

The Negative Influence of Drugs and Alcohol Abuse in South African Schools

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Abstract:- The article highlights the negative influence of drugs and alcohol abuse on school safety and suggests solution to the problem. Literature study and the focus group interviews revealed that drugs and alcohol abuse causes school violence, and learners' absenteeism. It is further highlighted that due to drugs abuse, most schools experience a problem of learner fights, gang fights, and learner mental hallucination. Learners who abuse drugs and alcohol have a tendency to be absent from classes, play school truancy or have a pattern of sneaking in and out of school premises. They sneak out from school premises to purchase and consume drugs and alcohol, supplied by drugs vendors and taverns in the school surroundings. Learners who are absent from classes are also found in school toilets where they take in drugs or are drunk. Thereafter they go to classes or loiter around the school and cause disruption. The consumption of marijuana (dagga) and other drugs, including alcohol alters the state of mind, causes disciplinary problems and also contribute to poor academic performance.

The article highlights the threatening high level drugs and alcohol abuse by learners in South African schools. It is not only fellow learners in this scenario whose safety is at risk, teachers as well are likely to become victims of the violent learners. The researcher applied the qualitative interpretive paradigm. Learners who participated were interviewed in focus groups and this informed the researcher about the findings on the influence of drugs and alcohol abuse.

Keywords:- Drugs and Alcohol Abuse, Violence, Learners, Poor Academic Performance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The abuse of drugs and alcohol is a worldwide problem that also manifests in schools, that includes South African schools. Alcohol and drugs abuse are one of the major causes of violence in schools (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, The Sowetan, 2015). Dagga (marijuana), glue, mandrax, and nyaope are among the drugs which learners are addicted to. Violent behavior, which includes fights with knives, stabbings, and shootings, may occur after the excessive consumption of drugs and alcohol (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Nieuwenhuis (2007) affirms that in some areas and in certain South African township schools it is not unusual for boys to carry knives and guns to school, to rape at gunpoint, to engage in armed robbery and car hijackings, after

drinking alcohol, and taking drugs (Netshitahame & Van Vollenhoven, 2002). The study assumes that the safety of the learners in many township schools is compromised. The teachers are also victims of violent attacks by learners as they are often assaulted, robbed, stabbed (Naidoo, 2007) and raped (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013) by violent learners (Ramorola & Taole, 2014; Zulu, Urbani & Van der Merwe, 2004; Masitsa, 2011; De Waal, 2011). The aforementioned illustrate the opposite to the parents' expectation for their children to be safe at school. The following two subsections define a safe school and school violence.

A. Safe School

A safe school is a school that is not unsafe (Langhout & Annear, 2010). It is a school where learning and teaching takes place peacefully. There is no fear that someone can cause pain or injury. Unsafe places are those where accidents are likely to happen, and where strangers could harm the children (Langhout & Annear, 2010). Bosworth *et al.*, (2011) define a safe school as one lacking direct and indirect violence, fear, and drugs or alcohol; and one where a positive school climate enhances learning and feelings of safety. Such an environment is a prerequisite for effective learning. Xaba (2006) alludes to a safe school as one that is free from danger and possible harm, where non-teachers, and teachers can work, and learners learn without fear of ridicule, intimidation, harassment, humiliation or violence (Prinsloo, 2006; Prinsloo, 2005). It is an ideal and prescribed learning environment that has the potential to produce positive results. Safety refers to the condition of being safe, of being free from danger, risk, or injury (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2009). Children need to be provided with a safe environment, and taught about methods of self-protection so as to reduce the potential from harm (the risk of injury) to them (Tabancali & Bektas, 2009; the Constitution of the RSA, Chapter 2: Bill of Rights, Section 29: Education). When school safety is not taken into account, the learners' academic performance, confidence, motivation, commitment, and attendance will be lower because they view the school environment as dangerous (Bosworth *et al.*, 2011). Secure school has a secure wall, fence, gates, and buildings that are in a good state. The following gives the definition of school violence.

B. School Violence

School violence is defined as anything that endangers the undertaking of the school to educate. It encapsulates verbal, physical, sexual, and psychological violence, social exclusion, and threats (Kramen *et al.*, 2007). It is aggressive

behaviour where the perpetrator uses his or her own body or an object (including a weapon) to inflict injury or discomfort upon another individual. Violence focuses largely on those violent acts that are deemed to be deviant and where the offender is motivated to willfully inflict harm on a person or persons (Roswell, 2012).

The World Health Organization defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power that results in or has the likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, or deprivation (School-based Violence Report, 2011, Burton, 2008).

Drugs and alcohol arouses violent behaviour amongst addicts. Learners indulge in drug abuse to enhance their esteem because of the pressure to belong and to be recognized by peers. Drugs and alcohol abuse are menace to school safety, collapses effective teaching and disrupts the tranquil of QLTC (Quality Learning and Teaching). The research empirically investigates the problem of violence in schools and suggests the solutions. The research highlights the following research objectives.

C. Research Objectives

- To describe drugs and alcohol abuse.
- To highlight the importance of intervention to curb drugs and alcohol abuse.
- To emphasize the importance of involvement of the school and the law enforcement agencies in curbing the problem of drugs and alcohol abuse.
- To suggest support systems to learners who are addicted to drugs and alcohol.

The objectives of the research are to find the best strategies possible to curb drugs and alcohol abuse on school premises.

The research objectives give rise to the following research questions:

- How to identify learners who are addicted to drugs and alcohol?
- What are intervention strategies that should be in place at schools to curb drugs and alcohol abuse?
- Which strategies are effective to curb drugs and alcohol abuse?
- How can the school and the law enforcement agencies get involved in the curb and alleviation of the problem of drugs and alcohol abuse?
- How can support be rendered to learners who are addicted to drugs and alcohol?

D. Statement of the Problem

Drugs and alcohol abuse on school premises and in the community has a negative influence on learners. The problem is aggravated by the increase in drugs sale by vendors and the resulting increase in alcohol consumption. Drug sellers and dealers disguise themselves as food sellers while selling drugs to learners, who smuggle these drugs into the school premises. In regard to the high rate of alcohol consumption, township schools are more vulnerable because of the availability of taverns in almost every street.

Authorities issuing liquor licenses are to blame because of possible non control of distance radius of taverns to schools. The aforementioned circumstances and factors perpetually impede on the schools educational mandate in learning delivery. Effective teaching and learning is adversely obstructed by disruptive learners' behavior, which in most cases is tantamount to hooliganism. The school also becomes unsafe because drunk and drugs consumers usually becomes violent and poses very serious threat to school occupants, learners and teachers included.

E. Background To The Study

The emphasis on schools to have better performance is a universal viewpoint of every country in regard to the role of teachers. In South Africa teachers are expected to be on time at school, teach effectively and produce desirable results. Teachers are also virtually expected by the academic world to produce learners with mental thinking that emphasize relevance, encourage tolerance and promote creative, analytic, critical and independent thinking (cf. African Academic Deans of Education Forum, May 2019).

Unfortunately the above viewpoint is hindered by contextual factors which include amongst others, the abuse of stupefying drugs and alcohol by learners. Drugs and alcohol abuse alters the abuser's state of mind and reasoning, making addicts violent and defiant to authority. It is assumed that the presence of taverns (liquor outlets) near the school and the ease in purchase of drugs from vendors is education sabotage. The alarming rate of drugs and alcohol abuse and the need to address the problem has prompted continuous research on the matter. The literature study further elaborates on alcohol and drugs abuse.

II. LITERATURE STUDY

Literature study has revealed that severe drugs and alcohol abuse can result in poverty; brokenness; hopelessness and homelessness (cf. Channel 403 report on 18 July 2019). South Africa invests in the education of its citizens, who are expected after 12 years of schooling to position themselves with sober mind in different careers and to reduce the percentage of unemployment rate in the country. The Regulation for Safety Measures at public schools (RSA, 2001) paragraph 4, sub-paragraph 2 (e) clearly states that no person may enter the school premises while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Masitsa, 2011). Masitsa (2011) indicates that the use of drugs undermines a safe and disciplined educational environment; and advises that the testing of learners for drugs will make the schools safer places. Drugs are dangerous to learners' health and safety. For example, the alleged chronic marijuana users have an increased risk of contracting bronchitis. Moreover, the earlier and greater involvement with marijuana has been associated with an increased risk of impaired mental health (Johnson *et al.*, 2008, Moffat, Botorff, Shoveller, Fisher & Haines, 2008).

As a point of departure, the literature review stimulates school stakeholders to seriously take into consideration the conditions that prevail in schools regarding safety, and the

acts relating to the rights of learners, as indicated in the SASA (Act 84 of 1996), the Constitution of the RSA (1996), the African Charter on the Rights of Children, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (1989).

III. RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The research approach used in this study is qualitative. Research studies that are qualitative are normally designed to discover what can be learned about a certain phenomenon of interest, particularly social phenomenon where people are the subjects (Eliyahu, 2013). The concern of this study is to understand the impact of drugs and alcohol abuse by learners in schools (Eliyahu, 2013, Kawulich, 2005). The qualitative method was therefore deemed appropriate for this study as participants were observed and interviewed in their natural settings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Merriam, 2009). The researcher listened to the participants as they articulated their views and opinions on issues of alcohol and drug abuse. The non-judgmental principle was applied by the researcher. The use of focus groups interviews assisted in gathering and in answering the questions on the state of drugs and alcohol abuse in schools.

Four schools with eight learners each were randomly selected for interviews and one non-teaching staff member. The participants were deemed sufficient for this study by the researcher to answer the research questions. The non-teaching staff member could either be a grounds man or an administrative assistant.

Teaching and learning was not disrupted, as highlighted in the permission letter from the Department of Basic Education. Learners were sampled from grade 8-12. Data collection and analysis are dynamic aspects of the research process (Zarah, 2018). The time for the collection of data was planned and executed during this period, so as to allow the participants' ample time to reflect on their experiences about drugs and alcohol abuse.

A. Qualitative Data-Analysis

Data-analysis is the process of finding the right data to answer the question, understanding the processes underlying the data, discovering the important patterns in the data, and then communicating the results. The process involves the analysis of the information in order to examine it in ways that reveal the relationships, patterns, trends, (Wood & Ross-Kerr, 2011) that can be found within it. In this study the qualitative approach will be used in the form of interviews, and audio material (Fox & Bayat, 2007; Kawulich, 2005). The researcher used pen, paper and voice recorder to gather field notes that will be put together in an organized way when reporting on data collection procedures in the qualitative approach. Participants were interviewed in focus groups to probe their opinions on drugs and alcohol abuse in schools. The transcripts of the recorded interviews data was carefully scrutinized and analyzed qualitatively in themes, to identify possible patterns and trends. The analysis

of the collected data indicated a number of emerging themes (Mokhele, 2006), which indicated the perceptions of learners about drugs and alcohol abuse in schools. The main qualitative data-collection strategy employed in this study was focus group interviews. The rationale behind the choice of this qualitative research strategy was to extend the understanding within the context of a particular situation, namely to obtain rich data in order to build concepts that describe the setting and to explain the phenomenon.

• Interviews

An interview is a significant data-gathering technique involving the verbal communication between the researcher and the participant (Fox, 2009). The interviewer needs certain skills, namely skills that include reflective questioning, summarising and controlling the interview process. The interviewer needs to be unbiased, systematic and thorough, and offer no personal views. The latter needs to be well-informed of the purpose of the research interview, and also be well-prepared and familiar with the questionnaire or topic guide. In addition, he/she needs to have good listening skills (Fox, 2009).

The interviews allowed the researcher the freedom to make inquiry and examine further into responses (Fox, 2009). Seeking the consent of the participants is important prior to interviewing them. The principles of qualitative research, namely respect, non-coercion, non-manipulation and support for democratic values were upheld. The researcher made complete transcripts of all interviews and field notes from the observations, and elaborated on each interview session (Zarah, 2018).

Interviews of learners and non-teaching staff member took place on the school premises of the four sampled schools. Four focus group sessions were held, one session with each school. As indicated above, each focus group consisted of nine participants. The participants were asked similar open-response questions in their respective groups. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), in-depth interviews are open-response questions with the aim to obtain data from participants and how they conceive of their world and make sense of the important events in their lives. The types of interviews used in the study included unstructured purposive interviews. The research questions and discussion highlighted the perception of learner understanding of drugs and alcohol abuse.

B. Sample of the Population

Delpont, De Vos, Fouché and Strydom (2002) state that a *sample* is a small representation of the whole, and the basic considerations in sampling are size and representativeness. The sample is the selected elements (people or objects) chosen for participation in the study (Denscombe, 2010; Barreiro & Albandoz, 2001; Fox & Bayat, 2007). Gray (2004) adds that a population is the total number of possible units or elements that are included in the study. Each focus group consisted of eight learners who were sampled from grades 8-12, and one non-teaching staff member, employed by the four participating schools in the North-West Province in South Africa. In consideration of

the equity principle one male and one female learner from each grade was sampled. Learners were sampled with no specification to age cohort from grades eight to twelve. In total the focus groups consisted of 32 learners and 4 non-teaching staff members.

C. Sampling Technique

A sampling technique is the process of selecting a group of people, events, behaviors or other elements with which to conduct a study (Bryman, 2012). The sampling should be done in such a way that everyone in the population has an equal opportunity to be selected as a subject or participant in the study (Barreiro & Albandoz, 2001). In this study the sampling technique used is purposive sampling, where specific people were selected for the purpose of the study. Purposive sampling is when members of a sample are chosen with a purpose to represent a location or type in relation to a key criterion (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003). Purposive sampling is the process of selecting a number of participants for a study in such a way that the participants represent the larger group from which they were selected. The logic of the sample is population size as it relates to the purpose of the study, the research problem, the data-collection technique and the availability of information-rich cases (Fox & Bayat, 2007).

IV. CONFIDENTIALITY

The responses of the participants in the focus groups were considered as confidential and were used to determine their mental reasoning. The participants were informed prior to their participation about the purpose of the research and they voluntarily completed the consent forms. The identities of the participants were protected. The researcher acknowledged that for the respondents to open up about their fears and insecurity in schools, they needed to feel secure and assured that they would not be judged. The interviewer's role is not to judge the respondents but to find ways to sustain a neutral demeanour. This was done by suspending judgments during the interview. The researcher responded neutrally and assured the participants that none of their comments would be made public. The opinions of the participants during focus groups interviews led to the following contributions.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Schools should have entrance control and damaged fences should be repaired as learners in school B said that alcohol was brought with ease on school premises during functions. In school C. Learner A said that learners' who are drunk are sometimes violent and cause disorder on school premises during teaching and learning time. The presence of taverns and liquor outlets near the school causes the learners to sneak out of the school premises. Some learners are habitually used to alcohol consumption in taverns during weekends and their parents are unable to exercise control over them because they exceedingly consume alcohol themselves. Alcohol and drug abuse by parent may also seriously impair judgment and the ability to keep the child safe (Help guide.org). Learners who are drunk are prone to

swearing and the use of terrible and severely shocking profane language. By engaging in violence, drug and alcohol abuse makes some young people strive for recognition and sense of belonging in groups. Violent behaviour which includes fights with knives, stabbings and shootings take place after the consumption of drugs and alcohol (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

Most violent incidences are aggravated by the availability and abuse of drugs, alcohol and other intoxicating substances. These learners become undisciplined, rowdy, and unable to concentrate or to cooperate with other learners and educators (Joubert, 2007). Nieuwenhuis (2007) highlights the viewpoint that drug addicts are often drawn into a variety of crimes in order to sustain their addiction, while the girls often turn to prostitution to finance their drug habit.

The learners in school D were likely to be affected by drug and substance abuse problems because their school fence has been removed at the back, making entry into the school premises easy for strangers who sell drugs. Substance-abuse problems have a negative influence on learner performance. Substance-abuse increases the rate of learner dropout, fighting and a general lack of concern for others (Ramorola & Taole, 2014; Nelson, Rose, & Lutz, 2010). Drugs may sometimes be considered to be soft, with no real consequences. However, the findings of a study that was conducted in Arizona in the United States indicate that the use of marijuana is gateway behaviour to harder drug-use and escalating violence (Ramorola & Taole, 2014; Bosworth *et al.*, 2011). For example, communities characterized by high levels of crime and violence are usually associated with the availability of alcohol and other addictive substances (Leoschut, 2008).

In school B learners are of the opinion that drugs and alcohol addiction hinders discipline. Learners who are under the influence of alcohol and drugs instill fear in innocent learners. In school D, due to the lack of adequate access control, some learners have developed a tendency to bring drugs into the school premises during events such the bashes. They easily bring drugs into the school premises through the vandalized school fence at the back.

The consumption of alcohol was condemned by all learners in school B, as cited by Learner A when she relates that it is completely unacceptable to come to school drunk or to bring alcohol to school, because it result in the addict being violent and beating fellow learners. School B focus group members added (as Learner B put it) that learners who come to school drunk usually do not show respect to the teachers.

In school C the learners were of the same opinion as the school B learners when they agreed that drunken learners can be a danger to other learners due to resulting behavioral problems.

In school D as mentioned by Learner A, because there is no fence at the back of the school, learners leave the school premises during events such as fund-raising and bring in alcohol.

Loitering learners are in many cases amongst those who smoke dagga and other addictive drugs. In cases where the school fence was damaged or one of the school gates was not locked, learners walked to the nearby tavern or liquor store to buy alcohol to drink or bring alcohol into the school premises.

Drugs and alcohol abuse problem is not easy to resolve and needs expert intervention from psychologists, psychiatrist and treatment centers. Drugs and alcohol abuse is often the cause of the violent behaviour of learners.

The attitude towards alcohol consumption in School A, B, C and D was discussed. The response as given indicated that learners in school B (as cited by Learner A) related that it is not correct to come to school drunk or to bring alcohol to school, as it may result in the drunkard to beat fellow learners. Learner B in School B added that learners who come to school drunk usually do not show respect towards the teachers.

In School C the learners were of the similar opinion to the School B learners where they agreed that drunken learners can be a danger to the other learners. The learners may sneak out of the school premises to indulge in alcohol consumption or drugs. When such a class is the last period of the day, the learners may even leave school early. With reference to drug addiction at school A, Learner A (LA) said that drugs were a hindrance to learners because when they are supposed to be studying, they often go to the toilets to smoke and come back to class to cause disruptions. The learners in school D were likely to be affected by drug and substance abuse problems because their school fence had been broken down at the back, making it easy for strangers to enter the school premises to sell drugs. Substance-abuse problems have a negative influence on youth school performance and serve to undermine the role of the school as a learning institution. LA in school C maintains that learners who take in drugs do it in school toilets. Such learners tend to disrespect teachers in classes. She says that learners who are under the influence of drugs instill fear in innocent learners.

The regulation for safety measures at public schools clearly states that no person is allowed to enter the school premises while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Masitsa, 2011). In an effort to control bringing of drugs, alcohol and dangerous weapons on the school premises, the

search for drugs in school D should be conducted as regulated by Section 8 (5) of Act 84 of 1996 of SASA as amended Act 31 of 2007 (8A) -random search and seizure and drug testing at schools. Clause 8A(1) stipulates that: unless authorized by the principal for legitimate educational purposes, no person may bring a dangerous object or illegal drug onto the school premises or have such an object or drug in his or her possession on the school premises or during any school activity. 8A(2) The principal or his or her delegate may, at random, search any group of learners, or the property of a group of learners, for any dangerous object or illegal drug, if a fair and reasonable suspicion has been established.

In school D where the school fence was damaged and part of it removed, for instance, drugs trafficking and abuse can extend from the surrounding community and streets into schools where learners are targeted and seen as fair game (Ramorola & Taole, 2014). Mncube and Harber (2013) assert that a school fence with many openings, some of which are large enough to just walk through, compromise the security of the school in a variety of ways. It lures entry into the school premises by unwelcome outsiders at any time. Learners are able to sneak out at any time unnoticed. At night security personnel will be unable to protect the school property due to openings around the school fence. The school will be vulnerable to possible burglary. Valuables such as computers, TVs, radios, and some educational material and documents including reports, school stamps, and examination papers may be stolen.

➤ *Factors Contributing to an unsafe school environment*

In a workshop held by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) and the Department of Education (DoE) in September 2002 (Leoschut, 2008), the following elements were identified as risk factors:

● *Environmental influences*

Include pubs or liquor stores near the school, drug-dealers (Leoschut, 2008), no fencing and the unavailability of telephones to report emergencies. This situation is relevant to school D where the fence at the back of the school had been removed (Netshitahame & Van Vollenhoven, 2002). The most violent incidences are aggravated by the availability and abuse of drugs, alcohol and other intoxicating substances. Learners who abuse drugs tend to be undisciplined, rowdy when under addiction and are unable to concentrate on their work or cooperate with other learners and educators (Joubert, 2007).

The above risk factors are illustrated in the following diagram and are, referred to in focus groups interviews

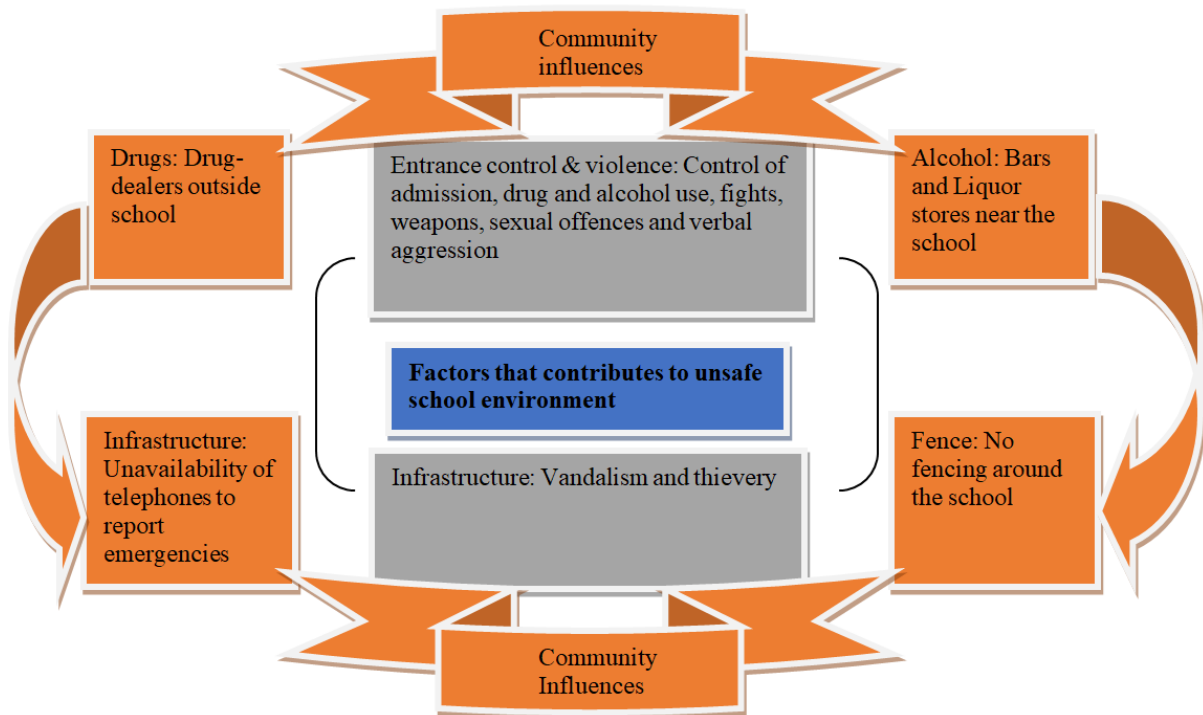


Fig 1: Identified risk factors in 2002 by the CSVr and the DoE

The above diagram highlights external and internal factors that contribute to an unsafe school environment.

- *The general attitude of learners to surprise police searches on school premises*

The researcher discovered that learners were defensive to police searches and maintained that when police conduct searches for drugs, they should recognize the learners' right to human dignity. The opinion of the learners' on the aforementioned matter should not be disregarded, as in terms of Section 10 (Human Dignity), Chapter 2 of the SA Constitution (1996), "Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The above response could have perhaps been aroused by the police behavior when handling learners. In School A learners said that police should administer search to girls with high levels of sensitivity as touching cannot be done to certain body parts because it will make them feel uncomfortable and invade their privacy.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Learner performance should be analyzed time and again for feedback as a strategy to identify poor performers. The root cause of the problem should be diagnosed to find out as to whether it is linked to drug and alcohol abuse.
- Schools to use tests to identify suspected learners who use drugs once a reasonable suspicion has been established about them.
- When drugs and alcohol abuse is detected, early referral and intervention by school psychologists could assist in organizing help for addicted learners.
- The school policy should clearly stipulate action to be taken to deal with drugs and alcohol abuse cases.

- Parents to be notified as soon as possible when drugs and alcohol abuse problem is detected, and to ensure that their child attend scheduled referral sessions.
- Police surprise searches to be conducted in accordance with the law and not infringe on constitutional rights of learners. The offenders to be dealt with in accordance with the law.
- Schools in the vicinity to share best practices to deal with drugs and alcohol abuse problem.

VII. SUMMARY

The abuse of drugs and alcohol poses a serious threat to school safety and security. It also affects academic performance of addicted learners. Drug and alcohol abuse problem is not easy to resolve and needs expert intervention from psychologists, psychiatrist and treatment centers. The research has revealed that intervention should also come from teachers and law enforcement agencies. The support role of the parents and the community is important. Involvement of learners in sports and other cultural activities could help to remove boredom. At home the parents can support the fight against learner violence at school by teaching the moral values of respect and become role-models to their children. The community must join hands with the school in providing information about drug sellers, liquor outlets and taverns that sells liquor to learners.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research should be conducted on continuous basis to get the advanced strategies to deal with drugs and alcohol abuse. The feedback should indicate more support to learners who are drugs and alcohol addicts.

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