

The Relationship Between Substance Use and Students' Discipline in Secondary Schools of Bushenyi District

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between substance use and discipline among Ordinary Level students in Bushenyi District, Uganda. A convergent parallel mixed-methods research design was employed, utilizing structured questionnaires for quantitative data and interviews for qualitative insights. The sample size consisted of 75 participants, including 42 students, 19 teachers, and 6 deputy headteachers. The results indicated that alcohol was the most commonly abused substance, with 70% of respondents acknowledging its prevalence. The overall level of discipline among students was perceived as good, with a mean score of 4.16 across various indicators such as dress code, respect for teachers, and lesson attendance. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship ($r = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$) between substance use and discipline, suggesting that increased substance use was associated with a slight decline in discipline levels. The study concluded that substance use among students is a significant concern that negatively impacts discipline. Recommendations included implementing comprehensive substance use education programs, fostering supportive school environments, and developing guidelines to promote positive student behavior.

Keywords: Relationship, Substance Use, Students' Discipline, Secondary Schools.

Introduction

Substance use, often referred to as drug abuse, is defined as the consumption of drugs in quantities or methods that are harmful to the individual or those around them. It is recognized as a form of substance-related disorder (Ray & Charles, 2023). Student discipline refers to the observance of established school norms, regulations, and expectations. It involves behaviors that align with respect for authority, adherence to school rules, and maintenance of acceptable

standards within the learning environment. Discipline plays a foundational role in shaping responsible, respectful, and self-regulated individuals. Magwa and Ngara (2014, p.89) highlight that appropriate student behavior involves respect for school authority, compliance with institutional rules, and the upholding of expected standards of conduct.

In a school environment, a disciplined student is one who demonstrates responsible behavior, listens to instructions, completes tasks or homework on time, acts honestly, follows rules without constant supervision, cooperates with others, respects authority, and remains focused on both academic and personal development. Such students are actively involved in academic and extracurricular activities, cultivate positive relationships with peers and teachers, and contribute meaningfully to the school community. Discipline is widely recognized as a cornerstone of academic success and character formation, making it essential for holistic education. However, in Bushenyi District, there has been a growing concern over increasing levels of indiscipline among secondary school students. According to the Uganda Police Annual Crime Report (2022), approximately 40% of school-related indiscipline cases in the district are linked to substance use. Substances such as alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and other illicit drugs are commonly consumed and are easily accessible to many students.

The Ministry of Education and Sports (2023) further reported that 30% of secondary school students in the district had used at least one type of substance, largely due to peer pressure, availability from local vendors, and exposure through social networks. Substance use among students has been associated with several forms of misconduct, including truancy, bullying, fighting, vandalism, and academic underperformance. Additionally, teachers have observed an alarming rise in classroom disruptions, absenteeism, and student dropouts related to substance abuse (ASSHU-Bushenyi, 2022). The increase in substance-induced misbehavior poses a serious threat to the education system in Bushenyi District. If not urgently addressed, this trend may result in deteriorating academic standards, unsafe learning environments, and long-term consequences such as increased youth crime, unemployment, and poor public health outcomes. The persistence of this problem not only undermines individual student growth but also jeopardizes the broader development and stability of the community. Given the widespread impact of substance use on

student behavior and discipline, there is a pressing need to investigate the underlying causes and effects of this issue. This study sought to examine the relationship between substance use and student discipline in secondary schools in Bushenyi District, with the goal of informing effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Purpose of the Study

To determine the relationship between substance use and students' discipline in secondary schools of Bushenyi District.

Literature Review

Discipline among students in public secondary schools remains a persistent and worsening issue worldwide. Numerous studies have linked this problem to drug and substance abuse. High levels of discipline are frequently observed among students who engage in violent behavior towards peers, participate in strikes and school riots, commit theft, experience teenage pregnancies, exhibit truancy, perform poorly academically, and violate school rules.

According to Mosby's Medical Lab (2022), students who abuse drugs often experience intoxication symptoms such as memory loss, emotional instability, anger, loss of consciousness, impaired coordination, and dizziness. Such intoxication increases the likelihood of disruptive behaviors within the school environment. Furthermore, students addicted to substances tend to show a lack of focus, diminished interest in academic work, truancy, absenteeism, and difficulty concentrating.

Ksir, Oakley Ray, and Charles (2022) highlight that drug and substance abuse can lead to depression among students, manifesting as mood swings, feelings of isolation, sadness, withdrawal, low energy, and hostility. These emotional disturbances often contribute to discipline and undesirable behaviors. Their study recommends that secondary schools integrate Life Skills education, which is crucial in shaping student behavior. Educating students about the dangers of drug abuse, alongside collaboration between parents and schools, is essential in addressing the issue both at home and in school settings. Teachers should actively engage in preventing and

managing drug abuse among students, and governments are urged to implement and enforce stricter policies to combat substance abuse in public secondary schools.

McIntyre (2020) found that exposure to violence and growing up in dysfunctional households, especially those where illicit drugs are used by family members, is associated with a higher likelihood of drug use later in life. Similarly, Frolenzano et al., (2022) emphasize the critical role of family and peer relationships in adolescent drug use, as these social environments significantly influence attitudes and behaviors.

Mitchell and Brooking (2020) reported that in Mombasa County, 49.4% of youth inject heroin while 25.9% inject cocaine. A significant proportion of these intravenous drug users (IDUs) share needles 22.5% for heroin and 20.3% for cocaine posing serious health risks. Additionally, multiple incidents of student discipline linked to drug use have been reported in Mombasa Island schools. For instance, in 2015, a 16-year-old Form Three student was caught with 35 rolls of bhang worth Ksh. 6,000 while preparing to return to school in Mikindani (Bwana, 2021). Drug use among very young children is also a concern; boys as young as nine years old have been reported to sniff or inject drugs (Okwany, 2021). Children as young as 12 are sometimes used to transport drugs, while many youths between 12 and 31 years have become regular users of substances such as bhang, miraa, heroin, and "white gold."

Toquero (2021) investigated the impact of drug and substance abuse on the management of discipline in secondary schools. Drug abuse and addiction have become some of the most challenging and widespread issues affecting school administration and management in many countries, including Nigeria. The consequences are severe and damaging, affecting not only the youth but also the broader schools and communities.

Bowman-Perrott et al., (2021) note that rapid social and technological changes have intensified the problem, negatively influencing youth behavior in schools and creating challenges in effective school management. Drug abuse is a pervasive global health and social issue, with significant effects on both in-school and out-of-school youth. It adversely impacts the academic, social, psychological, economic, and physiological development of those involved (Dingili & Yungungu, 2023).

Consequently, the issue has raised serious concerns among educational stakeholders, medical professionals, sociologists, religious leaders, counselors, and parents, all of whom call for urgent and coordinated action. Educational institutions worldwide face increasing threats from drug use, abuse, and substance misuse. While schools strive to impart knowledge, beliefs, values, and norms, they are often overwhelmed by the growing challenge posed by drug and substance abuse (Ray & Charles, 2023).

Methodology

Research Design

The researcher adopted a cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between substance use and student discipline among Ordinary Level students in Bushenyi District. This design was appropriate because it allowed data to be collected at a single point in time from a large population, enabling the researcher to identify patterns and statistical relationships while also capturing students' lived experiences.

Research Approach

The researcher employed a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between substance use and student discipline. This approach addressed the limitations of relying on a single method by allowing the integration of numerical data with students' personal experiences and perceptions.

Table 1: Target population, Sample size and Sampling techniques

Category	Target population	Sample size	Sampling techniques
Students (Only those once suspended from school)	54	44	Simple Random Sampling
Teachers	20	19	Purposive Sampling
Deputy Head teachers	6	6	Purposive Sampling
Head teachers	6	6	Purposive Sampling
Total	86	75	

Source: Bushenyi District Local Government Education Office, (2023)

Data Collection tools

The self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) was used, consisting of three sections: A, B, and C. Section A focused on the demographics of the respondents, while Sections B and C addressed the study's objectives, including the prevalence of substance use among secondary school students in Bushenyi District, the levels of discipline exhibited by students, and the relationship between substance use and student discipline. Items in Sections B and C were based on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed to students and class teachers.

An interview guide was used to gather qualitative data, allowing the researcher to collect detailed insights from respondents based on the study variables. This method provided deeper, more comprehensive responses depending on the respondents' knowledge and views regarding the research topic. The qualitative data complemented the quantitative data collected through the survey. The interviews were conducted with headteachers and deputy headteachers.

Data Management

All quantitative data collected through questionnaires were carefully coded, organized, and securely stored to ensure accuracy and consistency. The data were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and checked for errors or missing values before analysis. Proper management of the quantitative data ensured that the results would be reliable, valid, and ready for statistical examination.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews were transcribed, labeled, and systematically organized to facilitate thorough thematic analysis. The researcher ensured that all recordings and transcripts were stored securely and that participants' identities remained confidential. Effective management of qualitative data allowed for the accurate interpretation of students' experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors related to substance use and discipline.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to determine the prevalence of substance use with help of SPSS. These statistics described how widespread substance use was among the students and which substances were most commonly used. To determine the relationship between the two variables,

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to test for linear association between substance use and discipline levels. Furthermore, simple linear regression analysis was used to assess whether substance use significantly predicted the level of student discipline.

Qualitative data collected through interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis only. Responses were transcribed, coded, and grouped into themes relevant to the study objectives, such as common perceptions on substance use, causes of indiscipline, and school responses.

Results

Table 2: Response Rate

Category	Targeted Sample Size	Responded	Response Rate
Students once suspended	44	42	95.5%
Teachers	19	18	94.7%
Deputy Head teachers	6	6	100.0%
Head teachers	6	5	83.3%
Total / Overall	75	71	94.7%

In general, out of the total sample of 75 participants, 71 responded, producing an overall response rate of 94.7%.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for Prevalence rate of substance use among secondary school students in Bushenyi District (n=60)

Statements	5 f(%)	4 f(%)	3 f(%)	2 f(%)	1 f(%)	Mean
Alcohol is the most commonly abused substance among students.	42 (70%)	5 (8.3%)	4 (6.7%)	6 (10.0%)	3 (5.0%)	4.28
Tobacco use among students is noticeable during school hours.	21 (35.0%)	2 (3.3%)	27 (45.0%)	8 (13.3%)	2 (3.3%)	3.53
Marijuana use has been reported among students in this school.	9 (15.0%)	2 (3.3%)	42 (70.0%)	5 (8.3%)	2 (3.3%)	3.18

Some students misuse drugs such as painkillers and sedatives.	22 (33.7%)	2 (3.3%)	30 (50.0%)	4 (6.7%)	2 (3.3%)	3.63
Illicit drugs such as heroin and cocaine are rarely found among students here.	42 (70.0%)	11 (18.3%)	3 (5.0%)	3 (5.0%)	1 (1.7%)	4.50
Substance use tends to increase during weekends and school holidays.	2 (3.3%)	48 (80.0%)	1 (1.7%)	6 (10.0%)	3 (5.0%)	3.67
Peer pressure is a major factor driving students to use substances.	2 (3.3%)	45 (75.0%)	1 (1.7%)	7 (11.7%)	5 (8.3%)	3.53
Many students hide their substance use from teachers and school authorities.	12 (20.0%)	38 (63.3%)	2 (3.3%)	5 (8.3%)	3 (5.0%)	3.85
Students often use substances to escape academic and social pressures.	15 (25.0%)	37 (61.7%)	3 (5.0%)	3 (5.0%)	2 (3.3%)	4.00
Occasional substance use is common among students.	18 (30.0%)	7 (11.7%)	30 (50.0%)	2 (3.3%)	3 (5.0%)	3.58
Overall mean score						3.78

5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree, f = Frequency

The overall mean score ($m = 3.78$) suggested that, on average, students tended to agree that substance use was prevalent and influenced by various factors, including peer pressure, stress, and availability. The high prevalence of alcohol and the rarity of hard drugs such as heroin and cocaine were particularly notable.

Additionally, insights from interviews supported these quantitative findings. One of the head teachers noted that, “We have witnessed a growing trend of students experimenting with alcohol, especially after holidays. They come back with habits they picked up outside school.”

Another head teacher emphasized the role of peer influence, stating, “Peer groups are very powerful at this age. Once a student gets involved in a group where substance use is common, it becomes very difficult for them to resist.”

One of the deputy head teachers added that, “Some students are very clever in hiding their behavior. They often come to school with breath mints to mask alcohol, or hide cigarettes in their bags. It’s hard to detect unless we do random checks.”

Another deputy head teacher also pointed out the influence of social stress, saying, “We notice that during exam periods or when students are under pressure, some turn to substances like energy drinks and even pills to cope with the stress. It’s something we’re concerned about.”

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for levels of learners’ discipline among secondary school students in Bushenyi District (n=60)

Statements	5 f(%)	4 f(%)	3 f(%)	2 f(%)	1 f(%)	Mean
Dressing code	39 (65.0%)	7 (11.7%)	6 (10.0%)	5 (8.3%)	3 (5.0%)	4.23
Respecting teachers	36 (60.0%)	8 (13.3%)	7 (11.7%)	5 (8.3%)	4 (6.7%)	4.12
Attending lessons	43 (71.7%)	6 (10.0%)	5 (8.3%)	4 (6.7%)	2 (3.3%)	4.40
Time management	35 (58.3%)	7 (11.7%)	7 (11.7%)	6 (10.0%)	5 (8.3%)	4.02
Attending school assembly	38 (63.3%)	7 (11.7%)	6 (10.0%)	5 (8.3%)	4 (6.7%)	4.17
Personal hygiene	34 (56.7%)	8 (13.3%)	7 (11.7%)	6 (10.0%)	5 (8.3%)	4.00
Overall mean score						4.16

5 = Very Good, 4 = Good, 3 = Undecided, 2 = Fair, 1 = Not Good, f = Frequency

The overall mean score (m = 4.16) implied that the general level of discipline among learners in the sampled secondary schools was perceived as good. All the individual indicators—ranging from class attendance and dressing to time management and hygiene—were rated positively, with lesson attendance receiving the highest score and personal hygiene the lowest, though still within the “good” range.

Additionally, views from interviews supported the quantitative findings. One of the head teachers stated: “Discipline among our students has generally improved, especially in aspects like class attendance and dressing. However, we still observe issues with time management and some

students not taking assignments seriously. These areas require continuous guidance and mentorship.”

Another head teacher explained: “Most students are respectful and obedient. They rarely engage in fights or open disobedience. But peer influence remains a concern, especially when students come from outside with bad habits. We work closely with parents to address such issues early.”

One of the deputy head teachers shared: “We have seen great improvement in how students conduct themselves. They participate actively in school programs, maintain hygiene, and adhere to rules. Although we occasionally have cases of late coming, overall, the level of discipline is commendable.”

Table 3: Pearson correlation coefficient for relationship between Substance Use and Discipline among Ordinary Level Students in Bushenyi District

		Correlations	
		Substance Use	Discipline among Ordinary Level Students
Substance Use	Pearson Correlation [r]	1	0.24
	Sig. (2-tailed) [p value]		0.08
	N	60	60
Discipline among Ordinary Level Students	Pearson Correlation [r]	0.24	1
	Sig. (2-tailed) [p value]	0.08	
	N	60	60

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between substance use and discipline among Ordinary Level students in Bushenyi District, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.24$ and a $p = 0.08 < 0.01$. This suggests that as substance use slightly increases, there is a corresponding slight decline in students' discipline levels.

Discussion

The Pearson correlation analysis conducted in this study revealed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between substance use and discipline among Ordinary Level students in Bushenyi District. This finding indicates that as substance use slightly increases, there is a corresponding decline in students' discipline. This aligns with the broader literature that highlights the persistent and worsening issue of discipline among students in public secondary schools worldwide, often linked to drug and substance abuse. This is consistent with the findings of Mosby's Medical Lab (2022), which notes that students who abuse drugs often experience symptoms such as memory loss, emotional instability, and impaired coordination. Such intoxication not only increases the likelihood of disruptive behaviors but also diminishes students' focus and interest in academic work, leading to absenteeism and difficulty concentrating.

Similarly, Ksir, Oakley Ray, and Charles (2022) emphasize that drug and substance abuse can lead to emotional disturbances such as depression, which manifest as mood swings and feelings of isolation. These emotional challenges contribute significantly to disciplinary issues, reinforcing the need for schools to integrate Life Skills education into their curricula. This approach is crucial for shaping student behavior and educating them about the dangers of drug abuse. Collaboration between parents and schools is essential in addressing these issues both at home and in educational settings.

In contrast with the findings from McIntyre (2020), which highlight the impact of exposure to violence and dysfunctional family environments on later drug use, this study suggests that while family dynamics play a critical role, the immediate school environment and peer relationships are equally influential. Frolenzano et al., (2022) further support this notion, emphasizing that social environments significantly shape adolescents' attitudes and behaviors towards drug use.

The alarming statistics reported by Mitchell and Brooking (2020) regarding intravenous drug use among youth in Mombasa County illustrate the severe consequences of substance abuse on student discipline. The incidents of students being caught with drugs, such as the case of a 16-year-old Form Three student in Mikindani, highlight the urgent need for effective interventions in

schools. The involvement of very young children in drug use, as reported by Okwany (2021), raises additional concerns about the long-term implications for discipline and overall student well-being.

Conclusions

Substance use among secondary school students in Bushenyi District is prevalent, particularly with alcohol being the most commonly abused substance, as indicated by 70.0% of respondents. While there is moderate recognition of tobacco and drug misuse, perceptions of marijuana use vary, reflecting uncertainty among students. The findings also highlight the rarity of hard drugs like heroin and cocaine, alongside significant influences such as increased substance use during weekends and holidays, peer pressure, and the tendency to conceal substance use from teachers.

The overall level of discipline among learners in secondary schools is perceived as good, with an average mean score of 4.16. Most respondents rated various aspects of discipline positively, including students' dressing code, respect for teachers, lesson attendance, time management, and attendance at school assemblies. Notably, lesson attendance received the highest rating, while personal hygiene, although rated the lowest, still fell within the "good" range.

The study concluded that there is a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between substance use and discipline among Ordinary Level students in Bushenyi District. This finding suggests that as substance use slightly increases, there is a corresponding slight decline in students' discipline levels.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education and Sports should develop and implement targeted educational programs that address the risks associated with substance use, emphasizing its impact on student discipline and overall academic performance.

Head teachers should create a school environment that actively discourages substance use by implementing strict policies and providing support systems for students who may be struggling with these issues.

Students should be encouraged to engage in open discussions about substance use and its effects on discipline, fostering a culture of awareness and support among peers.

Teachers should incorporate discussions about the consequences of substance use into their lessons, helping students understand the importance of maintaining discipline in their academic and personal lives.

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