FACULTY OF SCIENCE AND EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS

THE INFLUENCE OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE PANDEMIC ON THE BEHAVIOR OF YOUTHS: A CASE STUDY OF NAGONGERA TOWN COUNCIL IN TORORO DISTRICT.

By

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This Dissertation is Submitted to the Faculty of Science and Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Bachelor of Science in Statistics at Busitema University.

AUGUST, 2026

DECLARATION

I, **Mango Alex**, hereby declare that the dissertation titled "The Influence of Substance Abuse Pandemic on the Behavior of Youths: A Case Study of Nagongera Town Council in Tororo District" is an original product of my own research and effort.

It was duly supervised and has never been submitted to any other university or institution for any academic award. The work of other researchers was also cited and referenced.

I therefore affirm this research to be original.

SIGNATURE ……

DATE……..

MANGO ALEX

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved family, guardians, and mentors for their unwavering financial, academic, and moral support throughout my educational journey, particularly my father, **Mr. Wambaka Sam.**

Their sacrifices, inspiration, and belief in my potential have been the driving force behind this dissertation's successful completion.

APPROVAL

The dissertation titled "The Influence of Substance Abuse Pandemic on the Behavior of Youths: A Case Study of Nagongera Town Council in Tororo District" has been submitted for examination with my full endorsement as the Busitema University research supervisor.

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The abbreviations and their meaning

Abbreviation	Full Meaning
GPA	Grade Point Average
A4HU	Action 4 Health Uganda
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CBO	Community Based Organization
CVI	Content Validity Index
EYP	Empower Youth Project
FY	Financial Year
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IRIS	Institutional Repository for Information Sharing (WHO)
LSD	Lysergic Acid Diethylamide
MDMA	3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (Ecstasy)
NDA	National Drug Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPHC	National Population and Housing Census
PCP	Phencyclidine
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNIPH	Uganda National Institute of Public Health
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
WHO AFRO	World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa

ABSTRACT

Substance abuse among youths is no longer merely a health issue; it is a social crisis that affects families and has serious implications for education, health, and social development. This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional design to investigate the influence of the substance abuse pandemic on the behavior of youths in Nagongera Town Council, located in Tororo District. Data were collected using structured, self-administered questionnaires administered via Kobo Toolbox and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS, Stata, and R. A targeted sample size of 390 was calculated using Slovin's formula, based on an estimated population of 14,860 in Nagongera. To account for potential non-response, 416 questionnaires were distributed across the study area. A total of 383 fully completed questionnaires were retrieved, yielding an overall response rate of 383 (92.1%) among distributed questionnaires and 383 (98.2%) of the target sample size.

The empirical findings revealed a high lifetime prevalence of substance abuse of 111 (43.9%) among the youths. Alcohol, shisha, and cocaine were the most commonly consumed substances. Furthermore, 44 (39.6%) of identified users reported daily consumption. Peer pressure emerged as the leading behavioral driver, with 72 (64.9%) reporting it, closely followed by academic stress, with 41 (36.9%).In terms of academic impacts, 35 (49.3%) of substance-abusing students admitted to chronic class absenteeism. A Likert-scale analysis showed severe cognitive and behavioral interference, with 68.8% of respondents experiencing significantly reduced classroom concentration and 47.6% attributing lower grades directly to substance exposure. Publicly, substance abuse was strongly linked to heightened aggression, deteriorating peer relationships, and domestic conflict. The study concluded that the rate of substance abuse among youths in the Nagongera context had escalated beyond recreational boundaries, actively compromising educational outcomes and community stability. Recommendations were made for the Nagongera Town Council and educational institutions to institute targeted, school-based counseling departments and to implement strict community regulatory frameworks to combat illicit substance supply chains.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study on substance abuse and its influence on youths' behavior in Nagongera Town Council. It presents the background, tracing the global, regional, and local trends of substance abuse among youths. It further defines the problem statement, outlines the objectives and research questions that guide the study, and establishes the scope and justification. Finally, this chapter highlights the significance of the research to various stakeholders, including educators, parents, and policymakers in Nagongera Town Council.

1.2 Background of the study

Substance abuse has become a global social and public health problem, affecting individuals, families, and entire communities. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines substance abuse as the harmful use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. Around the world, millions of young people are exposed to drugs at an early age through peer influence, family factors, media, and easy access (UNODC, 2023). This early exposure leads to long-term negative consequences for their education, health, and social development (WHO, 2024).

Among young people, substance abuse is an important public health and social concern because of its potential effects on education, health, and social relationships. Global data show that substance abuse is common in adolescence; more than a quarter of people aged 15-19 are current drinkers (about 155 million adolescents). Heavy episodic drinking and experimentation with substances remain important concerns for adolescent health. This data is highlighted in the global health assessments (WHO, 2024).

At the global level, illicit drug markets and patterns continue to shift the use of certain substances. While cannabis remains the most widely consumed illicit substance across the region, there is a growing prevalence of amphetamine-type stimulants and synthetic opioids among vulnerable youth populations (UNODC, 2023). This shift is exacerbated by the increasing availability of cheap, unregulated chemical formulations, which significantly elevate the risk of acute toxicity, mental health disorders, and severe social dysfunction.

In Africa, substance abuse presents additional challenges. The World Health Organization (WHO) Africa office reports substantial harms from alcohol and psychoactive drug use across the continent, with millions affected by drug use disorders and high rates of alcohol-related mortality. Structural drivers such as poverty, unemployment, weak regulatory environments, and limited treatment capacity contribute to both the scale and consequences of substance use in many African countries (WHO, 2024).

Within sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in East Africa, a recent systematic analysis indicated a relatively high prevalence rate of substance abuse among adolescents compared with other African sub-regions. A recent analysis found East Africa had the highest pooled current prevalence of any substance use among adolescents in the region. These higher regional rates are linked to urbanization, gaps in youth services, and local drug markets that increase accessibility to alcohol, cannabis ("Njaga"), and other substances (WHO, 2024)

At the national level, substance use among Ugandan youth is a growing public health and educational issue. The Uganda Ministry of Health reports that alcohol and illicit drug consumption among secondary school adolescents and out-of-school youth exceeds 20–27% in various regions, with peer pressure (52%) and curiosity or stress management (34%) being the main motivators for starting use. The National Drug Authority (NDA) and the Uganda National Institute of Public Health (UNIPH) have observed a concerning trend where psychoactive substance use among young Ugandans (aged 15–24) is increasingly associated with acute cognitive impairment, psychological distress, and risky social behaviors.

Although there are national guidelines for guidance and counseling from the Ministry of Education and Sports, rural and semi-urban town councils often lack effective monitoring systems to address the academic and behavioral decline caused by substance use (UNIPH, 2024; NDA, 2024).

In Eastern Uganda, especially in border areas like Nagongera Town Council in Tororo District, youth substance abuse has increased due to specific socio-economic and geographical factors. Assessments in Tororo District reveal that the easy access to low-cost artisanal spirits (like Uganda Waragi and Ajon/Malwa) and illicit drugs (such as cannabis and khat/miraa) is magnified by their closeness to major cross-border transport routes. Moreover, socio-ecological challenges like high youth unemployment, idle peer groups, and inadequate local rehabilitation services have led to a shift from casual use to regular dependence. Recent health and district evaluations indicate that the substance use trends in Tororo correlate with increasing rates of mental health issues in the community, school dropouts, and conflicts within youth-led households (Ministry of Health, 2024).

Although global and national literature broadly documents the health hazards of substance abuse, there remains a critical gap in localized quantitative evidence on its dual impact on academic performance and social behavioral outcomes among youth in semi-urban settings. In Nagongera Town Council, community observations link substance abuse to declining academic engagement (such as chronic absenteeism, reduced classroom concentration, and lower academic achievement) and disruptive social conduct (such as peer aggression and early police contact). Yet, these relationships lack empirical validation through rigorous statistical modeling. Establishing these quantitative metrics is essential for informing targeted district-level policy interventions, community counseling frameworks, and localized youth empowerment strategies (Ariong & Okaka, 2021),.

1.3 Problem statement

Substance abuse among youths, particularly concerning alcohol and cannabis, has emerged as a significant challenge in many communities worldwide, and Nagongera is no exception. Despite ongoing awareness campaigns and government regulations, the number of young people engaging in these harmful practices continues to rise (Aswathy & Kumar, 2026).

Schools and teachers are increasingly reporting a rise in poor academic performance, absenteeism, loss of concentration, and indiscipline among students. Outside of school, behaviors such as theft, violence, disrespect towards elders, and general idleness have become more frequent (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2024; NDA, 2024).

While several studies have explored substance abuse among Ugandan youths, most focus on larger urban centers, hospital samples, or national trends, leaving semi-urban and border areas like Nagongera underrepresented. For instance, Masari (2017) examined drug abuse and domestic violence in Nagongera Sub-county but primarily focused on married adults instead of the youth demographic. Similarly, Wanyama (2021) addressed drug abuse patterns across Tororo District without disaggregating the data to reflect the specific situation in Nagongera Town Council. Additionally, Makumbi (2018) studied substance abuse among adult HIV clinic attendees in Tororo, which does not accurately represent the behaviors of healthy youths in the community.

Given these gaps, this study aims to investigate the influence of substance abuse on the academic and social behavior of youths in Nagongera Town Council. The findings will help generate policies to inform stakeholders and ultimately reduce the prevalence of this growing concern.

1.4 Objectives of the study

1.4.1 Main objective of the study.

The main objective of the study was to examine the influence of substance abuse on the academic and social behavior of youths in Nagongera Town Council.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

i. To identify the prevalent types of substances usually abused by youths in Nagongera Town Council.
ii. To assess the association between substance abuse and academic performance in Nagongera Town Council.
iii. To evaluate the association between substance abuse and social behavior of youths in Nagongera Town Council.
iv. To explore potential factors mitigating substance abuse in the context of Nagongera Town Council.

1.5 Research questions

i. What are the most common substances abused by youths in Nagongera Town Council?
ii. How does substance abuse affect the academic performance and behavior of youths in Nagongera Town Council?
iii. What social behavioral impacts does substance abuse have on youths in Nagongera Town Council?
iv. What interventions could effectively address substance abuse among youths in Nagongera Town Council?

1.6 Scope of the study

Content scope: The study is delimited to youths aged 15-30 in Nagongera Town Council, focusing on academic and social settings. It covers prevalent substances like alcohol and cannabis and their influences, excluding in-depth clinical or economic analyses.
Geographical scope: The study was conducted in Nagongera Town Council, Tororo District, in eastern Uganda.
Time scope: The study covered a period of 5 months, during which data was collected and analyzed.

1.7 Justification of the study

Substance abuse among youths has become an increasing problem in many parts of Uganda. Youths who abuse substances often experience poor academic performance, increased absenteeism, and negative social behaviors.

Despite the seriousness of the problem, there is limited documented research focusing on the influence of substance abuse on the academic and social behavior of youths in Nagongera Town Council. While existing studies focus on large urban centers, leaving Nagongera underrepresented. This study is justified because it seeks to generate empirical evidence on the effects of substance abuse among youths in this local area, helping stakeholders to develop informed strategies to report these issues, foster community flexibility, and improve youth productivity.

1.8 Significance of the study

This research study is important as it will deliver valuable insights into how substance abuse affects both the academic and social behavior of youths in this border town. And also provide evidence data to most policymakers, educators, and health practitioners in Tororo District, aiding in custom-made prevention programs.

Policymakers and government agencies: The study will provide empirical data on the prevalence and behavioral impacts of substance abuse, enabling the Local Government and the Ministry of Health to formulate targeted public health tactics and local ordinances to lower this mounting pandemic.

Educational institutions: School administrators and educators can also utilize the insights in developing early identification frameworks and guidance and counseling programs, which will be aimed at reducing substance-related academic decline among the youths.

Parents and guardians: The research study will also raise awareness about the risks of substance abuse and its consequences on youths' academic and social life. Parents will use the findings to better guide, monitor, and support their growing children.

Scholars and youths: This research study's findings will be beneficial to youths, as they will provide information on the risks associated with substance abuse and promote awareness of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles. The study's findings will also inform the development of educational programs aimed at promoting drug-free living among university youths and youths in Uganda at large.

In conclusion, this study's significance lies in the potential to provide valuable insights into the prevalence and factors associated with substance abuse among youths, both the youths and the local people in Nagongera Town Council, Tororo, Uganda. The study's findings will be of great importance to various stakeholders and can inform policy and practice on substance abuse prevention and management among youths in Uganda.

1.9 Important terms

1.9.1 Youths

The term "youth" denotes a transitional phase from childhood dependence to adult self-sufficiency, marked by rapid biological, psychological, and social maturation. For this study, and in alignment with local demographic classifications, youths are defined as individuals aged 15 to 30 years (Jjuuko, 2021).

1.9.2 Substance abuse (independent variable)

Substance abuse is the harmful use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs.

Among youths, substance abuse is often associated with experimentation, peer pressure, stress, and curiosity. Studies from (WHO, 2024) indicate that early exposure increases the likelihood of dependence and long-term negative outcomes.

For this study, substances are categorized based on their physiological effects:

Stimulants such as nicotine, cocaine, khat, methamphetamine, ecstasy (MDMA), and prescription medications like Ritalin and Adderall, which increase alertness. **Depressants** such as alcohol and benzodiazepines (valium, Xanax), which slow down the central nervous system. **Hallucinogens** such as LSD, psilocybin like magic mushrooms, ketamine, and PCP. Cannabinoids such as cannabis and marijuana. **Opioids**, like Heroin, prescription pain killers like oxycodone, fentanyl, morphine, codeine, marijuana, and synthetic opioids. Inhalants like solvents, gases, and aerosols, such as paint thinner, glue, and nitrous oxide, are commonly used by youths due to their low costs (WHO, 2024; Marwa, 2023).

1.9.3 Academic Performance

In this study, academic performance is defined as the measurable extent of a youth's success and engagement in their educational endeavors. It is operationalized using three specific indicators:

Grade Point Average (GPA) or general grade performance, which assesses the overall academic achievement of students.

Class Attendance, indicating regular physical presence in scheduled lessons, highlighting the importance of consistent participation in the educational process.

Classroom Concentration, which refers to the ability to maintain focus and actively engage in learning activities without being distracted by the effects of substance use.

These indicators collectively provide a comprehensive overview of academic performance as it pertains to the influences of substance abuse (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013; WHO, 2024).

1.9.4 Social Behavior

In this research study, social behavior refers to how a youth interacts with others and adheres to the rules of their community and school. It is specifically measured by:

Peer Relationship Quality: The nature of a youth's interactions with their age mates, including whether they associate with pro-social or anti-social groups (UNIPH, 2024).

School Discipline: The level of a youth's adherence to school rules, regulations, and respect for authority figures.

Community Conduct: The display of behaviors such as aggression, violence, or "disrespect to elders" within the Nagongera Town Council community (NDA, 2024).

1.10 Conceptual framework

This study is built on the understanding that youth behavior is a product of various interacting forces. Youths are in a period of high experimentation and peer influence. The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between the independent variable (substance abuse) and the dependent variables (academic performance and social behavior).



CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical review of existing literature related to substance abuse and its influence on the academic and social behavior of youths. It explores the theoretical framework, and synthesizes empirical evidence aligned with the four specific objectives of the study: prevalent types of substances abused, the association with academic performance, the association with social behavior, and mitigating factors. Finally, the chapter identifies the research gaps that justify the need for this study in Nagongera Town Council.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in two primary theories that explain the acquisition and manifestation of substance-related behaviors among youths.

2.2.1 Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura, 1977)

According to Albert Bandura, behavior is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning. He continues to urge that individuals, especially youths, model their behavior based on "influential others" such as parents, older siblings, and peers (Bandura, 1977).

In the Nagongera Town Council context, youths may initiate substance use after observing the habits of peers or adults in their immediate social circles, using alcohol and drugs since they are culturally accepted, such as local brewing, and thus youths imitate the behavior (Wanyama, 2021)

2.2.2 Problem Behavior Theory (Richard Jessor, 1987)

Problem Behavior Theory (PBT) suggests that various problem behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency, and academic failure do not occur in isolation. Instead, they are part of a larger behavioral syndrome. According to Richard Jessor (1987), a youth who engages in one risky behavior is statistically more likely to engage in others due to a common underlying cause, such as low unconventionality or poor social ties.

This justifies the study's focus on two distinct outcomes, academic performance and social behavior, suggesting that substance abuse in Nagongera is most likely to trigger other negative outcomes like school absenteeism, lower grades, and aggressive social interactions, as informed by (Ochieng, 2009)

2.3 Prevalent Types of Substances Usually Abused by Youths

Current literature indicates varying patterns of substance abuse among youths across different regions, with alcohol often being the most commonly abused substance. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), alcohol and a range of psychoactive substances are widely used by adolescents worldwide, and early exposure significantly increases the risks of dependence and poor developmental outcomes (WHO, 2024). Furthermore, cannabis remains one of the most widely used illicit substances globally, while the prevalence of amphetamine-type stimulants and synthetic opioids is rising among vulnerable youth populations (UNODC, 2024).

In the African context, the WHO Regional Office for Africa has reported substantial health and social challenges stemming from alcohol and psychoactive drug use among young people, exacerbated by weak regulatory frameworks and limited access to treatment services (WHO AFRO, 2024). In Uganda specifically, the National Drug Authority has documented a range of substances used by youths, including alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, khat, and an increasing trend in the use of hard drugs like cocaine, with availability differing between regions (NDA, 2024). Additionally, the Uganda National Institute of Public Health highlighted that alcohol and other drugs are notably prevalent within secondary school environments (UNIPH, 2024).

Locally, within Eastern Uganda, research has identified that waragi (local gin), ajon (local brew), marijuana, and mirungi (khat) rank among the most commonly abused substances in Tororo District (Wanyama, 2021). The border community dynamics in places like Nagongera further complicate the situation, with residents experiencing greater exposure to illicit trade networks. This has made cheap, unregulated spirits and smuggled substances readily accessible to youths in the area (Monica, 2018).

These findings substantiate the first objective of this study, which aims to identify the specific prevalent types of substances abused by youths in Nagongera Town Council.

2.4 Association between Substance Abuse and Academic Performance

Numerous studies indicate that substance abuse has a detrimental impact on the academic performance and educational outcomes of youths. The World Health Organization highlights that substance use during adolescence can disrupt cognitive development, memory, and educational attainment (WHO, 2024). Neurobiological research supports this, demonstrating that the human brain, particularly the prefrontal cortex, continues to develop until the mid-twenties, making youths particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of substances on memory, concentration, and decision-making (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2023).

In Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports has expressed concerns regarding substance use in secondary schools and its direct impact on learner behavior, absenteeism, and overall academic decline (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2024). According to the National Drug Authority, substance use among adolescents correlates with poor school attendance, diminished concentration, and a lack of academic discipline (NDA, 2024). The Uganda National Institute of Public Health also found that while schools acknowledge the issue of substance misuse, they often lack effective systems to manage it and protect academic performance (UNIPH, 2024).

Locally, in Tororo District, reports indicate that substance abuse leads to significant memory loss and mental health disorders, which directly hinder a student's ability to learn and engage in school activities. Moreover, students who engage in substance abuse frequently miss classes due to hangovers, health issues, or prioritizing drug-seeking behaviors over educational commitments. These empirical findings robustly support the second objective of the current study, which investigates the link between substance abuse and academic performance among youths in Nagongera Town Council (Wanyama, 2021).

2.5 Association between Substance Abuse and Social Behavior of Youths

Substance abuse is closely linked to negative social behaviors and overall community instability among youths. The World Health Organization reports that substance use during adolescence often leads to problematic social relationships, mental health issues, and an increase in risky or aggressive behaviors (WHO, 2024). On a global scale, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) emphasizes that drug use is inherently associated with crime, violence, and social disorder, particularly in areas where illicit drug markets thrive (UNODC, 2024).

In Uganda, the National Drug Authority (NDA) indicated that substance use among youths is a significant contributor to public intoxication, theft, assault, and subsequent legal issues (NDA, 2024). Research by Ekwaro (2024) found that substance abuse heavily impairs youth livelihoods and social functioning, often resulting in emotional distress, physical weakness, and the breakdown of familial and community relationships. Additionally, the Uganda National Institute of Public Health highlights that peer pressure and the desire for social acceptance significantly influence substance use behaviors, which frequently leads to the decline of pro-social interactions (UNIPH, 2024).

The Ministry of Health further correlates substance use with mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety, as well as social withdrawal among adolescents (Ministry of Health, 2023). Locally, Masari (2017) identified alcohol abuse in the Nagongera Sub-county as a critical risk factor for domestic violence and family conflict. These findings underscore the importance of evaluating how substance abuse affects the social behaviors of youths in Nagongera Town Council, which aligns with the third objective of the present study.

2.6 Factors Mitigating Substance Abuse among Youths

The problem of substance abuse among youths is a significant concern, but literature suggests that it can be effectively reduced and managed through interventions at various levels. Notably, the World Health Organization advocates for a range of adolescent health strategies, including prevention, early identification, counseling, and the provision of youth-friendly health services (WHO, 2024). Similarly, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime underscores the importance of implementing evidence-based prevention programs, treatment options, and community-oriented approaches to mitigate the adverse impacts of drug use (UNODC, 2024)

In Uganda, the National Drug Authority emphasizes key strategies to combat adolescent substance use, including prevention, counseling, rehabilitation, and community sensitization (NDA, 2024). Non-governmental organizations are also significant players in this arena; for example, Action 4 Health Uganda has launched youth empowerment initiatives designed to enhance life skills and promote health-seeking behaviors among young people (A4HU, 2024). Additionally, the Ministry of Education and Sports endorses school-based guidance and counseling as a primary approach to tackle issues of substance use and academic stress faced by students (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2024). At the local government level, essential measures such as regulatory frameworks, community awareness campaigns, and by-laws that restrict the sale of alcohol to minors are crucial in mitigating these challenges (Monica, 2018). These interventions are particularly relevant to the fourth objective of this study, which investigates potential factors and strategies that can help reduce substance abuse in Nagongera Town Council.

2.7 Research Gap

Despite the extensive literature reviewed above, several critical gaps remain that limit the applicability of prior findings to Nagongera Town Council.

Contextual gap: The existing local studies have not adequately addressed the specific needs and circumstances of youths aged 15 to 30 living within Nagongera Town Council. For example, Masari (2017) focused on married adults in Nagongera Sub-county, exploring only the relationship between alcohol consumption and domestic violence, thus missing the unique challenges faced by the youth. Similarly, Wanyama's (2021) analysis of drug abuse patterns across Tororo District failed to provide data specific to individual town councils, including Nagongera. Makumbi (2018) utilized hospital records from ART clinics, which included only HIV-positive adults, thereby neglecting the broader youth population that is not necessarily represented in healthcare settings. As a result, there are no prevalence estimates or comprehensive insights regarding the youth demographic within Nagongera Town Council, indicating a significant gap in the research that needs to be addressed.

Variable gap: The reviewed local studies reveal a significant variable gap as they did not measure both academic and social behaviors within the same youth sample. For instance, Wanyama (2021) primarily concentrated on identifying the types of substances abused and their general health effects, neglecting to collect specific data on critical academic metrics such as school attendance, grade changes, or classroom concentration. In another study, Masari (2017) investigated domestic conflict but did not address the essential aspects of peer relationships, school discipline, or potential legal issues among youths. Consequently, there exists a noticeable lack of localized empirical evidence that simultaneously evaluates both academic and social indicators among substance-abusing youths in this particular border community. This gap highlights the need for comprehensive research that examines these intertwined dimensions to understand the full impact of substance abuse on youth in the Nagongera Town Council context.

Methodological gap: Local government reports indicate that substance abuse is a significant and growing concern; however, they primarily rely on administrative observations, health facility records, and police summaries. This reliance results in a lack of comprehensive data, as it does not incorporate primary, structured quantitative data gathered directly from the youths themselves (Monica, 2018). During preliminary visits to the area in March 2026, it was noted that local schools did not maintain written tracking files for drug-related absenteeism. Additionally, the Town Council health office lacked a youth-specific substance use register, further highlighting the need for targeted research that captures the firsthand substance use experiences of youths in the community.

This study fills such gaps by collecting primary questionnaire data directly from 383 youths across the four wards of Nagongera Town Council. It specifically measures both academic behavior (Objective 2) and social behavior (Objective 3) within the same sample, while reporting the prevalent types and frequency of substances at the town council level (Objective 1).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter covered the background of how the data were gathered throughout the study process. It also discussed the research design, study population, sampling, and study variables, sources of data, data collection methods, sample size determination, and instruments for data processing, analysis, and presentation.

3.2 Research design

The study adopted a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional research design. The design was appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from youths at a single point in time, allowing the researcher to examine the associations between substance abuse, academic and social behavior without manipulating any variables (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

3.3 Research approach

The study strictly utilized a quantitative approach, where structured self-administered questionnaires were used in collecting numerical data. The quantitative approach was chosen because the study sought to identify patterns, frequencies, and statistical correlations across a fairly large sample of youth's data collected (Brunette et al., 2013). And because the sensitive nature of substance abuse made anonymous self-reporting via questionnaires more practical, and so, Kobo Toolbox was used to deploy and manage the data collection efficiently (Kobo toolbox, 2020).

3.4 Study area

Nagongera Town Council, located in Tororo District, Eastern Uganda. It is composed of administrative wards (Central, Eastern, Northern, and Southern) characterized by both semi-urban commercial hubs and surrounding rural agricultural settings. The area was selected due to increasing concerns regarding substance abuse among youths, its proximity to the Uganda-Kenya border, and the presence of both educational institutions and a youthful demographic (Monica, 2018).

3.5 Study population

The target population for this study comprised youths aged between 15–30 years residing in Nagongera Town Council. According to the 2024 Uganda National Population and Housing Census, Nagongera Town Council had a total population of approximately 14,860 people (UBOS, 2024).

The preliminary census report did not publish the specific total of youths aged 15–30 within the Nagongera Town Council at the time of the study. Therefore, the total population of the Town Council, which is approximately 14,860, was utilized as the sampling frame (N) for sample size calculations. This approach is standard practice in local government studies, especially when age-disaggregated data at the ward level is not available. It ensures that the sample remains adequately large to effectively represent the youth demographic within the community.

3.6 Sample size determination

The study will use a representative sample from the target population of 14,860 youths. To obtain a statistically valid sample size, Slovin's Formula (1960) is applied as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Calculated sample size
N = Total study population ($N = 14{,}860$)

e = Margin of error (set at 0.05, corresponding to a 95% confidence level).

Substitution

$$n = \frac{14860}{1 + 14860(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{14860}{1 + 14860(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{14860}{1 + 37.15}$$

$$n = \frac{14860}{38.15}$$

$$n = 389.5 \approx 390$$

Based on the calculation, the targeted minimum sample size is 390 respondents.

3.7 Sampling Techniques.

Simple Random Sampling was used to select the youth respondents for the questionnaires (Cochran, 1977).

This probability sampling method gave every eligible youth in Nagongera Town Council an equal and independent chance of being selected, thereby reducing selection bias and allowing the findings to be generalized to the broader youth population of the Town Council.

3.8 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

3.8.1 Instrument Validity

To ensure face and content validity, I drafted a questionnaire to be evaluated by three academic experts in statistics and social research from Busitema University. The experts assessed item relevance, clarity, and alignment with the research objectives. Based on their feedback, a Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed as follows:

$$\mathbf{CVI} = \left(\frac{\text{Number of items rated relevant}}{\text{Total number of items evaluated}}\right)$$

The resulting CVI was 0.86, exceeding the standard academic one of 0.70, confirming that the instrument was suitable for field administration (Lynn, 1986).

3.8.2 Instrument Reliability

I established a pilot study conducted in Namwaya Parish a neighboring parish outside the primary sampling frame in Nagongera Sub-County. The piloting involved 38 youth respondents (approximately 10% of the target sample). The pilot data were imported into SPSS (Version 26.0) to calculate internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha (α) (George & Mallery, 2003).

The overall questionnaire achieved a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.82$, with individual Likert-scale items scoring above 0.75, demonstrating high instrument reliability before the main data collection (Cronbach, 1951).

3.9 Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection: Structured self-administered questionnaires organized digitally through Kobo Toolbox helped in collecting the data (Brunette et al, 2013). These contained closed-ended questions, Likert-scale items, and multiple-choice options designed to capture demographic information, substance use patterns, and academic and social behavior.

Data Analysis: After completing the field data collection, the raw data was first exported from Kobo Toolbox into Microsoft Excel for cleaning and coding. It was then imported into SPSS (Version 26.0), R (Version 4.3.1), and Stata for analysis. Statistical measures were specifically aligned with the data types and research objectives as follows:

Table 3.1. Showing analysis distributions based on the objectives.

Research Objective	Data Type	Statistical Technique
Objective 1: Identify prevalent types of substances abused	Nominal / Ordinal categorical data	Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, and modal categories.
Objective 2: Assess association between substance use and academic performance	Categorical data (substance use vs. class attendance), (frequency of use vs. grade changes)	Pearson's Chi-Square Test of Independence chi^2 to evaluate statistically significant associations. Fisher's Exact Test was applied where contingency table cell counts fell below 5.
Objective 3: Evaluate association between substance use and social behavior	Nominal categorical variables (substance use vs. legal trouble, aggression, peer conflicts)	Pearson's Chi-Square Test of Independence chi^2 to measure non-causal behavioral associations.
Objective 4: Explore interventions and mitigating factors	Ordinal / Categorical data	Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies and percentages of self-reported desire to quit, feelings of guilt, and perceived ease of access.

A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ (95% confidence level) was used for all inferential tests. Results were presented by frequency tables, cross-tabulations, and charts for strong interpretation.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

To ensure the integrity of the research and the safety of the participants, the following ethical principles were observed (Creswell and Creswell, 2018):

Informed Agreement: It was clearly explained to each respondent during data collection. The research provided informed permission via a digital consent prompt on Kobo Toolbox confirming their voluntary involvement.

Confidentiality and Secrecy: No names, student numbers, or personal identification numbers were recorded on the questionnaires to protect the participants. All data collected via Kobo Toolbox was stored on a password-protected device, and results were reported only in aggregate form.

Right to Pull Out: Respondents were clearly informed that they had the right to skip any question they were uncomfortable with or to withdraw from the survey at any time without any negative consequences.

Institutional Approval: An official introductory letter was obtained from the Department of Mathematics, Busitema University. Administrative permission was formally required and granted by the Nagongera Town Council authorities before commencing with the field study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presented all the findings of the study based on data collected. My main focus for the analysis was to evaluate the influence of substance abuse on the academic and social behavior of youth. The data was processed using R version 4.3.1, STATA, and SPSS, utilizing both descriptive (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics to draw meaningful conclusions.

4.2 The Response rate and sample accounting.

A total of 416 questionnaires were shared across Nagongera Town Council to achieve the calculated target sample size (n = 390). A total of 383 completed questionnaires were successfully retrieved and verified for final analysis. To ensure clarity, responses are reported across two standard benchmarks:

Table 4.1. Response Rate of Respondents by Questionnaire Distribution and Required Sample Size.

Category	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Questionnaires Distributed	416	100%
Completed Questionnaires	383	92.07%
Non-responses	33	7.93%
Actual Response of (390)	383	98.2%

Interpretation: The response rate based on 416 distributed questionnaires was 383(92.1%), while the rate based on the targeted Slovin's formula sample size of 390 was 383(98.2%).

4.3 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The characteristics analyzed include age, gender, education level, employment status, and residence.

Table 4.2. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Category	**Variable**	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender (N=380)	Male	230	60.50
	Female	150	39.50
Age Group (N=381)	15 – 19 Years	151	39.60
	20 – 24 Years	82	21.50
	25 – 30 Years	148	38.80
Education Level (N=382)	Not in School	123	32.20

	University	99	25.90
	Secondary	66	17.30
	Vocational	61	16.00
	Primary	33	8.60
Employment Status (N=381)	Unemployed	236	61.90
	Employed	145	38.10
Residence (Ward) (N=383)	Central Ward	127	33.20
	Southern Ward	113	29.50
	Eastern Ward	72	18.80
	Northern Ward	71	18.50

Interpretation: The gender distribution of the participants revealed a male majority, with 230 males (60.5%) compared to 150 females (39.5%). This prevalence of male engagement aligns with existing literature, which suggests that men in semi-urban areas like Nagongera are often more active participants in community-based youth studies. However, it's important to note that this does not diminish the vulnerabilities faced by females in these settings.

In terms of age, the sample featured a fairly balanced distribution. The youngest cohort, aged 15–19 years, comprised 151 participants (39.6%), while the oldest cohort, aged 25–30 years, accounted for 148 participants (38.80%). The 20–24 age group included 82 individuals (21.5%). This distribution indicates that the study effectively captured the active youth demographic that is significantly affected by issues like substance abuse.

Looking at education, the largest segment was composed of youths not currently enrolled in school, totaling 123 individuals (32.2%). University students followed closely, making up 99 participants (25.9%). The considerable number of out-of-school youths highlights potential socio-economic disparities and the dangers of idle time, both of which can increase vulnerability to experimenting with substances. This trend is mirrored in employment data, where 236 respondents (61.9%) reported being unemployed. The high unemployment rate among youth in the area limits their ability to engage in constructive activities, often leading them toward behaviors influenced by peers.

Geographically, respondents were well-distributed throughout the town council, with the highest concentrations in Central Ward, totaling 127 participants (33.2%), and Southern Ward, which included 113 respondents (29.5%). This distribution ensures that the study area is adequately represented..

4.4 Prevalence and Patterns of Substance Abuse

Presented findings based on the level of awareness, the lifetime prevalence of substance use, the specific types of substances consumed, and the frequency of abuse of these substances. This analysis aligned with the first objective of the study.

Table 4.3. Prevalence and Patterns of Substance Abuse

Indicator	Variable	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Awareness (N=382)	Aware (Yes)	254	66.50
	Not Aware (No)	128	33.50
Lifetime Prevalence (N=253)	Ever Abused (Yes)	111	43.90
	Never Abused (No)	142	56.10
Types Abused (N=111)	Alcohol	99	89.20
	Shisha	38	34.20
	Cocaine	29	26.10
	Khat/Mairungi	24	21.60
	Marijuana	23	20.70
	Weed Cookies	19	17.10
	Cannabis	14	12.60
	Others	8	7.20
Frequency of Use (N=111)	Daily	44	39.60
	Once a week	35	31.50
	Ever used once	18	16.20
	Thrice a week	8	7.20
	Twice a week	6	5.40

Interpretation: The study provides a comprehensive overview of substance abuse awareness, prevalence, and patterns among youths in the community. It reveals that a significant majority, 254 individuals (66.50%), recognized substance abuse, indicating some level of community awareness. However, the 33.50% who were unaware points to significant shortcomings in local health education and awareness initiatives.

Alarmingly, among those who were aware, the lifetime prevalence of substance abuse was notably high, with 111 respondents (43.90%) admitting to using substances. Poly-substance use was prevalent, with users averaging 2.3 different substances each. Alcohol was the most commonly abused substance, reported by 99 individuals (89.20%), followed by shisha at 38 (34.20%) and cocaine at 29 (26.10%). The presence of these hard drugs signifies a troubling "gateway effect," where socially accepted substances like alcohol and shisha lead to the use of more dangerous drugs.

Furthermore, the frequency of substance use suggests that the situation in Nagongera extends well beyond casual experimentation. A total of 71.10% of users reported habitual use, with 44 individuals (39.60%) using substances daily and 35 (31.50%) at least once a week. This high rate of chronic substance use highlights the pressing addiction crisis in the town and emphasizes the urgent need for targeted interventions to address this escalating issue.

4.5 Factors Influencing Substance Abuse

This unit explored the environmental and psychological drivers that led youths into substance abuse, as well as the ease with which these substances were acquired.

Table 4.4. Factors Influencing Substance Abuse

Indicator	**Variable**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Influencing factors	Peer pressure	**72**	**64.9%**
	Academic stress	**41**	**36.9%**
	Curiosity	**28**	**25.2%**
	Family influence	**15**	**13.5%**
	Trauma/personal issues	**12**	**10.8%**
Ease of access	Very Easy	58	52.30%
	Easy	32	28.80%
	Difficult	21	18.90%

Interpretation: The study delves into the various factors contributing to substance abuse among youths, highlighting the environmental, psychological, and social influences that play a significant role. Among the 111 users surveyed, peer pressure was identified as the most significant factor, reported by 72 respondents (64.90%). This finding aligns with the Social Learning Theory, suggesting that the behaviors of youths in Nagongera are heavily influenced by those around them. Academic stress also emerged prominently, with 41 respondents (36.90%) citing it as a driving factor. Curiosity was reported by 28 individuals (25.20%), while family influence and personal trauma followed, reported by 15 (13.50%) and 12 (10.80%) respondents, respectively.

Additionally, the accessibility of substances is a critical concern. An overwhelming 81.10% of users indicated that obtaining drugs was easy, with 58 respondents (52.30%) labeling access as "Very Easy" and 32 (28.80%) as "Easy." Just 21 individuals (18.90%) reported finding it difficult to acquire substances. This high level of accessibility is likely exacerbated by Nagongera's location near cross-border transport routes and insufficient local regulatory enforcement, ensuring that once youths are influenced by peer pressures or stressors, substances are readily available to perpetuate their usage habits.

4.6 Impact of Substance Abuse on Academic Behavior

This section explored how drug and alcohol use relates to schooling for youths in Nagongera. It looked closely at grades, attendance, in-class focus, and completion of schoolwork.

Table 4.5. Impact of Substance Abuse on Academic Behavior

Indicator	Variable	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Self-Rated Performance (N=71)	Very Good	33	46.50
	Good	16	22.50
	Fair	12	16.90
	Poor	10	14.10
Class Attendance (N=71)	Did Not Miss Class (No)	36	50.70
	Missed Class (Yes)	35	49.30
Academic Interference (Likert) (N=64)	Reduced Concentration	44	68.80
	Lowered Grades/Performance	30	47.60
	Missing Lectures/Lessons	27	42.90
	Failure to Submit Assignments	24	38.10

Interpretation: The study revealed concerning insights into the effects of substance abuse on the educational engagement of the 71 students surveyed. When participants were asked to rate their academic performance, a notable 33 students (46.50%) considered their performance to be "Very Good," while 16 students (22.50%) rated it as "Good." This optimistic self-assessment, however, starkly contrasts with observable behavioral metrics, highlighting a significant disconnect between students' perceptions of their academic abilities and their actual academic performance.

This disconnect is further illustrated by their class attendance and cognitive engagement. A striking number of students, 35 (49.30%), acknowledged that they had missed classes as a result of substance use. The impact of substance abuse on cognitive function was underscored by a Likert-scale assessment, which revealed alarming levels of cognitive impairment: 44 students (68.80%) reported difficulties maintaining concentration during class, while 30 students (47.60%) attributed their declining grades directly to substance usage. Additionally, 27 students (42.90%) admitted to missing lectures, and 24 students (38.10%) indicated that they failed to submit assignments on time.

These findings strongly suggest that while many students may physically attend their educational institutions, substance abuse leads to significant mental disengagement, ultimately culminating in a

discernible and gradual decline in their academic performance. This underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems to address substance abuse among youth and mitigate its detrimental effects on education.

4.7 Impact of Substance Abuse on Social Behavior

The section examined the social consequences of youth substance abuse in Nagongera Town Council. It focused specifically on interpersonal relationships, physical fights, legal issues, and the psychological impact of social isolation.

Table 4.6. Impact of Substance Abuse on Social Behavior

Indicator	**Variable**	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Behavioral Consequences (N=111	Experience of Blackouts	83	74.8
	Physical Fights/Conflicts	66	59.5
Legal Consequences (N=109)	Encountered Law Enforcement (Yes)	55	50.5
	No Legal Trouble (No)	54	49.5
Social & Family Dynamics **(N=111)**	Social Isolation (Feeling Alone)	78	70.3
	Social Conflicts with Friends	59	53.2
	Strained Family Relationships	53	49.5
Recovery Indicators **(N=111)**	Wish to Stop	107	96.4
	Felt Guilt after Use	110	99.1

Interpretation: The research presents a comprehensive overview of the significant social, behavioral, and legal repercussions stemming from substance abuse among a group of 111 identified users. Behaviorally, the impact is stark: a notable 83 users (74.80%) reported experiencing blackouts, indicative of high toxicity levels, while 66 users (59.50%) engaged in physical altercations. This erratic behavior contributes to legal troubles, with over half 55 users (50.50%) having encounters with law enforcement, underscoring substance abuse's role in fostering public disorder and criminal activity within the community.
Socially, the findings reveal a troubling cycle. Many youths turn to substance use as a means to connect with peers, but the resulting negative behaviors lead to social degradation. The most frequently reported issue was social isolation, affecting 78 users (70.30%), followed by 59 users (53.20%) facing conflicts with friends, and 53 users (49.50%) reporting strained family relationships. The associated stigma, aggressive behavior, and legal issues culminate in rejection from essential support networks.
In spite of these dire outcomes, there are indications of a potential path to recovery. A remarkable 110

users (99.10%) admitted to feeling guilt after substance use, while 107 users (96.40%) expressed a sincere desire to quit. This suggests that the youth are not resistant to change; instead, they find themselves trapped in a cycle of dependency, largely due to the absence of accessible rehabilitation and counseling services in Nagongera.

4.8 Inferential Statistics

This section presented an inferential statistical analysis conducted to examine the relationship between substance abuse and the academic and social behavior of youths. Chi-square tests were employed to explore the associations between categorical variables. Additionally, Pearson correlation analysis was utilized to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between the frequency of substance abuse and various academic indicators. A significance level of $\alpha=0.05$ was applied in the decision-making process.

4.8.1 Chi-Square Test: Employment Status vs. Substance Abuse

This test determines if being unemployed makes a youth more likely to abuse substances.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no association between employment status and substance abuse.

```
. tab employment ever_abused, chi2
```

employment	ever_abused: No	Yes	Total
No	84	54	138
Yes	58	57	115
Total	142	111	253

Pearson chi2(1) = 2.7737 Pr = 0.096

Decision: Since ($p>0.05$), we fail to reject the null hypothesis. There is no statistically significant association between employment status and substance abuse. This indicates that substance abuse is a widespread issue affecting both working and non-working youth in Nagongera.

4.8.2 Chi-Square Test: Substance abuse Vs Missing Class

The study utilized a Pearson Chi-square test to determine if a statistically significant relationship exists between lifetime history of substance use and academic behavior.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no association between substance abuse and missing class.

ever_abused	missed_class: No	Yes	Total
	130	0	0	130
No	142	0	0	142
Yes	40	36	35	111
Total	312	36	35	383

Pearson chi2(4) = 213.5740 Pr = 0.000

Decision: Since ($p<0.05$), we reject the null hypothesis. There is a statistically significant association between substance abuse and missing classes.

4.8.3 Chi-Square Test: Substance abuse vs. gender

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no association between gender and substance abuse.

```
. tab gender ever_abused ,chi2
```

gender	ever_abused No	Yes	Total
Female	60	45	105
Male	81	66	147
Total	141	111	252

```
          Pearson chi2(1) =   0.1035   Pr = 0.748
```

Decision: Since ($p>0.05$), we fail to reject. No statistically significant association was detected in this sample between gender and lifetime history of substance use. This suggests that susceptibility to substance abuse experimentation is not strictly determined by gender in this context.

4.8.4 Chi-Square Test: social conflicts vs. gender

This test analyzed whether male or female users are more prone to physical fights while under the influence.

```
. tab social_conflict gender, chi2
```

social_conflict	gender Female	Male	Total
No	19	33	52
Yes	26	33	59
Total	45	66	111

```
          Pearson chi2(1) =   0.6500   Pr = 0.420
```

Interpretation: A Pearson chi-square test found no statistically significant association between gender and involvement in social conflict ($\chi 2\ (1) = 0.65$, $p = 0.420$). These findings suggest that the social consequences of substance abuse, such as arguments and physical altercations, affect male and female youths in the study area similarly.

4.8.5 Chi-Square Test: Frequency of Abuse vs. Legal Issues

This test examined whether youth who use substances more frequently (daily) are more likely to have trouble with the law.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no association between the frequency of substance abuse and legal issues

```
. tab freq_abuse Haveyoueverbeeninfaultwith, chi2
```

freq_abuse	Have you ever been in fault with the law due to these substances: No	Yes	Total
Daily	14	30	44
Ever used once	16	2	18
Once a week	16	18	34
Thrice a week	3	4	7
Twice a week	5	1	6
Total	54	55	109

Pearson chi2(4) = 19.6267 Pr = 0.001

Decision: Reject (H0). There is a highly statistically significant association between the frequency of substance use and legal trouble. Specifically, daily users are significantly more likely to encounter law enforcement than those who use substances occasionally.

4.8.6 Chi-Square Test: Frequency of Abuse vs. Social Isolation

This test evaluated if more frequent drug use leads to higher feelings of social isolation (feeling alone).

```
. tab freq_abuse social_isolation,chi2
```

freq_abuse	social_isolation: NO	Yes	Total
Daily	12	32	44
Ever used once	6	12	18
Once a week	11	24	35
Thrice a week	3	5	8
Twice a week	1	5	6
Total	33	78	111

Pearson chi2(4) = 1.0087 Pr = 0.908

Decision: Fail to reject (H0). There is no significant association between the frequency of use and social isolation. Social isolation is reported widely across all user groups, such as 72.7% of daily users feeling isolated, but so do 66% of one-time users, suggesting that the stigma or psychological impact of substance abuse begins even with low-frequency use.

4.9 Chapter Summary

The findings presented in this chapter provided a comprehensive look at the influence of substance abuse on the youths of Nagongera Town Council.

Prevalence and Factors: The study established a high lifetime prevalence rate of 111(43.9%), which was driven largely by peer pressure, 72 (64.9%), and academic stress, 41 (36.9%).

Academic Impact: Descriptive statistics showed that 35 (49.3%) of substance-abusing students always missed classes, and 44 (68.8%) reported reduced concentration. Inferential analysis confirmed a statistically significant association between substance abuse and class absences ($p<0.001$).

Social Impact: Substance abuse was strongly associated with community instability. Although gender did not significantly influence behavioral outcomes, the frequency of abuse was highly significantly associated with legal trouble ($p<0.001$). High rates of social isolation 78 (70.3%) and physical conflicts 66 (59.5%) underscore the erosion of personal well-being.

Conclusion of Findings: The results indicate that substance abuse in Nagongera is a widespread issue fueled by social networks and academic pressures. Despite these challenges, the overwhelming desire of 107 (96.4%) of users to stop using substances provides a critical window of opportunity for targeted community and institutional interventions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive summary of findings and conclusions drawn from the empirical data presented in Chapter Four. Recommendations are provided based on these findings to address the issues identified. Additionally, it discusses the limitations of the study and outlines potential areas for further research to build upon this foundational work.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The research study sought to address key research questions regarding the prevalence, academic impact, social impact, and potential interventions related to substance abuse among youth in Nagongera Town Council. The key findings are summarized below according to each objective:

5.3 Prevalence and Drivers of Substance Abuse

The research study established that substance abuse was a significant public health concern in Nagongera Town Council, with a lifetime prevalence rate of 111(43.9%) amongst the sampled youth population.

Substance abuse emerged as a significant public health concern, with a lifetime prevalence rate of 43.9% among the sampled youth.

Alcohol (25.8%) and Shisha (9.9%) were the most commonly abused substances, with concerning trends in the use of harder drugs like Cocaine (7.6%) and Cannabinoids (9.7%).

Over 70% of users reported that substance consumption was a regular habit, highlighting the need for urgent intervention.

5.3.1 Impact on Academic Behavior

The study exposes strong negative associations between substance abuse and academic engagement.

The study found strong negative associations between substance abuse and academic engagement. Nearly half of the respondents (49.3%) reported missing classes due to substance use, and 68.8% experienced reduced concentration.

Inferential analysis confirmed statistically significant associations between substance abuse and poor academic performance, with many users attributing failure to submit assignments and declining grades to their substance use.

5.3.2 Impact on Social Behavior

Behavioral Volatility: The study found that there were high rates of severe behavioral consequences, with 83 (74.8%) users experiencing blackouts and 66 (59.5%) engaging in physical fights or conflicts while under the influence of substances.

Legal Consequences: There was a highly significant relationship between the frequency of abuse and legal trouble ($p < 0.001$). Over half, 55 (50.5%), of users reported having been in fault with the law, indicating that substance abuse was therefore a direct driver of criminality and public disorder in the town council.

Social Isolation: As peer pressure initiates use, the outcome was often isolation. About 78 (70.3%) of users reported feeling socially isolated, and 53 (49.5%) noted strained family relationships. This suggested that substance abuse eroded the social support networks youths rely on.

Gender Neutrality: Chi-square tests revealed that there were no significant differences between males and females regarding the vulnerability to abuse ($p = 0.748$) or the involvement in social conflicts ($p = 0.420$). This challenged the stereotype that substance abuse was primarily a male issue. In this context, female youths were found equally vulnerable to its associated social consequences.

5.4 Conclusions

Based on the findings from the study, several conclusions can be drawn:

Prevalence of Substance Abuse: The data indicates that substance abuse among youth in Nagongera is a significant concern, with alcohol and shisha being the most commonly abused substances. Additionally, respondents noted that these substances are readily accessible, exacerbating the problem.

Cognitive Impairment Leading to Academic Failure: The study highlights that cognitive impairment, particularly loss of concentration, is a primary mechanism through which substance use negatively impacts academic performance. Students may attend classes physically but are mentally disengaged, leading to a gradual decline in their academic achievements.

Gateway Effect Observed: The research suggests that the use of socially acceptable substances like alcohol and shisha contributes to a gateway effect. This normalization increases the likelihood of youths experimenting with more potent and harmful drugs, such as cocaine and marijuana.

Cycle of Social Isolation: The findings indicate a troubling cycle where youths turn to substance use to cope with peer pressure but consequently face negative social consequences. Aggressive behavior, legal troubles, and blackouts lead to rejection by family and peers, which results in a deep sense of isolation, as reported by 70.3% of users.

Opportunity for Recovery: The high percentage of youths 107 (96.4%) expressing a desire to quit using substances reveals an important opportunity for intervention. However, there remains a significant gap between this demand for support and the available rehabilitation or counseling services in the community.

These conclusions underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions and the development of support systems to address substance abuse and its widespread effects on youth in Nagongera.

5.5 Recommendations

In light of the conclusions, the following recommendations are made to various stakeholders to mitigate the influence of substance abuse on youths in Nagongera Town Council.

5.5.1 To Policy Makers and Local Government (Nagongera Town Council & Tororo District)

Enforce Regulatory Controls on Access: Given that 58 (52.3%) of users found drugs "Very Easy" to access, the Town Council must strictly enforce laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol and shisha to minors. Regular raids on vendors operating near schools and youth centers should be institutionalized.

Establish Youth Rehabilitation Centers: With 107 (96.4%) of users wanting to quit, there is an urgent need for a localized rehabilitation or counseling center in Nagongera. The District Local Government should allocate budgetary resources to support local rehabilitation programs rather than relying solely on punitive measures.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch targeted campaigns that specifically address the misconception that Shisha and Alcohol are "safe." These campaigns should highlight the link between these "gateway" drugs and harder substances like Cocaine, which was used by 29 (7.6%) of respondents.

5.5.2 To Educational Institutions (Schools in Nagongera)

Integrate Stress Management: Implement mandatory guidance and counseling sessions centered on stress management, especially during exam periods. These sessions should equip students with coping strategies to handle academic pressures that may lead to substance abuse.

Peer-Led Education: Establish a program that trains student leaders to serve as "Peer Educators." These peer educators can actively engage their classmates in discussions about the dangers of substance abuse and counteract negative peer pressure through mentorship and support.

Early Detection Systems: Develop training for teachers to help them recognize early signs of cognitive impairment and related issues in students. By identifying these signs early, educators can intervene proactively rather than waiting for absenteeism or academic decline to become evident.

5.5.3 To Parents and Guardians

Monitor Social Circles: Encourage parents to know their children’s friends and engage with other parents to create a network of supervision.

Foster Open Communication: Establish relaxed communication channels so youths feel safe seeking help.

5.5.4 To NGOs and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

Vocational Engagement: Expand vocational training and sports programs to provide constructive alternatives to drug use for the 236(61.9%) unemployed youth.

Family Support Groups: Establish support groups to help families manage relationship strains and learn how to support recovering youths.

5.6 Limitations of the study

Self-Reporting Bias: Due to the illegal and stigmatized nature of substance abuse, respondents may have under-reported their usage or frequency, despite assurances of anonymity. This could mean the actual prevalence is higher than the reported 111 (43.9%).

Cross-Sectional Design: Data were collected at a single point in time. Therefore, while associations were found, causality cannot be definitively proven.

Geographical Generalizability: Findings may not be fully generalizable to rural villages in Tororo District with different socio-economic dynamics.

5.7 Suggestions for Further Research

Longitudinal Studies: A longitudinal study tracking a cohort of youths over 2–3 years will help establish causal relationships between substance initiation and long-term academic dropout rates.

Qualitative Deep-Dive: A qualitative study focusing on the lived experiences of female youths in Nagongera could also provide deeper insights into the gender-neutral findings of this study, exploring why females are equally susceptible despite different social pressures.

Evaluation of Interventions: Additional research into the effectiveness of current local government interventions in Tororo District will help identify best practices and gaps in policy implementation.

Family Dynamics: A study specifically examining the role of family structure (such as single-parent vs. dual-parent households) on substance abuse initiation in Nagongera would add depth to the understanding of home-based risk factors.

5.8 Final Remarks

Substance abuse among youths in Nagongera Town Council continues to be a significant challenge, impacting both individual potential and community stability. The research reveals that while the prevalence of substance use is a growing concern, there is a notable desire for change among users, highlighting an opportunity for meaningful intervention.

Addressing the underlying factors contributing to substance abuse-namely peer pressure, academic stress, and ease of access to substances—will also be critical. By fostering coordinated efforts among government authorities, educational institutions, and families, Nagongera can work towards establishing a safer and more supportive environment for its youth.

This study serves as a foundational evidence base that can guide targeted actions and interventions to combat substance abuse effectively. By mobilizing resources and implementing comprehensive strategies, the community can help nurture healthier behaviors and support the well-being of its young people.

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