

NATIONAL SURVEY ON ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KENYA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction: The Government of Kenya lays significant focus on the control of substances of abuse in the various sectors. This survey on alcohol and drug misuse in Kenyan secondary schools contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the impact of alcohol and drug abuse in the country as a whole and the education sector in particular. The school environment is a critical point of interaction between the students and the larger society as a whole.

Methodology: A sample of students was drawn from 10 stratified regions across the country, broadly divided into Nairobi, Central, Lower Eastern, Upper Eastern, North Eastern, Coast, Upper Rift, Lower Rift, Nyanza and Western. Using a sampling frame of schools registered with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the schools were categorized into National, County and sub-County schools as well as into boys, girls, mixed boarding and mixed day schools. A questionnaire was used to capture information directly linked to the study objectives. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with either the principals/deputy principals or guidance and counselling teachers of selected schools.

Findings: A total of 3,908 students (60% male and 40% female) from 77 randomly sampled schools were interviewed. Overall, the survey shows that students are fairly knowledgeable on the different drugs and substances of abuse. Bhang, alcohol, cigarettes, cocaine, heroin, inhalants, mandrax and *khat* are all fairly well known with at least 80% of the students identifying them as drugs. The three top drugs and substances of abuse reported as most readily available to students in schools are cigarettes, alcohol and *khat*.

Students reported that they can use alcohol and drugs discretely, a notion that could contribute to students carrying substances of abuse to school. A majority of students (72.8%) thought that it was possible for a student to use drugs without their teachers' knowledge. Consequently, a majority of the students agree that the school environment could provide opportunities for students to initiate use of alcohol and other substances of abuse. More than seven in ten (71.3%) of the students agreed that students are likely to initiate alcohol and drug of abuse in schools. An almost similar number (69.1%) thought that students have a role to play in the supply of alcohol and drugs of abuse in schools.

The survey showed that the home environment was an important risk factor for initiation of alcohol and drugs among the students. The highest proportion of students reported the home environment as the place where a substance of abuse was used the last time. In the case of alcohol, the home environment was reported by 14.5% of the students. It was followed by other occasions such weddings or parties (7.9%) and pubs (4.1%). Noteworthy is the high proportion of students who reported accessing prescription drugs within the school.

Not surprising, use of alcohol and other drugs of abuse by schoolmates closely mirrors use of those substances by close friends. The students were asked if they were aware that their school mates and friends were abusing alcohol or drugs. Among the top four reported substances that schoolmates and friends are using include alcohol (41.4%; 40.1%), *khat* (34.1%; 32.6%), cigarettes (31%; 27.5%) and prescription drugs (30%; 27.6%) respectively. These are followed by chewed tobacco, *shisha*, *kuber* and sniffed tobacco. The least mentioned drugs and substances of abuse are rohypnol, heroin, mandrax, cocaine and inhalants.

The students were also asked to mention the period when alcohol and drugs are most likely to be used in schools. Data shows that alcohol and drugs are more likely to be used during school holidays (48.5%) and on their way home (35.1%). Within the school environment, students are more likely to use drugs during weekends (30.4%). Other times mentioned include during inter-school meetings (27.8%), during school outings (27.3%), during entertainment in school (24.4%), during games (23.7%) and during school trips (21.8%).

The students were also asked to mention the possible sources of alcohol and drugs. The most commonly mentioned source of these substances of abuse is from friends (32.2%). The drugs and substances of abuse are also carried from home (29.3%), bought from other students (25.7%), bought from a bar near school (22%) or from a local brew den (19.1%). Other sources are kiosks or shops near school (16.9%), relatives (16.7%), supermarkets (11.3%), non-teaching school workers (7.4%), parents (5.3%), teachers (4.8%) and school canteen (3.9%).

The survey shows that the age of onset to alcohol and drug use marks the period of transition from primary school to secondary schools. The age between 13 to 15 years presents the most critical period for the students in secondary schools to initiate alcohol and drug use. The students are likely to initiate prescription drugs and inhalants at the age of 13 years. The students are likely to initiate alcohol, *khat/ miraa*, tobacco and heroin at the age of 14 years. For cocaine, the age of onset is 14.5 years while bhang is 15 years.

The students were asked to mention the drugs and other substances of abuse that they have ever used in their lifetime (ever use). Data shows that alcohol (23.4%) is the most commonly ever used substance of abuse by students followed by ever use of *khat/ miraa* (17.0%), prescription drugs (16.1%), tobacco (14.5%), bhang (7.5%), inhalants (2.3%), heroin 1.2% and cocaine (1.1%). Table 1 shows the prevalence of lifetime use/ever use of drugs by students in secondary schools.

Table 1: Lifetime Use/ Ever use of Drugs by Secondary School Students

Type of Drug	Prevalence (%)	No. of Students
Alcohol	23.4	508,132
<i>Khat/ miraa</i>	17.0	369,155
Prescription drugs	16.1	349,613
Tobacco	14.5	314,869
Bhang	7.5	162,863
Inhalants	2.3	49,945
Heroin	1.2	26,058
Cocaine	1.1	23,887

NB: Total enrolment of students was 2,171,504 (MoEST, 2014)

The commonly ever used tobacco products in a student's lifetime include cigarettes 9.2% (199,778 students), *shisha* 6.2% (134,633 students), chewed tobacco 3.9% (84,689 students), *kuber* 3.9% (84,689 students) and sniffed tobacco 3.0% (65,145 students). The most commonly ever used prescription drugs in a student's lifetime include sleeping pills 15.5% (336,583 students), mandrax 1.0% (21,715 students) and rohypnol 0.6% (13,029 students).

The students were then asked to mention the drugs and other substances of abuse that they have used in the last six (6) months. Findings show that alcohol (9.3%) is the most commonly used substance of abuse by students in the last six (6) months followed by use of prescription drugs (6.8%), *khat/ miraa* (5.9%), bhang (3.7%), inhalants (0.8%), heroin 0.4%, and cocaine 0.4%. Table 2 shows the prevalence of drug use in the last six (6) months by students in secondary schools.

Table 2: Use of Drugs in the Last Six (6) Months by Secondary School Students

Type of Drug	Prevalence (%)	No. of Students
Alcohol	9.3	201,950
Prescription drugs	6.8	147,663
<i>Khat/ miraa</i>	5.9	128,118
Tobacco	5.2	112,919
Bhang	3.7	80,346
Inhalants	0.8	17,372
Heroin	0.4	8,686
Cocaine	0.4	8,686

NB: Total enrolment of students was 2,171,504 (MoEST, 2014)

The commonly used tobacco products in the last six (6) months include cigarettes 3.1% (67,317 students), *shisha* 2.9% (62,974 students), *kuber* 1.7% (36,916 students), chewed tobacco 1.5% (32,573 students) and sniffed tobacco 1.3% (28,230 students). The most commonly used prescription drugs in the last six (6) months include sleeping pills 6.4% (138,976 students), mandrax 0.4% (8,686 students) and rohypnol 0.3% (6,515 students).

The students were also asked to mention the drugs and other substances of abuse that they have used in the last 30 days. Findings show that alcohol (3.8%) is the most commonly used substance of abuse by students in the last 30 days (current use) followed by use of prescription drugs (3.6%), *khat/ miraa* (2.6%), bhang (1.8%), inhalants (0.6%), heroin (0.2%) and cocaine (0.2%). Table 3 shows the prevalence of drug use in the last 30 days (current use) by students in secondary schools.

Table 3: Use of Drugs in the Last 30 Days by Secondary School Students

<i>Type of Drug</i>	<i>Prevalence (%)</i>	<i>No. of Students</i>
Alcohol	3.8	82,517
Prescription drugs	3.6	78,175
<i>Khat/ miraa</i>	2.6	56,459
Tobacco	2.5	54,288
Bhang	1.8	39,087
Inhalants	0.6	13,029
Heroin	0.2	4,343
Cocaine	0.2	4,343

NB: Total enrolment of students was 2,171,504 (MoEST, 2014)

The commonly used tobacco products in the last 30 days (current use) include cigarettes 1.6% (34,744 students), *shisha* 1.1% (23,887 students), *kuber* 1.0% (21,715 students), chewed tobacco 0.8% (17,372 students) and sniffed tobacco 0.7% (15,201 students). The most commonly used prescription drugs in the last 30 days (current use) include sleeping pills 3.4% (73,831 students), mandrax 0.3% (6,515 students) and rohypnol 0.1% (2,172 students).

Ease of access was determined by asking students how easy it was for them to access the various drugs and substances of abuse. Accordingly, prescription drugs (36.8%), alcohol (32.4%), cigarettes (32.2%), *khat* (29.6%) and bhang (22.8%) are the top five easily accessed substances. On the other end, rohypnol (5.8%), mandrax (6.5%), cocaine (6.9%), and heroin (7.5%) are less likely to be accessed while at school.

In order to have an insight into the risk factors associated with alcohol and drug abuse among secondary school students, the survey analysed data on alcohol consumption by students in the last six months. According to the findings, the risk factors associated with alcohol and drug abuse among secondary school students are being male, being in a school with male students (e.g. boys boarding or boys day); being in Form 3 or Form 4 (the risk increased with increase in number of years in the school); having fewer frequency of inspection; schooling in Lower Eastern, Central or Upper Eastern; living with a single parent who is a father; not being an active member of a religious group or club; having a high amount of pocket money; having a family member or friend using alcohol or other drugs; knowledge of a schoolmate using alcohol or other drugs; and lack of awareness that alcohol and drugs are detrimental to academic performance.

The survey also shows that schools have several strategies of dealing with students who are found with drugs and other substances of abuse in schools. These strategies include: guidance and counselling; suspension or expulsion from school; and summoning of parents to school. Less frequently mentioned was the use of police, punishment without suspension and referral for treatment or rehabilitation.

However, there is lack of a pro-active strategy to deal with alcohol and drugs in schools. Indeed, the guidance and counselling teachers only get involved when cases of drugs and substance abuse were reported.

Recommendations: Based on the survey findings, the following recommendations are made:

- ☛ The school-home continuum presents an axis along which adolescents transit into adulthood in society. Nine in ten of the students are in secondary school during their teenage years. Creating a multi-pronged approach to tackling alcohol and drug abuse in the school environment will maximize effective use of resources. Therefore, NACADA should continue to strengthen its coordinating role of supporting the youth in schools through innovative and evidence based preventive approaches.
- ☛ Most of the students pointed to the need for information on effects of drugs and other substances of abuse. Having curriculum in place would be critical to facilitate the equipping of students with the relevant knowledge on drugs and other substances of abuse. NACADA should therefore work with relevant stakeholders to put up a curriculum that also encompasses the other aspects of life skills training.
- ☛ The guidance and counselling teachers reported training needs on issues of alcohol and other drugs of abuse. They reported that they are not well equipped to handle the cases of alcohol and drug abuse and therefore they are ill prepared to guide and counsel students. NACADA in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should support in the provision of the relevant training to guidance and counselling teachers to empower them to deal with the emerging challenges of alcohol and drug abuse.
- ☛ The survey also established that the guidance and counselling teachers work within a time-constrained environment due to other competing demands and responsibilities such as covering the prescribed syllabus of other subjects that they teach. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Teachers Services Commission (TSC) and KICD should address the issue of overloading guidance and counselling teachers in order to improve the quality of the services that they provide.

- ☛ The preference of abusing prescription drugs as an emerging “high” of choice among students in secondary schools is without a doubt unusual and disturbing. Thus, the teachers and parents should be extra cautious with the students because they may be abusing these drugs without their knowledge. Further, strict controls and enforcement of legislations on access to prescription drugs by the Pharmacy and Poisons Board should be enhanced.
- ☛ Lastly, NACADA should support secondary schools to come up with school-based alcohol and drug abuse policies that holistically address the aspects of promoting free drug environments within the school; early identification of students with drugs and substances of abuse problems; focus on extra-curricular activities; and evidence based preventive strategies of dealing with cases of drugs and substance abuse in schools.

Key Findings from the Survey

1. Secondary schools in Kenya are not drug free environments;
2. Environments around schools are a common source for drugs being used in schools;
3. The home environment is a major risk for initiation of drugs by students;
4. There is evidence that students are initiating the use of drugs at very young ages. The age of onset to substances of abuse marks the period of transition from primary school to secondary schools. The age between 13 and 15 years present the most critical period for the students in secondary schools to initiate substance abuse;
5. Supervision and inspection of students for drugs in schools is not strict enough to discourage drug and substance abuse;
6. The guidance and counselling teachers are not equipped to deal with alcohol and drug abuse issues in their training;