

# Alcohol and Substance Abuse in Secondary Schools in Botswana: The Need for Social Workers in the School System

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## ABSTRACT

*This study adopts the descriptive research design with the aim of exploring social work interventions on alcohol and substance use amongst secondary school students in Botswana. Three research questions are formulated to guide the study. The population is secondary schools in Maun community, which is located in the northern part of Botswana. Structured questionnaire is administered on 100 students. Statistical Package for Social Sciences is used to analyse the data. The result reveals that secondary school students are involved in alcohol and substance abuse, and that prevention in schools is a top priority in spite of the ineffectiveness of hitherto intervention programmes in the area. Consequent upon the finding of the study, social workers are needed in the school system in Botswana to help students experiencing many psychosocial problems resulting from drug and substance abuse, neglect, homelessness and many more. It is the conclusion of this work that social workers intervention would bring significant changes in the school systems on the basis that by nature of their work they intervene at individual, family and societal levels.*

**Keywords:** Alcohol, substance abuse, students, social work intervention, Botswana.

## INTRODUCTION

Drug and alcohol abuse are some of the major burdens of societies in the 21st century. Globally students in schools are abusing drugs and alcohol (UNICEF, 2008; WHO, 2014). In recent times, African continent has witnessed an

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unprecedented problem of alcohol and drug abuse amongst students with its negative consequences. A few prior studies (such as Seloilwe, 2005; Julius, 2008; Moitlakgola and Amone-P'Olak, 2015; Ludick and Amone-P'Olak, 2016) have highlighted the prevalence of illicit drug use among university students in Botswana. From the above studies, it can be argued that Botswana is reeling under the scourge of drug and alcohol abuse. The problem is eating out young people away at an alarming pace but many are oblivious to this danger. Even though there is general agreement that drug abuse is not good for one's health, the wide spread of illicit drugs has not attracted much attention and campaigns in secondary schools like other social ills yet it poses an imminent threat to the societal fabric.

School children who are now deeply into drug use are struggling to come out (Letamo, Bowelo and Majelantle, 2016). Their lives are in tatters, with hopeless and uncertain future in the horizon. Concerns have been expressed by the media that organised syndicate of drug cartels are feasting out of the growing number of new drug converts, and the potent platforms are schools, where children go to learn (Gareikitse and Plattner, 2016). Worse still, students vulnerability has made them easy targets. It was perhaps, in response to the above concerns that the Botswana Government came with a liquor Act in 2004 where children under the age of 18 years are regarded as minor and are restricted to enter identified liquor areas.

However, even though there is a liquor Act, Julius (2008) in his study on alcohol and substance and behaviour of youth in Botswana observes that though there is age restriction, there are *shebeens* in the communities where young people access alcohol and drugs (*chibuku* "local Brew" and marijuana) without any restrictions. Furthermore, family has been noted as the most influential social aspect that compels adolescents to engage in alcohol and substance use (Pitso, 2004). Children raised in families where parents abuse drugs, observe the behaviour and in turn do what they have seen their parents doing.

Peltzer, Ramlahan and Gliksman (2009) assert that a child is brought into this world so that the society may create or mould it accordingly to fit well into existing way of life. Thus the key institution for transmission of traditional values is the family. As such, the success of socialization results in children cherishing similar beliefs, customs and expectations as those of their parents. However, for children who model parents using alcohol and substances results in socialization being a hazard to their upbringing. Moreover, scholars such as

Mupedziswa and Jacques (2011); Maundeni and Diraditsile (2016) have stated that a number of commendable efforts at policy, practice and research levels have been undertaken by stakeholders to address issues affecting vulnerable children. However, it is the contention of this study that, a lot more needs to be done in the school environment with regards to alcohol and drug abuse.

It is against this background that despite the fact that drug prevention in schools is a top priority in most African countries, the situation remains unabated. Several studies have shown that prevention programs have the potential of reducing drug use in adolescents. However, a lot needs to be done as in the form of a political will to address drug and alcohol abuse in secondary schools. As such, there is need to ascertain whether there are social work interventions for drug and substance abuse in secondary schools in Botswana. Whereas most previous studies in Botswana focused on examining alcohol consumption and its effects on sexual behaviour of youths, the aim of this current study is to explore social work interventions regarding drug and substance abuse in secondary schools. This study argues that in order to effectively deal with drug and substance abuse in the schools, greater emphasis should be on employing social workers in secondary schools to efficiently intervene on this humongous problem.

## METHOD

This study employed descriptive research design. The population is secondary schools in Maun community, which is located in the northern part of Botswana. The participants were 100 students selected from one of the secondary schools in Maun community. Owing to the fact that, there are five secondary schools in Maun. Simply random sampling technique was utilised to select the school that took part in the study. All the students were willing to participate in the study. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: demographic details; the prevalence of alcohol and substance abuse; early prevention interventions; and the student's knowledge regarding social work interventions. Nearly all the questions were closed ended, yet there was small sections were respondents were asked to describe substance abuse in more details. It is worth noting that, the questionnaire also included a number of vignettes accompanied by a series of closed ended questions.

The survey questionnaire was administered to a group of participants

with the anticipation of generating different views and opinions with a general focus on the topic being measured. This was helpful because group administered questionnaire cut back on time looking at the fact that we were allocated a short time for our data collection. Thereby, a group administered survey was beneficial on the grounds that we were able to collect data within the allocated time. The questionnaire was in English language, for the reason that students in junior schools are able to read and write in English. The first step in data collection involved approaching the school head in obtaining permission to administer a group questionnaire in the school, and the date to administer the questionnaire was set.

The researchers obtained information from Ministry of Education and Skills Development, which showed a total of five junior secondary schools in Maun village. Therefore, taking into consideration that, generally it is impossible to study the entire population, the researchers relied on sampling to acquire a section of the secondary school to observe. The study utilised the probability sampling technique to select the desired sample. Simple random sampling was used to select one school out of five secondary schools in Maun. In order to select classrooms, a list of classes (i.e form one, form two, and form three) was ordered in the sampled school and 10 classes were selected randomly from each grade. Then from the chosen 10 classes, 10 participants were selected using systematic random sampling.

The instrument being survey questionnaire was administered to selected participants in their classrooms by the researchers with the help of research assistant. It is of paramount importance to note that, prior to the survey, the school heads sent out letters to the participating learners' parents for consent and assent before being selected to participate or volunteer to take part in the study. The research assistant verified and collected all the signed letters sent to parents/guardians. The learners whose parents/guardian did not consent were not allowed to take part in the study. The students completed a self-administered questionnaire during study time in the afternoon which was collected upon completion. It was impressed upon all participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable. The researchers also emphasized to participants that the information collected was confidential and will be used only for purposes of the study. It was interesting to note that none of the participants withdrew from participating in the study after agreeing to participate. Statistical data in the

form of tabulations was used. The purpose of this current study was to explore social work interventions on alcohol and substance use amongst secondary school students. Since the study adopted quantitative approach the researchers used SPSS. Quantified data was analysed through the use of descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and charts. Furthermore, the researchers identified underlying meaning for open ended questions and summarised the data coming up with major themes. After presenting the results, we were in a position to evaluate and interpret their implications, especially with respect to the need for social workers to be employed in secondary schools.

### ***Ethical consideration***

Often, though not always, social research represents an invasion into people's lives, and wants people to reveal their personal information, as such people should be protected (Babbie, 2010). Therefore, a social research is directed by ethical considerations that the researcher is obliged to follow and apply. It was upon us to protect the respondents, as such, respondents were assured that information obtained from them will be kept confidential. No respondent was deliberately misled in order to get certain information. They were not forced neither manipulated to answer the questions on the questionnaire. As a result, they participated in the study voluntarily and freely. The researchers were committed to protecting the respondents from anything that would harm them, either physically or psychologically. Also the researchers did not unnecessarily consume respondents' time because we did not want to disturb their study time. The names of the respondents were not disclosed at any time to ensure that their anonymity is protected and to eliminate harm. The study was submitted to the University of Botswana Institutional Review Board (UB IRB) for ethical clearance and permission was sought and granted from UB IRB as well as the Ministry of Education, Skills and Development.

Nevertheless, the study findings should be cautiously interpreted due to some limitations. Firstly, using the quantitative research method was disadvantageous because it led to collection of much narrower information since respondents were mostly given options to choose from. This could have limited the reliability of the scales as respondents could have under reported alcohol use due to social desirability. Secondly, results were limited as they provide numerical descriptions rather than detailed narrative and generally provide less elaborate accounts of human perception. Lastly, the sample size was small as

this was not a national study, therefore limiting external validity of the findings to other secondary student's population in Botswana. However, it is worth noting that, the findings in this study are consistent with results of previous studies conducted elsewhere in Africa and are indicative of the current trend of drug and alcohol abuse among students. Nonetheless, there is a need for more research that may be wide in scope; in particular more longitudinal research covering other geographical areas. In order to disentangle the roles of individuals, family, and environment contexts regarding drug and alcohol abuse in secondary schools.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to explore social work interventions on alcohol and substance abuse use among secondary school students in Botswana in order to inform research, policies and social work interventions. It is of utmost importance to note that during analysis of the results a number of themes emerged. The effects of drug and substance abuse on the students, the school and the education system in general. Therefore, since most of the results were consistent with what has been extensively researched, the article was narrowed down to look at the issue from social work perspective. On this basis, the findings focus on how social workers can be brought to the picture to address drug and substance abuse amongst students in secondary schools.

### ***Demographic Data***

The participants were between 13-17 years of age. Fifty eight percent were females and 42% were males. The majority of the students were born in Maun, while only 12% were born outside Maun. The demographic characteristic shows that majority of the respondents were females while males only accounted for 42%. This may be suggested by the class allocation, because they were more females than their male counterparts in the classes. The dominant student age was 15 years as represented by 40%.

### ***The Prevalence of Alcohol and Substance***

It is apparent that alcohol and substance abuse is common among children in secondary schools in Botswana. The findings showed 20% prevalence of alcohol and substance abuse among form one student's participants. This may indicate

that form one students are more prone to alcohol abuse because they are new to the school environment; therefore exploring new phenomena could be appealing compared to their senior counterparts who have been in school for a little longer. As for the prevalence of students doing form two they were at 17% and form three students were at 10%. The data showed that 20% students had smoked cigarettes and 28% had also smoked marijuana. It is also worth noting that, there are potential or possible consequences of high levels of substance abuse. For instance, from the findings, students cited that alcohol affected them negatively such as performing poorly in school (29%), coming late to lessons (2%), misbehaving in the school (9%) and vandalizing of school property (5%). Further, the results showed that alcohol and substance prevalence rate at this particular Junior Secondary School was at 9%. This is in agreement with Hawkins, Catalano and Miller (1992) that substance abuse can have undesirable consequences at different levels of society.

One of the observed consequences involving school problems associated with substance abuse among young people include lowered commitment to education, declining grades, absenteeism from school, increased potential for dropping out of school and higher truancy. The prevalence rate in this present study therefore shows that there is problem of alcohol and substance abuse in the school; hence the need for social work interventions to address the situation before it gets out of control. It is the contention of this study that, if the status quo is maintained where there are no social work interventions in schools, other students who are non drinkers are likely to be classically conditioned. On the basis that, the emotional response may force them to end up taking alcohol and drugs believing that they are pleasant due to influence from people close to them such as peers and friends.

### ***Early Prevention Interventions***

The findings of this study indicate the existence of drug and substance abuse preventions in secondary schools. These preventions/interventions can be categorised into two, mainly universal and selective. The former is aimed at all students, whether they are at high risk for drug or not whilst the latter is aimed at students with high risk. The study findings are consistent with prior studies (Phorano, Nthomang and Ntseane, 2005; Moodley, Matjila and Moosa, 2012) which indicate that early efforts to prevent drug abuse were based on intuition than theory. In other words, many prevention approaches are designed to

dispense factual information, promote effective education or provide healthy alternatives to using drugs. Moreover, research by Letamo, Bowelo and Majelantle (2016) that has been conducted in testing efficacy of these informational approaches to prevention show that they may have impact on knowledge and anti-drug attitudes, but they have consistently failed to show any impact on use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs or on intentions to use drugs.

It can be deduced from the study findings and the literature that the primary goal of school based alcohol prevention programs in Botswana is to prevent or delay the onset of alcohol use, although some programs also seek to reduce the overall prevalence of alcohol use. Gareikitse and Plattner (2016) argues that school based alcohol interventions are designed to reduce risk factors for early alcohol use primarily at the individual level (eg, by enhancing student's knowledge and skills), although the most successful school based programs address social and environment risk factors (eg, alcohol related norms) as well. Some school based programs focus on the general population of adolescent (i.e., are universal programs). Whereas other target adolescents who are particularly at risk (i.e., are selective programs).

### ***Student's knowledge on social work interventions***

The data reveals that 51% of the students are aware of counselling as a social work service for those who abuse alcohol and substance. The counseling is provided to improve the social functioning and ultimately enhance the well being of students. Therefore, it can be concluded that counselling is known intervention that is given to students with alcohol and drug use problems. Pitso (2004) argues that information dissemination is an important school program because it helps in preventing or delaying the student's initiation into psychotropic substances, and reduces the chances of taking drugs. He further states that the effectiveness and efficiency is enhanced by providing normative information about the prevalence of drug use among students and prevailing attitudes towards drugs. Therefore, this suggests that, social workers should provide information on the impacts of alcohol and drugs through presentations, outreach, and most importantly giving information that answers the attitudes and norms of the people towards alcohol and drugs. As such this will result in students not imitating what they have observed about the use of alcohol and drugs. Evidence gleaned from official documents anecdotes that social workers are already over-stretched in



their daily work. They work under stressful situation with minimal resources at their disposal, yet their jurisdiction covers a number of areas. Hence, the need for social work to be employed in schools to specifically focus on many issues that affects children in the school set up.

### **The Need For School Social Workers Intervention**

It is the contention of this study that the need for social workers to be placed in schools is not a new argument. For example Ratsatsi (2000); Maundeni and Ntseane (2004), Diraditsile (2012) have highlighted that the need to employ social workers in schools in Botswana. Their arguments is centered around the fact that many children face numerous psychosocial problems that affect their well-being and teachers are not able to cope with the situation owing to the fact that they are not professionals when it comes to dealing with behavioural and emotional problems. In the current study, the findings also suggest that the presence of social workers in schools will best address student's alcohol and drug abuse as they will be working closely with students on a day to day basis to solve their issues unlike being located far from the students which hampers their efforts of assisting students on time.

Thus, in order for the behaviour, the individual and environment to be changed and monitored there is need for a close convenient location for the social worker and the student on alcohol and drug problem to have sessions or meetings. This study argues that when social workers are conveniently located to assist students with alcohol and substance use problems, excellent results, like students reducing or quitting alcohol are prominently possible. Miller and Plant (2004) view social worker's availability to enhance efforts of giving feedback that can include information about the individual's drug use and problems from screening instrument such as ASSIST (Alcohol, Substance, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test), information about substance related risks and harms.

### ***Social workers in the fight against drug abuse in schools***

Based on the results of the study, it argues that social workers are needed in school to fight against drug and substance. Owing to the fact that substance abuse can be one of the most difficult problems to detect, it is very secretive as those involved are often ashamed or secretive about their drug use. As such, social workers are better placed to deal with drug use because a student abusing

drugs may seek help for depression but conceal an underlying alcohol or substance abuse addiction. Therefore, social workers would be able to tease out these possible underlying issues and help the client obtain proper assistance in whatever way necessary. The following demonstrates some of the roles that social work would perform whilst working in the school set up to address the issue of drug and substance abuse.

### ***Identification and assessment***

It is of paramount importance to note that social workers are trained to identify and assess needs of their clients beyond the scope of their initial presenting problem. One of the initial tasks of a social worker in a school would be to perform a comprehensive assessment on a client, taking into account potential substance and alcohol abuse issues, even if the client does not disclose the problem. Social workers would assess substance abuse problems in both voluntary, or self referred and involuntary or mandated clients. One integral component of the profession is to complete a comprehensive assessment toward the development of a service plan for recommended placement into an appropriate treatment program. Thus to say, social workers may not be required to provide direct care, but they are required to recognise the warning signs and suggest a course of treatment to client during or directly after assessment.

### ***Direct treatment***

In the developed countries such as Japan and western countries, social workers act as substance abuse counselors in a variety of settings, including hospitals, drug treatment facilities and mental health clinics. Perhaps African countries such as Botswana and elsewhere can draw from valuable lessons from Asian countries with regards to incorporating social workers in schools. In USA, according to Holstead, King and Miller (2015) although all graduate social work programs include substance abuse education, many social workers decide to continue their studies to obtain a certification in alcohol and substance abuse counseling, especially if they wish to work specifically in this field. In that way, social workers will not only be providing identification and assessment services, they will also work directly with students suffering from substance abuse disorders, such as providing individual and group counseling, collecting urine samples if they work in a substance abuse facility or linking clients with other services, such as food ratio, housing, just to mention a few.

## ***Outreach***

There is no doubt that schools in Botswana have hardworking and committed teachers, but schools do not exist in a vacuum (Maundeni and Ntseane, 2004). It is on this basis that social workers may act as substance abuse educators in schools. They will be able to make presentations on substance abuse prevention, risk associated with drug abuse, and to provide counselling where necessary. Currently, teachers are not able to do all these because their core business is teaching; their interest is on delivering material to students. In addition, social workers working in schools will be able to link students with other services outside the school environment. This will be handy as it will allow for easy monitoring and addressing drug and substance abuse effectively in schools.

## ***Implications for Research***

In Botswana, evidence gleaned from numerous official document anecdotes that teachers are overwhelmed with their core business and they do not have time to do other extra activities in the school system. Therefore, there is a gap in terms of research to inform policies and practice intervention. In fact research undertaken by non-governmental bodies and students at the university level is normally small scale locality specific (Diraditsile, 2017). Most research findings are not known to policy makers or people who influence policy making. As a result, most of these findings never reach the market place of ideas hence limiting their value. On this basis, it is considered inadequate for policy purpose as it is not national in character. That being said, having social workers at schools will address the aforementioned challenge. For the reason that social worker working in schools would participate in substance abuse prevention research, such as helping with the development of empirically validated intervention and treatment strategies. Armed with empirical research findings, social workers and other human services professional in Africa could influence political decisions and also advocate effectively for appropriate policy formulation and implementation.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored social work intervention on alcohol and substance use amongst students in Botswana. From the literature review it was clear that drug and substance use by students is a worldwide problem which is on the increase.

There is need to enhance empirical knowledge on school social work interventions. The findings reveal that social work interventions are not widely known. It is worth to note that having informal discussions with social workers suggests that they are reluctant to assist in this issue as they are not situated in schools and that is making their intervention ineffective. It is the conclusion of this study that, there is a growing need for schools in African countries to provide programs and services to students at risk and to address problems such as child abuse, teenage pregnancy, school violence, drugs, alcohol and homelessness. Any attempt to address the above mentioned psychosocial problems in schools without the involvement of social workers will not yield any results to enhance children well-being, with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable children.

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