

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the results of this study. In this chapter, the findings of the study will be discussed in relation to the literature review. Furthermore, the following aspects are discussed: age and grade for use of substances, nature of substances abused by male adolescents, mode of substance use, progression in the use of substances, setting for substance use, maintaining the substance abuse habit, reasons for substance abuse, developmental stage of adolescence, depression, family structure, parenting style, educational level of parents, availability of substances, learned behavior, media, the school environment, effects of substance abuse; social effects, health effects, and economic effects.

AGE AND GRADE FOR USE OF SUBSTANCES

This study supported the notion that adolescence is the developmental stage during which adolescents start abusing substances. That is, male adolescents who are between 12 and 15 years of age abuse substances. This was also confirmed by previous studies that the mean age for the onset of substance abuse is 12. In addition, this study found that two adolescents began using substances at an even earlier age of 11 while still in grade 6. The participants exposed their developing body to substances at an earlier age than normally expected.

MODES OF SUBSTANCE USE

The modes of using substances include swallowing, drinking, sniffing, smoking and inhaling. The majority of the participants reported that they drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes and cannabis. Only one participant reported that he inhaled the smoke coming from a pill of heroin that was put under a burning bottle. However, that of burning a bottle and putting a pill of nyaope was a new mode of use in this study.

PROGRESSION IN THE USE OF SUBSTANCES

There is evidence of progression in the use of legal and illegal substances. Participants reported having used alcohol and then cannabis. While previous studies indicated that adolescents begin experimenting with the casual use of less serious substances often referred to as gateway substances and then progressing to illegal substances, some participants in the current study began with hard substances such as cannabis and heroin and then used more socially acceptable substances like alcohol and tobacco.

SETTING FOR SUBSTANCE USE

The setting for substance abuse in this study varied from home, school toilets, shops, butchery, tavern, bush and the mountain. This study revealed that substances are also sold at the butchery in rural areas. This then raises the question of lack of monitoring to ensure that entrepreneurs only sell goods that are stipulated in their business licenses. Furthermore, this study indicated that learners buy cigarettes at the tuck shop next to their school. This also raises serious concerns about a lack of monitoring products that are sold to learners during breaks at the tuck shops next to the schools. The use of substances in school toilets also raises concerns of monitoring and control in schools. That also endangers safety in schools for both the educators and the learners.

MAINTAINING SUBSTANCE ABUSE HABIT

Adolescents obtain substances by various means. These range from using pocket money, change, stealing money, doing part-time jobs, assisting people to carry groceries and obtaining substances from their friends. In some instances, they also contribute money in order to buy the substances. This means that they do not struggle to buy substances; they have found the means to

do this. Some participants even did part-time jobs to earn money to buy substances. Their intentions of doing part-time jobs are positive in that they gain working experience, but they do not use the money wisely. Furthermore, their idea of each member contributing to buy substances is not positive because it can encourage them to steal money at home in order to buy substances. As previously mentioned, friends do contribute to substance abuse, because they are the ones who will buy substances if their fellow friends do not have the money to do so.

The participants also seem to abuse their pocket money. This implies a lack of responsibility by these adolescents, in the sense that they are not using the money provided to them for its intended purpose. They might end up growing up as irresponsible parents who will not be able to use their own salaries or money earned efficiently. As a result they may fail to provide for themselves and their own families. Parents are also giving their children money and not monitoring how they use it. This causes many adolescents to fall prey to substance abuse because they have the means to buy them. They know that their parents will not ask them how they spend their pocket money.

REASONS FOR SUBSTANCE USE

Participants in this study reported various factors that contributed to their use of substances, these include personal, family and environmental factors.

Developmental stage of adolescence

Participants start abusing substances during the adolescent stage, Some adolescents in this study reported that they wanted to experiment with substances. They wanted to taste the substances and feel high after using them. Some participants in this study further indicated that they had a strong desire for substances. That is because these substances are easily available in their communities and they afford to buy them. Thus, they were able to satisfy their desire to use

these substances. In addition to that, some participants indicated that they wanted to be happy because they saw people laughing after using substances.

Depression

Depression also seems to be one of the reasons for substance abuse among adolescents. The findings revealed that adolescents are overwhelmed by the challenges in their own lives, their families, and the society in which they live. These adolescents become stressed if their needs are not met. This then leads them to abuse substances in order to forget their problems. They then resort to substance abuse as a way of coping with their problems, not realizing that their use of substances will not solve their problems. Instead, the use of substances aggravates their problems

Family structure

The family structures of these adolescents vary from single parent, nuclear, step parent, extended, up to child-headed families. The majority of the participants do not have father figures at home, and this leads to male adolescents expressing a need to want to know their fathers. Some participants even indicated that their fathers were not taking care of them. As a result, these male adolescents looked up to the behavior modeled by other male figures in their environment and media. Participants from nuclear family also used substances even though they had a father figure in their family. This may imply that their fathers did not guide them or even advise them not to use substances.

Parenting style

Parenting style also contributes to substance abuse. Parents who allow their children to go to taverns without reprimanding that type of behavior encourage their children to abuse substances. Adolescents from such families are free to use substances because no one corrects

such behaviour or even guides them. This confirms findings of previous studies that permissive parenting styles contribute to substance abuse.

Adolescents who are in conflict with their parents end up not being able to communicate with their parents. That puts them at risk of abusing substances because they will then spend most of their time with friends who will give them the love and support that they lack at home. Their peers become the only people with whom they are able to communicate. Furthermore, these adolescents may end up not being able to relate well with others and grow up as parents who will not be able to relate well with their own children. This strained parent-child relationship frustrates these adolescents and they end up being depressed.

Availability of substances

The findings revealed that despite the high rate of poverty, the adolescents in this study can afford to buy substances which seem readily available in their communities. Therefore, one may assume that there are too many outlets that sell alcoholic beverages and other substances and that adolescents have the means to buy these substances. Furthermore, it implies that laws prohibiting the sale of substances to minors are not implemented and adhered to in rural areas. This then contradicts government strategy of providing services to previously disadvantaged areas and ensuring that all policies and laws protecting the rights of children and minors are adhered to at all times. In addition to that, it seems that parents do not always monitor their children during adolescence. There is lack of monitoring and control from both the parents and Liquor boards. The Liquor boards do not ensure that the liquor act is implemented in shops and taverns in rural areas. The lack of parental control can be ascribed to the migrant labor system as some parents are compelled to work far away from home, leaving their children in the care of grandparents who cannot monitor the movement of their grand children. The role of community policing forums becomes questionable in this context. This may mean that such structures are either not established or although established, are not functional.

Media

The media play a role in the use of substances by adolescents. Alcohol adverts encourage adolescents to have a desire to use substances. These adverts are appealing to adolescent's and have a persuasive effect on them. Adverts make adolescents aware of new alcoholic beverages and tobacco products which they may obviously want to taste or test. Adolescents are in a vulnerable stage in which they are likely to be persuaded by these messages. Some participants in this study also indicated that alcohol adverts encourage people to want to use substances. All these factors have a negative impact on the lives of the adolescents.

The school environment

Adolescents abuse substances in schools even though they have signed the code of conduct that prohibit the possession and use of substances on the school premises. The high prevalence of substance abuse among adolescents makes the school environment unsafe to both the educators and learners. That is why learners are unruly and do not respect educators and fellow learners. That ultimately leads to poor academic performance. These adolescents fail tests, repeat the grades, and ultimately might drop out of school. Thus, effective teaching and learning cannot take place if learners are under the influence of substances. This revelation was also confirmed in other studies, namely that substance abuse has a negative effect on the academic performance of learners. The participants in this study reported that their use of substances made them fail and repeat grades. Furthermore, they regret their use of substances. Furthermore, failure and dropping out of school by these adolescents also add to the high rate of illiterate and unemployed people in our country. That also aggravates the already existing problem of illiteracy, unemployment and poverty in rural areas.

EFFECTS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The participants know the effects of taking substances and even regret their use thereof, but they continue using substances despite the negative effects of these substances. Their knowledge of substances is limited in the sense that they are not aware that alcohol and cigarettes are substances even though they are socially acceptable. Thus they are not aware of the other life-threatening effects of these substances. The use of substances will shorten their life span and impact negatively on the already depleted scarce health resources.

Social effects

The use of substances by adolescents has a negative impact on the welfare of society. If these adolescents are not monitored, they end up getting involved in criminal activities such as robbery, theft, rape and murder. Their use of substances endangers the lives of both their families and other people in their communities. They become dangerous to everybody. They end up being rejected by the very society that is supposed to nurture and guide them. That implies moral decay. These adolescents end up being arrested for their criminal activities and add to the already existing high rate of inmates in prisons. Furthermore, they will have criminal records even before completing matric; that puts them at risk of being expelled from schools, not being accepted in tertiary institutions or securing employment because of a bad criminal record. Their future may therefore be doomed due to their substance use. These criminal activities also undermine democracy, good governance and have a negative impact on our country as mentioned in the previous section.

Health effects

Adolescents in this study were dependent on substances and unable to stop using these substances. They reported that they want to stop using substances and that they need someone to assist them. This means that adolescents are aware that substances are dangerous,

they have tried to stop using them but they could not do so. These adolescents are helpless and desperate and this may put them at risk of further abusing substances if they do not get help timeously. Furthermore, they may fall prey to the wrong people who may give them the wrong information if they do not know where to get help. These findings also reveal that adolescents are not informed about the services available in their communities. Furthermore, this means that the services of life orientation educators, social workers and psychologists are not visible or accessible. If these services are indeed available, these learners are not using them. This then implies that there is a need for full time psychologists and social workers in schools who will assist these adolescents with challenges that they face on a daily basis. Furthermore, this study proves that there are no youth centers or recreational facilities in rural areas where adolescents meet and discuss the challenges that they face. This implies that the only recreation facility that was available to teenagers in this study is taverns. Thus the health of these teenagers is at risk.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the findings of this study were discussed in detail and related to previous studies. Adolescents use both legal and illegal substances. Substance abuse among adolescents is caused by personal, family and environmental factors. Substance abuse does not only affect the person using them, they also affect other people. Thus, substance abuse by the adolescents has health, economic and social implications. The next chapter will outline and discuss the conclusion, limitations, recommendations and reflections of this study.