

# Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Education in Selected Secondary Schools in Zambia: Activities and Policy Implementation

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## ABSTRACT

*The study sought to establish current practices and policies in drug and alcohol abuse prevention education in selected secondary schools in Zambia. This need was necessitated by the fact that despite escalating incidences of drug and alcohol abuse among school-going children, little was known concerning prevention practices and policies used in secondary schools. This article reports on two of the study objectives which were to; (1) explore how prevention education activities were conducted in secondary schools. And (2) explore how policy guidelines were implemented in secondary schools. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to collect, analyze and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data from 514 respondents. The study found that although a variety of activities such as lectures, discussions, video shows, role plays, drama, games and sports, were conducted, the most frequently conducted were lectures and discussions. In addition prevention education activities were irregularly conducted. It was also established*

*that distribution of school rules to learners as they reported to school and head teachers communicating the rules to learners during school assemblies were the most used ways of implementing policy guidelines. Based on the findings, it is recommended that teachers and other prevention education providers should use activities which are more interactive such as small group discussions, role-play, and educational games. Furthermore, preventive education should be provided on a regular basis by means of multiple and booster sessions. Teachers and school administrators should constantly remind learners of the rule and regulations through multiple avenues.*

**Key words:** Drug abuse, alcohol abuse, Prevention education activities, Secondary schools.

## BACKGROUND

Drug and alcohol abuse is a pervasive problem world over. It affects all sectors of society in all countries. In particular, it affects the freedom and development of young people, the world's most valuable asset (UNDCP, 2002). It has the potential to negatively affect the social fabric of communities, hinder economic development and place additional burden on national public health care systems (Wylter, 2012). Like many other countries, the situation of drug and alcohol use among young people in Zambia is growing at an alarming rate (DEC, 2012). This is despite many interventions driven by Government ministries/agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations and faith-based organisations. The increase in the number of learners who are abusing drugs and alcohol in schools raises concerns about what is being done and how it is done to prevent it. There is an urgent need to address the situation. However, despite the escalating incidences of drug and alcohol abuse among school-going children, little was known concerning how prevention education activities and policy guidelines were implemented in Zambia's secondary schools. The purpose of this study therefore, was to establish practices and policies in drug and alcohol abuse prevention education in selected secondary schools in Zambia by exploring at how activities and policy guidelines were implemented. This Article reports on two of the objectives of the study, which were to:

- Explore how the drug and alcohol abuse prevention education activities were conducted in secondary schools.

- Explore how the drug and alcohol abuse prevention policy guidelines were implemented in secondary schools.

The study was significant in that its findings may be used by school administrators, teachers and other prevention practitioners to improve upon the quality of implementation of prevention activities and policies in secondary schools. In addition, the study contributed to the body of knowledge on school-based drug prevention education in Zambia.

The study was carried out in twenty (20) secondary schools located in five provinces namely; Lusaka, Copper belt, Southern, Eastern and Luapula. The provinces were chosen based on the prevalence rate of drug trafficking and abuse country-wide. According to Kusanthan (2014) (unpublished) prevalence of drug trafficking and abuse in Zambia is higher in Lusaka (87%), followed by Copper belt (58%), Eastern (44%), Southern (34%), Muchinga (33%), Central (26%) and North-western (20%). However, due to the sensitive nature of the study, it was difficult to collect information from some target groups who did not want to present data which was considered 'damaging' to their school reputation, as a result, caution must be exercised when generalizing the results of the study. However, the researcher relied on triangulation to validate data.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents reviewed literature related to drug and alcohol abuse prevention education activities and policy guideline implementation.

A number of studies have suggested that using extracurricular activities as a strategy may have prevention potential to reduce abuse of alcohol and other drugs in learning institutions (Eccles et al., 2003; Moore and Werch, 2005; Hoffmann, 2006). For example Eccles et al. (2003), found that young people who participate in extracurricular activities such as sports and performing arts had a better academic performance, lower risk of dropping out of school and reduced involvement in risk behaviours such as abuse of alcohol and other drugs. However, other studies have also shown that different activities may produce mixed results in young people drug abuse behaviours. For example some types of sports and athletic involvement may not protect young people from drug and alcohol abuse (Moore and Werch, 2005; Hoffmann, 2006).

In their studies, Tobler and Stratton, (1997); Cuijpers, (2002); Botvin and Griffin, (2003) have revealed that some methods or activities for drug and alcohol abuse prevention are less effective and counterproductive while others have shown to produce desired outcomes. For instance, they have concluded that using interactive activities is an effective way of delivering drug and alcohol abuse prevention education. Tobler et al. (1999) define interactive activities as those with higher degree of active participation by all learners. These activities include: small group discussions, role-play, educational games, cooperative learning, demonstrations, brainstorming, modeling, homework assignments, drama, motivational interviewing, behaviour rehearsal, debate and peer education. Less

interactive activities include; Lectures, use of ex-addicts, use of scare tactics, large group discussions, use of brochures posters and campaign T-shirts, video shows depicting negative consequences of drug use and display of drugs that are commonly used. For example Bangert-Drowns (1988) who conducted a meta-analysis of 33 school-based programmes found that programmes that used lectures as their only intervention had less influence on attitude and behaviour change than those which used small group discussion.

Similarly, a study conducted by Yamada et al. (2014) to evaluate the effectiveness of small group discussions in drug abuse prevention in Japan, found that more learners acquired skills to prevent drug abuse by participating in small group discussions than in a lecture.

MOE (2003) noted that interactive methods are used to stimulate active participation by the audience. They also allow practice of interpersonal competencies and desired behaviour.

Botvin and Griffins (2003) have argued that the more intensive the delivery system is, the greater the success of the prevention programmes. This is also supported by UNODC (2004) who stated that providers should ensure that there is sufficient contact time with the target group.

White and Pitts (1998) and Tobler (1999) have provided evidence indicating that prevention strategies that allow for frequent and multiple sessions or booster sessions are generally associated with success in drug abuse prevention. This is as opposed to a one-off sessions which may not have

an impact on individuals who are currently using drugs or alcohol (Myers et al., 2008).

Pertaining to drug and alcohol abuse prevention activities, it was generally unclear regarding how they were conducted in schools in Zambia. This study was therefore, set to find out how prevention activities in secondary schools in Zambia were conducted.

For drug abuse prevention policies to be effective, the people concerned need to know about them. Policy dissemination is a vital component of drug and alcohol abuse prevention implementation in every institution. It ensures that the people it is intended for follow the guidelines as indicated in it.

In its 'Student Code of Conduct Policy Guidelines,' the Virginia Board of Education in USA stipulates that "local school boards must provide written copies of the Standards of Students Conduct to students, parents and school personnel" (Atkinson, 2015:11). The Board further suggests that dissemination procedures may include special students orientation activities and class teachers reviewing the standards with their students in the classroom. Additionally, Gaustad (1993) asserts that ongoing communication of policy is more effective than one-shot policy message. Gaustad further suggests that a policy should be distributed in writing and discussed verbally with stakeholders. This is to ensure understanding of the provisions of the policy for effective implementation.

In the same vein, Evans-Whipp et al. (2013) reported on a study conducted on Flemish secondary school learners where it was found that schools with clearly formulated and communicated rules had fewer regular drinkers than schools with less clarity surrounding alcohol regulations. These studies generally demonstrate that well implemented prevention policies are crucial to prevention of drug and alcohol abuse in schools. However, it was not clear how drug and alcohol abuse prevention education activities and policy guidelines were implemented in Zambia's secondary schools.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to collect, analyze and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data. This design was preferred because it allows the researcher to describe the facts and characteristics of a given phenomenon, population, or area of interest (Merriam and Simpson, 1995). A total number of five hundred and fourteen (514) respondents participated in the study. This number included: 400 learners, 91 teachers and 12 head teachers selected from twenty secondary schools in five provinces. In addition, 6 District Education Board Secretaries (DEBS) and 5 Drug Enforcement Commission (DEC) officers located in the selected sites were included because they represented providers or implementers of prevention programmes and activities in schools. A multi-stage sampling was conducted in which both probability and non-probability procedures were employed. This involved sampling of provinces, districts, schools and finally

respondents. For instance, a qualitative purposive sampling technique was used to select teachers, head teachers, DEBS and DEC officers, while quantitative simple random and systematic random sampling was used to select learners. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, ethical precautions were taken in this study. This included explaining the purpose of the study, giving respondents chance to decide on whether to participate in the study and by keeping their names anonymous.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the light of escalating incidences of drug and alcohol abuse among learners, the study sought to explore how prevention education activities and policy guidelines were implemented in secondary schools, by answering the following research questions:

- (i) How were the drug and alcohol abuse prevention education activities conducted in secondary schools?
- (ii) How were the drug and alcohol abuse prevention policy guidelines implemented in secondary schools?

This is because how something is taught or learnt, has a bearing on the knowledge retention rate and overall behaviour change in young people. Firstly, the researchers were interested in finding out how prevention education activities were conducted in the selected secondary schools and secondly, how policy guidelines were implemented. Details of the findings and discussion are presented below.

### How drug and alcohol abuse prevention education activities were conducted in secondary schools

Concerning how the drug and alcohol abuse prevention activities were conducted in the selected secondary schools, the study found that they were conducted through a number of activities which included class room lectures, discussions, video shows, role plays and drama. Other ways were through anti-drug club meetings, games and sports, and special skill training programmes. For instance, 29.5% of learners indicated they learnt through lectures in the classroom, 18.5% through talks and discussions with visiting professionals, 16% through drama, and 14.7% through anti-drug club meetings, while the least activity mentioned were Video show (8.4%), life skills training (8.4%) and sports and games at 4.5%.

In response to the question regarding how they learnt about drug and alcohol abuse prevention in school, most of the learners interviewed during focus group discussions confirmed having learnt mainly through lectures in classrooms and talks or discussions with visiting professionals such as DEC officers and some NGOs programme officers. To this effect one participant said:

*“Sometimes the head teacher also talks to us about the bad things of smoking and drinking at school during assembly periods.”*

Another participant said:

*“They just teach us in class and tell us to write notes about effects of drug abuse.”*

In the same vein, 26.9% out of 91 teachers who participated in the study agreed with the learners views and added counselling to the list of the frequently conducted prevention activities. Similar findings were indicated by DEC officers. They confirmed lectures and large group discussions as their most frequently conducted activity for drug sensitization programme in schools. Additionally, they said they sometimes combined different activities in one session depending on the situation and the audience they were attending to. For example one officers explained that they normally conduct lectures and large group discussions because it was convenient for them when dealing with large numbers of learners, with limited time for interaction.

The above findings suggest that although a variety of activities were used, the most frequently conducted by both internal (teachers) and external providers (e.g. DEC officers) were lectures and discussions. The over reliance on these activities by providers may be the contributing factor to the limited success scored in reducing drug and alcohol abuse among learners in schools. This is because studies have shown that the use of activities or methods such as lecture, talks, large group discussions in drug and alcohol abuse prevention education is less effective and counterproductive (Tobler and Stratton, 1997; Cuijpers, 2002; Botvin and Griffin, 2003). These methods are largely one way communication, that is, from source to audience. In addition, they do not provide for high level of active participation by all learners. This is supported by Banget-drawn (1988) who found that programmes that used lecture method as their only

intervention had less influence on attitude and behaviour change regarding drug use. In this regard, the researchers suggest that prevention education providers should engage more in activities which promote interactivity such as life skills training, small group discussions, role play/drama, debate, educational games and sports. As rightly pointed out by Ministry of Education (2003) interactive teaching strategies should be encouraged because they stimulate active participation among learners in the classroom or group activity, therefore, they allow for the development of interpersonal competencies. Additionally, as rightly argued by Tobler et al. (1999), the more communication exists among teachers, learners and peers, the more learners will be prevented from abusing drugs and alcohol.

To further understand how prevention activities were conducted, the researchers explored the intensity and duration with which they were done. With regard to intensity, the majority (62.5%) of learners indicated that they occasionally learnt about drugs and alcohol abuse prevention. Occasionally in this regard means once in six months or the entire school year. When asked how often they learnt about drug and alcohol abuse education in school, some grade twelve learners in focus group discussions further stated that they only learnt about it in grade ten. For instance, one of them said:

*“As for me sir, I learnt about drugs in class, when I was in grade ten. That was almost two year ago. It takes a long time before you learn about drug in the classroom. But sometimes the head teachers talks about*

*drug abuse during school assembly when they catch some learners who drink beer in town.”*

This response may have been due to learners considering what was learnt in the formal grade ten Civic Education syllabi. As regard to duration, most (46.5%) of the learners said forty minutes was the average time under which prevention activities were conducted. Findings from teacher showed that (68.1%) said they occasionally taught about drug abuse prevention while on duration they indicated similar views with those of learners. Head teachers interviewed agreed with teachers' and learners' views on duration. When asked how often they visited each school in the locality they operated to conduct drug prevention educational activities, DEC officers interviewed justified their infrequent visit to schools, indicating that the large number of schools in their catchment area made it difficult to cover them frequently. In support of this response, one DEC officer said:

*“Well, to tell you the truth, there are so many schools to visit. For instance at this office, I am alone catering for the whole province, so you find that one cannot manage to carry out sensitization activities in all the schools in the province. In fact sometimes we go there when they write us indicating that they want our services. Some schools are only visited once in a year.”*

The above findings show that drug and alcohol abuse prevention activities were occasionally conducted in schools, and that

the average duration in which they were conducted was forty minutes. This is contrary to the expectation of the researchers considering that both internal and external providers conducted prevention activities in the selected schools. As earlier mentioned, the explanation for this phenomenon may lay in the learners' considering formal classroom lessons which are time-tabled. It is important to note that the intensity or frequency of prevention activities has a positive impact on learners. As Botvin and Griffins (2003) pointed out, the more intensive the delivery system is, the greater the impact on the learners' delay of the onset of drug use, reduction or complete abstinence from drugs and alcohol abuse. When learners are given more opportunities to hear and practice skills they are likely to internalize them. Prevention education providers in secondary schools should consider conducting interactive activities in multiple sessions or booster sessions.

## **How drug and alcohol abuse prevention policy guidelines were implemented in secondary schools**

Effective policy implementation is critical for adherence to the guidelines for drug and alcohol abuse prevention by stakeholders in an institution. Hence in this study, learners were asked to indicate ways in which they became aware of the rule and regulations concerning drug and alcohol use in the school, while teachers and head teachers indicated how policies were disseminated. Hence the focus was on exploring the issue of policy dissemination in secondary schools.

Learners indicated several ways in which this was done. These included: Distribution of school rules to learners upon first entry in to school, school rules were communicated to learners by the head teacher during school assemblies and that they were posted on the school or classroom notice board. Other ways indicated were that school rules were read out to learners by the class teachers in the classroom and through counselling sessions. For example out of four hundred (400) learners who responded to the questionnaire, 48.3% of them indicated copies of school rules and regulation were distributed to them upon first entry into school, while 41% said that they were communicated to by the head teacher during school assemblies. Table 1 below shows the distribution of responses.

However, some learners who participated in focus group discussions argued that there were mainly two ways through which they got to know about school drug rules and regulations. That is, through being communicated to them by head teacher during school assemblies and by distributing copies of school rules to them upon first entry to the school. They explain that the documents were attached to acceptance letters for new learners. Teachers and head teachers mentioned similar modes of dissemination. For example, Head teachers were asked how they disseminated rules and regulations about drug and alcohol use in school to learners. One head teacher said:

*“One of the functions of a head teacher in a school is to guide both learners and teachers to achieve school goals as well as*

*individual goal in a warm social and academic environment. So I do take time to talk to learners during assemblies to explain school rule relating to drug and alcohol use as well.”*

An analysis of these findings show that the common mode of dissemination is the distribution of the school rules and regulation document to learners upon first entry into school and head teachers communicating to learners during school assemblies. The findings are in line with the Students Code of Conduct Policy Guidelines by Virginia Board of Education in USA as indicated by Atkinson (2015) which stipulates that school boards must provide written copies of policy guidelines to learners, parents and school personnel. Although the researchers find this acceptable, these findings have revealed the limited ways in which prevention policy guidelines (school rules) were implemented in the selected schools. As young learners grow and explore life, they become vulnerable to all sorts of behaviours including using drugs and alcohol. Hence there is need to constantly remind them of the rule and regulations through multiple avenues. It is important that secondary school avail written policies to all stakeholders in the school, because as evidenced by Evans-Whipp et al., (2004) findings, schools with clearly formulated and communicated rules had fewer regular drinkers than schools with less clarity surrounding alcohol regulations.



## CONCLUSIONS

The background of this study emanates from the fact that despite the escalating incidences of drug and alcohol abuse among school children, little was known concerning how drug and alcohol abuse prevention education activities and policy guidelines were implemented in Zambia's secondary schools. Therefore, the aim of the study was to explore how these aspect of prevention education were implemented. The researchers conclude that although a variety of activities / methods namely; lectures, discussions, video shows, role plays, drama, anti-drug club meetings, games and sports, and special skill training programmes were used, to conduct prevention education, the most frequently used by both teachers and DEC officers were lectures and discussions. These activities are largely one way communication that is from the provider to the learners with very limited interaction. In addition prevention education activities were irregularly conducted. The study also concludes that the most commonly used ways of implementing policy guidelines in the selected secondary schools was through distribution of school rules to learners as they reported to school and head teachers communicating the rules to learners during school assemblies. This entails that there are very limited ways in which they implement policy guidelines.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Teachers and other providers of drug and alcohol abuse prevention education should use activities or methods which are more interactive such as small

group discussions, role-play, educational games, cooperative learning, demonstrations, brainstorming, modeling, homework assignments, drama, motivational interviewing, behaviour rehearsal, debate and life skills training. This is because they stimulate active participation of all learners and provides a platform for practicing attitudes and skills for behaviour change as opposed to less interactive activities.

- Drug and alcohol abuse preventive education should be provided on a regular basis by means of multiple and booster sessions. This is to ensure that information and skills are retained for a period long enough to delay or abstain from drug and alcohol use by learners. In addition, DEC and other external providers should conduct regular visits to schools to conduct prevention activities. This is because as pointed out by Botvin and Griffins (2003), the more intensive the delivery system is, the greater the impact on the learners' delay of the onset of drug abuse, reduction or complete abstinence from use.
- Teachers and school administrators should constantly remind learners of the rule and regulations through multiple avenues. It is important that secondary schools avail written policies to all stakeholders in the school, because as evidenced by Evans-Whipp et al., (2004) study, which revealed that schools with clearly formulated and communicated rules had fewer regular drinkers than schools with less clarity surrounding alcohol regulations.

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Distributed to us upon first entry to the school	193	48.3
Posted on the school notice board or classroom	28	7.0
Through counselling sessions	8	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## TABLES AND FIGURES

**Table 1: Learners’ responses on way through which they become aware of rules and regulations about drug and alcohol abuse in the school**

Learners awareness of policy	Frequency (N=400)	Percent
Read out to learners in the classroom	7	1.8
Communicated to us by head teacher during school assembly	164	41.0