

Full Length Research Paper

Parental Involvement in the Management of Drug Abuse Crisis among Children and Youth in Kenya

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Abstract

The World Drug Report 2019 shows that in 2017, an estimated 271 million people, or 5.5 per cent of the global population aged 15–64, had used drugs in the previous year and that the drug problem had reached crisis level. The report indicated that the crisis affected young people irrespective of gender. Substance use in early age leads to many negative outcomes in adulthood including compromised work efficiency, poor family relationships and disrupted educational achievement. Though drug abuse is a major concern worldwide, the strategies adopted to address it do not succeed when they don't factor the range of factors that impact young people's lives, key among them parental involvement. Parental involvement refers to the amount of participation a parent has when it comes to a child's life. Research has shown that parents play a major role in preventing substance abuse among children and youth, including those who have initiated drug use. This paper is a desktop review of research and reports on parental involvement and its impact on management of drug and substance abuse (DSA) among children and youth with a view to making recommendations to address the problem. The paper concludes that parental monitoring and supervision of their children's friendships are critical for DSA prevention. It thus recommends that parents should set rules for their children's activities and monitor their friends as well as social engagement to ensure appropriate behavior and reduce chances of involvement in drug and substance abuse. law, trade in counterfeit alcohol brands that is not properly regulated, devolution of alcohol control function, litigations against the Act, and inadequate knowledge concerning the law.

Introduction

The World Drug Report (2019) indicates that drug use continues to exact a significant toll, with valuable human lives

and productive years of many being lost. The report shows that while 35 million people worldwide suffer from drug use disorders, only 1 in 7 receive treatment. Additionally, the report also shows that in 2017, an estimated 271 million people, or 5.5 per cent of the global population aged 15–64, had used drugs in the previous year, similar to the number estimated in 2016. However, this meant that the number of people who were using drugs in 2019 was 30 per cent higher than it was in 2009, when 210 million had used drugs in the previous year. The most widely used drug worldwide continues to be cannabis, with an estimated 188 million people having used the drug in 2016 according to the World Drug Report 2019. Illicit drugs used included marijuana/hashish, cocaine including crack, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, or prescription-type psychotherapeutics used non-medically.

In the US, the abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs are the leading causes of preventable and premature deaths and disabilities. For example, in 2007, an estimated 19.9 million Americans aged 12 or older were reported to be illicit drug users (NSDUH, 2007), representing 8 per cent of that age group. Of this number, 14.4 million had used marijuana while 2.1 million (0.8 per cent of the population) had used cocaine.

Different researches have shown that people who inject drugs (PWID) experience multiple health consequences such as increased risk of fatal overdose and blood-borne infectious diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis C. According to the World Drug Report (2019), the number of people who inject drugs worldwide stood at 11.3 million in 2017, with 43 per cent of these residing in just three countries - China, the Russian Federation and the United States. The same report found that deaths attributed to the use of drugs remained unacceptably high with 585,000 deaths in 2017. More than half of those deaths were due to untreated Hepatitis C leading to liver cancer and cirrhosis; while almost one third were attributed to drug use disorders.

Prevalence of Drug Abuse In Kenya

A survey conducted by the National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) dubbed Status of Drugs and Substance Abuse among Primary School Pupils in Kenya in 2019 revealed that drug use remains prevalent despite intensified attempts by the government to create awareness on effects of drug use. The survey, which covered 3307 pupils from 177 primary schools across 25 counties, revealed that children as young as 4 years were abusing drugs. The children were most likely to use drugs during school holidays, on their way home and during weekends. The most common sources of drugs were cited as small shops and bars near schools, friends and school workers. This implies that parents are also involved in the supply of substances and drugs to the children.

These findings collaborated those of a study by Kiringa (2015) on drug use by pupils in public schools in Kitui West district, Kitui County in Kenya, which established that the commonly abused drugs are tobacco, alcohol, khat and marijuana.

Risk Factors for Children and Youth Substance Use

While different factors, including genetic, psychiatric disorders, high or low socio-economic status, low self-esteem, or poor self-control, determine the risk of drug use among children, the main determinant is the extent to which the individual believes that these substances might cause self-harm.

In a national survey on drug use and health (NSDUH, 2013) in the US, young people aged 12 – 17 years were asked whether they thought they risked harming themselves if they used various substances, measured on a scale ranging from

great risk, moderate risk, slight risk, to no risk. In the survey, 65.7% perceived great risk in smoking one or more packs of tobacco cigarettes per day; 63.9% perceived great risk in having four or five alcoholic drinks nearly every day; 39.7% perceived great risk in having five or more drinks once or twice a week; 43.6% perceived great risk in smoking marijuana once or twice a week; 26.5% perceived great risk in smoking marijuana once a month; and 80% and 78% respectively perceived much higher risks for heroin and cocaine.

Notably, it was found that use of these substances was much lower among youth who perceive them as conferring great risk than among those who did not think they posed a great risk. These findings indicate that increasing children's awareness of potential harm of using substances is a strong deterrent of drug abuse.

The Role of Parents in Drug Use or Avoidance

Different studies have noted that there is an inverse relationship between school success and substance abuse (Cook and Moore, 2000). Moreover, research has pointed to correlation between the school and the social context in the phenomenon of abuse. The Social Ecological Theory (SET) developed by Berkowitz and Perkins (1986) explains that the causes of substance abuse among young people are within the social or home environment. The central tenet of SET is that individual behaviors are mainly the result of socialization, and therefore the social institutions that shape it must change if the individual is to stop drug use. The theory posits that many factors in the home environment can influence a child's attitudes and propensity to use drugs, which include: living with parents who abuse alcohol and other drugs, witnessing fights at home, parental neglect, parental depression or psychopathology, parents providing mixed messages about drugs, and permission for unlimited access to social networking.

In Kenya, the study by Kiringa (2015) found that some of the drug abusers come from families where local brews are made, cannabis is available, and in many cases, where children are given excess pocket money which they end up using in purchasing drugs. The study concluded that drug abuse as a problem can be handled by both the teachers and parents in collaboration while the government should enforce laws to reduce the vice in schools.

In addition to the home environment, Kenyan children particularly students in many schools face a great risk of being recruited into the abuse of drugs and substances by peers and drug barons / firms engaged in the production of various brands of unsafe products.

In the survey conducted by NACADA in 2019 (in collaboration with Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA)), it was found that pupils from families where one or both parents or guardians use drugs or substances of abuse were more likely to use the same, a finding which is in agreement with a study by Maithya and Marais (2015). Also very likely to use drugs were pupils with knowledge of a friend or schoolmate using drugs or those who accompany parents to events where alcohol or any drug is being served.

Common risk factors mentioned in the report include weak parental guidance and enforcement of laws, family conflicts, exposure to advertisements of drugs, negative role modeling by teachers, and existence of bars or small shops near schools.

These findings are collaborated by a study by NSDUH (2007) which shows that parent substance use disorders (SUDs) can have negative impacts on children, including lower socio-economic status, more difficulties in academic and social

settings, and family dysfunctioning. SUD is characterized by inability to control use of the substance; failure to meet personal, home and work obligations; and poor health.

Based on combined 2009 to 2013 data (NSDUH, 2013), about 8.7 million (12.3 percent) children aged 17 or younger lived in US households with at least one parent who had an SUD. About 7.5 million (10.5 percent) children lived in households with at least one parent who had an alcohol use disorder, and about 2.1 million (2.9 percent) children lived in households with at least one parent who had a past year illicit drug use disorder.

Another factor that pushes drug, as was found by a study Adan (2016) on students in public secondary schools in Wajir County, is peer pressure coupled with lack of school policies on drug and substance abuse and parental encouragement due to poverty. In another study targeting public secondary schools in Nairobi, Cheloti and Gathumbi (2016) established that lack of participation by parents and guardians was frustrating drug and substance abuse intervention efforts in schools. The study concluded that use of school community was not effective in DSA intervention and thus recommended that head teachers should collaborate with parents to address use of drugs in schools.

Parental Involvement and Drug Abuse Interventions Among Children and Youth

Building on the findings highlighted above, it emerges that early intervention to address the factors often has a greater impact than later intervention when it comes to helping children avoid drug abuse (NACADA, 2019).

This means that parental monitoring and supervision of friendships are critical for drug abuse prevention. One way parents can do this is by setting rules for children activities, monitoring friends and controlling the amount of time spent in social networking. Parents must also offer praise for appropriate behavior.

Parents should also act as role models to their children by restricting drug use when they are with their children and avoiding storing substances and drugs at home.

Parental monitoring of children's behavior and strong parent-child relationships are positively correlated with decreased drug use and abuse among learners (Meyer and Cahill, 2004).

According to the NSDUH report (2007), parents play an important role in preventing substance abuse among children and youth. For example, talking with a child about the dangers of substance use and showing disapproval of such behavior is a key factor. It is also essential that parents stay involved in a child's day-to-day activities. According to the NSDUH (2013) national survey, most adolescents aged 12 to 17 believed that their parents would strongly disapprove of their having one or two drinks of an alcoholic beverage nearly every day (89.6 percent), smoking one or more packs of cigarettes per day (92.1 percent), and using marijuana or hashish once a month or more (93.3 percent).

A similar study by NIDA (2018) shows that in the US, about 90% of the youth believe their parents would strongly disapprove of their using substances, including tobacco, cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana. Most importantly, youths aged 12 to 17 who believed their parents would strongly disapprove of their using specific substances were less likely to use these substances than those who believed their parents would somewhat disapprove or neither approve nor disapprove. Among youths who perceived their parents would disapprove of smoking one or more packs of tobacco cigarettes a day, 4.6% of them smoked. In sharp contrast, of youths who believed their parents were not strongly opposed, 31.9%

smoked at a rate of 7 times higher. The same differences were found for marijuana use. Among youth who perceived a strong level of disapproval of marijuana use, 4.3% used, but among those who thought their parents were not strongly opposed, 31% used the drug. This indicates that when parents do not set behavior rules for their children, chances of abusing drugs are high.

Based on these findings, parental intervention with risk factors often has a greater impact than later intervention when it comes to helping a child move away from drug problems and drug abusing peers.

A report by SAMHSA (2008) on drug use and health clearly shows that there is a causal relationship between parental involvement and the prevention of drug and alcohol use in adolescents and teens. According to the report, parents who want to keep their children off drugs need to remain directly involved in their children's day-to-day lives and at the same time remain honest about the perils and negative effects of drug use.

The involvement of parents in the lives of children is however often a challenge since most parents have limited time to spend with their children, especially in urban areas where most of them are employed. In addition, research findings reveal that parents are often not good role models for their children, and are also not supportive when teachers are disciplining students who abuse drugs on school property (Maithya & Marais, 2015).

According to this study, failure to involve all stakeholders in the war against drug abuse particularly parents who are role models to the children will mean that more and more adolescent children will risk losing their lives in addition to dropping out of school. Additionally, one of the challenges reported by teachers in dealing with drug abuse among students in secondary schools was how to monitor children out of school especially in day secondary schools. For these students, intensive counseling which may not be available in the school is important and particularly by parents.

As such, it seems logical that society should think in terms of preventive measures to address drug abuse among young people while at the same time encouraging parents to play their role in equipping children with values that make children serve the society better.

Further emphasizing the role of parents in children's behavior was the finding in the NIDA (2018) survey which indicated that if parents frequently helped with homework, the illicit drug use by youth was 7.6%, but was 18.1% among youth who reported that their parents "seldom" or "never" helped. Cigarette smoking and binge alcohol use were found to be lower among youths whose parents "always" or "sometimes" helped with homework while youth who spent a lot of time on social media websites were far more likely to use drugs.

These findings are in line with those of Coombs and Landsverk (1988) who emphasize that behaviors are enhanced when behavioral expectations are clearly specified and reinforced with praise, encouragement, and other positive rewards. Further, they also argue that parents have great potential for influencing the behavior of their adolescent children. This therefore calls for more involvement, attention and follow-up of children by their parents and guardians to reduce or eliminate possibilities of their predisposition to DSA addiction.

On the reverse side, as was documented by Baumrind (1975), neglectful and permissive parenting leads to psychological disorders and anxiety in adolescents and youths, which are risk factors for substance abuse. Another study by Timpano, Carbonella, Keough, Abramowitz, and Schmidt (2015) shows that parenting styles that include low parental

involvement, inconsistent discipline, and poor monitoring of adolescents can lead to teens having mood disorders and depression, making them susceptible to peer influence as well as drug and alcohol abuse.

Studies by Mussen, Maccoby and Martin (1983) and Timpano et. al (2015) show that authoritative parenting is associated with the best outcomes regarding adolescent substance use, and neglectful parenting with the worst, with children of permissive parents reporting more substance use than children of authoritative parents.

However, according to a study conducted by Cheloti, Okoth and Obae (2018) in Nairobi County, most parents are not aware of their specific parenting styles while others apply different styles haphazardly with the hope of arriving at a disciplined set of children.

This calls for initiatives to create awareness among parents on the parenting styles that work particularly in relation to DSA.

Way Forward and Recommendations

The literature reviewed in this paper shows that parents play a significant role in the lives of their children particularly in relation to drug and substance abuse. Consequently, to address the DSA menace among children and youth effectively, there is need for involvement of parents and other stakeholders in collaborative intervention and prevention strategies. It is also evident that early intervention to address risk factors often has a greater impact than later intervention when it comes to influencing children developmental path toward positive behavior. In view of the foregoing, the paper recommends that:

One, Parents be trained on parenting styles that are effective as well as the various substances of abuse so that they can equip their children with positive values and to understand their children's needs. In addition, the parents should be empowered to foster healthy environments in their families where children will feel free to express themselves and their problems with a view to helping them where necessary.

Two, parental monitoring and supervision of friendships should be encouraged as critical components for drug abuse prevention. This can be done through setting of rules for children's activities, monitoring friends and social engagements, limiting social networking, praising appropriate behavior, and maintaining consistent discipline guided by family rules. Such would reduce children's involvement in risky behaviors and especially drug and substance abuse.

Three, parents should be actively involved in their children's day-to-day activities. These would include talking with them about the dangers of substance use and showing disapproval of substance abuse.

Four, parents should actively collaborate with school authorities in monitoring an understanding the behavior of their children. On the same note, schools can organize for scheduled meetings in collaboration with parents to interact and guide students especially on matters affecting educational outcomes. This is because failure to meet academic targets can lead to stress which is a risk factor for drug abuse. Such a move would also give an opportunity for school administrators to sensitize the parents on the risks of negative modelling and keeping drugs at home.

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