectly by shaping the workforce's capabilities. A healthy and focused performance is essential for driving innovation, especially in sectors that rely on cutting-edge technology (Huang and Yongquan, 2025). When addiction impairs the cognitive functions of employees, it can slow down the pace of innovation, reduce the quality of outputs, and hinder the development of new products and services.

Global Workforce Dynamics

Globally, the effects of substance abuse on students' performance dynamics vary based on cultural attitudes and the availability of treatment resources. In regions where addiction is stigmatised, individuals may avoid seeking help, perpetuating addiction and its economic consequences. In contrast, countries that implement comprehensive approaches to substance use integrating prevention, treatment, and support may see improved workforce dynamics and productivity.

Substance abuse notably impacts technological innovation and economic outcomes. As organizations navigate a rapidly changing technological landscape, addressing substance abuse is crucial for fostering a healthy, innovative, and productive workforce. Huang and Yongquan, (2025) expressed that, implementing comprehensive support systems and promoting a culture of well-being, businesses may mitigate the negative effects of addiction, driving economic growth and enhancing competitive advantage in the global market.

Technology's Dual Role and mitigates Substance Abuse

Technology plays a complex role in the realm of substance abuse, acting both as a catalyst for exacerbating addiction and as a powerful tool for mitigation. Digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and telehealth solutions exemplify this duality, influencing patterns of substance use while also providing innovative avenues for treatment and support (Chen et al., (2023).

Exacerbation through digital platforms

Digital platforms, particularly social media and online marketplaces, have significantly exacerbated substance abuse. The anonymity and accessibility of the internet facilitate the promotion and distribution of drugs, making it easier for individuals, especially young people, to experiment with substances (Kickbusch et al., 2021). Online communities may normalise drug use, often glamorizing substance consumption through influencers and peer interactions. This environment can lead to increased curiosity and experimentation, ultimately contributing to higher rates of addiction. Additionally, the proliferation of apps and platforms that enable the sale of substances on the dark web poses serious challenges for law enforcement and public health officials, complicating efforts to combat drug trafficking and protect vulnerable populations.

The Role of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) also plays a dual role in substance abuse. On one hand, AI can exacerbate addiction by enabling targeted advertising for substances and related products, which can be highly persuasive and difficult to resist. Mbunge et al., (2023) alludes that, algorithms that analyse user behaviour may promote content that reinforces substance use, further entrenching individuals in cycles of addiction. On the other hand, AI has the potential to mitigate substance abuse through predictive analytics and personalized treatment approaches. According to the study by Chen et al., (2023) analysing data on substance use patterns, AI can help identify individuals at risk of addiction and facilitate early interventions. Furthermore, AI-driven tools can assist healthcare providers in developing tailored treatment plans, optimizing recovery strategies based on individual needs.

Telehealth Solutions

Telehealth solutions represent a significant advancement in mitigating substance abuse, particularly in increasing access to treatment. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of telehealth, allowing individuals to seek help without the barriers of transportation or stigma associated with in-person visits. Virtual therapy sessions, online support groups, and digital counselling have made it easier for individuals to access care, especially in underserved areas where traditional healthcare resources are limited. Telehealth also provide ongoing support for individuals in recovery, helping to reduce relapse rates by fostering continuous engagement with healthcare providers and support systems (Kickbusch et al., 2021).

Addressing the Challenges

Gooding (2019) posits that, technology offers innovative solutions for addressing substance abuse, it also necessitates a careful examination of ethical considerations and potential risks. Policymakers and public health officials must work to develop regulations that mitigate the harmful effects of digital platforms while promoting the positive aspects of technology in treatment and recovery. This includes implementing measures to limit targeted advertising for substances, enhancing digital literacy programs to educate users about the risks of drug use, and ensuring that telehealth solutions are accessible and effective for all populations.

Technology serves as both an exacerbating factor and a mitigating force in the landscape of substance abuse. Digital platforms and AI can contribute to addiction by promoting substance use, while telehealth solutions provide critical support and access to treatment (Kickbusch et al., 2021). In this regard understanding this duality, society can harness the positive aspects of technology to combat substance abuse, while also implementing strategies to address its negative effects. This balanced approach is essential for fostering healthier communities and promoting effective recovery solutions.

Comprehensive Strategies to Address Substance Abuse

Addressing the multifaceted consequences of substance abuse requires comprehensive strategies that integrate public health initiatives, technological advancements, and socio-economic insights (Hassan and Omenogor 2025). This holistic approach recognizes that substance abuse is not merely an individual issue but a societal challenge that demands coordinated efforts across various sectors.

Leveraging Technology

Technology plays a pivotal role in both prevention and recovery from substance abuse. Digital platforms can be harnessed to disseminate information, foster community support, and provide resources for those seeking help. For instance, mobile applications can facilitate access to counselling, track recovery progress, and connect individuals with support groups. Artificial intelligence can enhance treatment by personalizing care plans based on individual data, predicting relapse risk, and providing timely interventions. Hassan and Omenogor (2025) purported that, telehealth solutions enable remote access to healthcare providers, making it easier for individuals in underserved areas to receive treatment.

Collaboration and Policy Development

Creating comprehensive strategies also requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including healthcare providers, policymakers, community organizations, and individuals in recovery. Collaborative efforts lead to the development of policies that prioritize substance abuse prevention and treatment as public health priorities Babor (2020) dovetails that, policies should be informed by data-driven research that evaluates the effectiveness of different interventions and adapts strategies based on emerging trends. Hence, fostering a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility, communities can build resilience against substance

abuse and promote sustainable recovery efforts. Addressing the consequences of substance abuse needs a comprehensive approach that integrates public health, technology, and socio-economic insights. According to study by Voronkova et al., (2023) developing holistic strategies that prioritise prevention, leverage technological advancements, and consider socio-economic factors, societies can effectively combat substance abuse and promote recovery. This integrated framework not only addresses the immediate challenges posed by substance use but also lays the groundwork for healthier, more resilient communities in the long term.

Trends and patterns of substance use in the 4th industrial revolution

The 4th Industrial Revolution has brought about significant changes in various aspects of society, including the landscape of substance use among students in higher education. Voronkova et al., (2023) expressed that, one notable trend is the increasing prevalence of prescription drug abuse, particularly among students seeking cognitive enhancement. Medications such as Adderall and Ritalin, originally prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), are often misused to improve focus and academic performance. This phenomenon highlights a growing pressure on students to excel in competitive academic environments, leading them to resort to pharmaceutical solutions that have serious health implications.

Another pattern observed during this era is the normalization of substance use through social media platforms. Rassool (2024) pointed out that, the pervasive nature of social media allows for the sharing and promotion of drug culture, with students often showcasing their experiences with alcohol and recreational drugs. This visibility can create a sense of acceptance and even encourage experimentation among peers, blurring the lines between responsible use and abuse. The impact of peer influence is amplified in online spaces, where students may feel compelled to conform to perceived norms regarding substance use. Moreover, the accessibility of information has transformed the way students approach substance use. The Internet provides a wealth of resources on various substances, including potential effects, risks, and methods of use. While this can lead to greater awareness and informed decision-making, it can also facilitate risky behaviours as students become more knowledgeable about how to use substances without fully understanding the potential consequences. Taverna, (2025) pointed out that, the rise of e-cigarettes and vaping among young adults represents a shift in substance use patterns, with these products often perceived as safer alternatives to traditional smoking. Reports indicated a rise in alcohol consumption and substance use as coping mechanisms

during this challenging time. As institutions adapt to a new normal, understanding these trends and patterns is crucial for developing effective interventions and support systems to address substance use in higher education during the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Technological Influences on Substance Use: Online Drug Markets

The rise of online drug markets has significantly transformed the landscape of substance use, particularly among students in higher education. Taverna, (2025) supported that, digital platforms facilitate the buying and selling of illicit drugs with unprecedented ease and anonymity. Using cryptocurrencies and encrypted communication methods, individuals can navigate these marketplaces without revealing their identities, which has contributed to a surge in accessibility for a wide range of substances. This shift has made it easier for students to obtain drugs without the traditional risks associated with face-to-face transactions, such as police intervention or social stigma. Moreover, online drug markets often feature user reviews and ratings, which can create a false sense of security for buyers. This digital feedback mechanism allows users to assess the quality and reliability of substances before making a purchase, which can normalize and encourage drug use among students. Rassool (2024) revealed that, the availability of detailed product descriptions and images further enhances the appeal of these markets, making it easier for students to make informed choices about what to buy. However, this can also lead to dangerous outcomes, as the authenticity and safety of the substances cannot always be guaranteed.

Additionally, the anonymity provided by online platforms can exacerbate issues of substance abuse. Students may feel emboldened by the perceived lack of consequences and may experiment with substances they would otherwise avoid in a more traditional setting. The convenience of purchasing drugs online, coupled with the ability to have them delivered discreetly, reduces barriers to access and increases the likelihood of misuse. In response to the challenges posed by online drug markets, higher education institutions and law enforcement agencies are exploring new strategies for prevention and intervention. These efforts include increasing awareness about the risks associated with online drug purchasing, implementing digital monitoring tools, and fostering a culture of open dialogue about substance use.

Technological Influences on Substance Use: Social Media Influence

Social media has emerged as a powerful force shaping attitudes and behaviours surrounding substance use, particularly among college students. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok serve as venues for sharing personal experiences, promoting substance use, and normalizing behaviours that may have previously been stigmatized (Heidari, et al., 2025). Influencers and peers often showcase their interactions with alcohol and recreational drugs, leading to a perception that such behaviours are not only acceptable but also desirable. This visibility create a culture where substance use is glamorized, encouraging imitation among impressionable users who wish to fit in or gain social approval. The interactive nature of social media further amplifies its influence on substance use. Users can engage with content through likes, shares, and comments, creating a feedback loop that reinforces positive perceptions of drug use. For example, posts depicting parties, celebrations, and social gatherings often highlight the presence of alcohol or drugs, framing them as integral to social success and enjoyment. This phenomenon can lead students to believe that participation in substance use is a necessary component of their college experience, increasing the likelihood of experimentation and misuse (Chen et al., (2023).

Moreover, social media has facilitated the rise of drug culture communities, where users exchange information about substances, including usage techniques, effects, and locations to obtain drugs. These online forums can provide a sense of belonging for individuals who might feel isolated in their substance use, further normalizing and legitimizing their behaviours. While some users may find support and camaraderie, these groups can also perpetuate risky practices and misinformation, potentially leading to harmful outcomes. Imran, and Zulfaqar, (2025) posits that, the anonymity afforded by social media can embolden users to share their substance use experiences without fear of judgment. This can lead to increased experimentation as users feel less constrained by societal norms. The impact of peer influence is magnified in digital spaces, where students may feel pressured to conform to perceived behaviours shared by their online friends or influencers. As a result, understanding the role of social media in shaping drug and substance use patterns is crucial for educators and policymakers aiming to address this issue effectively. Developing strategies to foster responsible online behaviours and create supportive environments for discussing substance use can mitigate the negative impacts of social media on student health.

Technological Influences on Substance Use: Mobile Apps and Accessibility

The proliferation of mobile apps has significantly transformed the accessibility of substances, impacting patterns of use among college students (Heidari, et al., 2025). With just a few taps on their smartphones, users can connect to various platforms that facilitate the purchase and distribution of drugs, making it easier than ever to obtain substances discreetly. These apps often leverage user-friendly interfaces and streamlined payment methods, including cryptocurrencies, which further enhance the appeal of online drug markets. As a result, students may find themselves engaging in substance use behaviours that they might not have considered in a more traditional context, driven via the convenience and anonymity offered by mobile technology. In addition to facilitating access to illicit drugs, mobile apps also play a role in shaping users' perceptions of substance use. Many mobile applications are designed to promote social interactions centred on drinking or drug use, offering features that encourage users to share their experiences and connect with others who have similar interests (Hassan and Omenogor, (2025)). For example, apps that track alcohol consumption or promote party events can inadvertently normalize heavy drinking and substance use, leading to increased experimentation among users. This gamification of substance use can create a sense of community, where individuals feel compelled to participate to belong or gain social validation. Moreover, while some mobile apps aim to address substance use issues such as providing resources for addiction recovery or promoting harm reduction strategies their effectiveness can be limited. Heidari, et al., (2025) purported that, several students may not seek out these supportive resources, opting instead for apps that cater to their desire for instant gratification and social engagement. The challenge lies in competing with the allure of apps that facilitate substance use while promoting healthier alternatives.

Bello et al., (2025) expressed that, the rise of health and wellness apps that focus on mental well-being serve as a double-edged sword. While they may offer strategies for coping with stress and anxiety common triggers for substance use students may still turn to drugs or alcohol as a primary means of managing these challenges. In this regards, understanding the dual role of mobile technology in both facilitating and addressing substance use is crucial for developing effective interventions. Educational institutions and public health initiatives must adapt to this changing landscape by leveraging technology to promote liable behaviours and provide accessible support for students grappling with substance use issues (Hassan and Omenogor, 2025).

Existing interventions and their effectiveness on drug and substance abuse in higher education

In response to the rising concerns about drug and substance abuse among college students, various interventions have been implemented across higher education institutions. Imran and Zulfaqar (2025) expressed that, these interventions aim to prevent substance use, reduce harm, and provide support for students struggling with addiction. Their effectiveness varies based on the approach taken and the specific context of the institution. Many colleges employ educational programs that focus on raising awareness about the risks associated with drug and substance use (Kvillemo et al., 2021). These programs often include workshops, seminars, and informational campaigns that address topics such as the effects of drugs and alcohol, coping strategies, and responsible decision-making. Ibid research indicated that educational interventions can increase awareness and knowledge, their long-term effectiveness in changing behaviour is often limited. However, students may retain information but may not apply it in real-life situations, particularly in social settings where peer pressure is strong.

Mental health counselling and support services are critical components of interventions aimed at addressing substance abuse (WHO, 2023). Many institutions offer counselling services that provide students with access to therapists and support groups. These services can be effective in helping students develop healthier coping mechanisms and address underlying mental health issues that contribute to substance use. Studies have shown that personalized counselling and peer support programs can lead to significant reductions in substance use and improvements in mental health outcomes.

Harm reduction strategies, such as providing access to naloxone for opioid overdoses or offering safe spaces for drug use, aim to minimize the negative consequences of substance use without necessarily requiring abstinence. These approaches have gained traction in many college settings, showing promise in reducing incidents of overdose and promoting safer practices among users. Evaluations of harm reduction programs indicate that they can effectively lower rates of substance-related harm, although acceptance and implementation can vary significantly between institutions (Taverna, 2025).

Hosting alcohol and drug-free social events is another intervention strategy aimed at providing students with alternative ways to socialize without the influence of substances. These events, which include activities like concerts, game nights, and wellness fairs, can foster community

and reduce the stigma associated with sober living. Research suggests that such initiatives may lead to decreased substance use among participants, as they provide opportunities for positive social engagement in a safe environment. Institutions often implement policies aimed at reducing substance use, such as stricter enforcement of alcohol and drug policies on campus (Mehdipour et al. 2025). While these policies can deter use through disciplinary measures, they may also have unintended consequences, such as pushing substance use underground. The effectiveness of policy changes largely depends on how they are communicated and enforced, as well as the overall campus culture regarding substance use.

Peer-led interventions, where students educate their peers about substance use, have proven effective in promoting a culture of support and accountability (World Health Organisation, 2023). These programs utilize peer influence to encourage healthy behaviours and share relatable experiences. Research shows that peer education can successfully change attitudes and behaviours regarding substance use, as students are often more receptive to messages from their contemporaries. The effectiveness of various interventions in higher education depends on multiple factors, including the institutional context, the targeted population, and the methods used. A multifaceted approach that includes education, counselling, harm reduction, and community engagement is likely to yield the best results. Ongoing evaluation and adaptation of these interventions are essential to address the evolving needs of students and effectively combat substance abuse.

Theoretical frameworks:

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory emphasizes the role of observational learning, imitation, and modelling in shaping behaviours. In the context of substance abuse among students during the 4th Industrial Revolution, this theory provides a framework for understanding how technological advancements and social norms influence such behaviours. Students often learn by observing peers, and if substance use is normalized in a social group, others may feel pressured to imitate these behaviours, especially with the glamorization seen on social media. The 4th Industrial Revolution introduces technologies that can both exacerbate and mitigate substance abuse (Odenigbo, and Ajibo, 2025). Online platforms can normalize drug use while also providing educational resources that encourage healthier choices. Social Learning Theory suggests that the presentation of information online significantly affects students' attitudes toward substance use. Positive messaging can counter harmful narratives,

and peer approval encourages substance use, whereas negative consequences resembling academic failure can deter it.

Interventions to reduce substance abuse should leverage Social Learning Theory by promoting positive peer influence. Peer-led programs and educational campaigns on social media can highlight role models who demonstrate the benefits of sobriety, inspiring students to adopt healthier behaviours. Integrating these positive narratives into students' digital environments, the effectiveness of interventions can be enhanced. Overall, applying Bandura's theory offers valuable insights for educators and policymakers, enabling the development of comprehensive strategies that incorporate positive role modelling and address digital influences to reduce substance abuse in educational settings.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research will employ a qualitative case study design to explore the societal and technological impacts of drug and substance abuse in higher education, focusing specifically on two state colleges in Gwanda. The case study approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics at play, providing rich, contextual insights that quantitative methods may overlook. This qualitative research design will provide a comprehensive understanding of the societal and technological impacts of drug and substance abuse in higher education during the 4th Industrial Revolution. The semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, aims to capture diverse perspectives and generate valuable insights that can inform future interventions and policies in the two state colleges in Gwanda.

Research Methods

Sampling and Participants

Purposeful sampling will be utilized to select participants who possess direct experience or substantial knowledge of substance abuse issues within the two state colleges. This includes students, faculty members, counsellors, and community health workers who interact with affected individuals or are involved in prevention and intervention programs. Purposeful sampling is appropriate because it targets information-rich cases that can provide deep insights into the societal and technological impacts of substance abuse in higher education.

Recruitment Process

Recruitment will be conducted through a combination of institutional collaboration and voluntary participation. The researcher will first obtain permission from college authorities and counsellors to identify potential participants who meet the inclusion criteria. Notices and invitations explaining the research objectives, confidentiality measures, and participation requirements will be distributed via college notice boards, emails, and student support offices. Interested individuals will then contact the researcher directly or through designated coordinators, after which consent forms will be shared and participation scheduled at convenient times.

Sample Size and Data Saturation

The study will recruit an initial sample of approximately 20 participants, representing a balanced mix of students, faculty, and support staff from the two colleges. While 20 may seem modest, the goal of qualitative research is depth rather than breadth. This number is considered sufficient to capture diverse perspectives across participant categories while allowing for in-depth exploration of emerging themes. Data collection will continue until data saturation is achieved the point at which no new information, themes, or insights emerge from interviews or focus group discussions. Should new perspectives continue to arise after the 20th participant, additional participants will be interviewed until saturation is reached. The emphasis on saturation ensures that the findings are comprehensive, credible, and reflective of the varied realities within the study context

Data Collection Techniques

Structured Interview

In-depth, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with participants to gather personal experiences and perceptions regarding the societal and technological impacts of substance abuse. Interviews will be guided by open-ended questions, allowing participants to express their views freely while ensuring that key topics are covered.

Focus Groups:

Two to three focus group discussions will be organized, bringing together students and faculty to discuss their collective experiences and opinions. This method encourages interaction and can reveal shared concerns and ideas that might not emerge in individual interviews.

Observation

Observation will be a key research tool to explore the societal and technological impacts of drug and substance abuse in higher education at two state colleges in Gwanda. This will involve both participant and non-participant observation, allowing the researcher to engage with the college environment and observe student interactions related to substance use. By documenting substance-related activities and social media discussions, the researcher capture the complexities of substance abuse among students. Observing campus infrastructure, such as support services and recreational facilities, will provide context on available resources. This observational data will enhance interviews and focus groups, offering a comprehensive understanding of how societal and technological factors influence students' experiences with substance abuse.

Data Analysis

The research on the societal and technological impacts of drug and substance abuse in higher education will employ thematic analysis to identify patterns in qualitative data from interviews, focus groups and observations. The data will be transcribed and organized for review, with key themes such as societal influences, technological engagement, and coping mechanisms being coded and categorized. Triangulating data from multiple sources will enhance the validity of the findings, offering a comprehensive understanding of how these factors influence substance use among students in two state colleges in Gwanda. This approach will highlight individual experiences and inform broader educational policies and community interventions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial in researching the societal and technological impacts of drug and substance abuse in higher education due to the sensitive nature of the topic. This study will obtain informed consent from all participants, ensuring they understand the research purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality will be upheld by anonymizing data and securely storing it to protect participants' identities. The

research will also aim to minimise potential harm by providing resources for support and counselling if discussions trigger emotional distress. Ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant institutional review board to ensure adherence to established ethical standards. The priority of these considerations, offer valuable insights while safeguarding participants' well-being.

RESULTS

How has technology in the Fourth Industrial Revolution transformed the accessibility of drug and substance abuse?

Digital and Platform-Based Drug Markets

Participant 1 had this to say, *“These days, you don’t need to know a dealer in person; you just log in, send a message, and the drugs arrive like an online order”*. Participant 2 adds that *“Social media groups work like shops now people post menus, prices, and delivery options, so getting pills or cough syrup is as simple as ordering take-away.”* Participant 3 opined that, *“The dark web and encrypted apps make everyone feel safer from the police, so more people are willing to try buying drugs online”*.

Datafication, and Risk Patterns

Participant 4 shared this, *“When you see five-star reviews on certain tablets, you start trusting them like they’re normal products, not dangerous drugs.”* Another Participant 5 revealed that, *“Sellers follow the trends they see online if everyone is talking about a new crystal or syrup, more dealers start stocking it.”* Moreso, Participant 6 gave the following sentiments, *“The platforms track what people buy and then push similar stuff, so if you order once, you keep getting suggestions for stronger or cheaper drugs.”*

Digital Surveillance

Participant 7 said this, *“We know they are watching, so people keep moving from one app to another and use codes for drug names.”* Participant 8 had this to say, *“Sometimes accounts disappear after a raid or arrest, but new pages pop up quickly, so it doesn’t really stop the business.”* Participant 9 posits that, *“Everyone talks about digital footprints now; some friends only use crypto and hidden markets because they fear being tracked.”*

Technological factors contribute to the proliferation of synthetic drugs and online drug markets?

Anonymity and Online Platforms

Participant 10 indicated that, *“You don’t have to meet a dealer anymore; you just text on a secure app and they send the location or deliver to your gate.”* Participant 11 said this, *“There are closed social media groups where people advertise pills and syrups like they are selling clothes, and new members join through invites.”* Participant 12 opined that, *“Because the chats are encrypted and accounts can be deleted anytime, people feel more confident buying drugs online than on the street.”*

Cryptocurrencies and Digital Finance

Participant 13 commented that, *“Once I learnt to use crypto, sending money for drugs felt less risky than using my bank or mobile account.”* Participant 14 also said that, *“Vendors prefer crypto because it’s harder to trace, so they even give discounts if you pay with coins instead of cash.”* Participant 15 *“People say as long as you move the coins through different wallets, nobody can easily follow the trail back to you.”*

Globalised Production

Participant 16 commented that, *“Most of the powders and pills are said to come in small packages from overseas, mixed with normal online orders.”* Participant 17 *“People track their drug parcels the same way they track shoes or phones, using courier apps and delivery updates.”* Participant 18 adds that, *“Sometimes drugs arrive hidden in everyday items like electronics or cosmetics, so customs and police struggle to pick them out.”*

Logistics and Datafication

Participant 19 had this to say, *“Sellers watch which products get the best ratings and then stock more of those, especially the stronger or cheaper ones.”* Participant 20 opined that, *“If a vendor delivers fast and gets good reviews, their page appears at the top, so more people buy from them.”* Participant 3 shared this, *“The system remembers your past orders and suggests similar drugs, so it becomes easy to keep ordering without even searching.”*

How emerging technologies can be leveraged to prevent, monitor substance abuse?

Digital Prevention and Education Tools

Participant 1 said that, *“Learners actually pay attention to the app because it has videos and quizzes about drugs, not just a teacher talking in front.”* Participant 2 had this to say, *“The online modules explain the side effects in simple language, so even those who skip workshops can still learn on their phones.”* Participant 13 adds that, *“Serious games we tried at school made us practice saying no in different situations, and it felt more real than just reading a pamphlet.”*

Monitoring, Screening, and Early Warning

Participant 11 revealed that, *“The app tracks my mood and sleep, and when the pattern looks risky, it sends me a check-in message before I even think of using.”* Participant 6 propounded that, *“My counsellor showed me how the wearable picked up changes in my heart rate when I was stressed, so we could talk about triggers early.”* Participant 7 said that, *“The system can see when a lot of people in one area start searching about a certain pill, and they alert clinics before it becomes a big problem.”*

Technology-Enabled Treatment and Support

Participant 4 had this to say, *“When I can’t travel, I still meet my therapist on video, so I don’t miss sessions and lose progress.”* Participant 8 adds that, *“The recovery app reminds me about my goals, medication, and support meetings, and it messages me if I skip check-ins.”* Participant 9: *“Even late at night, I can talk to people in an online support group or use the chatbot instead of going back to drinking or drugs.”*

Discussion of the findings

The findings show that Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies have fundamentally reshaped how people access, use, and attempt to control drugs, creating a highly digitised, platform-driven ecosystem that both amplifies risk and opens new avenues for intervention. Participants’ narratives around digital and platform-based drug markets highlight a profound shift from traditional, face-to-face street dealing to an “on-demand” model where drugs are obtained through social media, messaging apps, and the dark web much like ordinary e-commerce goods. Statements such as “you just log in, send a message, and the drugs arrive like an online order” and descriptions of social media groups that operate like online shops underscore how convenience, perceived safety, and familiarity with digital platforms lower psychological and practical barriers to drug procurement. These accounts align with evidence that online and dark-web markets extend geographic reach, increase product variety, and normalize drug purchase behaviour by wrapping it in everyday digital shopping practices. Similarly, the theme of datafication and risk patterns shows how rating systems, reviews, and algorithmic recommendations recast drugs as consumer products with “five-star” quality signals, encouraging trust and experimentation. When participants report that they start trusting certain tablets because they have high ratings, or that platforms “push similar stuff” after a first order, they are describing the same feedback loops and recommendation logics that drive engagement in mainstream e-commerce. This supports research arguing that digital metrics not only optimize supply but actively shape demand, accelerating the diffusion of potent synthetic substances and making risk harder to perceive in an environment framed by convenience, customization, and positive user feedback. At the same time, the digital surveillance theme

reveals a parallel awareness that authorities use technology to monitor these spaces, prompting evasive tactics such as code words, frequent account changes, and migration between platforms. Participants' talk of "being watched," disappearing accounts after raids, and reliance on crypto and hidden markets shows a dynamic "arms race" between surveillance technologies and user adaptation, consistent with studies documenting how law-enforcement monitoring of online drug markets triggers rapid innovation in concealment and operational security among vendors and buyers.

The second set of themes, on technological factors driving the proliferation of synthetic drugs and online markets, deepens this picture by specifying how anonymity, digital finance, and globalised production and logistics interact. Participants' descriptions of secure apps, closed social media groups, and deletable accounts show how communication technologies provide both anonymity and social connectivity, allowing drug supply chains to embed themselves in familiar digital environments used for everyday communication. This supports literature that identifies encrypted and semi-open online spaces as key infrastructures for contemporary drug distribution. Their comments on cryptocurrencies viewed as safer, less traceable payment methods that even attract discounts illustrate how digital finance lowers the perceived risks of transacting, while also enabling cross-border deals and complicating financial monitoring. This perception echoes analyses of how crypto-assets are used to facilitate illicit drug payments, obscure money trails, and support globalised synthetic drug supply chains. In parallel, references to small overseas parcels mixed with normal online orders, detailed parcel tracking, and drugs hidden in everyday items reflect how participants experience the integration of synthetic drug flows into mainstream e-commerce and logistics systems. These accounts corroborate research showing that low-volume, high-frequency shipments via postal and courier services have become central to synthetic drug distribution, exploiting the sheer volume and complexity of legitimate trade. Finally, the logistics and datafication theme where sellers monitor which products get the best ratings, benefit from visibility when they deliver fast, and rely on systems that remember and recommend similar drugs demonstrates that online drug markets are not only facilitated by technology but actively governed by it. Participants recognise that reputation systems and algorithmic ranking shape which vendors thrive and which substances gain prominence, reinforcing claims those platform logics are central to the resilience, adaptability, and growth of online illicit markets.

The third cluster of findings, on how emerging technologies can be leveraged to prevent and monitor substance abuse, shows that the same digital infrastructures underpinning risk can also

support innovative prevention and treatment responses. Participant comments about learners paying attention to apps with videos and quizzes, online modules explaining side effects in simple language, and serious games that simulate refusal situations suggest that digital prevention and education tools can increase engagement, personalise content, and reach those who might avoid traditional didactic sessions. This resonates with evidence that technology-delivered prevention programs particularly interactive and game-based formats can improve knowledge, attitudes, and refusal skills among youth while overcoming logistical barriers in schools and communities. In the monitoring, screening, and early-warning theme, participants describe apps that track mood and sleep, wearables that reveal physiological signs of stress, and systems that detect spikes in searches for particular pills and alert clinics. These accounts reflect growing interest in AI-enabled and sensor-based monitoring to identify high-risk states and emerging drug trends, supporting research that highlights the potential of digital phenotyping, predictive analytics, and integrated data sources for early detection and targeted intervention, provided that consent, ethics, and privacy are carefully managed. Likewise, the technology-enabled treatment and support theme in which participants value video sessions when they cannot travel, appreciate apps that remind them of goals and medication, and rely on online groups or chatbots during vulnerable moments illustrates the practical ways telehealth, digital recovery tools, and virtual peer networks can extend the therapeutic environment beyond clinic walls. These lived experiences mirror findings that telemedicine, digital CBT modules, recovery apps, and online peer support can improve access, continuity of care, and adherence, particularly for individuals facing distance, stigma, or scheduling barriers. Taken together, the prevention and treatment themes indicate that emerging technologies, when appropriately designed and integrated into existing health and social systems, can counterbalance some of the risks introduced by digital drug markets by providing more responsive, accessible, and youth-friendly support.

Conclusion

The case study of drug and substance abuse in higher education institutions in Gwanda illustrates the multifaceted societal and technological impacts of this critical issue during the 4th Industrial Revolution. While substance abuse poses significant challenges to academic success and community well-being, technology offers pathways for prevention and support. A collaborative approach that integrates educational initiatives, community involvement, and

technological solutions is essential for addressing the complexities of substance abuse in higher education.

Recommendations

- The research recommends that state colleges implement comprehensive educational programs on drug and substance abuse awareness and prevention. These programs should educate students about the risks of substance use, promote healthy coping mechanisms, and teach resistance skills.
- **Strengthen community and parental involvement by** encouraging collaboration between colleges, families, and local communities to create a supportive network for students.
- Colleges should develop systems to analyse attendance, academic performance, and self-reported substance use to identify at-risk individuals early. Targeted interventions should be implemented, ensuring that students receive the support they need before issues escalate.
- Colleges should invest in extracurricular programs, clubs, and events that promote healthy lifestyles and social interactions without the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Colleges should provide accessible mental health services on campus, recognising the connection between substance abuse and mental health. Counselling centers must be adequately staffed to address both issues.
- Educational institutions should develop clear policies on substance use that encompass prevention, intervention, and disciplinary measures and must be communicated to both students and staff.
- Ongoing research should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of programs and strategies related to substance abuse.

References

Amaro, H., Sanchez, M., Bautista, T., and Cox, R. 2021. Social vulnerabilities for substance use: Stressors, socially toxic environments, and discrimination and racism. *Neuropharmacology*, 188, 10851.

Aggarwal, A., Tam, C. C., Wu, D., Li, X., & Qiao, S. (2023). Artificial intelligence–based chatbots for promoting health behavioral changes: systematic review. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 25, e40789.

Andersson, M. J. (2025). *Mental health in elite sports: Epidemiology, risk factors, and treatment experiences*. [Doctoral dissertation, Lund University]

Babor, T. F. (2020). Treatment systems for population management of substance use disorders: requirements and priorities from a public health perspective. In *Textbook of addiction treatment: international perspectives* (pp. 553-567). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Bello, M. L., Isiaka, S. B., Akintola, M. A., Ameen, A., Amosa, J. R., Adeoye, T. O., & AbdulKareem, A. K. (2025). The Double-Edged Sword of ICT: Balancing Efficiency and Wellbeing in Nigeria's Public Workforce. *Advances in Humanities and Contemporary Studies*, 6(1), 200-208.

Bouchrika, I. (2024). 50 Current student stress statistics: 2024 data, analysis & predictions. *Education*;

Cavitch, M. (2025). *Psychoanalysis and the University: Resistance and Renewal from Freud to the Present*. Taylor & Francis.

Chen, S., Cao, Z., Prettnner, K., Kuhn, M., Yang, J., Jiao, L. & Wang, C. (2023). Estimates and projections of the global economic cost of 29 cancers in 204 countries and territories from 2020 to 2050. *JAMA oncology*, 9(4), 465-472.

Gooding, P. (2019). Mapping the rise of digital mental health technologies: Emerging issues for law and society. *International journal of law and psychiatry*, 67, 101498.

Hassan, E., & Omenogor, C. E. (2025). AI powered predictive healthcare: Deep learning for early diagnosis, personalized treatment, and disease prevention.

Heidari, M., Zareipour, M., Mataji-Amirroud, M., & Mataji-Amirroud, M. (2025). Exploring Peer Influence: A Phenomenological Analysis of Adolescent Propensities for Association with Deviant Peers and Substance Use. *Deviant Behavior*, 1-23.

Huang, M., & Yongquan, T. (2025). Tech-driven excellence: A quantitative analysis of cutting-edge technology impact on professional sports training. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 41(1), e13082.

Imran, S., & Zulfaqar, M. (2025). The art of social media influencers: exploring women's healthcare marketing journey to prescription drug abuse and treatment engagement. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing*.

Kabir, M. N. (2019). Technologies of the future. In *Knowledge-Based Social Entrepreneurship: Understanding Knowledge Economy, Innovation, and the Future of Social Entrepreneurship* (pp. 91-133). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Kickbusch, I., Piselli, D., Agrawal, A., Balicer, R., Banner, O., Adelhardt, M., ... & Wong, B. L. H. (2021). The Lancet and Financial Times Commission on governing health futures 2030: growing up in a digital world. *The Lancet*, 398(10312), 1727-1776.

Kvillemo, P., Hiltunen, L., Demetry, Y., Carlander, A. K., Hansson, T., Gripenberg, J., ... & Skoglund, C. (2021). How to prevent alcohol and illicit drug use among students in affluent areas: a qualitative study on motivation and attitudes towards prevention. *Substance abuse treatment, prevention, and policy*, 16(1), 83.

Maunye, S. (2025). *An exploration of the problem representations constructed within the South African National Drug Master Plan 4th Edition (2019-2024)*. [Master's thesis, University of Cape Town]. OpenUC

Mbunge, E., Batani, J., Chitungo, I., Moyo, E., Musuka, G., Muchemwa, B., & Dzinamarira, T. (2023). Towards Data-Driven Artificial Intelligence Models for Monitoring, Modelling and Predicting Illicit Substance Use. In *Proceedings of the Computational Methods in Systems and Software* (pp. 361-379). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

Mehdipour Maralani, F., & Pfeiffer, S. (2025). The unique social-emotional challenges that bright immigrant youth face. *Gifted Education International*, 41(1), 137-157.

Nyblade, L., Mingkwan, P., & Stockton, M. A. (2021). Stigma reduction: an essential ingredient to ending AIDS by 2030. *The lancet HIV*, 8(2), e106-e113.

Odenigbo, C. I., & Ajibo, D. U. (2025). Portrayal of Substance-Use by Social Media Celebrities and its Influence on Substance Abuse among Students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology. *Journal For Family & Society Research*, 4(1).

Oosthuizen, R. M. (2021). The fourth industrial revolution: A resilience-based coping strategy for disruptive change. In *Agile coping in the digital workplace: Emerging issues for research and practice* (pp. 11-34). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Paul, F. A., Dangroo, A. A., Saikia, P., Ganie, A. U. R., Zaid, M., Das, M., & Gogoi, R. (2024). Societal and Individual Impacts of Substance Abuse: A Comprehensive Exploration. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems* (pp. 1-24). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Pincus, H. A., Scholle, S. H., Spaeth-Rublee, B., Hepner, K. A., & Brown, J. (2016). Quality measures for mental health and substance use: gaps, opportunities, and challenges. *Health Affairs*, 35(6), 1000-1008.

Rassool, G. H. (2024). *Alcohol and drug misuse: A guide for health and social care professionals*. Routledge.

Taverna, M. (2025). *Home delivery in the healthcare sector: A literature review and an empirical analysis* (Unpublished Thesis)

Voronkova, V., Vasylychuk, G., Nikitenko, V., Kaganov, Y., & Metelenko, N. (2023). Transformation of digital education in the era of the fourth industrial revolution and globalization.

World Health Organization. (2023). *Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) guideline for mental, neurological and substance use disorders*. World Health Organization

Yin, R. K. 2003. *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Challenges in managing Drug and Substance abuse in schools. A Case of Five Secondary Schools in Masvingo District-Zimbabwe

Denias Muzenda 

Lecturer - Robert Mugabe School of Education, Educational Leadership and Management,
Great Zimbabwe University

Email: muzeden@gmail.com | **ORCID:** 0009- 1905-5384

***Corresponding Author:** Denias Muzenda, muzeden@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the challenges in managing drug and substance abuse in schools in five secondary schools in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe. Drug and substance abuse is a pervasive global problem affecting individuals, families, schools and communities. In the Sub-Saharan context, leaders face significant challenges in managing this scourge, particularly among adolescents in schools. The challenge negatively affects school management, teachers and parents. Qualitative and descriptive research methods were used. The population comprised 20 secondary schools, 20 heads, 600 teachers and 20 000 learners. The sample interviewed had 5 schools with 5 school heads, 5 teachers (purposive sampling) and 25 learners randomly sampled. The study findings revealed that peer pressure is the leading cause of drug and substance abuse. Furthermore, school environments significantly contribute to the proliferation of drug abuse among learners, particularly at adolescent stage where the need for acceptance in social groups is highly valued. Heads of schools face challenges because of social, economic and external contexts. Awareness programmes are not very effective in some schools. Teachers, learners and heads concluded that the absence of capacity-building workshops was leading to drug abuse among learners. There is a clear need for professional development in managing students. The study recommended parental engagement in regulating learner behaviour.

Key words: Challenges, drug and substance abuse, secondary schools.

1.1 Background to the study

Drug or substance abuse is a common problem in the world. It is a big worry for societies and authorities throughout North America and Latin America, especially the Mexican-USA border, Ngesu et al, (2008). It is fast becoming the leading cause of death, mental illness, unproductivity and disintegrated families (Volkow, 2020). Among the most affected are the younger generation, according to Kim, Hong, Lee & Hyun (2017). The World Health

Organization's report in 2005 indicates that there are about 200 million opiate addicts in the world. This seems to suggest that there is a great need to curb drug or substance abuse. It has cut across almost all races, religions and nationalities (Anderson et al, 2020).

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2013), between 155 and 250 million people used illicit drugs at least once in the year. Another report by (WHO) in (2019) indicates that about 31 million people have drug use disorders throughout the world and Zimbabwe has the highest rate of 15-19-year-old people involved in heavy drinking. In a related recent report in 2023, UNODC also reported a 23% global increase in people using illicit drugs. This insight further gives impetus to this study in addressing this drug or substance abuse problem among learners in secondary and tertiary schools.

Global forums such as International Police (hereafter referred to as INTERPOL) have responded to the drug abuse challenge by tirelessly working towards fighting drug movements across international boundaries (Batsell, 2018; Maraire & Chethiyar, 2020). The World Health Organization has also responded to the issue of drug abuse by setting up international standards for drug abuse treatment and rehabilitation (WHO, 2019). The Zimbabwean government has responded to the issue by working on a drug abuse Master plan that serves to ensure that drug abusers get necessary treatment and rehabilitation at an affordable cost (ZCLDN, 2020).

The President E.D. Mnangagwa on February 1, 2019 appealed to all stakeholders to collaborate and offer recommendations to the Ministry of Health and Childcare in drafting a National Drug Control Master Plan. The launch was preceded by the setting up of an inter-ministerial committee to deal with the rising causes of drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe. The Plan is underpinned by five pillars namely; supply reduction, demand reduction, harm reduction, treatment and rehabilitation, community reintegration, media and communications (Kwaramba et al, 2024).

According to the Ministry of Health and Child Care, Zimbabwe has made remarkable strides towards improving the mental health system through decentralization of mental health institutions and capacitating human and logistical resources (Mangesh & Chibanda, 2010). Those who develop drug abuse- related mental illnesses are admitted into mental health institutions where they undergo detox programs, medical care and receive inpatient rehabilitation like cognitive-behavioural therapy and occupational therapy (Nhunzvi et al, 2019). However, it is worth noting that due to the economic challenges, the health sector has

been characterized by limited budgetary allocations, an acute shortage of medical supplies and reliance on external funding (Atieno et al, 2022).

Reports from other online media platforms have revealed that public health facilities are struggling to deal with the swelling numbers of hospitalizations due to drug and substance abuse and in most cases, patients are being turned away due to shortage of human resources and hospital capacity to accommodate patients (Gwarisa (2023). Reports have also revealed that by the end of 2023, drug rehabilitation centers in Zimbabwe were full and unable to cope with the rising demand to accommodate new patients. In 2024, 50% of the people at Ingutsheni Mental Hospital were drug abusers (Gonye & Chikandiwa, 2024). .

Another major challenge has been the limited capacity of public health institutions to deal with drug and substance abuse, with reports indicating that the available institutions are overwhelmed. Some patients are now being sent to prison for three months to cool off instead of being treated at hospitals as the relevant institutions cannot cope (Nyathi, 2022). Where some private centers take in drug and substance patients, the charges are exorbitant (Mutaka, 2022). The belief by most African communities that mental illness is associated with witchcraft is also another challenge affecting drug and substance management in Zimbabwe since the addicts are normally not sent to health institutions for treatment. Hence the relevance of conducting this study to address this challenge of drug and substance abuse.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOS) and embassies have also engaged in anti-drug awareness campaigns, with some of them contributing financial resources (Gonye and Chikandiwa, 2024). According to a study carried out by Chikoko et al (2016), Non-Governmental Organizations support the rehabilitation of youth drug abusers but they face numerous challenges like registering under Private Voluntary Organization Act Chapter 17:05. Similarly, there have been concerns that the progress and achievements made under the plan have not been made public, thus calling into question the efficacy of this noble cause (Mandura, 2023).

Law enforcement agents in Zimbabwe have responded to the issue of drug abuse by the youth through enforcing the laws of the country (Makande, 2017). In early 2023, ZRP launched a nationwide operation targeting drug peddlers and drug addicts, culminating in the arrest of about 1903 of them as of February 2023, (Madura, 2023). They conducted raids and confiscated drugs as well as destroying four bases in three provinces, namely two in Harare Metropolitan (Mbare & Epworth) and one in Midlands (Gweru) and one in Mashonaland West

(Gwayagwaya shopping center). However, it is worth noting that most of the drug addicts were released upon payment of fines. But, the involvement of police officers and politicians in the illicit drug and substance trade became another obstacle, a fact confirmed by the Minister of Home affairs in a 2023 media briefing (Mandura, 2023). This challenge made it difficult to stop the issue of drug and substance abuse. Again, this seems to suggest that there should be stiffer punishments for offenders, like custodial sentences, since current measures are not effective.

The Criminal Investigations Department (Drugs and Narcotics) and Community Policing and Crime Prevention also conducts awareness campaign programmes on drugs and their effect in the community (Magaya, 2017). They educate drug abusers together with their families in communities, schools, churches and growth points. However, it is worth noting that such interventions have not yielded desired results. Corruption is rampant in the drug industry. Detectives accept bribes from drug abusers, dealers and peddlers. Voice of America (VOA) once reported that Police Officers in Zimbabwe are receiving more than 100 cases of drug abuse every month in the capital city of Masvingo alone. But that figure has increased in 2024, indicating the need for further research on the intervention strategies being undertaken by home affairs.

Despite efforts by the government of Zimbabwe to amend the Dangerous Drugs Act Chapter 15:02 in 2024 in an attempt to include counselling on a dangerous drug, a lot of youths are still involved in drug peddling. It is even worrisome to note that international boundaries are becoming permeable and porous, making accessibility to dangerous drugs increasingly widespread. To make matters worse, after serving their sentences, drug abusers go back into the same environment, with the same mind set (Makande, 2017). Therefore, this study is important in addressing this issue or gap.

Communities in Zimbabwe also play a pivotal role in combating drug abuse by the youth. They support youth drug abusers through educating and encouraging them to desist from perpetuating the habit. However, the Zimbabwean community has mixed feelings about the issue of drug abuse by the youth. For example, Moyo (2015) explains that marijuana is sprinkled around the house, ingested or burnt to drive away evil spirits, therefore, there is over-familiarisation with the drug by the youths such that they easily revert to abusing it. Moreover, the church in Zimbabwe supports drug abusers in terms of pastoral counselling services. However, it is worth noting that the church lacks proper counselling skills and theories to

manage drug addiction. New trends are even emerging, for example, Bluetooth which entails infusion of an intoxicated person's blood into an unintoxicated person using syringes (Matsikiti, 2023). This often comes with a risk attracting STIs, especially HIV. Hence, it is crucial to conduct this study to address the ineffectiveness of all these measures. There have also been reports that young addicts are even dipping diapers and bleach products into boiling water and inhaling the vapour for intoxication (Madura, 2023).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Education is a tool for social development and transformation. It is the duty of any government to provide its citizens with education as part of nation- building. In Zimbabwe, the education system starts from ECD to tertiary level. Key pillars in the financing of the ECD education are the parents, the Ministry of Education and different stakeholders that include counsellors and psycho-support units. These provide infrastructure, material, fees, food and mental guidance to the society affected by drug and substance abuse issues. However, there are challenges that hinder the counselling support teams from delivering effective drug and substance control strategies and these include social issues and engagement strategies. Control strategies should be positive or rather ideal. Currently anticipated effectiveness of the substance abuse control strategies doesn't flow smoothly. As a result, the resources are wasted. Hence, the purpose of this study was to assess the challenges in managing Drug and Substance Abuse in schools. A case of five secondary schools in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe.

1.3. Main research objective

To assess the challenges in managing Drug and Substance Abuse in schools. A case of five secondary schools in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe.

1.3.1 Sub-research objectives

The study sought to:

- 1) Assess the roles of counsellors on drug and substance abuse cases in secondary schools under Masvingo District.
- 2) Examine the extent to which parents and other stakeholders engage counselling teams assisting drug and substance abuse learners.
- 3) Assess the challenges faced by counselling teams in the implementation of drug and substance abuse prevention strategies.

- 4) To suggest possible recommendations for improvements in the implementation of drug and substance abuse prevention strategies in secondary schools.

1.4 Main Question

What are the challenges in managing Drug and Substance Abuse in secondary schools in Masvingo District-Zimbabwe?

1.4.1 Sub-Research Questions

1. What are the roles of counsellors on drug and substance abuse cases in secondary schools under Masvingo District?
2. To what extent do parents and other stakeholders engage counselling teams in assisting drug and substance abuse learners?
3. What are the challenges faced by counselling teams in the implementation of drug and substance abuse prevention strategies?
4. What are the possible recommendations for improvements in the implementation of drug and substance abuse prevention strategies in secondary schools?

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Managing Drug and Substance Abuse

Drug and substance abuse refers to the use of certain chemicals for the purpose of creating pleasurable effects in the brain (1). It occurs when you use alcohol, prescription medicine, and other legal and illegal substances too much or in the wrong way (Matsikiti, 2023). (2) Substance abuse differs from addiction, as many people with substance abuse problems may quit or can change their unhealthy behaviours (3) Addiction, on the other hand, is a disease. (3) By addressing the immediate risks and reducing the long-term harm associated with substance use, harm reduction provides practical solutions that meet people where they are, helping to protect their health and dignity while offering a path toward improved health and well-being (Mutaka, 2022).

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by the Programme Implementation Theory designed by Roberts 1997

Programme Theory processes can be very beneficial to organisations looking to create or update programmes, products, or other types of initiatives. Specifically, they can help stakeholders determine and align assumptions, develop a shared understanding of the need, document specifications as a basis for funding, make it easier to identify successes and challenges, and ensure decisions are based on a complete and consistent set of information.

Situation Analysis is a comprehensive analysis designed to understand the nature and extent of a problem or need in order to set the stage for future change. It focuses on answering the question “what problem are we trying to solve” by understanding the components of a problem, including the size of the problem, its causes, consequences if left unsolved, who is affected by it, its history, and potential future scenarios of the problem if it is unaddressed. This comprehensive analysis, which digs deep to fully understand the problem that the new programme or product seeks to address, lays the foundation for all future stages of the process. At C1C, we partner with our clients to identify the optimal data sources that provide insight into the problem, need, or gap. We then gather data from a variety of sources such as historical data from archival sources and new data from interviews, listening sessions, focus groups, surveys, and assessments. We analyse all of this data using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods. We then cull t the critical insights that tell a story of the data in order to set the stage for building a Theory of Change.

2.3 Review of the empirical related literature

A review of related literature in this study is guided by the following sub-research questions

2.3.1The role of counsellors on drug and substance abuse cases in secondary schools.

According to literature reviewed by the researcher, a substance abuse counsellor, also known as an addiction counsellor, is a trained professional who provides support and guidance to individuals struggling with Substance Use Disorders (SUDs). These counsellors’ help clients address the root causes of their addictions, develop coping strategies, and work towards sustained recovery. Their work goes beyond treating the addiction itself; they focus on

helping clients improve their overall quality of life, regain control, and build healthier relationships (Smith, 2023).

Why Substance Abuse Counselling Matters

Literature reviewed shows that the importance of substance abuse counselling has grown alongside the increase in addiction rates. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, nearly 20 million Americans suffer from substance use disorders, with only a fraction receiving the treatment they need (WHO, 2022). Substance abuse counsellors serve as essential guides, helping clients navigate their recovery journey and offering critical support to prevent relapse and reinforce.

Substance use, abuse and addiction are among the leading causes of adolescent death in the United States (Brannigan, Schackman, Falco, & Millman, 2024; Sussman, Dent, & Galaif, 2017).

School counsellors are typically part of the prevention programme by presenting guidance curriculum lessons about character development and peer pressure. School counsellors are also positioned to offer additional prevention services for students who are at risk.

Research shows that students who are living in low social economic status (SES) may use illegal substances to handle the stress caused by their environment. Lower income and lower parental education are associated with higher substance abuse (Goodman & Huang, 2020). Other conditions related to increase substance abuse in adolescents are peer pressure, neighbourhood atmosphere, parental drug abuse, disorganised families, family history of mental health concerns, family violence, anxiety, rebellion and a culture of drug abuse. The current study addresses a gap on issues unresolved in the Masvingo District.

Protective factors can help fight the risks. Stable homes and adults who encourage high achievement, positive self-image, strong self-esteem, academic success and good health help support a life without abuse of drugs. Peers who are drug free are also a protective factor.

School counsellors are there to provide intentional support to students who are at risk. These students need specified support. Empirical evidence reviewed by the researcher shows that school counsellors can provide this in the following ways:

1. Discussing the availability of therapy, jobs, education, recreation, and transportation in the student's community (Sussman et al., 2018).
2. Serving as liaisons for students who have social concerns. They can facilitate assessments for learning disabilities, health concerns, psychological concerns and family functioning (ASCA, 2020; Sussman et al., 2018).
3. Involving parents – parents are vital to students' success. Counsellors can work with parents on prevention plans, parent trainings, and parent involvement at the building level (Mclaughlin & Vacha, 2023).
4. Creating a climate of trust to assist these students with enhancing protective factors. (Mclaughlin & Vacha, 2023)

5. Providing accountability factors. This is necessary to validate progress and document student's substance use and misuse (ASCA, 2020: Comerci & Schwebel, 2022: Sussman et al., 2018).
6. Incorporating shaping, modelling, role playing, assertiveness trainings and other behavioural and cognitive approaches in their counselling sessions with students (McLaughlin & Vacha, 2023: Meichenbaum, 2017: Weinberg et al, 2018).
7. Encouraging students to get involved in pro-social activities at school or in the community (Pate, Trost, Levin, & Dowda, 2020).

School counsellors are ideally situated to identify students who are at risk, collaborate with parents and stakeholders, and develop prevention and treatment plans for them.

The literature reviewed above is helpful to the current research in establishing what counsellors in Masvingo District are doing and not doing. Challenges can then be established by the participants and the researcher during the interview process.

2.3.2 The extent to which parents and other stakeholders engage counselling teams towards assisting of drug and substance abuse learners.

In this study, literature was sought on the extent to which parents and other stakeholders engage counselling teams in assisting drug and substance abuse learners. Empirical evidence shows that, psycho-educating parents about confidentiality, ethical considerations, and privacy helps them in better understanding the counselling process and thereby supporting it (Huss, Norris, Bryant, & Mulet, 2008). Confidentiality is a major concern in school counselling (ASCA, 2016). Parents fail to understand or deny the problems that children reveal in the counselling sessions (Auger, 2006). This could be anything ranging from self-harm behaviour to disability (Brooks, Fiedler, Waddington, & Zink, 2021). Auger (2016) suggests a four-stage process by which to communicate with parents, as it can be challenging sometimes (Auger, 2006). According to Gerrard (2018), in school-based family counselling (SBFC), the child client is referred to mental health professionals or the educator for personal and interpersonal problems. The session involves the parents in order to improve the family environment and this also serves as a support system for the child client. If it is successful, it helps the child client in various ways in terms of the different areas, like academic bereavement, depression, developmental delay, abuse, and other interpersonal issues (Gerrard, 2018). Similarly, another approach called school, family, and community (SFC) partnership was researched by Aydin (2021). The research focused on the school counsellor's ability and potential in helping the child client, but there were language barriers. In the study, it was proved that in the presence

of a translator and a counsellor with high involvement, progress was achieved. Other obstacles included counsellor training, efficient handling of the parents, and the variations of involvement between parent– counsellors–community in the session (Aydın, 2021). School counsellors perceived working with the family was for the betterment of the child and community and led to the progress in results. But including parents can lead to school counsellors facing some problems (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2024).

This study helps in understanding the problems faced by the counsellor when incorporating parents into the process. This study seeks to understand the experience of the school counsellor in handling difficulties in the presence parents and how they navigated the challenges. School counsellors include parents in the counselling sessions for various reasons. Parents play a role in the behaviour modification and progress of the child (Levine, 2006). However, the inclusion of parents changes the counsellor–client–parent dynamics and needs different handling. Thus, this study may contribute towards helping counsellors to better adapt. It may help in creating an understanding of the counsellor’s experiences.

There viewed literature above is helpful to the current research as it illuminates what counsellors in Masvingo District are doing and not doing. Challenges can then be established by the participants and the researcher during the interview process.

2.3.3 Challenges faced by counselling teams in the implementation of drug and substance abuse.

Lack of clarity

1. One of the most common challenges that career counselling clients face is lack of clarity. This means that they are not sure what they want to do, what they are good at, what they enjoy, or what they value in a career. Lack of clarity can make it difficult to set realistic and achievable goals, to explore different options, and to make informed decisions (McLaughlin & Vacha, 2023).

. To overcome this challenge, career counselling clients need to engage in self-assessment activities, such as taking interest and personality tests, doing values exercises, and reflecting on their past experiences and achievements (Mutaka, 2022). These activities can help them identify their strengths, preferences, and motivations, and narrow down their choices.

2. Fear of change

Another common challenge that career counselling clients face is fear of change. This means that they are afraid of leaving their comfort zone, taking risks, or facing uncertainty. Fear of change can prevent them from pursuing new opportunities, learning new skills, or adapting to new situations. To overcome this challenge, career counselling clients need to develop a positive mind-set, such as being optimistic, resilient, and confident. They also need to acknowledge their fears, and find ways to cope with them, such as seeking support, setting small and manageable steps, and celebrating their achievements (WHO, 2023).

3. External pressure

2. A third common challenge that career counselling clients face is external pressure. This means that they feel influenced or pressured by others, such as family, friends, peers, or society, to follow a certain career path or meet certain expectations. External pressure can make them feel stressed, conflicted, or dissatisfied with their choices. To overcome this challenge, career counselling clients need to assert their autonomy, such as being honest, respectful, and assertive. They also need to balance their own needs and wants with those of others and seek feedback and guidance from trusted sources (Mclaughlin & Vacha, 2023).

1. Limited resources

A fourth common challenge that career counselling clients face is limited resources. This means that they have constraints or limitations that affect their career options or goals, such as time, money, education, experience, or opportunities. Limited resources can make them feel frustrated, discouraged, or stuck. To overcome this challenge, career counselling clients need to be resourceful, such as being creative, flexible, and proactive. They also need to seek help and support, such as finding mentors, sponsors, or networks, applying for scholarships, grants, or loans, or accessing online or community resources (Sussman et al., 2018).

2. Lack of action

A sixth common challenge that career counselling clients face is lack of action. This means that they do not take the necessary steps to achieve their career goals, such as researching, networking, applying, or interviewing. Lack of action can make them miss opportunities, lose momentum, or waste time (Sussman et al., 2018). To overcome this challenge, career counselling clients need to be motivated, such as being inspired, committed, and

accountable. They also need to take action, such as making a plan, following a schedule, tracking their progress, and rewarding themselves.

From this literature reviewed above, it is helpful to the current research in establishing gaps under, what counsellors in Masvingo District are doing and not doing. Challenges can then be established by the participants and the researcher during the interview process.

2.3.4 The possible recommendations for improvements on the implementation of drug and substance abuse prevention strategies in secondary schools.

It is possible, and desirable, for schools to be concerned with drug demand reduction, drug supply reduction and mitigating the health and social consequences of drug use, with the major focus on demand reduction (WHO, 2016). However, education authorities should not accept sole responsibility for changing learner health behaviours, including reducing drug use. Schools may well be able to influence drug use behaviour and it is hoped that they will do so. However, it is the primary role of the schools to teach skills, to impart knowledge and to establish a sound value base in relation to health and drug use, not to change behaviours that may be determined by factors beyond the influence of the school. Schools, therefore, should not enforce changes in health behaviours of learners, particularly drug use behaviours. Schools can and should report to the community the achievement of educational outcomes that have been identified as contributing to the realisation of the broader health goals of preventing drug use and reducing adverse consequences to individuals and society at large (Sailes, 2020).

The school management incorporates statements in school plans about education for drug abuse prevention and intervention that include referral, counselling and procedures for managing drug incidents. This also includes informing the school community about education for drug abuse prevention programmes and procedures developed under the department of education drug policy (Gottfredson, 2019). It should report on policy implementation and the achievement of learning objectives that reduce the health, social costs and consequences of drug abuse. Last but not least, it should provide professional development opportunities that assist teachers to achieve drug-related educational outcomes.

2.4 Research methodology

The study used an interpretivist approach. The researcher used a qualitative method of inquiry. Accordingly, a descriptive research design was used in order to answer the research questions.

Research population

Table 1 research population

Category	Population	sample	sampling
SDCs	100	10	purposive
District Education Inspector	1	1	Purposive
School counsellors	20	5	Purposive
School heads	20	5	purposive
Learners	10000	50	Random sampling
Total		76	

Research Instruments

During the course of the study, the researcher used the two methods of data collection which are structured interviews and questionnaires. Both of these methods were used so as to compensate the limitations of each instrument in order to improve the accuracy of the findings. In order to provide supplementary data, the researcher also used document analysis. It should be noted that although questionnaires are used in this study, the dominant part of the study is qualitative in nature.

2.5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

2.5.1 What are the roles of counsellors in drug and substance abuse cases in secondary schools under Masvingo District?

Biographic data

Table2 research population

Category	Population	Sample	sampling
SDCs	100	10	purposive
District Education Inspector	1	1	Purposive
School counsellors	20	5	Purposive
School heads	20	5	purposive

Learners	10000	50	Random sampling
Total		76	

Table 3: Statistics of the schools sampled

School	Number of heads		School counsellors		Total
	M	F	M	F	
A	-	1	-	1	2
B	1	-	1	-	2
C	1	-	1	-	2
D	-	1	-	1	2
E	-	1	1	-	2
Total	2	3	3	2	10

N (10)

The table 3 above shows that 3 (60%) of the school heads sampled were females. It also shows that 2 (40%) of the school heads were males. The table above indicates that 3 (60%) school counsellors selected were males and 2 (40%) were females. The total number of school heads and school counsellors sampled was 10. The statistics above show that female heads were more than males. It was observed in this study that schools headed by females had more cases of drug abuse. This could be a result of the fact that females can be less firm in school management than males, thereby making it difficult to enforce school rules.

Table 4: Data on qualifications Heads and school counsellors'

Schools	CC		BED		PGDE		ME	
	H	SC	H	SC	H	SC	H	SC
A	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
B	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
C	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-
D	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
E	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
Total	0	0	0	1	1	4	4	-

Table 4 above shows that no school head or school counsellor had a certificate. It also shows that no school had a BED but only 1 (20%) school counsellor had that degree. Most of the school counsellors 4 (80%) had PGDE and only 1 (20%) school head had that degree. This also shows that most of the school heads 4 (80%) had Master’s Degree in Education. The statistics above show that both school heads and school counsellors were well educated and they had the capacity to manage drug and substance abuse in their school.

Literature shows that, regardless of setting and training, counsellors working with clients who are in or considering recovery can provide support by helping them build their strengths, resilience, and resources. This approach emphasises what is “right” or already working for clients regarding the strategies they use for coping and improving health and well-being. It emphasises client resilience and functioning instead of client weakness and pathology.

What are the roles of counsellors in drug and substance abuse cases in secondary schools under Masvingo District?

In this study, it was necessary to establish from the participants the specific roles of the counsellors in Masvingo district. These findings were established from the interview guide and observations made by the researcher.

According to literature reviewed, a substance abuse counsellor, also known as an addiction counsellor, is a trained professional who provides support and guidance to individuals struggling with substance use disorders (SUDs). These counsellors’ help clients address the root causes of their addictions, develop coping strategies, and work towards sustained recovery.

Table 5: Methods of eradicating drug abuse in schools

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Guidance and counselling	47	97.9
Peer counselling	48	100
Inco-operate drug education to other subjects	39	81.3
Strict school regulations	37	77.8
Invite guest speakers on danger of drug abuse	45	93.8

Table 5 shows some of the direct and indirect roles by school counsellor. All schools counsellors had the same responses, from A to E. Such responses correspond with the basic expected roles of counsellors.

A female counsellor from school D said,

“As we do our duties, there are problems experienced by schools as a result of drug abuse among learners and these are multiple. Our role is to guide, counsel and monitor.”

The highest number of respondents, 48 (100%), indicated that schools should do peer counselling. This response rate was seconded by 97 (97.9%) which was recorded for guidance and counselling. The lowest response rate of 37 (77.08%) was recorded for the view that schools should apply strict school regulations. In interviews, school heads agreed that there was need to win learners who abused drugs; they ruled out inflicting pain on the culprits. They stressed that it was imperative to transform attitudes of the drug abusers through peer counselling and effect guidance and counselling, then monitor the situation. Interview responses from heads and counsellors and the District Inspection Officer included:

Monitoring, one on one engagement, referrals, prescribing, motivating and controlling.

These responses tally with the roles cited by the literature. Counselling involves development of help, understanding and support to someone who is perplexed. A warm climate is created so that the client feels accepted and is able to open up and reveal his or her circumstances. He or she gains an insight on how to help himself or herself by drawing on available resources. In other words, counselling is a relationship that is created between the counsellor and counselee and stresses self-help which greatly benefits victims of drug abuse.

It was also revealed that integration of drug education in subject lessons and engaging resource persons would serve the same purpose. These findings imply that the suggested ways of eradicating drug abuse in schools could help to improve the situation. As part of the data discussion, it can be concluded that school counsellors are typically part of the prevention programme through presentation of guidance curriculum lessons about character development and peer pressure. School counsellors are also positioned to offer additional prevention services for students who are at risk.

2.5.2 To what extent do parents and other stakeholders engage counselling teams in assisting drug and substance abuse learners?

In this study, responses were sought on the extent to which parents and other stakeholders engage counselling teams in assisting drug and substance abuse learners. Responses from schools' A to E had the following revelations:

Table 6: Problems that school authorities encounter in dealing with drug abuse

Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Parents do not support the administration	40	83.3
Some teachers provide drugs to learners	34	70.8
Some teachers take drugs	29	60.4
The teachers do not discourage drug taking	27	56.3
Lack of adequate knowledge on drug use	36	75.0
Time schedules are not flexible	28	58.3

The highest number of respondents, 40 (83.3%), indicated that the problem that school authorities encountered in dealing with drug abuse in schools was that parents did not support the school administration. The lowest response rate was 28 (58.3%) recorded for the view that there was lack of adequate knowledge on drug use by learners. In interviews, teachers indicated that dealing with learners required a combined effort from the school administrators, teachers and parents. This lacked in most cases, and learners exploited this weakness. In focused group discussions, participants said that some teachers sent learners to buy beer and cigarettes. The findings suggest that school authorities encountered problems in dealing with drug abuse in schools. There is a high level of indiscipline in schools and teachers have difficulties in effectively managing classrooms. The study concluded that the level of support from various stake holders is inadequate. Empirical evidence shows that psycho-educating parents about confidentiality, ethical considerations, and privacy helps them in better understanding the counselling process and thereby supporting it (Huss, Norris, Bryant, & Mulet, 2008). Confidentiality is a major concern in school counselling (ASCA, 2016). Parents fail to understand or deny the problems that children reveal in the counselling sessions (Auger, 2006). This could be anything ranging from self-harm behaviour to disability (Brooks, Fiedler, Waddington, & Zink, 2021). Auger (2016) suggests a four-stage process by which to communicate with parents, as it can be challenging sometimes (Auger, 2006). According to Gerrard (2018), in school-based family counselling.....

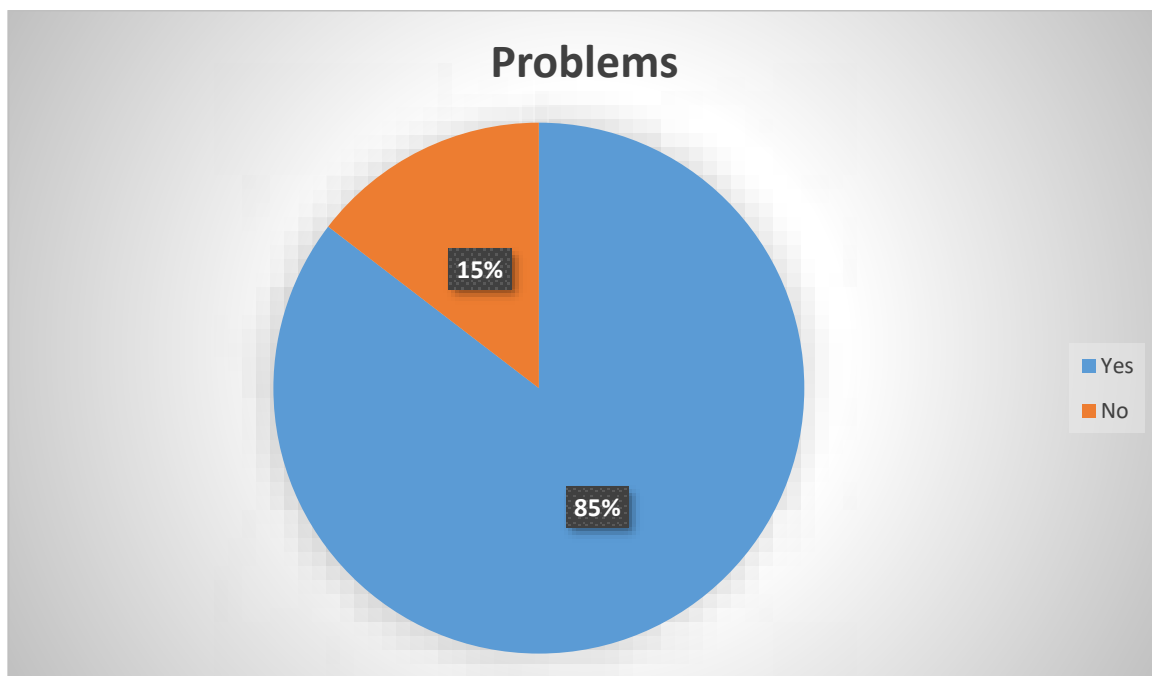
2.5.3 What are the challenges faced by counselling teams in the implementation of drug and substance abuse?

To do justice to the question, the researcher also started from the basic questions:

I. Problems faced by schools due to drug abuse

The study tried to establish from heads and counsellors whether their schools have experienced problems due to drug abuse by learners. This was important to determining the academic implications of drug abuse.

Figure 1: Problems faced by schools to drug abuse



The pie chart above shows that the highest number of respondents, 41(85%), indicated that schools experienced problems due to drug abuse among learners. Only 7(14%) made a negative indication on the perception. Key informant interviews indicated that the effects of drug abuse were not only restricted to disciplinary measures by school authorities. Other learners not using drugs suffered psychologically and this was apparent from the FGDs.

Table 7 Problems experienced by schools as a result of drug abuse by learners

Problem	Frequency	Percentage
Fighting amongst learners	33	68.8
Sneaking	29	60.4
Stealing	21	43.8
Strikes	13	27.1
Conflicts between teachers and learners	40	83.3
Poor performance in examinations	42	87.5

Table 7 shows that problems experienced by schools as a result of drug abuse among learners were multiple. The respondents on this issue were mainly heads. The highest number of respondents, 42 (87.5%), indicated that as a result of drug abuse among learners, schools experienced poor performance by learners in examinations. This response rate of 40 (83.33%) was recorded for the perception that there were conflicts between teachers and learners. The other effects of drug abuse included fighting among learners (68.8%), sneaking out (60.4%) and stealing (43.8%). The lowest response rate was 13 (27.08%) recorded for strikes. In interviews, school heads said that drug abuse is the chief source of disciplinary problems in schools. They went on to say that as long as learners got involved in drug use, they became uncontrollable. One teacher in the discipline department said:

“Lady teachers often... extreme challenges when teaching classes with learners involved in drug taking. In one case, a Grade 7 learner under the influence of drugs began to propose love to a young student teacher who was on teaching practice.”

These findings imply that abuse of drugs caused problems in schools and impeded the effective teaching – learning exercise. Educationists argue that unless learners show internal discipline, it is difficult to progress with their education.

2.5.4 What are the possible recommendations for improvement in the implementation of drug and substance abuse prevention strategies in secondary schools?

Figure 2: Education programmes on drug use in schools

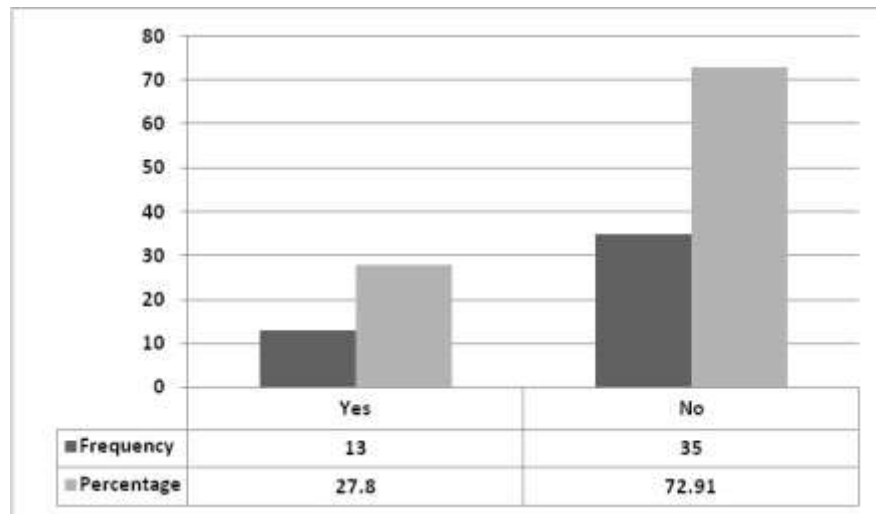


Figure 2 shows that the majority 35 (72.91%) of respondents indicated that they do not teach anything about drug use. Only 13 (27.8%) of the respondents gave positive indication. In questionnaires collected from school heads, it was confirmed that teachers focused on their subject content. Rarely did they talk about drugs unless the material was part of the content. Knowledge about the dangers of drug abuse is critical in reducing uptake of these drugs by learners. Educational programmes thus not only increase knowledge and awareness about the effects of drug abuse, but should also bring changes in values, attitudes and beliefs towards drug abuse. In most educational institutions, teaching-learning processes assume the interdisciplinary approach in which a teacher delivers particular content to satisfy the demands of a particular syllabus (Oyedele, 2011). Such an approach is rigid and may not allow integration of teaching about aspects of drug abuse.

Research question VI: The role of school management in controlling the prevalence of drug and substance abuse in school premises

Measures used to address drug abuse in schools

The study also assessed measures used to address drug abuse in schools. This was important in establishing a holistic approach to ending drug abuse in schools.

Table 8: Measures taken to fight drug- related problems in schools

Measure	Frequency	Percentage
Expulsion,	3	6.3
Suspension	31	64.6
Guidance and counselling	5	10.4
Ask parents to come to school	43	89.6
Heavy punishment	29	60.4

Table 8 shows that drug abuse affected learners who engage in the vice in a variety of ways. The highest number of respondents, 43 (89.6%), indicated that learners were asked to bring parents to school to look into the issue. 31 (64.58%) were suspended, punishment accounted for 60.4% and lowest response rate was 3 (6.3%) recorded for expulsion. School Heads indicated that they took disciplinary measures to deal with culprits. They said that they suspended the learner for fourteen days after which a hearing would be held in the presence of the guardians or parents. Thereafter, severe punishment would be administered to the culprit. These findings could be an indication that schools tried to deal with cases of drug abuse in a severe way. It has been observed that schools have applied several unorthodox means to deal with the challenge of drug abuse. The level of effectiveness was low because the strategies did not transform the attitudes of the culprits. The researcher concluded that school counsellors can take action to address all these weaknesses.

- A strengths-based approach is fundamental to recovery-oriented counselling, beginning with client intake and continuing throughout the duration of care.
- Recurrence of substance use happens, but recovery-oriented counselling can help clients avoid it or confidently return to recovery when it does occur.
- Counsellor participation in recovery-oriented systems of care can benefit clients by promoting holistic, coordinated, and nonperiodic services.

CONCLUSIONS

1. What are the characteristics of counselling support personnel working with drug and substance cases/victims in the district?

The counsellors lacked requisite counselling qualifications although they had teaching certificates. Staff development training courses were lacking among counsellors. Counsellors had good communication skills since they were educated.

2. What are the roles of counsellors on drug and substance abuse cases in secondary schools under Masvingo district?

The study concluded that counsellors and school heads and district school inspectors were aware of their key roles in drug and substance abuse cases though some roles are missing. They mentioned monitoring, one- on- one engagement, referrals, prescribing, motivating and controlling as some of them. Guidance and counselling were also mentioned.

3. To what extent do parents and other stakeholders engage counselling teams in assisting drug and substance abuse learners?

The study concluded that there was lack of adequate knowledge on drug abuse learners. In interviews, teachers indicated that dealing with learners required a combined effort of the school administrators also there was lack of support for counsellors and the school at large by parents and the community.

4. What are the challenges faced by counselling teams in the implementation of drug and substance abuse prevention strategies?

The study concluded that abuse of drugs caused problems in schools and impeded the effective teaching – learning exercise; it was confirmed that teachers focused on their subject content. It was rare that they diverted to talk about drugs unless the material was part of the content.

5. Possible solutions and best practices

Schools have applied several unorthodox means to deal with the challenge of drug abuse. The level of effectiveness was low because the strategies did not transform the attitudes of the culprits. The researcher concluded that school counsellors can take action to address all

these weaknesses. Counsellor participation in recovery-oriented systems of care can benefit clients by promoting holistic, coordinated, and nonperiodic services.

Recommendations

After the assessment of the challenges faced, the researcher recommended that:

- Schools should play a critical role in the prevention of drug and substance abuse as teachers and administrators often are the first to detect warning signs of possible drug problems, such as poor school attendance or declining academic performance. Effective school programmes to teach young people to resist drugs by developing personal and social skills, such as decision making, stress management, communication, social interaction, conflict resolution, and assertiveness.
- There is need for close collaboration between schools and the community in addressing drug abuse. Parents and family members thus should play an effective role in reducing drug abuse among students. In this regard, regular meetings between schools and parents should be encouraged and this enables both the school administration and parents to share ideas on methods to address drug abuse in schools.
- The school educational programmes should not only increase knowledge and awareness about the effects of drug abuse, but should also aim to change values, attitudes and beliefs leading to abuse of drugs. Educational programmes on drug abuse among students should, therefore, be holistic and address both the risks and protective factors.
- The guidance and counselling departments should organise peer counselling in schools with school administrators applying strict school regulations in conjunction with peer counselling and guidance to reduce drug abuse among students.
- There is also need for effective policy with regards to how schools should develop strategies to address drug abuse among students.

REFERENCES

- Benard, B. (2018). *The Case for Peers*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory; 327 755.
- Best, J. N. and Khan, J. V. (2011). *Research in Education*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bezuidenhout, F. (2018). *A Reader on selected social issues*. Third Edition, Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Chaloupka, F. (2017). *Tobacco Control in Developing Countries*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Creswell, J. S. (2014). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. California: Sage Publications.
- Cuijpers, P. (2016). *Effective Ingredients of School-based Drug Prevention Programmes*. A Systematic Review. *Addict Behav*, 2002; 1009-23.
- Devellis, L. (2013). *Introduction to Child Development*. New York: West Publishing Company.
- Dooley, T. (2010). *Social Research Methods*. 3rd Edition, Ghosh: Cannaught.
- Ellickson, P. L. and Bell, R. M. (2016). *Prospects for Preventing Drug use among Young Adolescents*. Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation.
- Fekjaer, H. (2019). *Alcohol and Drugs, Myths and Realities*. Molnycke: IOGT Alcohol and Drug Information Centre.
- Financial Gazette, 29 January, 2015.
- Floyd, R. (2012). *Psychology in action 4th Edition*. London: Macmillan publishers.
- Gill, J. and Johnson, L. (2010). *Research Methods for Managers*. Boston: Paul Chapman
- Gillham, M. (2018). *Psychology of learning for instruction (2nd ed)*. Needham heights: Allyn and Bacon.
- Gorman, D. (2016). Do School Based Social Skills Training Programmes Prevent Alcohol use among Young People? *Addiction Research*; 4: 191-210.
- Gottfredson, D. (2019). Characteristics of Effective School-based Substance Abuse Prevention. *Prevention Science*; 4: 27-38.
- Hoey, M. (2010). *Textual Interaction: An Introduction to Written Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.

- Huffman, K and Vernoy, (2019). *Psychology in action 4th Edition*. London: Macmillan publishers.
- Johnston, T. (2011). *Adolescent drug abuse in Kenya: impact on reproductive health*. Pathfinder International, Nairobi: New world printers.
- Kools, P. (2018). *Drug use and HIV among young people in sub-Saharan Africa*. Amsterdam: Sterling publishers.
- Lahey, S. (2009). *Readings in Social Psychology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Laurie, L. (2017). Substance Abuse Prevention in the Schools. *ED 264 502*.
- McLeod, S. A. (2015). Psychology Research Methods. Retrieved from www.simplypsychology.org/research.methods.html.
- National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2010 (ICPSR 32722).
- National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2018 (ICPSR 32722).
- Ngesu, L. M. (2010). Drug Dependence and Abuse in Kenyan Secondary Schools: Strategies for Intervention. *Educational Research and Review 3 (10)*, pp304 – 308.
- Ostrom, E. (2017). A Diagnostic Approach for going beyond Panaceas. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States*. New York: Nzama & Ajani / AIDS.
- Oyedele, V. (2011). *Research methods for education students*. Windhoek: Zebra Publishing.
- Payne, D. and Payne, K. (2004). *Research Methods in Education*. Loss Angels: SAGE.
- Rivara, F. (2019). A Systematic Review of School-based Smoking Prevention Trials with Long-Term Follow-up. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 2005; 36: 162-169*.
- Sailes, J. (2020). Content and Teaching Strategies in 10 Selected Drug Abuse Prevention Curricula. *Journal of School Health; 63: 247-253*.
- Schaefer, P. (2011). *Choices and consequences: What to do when a teenager uses alcohol/Drugs*. Washington: Johnson Institute.
- Schaefer, P. (2015). *Choices and Consequences: What to do when a Teenager uses Alcohol/Drugs*. Washington: Johnson Institute.
- Schulze, P. (2012). *Research in Adult Education*. Pretoria: UNISA.
- Smith, P. (2018). E-learning innovation through the implementation of an internet supported learning environment. *Educational Technology and society 3: 1-16*.
- Sussman, S. (2022). *Project ALERT Reduces Initiation of Cigarette and Marijuana use in*

- 12-14 Year Olds*. Evidence Based Mental Health. 2004; 7: 53.
- Tobler, N. (2022). Drug Prevention Programs can work: Research Findings. *Journal of Addictive Disease; 11: 1-28*.
- Tuckman, B. W. and Monneti, D. M (2011). *Educational Psychology*. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- United Nations: Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC). *W.H.O. Expert Committee on Dependence Producing Drugs: Fourteenth Report*. August 2010.
- United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC): Bulletin on Narcotics VOL LV, Nos 1 and 2, 2017. *The Practice of Drug Abuse Epidemiology*. UN. New York 2017.
- Vernoy, T. (2019). *Psychology in Action 4th Edition*. London: Macmillan publishers.
- WHO, 2016. www.who.org/pdf2016
- Whitley, J. S. (2015). *Attachment*. New York: Basic books.
- Zimbabwe Education Act, (1987). Harare: Government printers.

A step in the right direction: The role of religion in the eradication of Drug and Substance Abuse

Ndebele Nozipho ¹ and Mahlangu Mthokozisi ²

nndebele@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0000-0003-0122-7787

godonganzuza89@gmail.com | ORCID: 009-0001-6346-5425

***Corresponding Author:** Ndebele Nozipho, nndebele@gzu.ac.zw

“Drug abuse is a problem that has devastated the world, especially the younger generation” (Maraire & Chethiyar, 2020).

Abstract

Drug and Substance Abuse (DSA) has been a persisting issue in all communities despite the continuous efforts to eradicate it. Religion generally has a way of influencing its member's minds, attitudes and conduct because it mandates certain dos and don'ts insofar as its beliefs are concerned. DSA adversely affects the health, education and prospective positive future of the youth and it therefore, calls for urgent attention from all stakeholders. This study was undertaken to establish the role played or that can potentially be played by religion in drug eradication. The research conducted amongst 20 high schoolers at Lingfield Advent Schools attempts to determine if young people who subscribe to the Adventist doctrine are prone to the use of commonly abused drugs and the kind of assistance they obtain from the church to overcome the problem. It is the aim of this research to show the Seventh-day Adventist Church's part in fighting the adverse effects of this pandemic. It further examines whether these efforts are enough or the church needs to do more. Recommendations are also provided to foster synergies amongst all stakeholders, including religious institutions, in order to deal with the root causes of drug and substance abuse and render support to the youth who have succumbed to the problem.

Key words

Drug and Substance Abuse, addiction, faith, religion, eradication.

Introduction

A drug is defined as a “substance that has the ability to modify or alter a person’s perceptions, cognition, mood, behaviour and general body functions” (Imam, 2019). Drug abuse refers to the “improper use of drugs to the degree that the consequences are defined as detrimental to the user or/and, to the society” (Imam, 2019).

Blows and Isaacs (2022) define "substance use" as the use of “alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, prescription and over-the-counter medications”. They further define “substance abuse” as the “continued misuse of drugs, alcohol, tobacco and other psychoactive drugs despite the knowledge that the usage of the substances thereof may cause addiction or/and other several devastating problems” (ibid). In other words, substance abuse can be described as “the detrimental or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, as well as alcohol and illicit drugs” (Kabbash, Zidan, & Saied, 2022). Thus, the term substances encapsulate both alcohol and drugs (Blows & Isaacs, 2022).

Imam (2019) correctly asserted that in as much as drug abuse affects everyone, the youths partake more than other age groups and these drugs are taken in different ways including by “chewing, inhaling, smoking, drinking, by topical application or by injection”. Tsingo, Mushoriwa and Chinyoka (2023) acknowledge that world-wide, drug abuse among the youth is increasing at an alarming rate and although there are no rigorous statistics about drug abuse in Zimbabwe as pointed out by Muleyi (2023), it is generally agreed that drug abuse is now rampant. The emergence of DSA among the youth, has become a global worry attracting fervent interest and attention of both scholars and development practitioners (Mauganidze, 2024).

Religiosity denotes “a combination of beliefs, affiliation, and practice and one’s religious beliefs shape how they understand the world, what acts they consider immoral (such as using drugs or drinking alcohol) and how permissible such behaviours are” (Lindsey, 2021). Religion and spirituality can potentially aid in preventing substance abuse and Nawi et al (2021) insist that when religion is embraced by society, it can prevent and protect adolescents from being involved in drug abuse because several religions frown upon any conduct (including substance abuse) that is detrimental to one’s health. In as much as interventions that are medical and psychological are central in deterring and dealing with effects caused by drug and substance abuse, “religious beliefs, practices, and belonging as well as spiritual programmes inspired by faith in a Higher Being significantly contribute to the prevention of, and recovery from substance abuse” (Grim and Grim, 2019).

DSA among young people is not merely an issue faced worldwide, it is also a problem that affects the security of nations, the lives and health of individuals (Kabbash et al, 2022). Recent research uncovers that the detrimental impact of drug abuse has exacerbated like never before, and there are reports of nearly 35 million people globally who are dealing with drug use disorders (Frant, 2021).

DSA is a stubborn disease, particularly in young people, and nationally, the issue is concerning because the number of adolescents and youths that have succumbed to it is alarming (Banda, 2023). The voices of the most affected young people are significant in dealing with these issues in order to foster a good future for them. The challenge of drug abuse ought to be examined and addressed from different angles so that recommended strategies can be harnessed in resolving the issues identified (Maraire and Chethiyar, 2020). This research is an attempt to understand and address the issue of drug abuse in Zimbabwe from a religious perspective.

Methodology

Study Design

The research made use of a questionnaire and focus groups to gather information on drug and substance abuse; and analysed the role the Seventh-day Adventist Church plays in addressing this issue among high school students at Lingfield Advent Schools in Gweru. Likewise, the researchers aimed to understand the experiences of the high school students and those interfacing with the scourge on a day-to-day basis, including the triggers of DSA from the perspectives of the users. This methodology was found to be fit to explore trends associated with the triggers of drug and substance abuse.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was employed with the target audience being Form 3 and Form 6 students enrolled at Lingfield Advent Schools. The main goal of purposive sampling was to focus on particular characteristics of high schoolers that are of interest, and which will best enable one to answer the research questions. The sample being studied is not representative of the population of high school students at Lingfield Advent Schools. For this reason, the researchers opted for purposive sampling. Qualitative approach was used to explore the phenomena of DSA at Lingfield Advent Schools. The study objectives were continuously referred to in line with the demands of the research questions.

Sample Size

There were 20 participants (12 females and 8 males aged 15 to 18 years), who partook in answering the structured questionnaire. Additionally, the participants engaged in a focus group discussion on the effect of religion and how it deals with drug and substance abuse. Purposive sampling ensured the choice of participants capable of providing detailed insights on the questions posed.

Data Collection Methods

The researchers used a structured questionnaire to source information. The questionnaire facilitated collaboration between researchers and participants, offering a comprehensive understanding of DSA dynamics at Lingfield Advent Schools. The focus groups afforded participants an opportunity to discuss at length on whether the SDA church is doing enough to fight the scourge of DSA.

Data Analysis

The research used thematic analysis to closely examine collected data patterns of significance that came up repeatedly from the data extracted from the questionnaire. The approach was guided by identifying patterns in the responses. In this regard, data was analysed to determine themes that emerge from the data set in a comparative fashion. For the focus groups, discourse analysis was used to analyse the discussions and identifying key sentiments and quotes from participants.

Limitations

Data collection was disrupted by commitments of other targeted respondents who were participating in the mid-year examinations that were conducted between 14 and 25 July 2025. Their input was, however, incorporated during the focus group meeting conducted on 23 July 2025.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were undertaken to protect all participants who partook in answering the questionnaire and doing discussions in the focus groups. The research was conducted in such a manner that respondents' identity was kept anonymous in the answers they shared in response to the questionnaire and in the focus group discussions.

In the process of collecting data, the consent of participants was obtained and research objectives were explained and understood. All data collection was held in safe places that did not draw unnecessary attention.

Research Findings

Introduction

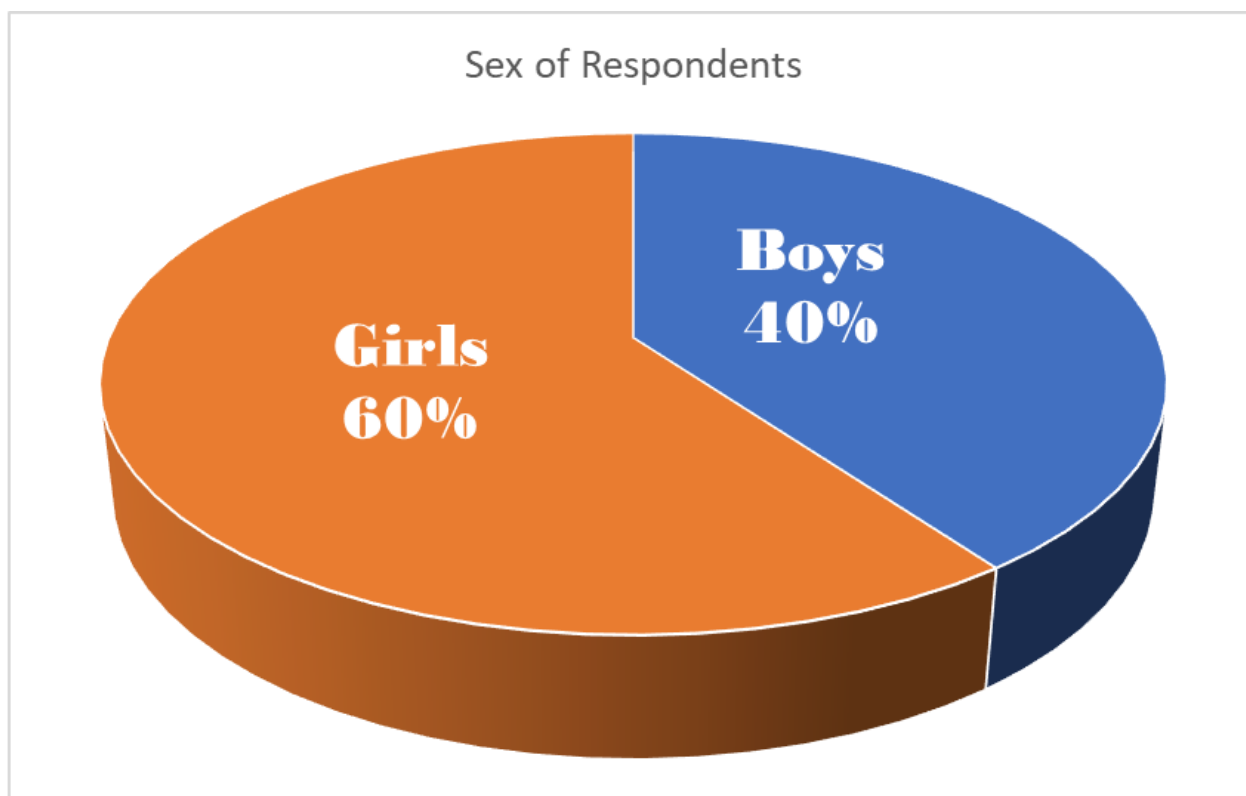
The research uncovered the prevalence of DSA among high school students aged between 15 and 18 at Lingfield Advent Schools. Illicit drugs are accessed by high school students, most especially through day schoolers. Apart from sneaking of drugs into the school, boarders also experimented with items in their tuck list to formulate drugs.

Efforts to address DSA are affected by lack of information to catch the suppliers and also the unavailability of whistle blowers. Furthermore, uncoordinated efforts in addressing drugs and substances abuse among the school administration and staff are also hampering efforts to address these problems.

Demographic Characteristics

Gender of Participants

20 high schoolers engaged in the research conducted with 60% being girls and 40% boys as illustrated in the diagram below



Age of the Respondents

The participants, 20 in total ranged from the age of 15 to 18 as indicated in *Table 1*.

Age	Number of Participants
15	9
16	3
17	3
18	5

Prevalence of drug use

The research conducted amongst students at Lingfield Advent Schools aged between 15 and 18 showed that participants as adolescents and youths are a vulnerable group prone to drug use. Commonly used substances include vapour, methamphetamine, alcohol, marijuana and mutoriro. Reports also highlight the use of drugs by mixing cerevita with mazoe orange crush.

Table 2: Categories of substances and drugs consumed by high school students

Category(s)	Different Types
Stimulants	Methamphetamine. <i>mutoriro</i> , chalk, ice, alcohol, marijuana/mbanje/cannabis
Inhalants	Alcohol, glue, cough mixtures and vapours, <i>fumbwa</i> or <i>kozoda</i>

Respondents shared that students also ingest highly intoxicating substitutes such as *mutoriro*, a colourless drink made from ethanol and emblems powders manufactured and distributed through tuck-shops in Gweru. “Drug abusers can take anything that they think will keep them euphoric or sedated and cases of organic psychosis are on the rise” said one of the respondents of the focus group discussion.

Causes of DSA amongst adolescences

DSA is a global issue, several factors have pointed out as contributory to drug use amongst young people and the knowledge of these factors can assist all stakeholders including schools, churches and the community at large to address the problem. It is worth mentioning that research has shown the root causes of drug use and substance abuse to be similar across the globe and they include the following;

Peer Pressure

A peer group refers to a “social group consisting of people who are equal in such respects as age, education, or social class” (Imam, 2019). Khondker, and Tucker (2021), concede that peer pressure has a vital role in impacting the way we think, or act in certain circumstances, including in situations of substance abuse. This phenomenon is observed in high schoolers in how they influence each other into behaving or acting in a certain way. Gasa et al (Op cit) concurs that “peer pressure is a reality, and it is greater during the adolescent period compared to other subsequent stages of life; adolescence is a period when the youth are likely to experiment with substances in order to be considered as cool”.

The research shows that a big number of high school students are introduced to drug and substance abuse by their age mates. One participant revealed that this was often done so as to have a belongingness in a certain group of people. The contributing factor driving youngsters to succumb to the influence of peer pressure of taking drugs is the desire of social acceptance and the fear of being side lined and rejected by fellow peers.

Curiosity

It is common for people to at some point to want to try new things, be it fashion or food. The curiosity to try something new lures adolescents into drug use. It is asserted that the “first experience in drug use or abuse produces a state of arousal such as happiness and pleasure which persuades the first-time user to continue the act” (Imam, 2019). Respondents mentioned curiosity as one of the drivers to DSA. Some respondents highlighted that they got to know about these drugs or substances by experimenting or being introduced to them by age mates. Ultimately, experimenting tend to spiral out of control and became a full blown addiction.

Pleasure and Enjoyment

Research has shown that, experimenting with drugs is considered to be normal by many students who seem to overlook the negative consequences that might be caused by drug and alcohol abuse (Mbuthia et al, 2020).

Another cause of drug abuse amongst students is the provision of a lot of money, sometimes more than the student needs. The economic status of the student’s families and their upbringing have shown to be a catalyst to DSA. As indicated by some students in the research done by Nomada & Karimi (2021), being raised by absentee parents pre-occupied, or focused on making money, made them to neglect them, creating sufficient time for their children to indulge in these malpractices. Such parents often attempted to compensate their absence by giving these said children a lot of money for campus upkeep. These children with fat purses end up using such moneys for drug use as it is in excess to their daily needs.

Reducing stress

There are a myriad of factors that can cause stress amongst students. Troubles in school, exams and lack of tuition fees have been proved to cause stress to students and they tend to believe that the best way to get rid of the stress and forget such negativities is to use drugs and substances.

The Self-concept Theory upholds that should there be a disparity between the “ideal self” and the “self-image”, there is loss of self-esteem (Maraire & Chethiyar, 2020). The “ideal self” is described as “what one would like to be”, and if that does not align with “self-image”, it leads in low self-esteem (Maraire & Chethiyar, 2020). Considering that all humanity including young people face numerous life challenges that can stress them to the core, young people sometimes have a feeling of worthlessness, especially if they don’t become that which they would like to

be. As a result, they attempt to bury their sorrows in drug and substance use and studies show that many drug abusers are young people with crushed dreams (Maraire & Chethiyar, 2020). Also, young people with low self-esteem are easily dissuaded from their own beliefs and they conform to others' beliefs to please them or to be accepted.

Absence of parental control

Furthermore, the absence of guidance and counselling exposes learners to vulnerabilities. The socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe has made many parents to migrate to South Africa and other Diasporas in search of a better life, leaving their learners unprotected and feeling “doubtful, uncertain, worried, and confused” (Chidakwa et al, 2023). Researchers discovered that learners who lack the wisdom of elders are prone to bad decision making which causes them pain and some learners respond negatively to advice and counselling from any adult if their parents are not present. Absence of parental supervision, uncontrolled pocket money spending among children, and the presence of substance-using family members are contributory factors.

Family background

Sutton (2021) affirms that “Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (SLT) suggests that we learn social behaviour by observing and imitating the behaviour of others”. The environment one is exposed to tend to influence their learning, habits and decisions. conditions around the individual are very influential in a social learning pattern and the basic principle of learning according to this theory is that what individuals learn, especially in social and moral learning occurs through imitation and modelling (Yusdiana, 2023).

Family’s unwavering support is what each person often looks up to. One of the factors that subject the youth to drug abuse is that “they lack empathy, understanding and unconditional positive regard from parents and family, the structures where they expect care, understanding and kindness” (Maraire & Chethiyar, 2020). Stump (2022) amplifies the significance of family history in that students with parents and grandparents who have a substance abuse problem are more susceptible to its use. Family members, particularly parents often become role models to their children. Hence, children coming households with family members who have subjected themselves to drug use are prone to imitate the same conduct. Additionally, older siblings’ behaviour tend to greatly have an impact on the younger ones as they possibly end up involving them in their malpractices, by giving them either alcohol or cigarettes (Namada & Karimi 2021).

The role of religion in curbing DSA

Research has shown that “religious and spiritual beliefs and practices lead to lower levels of substance abuse, including reduced likelihood of using various drugs, in the course of a lifetime”. The SDA Church is no stranger to the fight against DSA and has made great strides in an effort to stem the tide.

Religion and faith potentially lead the follower to desist from any conduct that collides with their religious principles and beliefs due to fear, or obedience to such religious preaching and sometimes as a result of the realization of the moral decay associated with drug abuse (Sanchez and Nappo, 2008)

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in Zimbabwe has been actively involved in the fight against drug and substance abuse through awareness campaigns, youth engagement, and a focus on preventative healthy living. The church collaborates with government bodies, schools, and communities to address the crisis prevalent among the youth.

Raising awareness and educating the community

The SDA Church utilizes various platforms to educate both its members and the wider public on the dangers of substance abuse:

- **Public marches and campaigns:** Congregations have organized and participated in awareness marches in communities like Gweru CBD, Goromonzi, and Bulawayo, involving local police and business leaders. Lingfield Advent School participated in one such march in July 2025.
- **Media programs:** Churches have launched educational programs, such as "Pulling the Plug" by Bluffhill SDA Church, to discuss drug abuse, addiction, and recovery.
- **Workshops and dialogues:** The church hosts workshops and conducts awareness campaigns featuring specialist counselors to empower youth and community facilitators with skills to combat substance abuse.

Promoting a healthy, substance-free lifestyle

A core tenet of the SDA Church is to regard the body as a “temple of the living God”. This fundamental belief drives their efforts toward a healthful lifestyle that avoids substances like alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs.

- **Lifestyle education:** The church endorses a holistic approach to health, encouraging members to adopt a lifestyle that promotes physical and mental well-being, which serves as a preventative measure against drug use. This was also buttressed home on a Sabbath program (19 July 2025) focusing on mental health issues that stem from DSA.

Engaging youths through alternatives to drug use

The church recognises the youth as a key demographic affected by substance abuse and has developed programs tailored to them:

- **Sports galas:** The SDA church in Midlands has organized sporting events, such as football, volleyball, and basketball, to give youths positive and engaging alternatives to drugs.
- **School programs:** Lingfield Advent Schools has joined the fight against drug abuse and is exploring the creation of rehabilitation programs for students. This is fostered through counseling sessions and sabbath programmes aimed at addressing this pandemic extensively.
- **Talent development:** By providing alternative recreational and constructive activities, the church helps young people to develop their talents and avoid destructive behaviours. This is addressed through the Adventist philosophy of education which seeks to train the head, hands and heart.

Addressing challenges in rehabilitation and community reintegration

While churches play a significant role, some religious leaders acknowledge areas for improvement, particularly regarding the stigma associated with addiction.

- **Reducing stigma:** SDA church leaders recognize that judgment and exclusion can hinder recovery and advocates for churches to become supportive centers for those struggling with addiction.
- **Need for professional support:** The SDA Church encourages those with addiction to seek professional treatment in addition to spiritual help.
- **Cooperation with the government:** The SDA Church and other religious leaders emphasise the need for continued cooperation with government and community leaders to address the drug crisis comprehensively, including vocational training to help recovering individuals to reintegrate into the community.

Effects of DSA

Research findings reflect the detrimental effects of DSA, affecting an individual subjected to drug use, their family, community and nation at large. DSA has dire repercussions on the health and well-being of the users.

a) Behavioural Consequences

The research revealed that drug users, particularly high school students, may show a disparaging behavior which can lead to alienation from peers and school activities. These societal and behavioral changes can be addressed by religion by availing counseling sessions so as to get to the root causes of these changes. Also, religion can offer spiritual programmes that address the negative impacts of these changes.

b) Mental Health Implications

DSA can adversely affect one's health that could result in drug use disorders affecting one's overall well-being. Religion can address these by securing services of professional therapy sessions for affected learners and also psychiatric consults so as to curb any adverse mental issues in the long term.

c) Social Consequences

- Drug use can affect family relationships, a strain on family resources and relationships results in emotional and psychological distress among family members, further perpetuating a cycle of instability and dysfunction. Religion has been proven to bring people together and in some cases provide a framework for mentorship, guidance and benchmarking for successful living with healthy family dynamics. Disengagement from any religious activities can be another effect of DSA. This is because of the sense of guilt in the victims of these issues and also perceived stigmatization.

Chapter Summary

The research unveils that there is drug use among high schoolers at Lingfield Advent Schools. Factors such as curiosity, stress, peer pressure and lack of parental supervision are some of the factors luring young people to drug use. The consequences of DSA, including school dropouts, family disintegration, and health disorders show that the future of young people is endangered.

Recommendations

Building on the conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are proposed

Strategy	Description
Social Interventions	Some learners come from broken homes with a dysfunctional family setup This requires religious organisations to reach out with initiatives to assist people living in affected communities
Recreation and Life Skills Development	Promote sporting activities and any other extra-curricular activities as a means of engaging students in constructive activities and developing essential life skills to deter substance abuse. Churches can organize recreational clubs which will engage learners in meaningful activities.
Stakeholder Coordination	Synergy among churches, schools, communities, government, police enforcement and all stakeholders to implement effective strategies to prevent and protect young people from drug use. Churches can serve as a platform to get civic groups and the community to meet and coordinate the fight against drug abuse.
Peer Engagement	Establish peer support groups to provide a supportive environment for individuals subjected to drug use and to reduce stigmatisation. Churches can setup support groups that will assist people on the journey to rehabilitation and also have rehab centers to assist addicts.
Family Communication and Support	Provide family interventions for families to be aware of their strong influence on children's actions, learning patterns, decisions and to foster dialogue and support to youngsters. Churches can facilitate reconciliation and awareness programs to teach families on the effects of DSA.

REFERENCES

- Al-Omari, H. Hamed, R. Tariah, H. (2014). The Role of Religion in the Recovery from Alcohol and Substance Abuse Among Jordanian Adults. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 53(3).
- Banda, R. (2023). Youth, Drug and Substance Abuse and Policy in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 7(9):968-978.
- Blows, S., & Isaacs, S. (2022). Prevalence and factors associated with substance use among university students in South Africa: implications for prevention. *BMC Psychology*, 10: 309.
- Dube, P. Christian spirituality as protective factors against drugs and substance abuse by Zimbabwean youths: A case of the Catholic church in Gweru urban. *The Dyke*, 17(1):1-22.
- Franç, A.E. (2021). The necessity of a new strategy to fight against drug trafficking. *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law*, 20:303-307.
- Gasa, H., Mkhize, B., Shumba, K., Cinini, S., & Gopal, N. (2022). Risk Factors of Substance abuse among University Students: An Exploratory Study. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 11:15-27.
- Grim, B & Grim, M. (2019). Belief, Behavior, and Belonging: How Faith is Indispensable in Preventing and Recovering from Substance Abuse. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 58:1713-1750.
- Imam, H. (2019). Causes and effects of drug abuse among students of University of Abuja, federal capital territory, Nigeria. *ResearchGate*, 1-16.
- Kabbash, I., Zidan, O., & Saied, S. (2022). Substance use among university students in Egypt: prevalence and correlates. *East Mediterrian Health Journal*, 28 (1):31- 40.
- Maraire, T., & Chethiyar, S. D. (2020). Drug and substance abuse problem by the Zimbabwean youth: A psychological perspective. *Practitioner Research*, 41-59.
- Maraire, T., Chethiyar, S. D. M. & Jasni, M. A. B. (2020). A General Review of Zimbabwe's Response to Drug and Substance Abuse among the Youth. PEOPLE: *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 6 (2):625-638.
- Marsiglia F.F, Kulis, S. Nieri, T. Parsai, M. (2005). God Forbid! Substance Use Among Religious and Nonreligious Youth. *Am J Orthopsychiatry*, 75(4):585-598.

- Mauganidze, L. (2024). Coping with drug and substance abuse among the university youth in Zimbabwe: Towards a 'quad-helix' model. *The Dyke*, 17(1): 1-24.
- Mbuthia, G., Wanzala, P., Ngugi, C.W, & Nyamogoba, H.A. (2020). Qualitative Study on Alcohol and Drug Abuse among Undergraduate (University Students) in The Coastal Region of Kenya. *African Journal of Health Sciences*, 33(1):38-48.
- Namada, K., & Karimi, J. (2021). Drug and substance abuse among university students. *Research Square*,1-22.
- Nawi, A. Ismail, R. Ibrahim, F. Hassan, M. Manaf, M. Ibrahim, N. & Shafurdin, N. (2021). Risk and protective factors of drug abuse among adolescents: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 21:1-15.
- Sanchez, Z & Nappo, S. (2008). Religious intervention and recovery from drug addiction. *Rev Saúde Pública*, 42(2):1-7.
- Stump, C. (2022). 7 Factors That Contribute to Addiction in College Students. Retrieved on July 4, 2025, from: <https://www.promises.com/addiction-blog/7-factors-contribute-addiction-college-students/>.
- Sutton, J. (2021). What Is Bandura's Social Learning Theory? 3 Examples. Retrieved on July 4, 2025, from <https://positivepsychology.com/social-learning-theory-bandura>.
- Yusdiana, N.M. (2023). Application of Albert Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theories in Teaching and Learning. *Journal Pendidikan Islam*,12(2):2131-2146.

Annexure A: Questionnaire answered by respondents

Drug and Substance Abuse and Religion Questionnaire:

1. How old are you

2. What is your gender

Male

Female

Transgender

3. What level of study are currently in

Form 1

Form 2

Form 3

Form 4

Form 5

Form 6

4. Do you associate yourself with any religious institution?

Seventh Day Adventist Church: _____

If other (specify)

5. Are you currently using drugs/substances or have you ever used them before?

Yes

No

5.1 If so, which one(s) have you used or are using

Alcohol

Cigarettes

Cocaine

Heroin

Marijuana

Weed

Abuse of prescription drugs

Inhalants/Vapors (e.g gasoline or glue)

Other (specify)

5.2 what is/was the purpose of using these drugs

6. Have you ever experienced any negative consequences as a result of drug and substance abuse?

7. Do you think drug use is a problem in your school?

Yes

No

8. What factor(s) do you think contribute to drug use amongst your peers?

Peer Pressure

Academic stress

Enjoyment

Family environment

Mental health issues

Access to drugs

Lack of education about its negative effects

Other (specify)

9. Can you say there is enough education about the dangers of drug and substance abuse in your school

Yes

No

10. Can you say religion plays a role in preventing drug use and are there any positive steps you are aware of that it is taking/ has taken

11. What effective initiatives do you think religion should consider in preventing drug use among teenagers?

Developing a comprehensive framework for addressing Drug and Substance Abuse in Masvingo: A Collaborative University Stakeholder Approach

Pride Mkandatsama ¹, Aron Gonye ², Beula Goroba ³ And Admore Mashokoh ⁴

1. Julius Nyerere School of Social Science, Human Resource Management Department, Great Zimbabwe University

pmkandatsama@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0002- -209X

2. Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences, Human Resource Management Department, Great Zimbabwe University

agonye@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0007-6838-3043

3. Information Services Librarian, Great Zimbabwe University Library

bgoroba@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0005-6915-5320

4. Research Data Management Librarian, Great Zimbabwe University Library

amashokoh@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0008-0744-2916

***Corresponding Author:** Pride Mkandatsama, pmkandatsama@gzu.ac.zw

Abstract

Drug and substance abuse remains a major challenge among unemployed youth. The study examined the intervention role of various university departments to combat drug and substance abuse among unemployed youths in Masvingo Urban, Masvingo Province. The study was made up of 80 participants comprising 20 university staff and 60 youths. A mixed method approach was employed. The study adopted Merton`s (1938) strain theory. Findings revealed that many unemployed youths in Masvingo province are engaged in drug and substance abuse. The study recommended that universities promote mental health awareness by organising drug/substance awareness campaigns, provide access to library and internet services to offer information on the effects of drug and substance abuse. Furthermore, the study also recommended the university to offer free vocational programs, casual and contract employment contracts in various university departments, offering university bursaries for unemployed youth who qualify for degree programmes, offer health and counselling services to drug addicts, assist the government with construction of a rehabilitation centre and support sport.

Key Words: Collaborative, Drugs, Substance Abuse, Unemployment, Youths,

1.0 Introduction and background

The prevalence of drug and substance abuse among youth is alarming in Zimbabwe, particularly in the urban areas (Chidume & Mugambiwa, 2024). The economic hardships bedevilling the country have decreased employment opportunities for employment active population, including youth (Azagba et al., 2021; Chidume & Mugambiwa, 2024; Marandure et al., 2023; Zimbabwe, 2024). Several studies have concluded that unemployment is a major cause of drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth in Zimbabwe (Azagba et al., 2021; Chidume & Mugambiwa, 2024; Maraire et al., 2020; Marandure et al., 2023; Mtemeri & Nhamo, 2019; Nhapi, 2019). A study conducted by Azagba et al., (2021) found that unemployment was associated with hospital admissions for drug and substance abuse such as alcohol, marijuana and cocaine.

A study conducted by Chidume & Mugambiwa, (2024) reports that 74% of unemployed youth in Chitungwiza Urban Centre indulge in drug and substance use. Another study conducted by Marandure et al., (2023) highlighted that most cases of psychiatry, paralytic like stupor (popularly known as *kusticker*) youths in the urban centres are related to drug and substance abuse. Furthermore, Maraire et al., (2020) conducted a study which revealed that at least 57 percent of mental health cases reported at hospitals in Zimbabwe were drug and substance abuse related and 45% cases involved youth.

Drug and substance abuse refers to the harmful intake of drugs and hazardous psychoactive substances, alcohol and banned drugs by individuals (World Health Organisation, 2020). Drug and substance abuse has an effect on the health and wellbeing of users, it also affects the public's health and social stability (World Health Organisation, 2020). Unemployment refers to all economically active persons who meet three criteria namely: not in paid employment or self-employment; actively seeking employment; and available to start work within a specified or reasonable time. This also includes the youth who are not in employment; education or training (NEET), (International Labour Organisation, 2012). ZIMSTAT (2024) reports that Masvingo province has a total of 445 164 youths (15-35 years). The total population of unemployed youth (Youth NEET) in Masvingo province is 212412 (ZIMSTAT, 2024). This translates to 50% youth unemployment rate in Masvingo province. Zimbabwe national statistics Agency (Zimstat) 2024 statistics indicate that out of the country's 10 provinces, Masvingo is ranked 4th in terms of youth unemployment rate.

In Zimbabwe, the youth refers to people between the ages of 15 and 35 (African Youth Charter, 2006; Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). Zimbabwe youth constitute 67,7 percent of the total population (Chidume & Mugambiwa, 2024) and latest statistics indicate that at least 57 percent of the total youth population in the country engage in drug and substance abuse (Maraire et al., 2020). Statistics of drug and substance abuse are continuously increasing by each year despite various stakeholder interventions to fight drug and substance abuse. Ironically, the youth is an important age group, which is expected to drive the country's future economy (Maunganidze, 2023). The youth are the most productive age group who provide labour force for the country (Maraire et al., 2020; Mugari, 2024). They are also the future leaders, who have a central role in Zimbabwe's economic development (Dube, n.d.; Mtemeri & Nhamo, 2019; Mugari, 2024). Therefore, it is important to develop interventions to curb drug and substance among youth to ensure that the country has the required work force and future leaders who are required in the growth and prosperity of the economy.

Recently, the Government of Zimbabwe has developed a collaborative framework for managing drug and substance abuse for the period 2024- 2030, (Government of Zimbabwe, 2024). The country's drug and substance abuse Plan call for all stakeholders to support the national response to drug and substance abuse at family, household, community and business levels. The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, (under which Universities fall) is one of the stakeholders in the national multi-sectoral drug and substance abuse programme of interventions for addressing drug and substance abuse, (Government of Zimbabwe, 2024). As a stakeholder in drug and substance abuse management, higher and tertiary education sector should actively contribute to intervention strategies in the communities under which they operate. The contribution of higher and tertiary education institutions, specifically Universities, has to align with its role in the country.

Universities offer many services that include teaching, research, innovation, industrialisation and community engagement (Kisambira et al., 2024; MHTESTD, 2019; Phuthi, 2022). Under community engagement, universities have a role of fostering social and economic development in the cities that host them through sharing their knowledge on community issues and development of collective strategies in support of government efforts to address national issues (Kisambira et al., 2024). Thus Universities could contribute to the drug and substance abuse through a collective capacity of their departments or sections to address drug and substance abuse among youth to ensure that the country has the current and future required human capital and leaders to spur economic growth. To that end, the study sought to explore the interventions

for drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth in Masvingo Urban that Great Zimbabwe University could offer as an institution hosted in Masvingo City.

Statement of the problem

The Government of Zimbabwe has called for various stakeholders to contribute to its effort to curb drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe. Various ministries and government departments who responded to the Government call have analysed and offered intervention strategies for drug and substance abuse but it continues to rise (Maraire et al., 2020). Maraire et al., (2020) revealed various stakeholders` (public health institutions, law enforcement, church, Non-Governmental Organisations and Communities) response to drug abuse. The absence of tertiary institutions in the fight against drug and substance abuse could be hindering the government`s efforts to curb the pandemic. Among other roles, Universities have the mandate to community engagement. However, despite Universities` role to offer service to various community challenges, their contribution on drug and substance abuse remains scant. Although the ministry of higher and tertiary education has taken the responsibility by conducting drug and substance abuse awareness campaigns (Marandure et al., 2023; Moyo & Mpofu, 2023), a lot needs to be done to curb the drug and substance abuse scourge. According to Marandure et al. (2023), there is little knowledge on the strategies to deal with drug and substance use and addiction. Even the youth are not aware of the effects of drug and substance abuse(Matutu & Mususa, 2019).

It is therefore crucial to analyse drug and substance abuse from a Universities approach in order to develop collaborative efforts by various University departments/ sections to address drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth. Therefore, the study seeks to explore the possible intervention strategies that Great Zimbabwe University can offer to curb drug and substance abuse among youth in Masvingo Urban.

Objectives

This study sought to address the following objectives:

- To explore the influence of unemployment on drug and substance abuse among youth in Masvingo Urban.
- To assess the unemployed youth`s understanding on the risks associated with drug and substance abuse.
- To identify the University intervention strategies for curbing drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth in Masvingo Urban.

Theoretical framework

This research was guided by Merton's (1938) strain theory. Merton (1968) assumes that a social system is influenced by its culture structure and social structure. The culture structure refers to the cultural valued goals (such as economic status, employment) and the accepted means to realise the accepted culture valued goals (Deflem, 2017; Merton, 1968). The social structure refers to the classes that exist in a social system (Deflem, 2017). Merton (1968) assumes that there is misalignment in the social system between the cultural valued goals and means to acquire them (Deflem, 2017; Messner, 2010). The strain theory states that the social system does not offer equal opportunities in all the social classes as opportunities are differentially distributed (Messner, 2010). The disadvantaged classes or groups who fail to access opportunities experience frustration (strain) which influence them to respond differently to their social environment (Deflem, 2017; Merton, 1968). Individuals may adapt to the environment through various modes namely conformation, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion (Merton, 1968; Messner, 2010). A conformer accepts the social system and pursues their goals regardless of unequal opportunities in the system. An innovator will use any means to realise the goals and the means are usually illegal. A ritualist abandons the goals whilst accepting the social system. A retreatist rejects the goals and the social system to engage in deviance such as alcoholism, vagrancy and drug abuse. Lastly, a rebel rejects both the goals and the social system to find new set of goals and means to accomplish them (Messner, 2010). The strain theory is applicable in the study of drug and substance abuse among youth as it helps to explain why youth may adopt drug and substance abuse to cope with strain (frustration, anger or stress) that they experience as a result of unemployment. ‘

2.0 Review of related literature

Unemployment influences on drug and substance abuse among youth

Drug and substance abuse is an effect of the malfunction of the environment and its components (Mudzingiri, 2023). It therefore becomes imperative to target the environmental factors that influence drug and substance abuse. Among all the factors influencing drug and substance use; unemployment remains the largest contributor to drug and substance addiction (Azagba et al., 2021; Chidume & Mugambiwa, 2024; Maraire et al., 2020; Nkomo et al., 2024). Zimbabwe is confronted with socio-economic challenges which have ripple effects on the youth ((Marandure et al., 2023; Mudzingiri, 2023). Firstly, a number of children , who have become youth now, dropped school due to lack of funds hence the reason for being unemployed (Marandure et al.,

2023). Secondly, some of those who had the opportunity to complete their educational courses have not secured employment due to reduced economic activities in the country (Marandure et al., 2023). Thus drug and substance abuse offers youth a temporary escape from unemployment (Nkomo et al., 2024).

According to Marandure et al., (2023), another contributing factor to drug and substance abuse is the extensive development of urban centres, particularly the construction of high density suburbs without corresponding industrial areas. Furthermore, the industry and factory closures caused by the country's economic situation has led to the underutilisation of youth as labour force (Marandure et al., 2023). The lack of employment opportunities among the youth has led them to indulge in illegal activities such as drug and substance abuse (Marandure et al., 2023).

It is clear that unemployment is the major influence of drug and substance abuse among the youth. According to Chidume and Mugambiwa (2024) due to high unemployment rates in Zimbabwe, the youth are idle, with more free time and lacking resources to engage in income generating projects, leading them to resort to drug and substance abuse. Dzinamatira et al., (2023) further state that the unavailability of industries in urban areas has led to idleness among the youth; leading to the formation of drug and substance cartels as coping strategies for unemployment related stress. The use of drug and substance abuse has become a form of entertainment for unemployed youth as a result of desperation (Dzinamatira et al., 2023). The inactivity caused by unemployment influence the youth to experiment as they have little knowledge on the effects of drug and substance abuse (Matutu & Mususa, 2019). The lack of employment opportunities among youth has incapacitated them to meet basic needs (Chidume & Mugambiwa, 2024; Nhapi, 2019). Thus drug dealing by youth has become a source of income to alleviate poverty and to provide their basic needs. A research conducted by Moyo and Mporofu (2023) indicate that drug and substance dealing is a profitable business which provides income for unemployed youth.

Risks associated with drug and substance abuse

Drugs and substance abuse has detrimental psychological and health effects on individuals' and the public. The use of inhalants drugs such as opiads cause cardiac arrhythmia, renal, pulmonary and nerve damage (Jakaza & Nyoni, 2018; Mugari, 2024). The use of drug and hazardous substances such as crystal meth (mutoriro) is correlated with HIV and AIDS related infections as youth who indulge in drug and substance abuse tend to engage in unprotected sex with more sexual partners leading to unwanted pregnancies and unhealthy babies that

contribute to high mortality rates (Dzinamatira et al., 2023; Mugari, 2024). A new form of drug and substance abuse; infusing blood of a drug or substance intoxicated person into an un-intoxicated person increases the risk of contracting HIV diseases and life threatening challenges (Marandure et al., 2023).

Marandure et al., (2023) further state that drug and substance abuse causes psychiatric and mental illness; sometimes misconstrued as witchcraft. Such illnesses have influenced anti-social behaviours in the form of rebellion, anger that usually lead to ruthless and criminal activities such as robbery, murder and rape. The anti-social behaviours caused by drug and substance abuse leads to illegal activities and depression related complications(Maraire et al., 2020; Mugari, 2024).

Intervention strategies for curbing drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth

Zimbabwe requires investment in health delivery systems in the fight to deal with drug and substance abuse. Marandure et al., (2023) and Mugari (2024) note that the interventions for drug and substance abuse have been incapacitated by poor health delivery systems, shortage of labour to manage drug addicts in hospitals and scarce knowledge on how to deal with drug addicts. Thus more rehabilitation centres and social workers are required to address drug and substance abuse. Furthermore, Maraire et al., (2020), Moyo and Mpofu (2023) and Mtemeri and Nhamo, (2019) propose health and counselling services as an important intervention for youth drug and substance abuse to complement government efforts to curb the scourge.

Providing financial resources and funding self-help projects are good interventions for drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth. The Government of Zimbabwe, through its National Drug Control embraces the contributions by various stakeholders that include financial resources, funding self-help projects and anti-drug awareness campaigns(Government of Zimbabwe, 2024).

Availing recreational facilities help to deal with drug and substance abuse among the youth. Marandure et al., (2023)recommend availing recreational activities such as sports as a strategy to deal with drug and substance abuse. Availing recreational facilities will keep the youth busy with sports and self-help projects help them to shun drug and substance abuse

Another intervention for drug and substance abuse is to invest in rehabilitation centres. According to Mugari (2024), the country`s major rehabilitation centres that include Ingutsheni Hospital and Ngomahuru Hospital are full and no longer have capacity to accommodate drug

patients and addicts. Thus the country requires more rehabilitation centres to accommodate drug abuse patients.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study adopts the interpretive research paradigm to examine the factors influencing drug and substance among youth as well as to gauge their understanding of the effects of drug and substance abuse.

Research approach

This research adopted a mixed methods approach to gain a deeper understanding on drug and substance abuse among youths. The research employed guided by descriptive and exploratory research designs. Descriptive research design was used to assess the state of drug and substance abuse among the youth. Exploratory research design was utilised to identify the effective interventions that universities can make for curbing drug and substance abuse among the youth.

Research procedure

The research targeted unemployed youth in the age range of 15 to 35 in Masvingo urban. It also targeted university principal officers at the institution who are responsible for the overall running of the institution and the staff who are involved in corporate social responsibility, information, health and counselling services.

Population

The total population of unemployed youth (Youth NEET) in Masvingo province is 212412 (ZIMSTAT, 2024). The population excluded all the youth who did not meet the International Labour Organisation context of unemployment. All persons in formal and informal employment were excluded including all persons not actively seeking employment as per International Labour Organisation (2012)..

Sample

The researchers sought assistance from the relevant ministry officials to get access to unemployed youth. Convenient sampling was used to sample 33 unemployed youth in the age range 15 to 35 in Masvingo urban centre. Purposive sampling was used to sample 20 participants from Great Zimbabwe University.

Data collection

The research conducted 2 focus groups discussions with unemployed youth. The focus groups were named as FGD 1, FGD2. Focus group discussion 1(FGD1) comprised 16 participants and

focus group discussion 2 (FGD2) comprised 17 participants. The discussions focused on the youth's experiences and knowledge of the causes and effects of drug and substance abuse as well as their recommendations for curbing drug and substance abuse. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with university staff to gain insights on their knowledge, challenges and possible recommendations for University interventions on drug and substance abuse.

Data analysis

Data obtained from the focus group discussions and interviews with university participants was presented in themes. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse research data.

Ethical considerations

The research sought informed consent from the research participants. Confidentiality of research participants was observed and sensitive information shared by participants was presented in anonymity. Participants responses obtained from focus group discussions were recorded by focus group discussion (FGD) and participant number (P) and responses obtained from interviews were recorded by participant number to protect their names.

4.0 Results and discussion

The study sample comprised 12 University staff and 32 unemployed youths. Name codes, A1 to A12 were created for 12 interview participants. 2 focus groups were made with Focus group discussion 1 (FGD1) comprising 16 participants and Focus Group Discussion 2 (FGD2) comprising 17 participants. Participants were informed on the purpose of this study and consent to participate was obtained from the participants. The themes that emerged from the study include unemployment influences on drug and substance abuse among youth, risks associated with drug and substance abuse and Intervention strategies for curbing drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth.

Unemployment influences on drug and substance abuse among youth

Data obtained from the focus group participants revealed that 20 out of 32 participants (62.5%) are engaged in drug and substance use. Of the 62.5% involved in drug abuse; 11,1 % are diploma and degree holders, (13,57%) completed Ordinary and Advanced levels of education, (17.76%)dropped secondary level education and (19.35%) are primary level dropouts. Out of the 20 participants who admitted to drug and substance use, 2 participants (10%) have been

involved in drug abuse for more than 3 years, 9 participants (45%) mentioned that they have been involved in drug use for more than 2 years, 4 participants (20%) have been in drug use for 6 months now, 2 participants (20%) revealed that they joined drug abuse in the last 5 months and 2 participants (20%) have been in drug abuse for 3 months now while 1 participant (10%) admitted to drug use for nearly a month now.

Responses obtained from focus group discussions and interviews indicated that unemployed youths engaged in drug and substance abuse as behaviours to handle unemployment pressures. The participants mentioned the following as reasons for drug and substance abuse: isolation, lack of productive activities, unemployment related stress, inability to secure employment, peer pressure, lack of support by the government, lack of skills to start self-jobs and lack of financial resources to complete education. The following responses were shared by the participants:

FGD1-P1: *I do drug and substance use because I have nothing to do. I just like drugs because they keep me occupied.*

FGD2-P4: *Our country does not have jobs, what else can I do besides kurova mutoriro (Chrystal meth)?*

FGD2-P6: *I have realised that it is better to use drugs to release my stress. Life is not balancing. Ndinaro degree chairo but I have not been employed. The only time I was employed was during attachment.*

FGD1-P12: *I was initiated into drug use by my friends. I realised that I did not have friends and decided to join their company.*

FGD1-P9: *The Government is not giving us jobs, companies are closing. We do not have hope. The only thing that I can do to relieve my frustration is alcohol use.*

FGD2-P5: *Handina kuzoenda kusecondary baba vangu namai vangu pavakashaya. Hama dzose dzakatirasa. Ndakaona kuti zvirinane ndiuye kutown kutsvaga basa. Apa hariskuwanikwa apa handina pekurara kana chekudya. Mutoriro unotondibatsira kuti ndisanzwa nzara kana chando.*

A1: *One of the reasons why these guys indulge in drug and substance abuse is peer pressure. Because of high unemployment rates, the youth are forced into drug and substance abuse.*

A5: *I think the youth are engaging in substance use because they have more free time, they are not employed and it is because they do not have skills to start self-projects.*

A9: Most of the youth who are into drugs are not educated. Its either they dropped or failed school. So they do not have jobs and they end up doing drugs.

The findings on the influence of unemployment on drug and substance abuse are similar to research conducted by Marandure et al., (2023), and Mudzingiri (2023) which found that unemployment largely contributes to drug and substance abuse among the youth. The findings also confirm a preceding study by Marandure et al., (2023) which assert that lack of employment opportunities influence the youth to indulge in drug and substance abuse. The findings also revealed that unemployed youth engage in drug use due to decreased job opportunities and company closures. This is in line Marandure et al., (2023) which assert that the extensive development of urban centres, and high density suburbs does not correspond with industrial areas.

Findings also revealed that unemployed youth engage in drug abuse because of lack of productive activities. This finding converge with (Dzinamatira et al., 2023; Moyo & Mpofo, 2023)`s findings that unavailability of industries in the urban areas has led to indolence among the youth; leading to the creation of drug and substance cartels as coping strategies for unemployment related stress.

The study revealed that unemployed youth engage in drug and substance abuse because of peer pressure and experimentation. These findings are consistent with(Matutu & Mususa, 2019) who found that drug and substance abuse has become a form of entertainment for unemployed youth as a result of desperation.

Risks associated with drug and substance abuse

From the focus group discussions held with the participants, 17 out of 32 participants (53,13%) were aware of the risks associated with drug and substance abuse and 15 out of 32 participants (46.88%) were ignorant of the risks of engaging in drug and substance abuse. Of the 15 participants who were unaware of the risks of engaging in drug and substance abuse, 5 participants (29.41%) were drug and substance abusers. The following sentiments were shared by focus group and interview participants:

FGD2-P14: *I started taking drugs in 2021, we were a group of 5 and only 2 of us are left. One of my friends had lung cancer, he smoked marijuana too much. Another one just got wild and murdered his father. I think he is in jail right now.*

FGD1-P7: *Personally I do not care about the health effects of using drugs and substances. For now, I am happy with the satisfaction I get after using them. But drug and substance use can drain a lot of money. I spend a lot of money on drugs than I spent on my basic needs.*

FGD1-P9: *Yaa pakaipa, ukatarisa vanhu varimutown vanoita sevanopenga but mutoriro uya, unogona kutogunga kuti waroiwa, ini ndombaizviziva hangu asi hapana kusiri kufa.*

FGD2-P3: *I am not aware of any health problems of using drugs. I don't think drugs are harmful because, take for example, marijuana, it is just a natural herb.*

FGD2-P13: *I am so much into drug and substance use but I know the effects. I have been affected by drugs but I cannot resist them. Drug use can cause mental health problems such as brain damage. Even the liver and other body organs. you can also have fatal respiratory and chest problems.*

FGD1-P6: *I am not happy with my marriage, I think I was under the influence of drugs, I never dated my wife but was forced to marry her because she got pregnant.*

FGD1-P12: *I started drugs out of curiosity, I just wanted to experiment but now I am trapped. I cannot do without drugs otherwise I will fall sick.*

A3: *Drugs are so bad, Drug abusers are very violent, they can easily loose control and end up raping, engaging in robberies and murder.*

A7: *Drug and substance use are harmful to the health of users. They cause pneumonia, chronic diseases. They also strain social relations due to isolation*

A11: *Drug and substance abuse influence promiscuity. Drug abusers may be pressured into unprotected sex with too many partners. This increases the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and infections.*

The findings indicate that drug abusers had increased chances of physical and mental health challenges such as respiratory problems, psychiatric problems and organs failure. The findings are similar to (Jakaza & Nyoni, 2018; Mugari, 2024)'s assertions that drug and substance abuse cause cardiac arrhythmia, renal and pulmonary and nerve damage. The study also revealed HIV and Aids, unplanned marriages and unwanted babies as associated risks of drug and substance

abuse. This confirms Dzinamatira et al., (2023) and Mugari, (2024)`s views that drug and hazardous substances usage correlates with HIV and AIDS related infections as youth engage in unprotected sex.

It was also revealed that drug and substance abuse propels negative behaviours such as anger, theft, murder and rape. The findings converge with (Maraire et al., 2020; Marandure et al., 2023; Mugari, 2024)`s findings that drug and substance abuse causes anti-social behaviours that leads to illegal activities.

The study`s findings that 15 out of 32 participants (46.88%) were ignorant of the risks of engaging in drug and substance abuse confirm Matutu and Mususa`s (2019) view that the e youth are not aware of the health risks associated with drug and substance abuse.

Intervention strategies for curbing drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth

Participants from the focus groups and interviews revealed creating employment opportunities, offering training to start income generating projects, equipping the youths with skills to start self-jobs, availing information services, offering health and counselling services and provision of sports and recreation facilities. The following are responses obtained from the participants:

FGD1-P11: *I think counselling is the best for us. The stress that I have could go if I find someone to talk to.*

FGD2-P5: *Organising sports activities can help us to direct our energy on the right things*

FGD2-P8: *I would stop drug use if I find something to do. I think if we are equipped with skills and capital, we can start self-projects.*

FGD1-P3: *We need the government support as youth. They need to create opportunities for us by opening factories so that we can work.*

FGD1-P1: *The government should roll out vocational training programmes so that we learn technical skills such as motor mechanics or engineering and start our own companies.*

FGD2-P12: *We need sponsorship to pursue education. I have 8 ordinary levels, with maths but my parents do not have money to go to college or university.*

A2: *Drug and substance abuse is major problem. The university can intervene through awareness campaigns to inform the youth on the effects of drug and substance abuse.*

A6: I think drug and substance abusers need counselling. The university can offer free health and counselling services at its health institutions. It can also identify the skills of the youth in drug use and offer free courses so that they can start their own projects and stop drugs.

A10: I suggest that the University offer contract and part time work to the youth so that they stop taking drugs.

The study revealed that offering financial assistance to youth assists to reduce drug and substance abuse. The findings are similar to Nkomo et al., (2024)'s assertion that provision of financial resources and funding self-help projects can work as possible interventions for addressing drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth. Drug awareness campaigns were also mentioned as another strategy for curbing drug and substance abuse. The finding converge with (Marandure et al., 2023; Moyo & Mpofu, 2023)'s views that drug and substance abuse awareness campaigns in the higher and tertiary education sector help to stop drug and substance abuse by the youth..

The study also revealed that sport recreational facilities and sponsoring sport are intervention strategies for drug and substance abuse. These findings are in line with (Maraire et al., 2020; Moyo & Mpofu, 2023; Mugari, 2024)'s assertion that availing recreational activities for sports and entertainment help to deal with drug and substance abuse by keeping the youth busy.

Another intervention for drug and substance abuse is to invest in rehabilitation centres. The findings corroborates (Azagba et al., 2021; Mugari, 2024)'s findings that the country's major rehabilitation centres that include Ingutsheni Hospital and Ngomahuru Hospital are full and no longer have capacity to accommodate drug patients and addicts.. Thus the country requires more rehabilitation centres to accommodate drug and substance abuse patients as well as to decongest patients so that they find more attention for effective rehabilitation.

5.0 Conclusions

The study focused on the University-led intervention strategies for curbing drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth. Findings revealed that (62,5%) of unemployed youth in Masvingo urban centre who participated in the study are actively involved in drug and substance abuse. The findings show that the majority of unemployed youths in Masvingo who are involved in drug and substance use (53.13%) are aware of the risks associated with drug and substance abuse albeit failure to resist drug and substance use. However, a small number of youth which mainly consisted new recruits for drug and substance abuse and inactive youths (29.41%), are not aware of the risks associated with drug and substance abuse. The research

concludes that a number of unemployed youth in Masvingo are being initiated into drug and substance use almost every month and year. It can also be concluded that Universities' intervention strategies can largely contribute to the national efforts to address drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth.

6.0 Recommendations

In light of the findings obtained on drug and abuse substance among unemployed youth in Masvingo urban, the following recommendations have been made as collaborative interventions for Universities:

- Through its health and counselling departments, the University can offer health and counselling services to augment the number of social workers required as a complement to government efforts to curb the scourge.
- Considering the shortage of labour and rehabilitation centres for accommodating drug patients, the University could assist by constructing a rehabilitation centre as a form of corporate social responsibility in the community that it operates in. The University can also take responsibility of the rehabilitation centre with the assistance from responsible government departments through assigning students from relevant disciplines as part of work related learning.
- Through the relevant departments and expertise, the University could offer free vocational programmes and short courses to offer training to qualified individuals in order to increase the number of counsellors and health personnel for manning rehabilitation centres.
- Offering university bursaries to unemployed youth who qualify for degree programmes.
- Holding anti-drug awareness campaigns and sensitisation programmes through the University's public relations department, the health and counselling units;
- Community programs to facilitate integration of drug abusers with their families and communities after rehabilitation.
- Offering financial assistance to capable youth for starting new projects. The University could assist the youth via the Institution's innovation and industrial hubs by testing and assisting them with commercialisation of their products and services.
- Through its human resource management and administration department, the University can offer unemployed youth casual and contract employment contracts for adhoc work.

- Library section to provide library and internet services to raise youth awareness on the effects of drug and substance abuse.
- The University`s sports and recreational department could engage and support sport by constructing more recreational facilities, sponsoring community games including uniforms, transport and awards to best teams. Partnering with various stakeholders in entertainment would also assist to deal with drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth.
- The researchers recommend other studies to consider evaluation of university led intervention strategies for curbing drug and substance abuse among unemployed youth and explore how universities can partner with local stakeholders to improve drug and substance abuse intervention strategies.

Acknowledgements

1. Zimstat Masvingo office
2. Masvingo Provincial Youth Office
3. Masvingo District Youth Office

References

African Youth Charter. (2006).

Azagba, S., Shan, L., Qeadan, F., & Wolfson, M. (2021). Unemployment rate, opioids misuse and other substance abuse: quasi-experimental evidence from treatment admissions data. *BMC Psychiatry*, 21. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-02981-7>

Chidume, M. ., & Mugambiwa, S. . (2024). Breaking the chains: Exploring the socio-economic ripple effectsof drug and substance abuseamong youths in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Substance Use*, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14659891.2024.2407628>

Constitution of Zimbabwe. (2013).

Deflem, M. (2017). Anomie, Strain and Opprotunity Structure: Robert, K. Merton`s paradigm of Deviancy Behavior. In *The Handbook of the History and Philosophy of Criminology*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119011385.ch8>

Dube, P. (2023). Christian spitituality as protective factors against drug and substance abuse by Zimbabwean Youths: A case of the Catholic Church in Gweru Urban. *The Dyke*, 17, 1–22.

- Dzinamatira, T. ., Mutevere, M., Nyoka, S., Mkwapatira, M., Murewanhema, G., & Dzinamatira, T. (2023). Illicit substance use among adolescents and youths in Zimbabwe: A stakeholder`s perspective on enabling factors and potential strategies to address the scourge. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*.
- Jakaza, T. ., & Nyoni, C. (2018). Emerging dynamics of substance abuse among street children in Zimbabwe. A case of Harare Central Business District. *African Journal of Social Work*, 8(2), 63–70.
- Kisambira, A., Khadijah, B., & Ahmed, A. (2024). The role of University Community Engagement programmes in influencing higher education outcomes and Community Development: Insights from Uganda. *Extensive Reviews*, 4(1), 15–28.
<https://doi.org/10.21467/e.xr.4.1.8028>
- Maraire, D., Jasni, M., & Devi, R. (2020). A general review of Zimbabwe`s response to Drug and Substance among the Youth. *Social Sciences*.
<https://doi.org/10.20319/pijsss.2020.62.625638>
- Marandure, B., Mhizha, S., Wilson, A., & Nhunzvi, C. (2023). Understandingn theh nature of substance use in Zimbabwe: State of the art and ways foward: A scoping review protocol. *Plos One*, 18(3), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0272240>
- Matutu, V., & Mususa, D. (2019). Drug and substance abuse among young people in Zimbabwe: A crisis of morality or public health problem. *Social Science Research Network*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3489954>
- Maunganidze, L. (2023). Coping with drug and substance abuse among the University Youth in Zimbabwe: Towards a “quad-helix” model.” *The Dyke*.
- Merton, R. . (1938). Social Structure and Anomie. *American Sociological Review*, 3(6), 677–682.
- Merton, R. . (1968). *Social Theory and Social Structure*. The Free Press.
- Messner, S. . (2010). Encyclopedia of Criminological Theory. In *Social Structure and Anomie* (pp. 613–620). Sage Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412959193.17171>
- MHTESTD. (2019). *Doctrine to Guide the translation of transitional stabilisation programme in Higher and tertiary education institutions and technology development*.
- Moyo, S., & Mpfu, M. (2023). Drug and substance abuse declared a National Disater. *The Chronicle*.
- Mtemeri, J., & Nhamo, M. (2019). Interrogating challenges of youths unemployment in rural areas of Masvingo, Zimbabwe. *African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(5), 16–27.
- Mudzingiri, A. (2023). Pandemic after pandemic: Adopting the multi-dimensional family

- therapy approach for youth drug abuse in Zimbabwe. *Global Journal of Psychology Research: New Trends and Issues*, 13(2), 139–151.
<https://doi.org/10.18844/g.pr.v3i2.9211>
- Mugari, I. (2024). The emerging trends and response to Drug and Substance Abuse among the youth in Zimbabwe. *Social Sciences*, 13, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci/>
- Nhapi, T. (2019). Drug Addiction among youths in Zimbabwe: Social Work Perspective. In *Addiction in Southern and Eastern Africa*. (pp. 241–259). Palgrave Millan.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13593-5_15
- Nkomo, N., Chinangure, F., Bangezhano, M., Mbuba, J., Fambi, T., & Mutakwa, S. (2024). Understanding and addressing drug and substance abuse among the youth in Zimbabwe: A comprehensive Review (2016-2024). *UNESSWA Journal of Education*, 7(1).
- International Labour Organisation (2012). *Towards the right to work. Analysing unemployment under underemployment*. ILO.
- Phuthi, N. (2022). Quality-driven university curriculum reform in Zimbabwe: a critical conceptualisation of harmonised minimum bodies of knowledge". *Higher Education Evaluation and Development*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/HEED-01-2022-0002>
- World Health Organisation. (2020). *Global Status Report on alcohol and health: Management of substance abuse*.
- Government of Zimbabwe (2024). *Zimbabwe MultiSectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan 2024-2030*.
- ZIMSTAT. (2024). *Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency*.

Zimbabwean WhatsApp Content Creators' Radar in Mitigating Drug and Substance Abuse: An Aristotelian's Rhetorical Triangle Approach to Persuasion

Lantern Beatrice 

Department of Languages, Media and Communication Studies, Great Zimbabwe University
bealantern@gmail.com, blantern@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0006-2941-0582

***Corresponding Author:** Lantern Beatrice, blantern@gzu.ac.zw

Abstract

Drug and substance abuse has become a pressing concern in Zimbabwe and the world at large, affecting not only individuals but also communities, healthcare systems, and economies. Despite the growing outcry, the number of users continues to rise, exacerbated by emerging drug combinations. The rapid spread of drug and substance abuse, facilitated by technology, has not been matched by effective media discourses to mitigate the issue. While information on drug and substance abuse is available in media spaces, it is often limited and inadequate. This article argues that since we are living mostly in a smartphone messaging world, digital artists can play a crucial role in preventing drug and substance abuse by creating and sharing targeted media content, particularly in Zimbabwean indigenous languages, on WhatsApp. Given the dearth of WhatsApp-compatible media addressing drug and substance abuse discourses in indigenous languages, this study proposes five media formats to bridge this gap and these are: videos (including recovery testimonials, GIFs, comedian-based content and infographics), WhatsApp Channels, audios, emotional chatbots, and stickers. Using Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle Theory, this article provides insights into structuring effective arguments that persuade audiences on drug and substance abuse prevention strategies. A total of twenty participants were selected using purposive sampling, and data was collected through asynchronous online interviews, immersive observation, and internet grazing. By leveraging media and sharing targeted messages across WhatsApp spaces, this study suggests that the devastating effects of drug and substance abuse can be drastically reduced. Since this article is aligned with national objectives in fighting drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe, it aims to make a useful contribution to the literature.

Key Words: WhatsApp-compatible media, drug and substance abuse, prevention, persuasion, indigenous languages.

Introduction

Drug and substance abuse (henceforth DSA) has become a pressing concern globally, affecting not only victims and their families but also politicians, law enforcement officers, environmental scientists, economists, educators and health practitioners. The outcry is becoming louder and louder, as the alarming statistics from the World Drug Reports underscore the severity of the issue. The 2023 World Drug Report estimated 296 million DSA users in 2021, up from 240 million in 2011, while the 2025 report recorded 316 million users in 2023, a significant increase from 243 million in 2013. In Zimbabwe, the situation is equally dire. The Afrobarometer Round 10 Survey (January 2024 - June 2024), revealed that eight (8) in ten (10) Zimbabweans (79%) consider DSA widespread in their communities, with 56% deeming it “very widespread”. Local media outlets frequently report on DSA, with chilling headlines like “Zimbabwe: Shock As Girl (8) Checks into Drugs Rehabilitation Centre” (Nyeve, 2025); “Grade 7 Girl, Two Other Minors Nabbed in Police Raids on Drug-Peddling Bases” (HarareLive, 2025); “Five Learners Caught Smoking Dagga” (Harare Mirror 52, 2025); “Zimbabweans Say Drug and Substance Abuse is Rampant, See it as a Society-wide Challenge” (Masunungure, 2025) and “A Generation Lost due to Drug and Substance...” (Chibamu, 2024). In addition, the frequent adverts on mass media, the mushrooming of rehabilitation centres country-wide; fundraising efforts, awareness and prevention campaigns further highlight the urgency of the issue.

Drug and substance abuse encompasses various substances including opioids, prescription drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug abuse (UPMC Editorial Staff, 2024; New Zealand Police Managers’ Guild Trust). This article focuses on illicit drug abuse, defined by Palen (2001:365) as the ‘use of a chemical substance to the degree that physical, psychological, and social harm results.’ Examples of illicit drugs are heroin, cocaine and cannabis. Heroin and cocaine are classified as Class A drugs, while cannabis, also known as *mbanje* or dagga, is categorised as Class C drugs (Misuse of Drugs Act, 1975; New Zealand Police Managers’ Guild Trust). These illicit drugs can be consumed through various methods including snorting, smoking, injecting or eating.

Drug trafficking has exacerbated the illicit drug abuse problem, with well-organised networks and syndicates exploiting technology to facilitate smooth transportation and delivery of illicit drugs worldwide. News reports of intercepted drugs are commonplace, such as “Zimra Intercepts 164kgs of Mbanje (Mphisa, 2025)”; “Two Suspects Nabbed for Possessing and

Smuggling Five Bales of Mbanje from South Africa (Moyo, 2025); “SA Police Intercept R8m Zim-bound Dagga (Harare Mirror 168, 2025”); “Nigeria: Customs Hand Over Intercepted 1,400kg suspected Cannabis Sativa to NDLEA in Ondo (TVC News, 2025)”); “American Gang Busted at UK Airport after Hiding in Toilets thought they were Going to Make a Fortune (Wilkes, 2025)”. However, many trafficked illicit drugs go undetected, contributing to the growing number of victims and drug dealers. Drug cartels employ various methods to traffic drugs, including swallowing them (Samuel, 2025; Ikeji, 2025b), concealing them under the wigs (Ikeji, 2025a), disguising them as hair products (Patel, 2025), using fake presidency vehicle plate numbers to beguile traffic security personnel and avoid proper checks (Hakim, 2025) and hiding them in underwear (Mubarak, 2025). Some individuals are even unwittingly used as drug mules, only discovering the truth when their luggage is scanned.

The threat of drug trafficking, peddling, and dealing in illicit drugs has led countries to establish severe penalties for those convicted of such crimes. In some cases, countries like Malaysia (Wing-Cheong, 2025), Vietnam (Ksnmedia Reporter, 2025), and Bangladesh (The Kenyan Daily Post, 2025) impose the death penalty. Meanwhile, nations like Kenya enforce lengthy prison sentences (50 years) or hefty fines (Ksh50million) (Oduor, 2025). Interestingly, Colombian President Petro advocates cocaine legalisation to combat illegal trade (Gekara, 2025). These stringent penalties instill fear among drug dealers, prompting them to conceal evidence at all costs. Unfortunately, some resort to desperate measures, such as swallowing drugs which can prove fatal (Matara, 2025). The internet reveals that the driving forces behind drug peddling and trafficking include the ‘get-rich-quickily’ mentality and corruption.

Drug dealing affects people from all walks of life, regardless of age, sex, race, or occupation. According to New Zealand Police Managers’ Guild Trust, drug dealing is defined as “possession for the purpose of supply or sale”. While government officials are sometimes implicated (Sibindi, 2025), the majority of those involved are unemployed individuals who have turned to drug dealing as a means of survival, despite the disastrous consequences. The effects of drug and substance abuse are far-reaching, including butchering a parent (Makondora, 2025), subjecting parents to severe mistreatment like assaulting and verbal abuse (Staff Writer, 2025). In addition, Maraire and Chethiyar (2020) discuss a cocktail of DSA effects which include lack of production, dropping out of school, criminal activities,

deteriorating quality of life, and violence. They also vouch that DSA by the Zimbabwean youth is costly to the government as it diverts its revenue to DSA related- spending like enforcing, prosecution, incarceration and rehabilitation of abusers instead of channeling it to development-related spending. Mugari (2024) identifies the following as effects of DSA; flooding of hospitals by victims, school expulsions, loss of life, among other effects.

In Zimbabwe, the government has implemented measures to fight DSA through its Multi-Sectorial Drug and Substance Abuse (DSA) Plan (2024-2030) whose strategic pillars are: supply reduction; demand reduction; harm reduction, treatment and rehabilitation; community reintegration; policy and legal enforcement; media and communication; and resource mobilisation and economic strengthening. It is vital to underscore that while this study directly aligns with the Zimbabwe Multisectorial DSA Plan (2024-2030) pillar number six, “Media and Communication” whose key outcome is “improved communication on drug and substance abuse”, it also aligns with pillar number two, “Demand Reduction” whose key outcome is “reduced prevalence of drug and substance abuse”. In other words, this research engages digital artists to scale up the fight against DSA through creating informative and persuasive content on social media platforms focusing on prevention strategies. Prevention, in this context of research, refers to preventing DSA from escalating. This research subscribes to Palen’s (2001) idea that the best treatment for drug abuse is prevention, and collective action is necessary to address this societal problem.

The rapid spread of DSA demands effective media discourses to mitigate this issue. This article proposes engaging Zimbabwean digital artists to complement government efforts in fighting DSA by creating comprehensive WhatsApp-compatible media. The Aristotelian Rhetorical Triangle perspective is suggested to improve persuasion and inspire the targeted audience. The proposed media formats include; videos in form of recovery testimonials, GIFs, comedian-based videos, and infographics; audios; chatbots; stickers; and Whatsapp channels. An entrepreneurship WhatsApp channel is also proposed to empower unemployed youth with skills and knowledge to earn a living. This article emphasises the importance of using indigenous languages to ensure the messages have a greater impact. By leveraging the social media and sharing targeted messages on WhatsApp, the devastating effects of DSA can be drastically reduced. The prevalence of DSA necessitates urgent action. Creating and circulating these suggested WhatsApp-compatible media formats can help manage this

pandemic. These formats are preferred due to their accessibility, especially to rural populations, and the ability to delete them when no longer needed. By harnessing digital art and social media, Zimbabwe can effectively combat DSA and promote a healthier society.

Objectives

- To explore drug and substance abuse landscape in Zimbabwe.
- To propose WhatsApp-compatible digital media focused on drug and substance abuse prevention strategies.
- To discuss the challenges and mitigation measures on drug and substance abuse.

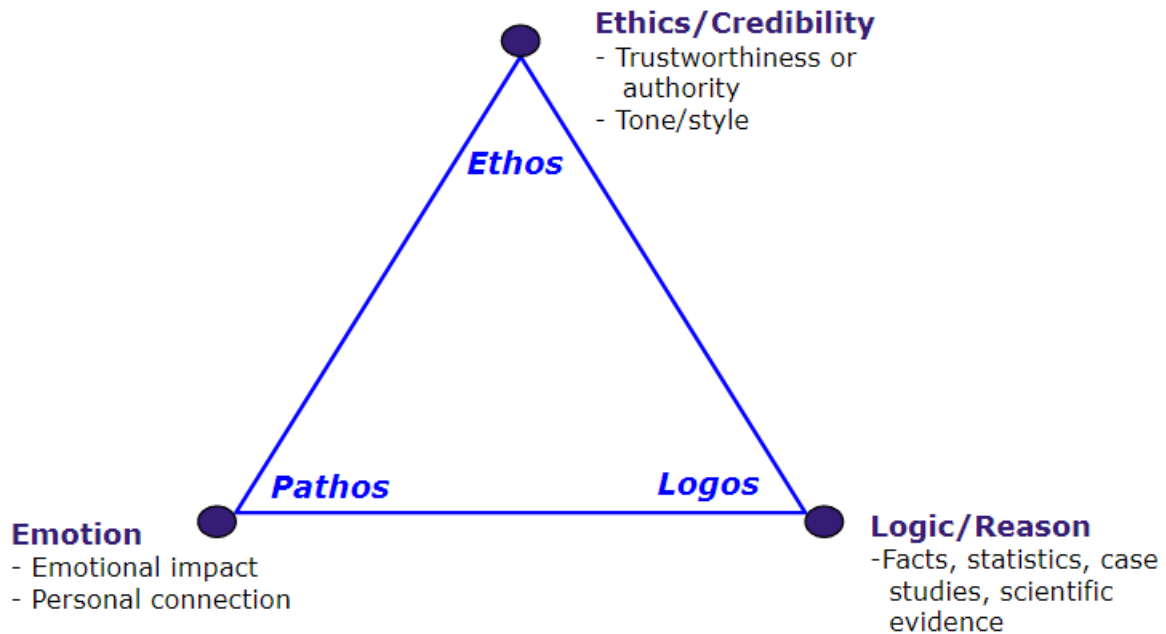
Methodology

This study is grounded in qualitative research. Gravetter and Forzano (2009:147) theorise qualitative research as “commonly used by social anthropologists, who often immerse themselves in a foreign culture to observe patterns of behaviour that help them to understand and describe the social structure and customs of a different civilisation”. Nachmias and Nachmias (1996:281) further explain that “qualitative researchers attempt to understand behaviour and institutions by getting to know the persons involved and their values, rituals, symbols, beliefs, and emotions”. Inferences gathered from these scholarly views inform that the underlying idea of qualitative research is that the participants’ context is vital in understanding them. In this study, the world of participants is located both in their physical environments and in the digital space, specifically on WhatsApp. WhatsApp is selected because it is a popular messaging app among interviewees and to the general population in Zimbabwe. The research employed a survey research design to explore DSA nuances, including types of illicit drugs mostly consumed in their areas, availability and prevalence of DSA information on WhatsApp, kind of content found on this social media platform, its availability in indigenous languages and Whatsapp-compatible formats that can be used to persuade WhatsApp users to reduce DSA. A total of twenty participants were selected using purposive sampling. Nachmias and Nachmias (1996:184) say that in purposive sampling “researchers select sampling units subjectively in an attempt to obtain a sample that appears to be representative of the population”. The sample consisted of eight rural high school teachers drawn from Midlands and Matabeleland South provinces and twelve (two current fourth years

and 10 former) African languages and Media students at Great Zimbabwe University, chosen for their expertise and experience. The rural high school teachers were preferred due to their proximity to the youth (their students and unemployed school-leavers) and their understanding of the community dynamics. Both, former and current Dual Honours in African Languages and Media students were selected for their solid backgrounds in both African languages and Media studies. Given the dispersed nature of the sample units, an asynchronous online interview survey was used. According to Amri, Angelakis and Logan (2021), asynchronous interviews allow respondents to receive questions by email or video or other technologies and reply to at their convenience, enabling them to reflect on their answers and ensuring rigour. In this study, WhatsApp was used to distribute the interview guide, and the response rate was high due to the specified response window. The collected data was analysed qualitatively, emphasising meaning-making through themes.

Theoretical Framework

This article uses Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle Theory to help understand how to structure effective arguments, connect with, and persuade audiences on multiple levels on DSA prevention strategies. Mancha and Tylor (2023) state that Aristotle was an ancient Greek philosopher who lived from 384 to 322 B.C.E. Among many of Aristotle's writings, he developed a theory he called 'rhetoric', which is based on three pillars: *logos* (logic), *ethos* (credibility) and *pathos* (emotion) (Ashar, 2025; Mancha and Taylor, 2023; Cruthers, 2021). Rhetoric, according to Aristotle, is the art of speaking persuasively. Today, we use the term to refer to all forms of persuasive communication, including written, spoken, and visual persuasion (Mancha and Tylor, 2023). Moreover, the rhetorical appeals can be described as the strategies or pillars a writer or speaker uses to persuade an audience. These three pillars of persuasion, when they work in combination help the user to build stronger persuasive arguments which connect with their audience, and drive action (Ashar, 2025). Although Aristotle himself did not use the image of a triangle, he did outline the effective uses of these three modes of persuasion (Mancha and Taylor, 2023). But today, it is commonly visualised in form of various triangles which resonate in its equilateral sides and the equivalent meaning of the Latin words that form the pillars. The triangle is usually read in a counterclockwise direction, that is, ethos, pathos and logic.



The Rhetorical Triangle

Source: Cruthers (2021)

Ethos: The Appeal to Credibility

Ethos is the Latin equivalent word for ethics, *ethos* is about establishing credibility and trust with your audience (Cruthers, 2021; Ashar, 2025). In addition, Cruthers (2021) vouches that *ethos* can be achieved by showcasing expertise, using reliable sources, and demonstrating a clear understanding of the subject matter.

Pathos: The Appeal to Emotion

According to Cruthers (2021), the Latin word ‘pathos’ is equivalent to emotion in English and *pathos* is about appealing to your audience’s emotions. On the other hand, Ashar (2025) vouches that *pathos* is the way of using feelings to persuade others. *Pathos* involves using storytelling, vivid imagery, and personal anecdotes to create an emotional connection with your audience.

Logos: The Appeal to Logic and Reason

Logos, a Latin word for logic, is about using logic and reason to persuade your audience. Cruthers (2021) and Ashar (2025) concur in that *logos* is all about convincing your audience by presenting evidence, facts, and data to support your argument.

Applicability

The Aristotle's triangle provides useful tools for DSA information literacy which is effective in shaping people's understanding of the DSA landscape. It also helps the composers to understand how to structure effective arguments, connecting with, and persuading audiences on multiple levels and in a meaningful way. Drawing insights from Ashar (2025) that a compelling argument is rarely based on just one element, thus, the true power of persuasion lies in how these elements complement and enhance each other; this study uses the combination of all these three elements in harmony, creating a persuasive, well-rounded communication strategy. Whatsapp-compatible digital formats such as videos in form of recovery testimonials, GIFs, comedian-based videos and infographics; emotional chatbots; stickers; audios; and WhatsApp channels are used to populate DSA information in order to school, persuade and drive mitigation towards DSA in Zimbabwe. In this study, *logos* strategy offers the audience the reasons why there is an urgency in fighting DSA, provide alarming statistics of victims, and highlighting far-reaching consequences; while *ethos* is achieved by sharing expert endorsements or personal experiences. Finally, *pathos* is attained through sharing powerful stories of recovery or loss in order to stir emotions and elicit feelings of fear, regret, empathy, sadness and so on to illicit drug abuse victims and the community in general. *Pathos* is a catalyst tool that will drive the victims to seek treatment, weaken drug relapse opportunities while promoting abstinence to those who have not yet experimented on it.

Literature Review

Classification and Criminalisation of Illicit Drugs

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1975; and New Zealand Police Managers' Guild Trust categorise illegal drugs into three classes: A, B and C. Class A drugs, which include heroin, speed, methamphetamine (P), cocaine and magic mushrooms carry the most severe penalties. Importing, supplying or dealing in these drugs can result in life imprisonment, while possession can lead to a one-year jail term or a \$1000 fine, or both. While Class B drugs, such as methadone, morphine and ecstasy, are punishable by up to 14 years' imprisonment for dealing supplying, or importing. Some Class B drugs become Class A when prepared for injection. Class C drugs, which include cannabis, carry a maximum penalty of eight years. Notably, all drug profits, including cash, cars and property, can be seized. Possession of Class B and C drugs can result in three months' imprisonment or a \$500 fine or both. This Act provides valuable insights into the classification and criminalisation of various drugs, helping to

understand better the drug abuse landscape in Zimbabwe. However, this study focuses on preventing DSA through creating and populating WhatsApp-compatible media formats to school, and raise awareness about the dangers of DSA.

Furthermore, the importance of the UNICEF (2023) article cannot be overemphasised in this research. It discusses a number of DSA-related nuances, among them being the types of illicit drugs consumed by the youth in Zimbabwe. According to UNICEF (2023:3), the Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network reports that alcohol, drugs and other substance abuse in order of consumption is cannabis (67%); cough syrup (47%); crystal meth (36%); illegal alcohol (31%); pharmaceuticals (13%); crack cocaine (3%); cocaine powder (3%); and heroin (2%). Maraire and Chethiyar (2020) and Mugari (2024) concur that cannabis is the most abused drug in Zimbabwe. The New Zealand Police Managers' Guild Trust informs that cannabis has three main forms, that is; marijuana, hashish and hash oil. Marijuana is the most common and least powerful form, while hash oil is the most powerful. Information gathered from all interviewees and analysis of captured cannabis pictures accompanying Zimbabwean cannabis stories of smuggling into and general usage within the country suggests that marijuana is the most commonly used form of cannabis in Zimbabwe. Moreover, Maraire and Chethiyar (2020) attribute the prevalence of cannabis use to its affordability and local availability, as some youth grow it in their backyards. In contrast, drugs like cocaine and heroin are expensive and less common in Zimbabwe (Matunhu and Matunhu (2018) in Maraire and Chethiyar (2020:52). This information helps the current study to sensitise digital artists to nail their prevention strategies on marijuana mostly, although also considering other types of drugs.

Victims, Causes, and Relapse to DSA

Maraire and Chethiyar (2020) emphasise that the youth are the most affected age group, with the most painful aspect being that this demographic group is also the most productive and responsible for building the economy. In a stark warning, the Minister of State for Mashonaland West Provincial Affairs and Devolution, Mirian Chombo notes: "A generation lost due to drug and substance," following her visit to the Fight Against Substances and Addictions (FASSA) Rehabilitation Centre in Norton, where she witnessed a heart-rending situation, with most of the local youth, both educated and uneducated, undergoing rehabilitation. The primary causes of drug abuse among Zimbabwean youth, according to Maraire and Chethiyar (2020:46), are lack of self-control and self-concept. These factors can

be attributed to inadequate education and awareness about drug abuse and its far-reaching consequences. This article focuses on bridging this perceived knowledge-gap in order to mitigate drug abuse prevalence in Zimbabwe.

Many a time, former drug victims suffer drug relapse. Drug relapse, defined as the return to substance abuse after being drug-free, affects nearly half of those recovering from addiction. In an effort to combat drug abuse relapse and empowering drug abuse survivors with the skills necessary for a productive life, the Government of Zimbabwe has introduced a new programme for youths admitted to provincial rehabilitation centres. The programme involves mandatory rehabilitation; then transfer to national youth service following rehabilitation; and to vocational training after completing the national youth service for skills development (The Youth Envoy Magazine, 2025; Jambaya, 2025).

The root drivers of alcohol, drugs, and other substances abuse, according to UNICEF (2023:4) are; death of parent(s), poverty and idleness, absent parents, broken homes, inadequate parenting practices, social influence, stress, deviant behaviour traits, and experimentation. Maraire and Chethiyar (2020) and Mugari (2024) concur that lack of self-control, self-concept, easy accessibility, lack of supervision to youths, peer influence, extremely high unemployment rates, poverty, despair and idleness contribute to drug abuse among youths. It is believed that if these drivers are addressed from a holistic approach, the abuse of drugs might be drastically reduced. This study proposes sharing of information on drug abuse through WhasApp-compatible formats to promote prevention and popularisation of entrepreneurship skills through WhatsApp Channels to lessen youth unemployment rates.

DSA awareness is crucial in fighting this pandemic. Nhunzvi et al (2019) in Maraire and Chethiyar (2020:54) state that a sad revelation is that most of these youth are unaware of the long term and short-term effects of drug abuse. Thus, sounding the urgency of raising awareness to youth, Maraire and Chethiyar (2020:54) recommend awareness programmes to support informed decision-making among youths. This study, therefore, aims to bridge the knowledge gap by exploring strategies to populate knowledge and awareness on DSA. This research aligns with the Zimbabwe's Multi-Sectorial DSA Plan (2024-2030), specifically pillar two and six, which focus on illicit drug demand reduction and populating DSA information to

the public. By educating the Zimbabwean citizenry about DSA, this study aims to empower them to make informed choices and reduce the social pressure barrier.

Prevalence and Mitigation of DSA in Zimbabwe

Masunungure et al (2025) discuss the June 2024 Afrobarometer survey which assessed the prevalence of DSA in Zimbabwean's ten provinces. The survey also explored community-proposed strategies to address the issue. This article provided valuable insights into the extent of drug abuse in Zimbabwe, and highlighting the need for education and awareness about its effects. The survey posed a question, among others, about the most effective strategy for combating DSA in Zimbabwe. The participants were asked to select the most effective strategy among the given propositions for combating DSA in Zimbabwe. The proposed strategies were; arresting and imposing severe penalties on drug users or offenders which garnered 39%; educating citizens on the dangers of drug abuse, which netted 23%; intensifying efforts to reduce drug peddling, which got 23%, providing mandatory rehabilitation services for drug users receiving 11%, and some other solutions 4%. Of interest among the given propositions is educating citizens on the dangers of drug abuse which garnered 23%. It is disheartening to note that some Zimbabweans, due to the given low percentage rate of those supporting the idea, fail to realise that education is crucial in imparting knowledge on DSA. It enables individuals to make informed decisions, aware of the consequences of their actions. Unfortunately, the low percentage of supporters for education as a strategy indicates a gap in awareness about the importance of education in combating drug abuse. Thus, this study aims to address this gap by proposing the use of digital artists to create and populate various WhatsApp-compatible media on DSA in order to empower them with knowledge. Thus, this current research aligns with both the second and sixth pillars which focus on public awareness - informing and educating people about the dangers of drugs in order to reduce their demand.

Artists, and Drug and Substance Abuse in Zimbabwe

Artists have been instrumental in combating DSA in Zimbabwe. They have complemented government efforts in a number of ways. Performing artists have utilised music and theatrical performances; while literal artists have performed plays, recited poems and wrote stories on DSA, although publication takes longer and literary products are for sale and not for free. Visual artists have designed DSA-related photographs on billboards and even on bus-boards like ZUPCO; and digital artists made their presence felt in the digital sphere. However, there

is need for these artists to scale up their activities. Of concern in this study are the digital artists, social media artists, to be specific.

The world is increasingly becoming digital, and digital art is becoming the new norm (EDEN, 2021.) Thomson-Jones and Moser (2024) theorise digital art in its broadest sense as referring to the art that relies on computer-based digital encoding, or on the electronic storage and processing of information in different formats - text, numbers, images, sounds - in a common binary code. Furthermore, EDEN (2021) vouches that the purpose of all art forms is to capture the composers, message, ideas or emotions and put them on display for others or themselves to enjoy. Be that as it may, this study prefers digital artists and their products due to their accessibility, flexibility, scalability, and fast information dissemination. Within the digital artistic sphere, this study focuses on WhatsApp-compatible digital artistic media like videos, channels, audios, chatbots and stickers.

Youth and the Social Media

The advent of the internet, Web 2.0, and Web 3.0 has led to the proliferation of social media, making it an integral part of modern life. Patton et al. (2014) note that today's youth are avid users of social networking sites. Apropos to this view, this study argues that social media can be a powerful tool in disseminating information on DSA, particularly among the youth. While social media is often associated with negative consequences, such as youth violence against their peers (Patton et al, 2014), it can also be leveraged to address societal problems. Subrahmanyam et al's (2009) view in Patton et al (2014) resonates well with the above idea as it suggests that adolescents use the online environments to explore matters important to them in their offline lives. Cognisant of this idea, it is, however, unfortunate that youth in Zimbabwe have very little to benefit from social media as far as DSA awareness issues are concerned. While there is very little information given in the English language, there is absolutely nothing provided in their indigenous languages - their mother-tongues, the languages most of them understand better. This study proposes the creation of WhasApp-compatible media formats in local languages to promote deeper understanding and visibility of indigenous languages in the digital sphere.

The sections above showed that the chief problem that drives the youth into drug abuse is lack of knowledge among other factors. Therefore, to address the knowledge gap driving youth into drug abuse, this research proposes that digital artists create WhatsApp-compatible media formats in order to effectively populate information on DSA promoting prevention, especially in the mother-tongues of the Zimbabwean youth. The proposed methods are the creation of: emotional chatbots providing clinical advice; audios; stickers; videos (in form of recovery testimonials, GIFs, comedian-based videos and infographics); and WhatsApp Channels. These media formats will serve as a hub for DSA information, raising awareness, promoting prevention, and fostering community engagement. The advantage of most of these formats lies in their accessibility, shareability, and ability to reach a wide audience.

Strategies for Promoting Illicit Drug Prevention Discourses on WhatsApp

This section presents findings from interviews conducted with participants. All interviewees acknowledged that drug abuse is prevalent in their communities, including rural areas, high schools, and universities. 80% of interviewees considered drug abuse a serious issue requiring urgent attention, education and support. Regarding the availability of DSA information on social media, responses varied from “scarce” to “average”, but all interviewees concurred that they had not seen content provided in indigenous languages. However, they believed it was possible to create such content, given that many social media platforms offer multilingual support. 90% of participants emphasised the need for comprehensive information in indigenous languages to reach a broader audience.

In response to interviewee suggestions, this article outlines strategies for digital artists to create and share WhatsApp-compatible media in indigenous languages, aiming to prevent the escalation of DSA cases in Zimbabwe. The study employs the art of persuasion as expounded in Aristotle’s Rhetorical Triangle to effectively promote illicit drug discourses that target prevention. The study borrows from Hadot’s (1997:92) vivid expression to emphasise the philosophy, urgency, and diplomacy required in addressing such circumstances, when he vouches that:

To emerge victorious from this battle, it is not enough to disclose the truth. It is not even enough to demonstrate it. What is needed is persuasion, and for that one must use psychagogy, the art of seducing souls.

Thus, the key to effective persuasion lies in balancing the three pillars of Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle in a single illicit drug discourse, by using *ethos* to build trust, and *pathos* to connect emotionally and *logos* to present evidence. These three appeals should complement each other, creating a well-rounded and compelling argument. This study proposes five major WhatsApp-compatible formats that can be created and shared by digital artists in an effort to increase illicit drug discourses on WhatsApp. These proposed formats are: chatbots providing clinical advice; audios sharing information and testimonials; stickers offering visual aids for awareness; videos in form of recovery testimonials, GIFs, comedian-based videos and infographics; and WhatsApp Channels offering a hub for illicit drug discourses. These media formats might serve as a hub for illicit drug discourses, raising awareness, promoting prevention, and fostering community engagement. Their key advantage lies in their flexibility, allowing viewers to access and learn from them at their own pace. With the rise of social media, there is a growing preference for visual and auditory content over written material. This shift in consumer behaviour positions the suggested formats for success, as they cater to the preferred learning styles of the target audience.

The proposed strategies are discussed in English to benefit content creators who are encouraged to adapt them into Zimbabwe's fourteen (14) official indigenous languages in order to reach the souls of the people, maximise retention rates and promote the use of indigenous languages in the digital spaces. The Zimbabwe's fourteen official indigenous languages, as identified in the 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution Chapter 1:6(1) are; Chewa, Chibarwe, Kalanga, Khoisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa.

(a) WhatsApp Channels

According to the 2024 WhatsApp Channels Guidelines, WhatsApp Channel is an optional, one-way broadcasting feature within WhatsApp, separate from private messaging, designed to help users follow information from people and organisations that matter to them. Launched in September 2023, WhatsApp Channels are offered for free and can be used by individuals, organisation or companies with a large following, and they can support multimedia content like videos, voice notes, images, and GIFs (Potor, 2025). This democratic feature of WhatsApp Channels allows anyone to create and share content, reaching a large audience. This enables the creation DSA-related WhatsApp Channels and Entrepreneurship Channels, which this

section explores. Fifty (50%) of the participants recommended creating and circulating illicit drug discourses through WhatsApp Channels. WhatsApp Channels play a crucial role in disseminating DSA information, as information can be easily forwarded to individual inboxes, family, and church groups. Without WhatsApp Channels, it is challenging to observe the presence or trafficking of DSA information as individual WhatsApp inboxes are private and inaccessible.

(i) WhatsApp Channels on Drug and Substance Abuse

A created WhatsApp Channel can serve as a hub for DSA information. Creating WhatsApp Channels on DSA is a fantastic way to raise awareness, provide support, and share valuable information. However, the 2024 WhatsApp Guidelines advises that channel admins should provide a title for their channel that reflects the channel content and helps users make informed choices about which channels they choose to follow. Channel titles suggested include “Drug Abuse Awareness”, “Substance Abuse Support Network”, and “Addiction Awareness”. These channels can deliver a wide range of information, including; educational content, for example, facts about drugs, their effects, and risks; personal stories such as inspiring stories of recovery and overcoming addiction; support resources, for example, information about rehabilitation centres, support groups, and helplines; news and updates, for example, latest news and research on substance abuse and addiction; and tips and advice, for example, practical advice on avoiding substance abuse, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. By creating WhatsApp Channels focused on DSA, one may provide a safe and supportive community for individuals struggling with addiction, as well as their families and friends.

To create impactful messages, channel creators should be guided by the pillars of persuasion; *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. The appeal to *ethos* can be achieved through using credible channel names that reflect and vouch for their quality and reliability of their information. *Pathos* and *logos* can be applied in the channel description to create an emotional connection with the audience. *Pathos* is established through using vivid language to convey DSA dangers and drive behaviour change as well as encouraging many people to join the channel, while *logos*, is attained by providing factual information about the channel’s benefits. In addition, all information posted to these channels should be created with this persuasive approach in mind.

(ii) WhatsApp Channels on Entrepreneurship Skills

Interviewees highlighted high unemployment rates among Zimbabwean youth. Regarding this state of affairs, content creators are encouraged to not only identify risk factors for DSA such as unemployment but also share entrepreneurship skills to benefit unemployed youth in Zimbabwe to reduce the number of illicit drug users or potential users. Possible names for entrepreneurship channels include, “Zimbabwe Youth Start Up”, “Entrepreneurship Empowered”, “Young Entrepreneurs Hub”, “Business Building Blocks” and “Turn Your Passion into Profit.” This study advises that channel names should avoid educational-related names such as “Small Business School” as users may avoid following them thinking that they are not offered for free.

Although there seems to be no visible entrepreneurship WhatsApp Channels targeting Zimbabwean youths; particularly the rural youths, where unemployment rates are very high and who may have limited access to wifi, the Government of Zimbabwe has promoted rural youth entrepreneurship skills. Almost all of these government interventions have been publicised through mass media, specifically the Zimbabwe Television Broadcasting Corporation. Supported sectors include; 1) agriculture and livestock sector where some youth have embarked on crop farming, livestock rearing, apiary, and fish farming; 2) handicrafts and local products sector where the youth ventured into basketry, and local food processing; 3) manufacturing and production where both youth and unemployed women undertake cosmetic production, baking, and recycling; and 4) services and trades sector where the youth do tailoring. Although the government has been instrumental in these sectors benefiting some of the youth, some still are yet to benefit. Creating WhatsApp Channels with titles reflecting these entrepreneurship skills can help share skills with the wider population of Zimbabwe since there are high chances that they may need them. Another potential area which might be ventured into is environmental conservation such as tree planting. The youth may start a tree planting business through planting and selling seedlings for valued traditional medicinal trees such as *umgugudu*, and *uMvebe* in Ndebele, which are known to treat various ailments including cancer. The scientific name for *umgugudu* is ‘*elaedendron matabelicum*’ while that of *umvebe* is ‘*kigella africana*’ (Nyagumbo et al., 2022). These entrepreneurial activities can help unemployed rural youth earn a living, improve their livelihoods, and contribute to the local economy.

The Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle can be applied in all the entrepreneurship activities discussed above to persuade youth to take up these activities. For example, in traditional medicinal trees identified above, *ethos* can be achieved through a testimony from a cancer survivor or a ZINATHA member adorned in traditional healer outfit explaining how the identified medicines are to be used to treat various ailments, especially cancer which has high records of killing people. The appeal to *pathos* may be attained through the use of vivid descriptions of disease symptoms and effects to the hosts, and the time taken to heal once medication has been administered, and *logos* is accomplished through common associations of cancer treatment with traditional medicine.

(b) Videos

A video is a multimedia format combining visual images and sound to convey information, tell a story, or provide entertainment (Cobrief, 2025). Pfister (2019) vouches that currently, this format is the pith of the digital world due to its ability to communicate and go viral on social platforms. A video can be short (just a few seconds) or long (an hour or two) (Pfister, 2019; Cobrief, 2025). Videos are a powerful medium for delivering information, including DSA education. They can convey complex messages in an engaging and easy-to-understand format (Cobrief, 2025). Various illicit drug discourses can be created and shared through videos and these include: educational content on substance abuse, risk factors, warning signs, consequences, testimonies, expert insights and advice, support services and resources. Highlighting support services and resources, is about the provision of information about helplines, support groups, and treatment options such as counselling, therapy, and rehabilitation programmes. By delivering all this type of content through videos, content-creators can help educate, inspire, and support individuals in their journey towards a healthier, substance-free life. Advantages of video information delivery include; high engagement and attention capture (Cobrief, 2025), easy sharing and accessibility, and creating an emotional connection with viewers, making the information more relatable and memorable.

Videos have high levels of engaging the targeted audiences, and their effectiveness is determined by the expertise of the creator. To create effective videos, one should consider Brame's (2017) elements; cognitive load; student (viewer) engagement, and active learning. Although initially applied in a biology class in higher education, they may also be transferred

to the creation of illicit drug videos targeting prevention. Considering these elements, content creators may create and share powerfully-moving videos that truly save lives.

This section discusses forms of videos that can be created and circulated by content creators on Whatsapp and these are recovery testimonials, GIFs, comedian-based videos, and infographics. Among these tools, 90% of the interviewees identified recovery testimonials as the most suitable strategy that may be used to circulate illicit drug discourses on WhatsApp, GIFs garnered 20%, comedian-based videos 0% and infographics 70%. This study suggests that while subscribing to Brame's (2017) elements when designing videos, pillars of persuasion should drive the weaving of the overall message to maximise its impact. In addition, illicit drug video topics should be also attractive.

(i) Recovery Testimonials

A testimonial, according to Farland and White (2023), is an endorsement by someone who has had firsthand experience with a product or person and is willing to share their thoughts publicly. Although there are many types of testimonials, recovery testimonials are pertinent to this study. Recovery testimonials provide real-life success stories that inspire and encourage individuals to seek treatment. A testimonial, especially recovery testimonials, have a strong human element - the personal language and story-like structure which attract attention, capture interest, and stick to memory and usually influence positive buy-in (Farland and White, 2023). Testimonials are underpinned by use by well-known people narrating their success stories, for example, right from how and why their DSA journey started up to their recovery.

One noted recovery testimonial that is doing rounds on WhatsApp is that of a former Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) Broadcaster and News Readers, Oscar Pambuka who is a DSA survivor. In his recovery testimonial, Oscar Pambuka begins his story by introducing himself and his profession, this according to Aristotle is an appeal to *ethos*. He then details that depression caused by stress-related issues that had to do with his marriage collapse are responsible for making him indulge in illicit drugs. Circumstances surrounding his addiction and social upkeep, leading to his incarceration and rehabilitation measures he received while in incarceration up to gaining his foothold back, the vivid language used in giving all this detail appeals to the emotions of the audience, evoking emotions of dissociating oneself with illicit

drugs, fearing to take them, and so on. All this flair in the art of weaving the message in vivid language appeals to the persuasion pillar of *pathos*, while *logos*, is achieved through the way the speaker-cum- 'rhector' arranges facts and contextual evidence to support his claims. While this recovery testimonial has much to offer on the information related to DSA as well as being a panacea to drug addicts as it gives hope for a drug-free future, it is inadequate to be able to cover all the nuances experienced in DSA journeys in terms of causes, experiences, consequences and methods of rehabilitation. Having a number of recovery testimonials may complement what is already there, and it helps in approaching the problem from a holistic dimension.

The other problem with this recovery testimonial, is that it is given in the English language. Whilst the English language is a lingua franca in the globalised village, very few people can understand it well. It is from the Rhetoric Triangle perspective that the researcher calls for more well-wishers to provide their recovery testimonials on WhatsApp in Zimbabwean indigenous languages. This might help the affected and the victims with information, and instill hope to overcome the DSA problem.

(ii) GIFs

A GIF, an abbreviation for Graphics Interchange Format, is a digital file format invented in 1987 by Steve Wilhite as a means of reducing the size of images and animations (Gregersen, 2025; Lepard, 2023). GIFs are a series of images or soundless videos that will loop continuously and do not require anyone to press play. Pfister (2019) describes GIFs as the bare bones minimum expression of a video, telling a story in space and time. In other words, a GIF is a short video clip. The GIF became a popular format for transmitting and storing graphic data because it is a lossless data compression format, meaning that no information is lost in the compression (Gregerson, 2025). The recommended playing duration for WhatsApp GIFs is 2-5 seconds for optimal performance. At the time of its creation, Gregerson (2025) alludes that GIFs supported 256 different colours, meaning that they can transmit better-quality images. Considering the importance of colour psychology in communication, this study advises that appropriate background colours should be used to deepen the short message communicated by the GIF. GIFs are useful for communicating ideas simply and quickly, such as emotions or a basic piece of information (Pfister, 2019).

The image and text (words or short sentences) used on the GIF determine its type. In the context of DSA targeting prevention, WhatsApp-compatible GIFs that can be used to inspire and motivate potential illicit drug users or users to desist or grow out of their situations include “Choose life, not drugs”, “Stay sober, stay strong”, “You are stronger than addiction”, “Addiction is a disease, not a choice”, and “Recovery is possible”. The colour green may serve well in such circumstances as it suggests feelings of sustainability if targeted audience make rightful choices. Moreover, the wording of short sentences of WhatsApp GIFs that focus on supporting and encouraging victims to seek support services include, “Support is just a message away” accompanied by contact details below so that victims can easily connect with health support services. Colour that may be used in such GIFs is blue, as it is frequently connected with trust, dependability and security. WhatsApp GIFs warning about the dangers of abusing illicit drugs may be worded, “Substance abuse: a slippery slope” and “Addiction: a ticking time bomb”. Both GIFs can use red colour to highlight danger, though with different intensity levels. The former GIF emphasises the dangers of illicit drug use, underscoring the fear that it is a point of no return. The latter GIF vividly communicates that the addicted are in a danger zone where disaster can strike any time. Rustico (2023) vouches that colour can elicit emotional responses and different hues are connected with different emotions. While these GIF texts can be used to create impactful WhatsApp GIFs that raise awareness, provide support, and encourage individuals to make positive choices; they can also be translated into various indigenous languages in order to reach a broader audience and drive positive envisaged change on DSA.

To integrate Aristotle’s Rhetoric Triangle Theory in this context of Whatsapp GIFs, the appeal to *ethos* is established through the tone of the message, for example, the authoritative and authentic tone will earn the trust of the readers and make them more likely to believe the argument. While *pathos* is attained by a combination of colour choice that works well with intended GIF, vivid imagery and a thought-provoking text, all this promotes increased engagement and influences the audience’s decision making. An appeal to *logos* is made through use of clear reasoning and structured arguments reflecting compressed factual statements on the DSA phenomenon.

(iii) *Comedian-based videos*

Baumeister and Fischer (2021) suggest that humour can improve the persuasiveness of preventive messages. Apropos to this view, Zimbabwean comedians such as Mahlalela, Mai Vee, and Dhafu can play a significant role in spreading awareness about DSA, targeting prevention. Comedian-based videos have high levels of relatability, impactful storytelling and have capabilities of reaching a wider audience. In terms of relatability, comedians often have a strong connection with their audience, making them more relatable and trustworthy. This idea finds resonance in Baumeister and Fischer (2021) who observed that the intention to share a health-related video online was increased when it included humorous appeals. This suggests that comedians can convey important messages about substance abuse in an approachable way, leveraging their strong connection with their audience. Furthermore, Scherer (2024) advises that to create impactful messages, comedians should match humour with messages, that is, inoffensive humour for preventing bad health behaviours and aggressive humor for promoting good health behaviours.

Although comedians have a potential in populating illicit drug discourses targeting prevention, they are also some possible weaknesses to consider. These potential weaknesses include credibility; tone and sensitivity; and overemphasis on personal experiences. On credibility, while comedians can be relatable and engaging, they may not be seen as credible sources of information on DSA. Their message might be perceived as less authoritative compared to medical professionals or experts in the field. McGraw et al (2015) in Baumeister and Fischer (2021) seem to support this idea when they opine that humorous messages can lead to decreased problem perception and problem-solving behaviour, particularly when the message is perceived as non-serious. On issues of tone and sensitivity, since comedians often use humour to address serious topics there is a risk of being perceived as insensitive or making light of the issue. They can overcome this perceived weakness by striking the right tone to convey the gravity of substance abuse. In addition, comedians should balance their personal experiences with a broader perspective, emphasising the wider implications of substance abuse. Overall, comedians can effectively spread awareness about DSA, but it is crucial to be mindful of their limitations and potential pitfalls.

To apply the pillars of persuasion in comedian-based videos, comedians can build *ethos* by mentioning their partnership with health experts and leveraging their influence. This assures the public of the trustworthiness of their messages. The punch line of the humour appeals to *pathos*, as it stirs emotions and influence recommended behaviour. An appeal to *logos*, is

achieved through referencing obvious facts about DSA effects such as mental problems, death, or harm to others.

(iv) *Infographics*

The term infographics blends information with graphics. This format emerged to transmit more complex chunks of information at a glance (Barnes, et al., (2024). Pfister (2019) calls infographics ‘the shining star of statistical graphics’ while Costa (1998) refers to them as “schematics”. Both agree that infographics effectively convey complex statistical or numerical information quickly and clearly. Infographics typically combine a visual content, text, title and subtitles, informative content or statistics, a bold colour scheme, eye-catching visuals to tell a clear and organised story (Vaghefi, 2023). This study focuses on data visualisation infographics which tell stories with data in a clear, eye-catching and memorable way. These infographics can effectively show DSA data and statistics, for example; on DSA admitted victims, in rehabilitation centres, under mental healthcare, and recovering from addiction. When creating infographics, consider technical specifications (for example, square and vertical formats work well on social media infographics; and universal and constant aspects, for example, featuring with other communication devices such as text and music; and also the context where it will be displayed (Pfister, 2019).

To integrate the Aristotle’s approach to persuasion in the creation of infographics media; an appeal to *ethos* is made through the use of expert endorsements, that is, featuring quotes or messages from experts in the field of health as well as highlighting success stories through sharing inspiring stories of recovery. An appeal to *pathos* is attained through the use of evocative language when presenting the message in order to connect with the intended audience, driving them to act or reflect on the message being shared. While *logic* is achieved through the presentation of facts and statistics on DSA cases such as addiction recovery, DSA-related mental health cases, or benefits of seeking support; sourced from Zimbabwe health and rehabilitation centres.

(c) *Audios*

Audio media refers to sound materials transmitted, produced or received through high-fidelity waves and heard through equipment (Scribid, 2025). In other words, audio media refers to any media that uses sound as a medium to deliver information. It includes radio broadcasts,

recordings, music, and sound effects. Whatsapp-compatible digital audios are preferred for sharing DSA information. Audios are a powerful educational medium when used well (Bates, 2015); this implies that audio format can also be used in circulating DSA information on WhatsApp. Audios received 60% recommendation from interviewees as a suitable media format for sharing DSA information. The mode of message delivery of audios is voice, thus, they rely on spoken language alone. It is advisable that audio messages use clear, objective and transparent language to teach people about DSA targeting prevention. Advantages of audio formats include flexibility, ease of creation, and allowing repetition and practice (Bates, 2015). It should be noted that almost all the information on DSA that may be shared through a video format may also be shared through an audio, this include educational content, personal stories, expert insights, and support resources. By delivering this type of content through audios, these content-creators can help educate, inspire, and support individuals in their journey towards a healthier, substance-free life.

Ethos, *pathos*, and *logos* are essential for persuasive communication. These modes of persuasive communication can be applied in audios in the same manner as in videos in creating DSA information to be shared targeting prevention, save for that with audios, emphasis is placed on voice. *Ethos* can be achieved to the audience through sharing personal experiences, expert opinions, or statistics related to DSA. For example, if a medical doctor is presenting information on addiction recovery, may mention their years of practice in the medical field in order to help build trust with their listeners. While appeal to *pathos* is established to listeners' emotions by sharing stories, testimonials, or scenarios illustrating consequences of DSA that evoke appropriate feeling which drive expected action. The doctor appeals to *logos* through citing statistics on DSA cases such as surging cases of admitted victims in hospitals and rehabilitation centres. By incorporating these pillars of persuasion, content creators can create engaging and persuasive audios that resonate with the audience and encourage positive change.

(d) WhatsApp Emotional Chatbots

Emotional chatbots received 40% recommendation from interviewees as valuable media format for sharing drug and substance abuse (DSA) information. According to Casu et al. (2024:2), a chatbot is “a computer program designed to interact with users, addressing specific tasks or requests through AI technologies”. This study focuses on WhatsApp chatbots which are automated conversational agents designed to interact with users on the platform

(Jagannathan, 2024). WhatsApp Chatbots can be a valuable tool in providing emotional support as they recognise, interpret, and respond to human emotions during conversations (Dilmegani, 2025). As emotional supporters, digital artists may develop chatbots that support the use of indigenous languages, are versatile and responsive to various needs and circumstances. They may also serve as trained listeners, crisis intervenors, and mood trackers (Dilmegani, 2025). Furthermore, digital artists may also capacitate these chatbots with recovery testimonial services that have a capability to walk through victims on their DSA recovery journeys as well as providing question and answer forums. Key benefits of emotional chatbots, as Dilmegani (2025) states, include being always available, reduced judgement and stigma, scalable support, consistent quality, early problem detection, and immediate response.

To integrate Aristotle's Rhetorical Theory, chatbots can establish *ethos* by making the chatbot provide credible information on its creators who may be health experts as well as its claim of being connected to Natural Language Processing tools in order to vouch for the quality of the information that it shares with the public. Thus, such chatbots may share DSA stories and statistics from credible sources such as medical professionals or certified counsellors. Since these are emotional chatbots, it implies that they were 'born' *pathos*, this means that their make naturally made them to be emotionally connected with users and have the ability to influence positive behaviour. Also *pathos* may be attained through using emotive language and storytelling to create an emotional connection with users, inspiring them to seek help and support. Creators may demonstrate *logos* by providing logical reasoning and evidence-based information to help users understand the recovery process and the benefits of seeking support. To ensure user trust, digital artists should prioritise confidentiality and data security, ensuring that users' conversations with chatbots remain secure and confidential.

(e) WhatsApp Stickers

WhatsApp stickers received 30% recommendation from interviewees as a suitable media format for sharing drug and substance abuse (DSA) information. According to Chu (2025), WhatsApp stickers are a communication medium with rich visual effects that can effectively convey emotions and ideas. Introduced in 2018, WhatsApp stickers come in two versions: static and animated stickers (Chu, 2025; WADesk Will, 2025). This study prefers animated stickers for their ability to convey complex emotions, boost engagement and provide a livelier and dynamic way to communicate. WhatsApp stickers can be a sensitive and engaging tool for

supporting addiction recovery and awareness. The benefits of using stickers include; 1) serving as visual reminders of motivational messages, recovery milestones, or supportive words; 2) easily shared on social media to spread awareness and support for addiction recovery; and lastly, 3) creating a sense of togetherness among individuals in recovery. Using stickers to populate information on DSA prevention creates a visually engaging and supportive tool that helps individuals in recovery to stay motivated, inspired, and connected. Incorporating insights from the Aristotle's Rhetorical Theory can enhance the design of stickers, making them more persuasive and emotionally engaging.

Digital artists can create WhatsApp-compatible stickers with motivational quotes, affirmations, or words of encouragement to support individuals in recovery, for example, "Recovery is a journey, and every step forward is a victory". While those that celebrate recovery milestones include, "30 days sober", or "1 year in recovery". In addition, stickers with supportive messages may be paired with texts such as "Recovery is possible, you're strong enough" or "We're here for you, every step of the way".

To integrate the pillars of persuasion in the creation of WhatsApp-compatible stickers in order for them to be effective, expressive, and relevant; *ethos* can be achieved through collaborating with social media influencers, recovery advocates, or health professionals to lend credibility to the messages. This might enable content creators to make short but powerful statements reflecting clear reasoning that convince the readers. To achieve *pathos*, content creators are encouraged to use colour psychology to carefully select colours (for example, blue for trust and green for recovery), images (that evoke feelings of hope, resilience, or inspiration, such as a sunrise, a person overcoming obstacles, or a supportive community), and texts (as in examples given above) to evoke emotions and create a connection with the audience. In other words, colour, image and text should enhance each other. Chu (2025) states that a well-designed sticker can often be worth a thousand words, making conversations more human and warm. An appeal to *logos* is attained by providing recovery resources such as hotline and online numbers, or support group information to offer a logical next step for individuals seeking help. When designing WhatsApp stickers, creators should prioritise simplicity, shareability, and emotional resonance to maximise their impact.

Conclusion

The rampant use of drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe has necessitated the urgent measures to combat it. However, this study reveals a significant gap in information on drug and substance abuse on WhatsApp, the most widely used messaging platform in Zimbabwe. To address this gap, this article discusses the five WhatsApp-compatible media formats that content creators can utilise to develop and share effective illicit drug discourses in Zimbabwean indigenous languages, targeting prevention. The proposed formats include: 1) videos (recovery testimonials, GIFs, comedian-based videos, and infographics); 2) WhatsApp Channels; 3) audios; 4) emotional chatbots; and 5) stickers. Guided by Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle (*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*), content creators can craft well-rounded, impactful communication that resonate with audiences. By creating media content in Zimbabwean indigenous languages, this study aims to inspire meaningful action towards positive change. Aligned with national objectives to combat drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe, this research contributes to the existing literature on effective prevention strategies.

References

- Amri, M., Angelakis, C., and Logan, D. (2021). Utilizing Asynchronous Email Interviews for Health Research: Overview of Benefits and Drawbacks. *BMC Res Notes* 14, 148 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-021-05547-2>. Accessed 10/07/2025.
- Ashar, K. (2025). What are Logos, Ethos, and Pathos? *Logome*. Retrieved from <https://www.logome.ai>. Accessed on 28/09/25.
- Bates, A.W.T. (2015). *Teaching in a Digital Age*. BC Open Textbooks. Retrieved from <https://opentextbc.ca>. Accessed on 09/10/2025.
- Barnes, S., Campbell, J. N., and Ndebele, L. M. (2024). The Effectiveness of Infographics and Graphical Media in Communication. *International Journal of Communication and Marketing (IJCM)*, Volume 1, Issue 1.
- Baumeister, R., and Fischer, F. (2021). Effects of Humor in Health Communication: Experimental Evidence for Video Sequences Aiming to Increase the Willingness to Donate Organs. *Front Public Health* 9:651736. DOI:10.3389/fpubh.2021.651736. Accessed on 02/10/2025.
- Brame, C. (2017). Effective Educational Videos: Principles and Guidelines for Maximizing Student Learning from Video Content. *CBE-Life Sciences Education*, Vol 15, No. 4. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.16-03-0125>. Accessed 10/09/2025.
- Casu, M., Triscari, S., Battiato, S., Guarnera, L., and Caponnetto, P. (2024). AI Chatbots for Mental Health: A Scoping Review of effectiveness, Feasibility, and Applications. *MDPI, Applied Sciences*. 2024, Volume 14,5889. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3390/app14135889>. Accessed 05/10/2025.
- Chibamu, A. (2024). A Generation Lost Due to Drug and Sustance, Let's Pray for Our Children - Minister. *New Zimbabwe* (17/06/2024). Retrieved from <https://www.newzimbabwe.com>All News>. Accessed on 15/09/2025.
- Chu, E. (2025). Using Custom WhatsApp Sticker in Business Conversations. *Omnichat*. Retrieved from <https://blog.omnichat.ai>. Accessed on 08/10/2025.
- Cobrief (2025). Video: Overview, Definition, Example. *Legal Glossary*: San Francisco. Retrieved from <https://www.cobrief.app>. Accessed 05/10/2025.
- Cruthers, A. (2021). The Rhetorical Triangle: Ethos, Pathos and Logos. *KPU Pressbooks*. Retrieved from <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub>. Accessed on 28/09/2025.
- Dilmegani, C. (2025). Best 6 Use Cases and Benefits of Emotional Chatbots. Retrieved from <https://research.aimultiple.com/emotional-chatbot/> Accessed on 28/09/2025.

- EDEN (2021). Digital Art Vs Traditional Art. *EDEN, House of Art - Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.edenart.com>. Accessed 23/09/2025.
- Farland, B., and White, D. (2023). Testimonial - Definition, Goal and Examples. *Psychology Courses*. Study.com. Retrieved from <https://study.com>. Accessed on 06/10/2025.
- Gekara, G. (2025). Cocaine is Like Whiskey - Colombian President Petro Advocates for Cocaine Legalisation to Kill Illegal Trade. *Uzalendo News (07/02/2025)*. Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/JsiCYN9adPg>. Accessed on 10/02/2025.
- Gravetter, F. J., and Forzano, L. B. (2009). *Research Methods for the Behavioural Sciences*. Wadsworth CENGAGE Learning: USA.
- Gregerson, E. (2025). GIF: Definition, Meaning, and Facts. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britanica.com>. Accessed on 05/10/2025.
- Government of Zimbabwe. Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013. Fidelity Printers and Refiners: Harare.
- Government of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe Multisectorial Drug and Substance Abuse Plan 2024-2030. Launch Version. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org>media>file>Dr...> Accessed on 28/01/2025.
- Hadot, P. (1997). *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Hakim, A. (2025). Nigeria: Men Trafficking Drugs Using Fake Presidency Plate Numbers Sentenced to 35 Years Imprisonment. Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/CfoqIJIR89BD>. Accessed on 08/03/25.
- HarareLive, (2025). Grade 7 Girl, Two Other Minors Nabbed in Police Raids on Drug-Peddling Bases. *HarareLive (20/02/2025)*. Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/FxYgV96gfm1>, Accessed on 22/02/2025.
- Harare Mirror 52 (2025). Five Learners Caught Smoking Dagga. Accessed 15/06/2025.
- Harare Mirror 168 (2025). SA Police Intercept R8m Zim-bound Dagga. Accessed on 01/10/2025
- Ikeji, L. (2025a). Nigeria: Airport Police Discovers 220g of Cocaine Worth 10,000 Euros under Man's Wig. Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/BvqJww8JJR3>. Accessed on 26/02/2025.
- Ikeji, L. (2025b). Nigerian Man Arrested at South African Airport with Cocaine Pellets in His Stomach. Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/JDCZ1K9G3v1>. Accessed on 08/03/2025.

- Jagannathan, K. (2024). Why WhatsApp Chatbots are Key to Sales and Marketing Strategies. Retrieved from <https://learn.g2.com/whatsapp-chatbot> Accessed on 02/10/2025.
- Jambaya, P. Zim Now Editor. (2025). New Agency to Combat Drug Crisis. Retrieved from <https://zimbabwenow.co.zw/articles/15641/new-agency-to-combat-drug-crisis>. Accessed 08/08/2025
- Ksnmedia Reporter (07/03/2025). Kenyan Woman Sentenced to Death in Vietnam for Smuggling Over Two kgs of Cocaine. Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/HsguCQu9R1I>. Accessed on 07/03/2025.
- Makondora, D. (2025). Mufakose Residents up in Arms with Drug Cartels after Addict Butchers own Mother. *Zimlive.com*. Accessed on 12/02/2025.
- Mancha, C., and Taylor, D. (2023). Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle: Definition and Examples. *Study.com*. Retrieved from <https://study.com/academy/lesson/rhetorical-triangle-definition-example.html?msockid=035a15a51f5168ed2842004f1e7269ae> Accessed on 28/09/2025.
- Maraire, T., and Chethiyar, S. D. (2020). Drug and Substance Abuse Problem by the Zimbabwean Youth: A Psychological Perspective. *Practitioner Research*, 2, 41-59.
- Masunungure, E.V., Moyo-Nyede, S., and Muruvi, M. T. (2025). Zimbabweans Say Drug and Substance Abuse is Rampant, See it as a Society-Wide Challenge. *Afrobarometer* Dispatch No. 939. Retrieved from <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/AD939-Zimbabweans-say-drug-abuse-is-rampant-Afrobarometer-24jan25.pdf> Accessed on 12/09/25.
- Matare, L. (2025). Drug Mule Dies after Swallowing Evidence During Police Raid. *Crime and Courts - AfroGazette*. Retrieved from <https://www.afrogazette.co.zw/drug-mule-dies-after-swallowing-evidence-during-police-raid/> Accessed on 25/11/2025.
- Moyo, S. Online Reporter. (2025). Two Suspects Nabbed for Possessing and Smuggling Five Bales of Mbanje from South Africa. *Herald Online* (01/07/2025). Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/ESVWHNIrUJz>. Accessed on 01/07/2025.
- Mphisa, R. (2025). Zimra Intercepts 164kgs of Mbanje- *NewsDay Zimbabwe. NewsDayLive*. Retrieved from News. Accessed on 04/02/2025.

- Mubarak, G. (2025). Businesswoman Going to Qatar Nabbed with Drugs Inside Underwear. *The Eagle Online* (21/09/2025). Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com?d=4271998740608257258>. Accessed on 22/09/2025.
- Mugari, I. (2024). The Emerging Trends and Response to Drug and Substance Abuse Among the Youth in Zimbabwe. *Social Sciences*, 13(9), 469. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13090469>.
- Nachmias, C.F., and Nachmias, D. (1996). *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*. St. Martin's Press: New York.
- New Zealand Legislation. *Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 No. 116*. Version as at 12 April 2024. Parliamentary Counsel Office. Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1975/0116/latest/DLM436101.html>. Accessed on 16/09/25.
- New Zealand Police Managers' Guild Trust. *Drug Abuse - Class A, B, and C, Legal, Pregnancy*. Retrieved from <https://pmgt.org.nz/drug-abuse>. Accessed on 12/09/2025.
- Nyagumbo, E., Pote, W., Shopo, B., Nyirenda, T., Chagonda, I., Mapaya, R. J., Maunganidze, F., et al. (2022). Medicinal Plants Used for the Management of Respiratory Diseases in Zimbabwe: Review and Perspectives Potential Management of COVID-19. PMC COVID-19 Collection - Elsevier. *Phys Chem Earth (2002)*. 22 September 21; 128:103232. doi:10.1016/j.pce.2022.103232. Accessed on 26/11/2025.
- Nyeve, R. Victoria Fall Reporter. (2025). Zimbabwe: Shock As Girl (8) Checks Into Drugs Rehabilitation Centre. *The Herald Online* (19/09/2025). Retrieved from AllAfrica.com, <https://allafrica.com>. Accessed on 23/09/2025.
- Oduor, F. (2025). Kenyan Woman Sentenced to 50 Years in Jail for Drug Trafficking. *Kenyans.co.ke*. Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/KTVTSJ3QfYn>. Accessed on 19/03/2025.
- Palen, J.J. (2001). *Social Problems for the Twenty-First Century*. McGraw Hill: New York.
- Patel, F. (2025). South Africa: R6m of Cocaine Disguised as Hair Products Seized at OR Tambo International Airport. *The Citizen - South Africa* (07/03/25). Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/IzQSpwqrFem>. Accessed on 08/03/25.
- Patton, D.U., Hong, J. S., Ranney, M., Patel, S., Kelley, C., Eschmann, R., and Washington, T. (2014). Social Media as a Vector for Youth Violence. A Review of the Literature. *Computers in Human Behaviour*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.02.043>.

- Pfister, A. (2019). Infographics, Gifs, Video: How to Communicate Visually. *AllAround*. Retrieved from <https://allaround.digital>. Accessed on 06/10/2025.
- Potor, M. (2025). Exploring WhatsApp Channels: What they are, and How to Use them for Marketing. Retrieved from <https://sinch.com/blog/whatsapp-channels-marketing-companies/>. Accessed on 24/11/2025.
- Rustico, F. (2023). The Impact of Color and Design in Creating Effective GIFs. Retrieved from <https://gifyard.com>. Accessed on 05/10/2025.
- Samuel. (2025). Nigerian Businessman Undergoes Surgery to Expel 81 Wraps of Cocaine Stuck in his Stomach. Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/DOtVcJo1cVu>. Accessed on 03/02/2025.
- Scherer, E. (2024). Lessons Learned: Match Your Humor to Your Message. *Harvard: Center for Health Communication*. Retrieved from <https://hsph.harvard.edu>. Accessed on 06/10/2025.
- Sibindi, L. (2025). Police Commissioner Drops Bombshell: Exposes Minister, Politicians, Police officers and Judges Linked to Drug Cartels and Political Assassinations. *My Zimbabwe* (07/07/2025). Retrieved from <https://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/news/182853-police-commissioner-drops-bombshell-exposes-minister-politicians-police-officers-judges-linked-to-drug-cartels-and-political-assassinations.html> Accessed on 07/07/2025.
- Staff Writer (2025). Why are You Taking Long to Die? Mutoriro and Tumbwa Addicted Son (30) Asks His 72-Year-Old Mother then Thoroughly Beats Her up. *MyZimbabwe* (24/06/2025). Retrieved from <https://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/news/182609-why-are-you-taking-long-to-die-mutoriro-and-tumbwa-addicted-son-30-asks-his-72-year-old-mother-then-thoroughly-beats-her-up.html> Accessed on 24/06/2025.
- The Kenyan Daily Post (2025). Photos of the Beautiful Lady Executed in Bangladesh for Drug Trafficking as NDUTA Awaits her Fate in Vietnam. Retrieved from [https://www.kenyadailypost.com/kenya/2025/11/20/photos-of-the-beautiful-lady-executed-in-bangladesh-for-drug-trafficking-as-nduta-awaits-her-fate-in-vietnam](#). Accessed on 20/11/2025.
- The Youth Envoy Magazine (2025). Zimbabwean Authorities Announce Measures to Combat Drug trafficking and Abuse. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php/?fbid=800345049244698> Accessed on 08/07/2025.

- Thomson-Jones, K., and Moser, S. (2024). "The Philosophy of Digital Art", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2024 Edition), Edward, N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (eds). Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/digital-art/>. Accessed on 24/09/2025.
- TVC News (14/04/2025). Nigeria: Customs Hand Over Intercepted 1,400kg Suspected Cannabis Sativa to NDLEA in Ondo. Retrieved from <https://phoenix-browser.com/GX74ZTtvaSf>. Accessed on 14/04/2025.
- UNICEF (2023). Understanding Drug Use and Substance Abuse by Zimbabwean Adolescents and Young People. *Research Brief*, September 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/media/8871/file> Accessed on 12/09/25.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2025*. United Nations Publication. Retrieved from <https://ebs.publicnow.com/view/3A4E879308A55BF58619DC58A032044AF8591703> Accessed on 26/09/25.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2023*. United Nations Publication. Retrieved from <https://unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2023/unisnar1474.html> Accessed on 26/09/25.
- UPMC Editorial Staff (2024). Substance Abuse Types, Diagnosis, and Treatment - UPMC. Retrieved from <https://www.upmc.com/services/primary-care/conditions/substance-abuse> Accessed on 12/09/2025.
- Vaghefi, S. (2023). What is an Infographic?: Definition, Types and Examples. *Study.com*. Retrieved from <https://study.com/academy/lesson/infographic-definition-types-examples.html>. Accessed on 08/08/2025.
- WhatsApp Channel Guidelines (2024). *WhatsApp*. Retrieved from <https://www.whatsapp.com>. Accessed on 02/10/2025.
- Wilkes, J. (2025). American Gang Busted at UK Airport after Hiding in Toilets thought they were Going to Make a Fortune. Retrieved from <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/american-gang-busted-uk-airport-34624587> Accessed on 10/02/2025.

Wing-Cheong, C. (2025). Death Penalty for Drug Offenders in Southeast Asia: Weakening of Resistance to Change? *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.3681>. Accessed on 25/11/2025.

An assessment of the impact of Drug and Substance Abuse government intervention strategies. A case of 5 selected secondary schools in Harare North District

Muzenda Denias ¹

1. Lecturer - Robert Mugabe School of Education, Educational Leadership and Management
Great Zimbabwe University

Email: muzeden@gmail.com | **ORCID:** 0009- 1905-5384

***Corresponding Author:** Muzenda Denias, muzeden@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of drug and substance abuse government intervention strategies in 5 selected secondary schools in Harare North District. Drug and substance abuse is a pervasive global issue affecting individuals, families, schools and communities worldwide. In the Sub-Saharan African context, and Zimbabwe in particular, the leaders face significant challenges in managing drug and substance abuse, particularly among adolescents in schools. The study is significant to school management, teachers and parents at large. A qualitative approach was adopted, and a descriptive survey research design was used. The population comprised 20 secondary schools, 20 heads, 600 teachers and 20 000 learners. The sample comprised 5 schools, 5 school heads, 5 deputy heads and 5 teachers who were purposefully selected, 25 learners were randomly sampled. The study revealed that government-initiated intervention strategies are failing to control drug and substance abuse in schools. The campaign strategies are in place, but learners' attitudes and behaviour do not seem to change. The study recommends sustainable and inclusive capacity-building workshops. The study also recommends parental engagement in regulating learner behavior.

keywords. Drug and substance abuse, impact, intervention strategies, secondary schools.

1.1 Background of the study

Global Context

The past two decades have witnessed an unprecedented increase in the rate of drug and substance abuse, threatening moral fabric and development (WHO, 2020, USAID, 2022). This spike has been witnessed in almost every part of the globe, cutting across all races, religions and nationalities (Anderson-Carpenter et al, 2020). Globally, 53% of people aged 15 years and above have used substances, mainly alcohol. These substances include alcohol (beer, wine, and distilled liquors) and tobacco (cigarettes, vapour-cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, and

snuff), which are legal, as well as illegal cannabinoids (marijuana/cannabis/ daga and edible cannabinoids) opioids, cocaine, and hallucinogens edible. aged 10-24years, and the age of onset for substance use is estimated to be between 13 and 15years in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and under 20 years in Europe, Britain and America.

Drug and substance abuse is a pervasive global issue affecting individuals, families, schools and communities worldwide. From a global context, this is in Africa, America, Asia and many different continents. The prevalence of various substances and drugs being abused by the youths, including cannabis, codeine, Broncleer, Musombodhiya, Kachasu, and Crystal Meth, poses serious challenges Mazuva *et al* (2023). The misuse of chemical substances as indicated by Mambokadzi (2017) can lead to physical, psychological, and social harm, with far-reaching consequences for public health, safety, and economic stability. As a complex and multifaceted problem, substance abuse requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates prevention, treatment, and policy interventions. This response will explore the global context of substance abuse, its causes, consequences, and strategies for addressing this critical issue.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Substance and drug abuse among high school students has become a pressing concern in Southern Africa over the past decade (WHO, 2020, USAID, 2022). In countries like Zambia, South Africa, Malawi and Botswana, evidence shows rising use of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other substances by adolescents. The adolescent population in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to grow significantly, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Increasing rates of substance use among youth pose a significant public health concern, potentially exacerbating morbidity, mortality, and risky behaviors (WHO, 2020, USAID, 2022).. The prevalence of substance use among youth in Sub-Saharan Africa constitutes a serious public health problem, potentially leading to elevated morbidity and mortality rates, and associated risk behaviors such as unprotected sex, increased vulnerability to sexual assault, and heightened suicide risk (Kabiru *et al.*, 2013, Kugbey, 2023, and Mupara *et al.*, 2022). In the Sub-Saharan African context, the leaders face significant challenges in managing drug and substance abuse, particularly among adolescents in Secondary schools. On his research on sub-Saharan Countries, Kugbey (2023) asserts that the prevalence of substance abuses in this demographic is alarming in the region engage in substance use, which includes alcohol, tobacco, and illicit

drugs. In South Africa, this issue is compounded by various socio-economic and cultural factors that influence both the availability of substances and the attitudes towards their use (Khoza & Shilubane 2021). For example, most secondary schools often lack the necessary resources and trained personnel to address substance abuse effectively. Teachers may not be equipped to recognize signs of substance use or to provide appropriate interventions. Therefore, providing training for teachers and school staff on recognizing and addressing substance abuse can create a more supportive environment for students.

National Context: Zimbabwean

Drug and Substance Abuse is a contemporary problem among the youth and has reached crisis levels in the nation of Zimbabwe (Mambokadzi, (2017). The problem has been compounded by acute socio-economic challenges that have characterized the nation for the decade (Ndlovu & Tigere, 2022). Despite the efforts to curb the problem, new forms of drug and substance abuse are emerging. While marijuana is viewed as the most abused drug, revelations are that there are some emerging trends such as the abuse of prescription drugs, use of home-made intoxicating substances, infusion of intoxicated people's blood, ingestion of drug laced foods and drinking sodium polyacrylate from boiled diapers.

Narrowing down to Zimbabwe Schools, managing drug and substance abuse in Secondary schools presents significant challenges. Ndlovu & Tigere (2022) lament that the issue is complex and multifaceted, influenced by various social, economic, and cultural factors. One of the primary challenges is the limited capacity of public health institutions to address drug and substance abuse effectively. Many schools lack the necessary resources to implement comprehensive prevention and intervention programs. Findings from Mazuva & Mudangwe (2023) indicate that health institutions are overwhelmed, leading to inadequate treatment options for affected youths. Some schools have attempted to implement programs aimed at educating students about the dangers of drug use. However, these programs often lack the necessary funding and trained personnel to be effective. For instance, while there are initiatives to raise awareness, the actual implementation of these programs is inconsistent and often underfunded (Mazuva & Mudangwe, 2023).

In Harare North District, acute socio-economic challenges, ease of access and porous borders such as Beitbridge border post from South Africa and long-distance trucks passing through Masvingo from South Africa, Johannesburg to DRC Congo, Zambia and Malawi, makes drug trafficking easy in Harare and Zimbabwe as a nation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the overwhelming intervention strategies by the Government, religious organisations, non-state actors and many other keen stakeholders to curb the problem of drug and substance abuse, especially among the youth, the number of secondary school going youth being sucked into drug abuse seems to be escalating day by day. The government has placed education at the center of the social pillar of vision 2030 that intends to make Zimbabwe an upper middle income economy society by 2030. All these intervention strategies have had a huge cost implication on the taxpayer including opportunity cost. Drug and substance abuse threatens and tends to derail these noble strides by demotivating the students in learning and subsequently ruining these school-going children that the government intends to rely on in driving the economy to the next level. Drugs and substance abuse menace should therefore be given the attention it deserves if the intentions of this hefty investment in education are to bear fruits. Harare North district, like any other district in the country, experiences internal inefficiencies in the school system such as declining academic performance, apathy in learning activities in subsequent dropout as demonstrated in the background study. The above scenario forms a justification of the current study an assessment of the impact of Drug and Substance Abuse government intervention strategies. A case of 5 selected secondary schools in Harare North district.

1.3 Main Research Objective.

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of Drug and Substance Abuse government intervention strategies. A case of 5 selected secondary schools in Harare North district.

1.3.1 Sub- research objectives

The Sub-research questions were formulated as follows:

- 1.To establish the causes of drug and substance abuse in secondary schools
- 2.To establish the impact of government intervention strategies in Curbing drug and substance abuse by learners

3.To suggest possible government intervention strategies that mitigate drug and substance abuse in secondary schools

1.4 Main Research Question

The main research question was framed as follows:

What is the impact of government intervention strategies on Drug and Substance Abuse in 5 selected secondary schools in Harare North district?

1.4.1 Sub-Research Questions

The Sub-Research Questions were framed as follows:

- (j) what the causes of drug and substance abuse in secondary schools?
- (jj) What is the impact of government intervention strategies in Curbing drug and substance abuse by learners?
- (jii) What are the possible government intervention strategies that mitigate drug and substance abuse in secondary schools?

1.5 Literature review:

This section reviews existing literature on an assessment of the impact of Drug and Substance Abuse government intervention strategies. A case of 5 selected secondary schools in Harare North district. The review aims to synthesize current knowledge, identify gaps, and inform the research study considering the global, regional and local experiences of drug and substance misuse in secondary schools. The section also covers the conceptual framework, theoretical framework that the researcher utilised to analyse the static and variable aspects of drug and substance misuse on participation in learning among secondary school students. The literature was reviewed based on the following questions:

- (j) what the causes of drug and substance abuse in secondary schools?
- (jj) What is the impact of government intervention strategies in Curbing drug and substance abuse by learners?
- (jii) What are the possible government intervention strategies that mitigate drug and substance abuse in secondary schools?

1.5.1 Conceptual Framework:

There is a relationship between drug and substance abuse in young persons and challenges school heads face in managing drug and substance abuse in secondary schools.

Drug and substance abuse Control strategies

Drug and substance abuse refers to the use of certain chemicals for the purpose of creating pleasurable effects on the brain.

- i. It occurs when you excessively use alcohol, prescription medicine, and other legal and illegal substances too much or in the wrong way, Matsikiti, (2023).
- ii. Substance abuse differs from addiction, as many people with substance abuse problems are able to quit or can change their unhealthy behaviour
- iii. Addiction, on the other hand, is a disease.

By addressing the immediate risks and reducing the long-term harms associated with substance use, harm reduction provides practical solutions that meet people where they are, helping to protect their health and dignity while offering a path toward improved health and well-being Mutaka, (2022).

1.5.2 Theoretical framework

This study is guided by the programme implementation theory designed by Roberts 1997.

Program theory processes can be very beneficial to organizations looking to create or update programs, products, or other types of initiatives. Specifically, they can help stakeholders determine and align assumptions, develop a shared understanding of the need, document specifications as a basis for funding, make it easier to identify successes and challenges, and ensure decisions are based on a complete and consistent set of information.

Situation Analysis is a comprehensive analysis designed to understand the nature and extent of a problem or need in order to set the stage for future change. It focuses on answering the question “what problem are we trying to solve” by understanding the components of a problem including the size of the problem, the causes of the problem, the consequences if the problem is left unsolved, who is affected by the problem, the history of the problem, and potential future

scenarios of the problem if it is unaddressed. This comprehensive analysis, which digs deep to fully understand the problem that the new program or product seeks to address, lays the foundation for all future stages of the process. At C1C, we partner with our clients to identify the optimal data sources that will provide insight into the problem, need, or gap. We then gather data from a variety of sources such as historical data from archival sources and new data from interviews, listening session, focus groups, surveys, and assessments. We analyse all of this data using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods. We then pull out the critical insights that tell a story of the data in order to set the stage for building a Theory of Change.

1.5.3 Review of the empirical related literature

1.5.3.1 The causes of drug and substance abuse in secondary schools.

Causes of Substance Abuse:

There is a wide range of underlying causes and risk factors that drive high school students into substance abuse (WHO, 2023, Smith, 2022). These factors are often interrelated, spanning individual, family, peer and community domains (Sussman et al., 2018). Research highlights peer pressure, family dysfunction, and socio-economic factors as contributing to substance abuse among secondary school students.

Peer Pressure and Social Influence:

According to the United Nations (2022), drug users, like other people seek approval of their behavior from whom they attempt to convince to join them in their habits as a way of seeking acceptance. Muthigani (2023) conducted studies on the issue of drug use and agreed that there is significant relationship between the subject's drug using behaviour and involvement of their friends in drugs. According to him, if an adolescent associate with other adolescents who use drugs the risk of involvement with drugs is further increased. Another survey of youth in Southern Nigerian, also found that the source of drugs for drug using drugs had more drugs using than abstinent friends (Imbosa 2020). Confirming this findings Kiiru92024) argues that peer pressure influences youth to use substances under the false impression that some drugs stimulate appetite for food, increase strength and give wisdom as well as courage to face life. According to Meneses (2023), an adolescent who is affiliated to drug-abusing peers expose the individual to other drugs. The interest expectation of the peer groups has an important bearing on whether or not a person will try dependence Peer influence is consistently identified as a

major factor in adolescent drug use. In a Zambian study, 57% of secondary school pupils cited peer pressure as a key reason for their drug abuse (Sussman et al., 2018). Wanting to fit in with friends or appear cool leads many teens to experiment with alcohol or cigarettes. Likewise, focus groups across countries reveal students often start using substances to be accepted by their peers. Being in a social circle where substance use is common greatly increases the risk that a teenager will partake.

1.5.3.2 The impact of government intervention strategies in Curbing drug and substance abuse by learners

Literature reviewed indicated that school management receive policies, instructions, personnel and other resources as part of intervention strategies. The success or failure of such interventions depends on a variety of factors.

Family Background and Drug Abuse

According to global review reports such as Who, 2022, UN, 2023, The family especially the parents, are the child's basic socializing agents. Muzenda (2024) indicates that a child gains his or her first standard of behaviour from the teaching of parents and other grown-up people around. He further argues that if a child observes a disjuncture between parents teaching and practice, it creates doubt, which is carried into adolescence, giving rise to deviant behaviour. Eggert (2021) associates' delinquency, for example alcohol and marijuana abuse with lax, inconsistent or abusive parental discipline. Government intervention strategies become difficult to achieve especially in homes with porous social background. Indeed, Ndeti (2024) noted that the family setup of a child influences his or her habits. If a child is borne of a drug addict, then there is a likelihood of the same habits being transferred. He further notes that this is why there is high rate of drug abuse at the coastal region of Kenya where over 150,000 inhabitants of Nyali are drug addicts, prompting some villagers to form vigil groups to eject visitors out of the villages.

Socio cultural factors

Government intervention strategies may fail to deliver the greatest impact due to socio-cultural factors. Imbosa (2022) also notes that society is always changing, and being a unit of society, the family has undergone many structural and role changes. Rapid social, economic and technological changes may under certain circumstances weaken family relationships and

reduce the sense of belonging in various social spheres. African family structure has been and is still changing from the mainly extended to the smaller nuclear family plus immediate relatives. Unlike in the past, socialization of the young has been neglected. Many children are left in the care of households because parents have to work. According to NACADA (2007), there is a strong link between alcohol/drug abuse by young people and the breakdown in family values. In today's setting, binge drinking is becoming an acceptable pastime with parents freeing the children from restrictions that once governed alcohol consumption. Stories of children barely in teens undergoing rehabilitation due to alcohol problems are causes of concern (NACADA, 2017).

Peer Pressure and Drug Abuse

School managers and several stakeholders in Africa, face challenges in their fight against Drug and substance abuse.

According to the United Nations (2022), drug users, like other people seek approval of their behaviour from whom they attempt to convince to join them in their habits as a way of seeking acceptance. Muthigani (2023) conducted studies on the issue of drug use and abuse and agreed that there is significant relationship between the subject's drug using behaviour and involvement of their friends in drugs. According to him, if an adolescent associate with other adolescents who use drugs, the risk of involvement with drugs is further increased. Another survey of youth in Southern Nigeria, also found out that the source of drugs for drug using-students was friends in the same or neighbouring schools, and students who reported using drugs had more drug using than abstinent friends (Imbosa, 2022). Confirming this findings Kiiru (2024) argues that peer pressure influences youth to use substances under the false impression that some drugs stimulates appetite for food, increase strength and give wisdom as well as courage to face life. According to Mwenese (1996), an adolescent who is affiliated to drug-abusing peers exposes the individual to other drugs. The interest expectation of the peer groups has an important bearing on whether or not a person will try dependence or be lured to taking drugs (Mwenesi, 2023). A peer group member is likely to be the source of information for the drug users about the availability of drugs and their allegeable effects (Mwenesi, 2023).

1.5.3.3 What are the possible government intervention strategies that mitigate drug and substance abuse in secondary schools?

Literature reviewed shows that there are possible government intervention strategies that mitigate drug and substance abuse in secondary schools. However, there is a gap in that, no specific research has been conducted in Harare North district. The desired impact by learners, parents, teachers and the Ministry of Education has to be realized.

From the best practices, initial drug abuse can be influenced by different people including those who first offer the drugs to nondrug user, for example, siblings and friends (Hawkins and Calatano, 2022). Association with drug-abusing peers is often the most immediate risk for exposing adolescents to drug abuse and delinquent behaviour. However, in an environment with no drug-abusing peers and strong antidrug norms, that child is likely to become a drug abuser (Hawkins and Calatano, 2022). Studies on early risk behaviours in school setting show that aggressive behaviour in boys and learning difficulties in girls are the primary causes of poor peer relationships (Elizabeth, Susan and Suman, 2003).

On the other hand, schools should note that families can serve a protective function where there is a strong bond between children and their families; parental involvement in a child's life; supportive parenting that meets financial, emotional, cognitive and social needs; clear limits and consistent enforcement of discipline (Gerstein and Green, 2023). Abandonment and homelessness is another reason for drug abuse among the youths in Kenya.

School Environment and Drug Abuse

Government intervention strategies have some impact if school environment is conducive. School environment also plays a part in deviant behaviour including drug abuse (UNESCO, 2020). School activities are a focal point for adolescents' behaviour (Kandel, 2020). Students in schools and colleges as well as other people are individuals with their unique problems and critical issues that can be tackled meaningfully only on individual basis. Failure to address the problem by individual students could result in feelings of hopelessness, hatred, failure and physical weakness. School counsellors and peer educators supported by the government need time, resources, knowledge and skill to solve various schools' environments respectively.

1.6 Methodology

In this study, an Interpretive research paradigm was used. It assumed that access to reality, given or socially constructed, is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments. According to interpretivist approach, it is

important for the researcher as a social actor to appreciate differences between people (Saunders and Thornhill, 2012). A qualitative methodology was also used in giving insights to explore underlying meanings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The study also used a descriptive research design because of the nature of the problem.

Target Population

Harare North District has approximately 20 secondary schools, 20 heads, over 800 teachers and 1 District schools' inspector. It consisted of experienced people who had the information on school management, learning and who are critical elements to understanding the impacts of substance abuse on learning such as teachers and students.

Sample Size.

Within the study the sample size was established as follows number of schools (5), 5 school heads, 5 deputy heads 5 teachers and 25 students. Purposive sampling was used on heads and teachers while stratified systematic sampling was used on students. The researcher employed a self-administered questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

1.7 Discussion of findings and conclusions.

1.7 1 The causes of drug and substance abuse in secondary schools.

1.7.1.1 Biographic variables of respondents

The data presented was obtained based on position and educational background of the participants. For balance, 5 heads, 5 Deputy heads, 5 teachers, and 25 students participated in the study on [mpact of government intervention strategies on drug and substance abuse in secondary schools. Most participants, about 25 students ranged from 11 to 20. Staff ranged from 25 to above 40 years.

Table 1. Age of Participants

The table below shows age of participants, about 25 of them (students), ranged from 13 to 20 years. 15 adults ranged from 21 to above 40 years.

40 participants		
Age range	male	female
11-20	15	10
21-30	2	3
31-40	2	3
Above 40	2	3
Total	21	19

Fig 1. Gender distribution of participants

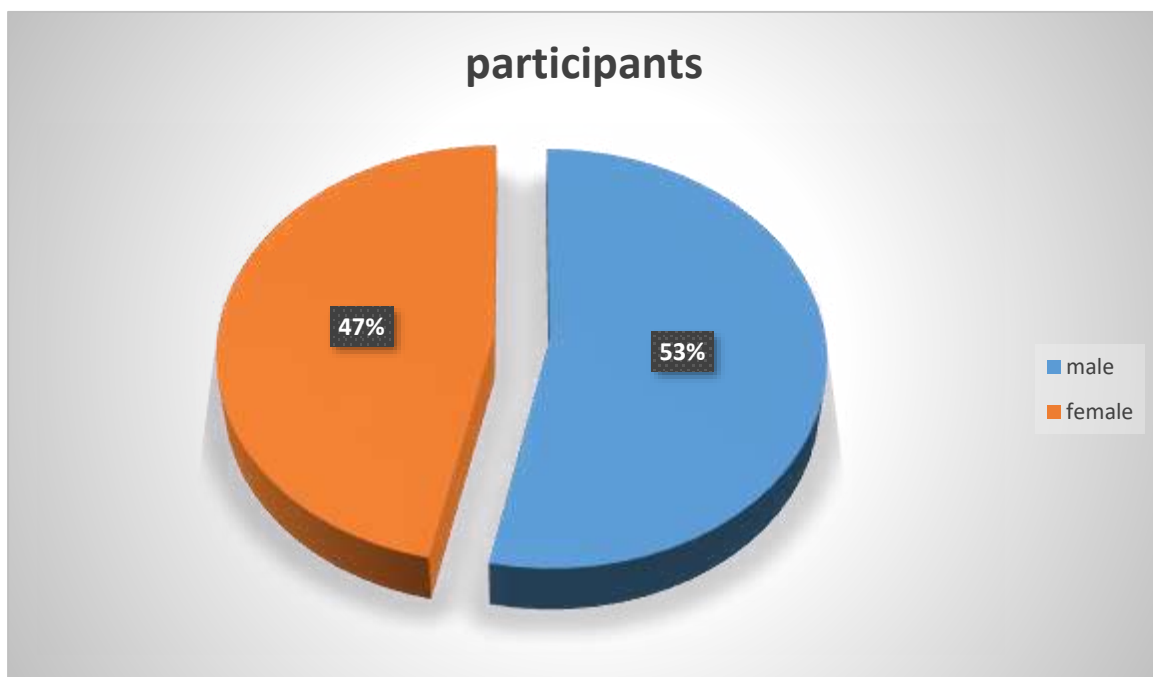


Fig 2 Educational Qualifications of Participants

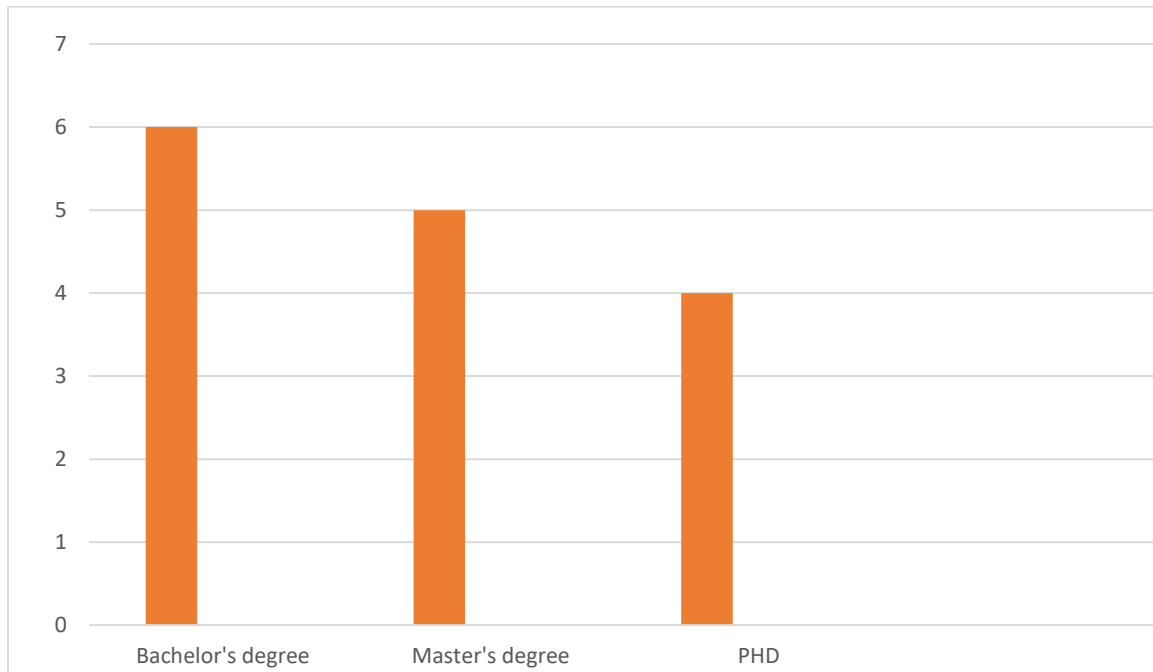


Fig 3 Working Experience of the Participants

Working Experience	Participants
5 to 10	4
11 to 20	6
21 to 30	3
Above 30	2
Total	15

From the table presented above, it shows that there was a balance on gender hence, views were fairly represented by all participants. Both figs 1 and 2 reveal that participants had knowledge and experience on issues affecting learners (Drug and Substance abuse).

Data collected from heads, Deputy heads and teachers through interviews revealed the following themes,

Peer Influence and Social Networks

Family and Home Environment Factors

Socio-Economic Status and Accessibility

School Environment and Academic Pressures

Personal and Psychological Factors

Peer Influence and Social Networks

According to heads, deputy heads and teachers, Peer influence and social networks play a significant role in drug and substance abuse among secondary school students. Participants highlighted that students are often introduced to drugs and substances by their peers, and the desire to fit in or maintain relationships can lead to continued use.

“Most students start using drugs because their friends introduce them, and they don’t want to feel left out or be seen as weak.” (5 teachers). “Peer pressure is a major factor; students want to be accepted by their peers, and if the group is using, they are likely to follow suit.” (two heads).

The literature reviewed also supports the notion that peer influence is a significant predictor of drug and substance abuse among adolescents. Research has shown that students who associate with peers who use drugs are more likely to engage in similar behaviors (Muhia, 2021). Similarly, a study by Nawi et al. (2021) found that peer influence was a strong predictor of substance use among adolescents, highlighting the importance of social networks in shaping behaviour.

Findings from other studies (Theuri & Mutisya et al., 2021) indicate that social networks can both positively and negatively influence students’ behavior, depending on the norms and values of the peer group. Therefore, addressing peer influence and social networks is crucial in preventing and managing drug and substance abuse in secondary schools.

Family and Home Environment Factors

Family and home environment factors significantly contribute to drug and substance abuse among secondary school students. Participants highlighted that unstable home environments, lack of parental guidance, and exposure to substance use at home can lead to abuse.

“Some students come from homes where parents or guardians use substances, so they learn from them.” (10 students).

“Lack of parental guidance and support can push students to seek comfort in substances.” (4 teachers).

The literature reviewed supports the notion that family dynamics play a crucial role in shaping students' behavior. Research has shown that students from dysfunctional families or those with a history of substance abuse are more likely to engage in similar behaviors (Chifamba & Chifamba 2023). A study by Belsky et al. (2017) found that parental involvement and support were significant predictors of adolescent substance use, highlighting the importance of a stable home environment. Findings from other studies (Jatau et al., 2021) indicate that family factors such as parental substance use, neglect, and abuse can increase the risk of substance use among adolescents. Therefore, addressing family and home environment factors is essential in preventing and managing drug and substance abuse in secondary schools.

Socio-Economic Status and Accessibility

Socio-economic status and accessibility play a significant role in drug and substance abuse among secondary school students. Participants highlighted that students from low-income backgrounds may turn to substances due to stress and lack of opportunities, while easy accessibility can also contribute to abuse.

“Some students use substances as a way to escape their poverty-stricken lives.” (3 deputy heads).

“Drugs are readily available, and some students can easily afford them.” (10 students).

The literature reviewed supports the notion that socio-economic factors can influence substance use. Research has shown that adolescents from low-income families are more likely to experience stress and engage in substance use as a coping mechanism (Abazit 2021). Also, a study by Jatau et al. (2021) found that accessibility and affordability of substances were significant predictors of adolescent substance use.

Findings from other studies (Humensky et al., 2018) indicate that socio-economic status can affect students' opportunities and stress levels, increasing the risk of substance use. Therefore, addressing socio-economic factors and accessibility is crucial in preventing and managing drug and substance abuse in secondary schools.

School Environment and Academic Pressure

The school environment and academic pressure play a significant role in drug and substance abuse among secondary school students. Participants highlighted that students often turn to substances as a way to cope with academic stress and pressure.

“Some students use substances to manage stress and anxiety related to exams and academic performance.” (Two heads). “The pressure to perform well can be overwhelming, leading some students to seek escape through substance use.” (5 students).

The literature reviewed supports the notion that school-related stress and pressure can contribute to substance use. Research has shown that academic stress is a significant predictor of substance use among adolescents, as students may turn to substances as a coping mechanism (Reichert et al., 2021). In support, Nawi et al. (2021) found that students who experienced high levels of academic stress were more likely to engage in substance use.. Therefore, addressing school-related stress and pressure is crucial in preventing and managing drug and substance abuse in secondary schools.

Personal and Psychological Factors

Personal and psychological factors play a significant role in drug and substance abuse among secondary school students. Participants highlighted that students' curiosity, desire for experimentation, and personal struggles can contribute to substance use.

“Some students want to experiment with substances out of curiosity or to feel different sensations.” (3teachers). “Students with low self-esteem or those struggling with personal issues may turn to substances as a coping mechanism.” (4 deputy heads).

The literature reviewed supports the notion that personal and psychological factors can influence substance use. Research has shown that adolescents' curiosity and desire for experimentation can lead to substance use (Deng et al., 2022). They also found that personal

struggles, such as low self-esteem and mental health issues, can increase the risk of substance use among adolescents.

.1.7.2 The impact of government intervention strategies in Curbing drug and substance abuse by learners

Through triangulation, it emerged from the heads, teachers and students that the government intervention strategies are not yielding the desired results due to some drawbacks summarised below.

School based intervention strategies that impact on Disruption of Classroom Environment and Learning

Substance abuse not only affects the individual student but also disrupts the classroom environment and learning for others. Participants highlighted:

“When students are under the influence, it disrupts the class and makes it hard for others to learn.” (6 students).

“Substance abuse can lead to behavioral issues in the classroom, which affects everyone’s learning experience.” (5 teachers).

What is worrisome is the fact that government-initiated intervention strategies seem not to have an impact on the idea that substance abuse can disrupt the classroom environment.

Poor Concentration and Reduced Cognitive Function

Teachers revealed that currently the problem of poor concentration haunts their affected learners despite the intervention strategies in place. Drug and substance abuse significantly impairs students' ability to concentrate and affects their cognitive function, leading to a decline in academic performance. Participants highlighted the issue:

“Students who abuse substances often struggle to focus in class and retain information, which affects their overall performance.” (10 students).

“Substance abuse can impair memory and decision-making, making it hard for students to keep up with their studies.” (6 students).

The heads and deputies supported these observations, indicating that substance abuse can have detrimental effects on cognitive function. Rahbar et al. (2023) found that substance use is associated with reduced cognitive performance, including impaired memory, attention, and decision-making skills. Through probing, the researcher wanted to establish facts on the ground why strategies in place were not yielding the desired results. It was revealed that, funding is a challenge in these schools.

Inadequate Resources and Funding

Inadequate resources and funding pose significant challenges to secondary schools in curbing or managing drug and substance abuse. Participants highlighted the issue:

“We lack sufficient resources to implement effective prevention programs and provide support to students struggling with substance abuse.” (5 heads).

“Inadequate funding limits our ability to train teachers and provide necessary services to address substance abuse issues.” (5 deputy heads).

The literature reviewed supports the notion that inadequate resources and funding hinder schools' efforts to manage substance abuse. Research has shown that schools with limited resources struggle to implement effective prevention programs and provide support services (Johnston et al., 2019). A study by Finn et al. (2018) found that funding constraints limit schools' ability to provide evidence-based interventions and support for students affected by substance abuse.

Insufficient Parental and Community Involvement

Insufficient parental and community involvement significantly undermines efforts to prevent and manage drug and substance abuse in secondary schools. Participants stressed the importance of collaboration:

“Parents and the community need to be more involved in addressing substance abuse. When everyone works together, we can make a real difference.” (3 heads).

“Without parental support, it’s hard to keep students on the right path. Substance abuse often starts at home, and we need parents to be part of the solution.” (5 teachers).

The literature strongly supports the role of parental and community involvement in curbing substance abuse. (Deng et al 2022) highlight that parental involvement is a critical factor in preventing adolescent substance use. Moreover, Web et al (2021) found that community-based

initiatives that engage parents and local stakeholders can significantly reduce substance abuse among adolescents.

1.7.3 What are the possible government intervention strategies that mitigate drug and substance abuse in secondary schools?

Below is a summary of the suggested possible government intervention strategies that can mitigate Drug and Substance abuse in secondary schools, the responses were from school heads, teachers and students.

Strengthening School Policies and Enforcement

Guidance and Counseling Services

Parental and Community Engagement

Life Skills Education and Peer Support Programs

Collaboration with Law Enforcement and Rehabilitation Centers

Teacher Training and Capacity Building

Monitoring and Evaluation of Intervention Programs

Strengthening School Policies and Enforcement

Strengthening school policies and enforcement is a critical step in mitigating drug and substance abuse in secondary schools. Participants emphasized the need for clear and consistently enforced policies:

“Having strict policies and enforcing them consistently can deter students from engaging in substance abuse.” (4 heads).

“Schools need to have clear consequences for substance use and ensure that students understand the policies.” (4 deputy heads).

The literature supports the importance of robust policies in preventing substance abuse. Johnston et al. (2019) found that schools with well-defined and enforced policies are more effective in reducing substance use among students. Nawi et al. (2021) also noted that consistent enforcement of policies is key to deterring substance abuse in schools.

By strengthening policies and enforcement, schools can create a safer environment that discourages substance abuse and supports students' well-being.

Guidance and Counseling Services

Guidance and counseling services play a vital role in addressing drug and substance abuse in secondary schools. Participants highlighted the importance of these services:

“Counseling services provide students with the support they need to overcome substance abuse issues.” (5 teachers).

“Guidance counselors can identify students at risk and provide them with the help they need before the situation escalates.” (10 students).

The literature confirms the effectiveness of guidance and counseling in mitigating substance abuse. **Hawkins et al. (2017)** found that school-based counseling services can significantly reduce substance use among adolescents. Jatau et al. (2021) also noted that access to counseling can help students address underlying issues that may contribute to substance abuse.

By providing guidance and counseling services, schools can offer students the support they need to make positive choices and avoid substance abuse.

Parental and Community Engagement

Parental and community engagement is essential in preventing and addressing drug and substance abuse in secondary schools. Participants stressed the importance of collaboration:

“When parents and the community are involved, we can create a united front against substance abuse.” (5 teachers).

“Community programs can provide additional support for students and help reinforce the messages we teach in school.” (2 heads).

Literature supports the role of parental and community engagement in reducing substance abuse. Chifamba & Chifamba (2023) found that parental involvement is a critical factor in preventing adolescent substance use. **Bradshaw et al. (2018)** also noted that community-based initiatives can enhance school-based prevention efforts and provide additional support for students.

By engaging parents and the community, schools can build a stronger support network for students and reduce the risk of substance abuse.

Life Skills Education and Peer Support Programs

Life skills education and peer support programs are effective strategies for mitigating drug and substance abuse in secondary schools. Participants highlighted the benefits:

“Life skills education teaches students how to make healthy choices and resist peer pressure.” (3 heads).

“Peer support programs can provide students with positive influences and help them stay away from substance use.” (10 students).

The literature confirms the effectiveness of life skills education and peer support in preventing substance abuse. Bradshaw et al. (2018) found that life skills training programs can significantly reduce substance use among adolescents. **Hawkins et al. (2017)** also noted that peer support programs can provide students with positive role models and reinforce healthy behaviors.

By incorporating life skills education and peer support programs, schools can empower students with the skills and support they need to avoid substance abuse.

Collaboration with Law Enforcement and Rehabilitation Centers

Collaboration with law enforcement and rehabilitation centers is crucial in addressing drug and substance abuse in secondary schools. Participants emphasized the importance of partnerships:

“Working with law enforcement can help us address substance abuse issues more effectively.” (2 heads).

“Rehabilitation centers can provide students with the help they need to overcome addiction.” (3 deputy heads).

The literature supports the value of collaboration with external agencies. Reichert *et al.* (2021) found that partnerships with law enforcement and rehabilitation centers can enhance school-based prevention efforts and provide students with access to additional resources.

Teacher Training and Capacity Building

Teacher training and capacity building are essential for effectively addressing drug and substance abuse in secondary schools. Participants highlighted the need for training:

“Teachers need training to identify and address substance abuse issues in the classroom.” (4 teachers).

“With proper training, teachers can provide better support to students struggling with substance abuse.” (3 deputy heads).

The literature confirms the importance of teacher training in mitigating substance abuse. **Hawkins et al. (2017)** found that teacher training programs can enhance teachers' ability to identify and address substance use issues. **Fergusson et al. (2015)** also noted that trained teachers are better equipped to support students and implement prevention programs.

By investing in teacher training and capacity building, schools can ensure that educators are prepared to address substance abuse and support students' well-being.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Intervention Programs

Monitoring and evaluation of intervention programs are critical for ensuring the effectiveness of substance abuse prevention efforts in secondary schools. Participants emphasized the importance of assessment:

“We need to regularly evaluate our programs to see what’s working and what’s not.” (4 heads).

“Monitoring and evaluation help us make informed decisions about our prevention strategies.” (4 deputy heads).

The literature supports the value of monitoring and evaluation in substance abuse prevention. **Nation et al. (2017)** found that ongoing evaluation of prevention programs is essential for identifying effective strategies and making necessary adjustments. **Fagan et al. (2018)** also noted that monitoring and evaluation can help schools assess the impact of their programs and improve outcomes.

1.8. Summary of Findings

The study revealed that socio-economic factors, peer pressure, and curiosity were significant causes of drug and substance abuse among secondary school students. Additionally, the school environment and academic pressure were found to contribute to substance abuse, with students often turning to substances as a coping mechanism for stress and anxiety.

The study also identified several challenges faced by the Ministry of Education through school management in curbing substance abuse, including inadequate resources and funding, lack of trained personnel and expertise, ineffective policies and enforcement, and insufficient parental and community involvement. Furthermore, student resistance and cultural factors were found to pose significant challenges to substance abuse prevention efforts.

The findings also showed that drug and substance abuse has a detrimental impact on students' academic performance, including poor concentration and reduced cognitive function, low motivation and decreased interest in studies, increased absenteeism and dropout rates, decline in academic achievement and grades, and disruption of the classroom environment and learning.

Finally, the study suggested several possible solutions to mitigate drug and substance abuse in secondary schools, including strengthening school policies and enforcement, providing guidance and counseling services, engaging parents and the community, incorporating life skills education and peer support programs, collaborating with law enforcement and rehabilitation centers, investing in teacher training and capacity building, and regularly monitoring and evaluating intervention programs.

1.9 Conclusions

Substance abuse is a significant challenge in secondary schools: The study confirms that drug and substance abuse is a prevalent issue in secondary schools, with far-reaching consequences for students' well-being and academic performance.

Multiple factors contribute to substance abuse: The research highlights that socio-economic factors, peer pressure, curiosity, and academic stress are among the key causes of substance abuse among secondary school students.

School management faces significant challenges: The study reveals that school management faces substantial challenges in curbing substance abuse, including inadequate resources, lack of trained personnel, ineffective policies, and insufficient parental and community involvement.

Substance abuse negatively impacts academic performance: The findings conclusively show that substance abuse has a detrimental effect on students' academic performance, leading to poor concentration, low motivation, absenteeism, and declining grades.

Comprehensive strategies are needed: The study underscores the need for a multifaceted approach to address substance abuse in secondary schools, including strengthening policies, providing guidance and counseling, engaging parents and the community, and investing in teacher training.

1.10 Recommendations

Schools should establish clear policies and procedures to prevent and address substance abuse, including consequences for substance use and support for students struggling with addiction.

They should offer sustainable and consistent guidance and counseling services to help students address underlying issues that may contribute to substance abuse and provide support for students struggling with addiction.

Teachers should receive training on substance abuse prevention and intervention to help them identify and support students struggling with addiction. Also, they should strive to create a supportive learning environment that encourages students to seek help and promotes healthy behaviors.

Parents and the community should be involved in substance abuse prevention efforts, including education and awareness programs and provide support for students and families affected by substance abuse, including access to counseling and treatment services.

For Policymakers, they should develop policies and programs to address substance abuse in schools, including providing resources and support for prevention and intervention efforts.

REFERENCES

- Abazid, H. (2021). Drug abuse in the Middle East: A focus on Syria. In Handbook of substance misuse and addictions: From biology to public health (pp. 1-20). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Adewale, O. A. (2022). Effect of Drug Abuse on the Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Nigeria. *European Journal of Biology and Medical Science Research*, 10(3), 72-79
- American Academy of Pediatrics (2007). The role of schools in combating illicit substance abuse. *Pediatrics* 120:6
- Babicka-Wirkus, A., Wirkus, L., Stasiak, K., & Kozłowski, P. (2021). University students' strategies of coping with stress during the coronavirus pandemic: *Data from Poland. PloS one*, 16(7), e0255041.
- Bradshaw et al. (2018): Bradshaw, C. P., Waasdorp, T. E., & Leaf, P. J. (2018). Effects of community-based prevention programs on student behavior. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 63(3), 346-353. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.02.013
- Brumback, T., Thompson, W., Cummins, K., Brown, S., & Tapert, S. (2021). Psychosocial predictors of substance use in adolescents and young adults: *Longitudinal risk and protective factors. Addictive behaviors*, 121, 106985.
- Chifamba, C., & Chifamba, B. (2023). Educators perceptions on drug abuse prevention: A post-pandemic approach. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 49(1), 94-105.
- Choate, P. W. (2015). Adolescent alcoholism and drug addiction: The experience of parents. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5(4), 461-476
- Cresswell, A. M., Dawes, S. S., Burke, G. B., & Pardo, T. (2004). *Modeling the social & technical processes of interorganizational information integration*. 37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2004. Proceedings of the, 0(C), 18 <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2004.1265307>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches (4th Ed.)*. SAGE: Thousand Oaks, CA

- Deng, Y., Cherian, J., Khan, N. U. N., Kumari, K., Sial, M. S., Comite, U., ... & Popp, J. (2022). Family and academic stress and their impact on students' depression level and academic performance. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, *13*, 869337.
- Eric, P. (2017). Socioeconomic Effects of Drug Abuse Among Nigerian Youths. *Canadian Social Science*, *13*(1), 49-53. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/9072> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9072>
- Farhadinasab, A.A.H, Bashirian, S. & Mahjoub H. (2018). Lifetime Pattern of Substance Abuse, Parental Support, Religiosity and Locus of Control in Adolescent and Young Male Users. *Iranian Journal of Public Health*, *37*, 88-95
- Fernández-Manzanal et al. (2007): Fernández-Manzanal, R., Rodríguez-Barreiro, L., & Carrasquer, J. (2007). Evaluation of environmental attitudes: Analysis and results of a scale applied to university students. *Science Education*, *91*(6), 988–1009. doi: 10.1002/sce.20218
- Finn et al. (2018): Finn, K. V., & Tonidandel, S. (2018). Exploring the relationship between school resource officers and student outcomes. *Journal of School Violence*, *17*(2), 147-159. doi: 10.1080/15388220.2016.1273717
- Galea et al. (2018): Galea, S., Nandi, A., & Vlahov, D. (2018). The social epidemiology of substance use. *Epidemiologic Reviews*, *30*(1), 36-48. doi: 10.1093/epirev/mxn003
- Hall, P. A., & Donnelly, Y. S.(2008). Drug use and academic performance among high school students . *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *43*(4),448-455
- Hanson et al. (2017): Hanson, K. L., & Medina, K. L. (2017). Substance use in adolescents: Risk and protective factors. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *60*(6), 761-766. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.02.013
- Hussong et al. (2018): Hussong, A. M., Curran, P. J., & Chassin, L. (2018). Pathways from adolescent substance use to young adult substance use disorders: A systematic review. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, *79*(2), 169-179.
- Jatau, A. I., Sha'aban, A., Gulma, K. A., Shitu, Z., Khalid, G. M., Isa, A., ... & Mustapha, M. (2021). *The burden of drug abuse in Nigeria: a scoping review of epidemiological studies and drug laws*. *Public health reviews*, *42*, 1603960.

Johnston et al. (2019): Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2019). Monitoring the Future national survey results on adolescent use of licit and illicit drugs, 1975-2019. *University of Michigan Institute for Social Research*.

Kabiru, C. W., Izugbara, C. O., & Beguy, D. (2013). *The Health and Wellbeing of Young People in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Under-Researched Area?*. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 13, 11.

Kilpatrick, D.G, Acierno, R, Saunders B. (2000). Risk factors for adolescent substance abuse and dependence: Data from a national sample. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 68:19–30, 2000.

King et al. (2018): King, K. M., & Chassin, L. (2018). Adolescent substance use: Risk and protective factors. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 62(3), S24-S28. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.09.02

Kokotailo, P., & Drug use, E. (2017) and academic performance among high school students. *Journal for adolescent health*, 43(4), 448-455.

Kugbey, N. (2023). Prevalence and Correlates of Substance Use Among School-Going Adolescents (11-18yers) in Eight Sub-Saharan Africa Countries. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*.

Kuntsche, E., Kuendig, H. and Gmel, G. (2007). Alcohol outlet density, perceived availability and adolescent alcohol use: a multilevel structural equation model. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 62:811-816

Leedy, P. and Ormond, J. E. (2005). *Practical Research: Planning and Design*. 8th ed. Ohio: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Makhubele, J. C. (2012). Social exclusion as a contributing factor for the addition of harmful substances to home-made alcohol: The case of Mopani District in Limpopo Province, South Africa. *African Journal of Drug and Alcohol Studies*, 11(1), 17-27

Mambokadzi, D. (2017) Substance Abuse among Young People in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Substance Abuse*, 22(1), 1-9.

Marandure, B.N., Mhizha, S., Wilson, A. and Nhunzvi, C. Understanding the nature of substance use in Zimbabwe: State of the art and ways forward: *A scoping review protocol*. *PLoS One*

Marin, Pilar, and Brett Brown (2008), "The school environment and adolescent wellbeing: beyond academics" *Child Trends Research Brief*. www.childtrends.org/.../child_trends-2008_11_14_RB_School_Environ.pdf.

Muhia, D. (2021). Impact of peer influence on substance abuse among students in public day secondary schools in Thika Sub-County, Kiambu County. *Journal of sociology, psychology and religious, 1(1), 1-18*.

Mupara, L. M., Tapera, R., Selemogwe-Matsetse, M., Kehumile, J. T., Gaogane, L., Tsholofelo, E., & Murambiwa, P. (2022). Alcohol and Substance Use Prevention in Africa: Systematic Scoping Review. *Journal of Substance Use, 27(4), 335-351*.

Muzuva, P, Gwiza, A, & MUDANGWE, P. (2023) The Emerging War On Drug and Substance Abuse the Case of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. Ngenani: *The Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti Journal of Community Engagement and Societal Transformations, 59-7*

Nawi, A. M., Ismail, R., Ibrahim, F., Hassan, M. R., Manaf, M. R. A., Amit, N., ... & Shafuridin, N. S. (2021). *Risk and protective factors of drug abuse among adolescents: a systematic review. BMC public health, 21, 1-15*.

Ndlovu, E, & Tigere, R. (2022). Life in the streets, children speak out. A case of Harare metropolitan, Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research, 5(1), 25-45*.

Neumann, R. (2016) *Understanding writing research proposals*. GBT Press: New Delhi

Obiechina, G. O. & Isiguzo, B.C. (2016). Curbing the Menace of Drug Use among Secondary School Students in Nigeria. *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences, 4(1), 53-64*.

Owobamigbe, K. D.¹, Usman, M. B.², and Oguche T. E. Effect of Substance Abuse On Maladaptive Behaviours and Academic Achievement Among Secondary School Students in Fct, Abuja: Implications for Guidance. *J Arts Humanit Soc Sci Vol 3. 2025*

Rakotsoane, F. C. L. (2012) *Writing a Scholarly Research Proposal: A professional step-by-step guide for beginners*, Morija Printing Works: Morija

Reichert, R. A., Silveira, K. M., Lopes, F. M., & De Micheli, D. (2021). Drug Abuse: Classifications, Effects and Risks. Behavior Analysis and Substance Dependence: *Theory, Research and Intervention, 3-20*.

Swadi, H. (1999), Individual risk factors for adolescent substance use: *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 55, 209-224.

Teddlie, C. and Tashakkori, A. (2009) *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Sage, London.

The Children's Act [Chapter 5:06]

The Education Act [Chapter 25:04]

The Mental Health Act [Chapter 15:12]



The Public Health Act [Chapter 15:09]

Theuri, J., & Mutisya, D. N. (2021). Alcohol and drug abuse as ecological predictors of risk taking behaviour among secondary school students in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County, Kenya. *African Journal of Empirical Research*, 2(1&2), 50-55.

Wills, T.A.; Sandy J.M, and Yaeger, A.M. (2001), Coping dimensions, life stress, and adolescent substance use: A latent growth analysis, *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 110:309–23

Zemba, M. (2022). The causes and effects of drug abuse on pupils' academic performance: A case study of Mindolo Secondary School in Kitwe, Zambia. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis*, 5(8), 2253-2260.

Indexing the Misery of Drug and Substance Abuse among Students in Higher and Tertiary Institutions of Masvingo Province

Prince Chimonero ¹ and Curthbert Pisirai ²

1. Department of Science and Technical Education, Great Zimbabwe University
Email: pchimonero@gzu.ac.zw; pchimonero@gmail.com | ORCID: 0000-0001-7987-7806

2. Department of Languages, Great Zimbabwe University
cpisirai@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0006-7324-0752

Corresponding Author: Prince Chimonero, pchimonero@gzu.ac.zw

Abstract: *Drug and substance use have putative cognitive enhancing impact despite their profound global public health threats and associated risks. This study explored the impact of drug and substance abuse among students in Higher and Tertiary Learning Institutions of Masvingo Province. High rates of drug misuse among young adults prompted this study to be conducted. Its design was a descriptive cohort anchored on a quantitative approach. The study population comprised 10 lecturers and 40 students from 3 chosen Higher Learning Institutes in Masvingo Province. The Problem-Prone Behaviour and Deviancy conceptual framework underpinned this study. Study participants were selected through random sampling. Questionnaires were used as data collection tools for the study. The collected data was presented on tables using descriptive statistics. Emerging findings statistically revealed soaring rates of substance abuse in Higher Learning Institutes of Masvingo Province. Multiple indisciplinary problems linked to drug abuse are rampant with high levels of cultural rot. There are many networks of clandestine drug peddling activities in Institutions of Higher Learning. The study recommends that WADA-based drug testing and counselling platforms be established at all Higher and Tertiary Learning Institutions. Re-purposed multi-sector-driven intervention programmes by all line ministries are essential. The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education is encouraged to provide a legislative policy that modularises drug and substance use in all Higher and Tertiary Institutes of learning.*

Key words: *Drug abuse, Higher Education Institutes, culture, health, students,*

Introduction

Drug and substance misuse is a global public health threat (Muzondo, 2023; Johnson et al., 2022) with amplified risks of addictive behaviours among adolescents (Kulak & Griswold, 2019). For many decades, drugs and substances have been used as internal curative mood suppressants to life challenges (anxiety, restlessness, disturbing emotions, feelings of hopelessness and loneliness) and external mood-coping enhancers in sport, recreation and celebration contexts (Wah et al., 2024; Wangesteen & Hystad, 2022). Habitual substance abuse pervades societal ideologies through crime, bullying, and violence leading to socio-cultural behaviours, alliances with unreceptive groups, social disorders, suicide and high mortality rates in students. Early initiation to substance use risks development of substance use disorders

among adolescent adults (Nath et al., 2022). Although a mine field of literature on drug and substance abuse exists at national and international settings, research scarcity on statistical data and factors that drive this scourge in Higher Institutes of Learning in Masvingo remains undocumented and unsolved. Hence, it was the purpose of this study to unplug this less chartered knowledge gap as an interventional mitigatory measure to abate high prevalence of drug and substance abuse through service providers directly linked with University-going students.

Research questions

1. How far does drug and substance use impact on societal image?
2. To what extent does drug and substance use impact on educational image in higher institutes of learning?
3. How prevalent is substance and drug use in tertiary learning institutes of Masvingo?

Review of Related literature

This section explores the theoretical and empirical review of studies connected with the aforementioned problem. It discusses the general global impact of the problem that eventually provides a lens into related evidence-informed burdens in other countries and university settings.

Conceptual Framework

The Problem-Prone Behaviour and Deviancy Conceptual Framework underpinned this study. The theory explicates that adolescent dropout and substance use are an assemblage of problem behaviours co-varying with other deviant behaviours to which certain adolescents are prone. Deviant behaviours envisage adolescents' non-conforming mind-sets to pre-laid ethics by identifying themselves as independent adult persons. Trapped in environments of this kind, individuals are more likely to indulge in multiple non-conformist engagements in drugs, alcohol and smoking. Subsequently, a multi-chronic-driven turmoil of health, social, psychological and emotional indices stems tarnishing the floral image of the society. Hence the choice of this conceptual framework was adopted in view of the trending landscape in drug and substance abuse among Higher and Tertiary students in Masvingo Province.

Landscaping the global burden of drug and substance abuse

Higher education forms the pillar to growth of countries and human development globally (Reiders et al., 2021) yet limited data on students' mental health among approximately 2.4 million sub-Sahara-African university students exist (Calderon, 2018). Global surveys indicate growing concern over drug abuse and the mental health of university students (Bantijes, Kessler, Lochner, Breet, Bawa, Roos, Davids, Maturiki, Kessler & Steen, 2023; Blows & Isaacs, 2022) which largely contributes to high curative and mortality rates (Combs, 2023). Research indicates that over 30 million people worldwide suffer from diagnosed drug-use disorders (Combs, 2023). For instance, global tobacco mortality for 2019 accounted for 229 million disability-adjusted life years and 8.71 million deaths. Figures of 2.44 million deaths were alcohol-related with 494 000 linked to illegal drug use (Institute of Health Metrics & Evaluation, 2022). Global alcohol abuse attracts an annual mortality rate of 3.3 million with

about 132.6 billion Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) cases. About 2.6 million (10-24 year-range) are highly susceptible to drug and substance use annually (World Health Organisation, 2019).

The National Institute of Drug Abuse (Avila, Weixelbaum & Compton, 2022) affirms risk-initiating factors in substance abuse to be influenced by socio-economic status, parenting quality, peer group influence and inherent pre-disposition to drug addictions. Correlates of sex, biological indicators, income, family and substance history, parental and marital issues and economic status have become high predictors of drug and substance abuse (Vigna-Taglianti et al., 2021). Furthermore, major transitional life-changes magnify risks for drug and substance abuse in youths due to more susceptibility to social, psychological and educational challenges. This further exposes them to drugs, drug abusers and social engagements in drug-manifested environments (Combs, 2023; Mutiso et al., 2022). With the general global abuse of psychoactive drugs on the increase in youths (Kaur et al., 2019), curative and preventive measures could become more burdensome on the health care systems and general economy of the country.

In America, substance abuse disorders are an endemic scourge accounting for nearly a million deaths annually from overdose since 1999. An American 2020 National Survey of Drug Use and Health accounted for greater than 40 million substance abuse sufferers among 12 years' age groups (Combs, 2023). In the Ontario region of Canada, youth service-providers have reported alarming rates of cannabis (94%) and alcohol (81%) abuse (Alia et al., 2022).

In Germany, the Epidemiology Survey of Substance Abuse in 2021 (18-64 years) showed high prevalence rate of alcohol (70.5%) among 36.1 million people with non-opioid analgesic drugs contributing 47.4% among 24.2 million people. Cannabis (8.8%; 4.5 million), cocaine (1.6%; 818 000) and amphetamine (1.4%; 716 000) contributes to amplified health burden and drug abuse. Curative psychoactive medications remain high (5.7%; 2.9 million) (Rauschert et al., 2022). With these kinds of trends, surges in mortality rates are inevitably likely to triple by 2030.

Statistical substance use in Sub-Saharan countries indicates serious threats to social and public health images among youths. Estimates indicate that 35.6 million people suffer from substance-oriented disorders (United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime, 2020). In sub-Saharan-Africa, alcohol is a leading cause of death and disability accounting for 5.3% of all deaths (Ferreira, Borges, Dias, Babor, Esser & Parry, 2015). Compared to Benin University (44.4%), Kenyan lifetime prevalence of substance use among Eldoret University and College students is much higher (69.8%), with alcohol consumption standing at (36%). Equally, alcohol is a highly abused psychoactive substance among Ghanaian university students (64.8%), (Adongo, Adedina, Benneh, Tandoh, Amekyeh, Nanga, Asmah & Woods, 2024). The same substance is commonly abused among Ethiopian male (66.5%) and female (50.8%) university students (Tilahun, Tadesse, Wolde, Abebaw, Abay & Testie, 2024).

In their cross-sectional study of 9 742 Kenyan collegiate and university students, Mutiso et al. (2022) established that drug and alcohol abuse were linked to diverse monetary challenges and psychological disorders. In a similar Nigerian study involving 400 15-24 year-range students from 4 selected south west Nigerian Universities, drug and substance abuse rates stood at

45.7%. Alcohol (61.5%) and cigarettes (54.5%) emerged as the predominantly abused substances with codaine-containing syrup and tramadol topping the list of abused drugs than cannabis (Olanrewaju et al., 2022). The prevalence of drug abuse still cuts across all Nigerian and Sudanese universities and educational institutes with post-graduate being the most vulnerable group to dangerous drug initiation and habits (Idouri et al., 2018; Osman et al., 2016).

In a parallel Nigerian study involving Nnamdi Azikiwe university students, Indian hemp (29.6%), cocaine (15.7%) and marijuana (11.1%) were the most commonly abused substances (Onyenekwe & Onyenekwe, 2024). Further, a recent study conducted by Obi, Udume, and Nkwangu (2024) has reported a lifetime prevalence of 44.4% substance abuse among Benin University undergraduate students in the Edo state of Nigeria. The prevalence of substance use stands at 68.1%.

Bassiony et al.'s (2018) survey study of Egyptian University students revealed a lifetime prevalence of 22.5% in drug use. In another similar 2018 study of Zagazig University students, Egypt, high substance abuse of alcohol (10.29%) and sedatives (5.2%) was reported while cigarette smoking (8.9%), hashish (3.6%) and alcohol (2.7%) emerged as commonly abused drugs among Kafr-El-Shekh University students (Kabbash, Zidan & Saied, 2022).

Coming closer home, in South Africa, alcohol and cannabis are prominently abused substances among Western Cape University students with a prevalence rate of 80.6% and 46% respectively (Blows & Isaacs, 2022). Alcohol-related traumatic injuries contribute to 40% of patients impacting heavily on health care resources (Ye, Shield, Cherpitel, Manthey, Korcha & Rehm, 2018) with 23.9% reported to be triggered by relationship stresses and increased workloads among SA undergraduate university students (Mbuqa, Ducasse, Ferreira, Danielkutty, Radebe & Rehm, 2018). Chen et al.'s (2023) cross-sectional study of undergraduate university students in Johannesburg, SA, established a lifetime prevalence use of alcohol of 79.1% with 70.2% alcohol use in the last 12 months. Compared to Zambian universities, cannabis, (30%) and codeine contained in Benlyn (17%) are highly abused substances among students with academic (27%) and peer pressure (20%) constituting substance abuse triggers (Mwanza & Mwale, 2023).

Turning on to Zimbabwe, the prevalence of drug abuse stands at 57% among youths, with marijuana and alcohol reportedly being among the most top trending substances of abuse (Zimbabwe Civil Liberties & Drugs Network 2019; Matutu & Mususa, 2019). Statistical indications show an increase in figures from 43%, 45% and 57% from 2017 – 2019 respectively for treated drug disorders with 80% manifesting in youths (ZCRDN, 2019). This translated to high incessant health curative costs for substance use disorders (Muzondo, 2023). Muzuva, Gwiza and Mudangwe (2023) in the Harare Central Business District. Nkoma and Bhumure (2014) also reported similar prevalence among first year students at Great Zimbabwe University, with Gurure and associates (2023) establishing presence of psychological dysfunctions of depression, anxiety and insomnia from *mjolo* use among students at the same university.

Despite stringent law enforcement and zero-tolerance for drug abuse and awareness programmes (Maraire & Chethiya, 2020; Kundwei & Mbwire, 2020), alarming drug abuse rates still remain a threat among Zimbabwean adolescents (Makande, 2017). Zimbabwe, like other countries, has embarked on a global movement towards anti-drug public health awareness approaches. Government, in partnership with NGOs (CASADA, Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Zimbabwe Civil Liberties & Drug Network, Community Against Drugs & Substance Abuse-CADSA) has adopted WHO & United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in addressing mental health services and substance use treatment (CASADA, 2019; UN, 2015). While on paper this is true, hands-on approaches are lacking. The nature and rates of substance and drug abuse in universities is likely to triple by 2030 in view of clandestine drug networks across all ages. The fact that Zimbabwe falls in the Economic Misery Index further contributes to an already existing turmoil.

Definitions

Drug abuse has been used by Chibaya and Maritz (2016) to mean the use of drugs for pleasure other than justifiable medical purposes. NINA (2020) popularised substance abuse with links to maladaptive blueprint of substance (drugs and alcohol) usage ultimately leading to one's medical significance. Substance Use Disorders, as defined by Centre for Disease Control, are treatable chronic diseases characterised by problematic pattern of use of a substance or substances leading to improvements in health, social function, and control over substance use (Combs, 2023).

The global public health approach

Literature searches place much prominence on law enforcement approaches towards reduction of drug and substance use (Combs, 2023; Agwogie, 2021, Babar et al., 2018; Csete et al., 2016). Despite widespread public health support for this approach for the past decades (but with less impact), researchers and healthcare professionals alike have shifted focus towards transitionalised humane evidence-based global movement in public health approaches (Johnson et al., 2022; Grisaffi; 2015) to substance use in view of high costs involved. The UNODC Commission on Narcotic Drugs Ministerial Declaration in conjunction with UN endorse the significance of human rights protection against world drug problems in form of data on evidence-based approaches from which policies are to be determined (UNODC, 2019). In view of the dangerous nature of drug and substance abuse, multinational organisations have provided training and technical assistance and awareness to drug and substance abusers. Taking a case in point, UNODC (2021-2025 strategic plan) in partnership with USA, WHO, EU and other organisations currently provide prevention and treatment schemes using evidence-based services from experts (WHO & UN Office On Drugs & Crime, 2020). TreatNet provides technical evidence-based practice services in addition to treatment. The Colombo Plan operates its services through the Universal Prevention Curriculum (UPC) and Universal Treatment Curriculum (UTC). Similar operations have been reported from the United States Agency for International Aid (USAID). The International Consortium of Universities for Drug Demand Reduction (ICUDDR) assists with technical training to university faculties via International Society of Substance Use Professions (ISSUP) and community-driven schemes from Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America through US state-support (Johnson et al., 2022).

Further, UNODC, USAID and the US State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (DBINLEA) assists with direct training and education services to Ukrainian policy makers and treatment providers inclusive of university pre and post-services (Yachruk, Pinchuk, Myshakivska, et al., 2021). With 1.4 million people displaced, treatment of drug users in war-torn regions is inevitable (UNOCHA, 2021). Subsequently, about 25% new infections are opioid-related cases (LaMonacal, Dumchev, Dvoriak, et al., 2019) although substance disorders still remains higher in men than women. This is possibly because men might be on call for national duty (war) and drug uses are critical stress and anxiety depressants.

The Philippines Dangerous Drug report show a lifetime drug use prevalence of 5.8% (10-69 year-age) among 1.67 million people with methamphetamine (47.9%) and cannabis (35%) being the most commonly abused drugs (Dangerous Drugs Board, 2019). Government initiatives to curb drug and substance use by drug traffickers and users were effected through ‘Operation Tokhang’ and ‘Operation High-Value Target’. Convicted drug abusers faced stiff prosecution penalties of murder. Subsequently, over 1 million drug abusers willingly surrendered themselves to law enforcement agents and were pardoned for drug committed offences (National Police Commission Head Quarters, 2016). USAID, UNODC, The Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Program and ISSUP proposed a 5year evidence-based treatment and prevention intervention community-based drug rehabilitation services in most Philippine cities (Hechanova & Regina, 2022).

Similarly, about 14.4% Nigerians (14.3 million adults, 15-64 age groups use psychoactive substances, a figure which alarmingly exceeds current global annual prevalence of 5.6%. Of these, 20% have substance use disorders which surpass the global average of 11% (Agwogie, 2021). Despite existing draconian measures to subdue drug and substance abuse, high crime rates, drug-related violence, high unemployment rates and strained relationships still contribute to this incessant cycle (which is similar to Zimbabwean situation). In addressing this issue, UNODC through EU-funded project, ‘Response to Drug and Related Organised Crime’ and Federal Ministry of Health, capacitated skills training for the workforce in treatment centres and training hubs, with national policies being crafted. Consequently, school-based prevention programs mushroomed. Treatment data was captured in modules for dissemination to stakeholders (Vigna-Taglianti, Mehanovic, and Alesina, 2021). Pathways of this nature could rescue Zimbabwe from the quagmire of drug and substance abuse.

Research Methodology

In this section the methodology that guided the study is presented below. This was a descriptive cohort study anchored on a quantitative approach. The Problem-Prone Behaviour and Deviancy Conceptual Framework underpinned this study. The study population was 50 comprising 10 lecturers and 40 students from 3 chosen Higher Institutes of Learning in Masvingo Province (Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo Polytechnic College and Masvingo Teachers College). The general health questionnaire and WHO students’ drug use questionnaire were used as data collection tools for the study. The collected data was presented on tables and analysed using descriptive statistics. Informed consent was sought from study participants. Participants were free to withdraw their participation whenever they wanted. Anonymity and confidentiality of data were established to meet ethical standards.

Results

In this section results of the study are presented

Table 1: Biodata information of students

Respondents N (40)						
Sex	Male N(20)		Female (20)		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age						
18-20	5	12.5%	6	15%	11	27.5%
21-25	7	17.5%	8	20%	15	37.5%
26-30	5	12.5%	2	5%	7	17.5%
31+	3	7.5%	4	10%	7	17.5%
Level of study						
Diploma	6	15%	4	10%	10	25%
Undergraduate	11	27.5%	8	20%	19	47.5%
Masters	3	7.5%	1	2.5%	4	10%
PhD	-		-			
Year of study						
First	5	12.5%	7	17.5%	12	30%
Second	6	15%	4	10%	10	25%
Third	5	12.5%	6	15%	11	27.5%
Fourth +	4	10%	3	7.5%	7	17.5%

Most participants are within the age range of 21-25 (37.5%), followed by the 18-20 year group (27.5%) with 26-30 and over 31 groups having 17.5% apiece. The majority were undergraduate university students (47.5%) followed by diploma group (25%) with masters students having the least numbers (10%). Those in the first year of study presented the highest figure (30%) followed by the third year group (27.5%), second year (25%) with the fourth year group recording the least figure (17.5%).

Impact and prevalence of drug and substance abuse in Higher Education

Table 2: Frequently abused drugs by university/college students (N=40)

Variable	Male (N=20)	Female (N=20)	TOTAL (N=40)
----------	-------------	---------------	--------------

Tobacco/cigarettes	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5%)
Alcohol	7 (17.5%)	6 (15%)	13 (32.5%)
Injecting illegal Drugs	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	4 (10%)
Hashish	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	4 (10%)
Amphetamines	2 (5%)	1 (2.5%)	3 (7.5%)
Cocaine	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5%)
Opioids	-	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)
Heroin	-	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)
Cannabis	2 (5%)	3 (7.5%)	5 (12.5%)
Marijuana	3 (7.5%)	2 (5%)	5 (12.5%)

In order of regularity, the most commonly abused substances were alcohol (32.5%), followed by marijuana (12.5%), cannabis (12.5%), hashish and injecting illegal drugs (10% apiece), amphetamines (7.5%), cocaine and tobacco/cigarettes (5% apiece) with heroine and opioids recording the least figures of 2.5% apiece. This could signal existence in lack of law enforcement to curb drug and substance abuse.

Table 3: Students' Sources of Drugs (N=40)

Source	Yes	Frequency (%)
Pharmacies	9	22.5%
Institutional Workers	6	15%
Slum areas	3	7.5%
Fellow friends	10	25%
University/college mates	8	20%
Online Purchasing	1	2.5%
Parents and relatives	2	5%
Small shops	1	2.5%

As shown in table 3 above, the greatest sources of drugs were from fellow friends (25%) pharmacies (22.5%), university/college mates (20%) and institutional workers (15%), university/college mates (20%). Other sources were the slum areas (7.5%), parents and relatives (5%) and online purchasing (2.5%). This implies that substance use and abuse are rampant due to their ease of access.

Table 4: Contributing Factors to drug and substance abuse among university/college students (N=40)

Factor	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Friends (Peer pressure)	13	32.5%
Ease of accessibility of drugs	6	15%
Curiosity (experimenting)	4	10%
Academic Pressure	9	22.5%

Achievement drive in Sports	6	15%
Family and Relatives	2	5%

Pertaining to contributory factors to drug and substance abuse, surveyed respondents had varied answers. The majority received pressure from peers (32.5%) while some used drugs and substances to cope with academic pressure (22.5%) and as an achievement-enhancing in sport (15%). As indicated in table 3 above, there is ease of access to drugs and substances (15%) making it easier for others to experiment (10%) possibly for group acceptance and achievement-enhancing in sport drive. Further, there is a high possibility of students from some families (5%) using drugs for medicinal purposes or those who might earn a living through illicit drug trafficking which could make these easy to access even at institutions of higher learning.

Table 5: Time students are most likely to use drugs and substances of abuse (N=40)

Time	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Anytime	6	15%
During lectures	4	10%
After lectures	10	25%
Weekends	8	20%
During inter-university/college/institutional competitions	7	17.5%
University/Institutional/College Trips	2	5%
During holidays/semester breaks	3	7.5%

Surveyed respondents indicated varied responses regarding the times during which they engage in drug and substance abuse. The greatest numbers showed this to occur during (10%), after lectures (25%), during weekends (20%) and during inter-university/college/institutional competitions (17.5%) (possibly for cognitive enhancement and reduction of negative psychological dysfunctions). A segment of 15% rated this to occur at any moment in time with 7.5% opting for holiday/semester breaks (7.5%), lecture times (10%) and institutional trips (5%). The general distribution is indicative of addictive behaviours and an endemic culture of health-risk-paradox.

Table 6: Adverse consequences of drug abuse among students (N=40)

Problems	Never		Yes Due to alcohol intake		Yes Due to illicit drugs		Yes But not related to drug intake	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Quarrels	9	(22.5%)	15	(37.5%)	11	(27.5%)	5	(12.5%)
Physical fights	18	(45%)	9	(22.5%)	8	(20%)	5	(12.5%)
Accidents with injuries	18	(45%)	7	(17.5%)	9	(22.5%)	6	(15%)
Conflicts with friends	7	(17.5%)	17	(42.5%)	12	(30%)	4	(10%)
Conflicts with parents	8	(20%)	22	(55%)	7	(17.5%)	3	(7.5%)
Conflicts with lecturers	8	(20%)	16	(40%)	10	(25%)	6	(15%)
Poor academic achievements	14	(35%)	10	(25%)	12	(30%)	4	(10%)
Trouble with police/Crime	24	(60%)	7	(17.5%)	6	(15%)	3	(7.5%)
Admissions to hospital	17	(42.5%)	6	(15%)	11	(27.5%)	6	(15%)
Unplanned sexual contact	9	(22.5%)	16	(40%)	10	(25%)	5	(12.5%)
Unprotected sex	12	(30%)	13	(32.5%)	11	(27.5%)	4	(10%)
Poor health	15	(37.5%)	11	(27.5%)	8	(20%)	6	(15%)
Deaths	22	(55%)	7	(17.5%)	8	(20%)	3	(7.5%)
HIV/STIs contraction	19	(47.5%)	8	(20%)	9	(22.5%)	4	(10%)

The general pattern of results shows multiple effects of illicit drug and substance abuse among students ranging from crime (60%), STIs affliction (47.5%), and hospitalisation (42.5%) to poor academic attainment (35%). Most respondents affirmed conflict with parents (55%), friends (42.5%), and lecturers (40%), poor academic achievements (30%; 25%), unplanned sexual behaviours (40%) and unprotected sex (unwanted pregnancies) (32.5%; 27.5%) from alcohol and illicit drug abuse eventually leading to HIV/STIs (22.5%; 20%) and mortality increases (20%; 17.5%). Thus, the image of society is compromised as indicated by high figures in disciplinary problems among students.

Table 7: General risk situations of drug abuse according to Lecturers

Lecturers' Responses (N=10)						
	Yes		No		TOTAL (%)	
	freq	(%)	freq	(%)		
Is there a drug problem at your institution?	8	(80%)	2	(20%)	10	100%
Is the drug problem increasing?	9	(90%)	2	(20%)	10	100%
Aware of students selling and involved in drug use?	6	(60%)	4	(40%)	10	100%

Any disciplinary issues on student drug abuse?	7	(70%)	3	(30%)	10	100%
Any institutional drug control measures?	4	(40%)	6	(60%)	10	100%
Any involvement of NGOs	8	(80%)	2	(20%)	10	100%

The issue of drug and substance abuse is problematic among students in educational institutions of Higher Learning. Surveyed respondents rated drug and substance abuse by students as very high (80%) and still remains a rising cause for concern (90%). About 80% indicated availability of intervention programmes from NGOs to reduce drug abuse although a small segment of 20% was unaware of activities of this nature. Of the surveyed respondents, 70% indicated existence of disciplinary problems from drug and substance abuse among students, with a figure of 60% admitting presence of clandestine drug peddling and networks amongst students, although 40% admitted being unaware of such situations. Institutional drug control measures appear to be lacking as indicated by 60% of respondents whereas only a small portion of 40% seem to be involved in drug and substance abuse prevention and interventional programmes. Thus, there is societal rot regarding the moral and health risks from drug and substance abuse among students who are from diverse backgrounds (full time drug traffickers and users, cultural beliefs). Educational institutions are fast becoming ‘hot spot and transit hubs’ of drug and substance abuse and requires urgent rescue in order to protect potential leaders of the country.

Table 8: Sources of assistance on mental health and substance abuse problems (N=40)

Source	Frequency	Percentage (%)
University/Institutional counsellor/Chaplin	12	30%
Health Centre	6	15%
Dean of Students	8	20%
University/Institutional lecturers	4	10%
Fellow Student	6	15%
Peer Counsellor	3	7.5%
Other	1	2.5%

Findings indicate varied preferential sources of assistance regarding mental health challenges emanating from drug and substance abuse. Most respondents preferred seeking assistance from institutional counsellors (30%) with some paying visits to Deans of students (20%), health-care centres (15%), fellow students (15%), and lecturers (10%), peer counsellors (7.5%) and other undisclosed sources (2.5%). These patterns of distributions are clear indicators on the endemic nature of drug and substance abuse among students in Higher Institutions of learning in Masvingo Province.

Discussion

This study reported varied sources from which university and college students sought assistance on mental health and substance abuse issues. However, not enough mitigatory measures are being instituted to subdue the endemic nature of Substance Abuse Disorders in tertiary institutions. Bantijes et al. s’ (2022) global survey documents a similar burden of drug

abuse and mental health among university students, with Calderon (2018) affirming that this scourge heavily impacts on approximately 2.4 million sub-Saharan-Africa university students. Study results significantly contribute to existing global statistics that over 30 million people are reported to suffer from diagnosed drug-use disorders as shown by Combs's (2023) study. Results of this study considerably reinforce Kaur et al.'s findings that there are alarming rates of abuse of psychoactive drugs among youths. This further corroborates United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (2020) report which observed that sub-Saharan countries (inclusive of Zimbabwe), an estimated 35.6 million people suffer from substance-oriented disorders.

Findings from this study revealed alcohol (32.5%), marijuana (12.5%) and cannabis (12.5%) as the most predominantly abused substances in Higher Educational Institutes. Compared to reports of alcohol abuse among Western Cape University students, results of this study are much lower than those reported by Blows and Isaacs (2022) of 80.6% and half of those reported by Odongo et al. (2024) among Ghanaian university students (64.8%). Additionally, statistics of 66.5% (males) and 50.8% reported among Ethiopian university students in Tilahuru et al.'s (2024) study is half of those reported in this study although they are slightly above the 36% announced in Kinyanjui and Sum's (2023) report among Nigerian Eldoret University and college students.

It is surprising, though, that even in well-developed states, alcohol abuse has reached unprecedented levels among the youths. Alia and associates (2022) announced alarming figures of 81% and 90% alcohol and cannabis abuse in the Ontario region of Canada. Those reported in this study are, comparatively, 7 times lower than those announced in Alia et al.'s study. For cannabis, results from this study are about three and half times lower than Blows and Isaacs' (2022) figure of 46% among Western Cape University students, SA but two and half times lower than Mwanza and Mwales' (2023) report of 30% among Zambian university students. Regarding reports of marijuana abuse in this study, results are comparable with the 11% which Onyenekwe and Onyenekwe (2024) recently documented reported the most predominantly abused substances among Nnamdi Azikiwe University students in Nigeria.

Global transformation in trade and commerce exist in most communities with drug peddling becoming undercover daily errands. Youths are part of the community population. By virtue of being resident in such drug manifested environments, respondents in this study are subjected to risks of drug and substance use and abuse as attested by Combs (2022) and Mutiso et al. (2022). This makes them more vulnerable to social, psychological and educational challenges. They risk further exposure to drugs, drug abusers and tempting social engagements.

Turning on to findings from this study, students were exposed to multiple drug sources and surreptitious drug involvement. With high academic pressure, they became more involved in drug and substance use to suppress multiple psychological traumas. Mwanza and Mwale (2023) replicated similar findings (as in this study) regarding academic and peer pressure as commonly observed triggers to substance and drug abuse among most Zambian university students. This is further demonstrated in Mbuqa et al.'s (2018) study findings where relationship stress and increased workloads among SA university undergraduates predisposed them to drug and substance abuse. These commonly shared predicaments reported among Nigerian and Sudanese post-graduate university and educational students whom Idouri et al. (2018) and

Osman et al. (2016) studied; happen to be the most vulnerable to dangerous drug initiation and habits. Global educational opportunities in institutions of higher learning have seen diverse ethnic backgrounds among students. Despite the educational benefits from well renowned higher institutes of learning, there has been a cultural blot among students through drug and sexual abuse. Subsequently, students' involvement in dangerous drug and sexual activities would lead to social conflicts, poor academic achievements, multiple health disorders and high mortality rates.

The above discussions illuminate the harmful nature and burdensome impact and risks connected with high prevalence of drug and substance abuse among the future crop of youths for any country's development. As observed by Reiders et al. (2021) higher education serves as a critical conduit to countries' growth and human development, yet institutions (inclusive of this study) are becoming undercover drug transit hubs. Students are dying because of drug and substance abuse (Bantijes et al., 2023; Rauschert et al., 2022; WHO 2019; Kaur et al., 2019; Idouri et al., 2018). Hence re-purposed evidence-informed approaches to drug and substance use need to be adopted.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this section concluding remarks and recommendations are proffered in view of findings above. Suggestions for future research are also provided.

Conclusions

The rates of drug and substance abuse among students in Higher Learning Institutes of Masvingo Province are soaring. Drug and substance abuse-oriented disciplinary problems are rampant. Networks of clandestine drug peddling and abuse activities in Higher Institutes of Learning are rampant. Students in tertiary institutions of education risk multiple drug-related substance abuse disorders. The once cherished image and cultural fabric of society among students in tertiary education institutes are on the verge of extinction because of drug and substance abuse. The image of higher learning institutes is being tarnished dwindling while evidence-based approaches and awareness gaps to drug and substance use still remain unappreciated.

Recommendations

The study recommends the need for the establishment of evidence-based epidemiological public health approaches to data collection on substance and drug abuse at micro settings (institutional) from which evidence-informed policies can be derived. WADA-based drug and testing and counselling platforms need to be established in all Institutes of higher learning. Legislative policies modularising drug and substance use need to be mandatory and enforced through Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. Re-purposed multi-driven intervention programmes by all line ministries in partnership with non-governmental organisations are essential in order to re-vitalise the cultural and educational images.

Suggestions for future research

More research should be further carried out on evidence-based approaches to drug and substance abuse for all school-going ages to allow for crafting of legislative measures and policies.

References

- Agwogie, M. O. (2021). Evidence-based substance use prevention policies and practices, Global Initiative on Substance Abuse, <https://gisainitiative.org/wp.content/uploads/2021/02/By-Martin-O-Agwogie-PhD2.pdf>.
- Alia, F., Russell, C., Nafeh, F., Chaufan, C., Imtiaz, S., Rahm, J., Spafford, A., & Elton-Marshall, T. (2022). Youth substance use service providers' perspectives on use and services access in Ontario: time to reframe the discourse, *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention and Policy*, 17, 9, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-022-00435-9>.
- Amin, D, A., & Emagdi, S. A. (2019). Drug abuse in Zagazig University Students, Egypt: a cross-sectional study, *Occup Dis Environ Med*, 7, (2), 37
- Kabbash, I., Ridan, O., & Saied, S. (2022). Substance abuse among university students in Egypt: prevalence and correlates, *East Mediterranean Health Journal*, 28(1), 31-40.
- Avila, A, H., Weixelbaum, J, H., & Compton, W. M. (2022). The National Institute of Drug Abuse Summer Research Internship Program: Building a Diverse National Scientific Workforce, *Neuropsychopharmacology*, 47, 2184-2188.
- Babor, T, F., Caulkin, J, P., Edwards, G., et al., (2018). Drug policy and the public good, 2nd ed, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Bassiony, M, M., Salah, E, D., Abdelghani, M., Youssef, U, M., Hassa, M., & El-Gohari, H. (2018). Addressing prevalence and correlates among a sample of Egyptian university students who suffer from substance use disorders, *Addiction Disorders and their Treatment*, 17(3), 114-123.
- Blows, S., & Isaacs, S. (2022). Prevalence and factors associated with substance use among university students in South Africa: implications for prevention, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-022-00987-2>.
- Chen, C., Mupinganjira, M., Motilol, A., Matukane, S., Lotsoalo, R., McKee, T., et al., (2023). Prevalence and correlates of alcohol use and risky drinking among undergraduates in Johannesburg, SA: a cross-sectional study, *Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(6), 89-98.
- Chibaya, G., & Maritz, J. (2016). Illicit drug use by secondary school learners: reclaiming a life, *The Social Work Practitioner Research*, 28, 264-277.
- Combs, K. E. (2023). How the US can Improve the Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse Disorders, *Classical Conversations*, 25, <https://firescholars.seu.edu/coplus/25>.
- Csete, J., Kamarulzeman, A., Kazatchkine, M., et al., (2016). Public health and international drug policy, *Lancet*, 387, (10026), 1427-1480.
- Dangerous Drugs Board, (2019). National household survey on E patterns of drug abuse, Quezon City, Philippines, <https://www.ddb.gov.ph/images/downloads/2019/Survey-Report>.
- Ferreira-Borges, C., Dias, S., Babor, T., Esser, M,B., & Parry, C. B. (2015). Prevalence and correlates of alcohol drinking among undergraduate students in Johannesburg, South Africa: a cross-sectional study, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-023-05043-w>.

Grisaffi, T. (2015). Drugs policy reform in Latin America, In West, J, editors, S. America, Central America & Caribbean, The European Regional Surveys of the World Series, London, Routledge.

Hechanova, M., & Regina, M. (2022). Development of community-based mental health interventions in the Philippines: an ecological perspective, *Psychology Research Urban Society*, 2(1), 8

Idowu, A., Aremu, A. O., Olumide, A., et al., (2018). Substance abuse among students in selected secondary schools of an urban community of Oyo State, South West Nigeria: Implications policy action, *African Health Science*, 18, 776-785.

Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, (2022). Global Health Data Exchange GHDx, GBD Results Tool Permalink, <https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-results>.

Johnson, K., Pinchuk, E., Melga, S, M, E., Agwogie, M, O., & Silva, F, S. (2022). The global movement towards a public health approach to substance abuse disorders, *Annals of Medicine*, 54(1), 1797-11806, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0753890.2022.2079150>.

Kaur, R., Singh, T., Basu, D., & Kumar, R. (2019). Prevalence and pattern of psychoactive substance use female students aged 18-25 years in universities of North India, *International Journal of Community Med. Public Health*, 6(2), 603.

Kundwei, G., & Mbwirire, J. (2020). Causes of drug abuse in secondary schools: A case study of Zengeza 4 High School, Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe, *International Journal of Humanities, Arts & Social Studies*, 5(1), 76-83.

LaMonaca, K., Dumchev, K., Dvorak, S., et al., (2019). HIV drug injection and harm reduction trends in Eastern Europe and central Asia: Implications for International and domestic policy, *Curr. Psychiatry Rep*, 21(7), 1-11.

Makande, N. A. (2017). The effectiveness of the Zimbabwe Republic Police Criminal Investigation Department in curbing drug abuse among youths in Zimbabwe: A case of Mbare, *Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 16(4), 413-432.

Maraire, T & Chethiyar, S. D. M. (2020). Youth Empowerment: A Criminological Approach to Crime Awareness and Prevention at North Malaysia, *E-Journal, GSHSS (A)* 20(10), 171-176.

Maraire, T., Chethiyar, S, D., & Jasni, M. A. B. (2020). A general Review of Zimbabwe's Response to Drug and Substance Abuse Among the Youth, *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(2), 625-638.

Matutu, V., & Mususa, D. (2019). Drug and alcohol abuse among youth people in Zimbabwe: A crisis of morality or Public Health Problem, *Biomedical Research & Training Institute*, <https://ssm.com/abstract=3489954>.

Mbuqa, B., Ducasse, R., Ferreira, M., Danielkutty, L., Radebe, B., & Jacob, N. (2014). Knowledge, attitudes and practice regarding alcohol use among undergraduate students at a

South African University, *Undergraduate Research Health Journal*, 2(1), e1650. <https://doi.org/10.7196/URHJ.2024.v2i1.1650>.

Muzuva, P., Gwiza, A., & Mudangwe, P. (2023). The emerging war on drug and substance abuse: The case of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe, *Ngenani*, 1(1&2), 1.35.

Muzondo, E. (2023). Women and Illegal Drug Use in Zimbabwe: Causes and Effects, *Sprink Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 2(07), 11-25.

Muzondo, E. (2022). Accessibility of Human Rights, Social and reproductive health services by female drug users in Zimbabwe: Challenges and Opportunities, *Journal of Social Issues in Non-Communicable Conditions and Disability*, 1(1), 38-50.

Mwanza, N., & Mwale, G. (2023). Students' perspectives on drugs and alcohol abuse at a public university in Zambia, *Herv. Teol. Stud*, 179, 3. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i38579>.

Mutiso, V. N., Ndetei, D. M., Muia, E. N., et al., (2022). Prevalence and perception of substance abuse and associated economic indicators and mental health disorders in a large cohort of Kenyan students: towards integrated public health approaches and clinical management, *BMC Psychiatry*, 22, 191. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-022-03817-2>.

National Police Commission National HQ Philippine National Police Office (2016). PNP, Command memorandum circular N16, Camp crime, Quezon City, Philippines.

NINA, (2020). <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/nih-almanac/national-institute-drug-abuse-nida>.

Nath, A., Choudhan, S. G., Dakhode, S. U., Rannaware, A., & Gaidhane, A. M. (2022). Substance Abuse Amongst Adolescents: An Issue of Public Significance, *Cereus*, 14(11), e31193. doi.10.7759/cureus.31193.

Olanrewaju, J. F., Hamzat, E. O., Enya, J. I., et al., (2022). An assessment of drug and substance abuse prevalence: a cross-sectional study among undergraduates in selected south western universities in Nigeria, *Journal of International Medicine Research*, 50(10), 1-11.

Osman, T., Victor, C., Abdulmeim, A., et al., (2016). Epidemiology of substance use among university students in Sudan, *Journal of Addiction*, 13, 48-57. doi: 10.1155/2016/0476164.

Rauschert, C., Mocklöl, J., Seitz, N. W., Wilms, N., Olderbak, S., & Kraus, L. (2022). The Use of Psychoactive Substances in Germany, *Deutsches Arzteblatt International*, 119(31), 527-534.

Standing, A. (2017). Evidence-based policy-making as a depoliticised government strategy: The case of European drug policy. Evidence in European social drug research and drug policy, Lengerich, Germany: Pabst. Science Publishers, p. 33.50.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs, (2021). Ukraine situation report, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/int/files/resources>.

United Nations (2015). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030.AgendaforSustainableDevelopmentweb.pdf>.

United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs, (2019). Strengthening our actions at the national, regional and international levels to accelerate the implementation of our joint commitments to address and counter the world drug problem, Ministerial declaration, Vienna, Austria: UNODC, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/2019/19-06699-E-book.pdf>.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – UNODC, (2020). World Drug Report: 5, socio-economic characteristics and drug use disorders, <https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/field/wR20-Booklet-5pdf>.

Vigna-Taglianti, F., Mechanovic, F., Alesina, M., et al., (2021). Effects of the unplugged school-based substance use prevention programs in Nigeria: a cluster randomised controlled trial, *Drug Alcohol Dependence*, 228, 108966.

Wangesteen, T., & Hystad, J. (2022). A Comprehensive Approach to Understanding Substance Use Disorders and Recovery: Former Patient Experiences and Reflections on the Recovery Process Four Years After Discharge from Substance Use Disorders Treatment, *Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Mental Health*, 9, 45-54.

Wah, T. H., Ong, A. J. X., Naidu, K. N. C., Hanafi, S., Tan, K., Tan, A., et al., (2024). Navigating drug use, cessation and recovery: A retrospective case notes review among sexual minority men at a commonly-based service in Singapore, *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention & Policy*, 19, 23.

Wood, E., Werb, D., Kazatchkine, M., et al., (2010). Vienna Declaration: a call for evidence-based drug policies, *Lancet*, 2010376 (9738), 310-312.

World Health Organisation & United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime, (2020). International Standards for the treatment of drug use disorders: revised edition incorporating results of field testing, Geneva, Switzerland: WHO, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331635>.

World Health Organisation, (2018). Global Status on Alcohol Report & Health, Geneva, <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/274603/9789241565639-eng.pdf>.

Ye, Y., Shield, K., Cherpitel, C. J., Manthey, J., Korcha, R., & Rehm, J. (2018). Estimating alcohol attributable fractions for injuries based on data from emergency department and observational studies: A comparison of two methods, *Addiction*, 114, 460-470. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30347115>.

A Critical Evaluation of Punitive and Rehabilitative Approaches in Addressing Drug and Substance Abuse in Zimbabwe's Criminal Justice System

Douglas Musebenzi 

dmusebenzi@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0008-2122-2848

***Corresponding Author:** Douglas Musebenzi, dmusebenzi@gzu.ac.zw

Abstract

Zimbabwe has witnessed an increase in drug and substance abuse and this prompted the criminal justice system to have response that is grounded primarily on criminalisation and incarceration of the drug and substance abusers. Although, recent policy measures acknowledge rehabilitation, it remains skeptical whether Zimbabwe's legal and institutional framework shifted significantly away from the punitive control mechanism to rehabilitation-oriented justice system. This article addressed the central question of whether Zimbabwe's criminal justice system operates predominantly as a mechanism of rehabilitation or retaliation in responding to drug and substance abuse. The study adopted a doctrinal legal analysis, policy analysis and limited comparative analysis. The article examined Zimbabwe's drug control legislation and sentencing practices. The article also examined the institutional arrangements for the drug and substance abusers. A comparative analysis with South Africa was undertaken to evaluate how law and policy structure respond to drug and substance use. The analysis was anchored on a rehabilitative public health justice framework that integrates criminal justice theory with public health models of addiction and restorative justice principles. Zimbabwe's criminal justice system remains essentially entrenched in punitive mechanism in addressing drug and substance abuse related issues, although there are formal policy assurances to provide rehabilitation for the drug and substance abusers. The legal framework continues to prioritise criminalisation and incarceration for drug and substance abusers. There are limited diversionary mechanisms, weak integration of treatment services and under-resourced rehabilitation infrastructure in Zimbabwe. Enforcement practices for drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe results in prison overcrowding and recidivism. The comparative analysis demonstrated that the South African jurisdictions prioritise treatment, diversion and reintegration to achieve more sustainable outcomes of the criminal justice system in drug and substance abuse. This article contributes to scholarship by identifying Zimbabwe's drug and substance abuse policy debate as a problem of legal and institutional design. The article offers an analytical framework for evaluating rehabilitation within criminal justice systems. It proffers for legislative and institutional reform aimed at aligning Zimbabwe's response to drug and substance abuse with public health and human dignity.

Key Words Drug and substance abuse, criminal justice system, rehabilitation, punitive, enforcement.

1. Introduction

Drug and substance abuse is a problem that has devastated the world, especially the younger generation (Maraire, etal 2020:625). Drug and substance abuse is a global threat that damages society (Hambali,

& Mappaselleng, & Wata, 2024:5226). Drug and substance abuse among Zimbabwean youth in the post-2000 era has reached an alarming crisis level (Nyatsanza & Nyoni, & Chiremba, 2025:400). Drug and substance abuse is an emerging catastrophe in Zimbabwe that is threatening the social fabric and national development. Drug and substance abuse among the youth in Zimbabwe has reached crisis levels, and the number of youths engaging in drug abuse is increasing yearly (Maraire, etal 2020:625). There has been a general consensus that illegal drug and substance uptake in Zimbabwe has reached crisis levels (Mugari, 2024:1). Drug and substance abuse was once believed to be a minor problem issue has spread like wildfire to become a major problem that affects the youth who are more than 60% of the population (Mugari, 2024:3). Many Zimbabweans are indulging in illegal substances like crystal methamphetamine (*mutoriro*) and other hazardous home brews. The primary research question guiding this study is: **Does Zimbabwe's criminal justice system respond to drug and substance abuse primarily through rehabilitation or punitive punishment?**

The CID Drugs and Narcotics Unit made 5364 arrests between January and March 2024 including 4839 end users and 525 suppliers and 91 drug bases were closed in Zimbabwe (The Herald, 2024) Over 50 drug homes were destroyed and over 10000 people suspected of trafficking or using illegal substances were arrested by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) in 2025(ZBC News Online, 2025). Zimbabwe's criminal justice system has taken a punitive stance in response to drug and substance abuse. This is shown in the raids, mass arrests and the imposition of criminal penalties by the courts. In partnership with other state security agencies, ZRP has made frantic efforts to disrupt supply chains and punish traffickers together with users. As a way to strengthen law enforcement mechanism, government has introduced new policy instruments such as the Zimbabwe Drug and Substance Agency Bill (2024). There is lack of funding for rehabilitation facilities and many provinces Zimbabwe enough operational facilities for rehabilitation processes (Harris,2025) Since mental health services are overburdened, long-term treatment and reintegration initiatives are either impossible or ineffective. Offender rehabilitation and reintegration is integral towards the functioning of any society (Gona & Mugari & Zondayi, 2014:109).

The rehabilitation versus punishment problem of the criminal justice system has been a contentious issue for many years (Ahmed, etal 2025:15). Miceli, (2012) define rehabilitation as a lifelong process in which prisoners acknowledge their antisocial behaviour and display a considerable level of commitment to reconstructing, asserting and redeveloping themselves to becoming reintegrated into the society after undergoing a psycho-educational programme (Zinyemba, & Maushe, & Mangwiwo, 2020:113). Rehabilitation refers to a system or process that aims to modify an individual's conduct in order to prevent them from engaging in any illegal activities (Khan & Nisar & Kanwel, 2023:557). Rehabilitation in the criminal justice system is aimed at reducing recidivism by focusing on the root causes of criminal behavior, which include poverty, addiction, and lack of education (Ahmed, etal,

2025:21). The rehabilitation program consists of a series of integrated efforts, both medical and social, to improve self-adjustment skills, independence, and achieve optimal physical, mental, social, and economic potential (Hambali, & Mappaselleng, & Wata, 2024:5234). Rehabilitation centers on reforming and reintegrating criminals back into society (Ahmed, et al 2025:16). The rehabilitative model employs interventions such as vocational rehabilitation, treatment programs, systems of community support, and education (Lipsey et al., 2010) (Ahmed, et al 2025:16).

The study adopted a doctrinal legal and policy analysis approach and also limited comparative review was used. Primary sources included legislation and statutory instruments were used. Secondary sources included reports and reviewed journal articles. A comparative analysis with South was carried to get insights for best practices. This article used the Punitive-Rehabilitative Theory of Criminal Justice as a theoretical framework. The article took into account legislative developments and institutional mechanisms in the fight of drug and substance abuse globally. It assessed the possibility of a paradigm shift towards a more human rights-based and rehabilitative approach to drug and substance use in Zimbabwe. The analysis shed light on the effects of the punitive approach to drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe. The article examined the law reform in the current legal and institutional framework for drug and substance abuse while promoting a more human rights approach. It tackled the underlying causes of addiction and promoted long-term recovery rather than continuing cycles of marginalisation and criminalisation. The article contributes to the multidisciplinary scholarship in several ways. It reframes Zimbabwe's drug policy challenge as a problem of legal and institutional design. It bridges criminal justice and public health scholarship by examining how their interaction affects treatment, access and recidivism. It offers an analytical model for evaluating rehabilitation in African criminal justice systems, contributing to comparative debates on drug and substance policy worldwide.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a doctrinal and policy analytical research design. It was supplemented by a comparative legal analysis with South Africa jurisdiction to examine whether Zimbabwe's criminal justice response to drug and substance abuse prioritises punishment or rehabilitation. The research was non-empirical and focused on the interpretation and evaluation of legal frameworks, institutional practices and policy instruments. The doctrinal approach analysed of Zimbabwean legislative framework on drug control and criminal justice. This included the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23], the Dangerous Drugs Act [Chapter 15:02]. The legal framework identified the objectives of punishment, deterrence and rehabilitation. It also highlighted the extent to which drug dependence was treated as a criminal offence or a public health concern. The policy analysis approach evaluated national policy instruments, including among other the National Drug Master Plan (2020–2025) and the Multi-Sectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan (2024–2030). These documents are

analysed to assess coherence between stated policy commitments to rehabilitation and public health and the practical operation of criminal justice institutions. The study relied on secondary sources that included official reports and peer-reviewed literature. Sources were selected based on relevance and contextual applicability to Zimbabwe. International instruments and reports from bodies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the World Health Organisation were used to provide guidance on rights-based and evidence-informed approaches to drug control. A limited comparative analysis was employed to contextualise Zimbabwe's approach and South Africa was used as an illustrative case on rehabilitation, diversion and restorative justice. The study was subject to certain limitations. It did not include empirical data or stakeholder interviews, and its comparative scope was limited. However, the combined doctrinal and comparative methodology was used to evaluate Zimbabwe's current approach to drug and substance abusers in the criminal justice system. Recommendations were made for legislative and institutional reform and for advancing legally grounded recommendations for reforms.

3.0. Literature Review

3.1. 3.1. Punitive Versus Rehabilitative Paradims in Criminal Justice

The tension between punitive and rehabilitative paradigms creates one of the most prevalent debates in criminal justice scholarship, particularly in relation to drug and substance abuse. The criminal justice theory, rooted in retributive and deterrence-based model, regards punishment as a morally justified to wrongdoing (Hemp, etal, 2018:25. Deterrence theory assumes that the certainty and severity of punishment will discourage both individual offenders and the broader population from engaging in drug-related activities (Hemp, etal,2018:25) Proponents of punishment believe that it upholds the social order, deters crime and maintains control through the fear of retribution (Ahmed, etal ,2025:16). The high recidivism rates and documented shortcomings in current rehabilitation programs demonstrate a vicious cycle where the punitive system falls short of its purported objectives of reform and deterrence. After serving, their sentence, drug abusers go back into the same environment, with the same mind-set as well as a criminal record (Maraire, etal 2020:629). Zimbabwe's criminal justice system's emphasis on punitive measures has led to a number of unfavorable outcomes. This has resulted in negative effects on the offenders, the prison system and the society at large. Remand centers and prisons in Zimbabwe are overcrowded. As of March 2021, 23000 prisoners were housed in facilities built for 17000 with an occupancy rate of 130%. (Aljazeera, 2023). Most prison facilities across in Zimbabwe are operating far beyond their holding capacities, with some facing congestion levels of over 300 percent (Harris, 2025). Overcrowding remains one of the most critical and persistent challenges affecting ZPCS (Harris, 2025). Although Presidential pardon free a number of inmates, they do not lessen the problem of overcrowding. McCourt,K & Ilminska,M (2012).

Rehabilitative measures are used as a broader categorising term of social interventions like institutional care (Glad, J et al, 2025:59). Rehabilitation scholarship advances a different viewpoint of both the offender and the purpose of criminal justice. Rather than viewing the offender primarily as an actor deterred by punishment, rehabilitative theory emphasises the structural, psychological and social drivers of criminal behaviour. Law enforcement must balance punitive measures and rehabilitation (Hambali, & Mappaselleng, & Wata, 2024:5226). The effectiveness of rehabilitation versus punishment in juvenile justice reforms is a central and contentious issue (Yadav, & Ranaut, 2023:2). Punishment, when applied without a rehabilitative component, may not always address the factors driving juvenile delinquency (Yadav, & Ranaut, 2023:2). A balanced rehabilitation and punishment are key in the development of a criminal justice system that upholds modern values of justice, equity, and sustainability (Ahmed, et al, 2025:16). Punitive measures may not yield significant results in prevention efforts (Masiye, & Ndhlovu, 2016:46.) The juvenile justice system is undergoing a significant transformation with a growing emphasis on rehabilitation and a reevaluation of punitive measures for young offenders (Yadav, & Ranaut, 2023:1). Policy initiatives should be primarily aimed at prevention, treatment, and broader social changes (Chidume & Mugambiwa, 2024:4).

It is evident that, historically, the focus was on a punitive response to crime without facilitating rehabilitation programming (Whitten, 2019:24). Substance abuse is specifically problematic when offenders are incarcerated and not offered rehabilitative programming to target substance abuse (Whitten, 2019:10). Culturally adapted rehabilitation services can help close the treatment gap and promote long-term recovery, particularly for marginalized and underserved youth (Munanura, 2025:172). Specialist substance use treatment services are often unavailable (Munanura, 2025:171). Drug abuse among the youth in Zimbabwe has reached crisis levels, and the number of youths engaging in drug abuse is increasing yearly (Maraire, et al 2020:625). The prevailing mechanisms to curb drug and substance abuse is essentially enforcement-driven at the expense of rehabilitation.

The degree to which criminal justice favours a punitive enforcement over rehabilitative interventions is examined in this section. The law rarely requires rehabilitation and this perpetuates the idea that drug and substance abuse is criminal rather than a health issue. Drug and substance abuse among youth particularly in urban areas has drawn national attention and enforcement efforts have been stepped up in recent years. Over 7000 people were arrested for drug-related offenses in 2023 alone most of these people were users rather than traffickers (The Herald 2024). Although government crackdowns have been presented as part of a war on drugs detractors contend that large-scale arrests don't really address

underlying problems like poverty unemployment and mental health disorders. Zimbabwe's prisons are overcrowded as a result of enforcement taking precedence over rehabilitation. A number of prisons lack the resources necessary to meet the complex needs of drug users who are incarcerated. The ZPCS claims that drug-related incarcerations are a major factor in the country's expanding prison population. There are insufficient rehabilitation services available within prisons few establishments to provide counseling and treatment for the offenders. The establishment of criminal rehabilitation has received tremendous support because it allows criminals to separate themselves from the environmental factors that made them offenders (Lebbie, 2021:5).

Despite the emphasis on rehabilitation and demand reduction in Zimbabwe's Multi-Sectoral Plan (2024–2030) and National Drug Master Plan (2020–2025) there is still a large gap between policy and practice. (Unicef, 2025) Courts frequently choose incarceration over treatment orders because drug courts and diversion programs for non-violent offenders are non-existent. Courts and law enforcement organisations lack the necessary resources and training to apply alternative sentencing for drug-related offenses. Remarks that portray drug and substance abuse use as a security risk rather than a health concern the incarceration of the offenders. Drug and substance abuse is often referred to by people as a scourge, language that favors harsh enforcement over harm rehabilitation. Public health officials and civil society's attempts to reframe drug and substance abuse use in terms of mental health and socioeconomic vulnerability are undermined by this framing. Youth, women and residents of informal settlements are disproportionately affected by the punitive enforcement mechanisms as they are more likely to be targeted by the law enforcement machinery. Young offenders are incarcerated in adult prisons which further exposes them to trauma and criminal activity. Punitive environments discourage disclosure and increase stigma for people who might need to receive health care. The criminal justice system fails to cater for early intervention mechanism when it places a strong emphasis on punishment. If a user is found in possession of drugs they may be referred to a youth counselor however in reality, they are likely to be arrested, fined or imprisoned. The transformation from arrest to rehabilitation is hampered by law enforcements' lack of screening and referral systems. Although designed to curb growing drug use Zimbabwe's current punitive- enforcement approach to drug and substance abuse has had little effect on long-term results. Drug use continues to be penalized, despite the fact that punishment does not ameliorate substance use disorders (Volkow, 2021:2048). It has increased stigma and overburdened the criminal justice system. It has ignored the underlying causes of addiction. It is imperative to rethink the priorities that are necessary for an effective response to drug and substance abuse. Zimbabwe can only develop long-term solutions that save lives lessen harm and preserve human dignity by moving away from enforcement and toward rehabilitation mechanism.

The only alternative is to give full importance to proper drug rehabilitation programs since addiction, more often than not, is one of the root causes of criminal behavior (Ahmed, etal, 2025:22). Zimbabwe

is at a critical stage in its efforts to combat the continued rise in drug and substance abuse. It is worrisome to note that drug abuse cases remain on the increase globally despite all efforts to fight the problem by different states, and world organisations (Maraire, etal 2020:626). It is divided between new commitments to health and rehabilitation and the punitive criminal justice in the fight of drug and substance abuse. Reducing drug-related harm and fostering long-term social cohesion, depends on the correct balance between retaliation that is punishment, and rehabilitation that is treatment and reintegration. Drug and substance laws in Zimbabwe have traditionally placed an emphasis on criminalization, deterrence and punishment. These laws which have their roots in international drug control conventions from the colonial era. The use and possession of controlled drugs and substances carry severe penalties including incarceration. Youths and first-time offenders often face criminal prosecution with little chance of counseling, diversion and rehabilitation. This legal system supports a model of retributive justice in which the main goal is to punish offenders rather than deal with underlying issues. Trauma, unemployment, poverty and mental health issues are underlying issues in drug and substance abuse. An effort to reintegrate low-risk offenders is reflected in the establishment of a community service correctional mechanism. However, without clear treatment infrastructure the criminal justice system will have enormous challenges in the implementation of the rehabilitation programs for the offender. Defaults to incarceration and implementation is still sluggish. The criminal justice system often faces challenges in dealing with drug abuse cases, where the punitive approach often ignores the more humane aspects of rehabilitation (Utomo, & Megawati, 2024:1827). This comparison demonstrates that although rehabilitation has more long-term advantages it is still underutilized because of resource constraints, institutional inertia and legal conservatism. The argument between retaliation and rehabilitation is not just academic, it also reflects broader political narratives and societal attitudes: Public sentiment which is frequently fueled by the media tends to support tough on drugs approaches particularly in response to highly visible drug-related crimes. In order to justify widespread arrests and high-profile crackdowns politicians and law enforcement frequently present drug use as a moral or national security threat. However, human rights advocates and civil society support approaches that acknowledge addiction as a medical condition.

Magistrates have little training in alternative sentencing and choose incarceration even in low-risk cases. (Gibbs, 2016) Prisons are overburdened and lack specialised treatment services despite the fact that prisons provide peer counseling and vocational programs. (Thielo, etal (2019). Police engagements exacerbate trauma rather than reducing crises because they are not trained in drug and substance use management (Barnett, 2024). Institutional reform is required at every level including among others, policing, sentencing and post-release assistance. For Zimbabwe the law can be changed to enable courts to divert drug and substance users into treatment and lessen the excessive reliance on punitive mechanisms. Rehabilitation approach reduces criminal behaviors prompting a decrease of criminality (Murhula, etal, 2019:34). Rehabilitation programmes can play a pivotal role in fostering awareness,

emotional growth, and behavioural change when they encourage participants to accept responsibility (Zitha, & Rensburg, 2025:20). Despite policy commitments to rehabilitation Zimbabwe's current approach to drug and substance abuse is still biased towards retaliation. The evidence shows that counselling and rehabilitation are being used as strategies to mitigate the problem of drug abuse (Gusha, 2024:319).

International law stipulates that imprisonment should not be limited to the deprivation of liberty alone but should include opportunities for prisoners to obtain knowledge and skills that can assist them in their successful reintegration (United Nations (2015:1). Rehabilitation programs are a crucial part of the criminal justice system, aiming to reduce recidivism rates by providing inmates with the tools and resources necessary to reintegrate into society (Suman et al,2023:894). Good drug rehabilitation programs form a part of the bigger rehabilitation structure, which supplements mental health care services (Ahmed, et al ,2025:22), It is becoming more and more clear that punitive approach is insufficient to address Zimbabwe's rise in drug and substance abuse problem particularly among young people. Punishment in itself is inadequate to prevent crime and reduce recidivism (Ahmed, et al ,2025:25) Drug abuse has also been a problem among the Zimbabwean youths and despite its known devastating effects, Drug and substance abuse is on the increase in Zimbabwe (Maraire, etal 2020:627). Drug and substance abuse may prevent the young adults from exploiting unique opportunities offered during their adolescent days (Nderezina, 2008) (Gazimbe, & Khosa, 2021:119). Changing the current criminal justice from one that emphasises punishment and deterrence to one that emphasises rehabilitation is indeed a worthwhile endeavor. This approach moves the emphasis from stigma to support and from retaliation to reintegration and from incarceration to rehabilitation. Global evidence such as that from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) both support integrated models that combine responses from the criminal justice and health systems that support rehabilitation. Drug and substance abuse has a huge burden on health care systems (Masiye, & Ndhlovu, 2016:42).

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) has highlighted that drug abuse among youths is a significant problem worldwide, with increasing drug abuse rates. (Gusha, 2024:311). For offenders with drug and substance use disorders, the criminal justice system should not be their starting point of entry. The offenders require care not punishment. The National Drug Master Plan (2020–2025) highlights the significance of treatment rehabilitation and reintegration Collaboration between the fields of health education, law enforcement and civil society is emphasized in the Multi-Sectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan (2024–2030). Educational programs on drug abuse should be holistic and address both the risk and protective factors (Oyedele, etal 2016:159). The Prisons and Correctional Service Amendment Act (2023) has provided new avenues for rehabilitation by introducing parole. Although implementation is still at its infant stage, these policies represent a paradigm shift away from strictly

retributive methods to rehabilitation methods. The following elements must be established and institutionalized in Zimbabwe in order to operationalize a rehabilitative model. Offender rehabilitation and reintegration is integral towards the functioning of any society (Gona, 2014:109).

3.2. Criminal Justice-Public Health Intersections

An increasingly body of literature views drug and substance abuse at the intersection of criminal justice and public health. Public health scholars argue that substance use disorders should be understood as chronic and relapsing medical conditions. From a public health perspective, criminal justice systems are poorly equipped to address addiction. Incarceration environments often lack adequate treatment services and may expose individuals to violence, infectious diseases, and psychological harm, thereby worsening health outcomes. The availability of resources and funding for rehabilitation programs is a critical factor in their effectiveness (Yadav, & Ranaut,2023:3) Under-resourced rehabilitation centres have failed to take in youths impacted by drug and substance abuse (Gusha,2024:312). Inadequate funding can limit the quality and accessibility of rehabilitation services (Yadav, & Ranaut, 2023:3). The high cost of rehabilitation services has been found to be one of the major barriers to the accessibility of rehabilitation services for drug and substance abuse use disorders (Muzondo, 2023:13) The success of rehabilitation programs relies heavily on the crucial factors of accessibility, meticulous design, and sufficient funding (Khan & Nisar & Kanwel,2023:557). The absence of adequate resources within rehabilitation centres may compel youths to seek services outside their communities, which may become expensive (Gusha, 2024:311). There is a need for more resources and funding to be directed towards rehabilitation centres and after-care services in the community (Gusha, 2024:321). Specialist substance use treatment services are often unavailable (Munanura, 2025:171)

In Zimbabwe, drug and substance abuse rehabilitation services are largely privatized despite the proliferation of drug or substance use in the country (Muzondo, 2023:13). Although Zimbabwe's policy highlight rehabilitation as a part of its response to drug and substance abuse, the practical situation on the ground presents a completely different picture. The majority of drug and substance users particularly from low-income and marginalised communities cannot access the underfunded rehabilitation infrastructure that currently exists.

Some facilities have been charged with abuse, neglect and there is little oversight or uniformity. Access is essentially non-existent in rural areas. Families in rural areas are forced to rely on traditional healers who might not be able to treat addiction due to lack of treatment options. There is a severe lack of

addiction specialists in Zimbabwe including social workers, clinical psychologists and psychiatrists. Less than 20 psychiatrists were in practice in Zimbabwe as of 2024 serving a population of more than 15 million people the majority of whom are based in Harare (WHO Mental Health Atlas 2023). The quality and effectiveness of services provided are lowered because general nurses and social workers in prisons and clinics lack training in drug and substance use disorders. The development of better and quality rehabilitation facilities is also a crucial step to enhance the effectiveness of rehabilitation decisions (Utomo, & Megawati, 2024:1834). Furthermore, there are limited services to cater for particular groups like women and girls who have particular vulnerabilities and obstacles. In the absence of an organised reintegration program to ex-offenders, there is high risk of recidivism. Detox and inpatient therapy are not enough for successful rehabilitation. Continued assistance is necessary to guarantee social reintegration. The objective of social reintegration programmes is to provide offenders with the assistance and supervision that they may need to desist from crime, to successfully reintegrate into the community and to avoid a relapse into criminal behaviour (United Nations, 2018:5). The objective of criminal rehabilitation is to reintegrate the offender into society and foster their transformation into a responsible member of the community (Khan & Nisar & Kanwel, 2023:557).

However, reintegration services are limited in Zimbabwe especially in rural areas. Rehabilitation facilities and prisons do not offer effective reintegration programs for rehabilitating inmates. Many inmates are released without proper rehabilitation. They are placed in the same settings where their drug use began and this subsequently results in recidivism. The National Drug Master Plan (2020–2025) and the Multi-Sectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan (2024–2030) are two examples of policy frameworks that have been introduced but actual budget allocations are limited. Less than 5 percent of the national health budget goes toward mental health. The training of addiction counsellors and the expansion of rehabilitation facilities are not adequately funded. The majority of rehabilitation initiatives rely largely on donor funding which is not sustainable in the long-term. The social stigma associated with drug and substance use continues to be a stumbling obstacle to rehabilitation even in areas where services are available. The notion that drug users should be punished rather than treated are common reasons why a number of families do not to seek help from professional services. Rejection from the community reduces the successful reintegration of former illegal users of drug and substance. The rehabilitation system in Zimbabwe is underfunded and cut off from the larger justice and health systems. There is a shortage of rehabilitation centres in the community, and the few that offer such services are underfunded and fail to serve their purpose (Gusha,2024:319). Despite policy commitments by a number stakeholder, the reality on the ground shows a disjointed system that is unable to satisfy the rising demand for accessible drug and substance treatment (Phelps, 2011) People with substance use disorders need treatment, not punishment and drug use disorders should be approached with a demand for high-quality care (Volkow, 2021:2048).

3.3. Restorative Justice and Alternative Justice Frameworks

Restorative justice theory offers an alternative conceptual framework for responding to drug-related offending. Rooted in principles of accountability, repair, and reintegration, restorative justice shifts the focus of criminal justice from punishment to addressing harm and restoring relationships between offenders, victims, and communities (Kemp et al,2018:25). Restorative justice practices aim to repair harm, promote accountability, and encourage empathy by involving offenders in the process of making amends to victims and the community (Yadav, & Ranaut,2023:2). Restorative justice is an alternative approach to reducing drug use, emphasizing rehabilitation rather than imprisonment (Hambali,2024:5226) Restorative justice serves as a balancing approach to formal sentencing, presenting a holistic response to harm that can potentially lessen recidivism rates (Zitha, & Rensburg,2025:20). Restorative justice practices can reduce the dependency on punitive measures especially for minor offenses or first-time offenders (Ahmed, et al ,2025:22). Legal system has treated minor drug offenders in the same regard as those committing violent crimes (Moses,2021:168). Rehabilitation of offenders in and outside prisons is given in the form of restorative measures that includes diversion programmes that are put in place to restore the offender to good or better behaviour and prevent re-offending in future (Zinyemba, & Maushe, & Mangwiwo, 2020:113). Restorative justice serves as a balancing approach to formal sentencing, presenting a holistic response to harm that can potentially lessen recidivism rates (Zitha, & Rensburg,2025:20). A restorative approach or an approach steeped in ubuntu should have been adopted (Nortje,2024:8). A retributive criminal justice system cultivates judges who are focussed on punishment and ignore the human element of punishment and accountability (Nortje,2024:24). *Makwanyane* case was the blueprint for interpreting *ubuntu* in sentencing (Nortje,2024:24). The case concerned a constitutional challenge to the death penalty for murder under South Africa's Constitution. The Constitutional Court held that capital punishment violated the rights to life and human dignity, drawing on *ubuntu* as a foundational value emphasising compassion and humaneness. (Kemp,2018:27) The death penalty was declared unconstitutional and incompatible with a society based on *ubuntu*. African legal scholarship has linked restorative justice to indigenous philosophies, particularly the concept of *ubuntu*, which foregrounds human dignity, interconnectedness, and social harmony. In the context of drug offences, restorative justice scholars argue that traditional punitive responses are ill-suited to addressing harms that are often diffuse. Restorative and diversionary approaches are therefore viewed as particularly appropriate for non-violent drug offences (Hambali, 2024).

3.4. African Comparative Perspectives on Drug Policy

The problem of drug abuse among youths is pervasive in many African countries, but it is often hidden due to poor aggregate information (Gusha,2024:311). Many African states continue to

prioritise criminalisation despite limited evidence of effectiveness and chronic underinvestment in rehabilitation services. South Africa is often cited as a partial exception, given its constitutional emphasis on dignity, proportionality, and restorative justice, alongside community-based diversion initiatives (Nortje, 2024). South Africa has established community-based diversion programs such as Khulisa which employ restorative justice. Offender reintegration and rehabilitation is a crime prevention strategy and part of a restorative justice approach to crime (Gona,2014:109). South Africa has managed to expand drug and substance abuse rehabilitation and treatment strategies through psycho religious ways making use of existing pastoral care and facilities (Maraire, etal 2020:633). Zimbabwean scholarship reflects similar tensions. While acknowledging the seriousness of drug abuse, scholars increasingly criticise enforcement-heavy approaches that disproportionately affect youth and marginalised communities (Maraire et al,2020). However, few studies analyse Zimbabwe's criminal justice system as an institutional actor shaping policy outcomes, a gap this article addresses.

3.5. Results

3.5.1. Zimbabwe's Legislative Framework

The two pieces of legislation that deal essentially with drug and substance abuse are the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] and the Dangerous Drugs Act [Chapter 15:02]. Drug abuse is a crime in Zimbabwe under the Dangerous Drugs Act [Chapter 15:02]. These pieces of legislation form the foundation of Zimbabwe's legal response to drug and substance abuse. These Acts create a framework that prioritise punishment and criminalization of drug and substance abuse. The objectives of these legal instruments are to control the importation, exportation, production possession, sale and distribution of dangerous drugs. For example, cannabis plants are raw substances that are specifically addressed by the legal instruments. Any violation of any of the regulations made under the Act carries harsh penalties such as a fine of up to level twelve or ten years in jail or both. Law enforcement organisations are given broad authority to search seize and forfeit property under the Acts. The Acts' continued enforcement mechanisms suggest a punitive approach that is embedded in Zimbabwe's legal system. This approach poses a serious conflict to the rehabilitative initiatives in the fight of drug and substance abuse.

The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act outlines particular offences and penalties associated with dangerous drugs in terms of Section 155 to 161 of Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] The Act strengthens the punitive approach. Cultivating manufacturing or producing a dangerous drug with the intention of dealing it is illegal under the Act. in terms of Section 156 of

Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23]. Aggravating circumstances which include involvement in organised crime, use of violence, abuse of public office and encouraging a minor to use or deal in drug and substance abuse. A key component of Zimbabwe's zero-tolerance policy is the clause which treats addiction more like a criminal offense than a public health concern. There is a zero-tolerance to drug abuse in Zimbabwe, the policy is whereby the Government of Zimbabwe takes a stern approach to the issue of drug abuse in Zimbabwe (Maraire, etal 2020:627

A thorough and harsh punitive approach to all aspects of drug activity is demonstrated by the Dangerous Drugs Act's broad scope which criminalises importation, exportation, production, possession, sale and distribution. Section 157 of the Dangerous Drugs Act's criminalises use and possession regardless of quantity. The severe penalties which include imprisonment for up to five years under Section 157 and ten years under the Dangerous Drugs Act demonstrate a strong emphasis on punishment. This suggests a retaliatory approach in which the main goal is to punish offenders for their prior behavior rather than to aid in their rehabilitation. Zimbabwe Drug and Substance Agency Bill was approved by the Cabinet in April 2024 creating a specialised Zimbabwe Drug and Substance Agency (ZDSA) with enhanced prosecutorial authority. (The Herald, 2025)

3.5.2. Institutional Mechanisms

The formal organisations created to carry out and oversee drug and substance abuse policies and initiatives are referred to as institutional mechanisms. Multiple stakeholders including government ministries law enforcement, health services and civil society organisations are involved in Zimbabwe's institutional framework. The Zimbabwean Government is appealed to by stakeholders to decriminalize drug use in the country and instead put in place measures that will allow people who use drugs to access, treatment and rehabilitation at public health centres (Maraire, etal 2020:629). To ensure a vibrant multi-sectoral response, a balance between law enforcement and rehabilitation is essential. Public health initiatives pertaining to drug and substance abuse prevention, treatment and rehabilitation are headed by the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC). The MoHCC supervises community-based health initiatives and mental health services. It collaborates with other ministries to incorporate programs for drug and substance abuse into larger health initiatives.

The Ministry of Justice Legal and Parliamentary Affairs is in charge of the legal frameworks that regulate criminal justice practices and drug control. It oversees the prosecutorial services and courts that deal with drug-related offenses. It contributes to legislative reform that strikes a balance between criminal penalties and rehabilitative justice strategies. The ZRP is tasked with enforcing drug laws conducting investigations and making arrests pertaining to drug and substance use. The Ministry of Home Affairs collaborates closely with the Ministry of Justice. It's in charge of community policing

programs that focus on early detection and prevention. The fight against drug and substance abuse needs the involvement of the community (Chikuvadze, & Saidi ,2023:35).

The Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) oversees the incarceration and rehabilitation of criminals including those found guilty of drug offenses. ZPCS is responsible for the protection of society from criminal elements, through incarceration and rehabilitation of offenders, for their successful re-integration into society. (Moyo & Muchibo,2015:370). The main function of ZPCS is to protect the society from criminals through incarceration and rehabilitation of convicted persons and others who are lawfully required to be detained and their reintegration back into the society, (Zinyemba, & Maushe, & Mangwiwo, 2020:110) putting in place rehabilitation and vocational programs in prisons. The Prisons and Correctional Service Act has authority to support the reintegration and facilitating parole and conditional release. The National Drug Control Authority (NDCA) is an independent organisation in charge of organising national drug control legislation. It carries out research, data collection and policy advisory tasks. It promotes public awareness initiatives and interagency cooperation.

Despite all these structures, there is evidence of poor communication and overlapping mandates and this impedes integration and cooperation. The availability of effective law enforcement and rehabilitation services is restricted by a lack of funding and human resources. (Sidharth, etal,(2019).

3.6. Theoretical Framework

3.6.1. Punitive-Rehabilitative Theory of Criminal Justice

This framework draws on classical and modern theories of punishment that is retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation. It provides the lens for assessing whether Zimbabwe's criminal justice response to drug and substance abuse is oriented toward retaliation or rehabilitation. By contrasting punitive with rehabilitative objectives, this framework enables analysis of sentencing practices, incarceration and reintegration mechanisms within the legal system. This article was anchored in a punitive-Rehabilitative Theory of Criminal Justice, which views drug and substance abuse as requiring integrated legal, medical, and social responses. Punitive theory of justice considers punishment as an acceptable response to crime (Hussin,2011:2399). The Rehabilitation theory promotes the internationally recognized humanitarian approach to deal with an offender with his dignity in view and to focus on his reclamation (Gul, 2018:69). Based on rehabilitation theory, and restorative justice principles, this framework rejects rigid binaries between punishment and treatment. It views criminal justice institutions as facilitators of care, diversion and reintegration. This theoretical framework provides an assessment of whether Zimbabwe's approach is normatively justified and sustainable.

4.0. Analytical Findings from Legal and Policy Analysis.

4.1. Punitive Legal Framework

The first analytical finding is that Zimbabwe's criminal justice framework governing drug and substance abuse remains punitive, despite formal policy recognition of rehabilitation. Legislative instruments continue to define drug and substance use and possession primarily as criminal offences attracting custodial penalties, with limited statutory guidance on treatment-oriented or diversionary responses. While rehabilitation is referenced in sentencing and policy documents, it does not function as a principle within the legal framework. Punishment operates as the common legal response, while rehabilitation remains exceptional, discretionary and weakly institutionalised. This finding supports the argument that punitive outcomes are not merely the result of implementation failure, but flow from how the law is designed.

4.2. Rehabilitation without Legal Operationalisation

The second finding concerns the gap between policy language and legal effect. National drug policies and strategic frameworks acknowledge addiction as a social and health-related concern and call for treatment, prevention, and rehabilitation. However, these commitments are not translated into enforceable legal duties, guaranteed funding streams, or integrated institutional mechanisms within the criminal justice system. Rehabilitation remains framed as an aspirational objective rather than a legally mandated pathway. There are no comprehensive statutory diversion schemes or treatment referral obligations. Rehabilitation operates at the margins of the justice system rather than as a core outcome. Policy recognition alone is insufficient to shift criminal justice practice without corresponding legal restructuring.

4.3 Weak Integration between Criminal Justice and Public Health Institutions

The analysis reveals institutional fragmentation between criminal justice agencies and public health systems. While addiction is acknowledged in policy discourse as a health issue, criminal justice institutions are not structurally embedded within public health referral and treatment mechanisms. Courts, prisons, and law enforcement agencies function largely in isolation from health services. This results in limited screening and post-release support for drug-dependent individuals. Rehabilitation facilities are inadequately linked to judicial processes and lack consistent legal pathways for offender access. This finding underscores that Zimbabwe's system does not operate as a criminal justice–public health system, but as parallel systems with minimal coordination, undermining the effectiveness of both.

4.4. Lack of Diversion and Restorative Justice Mechanisms

Another key finding is the absence of a coherent restorative or diversionary justice framework for drug-related offences. Although restorative justice principles are recognised in broader African jurisprudence and constitutional discourse, they are not meaningfully embedded in drug control legislation or sentencing practice. Community-based alternatives, treatment diversion, and restorative interventions

remain underdeveloped and inconsistently applied. This marginalisation reflects a legal culture that continues to equate accountability with punishment, rather than with repair, treatment, or reintegration.

4.5. Reinforcement of Stigma through Criminalisation

The doctrinal analysis indicates that the criminalisation of drug and substance use contributes to reinforcing perceptions of moral deviance rather than medical vulnerability. Legal frameworks provide for drug users as primarily as offenders who need custodial sentences. This finding aligns with rehabilitative and public health theories that identify stigma as a structural barrier to effective treatment.

4.6. Comparative Insight

The comparative component of the analysis demonstrates that alternative legal frameworks are practically viable. Jurisdictions that have restructured drug policy around decriminalisation, diversion, or treatment-based justice have done so through explicit legal reforms. These comparative insights show that Zimbabwe's punitive orientation is not inevitable.

5.0 Discussion

5.1. Reframing Zimbabwe's Criminal Justice Response: From Retaliation to Rehabilitation

The findings demonstrate that, although there are recent policy developments, Zimbabwe's legal and institutional framework remains punitive. The prevalence of punitive mechanisms reflects the influence of retributive and deterrence-based paradigms in Zimbabwean criminal law. Drug and substance use continues to be primarily a criminal transgression. This framing shapes both the legal framework and also the institutional framework. As a result, rehabilitation remains marginal rather than systematic. Responses to offender rehabilitation and reintegration are inadequate due to a lack of holistic services being provided as a result of stakeholders working in isolation. (Gona & Mugari & Zundayi,2014:109).

5.2. Punitive Legal Design and Limits of Policy Reform

While national strategies acknowledge drug and substance abuse as a public health concern, the legal instruments have not been amended to reflect this shift. In Zimbabwe's case, the legal framework continues to prioritise arrest, prosecution, and incarceration. Without embedding rehabilitation and diversion into enforceable legal norms, policy aspirations remain ineffective in addressing the problem of drug and substance abuse in society. High recidivism rates suggest a need for more tailored interventions (Glad, etal,2025:75). High rates of rearrest and recidivism, especially among drug-involved individuals, are of grave concern for the justice system and society at large. (Andrade,D etal, (2018). Criminal recidivism rates remain very high countries with individual countries having high rates of reoffending reaching some 70 per cent or more (United Nations, (2012). A progressive approach to

criminal justice reform aims to shift the focus from punishment to rehabilitation (Zitha, & Rensburg, 2025:21).

5.3. Criminalisation, Stigma and the Reproduction of Harm

By defining drug and substance use as criminal conduct, the legal system produces stigma and exclusion and positions people who use drugs as objects of control. Criminalisation is particularly problematic because it undermines the very conditions necessary for effective treatment. Fear of arrest and prosecution discourages early intervention and incarceration disrupts social ties. The Zimbabwean context illustrates how criminal justice can inadvertently entrench the social conditions associated with problematic drug use. Rather than functioning as a corrective mechanism, punitive enforcement becomes part of a process in which criminalisation is prevalent.

5.4. Rehabilitation as a Marginal and Symbolic Practice

Although rehabilitation is recognised as a goal of sentencing and corrections, the analysis reveals that it remains weakly institutionalised. Rehabilitation programmes are neither legally guaranteed nor systematically resourced. Without continuity of care, professional support, and post-release reintegration mechanisms, rehabilitation risks becoming ineffective in the transformative process. Parents and family members thus should therefore play an effective role in reducing drug abuse (Oyedele, et al 2016:158). The Zimbabwean case highlights the dangers of relying on externally supported rehabilitation initiatives. Where rehabilitation depends on NGOs rather than statutory mandates, access becomes uneven and raises concerns about accountability, and sustainability.

5.5. Public Health Integration

Reports of substance use in Zimbabwe paint a concerning picture of escalating prevalence of use, with over half of people admitted to inpatient mental health units reportedly experiencing a substance induced disorder. (Marandure, et al., 2023:1). The discussion of criminal justice public health intersections reveals a structural limitation. There is a broader challenge in low- and middle-income jurisdictions, where public health systems are under-resourced and criminal justice institutions dominate state responses to social problems. The rehabilitation of offenders and their successful social reintegration into society should therefore be among the basic objectives of criminal justice systems (United Nations, 2018:3). Rehabilitation programs are crucial for decreasing the recidivism rate and also reintegrate offenders back into the community (Lebbie, 2021:7). Within the rehabilitative, public health justice framework, integration is not merely desirable but essential. The Zimbabwean experience suggests that commitment to public health principles is insufficient without corresponding legal and institutional reform.

5.6. Restorative Justice and Missed Opportunities for Transformation

The underdevelopment of restorative and diversionary mechanisms represents a significant missed opportunity within Zimbabwe's criminal justice system. Restorative justice theory offers a normative framework that aligns with constitutional values of dignity, social justice, as well as indigenous philosophies such as *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is a foundational value emphasising compassion and humaneness. (Kemp,2018:27). The Zimbabwean framework lacks the legal framework necessary to operationalise rehabilitation. This reinforces the dominance of punitive measures.

Prisons should become correctional and rehabilitation facilities that provide life skills and psychological support. Effective rehabilitation in prison may result in a reduced relapse into criminal activities by inmates (Lebbie, 2021:12). For example,

9.Conclusion

Zimbabwe stands at a critical juncture in its response to the escalating drug and substance abuse crisis. The traditional reliance on a punitive, criminal justice system has failed to curb the problem. This retaliatory approach has led to prison overcrowding and high recidivism rates. Prioritising voluntary treatment and social reintegration not only reduces drug-related harms but also alleviates the burden on the criminal justice system. The lack of an upgraded health infrastructure and harm reduction service hinder the realisation of rehabilitation goals. For Zimbabwe to effectively address drug and substance abuse and foster a healthier a decisive shift is required. Fundamental legislative reforms that include the decriminalization of drug and substance use and possession for personal consumption, a comprehensive review of sentencing guidelines to ensure proportionality and the explicit integration of public health principles into law. Institutional reforms must prioritise strengthening public health infrastructure, expanding and enhancing rehabilitation and reintegration programs and promoting widespread harm reduction services.

By embracing the rehabilitation approach, this acknowledges that drug and substance abuse are viewed as a public health issue. Zimbabwe should move from retaliation towards a more humane and effective rehabilitation process. There is need to have a response to drug and substance abuse by prioritising diversion, support and dignity over incarceration. With the right policy shifts, Zimbabwe can build a justice system that not only punishes crime but also restores hope, heals trauma and rebuilds lives. The research is limited in that it is non-empirical and relies on legal texts, policy instruments, and secondary literature rather than fieldwork or

quantitative data. It does not capture lived experiences of people who use drugs and the criminal justice and health practitioners. Further empirical research involving interviews with affected individuals, judicial officers, law enforcement officials and health professionals would provide valuable insight into how punitive and rehabilitative approaches operate in practice. The core contribution of this article lies in its demonstration that the dominance of punitive responses in Zimbabwe is not merely attitudinal or historical, but structurally embedded in legal and institutional frameworks. The article advances scholarship on drug policy reform and highlights the central role of law in shaping the possibilities of rehabilitation-oriented justice.

10. Recommendations: Building a Rehabilitation-Oriented Criminal Justice System

To effectively address drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe a comprehensive paradigm shifts from a punitive to a rehabilitation approach is imperative. This requires significant legislative and institutional reforms.

10.1. Legislative Reforms

There is need to amend Section 157 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] to decriminalise drug use and possession for personal consumption. This removes the criminal penalties and treat the condition as a health issue rather than a criminal offense.

10.1.2. Reviewing of Sentencing Guidelines:

The Dangerous Drugs Act [Chapter 15:02] and Section 156 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] should be revised to ensure proportionality in sentencing, particularly for non-aggravated offenses and cannabis-related offenses. The current framework imposes harsh sentences, contributing to prison overcrowding and high recidivism.

10.1.3. Introducing provisions for alternative sentencing options:

These alternatives could include mandatory treatment programs, community service, diversion programs, and drug courts, aligning with the principles of rehabilitation.

10.1.4. Recognising drug dependence as a public health condition

There is need to recognize drug dependence in our laws as requiring medical and social intervention, rather than solely a criminal matter. This would necessitate a fundamental shift in legal language and intent across all relevant statutes.

10.2. Institutional Reforms

10.2.1. Strengthening Public Health Infrastructure

Significant financial resources to upgrade and expand public health institutions should be provided. This includes improving existing facilities and establishing new ones in both rural and urban areas.

10.2.2. Expanding Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs:

There is need to develop and implement rehabilitation programs within correctional facilities and community settings.

10.2.3. Strengthening post-release support and community reintegration initiatives

There is need to help ex-offenders find employment and social support so as to reduce recidivism.

10.2.4. Implementing strict accountability mechanisms

There is also need to address police complicity in the drug trade, illegal arrests and extortion.

10.2.5. Launching public awareness campaigns

There must be awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs.

References

Aljazeera, 2023,'Fit for pigs': Conditions in overcrowded Zimbabwe prisons choke inmates' <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/8/4/fit-for-pigs-conditions-in-overcrowded-zimbabwe-prisons-choke-inmates>(accessed on 13 January 2026).

Amiri S, etal (2021). Barriers to Provision of Spiritual Care in Mental Health Care Centers: A Qualitative Content Analysis.Iran J Psychiatry Behav Sci.;15(4):e115702.<https://doi.org/10.5812/ijpbs.115702>.

Ahmed, FA etal (2025) Analyzing the Effectiveness of Rehabilitation vs. Punishment in the Criminal Justice System, *Review of Education, Administration and Law (REAL)* 8(1)15-28.

Andrade, D etal, (2018) Substance Use and Recidivism Outcomes for Prison-Based Drug and Alcohol Interventions *Epidemiol Rev.* 40,121–133 <https://academic.oup.com/epirev/article/40/1/121/4992689?searchresult=1#117302215> (accessed on 13 January 2026).

Apriyani, MR (2020) Rehabilitation Narcotics Abusers in Perspective Criminal Policy, Surakarta Law and Society Journal, <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/530987-rehabilitation-narcotics-abusers-in-pers-2b5ebf58.pdf>(accessed on 13 January 2026).

Banda, R (2023) Youth, Drug and Substance Abuse and Policy in Zimbabwe *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 7(9) 968-978.

Barnett, DN (2024) Identifying Police Perspectives About Substance Abuse: Transformational Learning in Law Enforcement Walden University Scholar Works <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=17644&context=dissertations>(accessed on 14 January 2026).

Chidume,MR & Mugambiwa,SS (2024): Breaking the chains: exploring the socio-economic ripple effects of drug and substance use among youths in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe, *Journal of Substance Use*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14659891.2024.2407628>(accessed on 1 October 2025).

Chikuvadze, P & Saidi E (2023) Factors Influencing Drug and Substance Abuse among Secondary School Students in Zimbabwe, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*,14(1)28-38 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Cohen, A (2022) How the war on drugs impacts social determinants of health beyond the criminal legal system *Annals of Medicine*, 54(1) 2024–2038.

Dube, P (2023) Christian spirituality as protective factors against drugs and substance abuse by Zimbabwean youths: A case of the Catholic church in Gweru urban, *The Dyke*, 17(1):1-22.

Forsberg, L & Douglas, L (2022) What is Criminal Rehabilitation? *Criminal Law and Philosophy* (2022) 16:103–126 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11572-020-09547-4>(accessed on 1 October 2025).

Gazimbe, P & Khosa, TM (2021) Juvenile Delinquency as Manifested by Drug Abuse in Gweru Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe, *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, 8 (7) 119-126.

Glad, J et al (2025) Rehabilitative measures as a legal response for adolescents convicted for drug offences: The Swedish system, *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 42(1) 57–79.

Gibbs, P (2016) Are magistrates using prison because they don't know enough about community alternatives? <https://www.transformjustice.org.uk/news-insight/are-magistrates-using-prison-because-they-dont-know-enough-about-community-alternatives/>((accessed on 13 January 2026)

Gona, S & Mugari, I & Zundayi, M (2014) Effectiveness of Correctional Programmes in Curbing Reoffending, *International Journal of Innovative Research & Development* ,3(13)109-118.

Greena,KM et al (2018) Explaining continuity in substance use: The role of criminal justice system involvement over the life course of an urban African American prospective cohort, *Drug Alcohol*

Depend. 2019 February 01; 195: 74–81. doi: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2018.09.033. (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Gul, R (2018) Our Prisons Punitive or Rehabilitative? An Analysis of Theory and Practice *Policy Perspectives*, 15(3) 3 67-83.

Gunda K & Mbwirire J (2020) Fighting the Effects of Drug Abuse by Adolescents: A Case Study of Zengeza 4 High School in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe *International Journal of Humanities, Art and Social Studies (IJHAS)* 5 (2)51-59.

Gusha, MD (2024) Strategies to Address Drug and Substance Abuse among Youths. A Cross-Sectional Study of Mbare, Harare, *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)* 8(9),311-323.

Harris LB, 2025, Zimbabwe's drug crisis exposes gaps in rehab services, <https://cite.org.zw/zimbabwes-drug-crisis-exposes-gaps-in-rehab-services/> (accessed on 13 January 2026).

Harris, LB, 2025, Zimbabwe's prisons 300% overcrowded, lawmakers warn, <https://cite.org.zw/mps-detail-inhumane-treatment-in-zimbabwes-prisons/> (accessed on 13 January 2026).

Hambali, AR, & Mappaselleng, NF & Wata, SH (2024) Law Enforcement Against Drug Abusers Through Medical Rehabilitation and Social Rehabilitation, *International Journal of Religion* 5(11) 5226 – 5240 <https://doi.org/10.1080/07853890.2022.210092/> (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Hussin, N (2011) Punitive Justice in the Malaysian Criminal Law: Balancing The Rights of Offenders with Those of the Victims *Journal of Applied Sciences Research*, 7(13): 2399-2404.

Khan, MI & Nisar, A & Kanwel, S (2023) From Punishment to Progress: The Legal Evolution of Criminal Rehabilitation, *Pakistan Journal of Law, Analysis and Wisdom*, 2(2), 556-563.

Hemp, G (2018) *Criminal Law in South Africa*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town

Lebbie, K H (2021), "An Examination of the Relationship between Rehabilitation and Recidivism" (2021) *Culminating Projects in Criminal Justice*. 16. https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/cjs_etds/16 (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Makomo, A & Chisaka, BC (2020) Factors Underlying the Increase in Domestic Violence Cases in Zimbabwe Despite the Existence of the Anti-Domestic Violence, *Journal of Humanities and Social*

Sciences Studies (JHSSS),2(4),37-47(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)(accessed on 01 October 2025).

Makumbe, BL & Dzingirayi, P (2022) "The Insight of Young People toward Drugs and Chemical Abuse in Zimbabwe" *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development* (6 (1).2062-2068, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd49908. (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Makwanise, N (2023) The Challenges of Fighting Drug Abuse Among the Youth in Zimbabwe, *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*,6(9),52-61.

Manika, C (2025) Zimbabwe's healthcare system collapses a hospital serves as a beacon/<https://www.newzimbabwe.com/while-zimbabwes-healthcare-system-collapses-a-hospital-serves-as-a-beacon/>_(accessed on 14 January 2026).

Maraire, T., & Chethiyar, S. D. (2020). Drug and substance abuse problem by the Zimbabwean youth: A psychological perspective. *Practitioner Research*, 2, 41-59.

Maraire, T., & Ismail, S. (2024). Combating drug and substance abuse among 'private high school' learners in waterfalls district, Harare, Zimbabwe. *Jurnal Pembangunan Sosial*, 27, 51-68. <https://doi.org/10.32890/jps2024.27.3>(accessed on 1 October 2025).

Maraire, T etal (2020) A General Review of Zimbabwe's Response to Drug and Substance Abuse Among the Youth, *People: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(2), 625-638.

Marandure, B. N. etal (2023). Understanding the nature of substance use in Zimbabwe: State of the art and ways forward: A scoping review protocol. *PLoS One*, 18(3), 1-9. Article e0272240. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0272240>(accessed on 1 October 2025)

Masiye, I & Ndhlovu,D (2016) Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Education in Selected Secondary Schools in Zambia: Policy Guidelines used, *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)* 3(11),42-48 <http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.03110069> (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Masunda, W & Muzarurwi, R (2016) Prescription Drug Abuse Among the Urban Youth: Case Study of Gazaland Highfield Area, Aarare, *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*,7(3),1-12

McCourt, K & Ilminska, M (2012) Pardons are Not a Solution to Prison Overcrowding, <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/voices/und-27> (accessed on 13 January 2026).

McNeill, F (2024) Probation, Rehabilitation and Reparation, *Irish Probation Journal*,21,9-26.

Meijer, S (2017) Rehabilitation as a Positive Obligation, *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice*, 25, 145-162.

Mhizha, SR & Maunganidze, D Maunganidze (2022) The Emerging and Trending Issues on Drugs and Substance Abuse Among Youths During the Covid 19 Pandemic: A case Study of Mbare, Harare, *Global Scientific Journals*,10(10)901-916.

Mohamad A.S (2023) Implementation of the Rehabilitation Model on Victims of Drug Abuse in the Development of the Legal system in Indonesia, *Injury: Interdisciplinary Journal and Humanity*,2(4),285-296.

Moses, TT (2021) United States Penal System: Approaches to Rehabilitating Minor Drug Offenders and the Efforts of Governments to Reduce the Number of Incarcerated Individual. *Richmond Public Interest Law Review* ,24(2)167-186 <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/pilr/vol24/iss2/9> (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Moyo, W & Muchibo, M (2015) The Rehabilitative Effectiveness of Sentences Imposed On Offenders in the Zimbabwean Prisons: A Focus on Recurrent Offenders, *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*,5(11)370-382

Moyo, G (2020) Substance use and academic performance among university youth students. A case study of Bulawayo Metropolitan Province *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)* 4 (12),307-311

Mugari, I 2024. The Emerging Trends and Response to Drug and Substance Abuse among the Youth in Zimbabwe. *Social Sciences* 13: 469. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13090469> (Accessed on 17 November 2025)

Mugari, I & Bushu, R. (2024) Causes and Effects of Psychoactive Substance Abuse Among the Youth in Zimbabwe: The Case of Makokoba High Density Suburb, Bulawayo. *Societies* 14, 262. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc14120262> (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Munanura, T (2025) Addressing High Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol Use Disorders Among Adolescents and Young People in Sub-Saharan Africa: Pathways to Effective Action, Dovepress, Taylor & Francis Group.

Munyira, I & Mrewa, J (2025) Enhancing technology in counselling university students on drug and substance abuse, *Journal of Humanities Educational Technology and Innovation*, 1-9-DOI: 10.38140/joheti-2025v1i1a5 (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Murhula, P, et al (2019) "A Critical Analysis on Offenders Rehabilitation Approach in South Africa: A Review of the Literature," *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 12(1) <https://digitalscholarship.tsu.edu/ajcjs/vol12/iss1/12/> (accessed on 1 October 2025).

(Muvundusi, 2025), Stretched rehab centres, drugs menace: Inside Byo's deepening mental health crisis, <https://cite.org.zw/stretched-rehab-centres-drugs-menace-inside-byos-deepening-mental-health-crisis/> (accessed on 14 January 2026).

Muzondo, E. (2022). Accessibility of human rights and sexual & reproductive health services by female drug users in Zimbabwe: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Social Issues in Non-Communicable Conditions & Disability*, 1(1), 38-50.

Muzondo, E. (2023). Women and Illegal Drug Use in Zimbabwe: Causes and Effects. *Sprin Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(07), 11–25. <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v2i07.128/> (accessed on 1 October 2025)

Muzuva, P & Gwiza, A & Mudangwe, P (2023) The Emerging War on Drug and Substance Abuse: The case of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe, *NGENGANI 2* (1&2), 59-74.

Nortje W (2024) "Decolonising the South African Criminal Procedure: Towards a Critical Approach to the Use of Ubuntu in Sentencing" *PER / PELJ* 2024(27) 1-35 - DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/17273781/2024/v27i0a17751> (accessed on 2 October 2025).

Novi, E & Ayun, S & Mateus, S.A (2024) The Implementation of Drug Abuse Rehabilitation to Prevent Relapse: A Systematic Literature Review, *BIO Web of Conferences* 133, 1-22, <https://doi.org/10.1051/bioconf/202413300043> (accessed on 01 October 2025)

Nyatsanza R & Nyoni, FT, Chiremba, T (2025) Crisis, Identity, and Intoxication: Youth Drug Abuse and Socio-Economic Marginalization in post-2000s Zimbabwe, *Baileo: Jurnal Sosial Humaniora*, 2(3), 400-415, <https://ojs3.unpatti.ac.id/index.php/baileofisip/> (accessed on 1 October 2025)

O'Connor, C (2019) A Guiding Hand or a Slap on the Wrist: Can Drug Courts be the Solution to Maternal Opioid Use?, *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 103 <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc/vol109/iss1/> (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Oyedele, V. et al (2016) Drug Abuse and its Academic Implications among Students at Three Secondary Schools in Mutasa Central area of Mutasa District, *European Journal of Education Studies*, 2 (8) 139-161, www.oapub.org/edu 10.5281/zenodo.163777 V/ (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Phelps, MS (2011) Rehabilitation in the Punitive Era: The Gap between Rhetoric and Reality in U.S. Prison Programs, *Law Soc Rev.* 2011 March; 45(1): 33–68. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5893.2011.00427 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3762476/pdf/nihms464066> (accessed 13 January 2026).

Prastiyo, WE (2022) The reconstruction of rehabilitation for addictives and drug abuses in human rights perspective *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* 11(1)379-389

Samanyanga, I (2016) The Role of Rehabilitation Programmes in Curbing Recidivism in Zimbabwe Prisons: A Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Perspective. *Global Journal of Advanced Research*, 3 (9) 815-825.

Sani, KM et al (2024) Prevalence, Causes, and Effects of Drug and Substance Abuse among Youth in Kaduna State, Nigeria, *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12 (3) 30-45.

[Sidharth, A](#) et al, (2019) Closing the gap between training needs and training provision in addiction medicine, *BJPsych International* Cambridge University Press, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7283115/> (accessed on 13 January 2026)

Sonjaya, A (2020) Construction of the Rehabilitation Model for Drug Abuse in Non-Penal Criminal Policy Perspective, *Open Journal for Legal Studies*, 3(2), 111-124. <https://doi.org/10.32591/coas.ojls.0302.03111s> (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Suman O et al (2023) The Effectiveness of Rehabilitations in Prisons and the Criminal Justice System, *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* ,11(3),894-899
Surakarta Law and Society Journal ,2(2)101-110.

Tawandra L. et al (2021) Utilization of substance use treatment among criminal justice-involved individuals in the United States, *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 125 (2021) 108423, journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jsat(accessed on 1 October 2025)

Thielo, A. J et al (2019). Prisons or Problem-Solving: Does the Public Support Specialty Courts? *Victims & Offenders*, 14(3), 267–282. [https://doi.org/ 10.1080/15564886.2019.1595243/](https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2019.1595243) (accessed on 14 January 2026)

The Herald,3 June 2024, 83 drug dealers convicted, 91 bases shut, <https://www.heraldonline.co.zw/83-drug-dealers-convicted-91-bases-shut/>(accessed on 13 January 2026)

The Herald 6 March 2025, Combating drug, substance abuse in Zim
<https://www.heraldonline.co.zw/combating-drug-substance-abuse-in-zim/>(accessed on 1 October 2025).

Tomaz V & Moreira D & Souza Cruz O (2023) Criminal reactions to drug-using offenders: A systematic review of the effect of treatment and/or punishment on reduction of drug use and/or criminal recidivism. *Front. Psychiatry* 14:935755. doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2023.935755 (accessed on 1 October 2025).

Tshabalala, T et al (2015) Prevalence of Drug Abuse and Strategies for Combating It in Secondary Schools in Hwange District, *Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(1D)232-237.

Unicef,(2025) Zimbabwe Multisectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan 2024-2030
<https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/reports/zimbabwe-multisectoral-drug-and-substance-abuse-plan>
(accessed 13 January 2025).

United Nations,2018, Introductory Handbook on the Prevention of Recidivism and the Social Reintegration of Offenders, Criminal Justice Handbook Series, United Nations.

United Nations (2015) Roadmap for the Development of Prison-based Rehabilitation Programmes, Criminal Justice Handbook Series, United Nations

United Nations,2013, Handbook on strategies to reduce overcrowding in prisons [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Overcrowding _in_prisons_](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Overcrowding_in_prisons_) (accessed on 13 January 2026)

United Nations, (2012) Introductory Handbook on the Prevention of Recidivism and the Social Reintegration of Offenders Criminal Justice Handbook Series, https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/crimeprevention/12-55107_(accessed on 13 January 2026)

Utomo, &KS Megawati B (2024) Efforts for Reforming the Criminal Justice System in Implementing Rehabilitation Sentences for Drug Abusers *Journal of Economics, Technology and Business (JETBIS)* 3(12)1827-1836 <https://jetbis.al-makkipublisher.com/index.php/al/index>(accessed on 1 October 2025)

Volkow, ND (2021) Addiction should be treated, not penalized, *Perspective Neuropsychopharmacology*, 2048-2025, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41386-021-01087-2>(accessed on 1 October 2025)

Whitten,C (2019) The Effect of Substance Abuse Rehabilitative Programming on Recidivism, Walden University Scholar Works, this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>(accessed on 1 October 2025)

Yadav,S & Ranaut, A (2023) Juvenile Justice Reforms: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Vs Punishment, *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)*,5(6),1-10

Zinyemba, L& Maushe, F & Mangwiro, V (2020) Treatment and Rehabilitation Offenders: Options for Social Workers in Zimbabwe, *African Journal of Social Work*,10(2)10-115

Zitha,M &. Rensburg,SKJ (2025) The guilt–innocence paradox: Insights from convicted violent offenders in South African correctional centres, *Punishment & Society* DOI: 10.1177/14624745251366307(accessed on 2 October 2025)

ZBC News Online, 2025, Crackdown on drug abuse sees over 10k arrests & 50 drug dens dismantled <https://www.zbcnews.co.zw/crackdown-on-drug-abuse-sees.../> (accessed on 13 January 2026).

Small-Livestock Vocational Training as a Strategy for Drug and Substance Abuse Prevention to Vulnerable Youths in Zimbabwe

Madzana Jameson ¹

1. Great Zimbabwe University, Garry Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering, Department Livestock of Wildlife and Fisheries

jmadzana6@gmail.com | ORCID: 0009-0001-2326-8822

*Corresponding Author: Madzana Jameson, jmadzana6@gmail.com

Abstract

Zimbabwean youth face a growing crisis of drug and substance abuse (DSA), driven by economic hardship, unemployment, and weakened social supports. This mixed-methods study evaluated the efficacy of a six-month small-livestock vocational training program focusing on poultry (broiler and layers) and rabbit production training as a preventive intervention for at-risk youths (aged 15–25) in high-density urban and peri-urban communities of Masvingo Province. The program combined hands-on animal husbandry, enterprise management, financial literacy, and life-skills mentoring, co-designed and delivered in partnership with local NGOs, AGRITEX officers, and community leaders. Quantitative outcomes were measured pre- and post-intervention using the Drug Use Screening Inventory–Revised (DUSI-R), the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES), and a custom Vocational Aspiration Index (VAI). ANCOVA analyses, controlling for age and education, revealed significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between poultry training and the control group on all quantitative measures. Despite significant differences on GSES and VAI, there were no significant differences on DUSI-R between rabbit training and the control group. There were very large effect sizes recorded on reductions in DUSI-R scores for broiler ($d = 1.58$) and layers ($d = 1.95$) groups compared to controls, with moderate effects observed for rabbit trainees ($d = 0.71$). Qualitative data collected uncovered eight core themes, including discipline, peer support, confidence building, and future orientation, which elucidate the psychosocial mechanisms underpinning behavioral change. High attendance rate ($> 90\%$) and positive shifts in community perception underscored the program's acceptability and feasibility. These findings suggest that small-livestock vocational training especially poultry production can serve as a scalable, culturally appropriate strategy to reduce substance-use vulnerabilities and foster economic and psychosocial resilience among youth. It is therefore recommended to prioritize poultry-based curricula, strengthening market linkages for rabbit enterprises, and integrating long-term follow-up to sustain gains.

Keywords: drug and substance abuse prevention; youth vocational training; small-livestock agriculture; mixed-methods evaluation; self-efficacy; Community-Based Participatory Research; Zimbabwe

Introduction

Drug and substance abuse has emerged as one of the most pressing social and public health challenges facing Zimbabwean youths today. The country is witnessing a dramatic surge in the abuse of illicit substances such as crystal methamphetamine (*mutoriro*), cannabis, codeine-based cough syrups (*Broncleer*), glue, and alcohol especially among marginalized and unemployed youth in high density urban and peri-urban settlements (Kembo, 2023; Chipenda, & Cochrane, 2024). A combination of economic stagnation, rising unemployment, limited access to mental health services, and deteriorating family and community support systems has created a perfect storm for substance abuse to flourish among the Zimbabwean youths (Matanga, et al., 2024; Maraire, & Chethiyar, 2020).

Recent reports have shown that up to 57% of young Zimbabweans aged 15–25 are either actively abusing substances or are at high risk of doing so (Citaristi, 2022); Chipenda, & Cochrane, 2024). The scenario is most witnessed in high-density and peri-urban communities, where youth idleness, school dropout rates, and poverty are rampant (Zimusi & Moyo, 2023). DSA among youth often leads to increased crime, domestic violence, unsafe sex, poor academic performance, school dropouts, and diminished employment prospects (Jakaza, & Nyoni, 2018). This creates a vicious cycle in that as youth use drugs to cope with despair, their life opportunities further diminish, driving deeper dependence on such illicit substances. This is further worsened by the habit-forming tendencies of those drugs and substances as well as their affordability since some can be bought from as little as half a dollar.

As an intervention strategy to youth DSA, there is growing recognition that economic empowerment through vocational skills training can serve as a preventive tool against drug abuse (Simons et al., 2021) especially to the high risk and vulnerable youths who are not yet into DSA. Vocational training has been shown to reduce DSA risky behaviors by providing alternative livelihoods, enhancing self-worth, and fostering hope for the future (Chakravarty et al., 2019). Specifically, interventions that link youth with productive, income-generating ventures such as agricultural training can reduce the economic and psychological vulnerabilities that fuel substance abuse (Chauke & Ndwandwe, 2025).

Among the various livelihood pathways, small-livestock agriculture particularly poultry and rabbits stand out for several context-specific advantages. Chickens have rapid production cycles as they reach marketable weight in as little as six weeks, convert feed to meat more efficiently than larger livestock, their stocking density averages more than 10 birds/m², require low start-up costs for chicks, feed, and simple housing (Phiri, et. al, 2023). This enables quick cash flows and can reinforce participant engagement. Similarly, rabbit rearing requires minimal start-up capital as they can be housed in stacked cages. On feed availability, rabbits can be sustained largely on locally available forage and kitchen by-products thus driving down feed costs (Moto, 2024). Rabbits also mature quickly, are easy to sell for pocket money, and don't compete with human food grains, making them well suited to tight peri-urban plots (Moto, 2024). Small-livestock vocational training can therefore be a viable and practical entry point for youth to engage in sustainable self-employment, develop responsibility through animal care, and build soft skills like cooperation, planning, and problem-solving (Kebede et al., 2021).

Livestock training has also been linked with psychosocial benefits such as increased self-efficacy, social integration, and reduced anti-social behavior (Hin'ic et al., 2022) which are key in addressing DSA.

Anchored in a CBPR framework, this study collaborated closely with local leaders, community-based organizations, and the youth themselves to ensure relevance and sustainability. This allowed for a robust evaluation of both behavioral outcomes (through tools like the Drug Use Screening Inventory and self-efficacy scales) and the lived experiences and perceptions of participants. In doing so, the study contributes to a growing body of knowledge advocating for integrated, community-embedded, livelihood-based approaches to drug abuse prevention among youth in Africa.

This study therefore aimed to examine whether a structured, small-livestock vocational training program could reduce DSA vulnerability and enhance economic engagement (self-efficacy, aspiration) among at-risk youths. The specific objectives were to (1) compare DSA risk; (2) compare self-efficacy and vocational aspiration, and (3) compare the effect size for DSA reduction for vocationally trained participants and untrained youths. We hypothesized that (H1): vocational training participants will show a greater reduction in DUSI-R scores than those in the control group; (H2): All training groups will show greater improvements in GSES and VAI scores than the control group and (H3): the effect size for DSA reduction will be larger for vocationally trained groups than the control group. The findings are intended to inform policymakers, practitioners, and non-governmental organizations about scalable, context-appropriate strategies for combating youth substance abuse in Zimbabwe and similar settings.

Literature review

Theoretical foundations

The theoretical foundations of this study present an integrated framework with three core theoretical pillars feeding into a unified prevention pathway. The study is hinged upon self-efficacy, positive youth development, and community participation theoretical frameworks. The three are in line with contemporary prevention and livelihood interventions for youth DSA as it is most usefully interpreted through complementary social-cognitive and developmental frameworks. These explain both individual change mechanisms and the value of community-embedded delivery.

According to Kleppang et al., (2023), research on self-efficacy emphasizes that people's beliefs about their ability to perform actions required to reach desired goals are powerful determinants of motivation, persistence and coping in the face of stressors. Interventions therefore need to create repeated mastery opportunities, vicarious learning, and supportive feedback in order to raise perceived competence and reduce vulnerability to risky behaviours (Kleppang et al., 2023; Raimondi et al., 2025). In applied prevention work, vocational training delivers precisely these mastery and vicarious-learning opportunities, which can translate into higher generalised self-efficacy and lower propensity to engage in substance-using coping strategies.

The Positive Youth Development (PYD) perspective complements self-efficacy theory by shifting attention from deficits to strengths. Structured opportunities for skill acquisition, leadership, and meaningful contribution build competence, confidence, connection, character and caring (5Cs), which are associated with lower risk behaviours and improved life trajectories (Gómez-Baya et al., 2023; Martin-Barrado et al., 2024). From a PYD standpoint, livelihood-oriented programs including small-livestock vocational curricula simultaneously develop economic assets and psychosocial resources.

This therefore creates multiple protective pathways including economic reinforcement, enhanced agency, and strengthened social ties all which can reduce the appeal and perceived utility of DSA.

The CBPR principles dictates how interventions are designed and delivered. CBPR stresses co-design, shared decision-making, and equitable partnerships between researchers, practitioners and community stakeholders. When these principles are observed, programs show greater cultural relevance, higher recruitment and retention as well as improved contextual relevance all of which increase the likelihood that gains in skills and psychosocial resources will be sustained (Collins et al., 2018; Wallerstein et al., 2020). Yau et al., (2024) caution that although the quality of CBPR practice varies, the adherence to participatory principles matters for observable impacts.

In sum, combining self-efficacy–focused activities, PYD-oriented assets, and CBPR-based co-design produces an integrated theoretical rationale for livelihood-centred prevention interventions that aim both to reduce substance-use vulnerability and to create durable pathways to economic and social inclusion (Aler et al., 2024).

The Integrated Framework Flow Diagram

Figure 1. below presents an integrated framework with for a unified prevention pathway. On the left, Self-Efficacy Theory emphasizes mastery experiences, social modelling, and supportive feedback as mechanisms that strengthen youths’ belief in their ability to resist risky behaviours. Parallel to this, PYD highlights the development of the 5Cs through structured skills training and mentoring. A third pillar, CBPR, underlines co-design, shared ownership, and community engagement to enhance program relevance and sustainability. All three components converge and ultimately lead to the main outcome of reduced youth DSA vulnerability through combined economic, psychosocial, and social-support mechanisms.

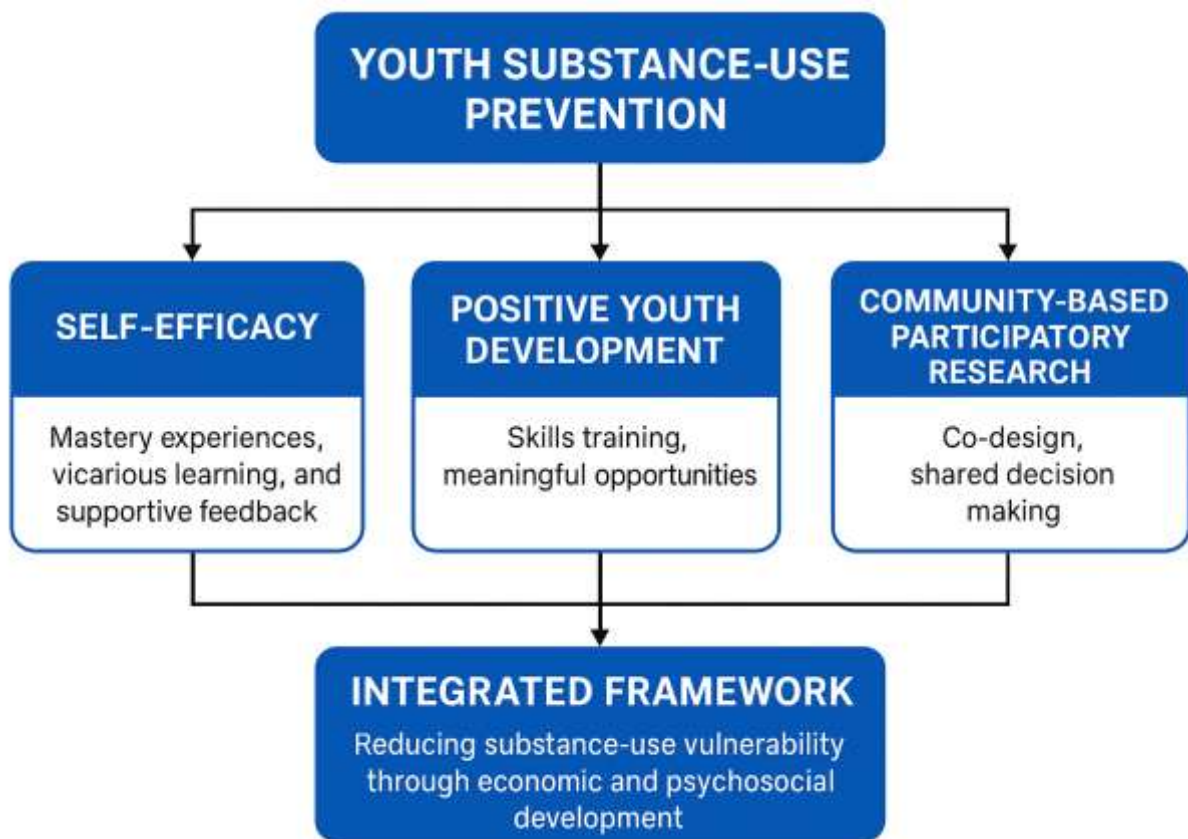


Fig. 1: The Integrated Framework Flow Diagram

The scale and drivers of youth drug and substance abuse in Africa

DSA among young people across Africa is substantial and heterogeneous. Recent region-wide syntheses are reporting pooled lifetime, 12-month, and current prevalence estimates of any substance use of approximately 21%, 18%, and 15% respectively (Ebrahim et al., 2024). Although, this indicates a downward trend in the region which can be attributed to varying intervention strategies, some nations within the region, like Zimbabwe are experiencing a rise in DSA. Alcohol remains the most commonly used substance, followed by regionally important substances such as khat, stimulants, tobacco and cannabis, while other drugs like inhalants, sedatives and synthetic stimulants appear in specific localities (Ebrahim et al., 2024; Asante & Atorkey, 2023). Sub-regional analyses highlight important variation. West African studies point to a notably high burden of non-medical opioid use, notably tramadol and codeine-containing syrups in particular populations, whereas Southern African settings frequently report higher overall alcohol and stimulant use (Emmanuel et al., 2024; Alhassan, 2022).

Multiple, interacting drivers underlie these patterns. Structural and economic stressors varying from high youth unemployment, poverty to limited access to stable livelihoods act as some determinants that increase DSA (Ebrahim et al., 2024). In such cases, DSA according to Ebrahim et al., (2024) is wrongly perceived as coping strategies and the likelihood of engagement in informal economies where drugs circulate. Proximal social influences such as peer networks, family disruption, school dropout and exposure to substance-using social environments are robust correlates of initiation and continued DSA (Asante & Atorkey, 2023).

There are also, the supply-side factors which may exacerbate DSA. Such factors include weak regulatory oversight, porous pharmaceutical supply chains, and informal markets. These have facilitated the diversion and availability of prescription medicines. On the other hand, trafficking and local production sustain access to illicit drugs (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2024; Emmanuel et al., 2024). Moreover, urbanisation and the growth of high-density peri-urban settlements create social and economic contexts which are marked by poverty, idleness and reduced informal social controls which amplify vulnerability among out-of-school and unemployed youths (Ebrahim et al., 2024; World Health Organization, 2023). Qualitative studies underscore that media and policy framings which moralise youth drug use often obscure these structural drivers, reinforcing stigmatising responses rather than livelihoods-oriented prevention (Alhassan, 2022).

Recent reports in Zimbabwe document an alarming rise in DSA among adolescents and young adults in Zimbabwe, particularly in high-density urban and peri-urban settlements. National assessments and policy briefs highlight the combined influence of economic stagnation, high youth unemployment, weakened family and community supports, and ready availability of inexpensive, habit-forming substances as key upstream drivers of youth substance use in Zimbabwe (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2023; Mugari, 2024). These reports also underscore how deteriorating livelihoods amplified risk factors. This calls for prevention strategies that go beyond individual education by targeting socio-economic vulnerabilities and community-level determinants. The country evidence is consistent with broader regional patterns showing that socio-structural stressors and poor access to youth-appropriate services elevate DSA risk (Saba et al., 2021; Aleer et al., 2024).

The scale and drivers of youth DSA indicate that effective prevention must be multi-faceted. It must combine supply-reduction and regulatory measures with investments in youth employment, livelihoods, and community-based psychosocial supports, and improved surveillance to track emerging substance trends (Ebrahim et al., 2024; UNODC, 2024; WHO, 2024). Mixed-methods and longitudinal evaluations are particularly needed to assess whether livelihood-centred interventions including vocational and agricultural pathways produce durable reductions in substance-use vulnerability among marginalized youth.

Evidence on vocational and livelihood interventions for substance-use prevention and recovery

A growing but still limited literature suggests that vocational and livelihood interventions can contribute to preventing substance use and supporting recovery among vulnerable youth. Technical skills training when combined with psychosocial supports and credible pathways to income can provide the much-needed DSA preventive standpoint. Systematic reviews of prevention programs in Africa find that multi-component interventions tend to show stronger effects on risk behaviours than knowledge-only or classroom-based approaches (Saba et al., 2021; Ebrahim et al., 2024). Regional syntheses focused on refugee and displaced youth similarly emphasise that livelihood and employment-oriented programs are promising but under-evaluated, and that evidence quality varies widely (Aleer et al., 2024).

African programme evaluations and sector reviews point to implementation fidelity and program design matter. Interventions should provide repeated, hands-on mastery experiences and ongoing coaching so as to produce larger psychosocial gains than once-off trainings (Onyiko et al., 2024; Saba et al., 2021). Apart from program design, market linkages are also crucial. Without reliable demand or offtake arrangements, trainees may gain skills but fail to translate them into sustainable earnings, blunting the economic reinforcement that helps displace risky behaviours (Onyiko et al., 2024; Ebrahim et al., 2024). In addition, tailored psychosocial supports amplify vocational gains by increasing retention, modelling pro-social norms, and strengthening generalised self-efficacy. Kenya's national surveys and reviews as an example, document the scale of youth substance vulnerability and the opportunity for livelihood programs to target out-of-school youth (NACADA, 2022), while evaluations of youth livelihood initiatives in Uganda show modest but measurable increases in self-reliance following government-sponsored livelihood support (Achiro & Mwesigwa, 2023).

At the same time, the African evidence base contains mixed findings and important reservations. Reviews emphasise that many interventions are short-term or not designed to detect behavioural change. School-based prevention studies dominate the literature, and rigorous trials of vocational models with substance-use endpoints remain rare (Saba et al., 2021; Ebrahim et al., 2024). In short, livelihood-centred prevention holds conceptual and practical promise in African contexts, especially when programs combine high-quality skills training, active market development, and psychosocial supports. Therefore, stronger, longer-term, mixed-methods evaluations are required to establish which models reliably reduce substance-use vulnerability.

Why small-livestock are promising vocational pathways in low-resource peri-urban settings

Small-livestock enterprises especially poultry offer practical entry points for youth livelihood programs in peri-urban settings because they require minimal start-up capital, can be managed in small spaces, and have short production cycles that generate rapid cash flows through broiler sales or continuous egg production. These features increase the likelihood that trainees experience early success and tangible economic rewards which are known to strengthen self-efficacy and reduce reliance on risky income activities (Birhanu et al., 2023; FAO, 2021). Poultry also benefits from high and consistent consumer demand across African urban and peri-urban markets, making it easier for youth to convert training into reliable small-scale income when market-linkage and basic business modules are integrated into the curriculum (Gobvu et al., 2025).

Rabbit production similarly aligns with youth livelihood needs because rabbits require very limited land, have efficient feed conversion, and can be reared in stacked hutches suited to crowded peri-urban environments. Emerging African evidence shows that rabbits can provide households with affordable protein and modest income in low-input systems (Mensah, 2024; Muchira, 2025). However, several studies note that rabbit value chains and consumer markets in many African countries remain underdeveloped, with lower public familiarity and fewer stable offtake channels compared to poultry and these conditions can delay income generation unless programs deliberately pair training with market development strategies (Ayeni, 2023).

Overall, African livelihood and agribusiness programs indicate that small-livestock training works best when practical husbandry modules are combined with mentorship, market linkages, and technical support. Such combinations increase the likelihood that youth experience consistent reinforcement,

build future-oriented motivation, and maintain engagement in prosocial economic activities. In this way, small-livestock becomes a viable and scalable pathway within youth-focused prevention and recovery programming (Rogers et al., 2024; Chibanda, 2021).

Mechanisms of change

Vocational livestock training can reduce youth substance-use vulnerability through mutually reinforcing pathways. These pathways are economic reinforcement, psychosocial change, and social capital. Economic reinforcement operates when short production cycles and predictable, short-term returns supply legitimate and immediate income that competes with informal or illicit earning strategies. Empirical work on small-livestock livelihoods shows that early, visible economic gains increase household cash flow and reduce economic pressure, conditions that make substance-using coping strategies less attractive (Birhanu et al., 2023). In support of this, Acuff et al., (2024) point to the importance of increasing access to non-drug sources of reward, that is non-drug reinforcement as a mechanism of behaviour change in substance-use interventions.

Psychosocial processes mediate how economic and practical experiences translate into durable behaviour change. Hands-on skills training provides repeated mastery experiences, vicarious learning and performance feedback that raise perceived competence and generalised self-efficacy. All these are psychological resources that are robustly associated with reduced risk taking and better coping (Gueroni et al., 2023; Cherewick et al., 2024). When participants repeatedly succeed at livelihood-relevant tasks like meeting weekly weight and egg targets, those mastery experiences positively influence future orientation and problem-solving capacity, which in turn lower the appeal of substance use as an immediate coping response.

Finally, social capital and peer support strengthen and sustain these individual gains. According to Pei et al., (2022) and Aleer et al., (2024), well set cohort-based training fosters group cohesion, mutual accountability, and opportunities for social modelling that buffer against initiation and relapse. On the same note, mixed-methods evaluations of livelihood programs frequently report that peer networks and mentoring increase retention, provide informal safety nets during setbacks, and create locally legitimate social roles that replace stigmatized identities associated with substance use (Ebrahim et al., 2024).

Interventions should therefore intentionally integrate these three domains so as to show the largest and most durable behavioural effects in the evidence base (Saba et al., 2021; Birhanu et al., 2023). This model therefore offers a prudent and testable theory of change for small-livestock vocational programs aimed at preventing or reducing substance use among vulnerable youth.

Measurement and evaluation considerations relevant to the present study

Robust evaluation of vocational interventions aimed at DSA prevention requires the use of validated instruments, culturally appropriate adaptations, and mixed-methods designs capable of capturing both outcome changes and underlying mechanisms. Contemporary adolescent health and behavioural research continue to employ tools such as the DUSI-R and the GSES, which demonstrate strong psychometric performance across diverse contexts when properly adapted (McQuaid et al., 2022; Gueroni et al., 2023). Best practice guidelines emphasise systematic translation and back-translation, pilot testing with representative youth, and minimising social-desirability bias. Social-desirability is

particularly important in community settings where substance-use stigma may affect self-reporting accuracy.

Gaps in the literature and justification for the present study

Despite converging policy interest and a plausible theoretical rationale, empirical evidence specifically evaluating small-livestock vocational training as a primary preventive strategy for DSA at-risk youth in Zimbabwean peri-urban settings is sparse. Existing regional reviews document many school-based and counselling programs, but few controlled trials have tested species-specific vocational pathways with validated substance-use and psychosocial measures (Saba et al., 2021; Aloor et al., 2024). Moreover, comparative evidence about which livestock modalities produce the most rapid economic reinforcement, the strongest psychosocial gains, and the most scalable market linkages is limited (Birhanu et al., 2022). The current study addresses these gaps by evaluating a six-month, CBPR-informed poultry and rabbit training program using validated behavioural and psychosocial instruments and integrated qualitative analysis thereby generating evidence directly relevant to program design and policy prioritisation in Zimbabwe.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Masvingo Province following a convergent mixed-methods design grounded in a CBPR framework to evaluate a six-month small-livestock vocational training program as a preventive intervention for youth drug and substance abuse (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010; Creswell et al., 2011). Forty participants aged 15–25 and ten key informants (mentors, local leaders, NGO coordinators) were purposively selected from one high-density suburb and two rural growth-points of Masvingo Province and used for the study. Eligibility criteria for youths included self-reported vulnerability to illicit substances (crystal methamphetamine, cannabis, inhalants, codeine syrups) through the use of baseline DUSI, unemployment or school dropout status, residency in the target community, commitment to full participation for 24 weeks. The participants were divided into four groups of ten according to the training program (broiler, layers and rabbit training as well as the control group with no training). A sample of forty was chosen to balance logistical feasibility for intensive mentorship with enough power (Cohen's $d \geq 0.50$) to detect medium-to-large effect sizes in pre–post comparisons (Cohen, 1988; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Ethical considerations including informed consent (or assent with guardian consent for minors) was obtained in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, confidentiality, integrity, and beneficence were assured and adhered to. Local NGOs, local leaders and AGRITEX officers together with youth cooperative associations, served as community partners who co-designed the curriculum, facilitated recruitment, and hosted training sessions to ensure cultural relevance and community ownership (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010).

The groups received combined technical animal husbandry, enterprise management, and life skills into a structured curriculum spanning 24 weeks. Participants attended two four-hour sessions each week, alternating between classroom workshops and on-farm practical sessions. Classroom components covered ration formulation, disease identification, vaccination protocols, and biosecurity measures (Hersman & Schroeder, 2017), while practical sessions had youth construct and maintain poultry coops, feeding livestock, monitor feed conversion ratios, administer deworming treatments, cleaning the housing and perform health checks as well as marketing under agribusiness mentor supervision. Enterprise modules focused on record-keeping (stock registers, income–expenditure ledgers), budgeting, cooperative governance, and market engagement, thus encouraging the formation of youth

cooperatives that pooled inputs and negotiated sales contracts (Noack & Buhl, 2004). To foster psychosocial resilience, weekly life-skills workshops addressed teamwork, goal-setting, and reflective journaling. Also, one-on-one coaching by agribusiness mentors occurred during monthly review meetings. Field visits to successful youth livestock enterprises provided real-world models and networking opportunities (Hinic et al., 2022).

Data Collection and Measures

Quantitative data were collected using questionnaires at baseline (week 0) and endline (week 24) using the DUSI-R (Tarter & Kirisci, 2001), the GSES (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), and a custom VAI (Noack & Buhl, 2004). Paper-based questionnaires were administered in private settings and data were double-entered in REDCap (Harris et al., 2009), and missing values (<5%) were imputed via multiple imputation (Rubin, 1987). Completed forms were anonymized and stored securely. To ensure cultural and linguistic validity, the questionnaires were translated and back-translated before being pilot-tested to confirm clarity, reliability and internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq .80$) in the target population (Scholz, et al., 2002; Noack & Bühler, 2004).

1. Drug Use Screening Inventory (DUSI-R) (Tarter & Kirisci, 2001)

An 80-item DUSI-R was self-administered in a quiet and private session and computed to get the problem density index (PDI), with PDIs denoting greater substance-use risk (Boyle, et al., 1993).

$$PDI = \frac{\text{Total Affirmative responses}}{\text{Total number of items}} * 100 \quad (\text{Boyle, et al., 1993}) \quad (1)$$

2. General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995)

Participants completed the 10-item questionnaire rating each item on a four-point Likert scale from 1 (Not at all true) to 4 (Exactly true). Responses were summed to yield a total self-efficacy score ranging from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating stronger perceived ability to cope with a variety of challenges including DSA related challenges

$$GSES = \sum \text{of all scores} \quad (\text{Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995}) \quad (2)$$

3. Vocational Aspiration Index (Noack & Buhl, 2004)

VAI questionnaire comprised of 6 statements assessing career and educational aspirations. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Responses for each participant were averaged to yield an overall aspiration score, with higher values indicating stronger vocational intent and planning.

$$VAI = \frac{\text{Total score}}{\text{the number of questions}} \quad (\text{Noack & Bühler, 2004}) \quad (3)$$

4. Cohen's d effect size

To compare and quantify the magnitude of differences between pre- and post-intervention scores for the four group of participants, Cohen's *d* was calculated using the mean of the differences and the standard deviation of the differences so as to get the effect size.

$$Cohen's d = \frac{\bar{X}_{post} - \bar{X}_{pre}}{\text{Standard deviation differences}} \quad (\text{Cohen, 1988}) \quad (4)$$

Qualitative data from focus groups (3 groups of 8–10 participants) and key-informant interviews (mentors, local leaders, NGO coordinators) captured attitudinal and behavioral change and psychosocial processes at midline and endline. Sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

Quantitative gathered data were analyzed in GenStat software 18th Ed. through ANCOVA controlling for age and education to quantify changes in drug-use risk behaviors attributable to the small-livestock vocational intervention (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). To assess the effect size of the intervention, Cohen’s d was used (Cohen, 1988). Qualitative data from focus group discussions and interviews was analyzed in NVivo 12 (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013) using Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic analysis (2006). Member-checking workshops in each community validated emergent themes such as responsibility, peer support, and confidence building.

Findings and Discussion

The study looked at the impact of small-livestock vocational training program as preventive intervention to youths who are at risk and vulnerable to DSA. Data on DUSI, GSES, VAI and attitudinal and behavioral change was collected and analysed.

Post intervention DUSI-R, GSES and VAI results for the youths

The results show that the DUSI for poultry (broiler and layers) groups were significantly different from the control group ($p < 0.05$) while the rabbit group was not significantly different from the control group but it was significantly different from the layers group. GSES and VAI for the poultry and rabbit groups were all significantly different from the control group ($p < 0.05$) as shown on Table 1 below.

Table 1: DUSI-R, GSES and VAI for youths who undertake small livestock vocational training as a DSA preventative measure

Training Program	Measure		
	DUSI-R	GSES	VAI
Broiler training	54.56 ±11.34 ^{bc}	30.45 ±3.36 ^b	3.43 ±0.63 ^b
Layers training	50.18 ±9.00 ^c	31.88 ±3.97 ^b	3.45 ±0.74 ^b
Rabbit training	62.15 ±12.70 ^{ab}	26.74 ±2.79 ^b	2.70 ±0.74 ^b
No training	70.50 ±6.69 ^a	23.34 ±1.61 ^a	2.01 ±0.67 ^a

*Note: Different superscripts in the same column indicate significantly differences

The DUSI revealed that both broiler and layers training produced statistically significant reductions in substance-use risk compared to the no-training control, whereas rabbit training did not differ from control. This pattern shows that not all vocational modalities yield equivalent preventive benefits since hands-on engagement with poultry husbandry, both for meat or egg production appears more potent in disrupting drug-use trajectories among at-risk youths (Poudel, et al., 2025). Whereas previous research has broadly linked vocational training to improved behavioural outcomes among youth (Simons et al., 2021; Saba et al., 2021), the present study offers species-specific evidence showing that poultry training yields substantially stronger preventive effects than rabbit husbandry. This level of comparative livestock analysis is largely absent from the literature on African vocational interventions. The findings suggest that poultry’s short production cycles, accessible markets, and visible progress markers generate

more immediate economic reinforcement and mastery experiences than rabbits. These factors are long associated with reductions in risk-taking behaviour (Bandura, 1997; Gueroni et al., 2023).

Poultry training outperformed rabbit husbandry because broiler and layers enterprises typically generate clearer, more immediate economic returns, as local markets for meat and eggs are well established and turnover cycles are short. The early and clearer financial gains from poultry enterprises (FAO, 2021) reinforce prosocial behavior and enhance participants' sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) which are critical for resisting substance use. On the other hand, rabbit production often requires longer maturation periods and faces less robust market demand, limiting its capacity to deliver timely economic reinforcement. Compared to other livestock meat, rabbit remains essentially absent due to prevailing dietary preferences (FAO, 2021).

The study also identified the psychosocial mechanisms of change through which small-livestock training reduces substance-use risk. The findings highlight daily discipline, peer collaboration, and identity re-authoring as central psychosocial mechanisms. This was necessitated by structured and timely routines like feeding, cleaning, vaccination, record-keeping which participants followed. These routines proved to disrupt idle time and replaced it with purposeful, goal-oriented behaviour, echoing evidence that structured livelihood routines reduce youth exposure to high-risk environments (Poudel et al., 2023; Anona et al., 2024). Identity transformation was observed where previously marginalised youth began to view themselves as capable and responsible. This mirrors desistance research which have shown that prosocial identity reconstruction is a predictor of long-term behaviour change (Maruna & LeBel, 2012). These psychosocial insights are complemented by some African studies that emphasise agency, self-concept, and social belonging as protective factors against substance misuse (Shifa et al., 2025).

The socially acceptability of poultry training may amplify its preventive impact. Larger cohorts working together on broiler and layers projects tend to foster peer support, collective problem-solving, and accountability. All these are core ingredients of developmental mentoring, scaffolding and group cohesion that buffer against drug-use pressures (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010; Aakerblom & Ness, 2021). On the other hand, rabbit rearing provides fewer opportunities for structured peer engagement, weakening psychosocial reinforcement. These findings highlight impact differences of different species and the importance of species selection in vocational training interventions. Poultry enterprises align with local cultural practices and market realities. This catalyses rapid skill acquisition, visible progress, and strong peer networks, thereby creating an optimal environment for sustained behavior change (Chakravarty et al., 2020; Simons et al., 2021). It is therefore important to scale up and prioritize poultry vocational training initiatives towards youth DSA-prevention

Moreover, broiler and layers trainings typically had larger cohorts. This offered more opportunities for vicarious learning and social persuasion as participants had opportunities to see peers succeed and receive ongoing encouragement whereas rabbit husbandry often involves smaller, more solitary workgroups (Aakerblom & Ness, 2021). These dynamics suggest that vocational interventions aiming to improve youth self-efficacy should emphasize activities with short feedback loops and robust peer-support structures, as these elements amplify the psychological benefits beyond mere skill acquisition.

On VAI scores, all three training programs, broiler, layers, and rabbit produced significant gains compared to the no-training control group. This confirms that hands-on livestock training programs bolster youths' career intent and planning (Noack & Buhl, 2004; Ginevra, et al, 2024). Broiler and layers

participants notably outperformed the rabbit group, suggesting that poultry enterprises deliver stronger signals of realistic, market-aligned vocational pathways. Short production cycles and clear revenue prospects in broiler and egg ventures likely enhanced youths’ perceived attainability of their goals, an effect captured by higher VAI scores. On the other hand, longer maturation and less familiar market for rabbits may have affected aspiration gains. These results underscore the importance of aligning vocational interventions with both economic feasibility and youth perceptions of career clarity to maximize aspiration outcomes.

Cohen’s d

The Cohen’s d for broiler and layers groups on DUSI, GSES and VAI all fall into the “very large effect” range ($d = 1.2 - 1.99$). For rabbit group, DUSI falls into the medium effect category while the GSES and VAI falls into the large effect range. For the control group, all measures fall into the no effect category (Table 2).

Table 2: Cohen’s d for DUSI-R, GSES and VAI for youths who undertake small livestock vocational training as a DSA preventative measure

Measure	Training program			
	Broiler	Layers	Rabbit	Control
DUSI-R	1.58	1.95	0.71	0.05
GSES	1.74	1.96	0.90	0.01
VAI	1.91	1.93	0.90	0.22

The exceptionally large effect sizes for broiler and layers training, $d = 1.58$ and 1.95 on the DUSI, 1.74 and 1.96 on self-efficacy, and 1.91 and 1.93 on vocational aspiration far exceed Cohen’s (1988) threshold of 0.80 for “large” effects and even approach what Sawilowsky (2009) terms “very large” effect ($d \geq 1.20$). These values confirm statistical significance as well as speaking to profound, real-world impact of the intervention strategy. Small livestock vocational training thus has a very strong effect on preventing DSA to vulnerable youths. Poultry training appeared to be uniquely powerful at reducing substance-use risk and strengthening both confidence and career orientation among at-risk youth. In contrast, rabbit training, although still yielding meaningful effect size ($d \approx 0.71-0.90$), falls into the medium-to-lower-large effect range, suggesting that its more modest effect might be bolstered by integrating accelerated market linkages or enhanced peer-group mentorship. Although the DUSI for rabbit training was not significantly different from the control group, its Cohen’s d indicates that rabbit training has a visible and meaningful impact.

When viewed against broader meta-analytic norms where vocational and behavioral interventions often achieve average effects of $d \approx 0.40-0.70$ (Hattie, 2009) the broiler and layers findings stand out as unusually strong for the three measures. This consistency across domains implies that rapid feedback loops, clear economic returns, and rich social reinforcement inherent in poultry enterprises combine to drive exceptionally high engagement and sustained behavior change. In practical terms, these results recommend prioritizing poultry-based vocational programs in drug-prevention strategies, while recognizing that rabbit

production, though beneficial, may require supplementary components especially market avenues to match the high-impact performance of broiler and layers models.

The current study's findings indicate that participation in small-livestock vocational training program was associated with substantial reductions in substance-use risk behaviors and significant enhancements in self-efficacy and vocational aspirations among at-risk Zimbabwean youth. The success of this intervention also underscores the value of CBPR. Involving local NGOs and youth associations in co-design and delivery enhanced cultural relevance, participant buy-in, and program fidelity which have been linked to higher retention and stronger outcomes in community health interventions (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). High attendance (> 90%) and minimal attrition suggest that locally tailored, co-created programs can effectively engage marginalized youth.

From thematic analysis, eight interrelated themes emerged from the focus group discussions and key informant interviews. These are responsibility, peer support, confidence building, skills development, motivation for change, future aspirations, community perception, and challenges. These themes highlight the multifaceted ways in which a small-livestock vocational training program contributed to personal growth, behavioral transformation, and social integration among at-risk youth in vulnerable communities.

A dominant theme across the data was the development of responsibility. Participants consistently described how their involvement in livestock training and practical work introduced structure into their lives. Daily routines helped instill discipline, punctuality and accountability. For many, these habits marked a departure from previous idle or substance-affected lifestyles. Mentors corroborated these observations, noting that youth began arriving early and taking initiative. These findings align with Moffitt's (2017) developmental taxonomy, which links structured environments with reductions in adolescent-limited antisocial behavior. More recently, Poudel, et al., (2023) emphasized that vocational tasks promote behavioral regulation and goal orientation among disadvantaged youth in South Asia.

Peer support also emerged as a critical factor in program success. Youth described assisting one another with animal care and construction of small livestock shelters, and forming small collaborative teams as some of the gained social skills. This network of mutual support created a positive social atmosphere and was especially valuable for participants with limited family support. The role of peers in promoting resilience and social learning is well documented (Osher et al., 2020; Resnick et al., 2018), and this study reaffirms the importance of such bonds in vocationally structured interventions.

Confidence building was particularly pronounced among female participants, many of whom indicated that the program provided their first opportunities to lead, speak in groups, and make valuable contributions and decisions. These findings reflect Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, which identifies mastery experiences as key to developing confidence and motivation. Similarly, Tavakoli, et al., (2022) found that vocational programs significantly improve self-efficacy and interpersonal communication in marginalized youth populations. The safe, friendly, and inclusive nature of the training environment may have allowed participants to gradually overcome fear and self-doubt thus promoting self-efficacy.

Another prominent theme was the acquisition of practical and technical skills. Youths reported learning to vaccinate animals, maintain feeding schedules, and track growth data. These vocational competencies were not only practical but also sparked interest in entrepreneurial ventures. The acquisition of marketable skills is central to the empowerment of young people, especially in economies with high youth unemployment (ILO, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). As confirmed by participants, this technical capacity gave them a sense of independence and hope for self-reliance.

A key motivational factor for youth enrollment was the desire to escape substance abuse and poverty. Participants described the program as a turning point in their lives, one that replaced idleness with purpose. This finding echoes the work of Hirani et al. (2022), who argue that structured prosocial engagement is one of the strongest protective factors against adolescent substance abuse. The holistic nature of this vocational training included combining skill-building, mentoring, and peer interaction, appears to have provided the psychosocial scaffolding needed for sustained behavioral change.

Participants frequently expressed future aspirations that extended beyond the program. Many planned to start small-scale enterprises in poultry and rabbit production. Some promised to enroll for vocational skills in vocational training colleges. This future orientation is a hallmark of developmental resilience (Masten, 2021), suggesting that the training helped reposition youth from a survival mindset to one of planning and long-term thinking. Such shifts are essential in integrating youth into productive societal roles.

An unexpected but powerful theme was the change in community perception. Some youths who had previously been viewed as troublemakers or idle began to be seen as more responsible contributors. Community members expressed admiration and support, with elders reportedly praising the youth's efforts. This supports Maruna's (2001) narrative identity theory, which argues that reauthoring one's life story in prosocial terms is crucial to desistance from crime and deviance. McNeill (2019) further argues that such changes in identity are only sustainable when they are affirmed by the community, a dynamic clearly evident in this case.

Despite these positive findings, several challenges were reported. Resource limitations, especially the scarcity of feed, veterinary supplies, and startup capital, were frequently cited as barriers to sustaining projects. Mentors stressed the need for additional support to ensure continuity. These concerns mirror systemic challenges reported in vocational training initiatives across sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2022; FAO, 2021). Without targeted investment in inputs and market access, the transformative potential of such programs may be diminished.

Although the results align with evidence that integrated youth livelihood programs can improve behavioural outcomes (Kiconco, 2019; Aler et al., 2024), several African and global studies report weak, inconsistent, or short-lived effects of agricultural and vocational programs when delivered as standalone interventions (Fox & Kaul, 2018; Blattman et al., 2020; Kluge et al., 2019). Youth entrepreneurship funds in Kenya and South Africa have shown limited employment or empowerment outcomes due to insufficient mentorship, weak market linkages, and lack of follow-up support (Halpern & Walther, 2022). In addition, some agricultural livelihood projects in East and West Africa displayed minimal behavioural effects when psychosocial components were absent (Danquah et al., 2023).

The stronger effects observed in this study may be attributed to its holistic and participatory design, which integrates technical training, mentoring, psychosocial support, and community involvement. Consistent with the CBPR approach, collaborative program design enhances cultural relevance and youth engagement (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010; Aler et al., 2024). Moreover, evidence suggests that youth programs achieve larger and more durable effects when they combine economic opportunity with soft-skills training, coaching, and group-based learning (Kluge et al., 2019). This multi-dimensional design likely explains why this study produced effect sizes ($d = 1.58$ – 1.96 for poultry groups) that exceed those reported in more narrowly focused interventions.

This study affirms the value of small-livestock vocational training as a multifaceted intervention that supports psychosocial development, enhances life skills, and reduces risk behaviors among vulnerable

youth. The results are consistent with theoretical models of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), resilience (Masten, 2021), and positive youth development (King et al., 2005). However, for such interventions to be scalable and sustainable, a strong enabling environment, inclusive participation, and ongoing mentorship are essential.

Nevertheless, there are certain limitations to this study. The relatively small sample ($n = 30$) within one province limit generalizability and long-term inference. The selected few participants from the province may have been more community-connected or have had slightly more initial motivation than the broader at-risk youth population. This maybe different from other provinces. The 24-week period cannot tell explicitly if the reductions in DSA risk are sustained after project support ends. Although the participants were trained to collectively continue running the projects, this does not mean a sustained DSA risk reduction. Poultry enterprises face several market shocks ranging from input shortages, availability of substitutes, supply, demand and price fluctuations which also limit sustainability. In support, As World Bank (2022) cautions that without reliable access to inputs, financing, and markets, agricultural youth programs often experience rapid drop-offs in performance. Likewise, FAO (2021) highlights persistent structural barriers for youth agripreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa, including restricted credit access, inconsistent extension support, and market volatility. This study did not ascertain whether and how the small-livestock enterprises can survive these and other market shocks. These structural obstacles underscore that the success of vocational livestock programs hinges not only on training quality but also on creating an enabling ecosystem (FAO, 2021; Citarist, 2022a).

Also, the self-report measures such as the DUSI-R, while validated (Tarter & Kirisci, 2001), remain susceptible to social desirability bias particularly in a cohort receiving ongoing mentorship. The dramatic reductions could be partially inflated by participants' desire to report success to their mentors thus not giving a true reflection. Another major limitation is the methodological limitation. Participants were purposively selected and allocated to groups. Pre-existing differences between groups could explain some of the effects reported by this study. For example, more disciplined youth may have opted for poultry than those who were in the rabbit group, thus producing biased results.

Despite these caveats, the study adds to a growing body of evidence that livelihood-centered interventions can deliver synergistic economic and public health benefits. By equipping youth with marketable skills and fostering psychosocial assets, small-livestock training programs may interrupt the cycle of idleness and substance dependency (Chakravarty et al., 2020; Simons et al., 2021). Policymakers and practitioners in Zimbabwe should therefore consider embedding agricultural vocational training within national DSA prevention strategies, ensuring that such programs integrate technical skill development, psychosocial support, and pathways to market linkage. With appropriate scaling and rigorous evaluation, small-livestock vocational training holds considerable promise as a culturally congruent, sustainable approach to reducing youth substance abuse in Zimbabwe and similar contexts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study shows that a small-livestock vocational training program can led to substantial reductions in DSA risk behaviors, robust gains in self-efficacy and vocational aspirations among at-risk Zimbabwean youths. Poultry training, both broiler and layers yielded

exceptionally large effect sizes ($d \geq 1.58$) on the DUSI-R, GSES, and VAI, highlighting its capacity to deliver rapid economic returns, frequent mastery experiences, and rich peer-support opportunities. Rabbit training, while still beneficial ($d \approx 0.71-0.90$), generated more modest effects, reflecting less viable market linkages due to lower consumer preferences for rabbit meat. Therefore, it is prudent to prioritise poultry-centred curricula during scale-up because poultry has short feedback loops, established local markets, and strong cohort dynamics. Rabbit production should remain an option but must be supported with deliberate market-development and offtake strategies to accelerate returns and peer engagement. Across modalities, CBPR approaches were crucial to high participation, cultural fit, and program fidelity and should be retained as a core design principle.

By linking rapid, income-generating and livelihood pathways to psychosocial supports, small-livestock vocational training promotes both the economic and social drivers of youth DSA desistance. In Zimbabwe and in similar low-resource, peri-urban and high-density settings across the region, this model offers a scalable strategy that simultaneously reduces DSA vulnerability, builds employable skills, and restores prosocial identity and community standing. Since the intervention targets upstream determinants which are unemployment, idleness and social exclusion, it has the potential to produce lasting returns for public health, social stability, and local economies.

Considering the magnitude and coherence of the results, provincial and national policymakers, development partners, and donors should adopt poultry-centred small-livestock vocational training as a core component of youth DSA prevention strategies. This must be accompanied by targeted investments in market linkages, input supply, seed financing, and longitudinal monitoring to ensure sustainability and scale. This calls for urgent scaled-up poultry training, shore up rabbit value chains, embed CBPR, and evaluate at scale. Doing so would convert a promising pilot into a cost-effective, system-level intervention for healthier, more economically resilient youth across Zimbabwe and comparable contexts.

Recommendations

The results of this study suggest several targeted avenues for advancing both practice and research on small-livestock vocational training as an intervention for youth substance-use prevention. Given the very large effects observed for poultry training compared with the more moderate gains from rabbit production, future research should prioritize a rigorously designed randomized controlled trial (RCT) to establish causal impact and assess comparative cost-effectiveness. Such a trial should formally compare poultry-based vocational training with standard DSA prevention approaches including counseling-only or awareness campaigns and track outcomes at 6, 12, and 24 months. Incorporating an economic evaluation framework would allow researchers and policymakers to determine whether poultry training provides superior value per unit reduction in substance-use risk and per sustained enterprise relative to conventional prevention strategies.

The study also underscores that the intervention's impact was driven not only by technical skills, but by distinct psychosocial mechanisms. Accordingly, future studies should undertake quantitative mediation analyses to test the extent to which these psychosocial factors serve as causal pathways linking skills acquisition to reduced substance-use vulnerability. Embedding validated measures of routine, connectedness, and future orientation within longitudinal designs would allow researchers to empirically verify which mechanisms account for the largest proportion of behavioural change, thereby informing refinements to curriculum, mentorship, and cohort structures.

Since rabbit training demonstrated only moderate effects, further investigation is required to design and evaluate targeted booster interventions that address its weaker components. These could include structured market-linkage packages such as formal offtake agreements, local consumer awareness campaigns, and centralized aggregation points as well as enhanced cooperative structures that strengthen peer accountability and enterprise stability. A small factorial trial or multi-arm RCT would enable researchers to determine whether such boosters can elevate the effectiveness of rabbit enterprises to levels more comparable to poultry models.

In addition, the study highlights the importance of CBPR in achieving high attendance, cultural relevance, community trust, and program fidelity. Future participatory action research should therefore explore pathways for institutionalizing CBPR-informed co-design and mentorship models within existing government structures, particularly AGRITEX and local youth development offices. Co-developing standardized implementation manuals, formalizing inter-agency roles through memoranda of understanding, and piloting provincial-level integration would provide evidence on feasibility, sustainability, and systems-level adoption.

Finally, to address current limitations related to small sample size and short follow-up, future evaluations should adopt harmonized longitudinal monitoring frameworks with consistent data collection at baseline and at 6-, 12-, and 24-month intervals. This will help determine the durability of psychosocial and behavioural improvements and allow tracking of enterprise survival, income stability, and transitions into employment or education. Multi-site and multi-province studies are also needed to assess external validity and examine how contextual factors such as market access, gender, baseline risk, or local economic conditions moderate program outcomes. Collectively, these recommendations provide a clear pathway for transforming an effective pilot into a scalable, evidence-based youth development and substance-use prevention strategy that can inform national policy and regional programming.

References

Aakerblom, K. B., & Ness, O. (2021). Peer support workers in co-production and co-creation in public mental health and addiction services: Protocol for a scoping review. *Plos one*, *16*(3), e0248558.

Achiro, E. D., & Mwesigwa, D. (2023). Analysis of the contribution of the Youth Livelihood Program towards enhancing self-reliance among the youths in Lira City, Uganda. *Journal of*

Social, Humanity, and Education, 3(2), 157–171. <https://doi.org/10.35912/jshe.v3i2.1337>

Acuff, S. F., Ellis, J. D., Rabinowitz, J. A., Hochheimer, M., Hobelmann, J. G., Huhn, A. S., & Strickland, J. C. (2024). A brief measure of non-drug reinforcement: Association with treatment outcomes during initial substance use recovery. *Drug and alcohol dependence*, 256, 111092.

Aleer, E., Alam, K., & Rashid, A. (2024). A systematic literature review of substance-use prevention programs amongst refugee youth. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 60, 1151–1170. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-024-01267-6>

Alhassan, J. A. K. (2022). Where is the pain? A qualitative analysis of Ghana’s opioid (tramadol) ‘crisis’ and youth perspectives. *PLOS Global Public Health*, 2(12), e0001045.

Anona, K., Onigu-Otite, E., Conner, C., & Saxena, K. (2024). Trauma, Resilience, and Substance Use in Adolescents: A Review Article. *Adolescent Psychiatry*.

Asante, K. O., & Atorkey, P. (2023). Cannabis and amphetamine use among school-going adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa: a multi-country analysis of prevalence and associated factors. *BMC psychiatry*, 23(1), 778.

Ayeni, M. D., Adewumi, M. O., Bello, M. A., AdiAdi, K. F., & Osungade, A. A. (2023). Effects of rabbit production on income and livelihood of rural households in Nigeria. *Heliyon*, 9(8).

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.

Bazeley, P., & Jackson, K. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

Birhanu, A., Bete, T., Eyeberu, A., Getachew, T., Yadeta, E., Negash, A., ... & Deballa, A. (2023). Nearly one-fourth of eastern Ethiopian adolescents are current psychoactive substance users: a school-based cross-sectional study. *Substance abuse and rehabilitation*, 25-34.

Blattman, C., Fiala, N., & Martinez, S. (2020). The long-term impacts of grants on poverty: Nine-year evidence from Uganda’s youth opportunities program. *American Economic Review: Insights*, 2(3), 287-304.

Boyle, M. H., Offord, D. R., Racine, Y., Fleming, J. E., Szatmari, P., & Sanford, M. (1993). Evaluation of the revised Ontario child health study scales. *Journal of Child Psychology and psychiatry*, 34(2), 189-213.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Chakravarty, S., Lundberg, M., Nikolov, P., & Zenker, J. (2019). Vocational training programs and youth labor market outcomes: Evidence from Nepal. *Journal of development economics*, 136, 71-110.

Chauke, T. A., & Ndwandwe, N. D. (2025). A Scoping Review of Youth Development Measures to Mitigate Drug and Alcohol Abuse Among Young People in the SADC Region. *Youth*, 5(3), 92. <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth5030092>

Cherewick, M., Cruz, C. M., Giri, P., Matergia, M., & Rai, R. P. (2024). Relationships between autistic traits, self-efficacy, and internalizing symptoms in a nonclinical sample of Indian early adolescents. *Brain and Behavior*, *14*(8), e3646.

Chibanda, N. F. (2021). Program Design Features Attracting Youth in Diepsloot to Urban Agriculture: Exploring Rhiza Babuyile's Tiny Farm Agri-Program.

Chipenda, C., & Cochrane, L. (2024). Out of school children in the context of new policy trajectories and interlocking crises in Zimbabwe: a transformative social policy perspective. *SN Social Sciences*, *4*(7), 131.

Citaristi, I. (2022). African Development Bank—AfDB. In *The Europa Directory of International Organizations 2022* (pp. 417-423). Routledge.

Citaristi, I. (2022). United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime—UNODC. In *The Europa Directory of International Organizations 2022* (pp. 248-252). Routledge.

Cohen, J. (1988). Set correlation and contingency tables. *Applied psychological measurement*, *12*(4), 425-434.

Collins, S. E., Clifasefi, S. L., Stanton, J., Straits, K. J., Gil-Kashiwabara, E., Rodriguez Espinosa, P., ... & Wallerstein, N. (2018). Community-based participatory research (CBPR): Towards equitable involvement of community in psychology research. *American Psychologist*, *73*(7), 884.

Creswell, J. W., Klassen, A. C., Plano Clark, V. L., & Smith, K. C. (2011). Best practices for mixed methods research in the health sciences. *Bethesda (Maryland): National Institutes of Health*, *2013*(2011), 541-545.

Danquah, J. K., Mensah, M. S. B., Yamoah, W., & Mahmud, Q. M. (2023). Understanding the Impact of the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem on Sustainability in Africa. In *Corporate Sustainability in Africa: Responsible Leadership, Opportunities, and Challenges* (pp. 229-253). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Ebrahim, J., Adams, J., & Demant, D. (2024). Substance use among young people in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, *15*, 1328318.
Emmanuel, G. O., Akinsolu, F. T., Abodunrin, O. R., & Ezechi, O. C. (2024). Prevalence and patterns of substance use in West Africa: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLOS Global Public Health*, *4*(12), e0004019.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2021). The state of food and agriculture 2021: Making agri-food systems more resilient to shocks and stresses. <http://www.fao.org/3/cb4476en/cb4476en.pdf>

Fox, L., & Kaul, U. (2018). The evidence is in: How should youth employment programs in low-income countries be designed?. *World Bank policy research working paper*, (8500).

Ginevra, M. C., Santilli, S., Hartung, P. J., & Nota, L. (2024). A career education program for early childhood youth: Development and initial evaluation. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 72(2), 78-92.

Gueroni, L. P. B., Pompeo, D. A., Eid, L. P., Ferreira Júnior, M. A., Sequeira, C. A. D. C., & Lourenção, L. G. (2024). Interventions for strengthening general Self-Efficacy beliefs in college students: an integrative review. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, 77, e20230192.

Gobvu, V., Ncube, S., Imbayarwo-Chikosi, V. E., Bourgeois, R., Mugabe, P. H., & Caron, A. (2025). Preferred livestock interventions for small-scale farmers in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area: a demand-driven and participatory approach. *Peer Community Journal*, 5.

Gomez-Baya, D., Muñoz-Parralo, M., Martin-Barrado, A. D., Trejos-Castillo, E., Gaspar de Matos, M., & Wium, N. (2023). Socio-demographic differences in positive youth development in Spanish undergraduates. *Social Sciences*, 13(1), 11.

Halpern, J., & Walther, C. (2022). Design thinking and the UN sustainable development goals: design thinking and youth empowerment case study ForUsGirls (US) and start-up africa (Kenya). In *Design Thinking in Education: Innovation Can Be Learned* (pp. 233-253). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Hattie, J. (2009). The black box of tertiary assessment: An impending revolution. *Tertiary assessment & higher education student outcomes: Policy, practice & research*, 259, 275.

Harris, P. A., Taylor, R., Thielke, R., Payne, J., Gonzalez, N., & Conde, J. G. (2008). Research electronic data capture (REDCap). *Journal of Biomedical Informatics*, 42(2), 377-381. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbi.2008.08.010>

Hersman, B., & Schroeder, N. (2017). Strategies for designing engaging online kinesiology courses based on the community of inquiry model. *Quest*, 69(4), 480-493.

Hinić, D. (2022). Should I be bothered or not? Development of the Environmental Attitudes Scale (EAS). *Primenjena psihologija*, 15(3), 409-428.

Hirani, S., Ojukwu, E., & Bandara, N. A. (2022). Understanding the role of prosocial behavior in youth mental health: findings from a scoping review. *Adolescents*, 2(3), 358-380.

ILO. (2021). Skills development in the time of COVID-19: Taking stock of the initial responses in technical and vocational education and training. International Labour Organization

Jakaza, T. N., & Nyoni, C. (2018). Emerging dynamics of substance abuse among street children in Zimbabwe. A case of Harare Central Business District. *African Journal of Social Work*, 8(2), 63-70.

Kebede, A., Asgedom, A., & Asfaw, A. (2024). Is linking technical and vocational training with industry a bridge to employability? Lessons from a literature review for Ethiopia. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), 2406721.

Kembo, S. (2023). Health marketing for substance and drug abuse prevention among the youth in Zimbabwe: Evidence and Strategies. *The Dyke*, 17(1), 1-15.

- Kiconco, M. (2019). *The impact of the youth livelihood program on youth well being* (Doctoral dissertation, Kampala International University, College of Humanities and Social Sciences).
- King, P. E., Schultz, W., Mueller, R. A., Dowling, E. M., Osborn, P., Dickerson, E., & Lerner, R. M. (2005). Positive youth development: Is there a nomological network of concepts used in the adolescent developmental literature?. *Applied Developmental Science, 9*(4), 216-228.
- Kleppang, A. L., Steigen, A. M., & Finbråten, H. S. (2023). Explaining variance in self-efficacy among adolescents: the association between mastery experiences, social support, and self-efficacy. *BMC public health, 23*(1), 1665.
- Kluge, J., Puerto, S., Robalino, D., Romero, J. M., Rother, F., Stöterau, J., ... & Witte, M. (2019). Do youth employment programs improve labor market outcomes? A quantitative review. *World Development, 114*, 237-253.
- Lipsey, M. W., & Wilson, D. B. (1995). Reply to comments on Lipsey and Wilson (1993). *American Psychologist, 50*(2), 113–115. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.50.2.113>
- Maraire, T., & Chethiyar, S. D. M. (2020). Drug and substance abuse problem by the Zimbabwean youth: A psychological perspective. *Practitioner Research, 2*, 41–59.
- Martin-Barrado, A. D., & Gomez-Baya, D. (2024). A scoping review of the evidence of the 5Cs model of positive youth development in Europe. *Youth, 4*(1), 56-79.
- Maruna, S., & LeBel, T. P. (2012). The desistance paradigm in correctional practice: From programmes to lives. In *Offender supervision* (pp. 65-87). Willan.
- Masten, A. S. (2021). Resilience in developmental systems. *Multisystemic resilience, 113-134*.
- Matanga, A. A., Chiparousha, M., Kurevakwesu, W., & Charamba, S. (2024). Challenges for reintegrated youths recovering from substance use disorders in Harare, Zimbabwe: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Social Development in Africa, 39*(1), 18-44.
- McQuaid, G. A., Darcey, V. L., Patterson, A. E., Rose, E. J., VanMeter, A. S., & Fishbein, D. H. (2022). Baseline brain and behavioral factors distinguish adolescent substance initiators and non-initiators at follow-up. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 13*, 1025259.
- Mensah, A., Adams, F., Prah, S., & Afriyie, S. O. (2024). Prospects for commercialization of rabbit production in Africa: Empirical evidence from Ghana. *Cleaner and Circular Bioeconomy, 9*, 100122.
- Moffitt, T. E. (2017). Adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behavior: A developmental taxonomy. *Biosocial theories of crime, 69-96*.
- Moto, E. (2024). Potential, challenges and prospects of rabbit farming in urban and peri-urban areas of Dodoma city, Tanzania. *World Rabbit Science, 32*(1), 31-42.
- Muchira, A., Mutai, B., & Muange, E. (2025). Rabbit meat perceptions and consumption determinants among households in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Mugari, I. (2024). The emerging trends and response to drug and substance abuse among the youth in Zimbabwe. *Social Sciences*, 13(9), 469. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13090469>

National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse. (2022). National survey on the status of drugs and substance use in Kenya, 2022. NACADA.

Noack, P., & Buhl, H. M. (2004). Child-parent relationships. *Growing together: Personal relationships across the lifespan*, 45-75.

Onyiko, K. K., Orucho, J. A., Asige, L., Obushe, D. O., Esokomi, A. A. A., Olita, F. I., & Kitiyo, S. (2024). From "At-Risk" to "Aspiring" Youth: Locating Positive Youth Development in Kenya. *Journal of Youth Development*, 19(4), 72-104.

Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2020). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development1. *Applied developmental science*, 24(1), 6-36.

Paudel, K., Gautam, K., Hossain Sujan, M. S., Adhikari, P., Bhusal, S., Wickersham, J. A., ... & Shrestha, R. (2025). Patterns of Alcohol Use and Daily Smoking Among Men Who Have Sex with Men in Nepal. *Journal of Community Health*, 1-8.

Pei, F., Li, Z., Maguire-Jack, K., Li, X., & Kleinberg, J. (2022). Changes of perceived Neighbourhood environment: A longitudinal study of collective efficacy among vulnerable families. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 30(6), e6228-e6239.

Phiri, P. T., Ruzhani, F., Madzokere, F., & Madududu, P. (2023). Factors affecting the profitability of smallholder broiler production in Mutare district, Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe: A quantile regression approach. *Cogent Economics & Finance*, 11(2), 2242660.

Raimondi, G., Cavicchiolo, E., Alivernini, F., Lucidi, F., & Manganelli, S. (2025). Socioeconomic Differences in the Use of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies: A Population Study. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(11), 1493.

Resnick, B. (2018). The relationship between resilience and motivation. *Resilience in aging: Concepts, research, and outcomes*, 221-244.

Rogers, K., Le Kirkegaard, R., Wamoyi, J., Grooms, K., Essajee, S., & Palermo, T. (2024). Systematic review of cash plus or bundled interventions targeting adolescents in Africa to reduce HIV risk. *BMC Public Health*, 24(1), 239.

Rubin, D. B. (1987). Multiple imputation for nonresponse in surveys. Wiley.

Sawilowsky, S. S. (2009). Very large and huge effect sizes. *Journal of Modern Applied Statistical Methods*, 8(2), 597-599.

Shifa, J. E., Adams, J., & Demant, D. (2025). Substance use among young people in the West Arsi Zone, Ethiopia: A cross-sectional study. *Plos one*, 20(3), e0319432.

Scholz, U., Gutiérrez-Doña, B., Sud, S., & Schwarzer, R. (2002). Is general self-efficacy a universal construct? *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 18(3), 242–251. <https://doi.org/10.1027//1015-5759.18.3.242>

Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). Generalized self-efficacy scale. In J. Weinman et al. (Eds.), *Measures in health psychology* (pp. 35–37). NFER-NELSON.

Simons, D., Shahab, L., Brown, J., & Perski, O. (2021). The association of smoking status with SARS-CoV-2 infection, hospitalization and mortality from COVID-19: a living rapid evidence review with Bayesian meta-analyses (version 7). *Addiction*, 116(6), 1319-1368.

Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2013). *Using multivariate statistics* (6th ed.). Pearson.

UNICEF Zimbabwe. (2023). *Understanding drug use and substance abuse by Zimbabwean adolescents and young people*. UNICEF Zimbabwe.

Tarter, R. E., & Kirisci, L. (2001). Validity of the Drug Use Screening Inventory for predicting DSM-III-R substance use disorder. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, 10(4), 45-53.

Tavakoli, M. (2022). *Study of the influence of entrepreneurship teachers' passion on the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programmes* (Doctoral dissertation, Université Grenoble Alpes [2020-....]).

UNESCO. (2020). *Future of Education: Reimagining Education for Global Challenges*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing

United Nations Office on Drugs. (2024). *World Drug Report 2024 (Set of 3 Booklets)*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Wallerstein, N., & Duran, B. (2010). Community-based participatory research contributions to intervention research: the intersection of science and practice to improve health equity. *American journal of public health*, 100(S1), S40-S46.

Wallerstein, N., Oetzel, J. G., Sanchez-Youngman, S., Boursaw, B., Dickson, E., Kastelic, S., ... & Duran, B. (2020). Engage for equity: A long-term study of community-based participatory research and community-engaged research practices and outcomes. *Health Education & Behavior*, 47(3), 380-390.

World Bank Group. (2022). *Global economic prospects, January 2022*. World Bank Publications.

World Health Organization. (2024). *Global status report on alcohol and health and treatment of substance use disorders*. World Health Organization.

Yau, J. H. Y., Wong, E. L. Y., Kanagawa, H. S., Liu, T., Wong, G. H. Y., & Lum, T. Y. S. (2024). Effectiveness of community-based participatory research (CBPR) interventions on mental health outcomes: A systematic review. *Social Science & Medicine*, 363, 117491.

Zimusi, L., & Moyo, G. (2023). Impact of substance abuse on savings and investment behaviour of youths in Zimbabwe: The case of Gweru high density suburbs. *The Dyke, 17*(1), 1-18.

The relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse among youths in Mucheke A suburb, Masvingo Province

Gonye Aron ¹, Mashokoh Admore ², Goroba Beula ³, and Mkandatsama Pride ⁴

1. Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences, Human Resource Management Department,
Great Zimbabwe University

agonye@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0007-6838-3043

2. Research Data Management Librarian, Great Zimbabwe University Library

amashokoh@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0008-0744-2916

3. Information Services Librarian, Great Zimbabwe University Library

bgoroba@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0005-6915-5320

4. Julius Nyerere School of Social Science, Human Resource Management Department, Great
Zimbabwe University

pmkandatsama@gzu.ac.zw | ORCID: 0009-0002-209X

***Corresponding Author:** Gonye Aron, agonye@gzu.ac.zw

Abstract

The study explored the relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse among youths in Mucheke A Suburb, Masvingo Province. The study was triggered by a high rise in drug and substance abuse among the unemployed youths. The study focussed on the post Covid 19 era. The total sample was 100 unemployed youths and 20 community leaders. A mixed method approach was employed. Data was collected through 100 questionnaires and 20 structured interviews for unemployed youths and community leaders respectively. The study was guided by the Social Disorganization theory. Findings revealed that drug and substance abuse was common among unemployed youths. Findings also noted that youths engaged in drugs and substance abuse as a coping strategy for stress, anxiety and depression. The study concluded that drug and substance abuse was a serious issue among the unemployed of all age groups and has significant implications on mental health. The study recommended that Government should provide more vocational training institutions in order to address unemployment among youths in Mucheke A Suburb, Masvingo Province. The study recommended that urgent alternative coping mechanisms should be in place to address challenges being faced by youths. The study also recommended that local leadership should

lobby Masvingo City Council to offer more recreational facilities to keep youths occupied in order to avoid drug and substance abuse.

Key Words: Drugs, Relationship, Substance Abuse, Unemployment, Youths

1.0 Introduction

Youth unemployment is a significant global social and economic challenge with serious implications on their behaviour in particularly drug and substance abuse. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted global economies and societies, resulting in unprecedented levels of unemployment, particularly among youths (MacDonald, King, Murphy, & Gill, 2024). As young people face job losses and economic uncertainty, there is growing concern about the potential for increased substance abuse. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), youth unemployment rates soared to nearly 15% in 2020, nearly three times the rate of adult unemployment. This trend reflects a broader global phenomenon, with youths comprising 43.7% of the total unemployed worldwide (ILO, 2024). In Sub-Saharan Africa, about 60% of the unemployed are youths (ILO, 2024), and Zimbabwe is no exception. The country's economic struggles have led to a youth unemployment rate of 35% in 2023, pushing many vulnerable individuals toward substance use as a coping mechanism. Zimbabwe has an estimated population of 15.2 million, with 32% of its residents aged between 10 and 24 years (Census, 2022). The country is facing a growing problem of drug and substance abuse, especially among unemployed youths, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to address this intertwined crisis. Mugari (2024) revealed some emerging trends such as the abuse of prescription drugs, use of home-made intoxicating substances, infusion of intoxicated people's blood, ingestion of drug laced foods and drinking sodium polyacrylate from boiled diapers. The study discovered that severe socioeconomic issues, ease of access, and porous borders were the most significant contributory factors to drug and substance usage. Despite attempts by the government and law enforcement to combat the pandemic, this study found that current measures have not been as effective as anticipated. The long-term economic repercussions have left many without stable job opportunities, leading to feelings of hopelessness and despair (Griswold et al. 2018). Ghaleb (2024) asserts that, as economies begin to recover, youth unemployment remained a critical concern. Even as some sectors rebound, many young individuals continue to struggle with joblessness due to skill mismatches, lack of experience, and the ongoing economic disruptions caused by the Covid 19 pandemic (George,

2024). This prolonged unemployment exacerbated mental health issues, creating a fertile ground for substance abuse.

The majority of the studies that examined youth unemployment and substance use revealed high correlations. Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista's (2018) study in Europe showed that increasing unemployment can be associated with more young people believing it is more difficult to obtain drugs, namely access to ecstasy, cocaine, and heroin. According to young Europeans, with the economy going downhill, anti-drug policy must focus on removing poverty and unemployment, not tougher sanctions for addicts. Similarly, Nolte-Troha, et al. (2023) found that, unemployment was found to be a risk factor for substance-use disorder, and vice versa. The findings revealed strong complex associations between unemployment and substance-use disorder, implying that prevention and early intervention are necessary to avoid negative psychosocial repercussions such as social disintegration and serious psychiatric problems. Furthermore, Fergusson and Boden's (2008) analysis of a New Zealand birth cohort found that heavy cannabis usage during adolescence and young adulthood was linked to increased unemployment in the mid-twenties.

Kerker, & Adeyongo, (2024) found that prevalence of drug abuse among youths in Nigeria underscored the need for immediate action and highlights the responsibility of each stakeholder to play a role in prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation efforts towards mitigating drug and substance abuse among youths in Benue State. Similarly, in a study by Okoye & Nwaka-Nwandu (2019) found that prevalence of unemployment in Nigeria has contributed to drug abuse among the youths. According to Rwafa et al (2019) there is evidence suggesting that drug use is impacting the unemployed youth population in Zimbabwe. This partly explains that unemployment plays a pivotal role in drug and substance in Masvingo. The Ministry of Health and Child Care Report showed that in 2024, Ngomahuru Psychiatric Hospital recorded a sharp increase in drug and substance abuse related admissions (Ministry of Health and Child Care Report, 2024). This suggests that drug misuse contributes to mental health issues among youngsters in Masvingo city. Furthermore, the Zimbabwe Multi-Sectoral Drug and Substance misuse Plan, 2024-2030, stated that drug and substance misuse in Zimbabwe poses an increasing threat to the country's health, economy, and social stability. Another study by

Chidume & Mugambiwa (2024) explored socioeconomic factors provoking the escalation of drug and substance use among youths in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that the majority of the young people in Chitungwiza use drug and substance abuse as an adaptation to social and economic challenges, such as school difficulties, poverty, anxiety, and unemployment. The study revealed that there was a strong relationship between socioeconomic determinants and the increase in drug and substance abuse among the youth in Chitungwiza. According to the Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network, the most commonly used drugs are cannabis (67%), cough syrup (47%), crystal meth (36%), illegal alcohol (31%), pharmaceutical crack (3%), cocaine powder (3%), and heroin (2). Similarly, Kurevakwesu, et al (2023) revealed that psychosocial and economic factors push youths into substance use. To tackle this conundrum, social workers were advised to enlighten communities, provide counselling and psychosocial support, and engage in development-oriented practice. Finally, this paper emphasizes the importance of a multi-sectoral strategy as well as prophylactic strategies to address this issue.

Statement of the problem

Unemployment and drug abuse among youths is a significant public health concern with consequences such as mental health among youths. Although there has been many educational programmes on drugs and substance abuse among youths still there is rampant drug abuse. There is high youth unemployment rates 60% in sub-Saharan Africa and substance abuse prevalence 40% alcohol issues among South African youths (Ebrahim, Adams, & Demant, 2024). However, Mngoma and Ayonrinde, (2023) indicated that, few studies examine their intersection within broader socio-economic factors like poverty and limited skills training. Existing research often isolates unemployment or substance use, overlooking bidirectional links where joblessness predicts higher drug and substance abuse. This gap hinders targeted strategies, perpetuating cycles of addiction, crime, and economic loss, particularly in Zimbabwe where youth comprise 75% of the unemployed.

Objectives

- To evaluate the relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse among youths in Masvingo urban
- To assess the socioeconomic factors contributing to substance abuse among youths in Masvingo urban

- To develop intervention strategies on how to reduce drugs and substance abuse among youths in Masvingo urban

Theoretical framework

The study was guided by the Social Disorganization Theory. The Social Disorganisation Theory helped to direct the investigation on understanding the link between unemployment and substance addiction among young people which depends especially on the Social Disorganisation Theory (Errol, Madsen, & Moslehi, 2021). Kubrin & Tublitz (2023) claims that a collapse of social institutions includes family, education, and community results in higher crime and deviant conduct including drug misuse. The social disorganisation theory assumes as propounded Shaw and McKay (1942) posits that crime rates are constant in areas with certain environmental conditions such as high unemployment, population fluctuation and material decay prevail. The theory of social disorganisation emphasises the need of social controls in controlling behaviour (Errol, Madsen, & Moslehi, 2021). Similarly, the social disorganisation theory maintains that community characteristics are the root cause of deviance Jaynes (2014). In communities with heavy unemployment, the systems usually guiding young behaviour parental supervision, school involvement, and community events often become weaker, (Kubrin & Tublitz, 2023). Lack of supervision can lead to more chances for drug and alcohol abuse among young people who turn to them without thinking about societal consequences. As a result, social disorganization theory has evolved as a fundamental framework for analyzing the relationship between community characteristics such as unemployment, drug misuse, and criminal activity. Sanchez-Delgado, H. (2025). Accordingly, the social disorganization theory has specific characteristics, most notably unemployment and poverty, which might lead to social disorganization and, as a result, crime and drug usage in the community.

In understanding the relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse, the social disorganisation theory is assumed to be fruitful approach. The consequences of social disorganisation include increased poverty, drug and substance abuse, poor health conditions and violence Errol, Madsen, & Moslehi, (2021). The theory emphasises also how societal disorganisation results from financial pressures. The high unemployment rate among young people in Mucheke A causes major economic burden, which might contribute to rising mental health problems and dependence on drugs as coping mechanism. The probability of drug abuse increases as economic times go bad, so fuelling a vicious cycle that disturbs the society more

and more. Young people who are unemployed may become more vulnerable to participate in dangerous activities, including drug usage, (Gusha, 2024). According to the Social Disorganisation Theory, underprivileged people could not have access to tools and support networks that could otherwise enable them to fight harmful impacts (Sánchez-Delgado, 2025). Socio-economic elements in Mucheke A can aggravate this marginalisation and drive more young people into drug use as a kind of escape. Knowledge of Social Disorganization's Dynamics Theory can guide focused treatments meant to solve unemployment as well as drug abuse. Thus, by improving community relationships, boosting social support, and giving young people tools for work, stakeholders can help to lessen the consequences of disorganisation and lower substance use among vulnerable groups in Mucheke A.

1.0 Review of related literature

Relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse among youths

Empirical research has been conducted to investigate the association between unemployment and drug and substance misuse among young people. According to Hakim, Abdul-Hassan & Alkhudhairy (2024), there is a definite association between high rates of drug use and marital status, with unmarried drug users accounting for 63 (56.2%) and married drug users accounting for 35.3 (31.3%). Among unemployed teenagers, 41 (36.6%) admitted using drugs. In the same study, crystal and captagon were found to be the most popular among young people, accounting for 44 (39.3%). Furthermore, Casal, Rivera & Costa-Storti's (2023) meta-analysis found a partial correlation of 03 (95% confidence interval (CI):.0147-.0453) between the unemployment rate and drug use among youth. Thus, the study found that recessions boosted drug use. Similarly, Jamatia & Gurumoorthy (2024) study showed that 90% of the unemployed were addicted to drugs such as marijuana, alcohol, and heroin thus, proving that unemployment and drug addiction are interrelated.

In Zimbabwe the economic meltdown from the 1990 and exacerbated by Covid 19 has resulted in a very high unemployment rate has perpetuated drug and substance abuse among youths, (Gomo & Mujuru, 2021), Unemployment has left youths with unproductive time on their heads. Furthermore, the lack of recreational facilities and activities has forced youths to become reactive with drugs Marandure etal (2023). Zimbabwe has been battling with the surge in drug and substance abuse particularly among the youths. Unemployment plays a pivotal role in

Socioeconomic factors contributing to substance abuse among youths

There are various factors that led to drug abuse and unlawful trading amid the community, including economic, socio-cultural and living environment. Hulukati, Ismail & Nggilu, (2020) found that socioeconomic factors, including economic disparities, social disparities, poverty, unemployment, financial constraints, inflation, peer pressure, and institutional dysfunction, influenced their decision to use drugs and substances. Similarly, Khoza & Shilubane (2021) findings show good financial background (69%), more pocket money (67%), high financial difficulties (67%), availability and accessibility of substances (51%), and psychological factors (low self-esteem, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder) as contributing to learners' involvement in substance use. Moreover, Nyaoke & Otieno (2021) showed that social status, economic status, cost of drugs, parent's level of education and family size status influenced drug and substance abuse in institutions of higher learning in Mombasa County. The study recommends that parents need to ensure that children form appropriate bonds and learn age appropriate behaviours by being positive role models and showing their children the negative aspects of substance abuse. Furthermore, *Ugbem-Onah (2023)* study revealed that there was high rate of substance abuse among youths in Makurdi. The study found also that peer influence, ignorance, sexual experiments, availability of the drugs, to enhance performance in sports and curiosity; unemployment and frustration were the major factors influencing the involvement of youths in drug abuse in Makurdi metropolis. More so, Joel & Oguanobi, (2024) found that, socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of educational and recreational opportunities are major drivers of substance use. The breakdown of traditional family and community structures in urban areas leaves many adolescents without essential support systems.

Strategies to reduce drugs and substance abuse among youths

Strong community support systems positively influence youth behaviour, leading to improved social-emotional well-being, increased academic performance, and a sense of belonging. Camara, Bacigalupe, & Padilla, (2014) revealed the dual role of interpersonal relationships as stressors and as sources of social support. Adolescents draw on sources of support that are familiar, mature, friendly, and, most importantly, worth of trust. Another study by Chi, et al. (2023) found that strong community support systems significantly reduce risky behaviours among youths. The presence of mentors and community programs was linked to

lower rates of substance abuse and delinquency. The authors recommend increasing funding for community youth programmes and training more mentors to engage with at-risk youth. Hanson, Venturelli, & Platteborze, (2024) found that, community service offered numerous benefits to adolescents, including improved self-concept, promoting career exploration and improving interpersonal skills. Effective community-based strategies to combat adolescent substance use in the United States often involve collaboration across various sectors (Adeghe, 2024). Eruaga, Bature, & Itua, (2024) established that community-based strategies ensured comprehensive support and resources for prevention and intervention efforts. Programmes such as Life Skills Training and the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program equipped students with knowledge about the risks of substance use and develop skills to resist peer pressure.

Gusha (2024) indicated that educational campaigns, counselling and rehabilitation, and empowerment programmes are the major strategies used in the Mbare community to curb drug abuse among youths. The findings also showed that the successful implementation of evidence-based drug abuse prevention programs in communities depends on several factors, including community readiness, stakeholder collaboration, funding and resources, program adaptation and fidelity, program evaluation, and political and social support. Similarly, Kerker, & Adeyongo, (2024) study showed that tailoring national campaigns to local contexts through domestication enhances effectiveness by customizing messages and interventions to the local culture of drug and substance abuse. The study recommended implementing comprehensive prevention programs, advocating for good parenting, strengthening law enforcement, and improving access to mental health services for affected youths. This study underscores the collective responsibility of stakeholders, including governmental agencies, community institutions, religious leaders, educators, parents, NGOs, and youths themselves, in addressing drug abuse among youths in Benue State. The study concludes that the significance of acknowledging drug abuse as a collective concern that requires the involvement of various stakeholders, including governmental agencies, community institutions, religious leaders, educators, parents, NGOs, and youths themselves. Another, study by Gitonga, (2015) recommended the adoption of strategies to encourage youths to utilize recreation facilities and access economic empowerment programmes. It also recommended initiation of training programmes on drugs and substances targeting the youths, sensitization of youths on all drugs and establishment of rehabilitation centres.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, purposefully sampling 120 participants (100 youths, 20 community leaders) from Mucheke A Suburb, Masvingo, to explore unemployment-substance abuse links. The study used quantitative method integrated with qualitative methods (thematic insights), yielding triangulated findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study captures the complexity of participants' experiences and perceptions by combining surveys and interviews. In order to improve the validity of study findings, Yin (2018) highlights the significance of utilising many sources of evidence, which is accomplished through this mixed-methods approach. Additionally, Flick (2018) underlines the relevance of qualitative insights in understanding quantitative results, ensuring that the views of both youths and community leaders are heard and understood in the study. Babbie and Mouton (2018) opines that the terms frequently used in positivism include causal relationships between variables and in this relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse. This methodological approach promotes a thorough analysis of the challenges at hand, ultimately leading to more effective interventions and recommendations. To gather information, a structured close ended questionnaire was administered to 100 social youths, and interviews were conducted with 20 community leaders. The selection of participants was done purposively, meaning that individuals were chosen based on their relevance and expertise in the study's context. The questionnaire aimed to collect quantitative data from the youth participants, while the interviews with community leaders allowed for more in-depth qualitative insights. The statistical analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire method was complemented using graphs and pie charts, whereas the data obtained through the interview method was analyzed thematically. The study's ethical considerations were crucial since they guaranteed the confidentiality and rights of the participants were maintained at all times. In the end, this strong methodological framework facilitates a careful examination of the issues the community faces, resulting in recommendations and solutions that are more successful.

Research procedure

In this study, the target population were youths in Mucheke A Suburbs. The study population consist of one hundred and twenty (120) participants among the youths. In addition Creswell and Cresswell (2016) posits a sample is considered to be representative if the analyses made

using the researcher's sampling units produce similar results similar to those that would obtained had the researcher analysed the entire population.

Sample

Data for the purpose of this study were collected as located in the place where participants lived. The study used purposive sampling is a criterion based selection generally used for qualitative studies in which the researcher decides to select deliberately beforehand which characteristics (such as the research sites and settings participants and persons or events and areas) are needed to provide the best insight into the research topic and answers the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data analysis

This section present and analyse the data that were collected for the study. The findings were presented in line with the objectives of study which is to explore relation between unemployment and drug and substance abuse. Evidence is overwhelming that unemployment is the major cause of drug and substance abuse among youths.

The research established that besides unemployment there are other pushing factors of drug and substance abuse among youths.

Ethical considerations

In every research, the researcher considers ethical issues that surround the study. Ethical principles were upheld to protect interest of respondents and the research sought for consent from respondents before research commend. The participants will voluntarily participate and have every right to withdraw at any time from the research. In light of the above, the researcher ensured that participants voluntarily participate in the study and was well informed of what the research is about, how it will affect them, that is, the risks and benefits of participation.

4.0 Results and discussion

The study results revealed that that there is a correlation between unemployment and drug and substance abuse among youths in Masvingo urban. Many youths werenot involved in any specialised skills training. This lack of specialised training and unemployment triggered youths to be involved in drugs and substance abuse. The study observed that the commonly abused

drugs and substances in Mucheke A, Suburb were alcohol, tobacco, marijuana (cannabis) and non medicinal use of controlled medicines such as codeine containing cough medicines, benzodiazepines, crystal meth (mutoriro alcohol, marijuana (cannabis) crystal meth (mutoriro) and bronclear.

Relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse among youths

The research found that there were various causes of drug and substance abuse among youths and unemployment was largely found to be a strong determinant of drug and substance abuse. The interviewed youths revealed that unemployment was a major driving force for drug and substance abuse and there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between unemployment and drug and substance abuse.

This indicates that economic hardships which have contributed to unemployment is the major driver of drug and substance abuse amongst youths. Unemployment/poverty was mentioned as one major cause of abuse of drugs and has compelled youths to engage in drug and substance abuse. Other factors mentioned include poverty. These results underscore the influence of poverty and unemployment being the major driver of drug and substance abuse. There was agreement among the participants that unemployment has a correlation with drug and substance abuse amongst youths. The findings were consistent with Okoye and Nwaka-Nwandu's study in Nigeria which revealed that unemployment youths were involved in drug and substance abuse.

Community leaders' perception on unemployment and substance abuse among youths in Mucheke A Suburb

Qualitative results were compiled from interviews held with twenty community leaders indicated that there is need to ensure that there is enforcement of legislation protecting youths from the abuse of drugs. Community leaders in Mucheke were interviewed to find out their views on unemployment and drug and substance abuse. Most of the leaders felt that unemployment was contributing towards drug and substance abuse which is worrisome pandemic. For example, one community elder said *kushaya mabasa kwavana ndiko kwaita kuti vana vamwe mutoriro*. (Having no jobs has forced youths to resort to drug abuse). In their study, Hakim, Abdul-Hassan, & Alkhudhairy (2024) found a strong correlation between drug and substance abuse and unemployment.

Socioeconomic factors contributing to substance abuse among youths

Findings from the study have shown that besides unemployment the other drivers of drug and substance abuse include peer pressure, idleness, stress and trauma. In terms of socio factors, the most prevalent cause cited was peer pressure as the major cause of drug and substance abuse among youths. The findings were consistent with Gomo and Mujuru (2021)'s study on Mufakose youths in Harare which revealed that peer pressure forced youths to resort to drug and substance abuse.

The study also found that a growing number of youths are resorting to drug addiction as a form of fun as a result of poverty and despair. Poverty can cause youths to feel that there is nothing else except to engage in drug and substance abuse. Moreover, the findings showed that most of the youths were from single parent households and some stayed at Mucheke bus terminus and some were orphans.

Strategies to reduce drugs and substance abuse among youths

On strategies to curb drugs and substance abuse among youths, results showed there was need for effective community-based strategies such as carrying out awareness campaigns to combat drugs and substance abuse targeted against youths. The findings also indicated that quite a number of youths who abused drugs have ended up developing mental health issues. Research by Ministry of Health and Child Care in 2023 showed an increase in drug use related admission at Ngomahuru Hospital in Masvingo. Similarly, an Action Aid Research Report (2023) on challenges of drug and substance abuse among young people in Hopley showed an alarming number of youths who developed mental health issues after abusing drugs. Results also showed that there was need to offer specialised skills training for youths and strengthen local communities to handle problems associated with drugs and substance abuse.

5.0 Conclusion

The paper analysed the prevalence and determinants of drug abuse and substance use among youths in Mucheke A suburb, Masvingo. The study also explored the nature of drug and substance addiction among youths. First, studies suggested that there was a favorable relationship between unemployment, drugs, and substance misuse. The survey showed that there was a high frequency of drug and substance misuse among young people in Mucheke A suburb of Masvingo city.

These findings suggest that attacking unemployment as the root cause of drug abuse and ensure that youths have something to do would in a way reduce incidences of drug and substance abuse. The proliferation of drug abuse among youths is a potential threat to the country's development trajectory which can also be curbed in various ways and through development of policies to ensure that youths are employed.

6.0 Recommendations

A multi-faceted approach is needed to prevent the abuse of drugs which is a growing menace public health issue with negative outcomes on youths' mental health. Based on the findings, the study recommended that, government should implement initiatives such as provision of more vocational institutions which offer skills such as building and carpentry in order to address unemployment and idleness among youths in Mucheke a Suburb, Masvingo Province. Furthermore, Government should ensure that there is enforcement of policies and anti-drug laws and stiff penalties are meted to those involved in manufacturing and selling dangerous drugs such as *asmutoriro and tumbwa* to youths in Masvingourban. In light of the above, it is also imperative that, Government pass laws which would impose a mandatory jail term for drug dealers and peddlers like what happens to rapist instead of fines options.

Local authorities such as Masvingo City should be empowered to increase provision of institutions that provide affordable and easily accessible rehabilitation of youths to deal with drug and substance abuse in Mucheke a Suburb. Additionally, alternative coping mechanism is put in place to address challenges being faced by youths. The study also recommended that, local leadership should lobby Masvingo City Council to offer more recreational facilities in order to keep youths occupied and avoid drug and substance abuse.

There is need to widen interventional programmes such as intensifying crackdowns by law enforcement agents such as Zimbabwe Republic Police Department of Drugs and Narcotics to work with Mucheke A Community leaders and Councillors and form proactive community initiatives. Additionally, the Mucheke A community would form committees which will be responsible for dealing with drug and substance abuse in Mucheke A and carryout activities such as raising drug and substance abuse awareness.

References

- Action Aid Research Report. (2023). Facing the challenge of drug and substance abuse among young people in Hopley
- Casal, B., Rivera, B., & Costa-Storti C. (2023). Economic recession, illicit drug use and the young population: a systematic literature review and meta-analysis. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 145(1):32-41. doi:10.1177/17579139231180751
- Chidume, M. R., & Mugambiwa, S. S. (2024). Breaking the chains: Exploring the socio-economic ripple effects of drug and substance use among youths in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Substance Use*, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14659891.2024.2407628>
- Ebrahim, J., Adams, J., & Demant, D. (2024). Substance use among young people in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 15, 1328318. Accessed 17 December 2025
- Errol, Z., Madsen, J. B., & Moslehi, S. (2021). Social disorganization theory and crime in the advanced countries: Two centuries of evidence. *Journal of Economic Behaviour & Organization*, 191, 519-537
- George, A. S. (2024). India's employment crisis: causes, consequences, and potential solutions. *Partners Universal International Research Journal*, 3(3), 38-60.
- Ghaleb BDS (2024) The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on unemployment in the world. *J Res Dev*, 12, 247.
- Gomo, S. & Mujuru, P. (2021). Urban youths' resilience in Zimbabwe: Reflections on the Mufakose youth of Harare in light of the provisions of the national youth policy, *Journal of Urban Systems and Innovation for Zimbabwe*, 2(20).
- Government of Zimbabwe (2024) Zimbabwe Multi Sectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan, 2024-2030
- Griswold, M. G. Fullman, N., Hawley, C., Arian, N., Zimsen, S. R. M., Tymeson, H. D. (2018) Alcohol use and burden for 195 countries and territories, 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the global burden of disease study 2016. *The Lancet* 392(10152):1015–1035

Gusha, M. D. (2024). Strategies to address drug and substance abuse among youths. A Cross-sectional study of Mbare, Harare, *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 8(9), pages 311-332.

Hakim, H. I., Abdul-Hassan, L. S., & Alkhudhairy, M. K. (2024). Prevalence and patterns of drug use among people in Al-Najaf Governorate, Iraq. *Medical Science Journal for Advance Research*, 5(3).

Hanson, G. R., Venturelli, P. J., & Platteborze, P. (2024). *Drugs and society*. Jones & Bartlett Learning.

Hulukati, YR, Ismail, DE, & Nggilu, N. (2020). Narcotics abuse by civil servants seen from the perspective of criminological studies. *Journal of Legality*, 13(01), 16-30.

<https://doi.org/10.33756/jelta.v13i01.7303>Jaynes, S. (2014). Using Social disorganisation theory to guide substance abuse prevention among adolescents: Implications to educators, *Journal of at Risk Issues* vol 18 No1 p35-40.

Kerker, J & Adeyongo, I. (2024). Intervention strategies for mitigating drug and substance abuse among youths in selected local government areas of Benue State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Humanities and Contemporary Education Research*. 14. 1-18. 10.62154/2z3gv253.

Kubrin, C. E., & Tublitz, R. (2023). *Social disorganization theory and community-based interventions*. In *Routledge Handbook of Evidence-Based Criminal Justice Practices* (pp. 13-25). Routledge.

Kurevakwesu, W, Masona, G, Mabeza, T. T, Zengeni, F, & Chiweshe, C. C. (2023). Factors responsible for substance abuse among youths in urban areas and social work-related interventions. *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*, 24(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1533256X.2023.2212475>

MacDonald, R, King, H, Murphy, E, & Gill, W. (2024). The COVID-19 pandemic and youth in recent, historical perspective: more pressure, more precarity. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 27(5), 723-740.

Mugari, I. (2024). The emerging trends and response to drug and substance abuse among the youth in Zimbabwe. *Social Sciences*, 13(9), 469. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13090469>

Nolte-Troha, C., Roser, P., Henkel, D., Scherbaum, N., Koller, G., & Franke, A. G. (2023). Unemployment and substance use: An updated review of studies from North America and Europe. *Healthcare*, 11(8), 1182. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11081182>

Sánchez-Delgado, H. (2025). Analyzing Social Disorganization Theory of Crime in Barcelona: Micro-level insights from census sections. *Sociological Focus*, 58(2), 153-176.

Maraire, T & Chethiyar, S. D. (2020). Drug and substance problem by the Zimbabwean youth perspective, A psychological perspective, *Practitioner Research 2*

Marandure, B.N, Mhizha, S, Wison, A, Nhunzvi, C. (2023). Understanding the nature of substance use in Zimbabwe: State of the art and way forward: *A scoping Review Protocol Plos One* 18(3).

Masiye, F & Ndhlovu, C. E (2016). An assessment of the prevalence and predictors of substance among youths in Zimbabwe, *Journal of Social Sciences* 46 (2) 147-156 Mngoma, N. F., & Ayonrinde, O. A. (2023). Mental distress and substance use among rural Black South African youth who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 69(3), 532-542. Accessed 17 December 2025

Muzondo, E (2023) Women and Illegal Drug use in Zimbabwe, Causes and Effects, *Springer Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 2(07)

Mukwenhaetal (2021) Increased illicit substance use among Zimbabwean adolescents and youths during the Covid 19 era an ingending Public Health Disaster Society for Study of Addiction

Nhunzvi, C. (2017). Recovery from substance abuse among Zimbabwean men: An occupational transition.

Raphael, L, Raveendran, P & Sajna, M (2017) Prevalence and determinants of substance abuse among youths in Central Kerala, India, *International Journal of Community Medicine Public Health* 4 (3) pp747-751. Rieknel, A. (2022). Impact of Social Disorganisation on drug use among youths from gender perspective, Malmo Univ.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime World Report (2021)

UNICEF (2023) Understanding drug use and substance abuse by Zimbabwean adolescence and young people [http://www. Unicef.org/Zimbabwe/media 8871](http://www.Unicef.org/Zimbabwe/media 8871).

World Health Organisation (2021) Alcohol, drugs and addictions behaviours Unit <https://www/teams/mental health and substance use/alcohol/drugs>

Zimbabwe National Statistic Agency (2022) Population and Housing Census Preliminary Report on Population figures, [www.zimsta.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/census 2022 Preliminary report.pdf](http://www.zimsta.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/census-2022-Preliminary-report.pdf). Accessed 29 April 2025