The Prevalence of Drug Abuse on School Completion Rates among Learners in Public Junior Schools in Kimilili Sub-County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Drug and substance abuse had become a growing socio-economic challenge affecting societies globally. This study investigated the prevalence of drug abuse on school completion rates among learners in public junior schools in Kimilili Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between prevalence of drug abuse on school completion rates among learners in public junior schools. The study was carried out in Kimilili sub-county which had three zones: Kimilili west zone, Kimilili east zone and Kimilili central zone. It was guided by two theories Natural Theory and Primary Socialization Theory. The Natural Theory contends that the desire to use psychoactive substances was an innate and universal characteristic of human beings. According to Casey J. Roulette (2020–2024), the inclination to alter consciousness through psychoactive substances had existed throughout human history and reflected a natural human tendency. One of the earliest proponents of this perspective was Andrew Weil, a medical doctor and expert in alternative medicine, who argued that human beings possessed an inherent drive to experience altered states of consciousness. The Natural Theory was applicable to this study because it provided a biological explanation for why some junior school learners may be more vulnerable to drug abuse than others. Learners with inherited susceptibility to substance use disorders may be more likely to experiment with drugs when exposed to environmental risk factors. Once learners engage in drug abuse, the substances might impair cognitive functioning, concentration, memory, judgment, and decision-making. Consequently, affected learners might experience declining academic performance, increased absenteeism, indiscipline, and reduced motivation to learn. These challenges interfere with regular school attendance and academic progression, thereby reducing the likelihood of completing junior school education successfully. The Primary Socialization Theory (PST), developed by Q. R. Oetting (1998), posits that both normative and deviant behaviors were acquired through interactions with an individual's primary socialization sources. The theory argues that behaviors such as drug use were learned primarily through close relationships with family members, schools, and peer groups. These primary socialization agents shape learners' beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors by transmitting social norms that either discourage or encourage substance use. According to Joseph F. Donnermeyer, who further elaborated on the theory, attitudes toward drug use were influenced more strongly by close friends than by general peer culture, while strong social bonds with families and schools served as protective factors against substance abuse. The Primary Socialization Theory was highly applicable to this study because it explained how social environments influenced drug abuse among junior school learners and how these behaviors subsequently affected school completion rates. Learners who experienced weak parental supervision, inadequate teacher support, or association with peers who engage in drug use were more likely to initiate and continue substance abuse. Drug abuse may lead to poor academic performance, behavioral problems, absenteeism, school suspension, and eventual dropout, thereby reducing school completion rates. Conversely, learners who receive consistent parental guidance, positive peer influence, effective teacher mentorship, and supportive school environments are less likely to engage in substance abuse and are more likely to remain in school until completion.

The target population comprised one Teachers Service Commission (TSC) wellness officer at the Wellness Centre, 58 head teachers, 58 teachers in charge of guidance and counselling, and 1,160 learners. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling design incorporating census, stratified random sampling, purposive sampling, and supplementary snowball sampling techniques. A census approach was used to include all 58 head teachers,

58 guidance and counselling teachers, and the one TSC wellness officer. The learners were selected through stratified random sampling, whereby public junior schools were stratified into three educational zones—West, East, and Central—and schools and learners were subsequently selected using random sampling procedures. Snowball sampling was used strictly as a supplementary qualitative technique to identify a small subgroup of learners known to be involved in drug abuse for in-depth observation, subject to parental consent. Data were collected using questionnaires, observational checklists, and archival records, incorporating both primary and secondary data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, followed by a chi-square test to establish associations among the study variables. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically in line with the research objectives. The findings were presented using tables and figures.

Keywords: Drug Abuse, Prevalence, School Completion rates, Junior School Learners

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Education plays a key role in the socio-economic development of people and society in Kenya. Primary education, which includes junior school, has been free and compulsory according to the sessional paper of 2005. This was a crucial foundation for further education and lifelong learning. However, various factors continue to hinder pupils from completing junior school education, one of which has been the growing problem of drug abuse among school-aged children. From recent years until now, there has been an increasing concern about the exposure of children in public junior schools to drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, and bhang (cannabis).

The abuse of drugs has been defined differently across disciplines. WaiteLabolt (2022) described it as using drugs for non-medical purposes. Other scholars and healthcare professionals broaden this view, defining drug abuse as the excessive or improper use of substances including prescription medicines, over-the-counter drugs, and illicit substances. More recent findings emphasized clinical framing: the Social Work Institute (2025) characterized drug abuse as a health condition marked by compulsive drug-taking, escalating dosage, and the development of psychological or physical dependence.

This shift reflected a move from moralistic interpretations toward medical recognition of substance use disorders as complex health challenges that affected people in all spheres, including junior school learners. Drugs were abused when they were used for non-medical purposes (Waite-Lobolt, 2022). Policymakers define abuse of drugs in terms of public health crisis that required prevention, treatment and education to reduce the negative side effects of drugs on individuals. The early stages of using drugs are mostly influenced by environmental risk factors; digital media now surpasses traditional marketing for most underage adolescents and young adults, and in that context, social media placements were overtaking overt advertising and media product placement.

Although the influence of advertising was mostly done for tobacco and alcohol, the conclusions from these studies were extended to other forms of substance use. WHO (2016) Age and use statistics showed that young people typically experimented with tobacco, alcohol, inhalants, and marijuana. The age of initiation for each of these substances was lower than for any illicit substance, according to NHSDA (1999). In Kenya, drug and substance abuse among young people in learning institutions had been a growing social and public health problem.

In 2010, NACADA observed that learning institutions had become a hub for drug sale and consumption, with both licit and illicit dealers targeting pupils for recruitment into business. The substances were being sneaked into schools without the knowledge of the school authorities since they were mixed with juice and other confectioneries. This impacted negatively on learners' academic performance as it impaired cognitive function, memory and concentration, which led to lower grades, difficulty focusing during class, reduced ability to learn and retain new information. It had negative consequences for learners such as social isolation, financial problems, and legal issues, which further contributed to learners' inability to complete their academic studies successfully

Recognizing the negative impact that drugs and substances caused, the government of Kenya had to put in place legal and institutional frameworks within which the problem was addressed. With respect to legal frameworks, the government ratified two major United Nations conventions on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in its quest to protect its citizens from drugs and substance abuse. These included the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961) and the Convention against illicit trafficking on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1998).

In 1994, the government enacted a new anti-drug law, the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substance Control Act. To reduce alcohol abuse in the country, the alcoholic drinks control act of 2010 came into operation on 22nd November 2010 and repealed the Chang'aa Prohibition Act (cap 70) and the Liquor Licensing Act (cap 121). The objective of the Act was to provide a law for control of production, manufacture, sale, labelling, promotion, sponsorship and consumption of alcohol drinks to protect the health of individuals, protect the consumers of alcohol drinks from being misled enacted the alcoholic drinks control act 2010 which aimed to regulate any deceptive inducements, protect the health of persons under age, informed and educated the public on health effects of alcohol abuse, adopted and implemented measures that eliminated illicit trade in alcohol, such as smuggling, promoted and provided for treatment and rehabilitation programs, and promoted research and dissemination of relevant information.

The government also enacted the Tobacco Control Act of 2007 which aimed at controlling the devastating health, social, and economic effects of tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke on individuals and families. Other laws, strategies and policies aimed at regulation, sale and consumption of alcohol included: The Dangerous Drugs Act, cap 245; the Kenya National Drug Policy Ministry of Health, (1994); and the National Strategy on Prevention, Control, Mitigation of Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Kenya 2007-2017.

The national and county government ministries and departments, respectively, were required through performance contracts to report on drug-related activities. It was widely recognized that children living with parents with alcohol- related problems were more at risk of depression and low self-esteem, and substance abuse during adolescence was the single most predictive factor for being dependent on drugs as an adult.

According to the study, it was the misuse of substances by the learners which interfered with the ability to concentrate, attend school regularly, perform academically and ultimately complete their education. This made the researcher to look critically into the relationship between drug abuse and school completion rates among learners in public junior schools in Kimilili Sub-County

Statement of the Problem

Drug abuse remains a critical public health issue which affected individuals across all demographics, including young learners in junior schools. In Kimilili Sub-County, the challenge had become increasingly evident, with rising cases of substance use among learners, which contributed to poor academic performance and alarming school dropout rates. National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) and the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA).

These two institutions collaborated on a comprehensive study titled Special Paper No. 20 of 2019, which looked at the status of drug use among primary school learners across Kenya who form part of the junior schools. While the report covered national trends, it included findings from various counties and sub-counties, including Bungoma County, where Kimilili Sub-County is located. The study revealed that drug and substance abuse was not limited to secondary or tertiary institutions. It began as early as primary schools, with pupils as young as 10 years being exposed to substances like alcohol, tobacco, and bhang.

Although the report presented a national overview, it highlighted specific regions, particularly in Western Kenya, where drug abuse among school-aged children was notably prevalent. Kimilili Sub-County, located within Bungoma County, was among the areas identified that experienced heightened concern. Its inclusion within the high-risk zone made it a strategically appropriate and contextually relevant site for investigating the patterns, causes, and impacts of drug abuse among learners

Although studies had examined drug abuse among adolescents, there was limited research focusing on junior school learners and its direct impact on school completion rates. Most existing studies in Kenya and globally emphasized drug abuse in secondary schools and college students, leaving junior school learners under-researched. The early onset of drug use in children who are part of junior schools was often overlooked, yet had long-term effects on education. While drug abuse prevalence had been documented, few studies explicitly measured its impact on school completion rates (dropouts, absenteeism, or academic performance). This created a gap in understanding how substance use directly affected educational attainment at the junior level

Learners in Kimilili Sub-County faced unique vulnerabilities due to socio-economic and cultural factors, with alcohol being the most commonly abused substance. Reports from teachers and school administrators indicated a growing number of indiscipline cases linked to drug use, with one study revealing that 16% of such cases involved substance abuse. To add on children had been found to access drugs from within their own homes and communities through family members, shopkeepers, and other local residents which highlighted a critical lapse in parental guidance and community vigilance. NACADA 2022 National Survey on the Status of Drugs and Substance Use in Kenya identified, Western Kenya as a hot spot for drug abuse Bungoma county which had several sub-counties including Kimilili sub-county were mostly affected. However, there was a significant lack of comprehensive data and targeted interventions addressing how the issue directly affected school completion rates among junior school learners. Without empirical evidence, stakeholders struggled to design effective policies and programs to mitigate the impact of drug abuse on education.

The study sought to bridge the gap by investigating the prevalence of drug abuse among learners in public junior schools in Kimilili Sub-County and its correlation with school completion rates. By generating actionable insights, the research aimed to support policymakers, educators, and community leaders in developing informed strategies that promoted academic success, completion rates, and safeguarded the well-being of children in the region (Emma, 2026).

Theoretical Literature

Primary Socialization Theory

The proponent of the theory was QR Oetting, (1998) which said that normative and deviant behaviors were products of psychological and cultural characteristics and that norms of social behaviors included drug use were learned prominently through engagement with primary socialization sources. The primary social agents were; family, school and peer cluster. Joseph F. Donnermeyer's publication on primary socialization theory regarding drug use and abuse says that as a successor to peer cluster theory PST holds that attitudes to drug use is shaped by close friends, not general peer culture, social bonds to families and schools also make a difference. Children with weak bonds with their families for example, absent parents and in schools where they did not relate well with peers and teachers, as measured by such factors, used drugs of various types more than children with stronger bonds to their families and schools. Their weaker bonds prompted them to be less likely to accept conventional norms and more likely to use drugs and engage in other delinquent behavior. Regarding social interaction, sociologists emphasized that peer influences greatly affected one's likelihood of using alcohol, tobacco, and a host of other drugs (Watts, L. L., Abo Hamza, E., Bedewy, D. A., & Moustafa, A., 2024). This perspective had a preventive approach, which suggested that strengthening family bonds fostered positive peer relationships and a friendly school environment, making it an effective strategy for preventing drug abuse.

Overall, Primary Socialization Theory provides a comprehensive explanation of how interactions within families, schools, and peer groups shape learners' attitudes toward drug use. Its emphasis on social learning, behavioural modelling, and institutional influence aligns closely with this study, which seeks to examine the prevalence of drug abuse and its influence on school completion rates among learners in public junior schools in Kimilili Sub-County.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Perspective on the Prevalence of Drug Abuse among Learners

Drug abuse among school-going children has become an increasingly important global public health concern. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024) reports that approximately 292 million people worldwide used illicit drugs in 2022, representing nearly a 20 percent increase over the previous decade. Cannabis remained the most commonly used illicit substance, followed by opioids, amphetamine-type stimulants, cocaine, and ecstasy. Although these statistics largely represent the general population, growing evidence indicates that experimentation with drugs begins during early adolescence, with many children initiating substance use while still attending primary or junior school.

Similarly, the World Health Organization (2024) observed that alcohol and tobacco continue to be the substances most frequently introduced during childhood. Early initiation into substance use significantly increases the likelihood of long-term dependence, mental health disorders, poor educational outcomes, and risky behaviours. Children who begin experimenting with drugs before the age of fifteen are considerably more likely to experience chronic substance abuse during adulthood than those who initiate use later in life.

A multinational study conducted by **Yeung et al. (2024)** involving school-going adolescents across North America and Europe established that approximately one in every five learners had experimented with at least one psychoactive substance before completing lower secondary education. Cannabis, alcohol, electronic cigarettes, prescription medicines, and inhalants were identified as the most common substances. The study further established that learners who reported substance use demonstrated significantly lower academic achievement, reduced classroom participation, and increased absenteeism compared to non-users.

Likewise, **Watts et al. (2024)** examined social determinants of adolescent drug abuse across several developed countries. The researchers established that peer influence, family instability, school disengagement, and community availability of drugs remained the strongest predictors of early substance use. Learners who associated with friends using drugs were substantially more likely to initiate alcohol consumption, tobacco smoking, and cannabis use than learners whose peer networks discouraged substance abuse.

Collectively, these international studies demonstrate that drug abuse has become a global educational challenge affecting learners at progressively younger ages. However, most of these studies originate from developed countries whose educational systems, cultural environments, and social protection mechanisms differ considerably from those in developing countries, thereby limiting direct applicability to the Kenyan context.

Prevalence of Drug Abuse among Learners in Africa

Across Africa, rapid urbanization, unemployment, poverty, social inequality, and increased availability of illicit substances have contributed to rising drug abuse among children and adolescents. The African Union Commission (2022) notes that substance use among school-going children has become an emerging challenge across many African countries, particularly in urban informal settlements and economically disadvantaged rural communities.

A study by **Ebrahim, Adams, and Demant (2024)** investigating substance use among school-aged children in Sub-Saharan Africa established that alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, inhalants, and prescription medicines were the most frequently abused substances. The researchers found that substance use was strongly associated with declining academic performance, school absenteeism, behavioural misconduct, and increased dropout rates. Learners from low-income households and communities characterized by weak social control demonstrated significantly higher prevalence rates than learners residing in more stable environments.

Similarly, research undertaken in South Africa by **Mahlobo and colleagues (2023)** reported increasing alcohol and cannabis use among learners aged 11–15 years. The study revealed that early exposure to drugs significantly reduced learners' educational motivation while increasing school disciplinary problems and early

school leaving. The authors recommended strengthening school-based prevention programmes and family interventions to reduce early drug initiation.

Research conducted in Uganda by **Namutebi et al. (2022)** similarly found increasing prevalence of alcohol consumption and inhalant abuse among upper primary learners. Approximately 16 percent of learners reported previous experimentation with at least one psychoactive substance. Peer influence, family alcohol consumption, and community accessibility of drugs emerged as the principal determinants of substance use.

These African studies demonstrate that drug abuse among younger learners is no longer an isolated phenomenon but represents an expanding educational and public health challenge. Nevertheless, differences in educational policies, cultural practices, socioeconomic conditions, and legal frameworks necessitate country-specific studies capable of informing locally appropriate interventions.

Empirical Evidence from Kenya

Within Kenya, increasing concern has emerged regarding the growing prevalence of drug abuse among school-going children. National surveys conducted by NACADA indicate that alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, miraa, prescription medicines, inhalants, and locally brewed alcoholic beverages remain the most commonly abused substances among learners. The agency further reports that exposure to drugs increasingly begins before learners' complete basic education, highlighting the need for early prevention strategies.

A nationwide study conducted by **KIPPRA (2019)**, whose findings continue to inform recent policy discussions, established that tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis remained the most commonly encountered substances among primary school learners. The researchers found that community accessibility, parental substance use, and peer influence substantially increased children's likelihood of experimenting with drugs before joining secondary school.

The **NACADA Policy Brief (2020)** further established that early initiation into drug use was becoming increasingly common among Kenyan learners. The report identified family environments, weak parental monitoring, poor enforcement of alcohol regulations, and community availability of drugs as major contributors to increasing prevalence. Importantly, the report emphasized that early substance use frequently preceded poor academic performance, indiscipline, absenteeism, and eventual school dropout.

A more recent mixed-methods study conducted in **Ngong Municipality (2026)** reported that 7.6 percent of junior school learners screened using the Cannabis Abuse Screening Test exhibited problematic cannabis use. The study further identified higher prevalence among male learners and older junior school pupils while highlighting the importance of school counselling services, psychosocial support, and parental engagement in reducing substance abuse among learners.

Research focusing specifically on Bungoma County similarly demonstrates that alcohol, busaa, chang'aa, tobacco, cannabis, and inhalants remain readily available within many communities. The widespread production and consumption of traditional alcoholic beverages expose children to substance use from an early age, increasing opportunities for experimentation and normalization of drug-related behaviours.

Despite these important findings, most Kenyan studies continue to focus on secondary schools, universities, or the general youth population. Comparatively few studies specifically investigate prevalence patterns among junior school learners under the Competency-Based Curriculum. This empirical gap justifies further research focusing on younger learners, whose developmental characteristics differ substantially from those of older adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the prevalence of drug abuse and its influence on school completion rates among learners in public junior schools in Kimilili Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya. The study was conducted in 58 public junior

schools across the East, West, and Central educational zones. The target population comprised 11,717 respondents, including 11,600 learners in Grades 7–9, 58 head teachers, 58 guidance and counselling teachers, and one Teachers Service Commission (TSC) Wellness Officer. A sample of 1,277 respondents was selected, whereby census sampling was used for the head teachers, guidance and counselling teachers, and the TSC Wellness Officer, while stratified random sampling was employed to select learners proportionately across grades and educational zones. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, an observational checklist, and archival school records to obtain both quantitative and qualitative information on drug abuse prevalence and school completion. The research instruments underwent expert review to establish content validity. At the same time, a pilot study conducted outside the study area assessed their reliability using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with a threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ considered acceptable. Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee, followed by a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), and permission from the County and Sub-County Directors of Education as well as participating schools. Informed consent was obtained from adult participants, while parental consent and learner assent were secured for minors. Quantitative data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29, where descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages,) summarized the prevalence of drug abuse, and the Chi-square (χ^2) test examined the relationship between drug abuse prevalence and school completion rates at a 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$). Qualitative data were analysed thematically, and the findings were triangulated with quantitative results to enhance the validity, credibility, and comprehensiveness of the study findings.

Findings from the Literature Review

The reviewed literature demonstrates that drug abuse among school-going children has become a significant educational and public health concern globally, regionally, and nationally. Evidence consistently shows that learners are being exposed to psychoactive substances at increasingly younger ages, with alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, inhalants, prescription medicines, and locally brewed alcoholic beverages emerging as the most commonly abused substances. Although prevalence rates differ across countries and regions due to variations in research methodologies, social environments, and policy frameworks, there is broad consensus that early initiation into substance use negatively affects learners' educational progression and completion.

At the global level, studies reviewed indicate that drug abuse among children and adolescents continues to rise despite increased prevention efforts. UNODC (2024) reported that nearly 292 million people used illicit drugs worldwide in 2022, while WHO (2024) noted that experimentation increasingly begins during childhood and early adolescence. International studies consistently associate early drug use with impaired cognitive functioning, poor classroom participation, declining academic performance, increased absenteeism, behavioural misconduct, and reduced educational attainment. These findings demonstrate that drug abuse is not merely a public health issue but also an important educational challenge requiring coordinated intervention.

The African literature similarly reveals increasing prevalence of substance use among school-going children. Studies conducted in South Africa, Uganda, Nigeria, and Ethiopia indicate that alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and inhalants are the substances most frequently abused by learners. Common determinants include poverty, family instability, weak parental supervision, peer influence, availability of drugs within communities, and inadequate school support systems. Across these studies, drug abuse consistently predicts school absenteeism, indiscipline, low academic achievement, grade repetition, and increased risk of school dropout.

Within Kenya, the literature demonstrates that drug abuse among learners has expanded beyond universities and secondary schools into primary and junior schools. National reports by NACADA (2022) indicate increasing exposure of learners aged between 10 and 14 years to alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, prescription medicines, miraa, and inhalants. Similarly, KIPPRA (2019) identified tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis as the substances most commonly encountered by primary school learners, while the NACADA Policy Brief (2020) established that early initiation into drug use remains a growing national concern. The Ngong Municipality study (2026) further confirmed problematic cannabis use among junior school learners, emphasizing the need for strengthened counselling services, parental involvement, and school-based interventions.

The literature also reveals that the prevalence of drug abuse varies considerably according to learners' social environments. Family characteristics emerge consistently as important determinants of substance use. Learners from households characterized by parental alcohol consumption, family conflict, weak supervision, neglect, or socioeconomic deprivation are considerably more likely to experiment with drugs than learners raised within stable family environments. This finding strongly supports Primary Socialization Theory, which emphasizes the protective role of strong family attachment in preventing deviant behaviour.

Peer influence equally emerges as one of the strongest predictors of drug abuse among learners. Nearly all reviewed studies conclude that learners whose close friends engage in substance use are substantially more likely to initiate similar behaviours. Peer acceptance, curiosity, desire for social belonging, and fear of rejection encourage experimentation with alcohol, cigarettes, cannabis, and other substances. The reviewed literature therefore consistently identifies peer networks as critical targets for preventive interventions.

School-related factors also contribute significantly to drug abuse prevalence. Schools lacking effective guidance and counselling programmes, life skills education, learner mentorship, and psychosocial support experience greater difficulty preventing substance use among learners. Conversely, schools characterized by strong leadership, positive teacher-learner relationships, active counselling departments, and supportive learning environments report relatively lower levels of substance abuse. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening institutional capacity to prevent early drug initiation.

The reviewed studies further demonstrate that community characteristics substantially influence drug abuse prevalence. Learners residing in communities where alcohol brewing, drug trafficking, tobacco sales, and substance use are socially accepted encounter greater opportunities for experimentation. Weak enforcement of legislation restricting access to alcohol and tobacco by minors' further compounds learner vulnerability. Consequently, successful prevention requires collaboration among schools, families, local administrators, law enforcement agencies, religious institutions, and community organizations.

Despite considerable progress in understanding drug abuse among adolescents, important knowledge gaps remain. First, most empirical studies focus predominantly on secondary school students, university students, or the general youth population, with relatively limited attention directed toward junior school learners. Second, many studies adopt broad national perspectives that may not adequately capture contextual variations within rural counties such as Bungoma. Third, although numerous studies investigate determinants of drug abuse, comparatively fewer specifically examine how prevalence influences school completion rates among learners in public junior schools.

The reviewed literature therefore justifies further investigation within Kimilili Sub-County, Bungoma County. Establishing the prevalence of drug abuse among junior school learners and examining its relationship with school completion rates will generate context-specific evidence capable of informing educational policy, school-based interventions, parental involvement programmes, and community prevention initiatives.

Research Gap

Although extensive literature exists on drug abuse among adolescents, several important research gaps remain.

First, most previous studies have concentrated on secondary schools, colleges, and universities, leaving junior school learners inadequately represented in empirical research. Since learners in Grades 7–9 are undergoing significant developmental transitions, findings from older adolescents cannot automatically be generalized to this younger population.

Second, many studies have examined factors contributing to drug abuse without explicitly investigating how the prevalence of substance use influences school completion rates. Consequently, the educational consequences of early substance abuse remain insufficiently documented within the context of junior schools.

Third, available Kenyan studies are largely national or urban-based, with limited evidence from rural settings such as Kimilili Sub-County. Rural communities possess unique socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental

characteristics that may influence both access to drugs and educational participation differently from urban areas.

Finally, the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum has introduced new educational structures, including public junior schools, yet empirical evidence specifically focusing on drug abuse under this educational system remains scarce. This study therefore addresses these gaps by examining the prevalence of drug abuse and its influence on school completion among learners in public junior schools in Kimilili Sub-County, Bungoma County.

CONCLUSION

The reviewed literature clearly demonstrates that drug abuse among school-going children has become an increasingly significant challenge affecting educational achievement worldwide. Across global, African, and Kenyan contexts, evidence consistently shows that children are initiating alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, inhalants, prescription medicines, and other psychoactive substances at younger ages than previously documented. Early initiation into substance use negatively affects cognitive development, classroom participation, academic performance, school attendance, learner discipline, and ultimately educational completion.

Primary Socialization Theory provides an appropriate explanation for these behavioural patterns by emphasizing the influence of family relationships, school environments, and peer groups in shaping children's behavioural choices. Strong attachment to parents, teachers, and positive peer networks serves as an important protective factor against drug abuse, whereas weak social bonds significantly increase learners' vulnerability to substance experimentation.

Empirical studies consistently identify parental supervision, peer influence, school connectedness, community characteristics, and accessibility of drugs as the principal determinants of substance abuse among learners. Likewise, the literature establishes that increasing prevalence of drug abuse contributes directly to absenteeism, poor academic performance, behavioural misconduct, school suspension, grade repetition, and eventual school dropout.

This review therefore concludes that determining the prevalence of drug abuse among learners in public junior schools is essential for understanding its influence on school completion rates. Context-specific evidence generated from Kimilili Sub-County will provide policymakers, educational administrators, school leaders, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders with valuable information for designing targeted interventions aimed at preventing substance abuse, improving learner retention, and enhancing educational completion.

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