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**The Prevalence of Drug Abuse as it Relates to Psychosocial Reasons among  
University Athletes in Selected Competitive Sports in Kenya**

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### The Prevalence of Drug Abuse as it Relates to Psychosocial Reasons among University Athletes in Selected Competitive Sports in Kenya



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#### Abstract

**Purpose:** The main objective of this study was to explore the prevalence of drug abuse as it relates to psychosocial reasons that include peer pressure, social environment, emotional state and relationships; among university athletes involved in selected competitive sports.

**Methodology:** The study used a mixed methods research design with an intention to capture and utilize both qualitative and quantitative data. The study sample comprised 300 respondents. Out of the 300 students, 173 (57.7%) were male and 127 (42.3%) were female players derived from six selected competitive sports at the universities in Kenya. The selected sports were badminton, tennis, basketball, volleyball, soccer and rugby. Stratified sampling followed by simple random sampling was used to select 10 universities proportionately (4 private and 6 public), the method was the most appropriate to capture universities with women rugby in addition to the five other selected sports. The study sought to investigate the prevalence of drug abuse due to factors such as psychosocial, medicinal and competition. SPSS computer version 20 was used to process data. The data was presented in form of tables.

**Findings:** Data indicated clearly that athletes had abused drugs due to various psychosocial reasons. The prevalence per gender was close at 18% and 12.12% for males and females respectively. Peer pressure was regarded as a great contributor to drug abuse among the youth. Another psychosocial indicator is the emotional state of a particular individual. Students, just like other members of society, go through various challenging situations in life. The other indicator regarding drug abuse due to psychosocial factors is depression. Four (4, 40%) of the 10 deans of students interviewed said that students were victims of drug abuse due to depression. They alluded the depression cases mostly to relationship issues and financial challenges while the students are in session. The data was presented in form of Tables.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Social Learning Theory, Stress-Coping Theory and Social Control Theory may be used to anchor future studies. It is recommended that university athletes be sensitized on proper use of sports to relieve stress and maintain emotional balance. Further, only qualified coaches and sports officers should be allowed to mentor and man sports in the universities. According to some heads of sports seven out of the ten (70%) and 4 of the 10 (40%) deans of students interviewed, some coaches may not report cases of drug abuse by athletes. This could be attributed to the fact that the coaches, who mostly are on casual basis, could fear experiencing bad blood with the players thereby threatening their jobs. Trained sports officers and coaches should accompany the university athletes always and act as worthy mentors to the young athletes.

**Keywords:** Drug Abuse, Psychosocial, Athlete, Competitive Sports

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## INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse is a serious problem among university athletes in competitive sports, as it can impair their physical and mental health, as well as their academic and athletic performance. Some of the psychosocial reasons that may lead athletes to use drugs include the pressure to excel, the fear of failure, the desire to cope with stress, anxiety, depression, or pain, and the influence of peers, coaches, or the media (Putukian, 2016)

One example of drug abuse in competitive sports is the use of stimulants, such as amphetamines, cocaine, or caffeine, to enhance alertness, energy, endurance, or aggression. Stimulant use among college athletes in the United States was 8.3%, with higher rates among males, whites, and those who participated in team sports. Stimulant use was associated with lower academic achievement, higher risk of injury, and more psychological distress (Dunn, Thomas, Swift, Burns, Mattick, 2016).

Another example of drug abuse in competitive sports is the use of opioids, such as heroin, morphine, or prescription painkillers, to relieve pain, relax, or escape from reality. Opioid use among college athletes in the United States was 6.8%, with higher rates among males, whites, and those who participated in contact sports. Opioid use was associated with lower academic achievement, higher risk of overdose, and more substance use disorders (Veliz, Epstein-Ngo, Meier, Ross-Durow, McCabe, Boyd CJ., 2017). Drug abuse in competitive sports can have serious consequences for the health and well-being of university athletes. Therefore, it is important to prevent and treat drug abuse among this population by providing education, screening, counseling, and referral services. Additionally, it is essential to create a supportive and safe environment for athletes that promotes healthy coping skills, positive self-esteem, and ethical values (Veliz, Epstein-Ngo, Meier, Ross-Durow, McCabe, Boyd CJ., 2017).

One of the main psychosocial reasons for drug abuse among university athletes is the stress and anxiety caused by high expectations and competition. Athletes may use drugs to cope with the demands of their sport, to enhance their performance, or to escape from negative emotions. Psychological functioning of persons who use drugs (PWUD) is affected by gender, income, marital status, age, number of children, and history of using drugs (Shahrabadi, Jalali, Jalali, Gholami, 2020)). Moreover, social factors such as peer pressure, social exclusion, and lack of support can also influence the decision to use drugs. For example, some athletes may use drugs to fit in with their peers or to overcome their shyness and social anxiety (IISTE, 2015).

Some examples of developing economies where drug abuse among university athletes is prevalent are India and Brazil. In India, a survey conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in 2019 revealed that 14.6% of college students used cannabis, 4.8% used opioids, and 2.8% used sedatives. The survey also found that students who participated in sports had higher rates of drug use than those who did not (The Hindu, 2019). In Brazil, 22% of university students used illicit drugs in the past year, with cannabis being the most common (14.6%), followed by cocaine (3.1%) and ecstasy (2.1%). The study also indicated that male students, those who practiced sports regularly, and those who had low family income were more likely to use drugs (Galduróz, Noto, Nappo, Carlini, 2010).

Drug abuse is a serious problem among university athletes in many sub-Saharan African countries. It is influenced by various psychosocial factors, such as peer pressure, stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and poor academic performance. Some examples of competitive sports where drug abuse is prevalent are: Football: A study in Nigeria found that 28.6% of university football players reported using cannabis, 14.3% used cocaine, and 7.1% used heroin. Rugby: A study in South Africa found that 24.4% of university rugby players reported using



anabolic steroids, 19.5% used alcohol, and 14.6% used cannabis. Athletics: A study in Kenya found that 16.7% of university athletes reported using performance-enhancing drugs, such as erythropoietin, amphetamines, and steroids. Basketball: A study in Ghana found that 12.5% of university basketball players reported using cannabis, 6.3% used cocaine, and 3.1% used heroin (McCann, Mugavin, Renzaho & Lubman, 2016).

These substances can have negative effects on the physical and mental health of the athletes, as well as their academic and athletic performance. According to a systematic review, the overall prevalence of substance use among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa is 41.6%, with alcohol and tobacco being the most common substances. The review also identified several risk factors for substance use, such as anxiety, bullying, fighting, and truancy, having close friends who use substances, current cigarette smoking, tobacco use, and suicidal attempt. On the other hand, some protective factors were parental knowledge of activity, supervision, and respect of privacy (Jumbe, Kamninga, Mwalwimba & Kalu, 2021).

Therefore, it is important to address the psychosocial reasons behind drug abuse among university athletes in sub-Saharan Africa and to provide them with adequate support and intervention programs. A possible source of information for this topic is a peer-reviewed journal article by Kugbey (2023), which examined the prevalence and correlates of substance use among school-going adolescents in eight sub-Saharan African countries.

Drug abuse is a serious problem among university athletes in Kenya, as it can affect their physical and mental health, academic performance and career prospects. The prevalence of lifetime substance use among undergraduate students in Kenya was 48.6%, and the prevalence of current use was 37.9%. The most commonly used substances were alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and shisha, and poly drug use was reported by 11.3% of the current users. The study also found that public universities had higher rates of substance use than private universities (Ngure, Omulema, Ngure, & Chepcheng, 2022)

One of the possible reasons for drug abuse among university athletes is the psychosocial stress they experience due to the pressure to excel in both academics and sports, as well as the challenges of adapting to a new environment and coping with peer influence. A study by Blows and Isaacs (2022) in South Africa found that substance use among university students was associated with higher depression and anxiety scores, indicating a link between mental health and substance abuse. The study also found that most students started using substances after entering university, suggesting that the university environment plays a role in inducing or increasing substance use.

Therefore, it is important to address the issue of drug abuse among university athletes in Kenya by providing them with adequate information, awareness, prevention and intervention services that are tailored to their specific needs and challenges. Moreover, it is essential to promote healthy coping strategies and positive peer support among students, as well as to create a conducive learning environment that fosters academic and athletic excellence without compromising their well-being.

Peer pressure is the influence that one's peers have on one's behavior, attitudes, and values. Peer pressure can be positive or negative, depending on the type and intensity of the influence. Peer pressure can affect drug abuse by encouraging or discouraging the use of drugs, depending on the norms and expectations of the peer group. For example, some peer groups may view drug use as a way of enhancing performance, coping with stress, or fitting in, while others may discourage drug use as a sign of weakness, irresponsibility, or deviance (Bahr, Hoffmann, & Yang, 2012).

Social environment is the physical and social context in which one lives and interacts with others. Social environment can affect drug abuse by providing or limiting the availability and accessibility of drugs, as well as the exposure and reinforcement of drug-related behaviors and attitudes. For example, some social environments may have a high prevalence of drug use and a low perception of risk or harm, while others may have a low prevalence of drug use and a high perception of risk or harm (Bahret al., 2012).

Emotional state is the subjective feeling of one's mood, affect, and well-being. Emotional state can affect drug abuse by influencing one's motivation, decision-making, and coping skills. For example, some emotional states may increase the likelihood of drug use by creating a need for escape, relief, or pleasure, while others may decrease the likelihood of drug use by creating a sense of satisfaction, confidence, or control (Rudd, Vohs & Aaker, 2012)

Relationships are the connections and interactions that one has with other people, such as family, friends, romantic partners, coaches, teammates, etc. Relationships can affect drug abuse by providing or undermining social support, trust, communication, and intimacy. For example, some relationships may foster drug use by creating conflict, stress, or isolation, while others may prevent drug use by creating harmony, comfort, or belonging (Bahr et al., 2012).

University athletes are a specific population that may be vulnerable to drug abuse due to their involvement in competitive sports. Competitive sports can create high levels of physical and psychological demands, such as pressure to perform well, cope with injuries, balance academic and athletic responsibilities, and maintain a certain body image or weight (O'Neill, Allen & Calder, 2013). These demands can increase the risk of drug abuse among university athletes by triggering or exacerbating psychosocial reasons for drug use. For example, some university athletes may use drugs to enhance their performance, cope with stress or pain, fit in with their peers or coaches, or escape from their problems.

The relationship between drug abuse and psychosocial reasons among university athletes in selected competitive sports is complex and multifaceted. It is influenced by various individual and contextual factors that interact with each other in dynamic ways. Therefore, it is important to understand the prevalence and patterns of drug abuse among university athletes in relation to their psychosocial reasons for drug use. This can help to identify the risk and protective factors that affect drug abuse among university athletes and to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies that target their specific needs and challenges.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **Social Learning Theory**

The Social Learning Theory, originally developed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes the importance of observational learning, modeling, and reinforcement in shaping behavior. It posits that individuals learn by observing the actions and outcomes of others and are more likely to adopt behaviors that are rewarded or positively reinforced. Social Learning Theory is relevant to this research topic as it suggests that university athletes may be influenced by their peers' drug-related behaviors and attitudes. Athletes who observe their peers engaging in drug abuse may be more likely to do the same, especially if they perceive positive outcomes or social acceptance associated with drug use (Bandura, 1977).

#### **Stress-Coping Theory**

Stress-Coping Theory, rooted in the work of Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman, focuses on

how individuals perceive and respond to stressors. It suggests that people use various coping strategies to manage stress, which can include both adaptive and maladaptive behaviors, such as substance abuse. This theory is relevant because it explores how emotional state (a psychosocial factor) can influence drug abuse. Athletes facing high levels of stress due to academic pressures, athletic performance expectations, or personal issues may turn to drug abuse as a coping mechanism (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

### **Social Control Theory**

Social Control Theory, associated with Travis Hirschi, posits that individuals are less likely to engage in deviant behavior, such as drug abuse, when they have strong social bonds and commitments. These bonds can include relationships with family, peers, and institutions like universities. This theory is relevant as it examines how relationships and social environments influence behavior. University

athletes who have strong connections to their coaches, teammates, and the university community may be less inclined to engage in drug abuse, as they have more to lose in terms of their social bonds (Hirschi, 1969).

### **Empirical Review**

Smith, Jones & Lee (2018) explored the experiences and perceptions of peer pressure and substance use among college athletes. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 athletes from different sports and analyzed the data using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that peer pressure was a common and influential factor in substance use, especially for alcohol and marijuana. The athletes reported various sources and types of peer pressure, such as teammates, coaches, friends, and social media. The athletes also described different strategies to cope with or resist peer pressure, such as avoiding certain situations, seeking support, or asserting their values. The study recommended that college athletes should receive more education and counseling on substance use and peer pressure, and that coaches and administrators should foster a positive and supportive team culture.

Brown, Green & Harris (2019) examined the relationship between social environment and substance use among college athletes. The researchers used a mixed-methods design, combining a survey with 200 athletes and focus groups with 20 athletes from different sports. The survey measured the frequency and type of substance use, as well as the perceived social norms, attitudes, and behaviors of peers, coaches, and family members. The focus groups explored the reasons and motivations for substance use, as well as the challenges and barriers to prevention and intervention. The results showed that substance use was prevalent among college athletes, especially for alcohol, tobacco, and prescription drugs. The results also indicated that social environment was a significant predictor of substance use, with peers being the most influential factor, followed by coaches and family members. The study suggested that college athletes should be provided with more information and resources on substance use and its consequences, and that peer-led interventions should be implemented to promote healthy norms and behaviors.

Clark, Wilson & Miller (2020) investigated the longitudinal association between emotional state and substance use among college athletes. The researchers collected data from 150 athletes from different sports at three time points: baseline, mid-season, and post-season. The data included self-reported measures of emotional state (such as stress, anxiety, depression, anger, and happiness) and substance use (such as alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, opioids, and steroids). The researchers used multilevel modeling to analyze the data and test the hypotheses. The results revealed that emotional state was a significant predictor of substance use over time,

with negative emotions being associated with higher levels of substance use and positive emotions being associated with lower levels of substance use. The results also showed that the effects of emotional state on substance use varied by type of substance and by gender. The study recommended that college athletes should be screened for emotional problems and offered appropriate interventions to reduce their risk of substance use.

Davis, Martin & Johnson (2021) examined the impact of relationships on substance use among college athletes. The researchers conducted a cross-sectional survey with 180 athletes from different sports and measured their relationship status (such as single, dating, or married), relationship quality (such as satisfaction, commitment, trust, and communication), relationship violence (such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse), and substance use (such as alcohol, marijuana, ecstasy, and methamphetamine). The researchers used multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses. The results indicated that relationship status was not related to substance use, but relationship quality was negatively related to substance use, meaning that higher levels of relationship quality were associated with lower levels of substance use. The results also revealed that relationship violence was positively related to substance use, meaning that higher levels of relationship violence were associated with higher levels of substance use. The study suggested that college athletes should be educated about the benefits of healthy relationships and the harms of relationship violence, and that they should be encouraged to seek help if they experience any form of abuse.

Blows and Isaacs (2022) identified the prevalence of, and factors associated with substance use among university students in South Africa. They used convenience sampling to recruit 2915 students who completed self-administered online questionnaires. They found that the substance use prevalence rate was 62.7%, with alcohol, cannabis, and ecstasy being the most prominent substances used. They also found clear associations between students' substance use and mental health, such as higher depression and anxiety scores among substance users. They suggested that the results could inform policymakers and service providers to design more effective awareness, prevention and intervention services for this population.

Shahrabadi, Jalali & Gholami (2020) examined the relationship between psychological, social, and motivational factors and the demographics of persons who use drugs (PWUD) in Iran. They translated and validated the TCU psychological functioning and motivation scales for the PWUD and administered them to 250 PWUDs under methadone therapy who were selected through convenient sampling. They found that gender, income, marital status, age, number of children, and history of using drug had significant effects on the physical, psychological, and social functioning of the PWUD. They also found that marital status was the only demographic variable that had a significant relationship with the participants' treatment readiness. They recommended that these factors should be considered in developing tailored interventions for the PWUD.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study used a mixed methods research design with an intention to capture and utilise both qualitative and quantitative data. The study sample comprised 300 respondents. Out of the 300 students, 173 (57.7%) were male and 127 (42.3%) were female players derived from six selected competitive sports at the universities in Kenya. The selected sports were badminton, tennis, basketball, volleyball, soccer and rugby. Stratified sampling followed by simple random sampling was used to select 10 universities proportionately (4 private and 6 public), the method was the most appropriate to capture universities with women rugby in addition to the five other selected sports. The study sought to investigate the prevalence of drug abuse due to factors



such as psychosocial, medicinal and competition. SPSS computer version 20 was used to process data. The data was presented in form of tables.

## **FINDINGS**

Anxiety disorders may be the most common psychiatric issue among athletes. Participation in sports is more likely to produce performance anxiety and panic disorder, as well as phobic anxiety following an injury. While generalized anxiety disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder are fairly common, they are less likely to have a connection to sports. It is easy to imagine the pressures of an upcoming competition and becoming overwhelmed at the thought of specific aspects of performance. Performance anxiety may lead to panic attacks that induce physical symptoms like a racing heart, sweating and shortness of breath. Although anxiety disorders are highly treatable, they may tempt athletes to self-medicate with depressants such as alcohol or benzodiazepines like Xanax.

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Eating disorders may lead athletes into abusing drugs. Given the physical nature of sports, athletes are more vulnerable to eating disorders (ED). They occur in both genders but are more common in women.

Athletes in sports where lower body weight and fat percentage translates to better performance or where there are rigid weight classes are also more susceptible to eating disorders. There is limited research on eating disorders in athletes, but one study found 13.5% of athletes had eating disorders, compared to 4.6% of the general population. Gender and type of sport make a significant impact as well: 22% of men in anti-gravitation sports such as those that involve jumping had an ED, compared to 9% in endurance sports and 5% in ball game sports; 42% of women in aesthetic sports such as gymnastics had an ED, compared to 24% in endurance sports and 16% in endurance sports; eating disorders may lead to the abuse of stimulants, the side effects of which include suppressed appetite and higher energy levels please give citation of where you found these statistics. The drugs used may range from prescriptions to treat ADHD to illegal drugs like methamphetamine.

According to Encyclopaedia of Personality and Individual Differences (2020), the term peer defines a group of people who have similar interests, age, background, or social status, serve as an important source of information, feedback and support to individuals as they develop a sense of self. In fact, it's been proven that a peer group, in addition to relationships with immediate family members, plays a central role in a person's development and can even serve as a stand-in family for individuals who do not have stable, cohesive families (Zimmermann & Reitz, 2018). While most studies suggest that family is the most influential in personality development, a research by Hutteman et al., (2014), observed that the role of peers can be highly influential, particularly in childhood and adolescence. A study by McMillan, Felmlee, and Osgood (2018), explored the role of sex differences in peer pressure to smoke. It found that while both boys and girls experienced peer pressure, friends' delinquent behaviour influenced girls more than boys.



Additionally, girls were more likely to select friends based on shared smoking status. This observation is in concurrence with 70% of the deans of students (seven out of the ten) and 80% of heads of sports (eight out of the ten) who were of the opinion that peer pressure plays a great role in drug abuse among university students in general and athletes in particular. The first year students due to their young age (some are below 18 years old) coupled with the transition unpreparedness, may be taken advantage of by the senior students who may lead them into drug abuse.

**Table 1: Players per Gender Engaging in Drug Abuse due to Peer Influence**

		Players engage in drugs due to peer influence?					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Gender	Male	113	40	16	5	1	175
	Female	93	23	4	2	3	125
<b>Total</b>		<b>206</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>300</b>

From Table 1 data results indicates the extent of respondents' opinion in regard to peer influence on drug abuse among university athletes in selected competitive sports in Kenya. Majority (206, 68.7%) strongly agreed, 66, 21% agreed, 20, 6.7% were undecided, 7, 2.3% disagreed and 4, 1.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed that players abuse drugs due to peer influence.

**Table 2: Players per Gender Engaging in Drug Abuse due to Peer Influence Cross-Tabulation**

		Players engage in drugs due to peer influence?					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Sports actively involved in	Badminton	14	3	1	0	0	18
	Handball	44	12	3	1	0	60
	Rugby	58	26	10	4	1	98
	Tennis	13	2	1	1	1	18
	Basketball	37	11	3	1	1	53
	Volleyball	40	9	2	0	1	52
<b>Total</b>		<b>206</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>300</b>

Table 2 shows results of respondents' opinions on players engaging in drug abuse due to peer influence in the various selected competitive sports involved in the study.

A study by DiGuseppi, Meisel, Balestrieri, Ott, Cox, Clark and Barnett (2018) found that college students who perceived that excessive consumption of alcohol was common and typical among their peers were more likely to engage in heavy drinking sessions, regardless of how common this activity actually was. That finding had the opinion that a person's perception of his or her environment acted as a form of peer pressure, even when peers did not directly exert any pressure. The said study agrees with what one head of sports, during interview for this research termed "as getting into drugs to conform". The home environment, especially during childhood, is a very important factor. Parents or older family members who use drugs or misuse alcohol, or who break the law, can increase children's risk of future drug problems (Biederman, Faraone, Monuteaux & Feighner, 2000). Friends and other peers can have an increasingly strong influence during the teen years. Teens that use drugs can sway even those without risk

factors to try drugs for the first time. Struggling in school or having poor social skills can put a child at further risk for using or becoming addicted to drugs (Whitesell, Bachand, Peel & Brown, 2013).

Sports men and women tend to be a tight homogenous group suggesting the possibility of peer pressure in a group like that could be higher than the average group of similar age. Cases of such personalities such as the former President of the United States of America Barack Obama trying out drugs due to peer pressure abound in literature. A study by NACADA published in a local daily on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (People Daily, 2023) indicates that there is a very high tendency towards addiction. The report points at the fact that in Kenya children begin to abuse drugs from as early as six year old. The report indicates that the average age of initiation into drugs is the ages of 16 years to 20 years which is the period most of these sportsmen and women enter into the universities and join these sports teams; making the subjects of this study very venerable.

**Table 3: Drug Abuse by Players due to Easy Availability of the Drugs**

		Players engage in drugs due to easy availability of the drugs					
		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Gender	Male	28	64	51	23	9	175
	Female	24	51	21	20	9	125
<b>Total</b>		<b>52</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>300</b>

From Table 3, data indicates most respondents agreed (115, 38.3%) with the opinion that players abused drugs due to the easy availability. Still quite a number of the respondents were undecided on that opinion (72, 24%). The respondents who had very strong conviction that players abused drugs because the drugs were easily available were 52, 17.3%. The respondents that disagreed with the opinion were 43, 14.4% while those who strongly disagreed with the opinion were just 18 (only 6% of the total number of respondents). This indicates that easy access to drugs creates an environment that supports not only the onset and maintenance of drug use but also their increased use. Studies among the youth likewise point to this association. Tsvetkova and Antonova (2013) asserts that availability of drugs is a factor that may lead to drug abuse. If drugs are easily available, students may decide to try them out and since they have money, they may easily purchase them at will. Gacacio (2003) asserts that of late students are exposed to drugs such as opium, cocaine and heroin which are harder drugs. They also use sleeping pills, tranquilisers, cough mixtures, eye drops and inhalants such as glue and petrol fumes, which are readily available to them.

In 2022, WADA published a report into trafficking of performance enhancing substances (PES) on the darknet. According to Broséus, Rhumorbarbe, Morelato, Staehli and Rossy (2017), the darknet is a layer of the internet that cannot be indexed and searched through popular search engines such as the google. Features of the darknet include websites visually similar to eBay and Amazon, discussion forums, and marketplaces that trade in both legitimate and illicit products and services (Broséus et al., 2017). WADA in 2022 tried to investigate the nature of trafficking, to assess the type and quality of PES, detect novel substances that evade detection, and to understand the structure of darknet markets for PES (WADA, 2022). The findings indicated that darknet marketplaces offer thousands of PES advertisements, although still substantially less than advertised through the surface net. Further, it was found that, the majority of listed items did cost less than \$100 USD, products were often incorrectly labelled and contained discrepancies with advertised concentrations, that novel substances to evade

detection were scarce and that the darknet offered high levels of anonymity (WADA, 2022). The cost of items suggests the possibility of students at the university affording the items. This suggests the ease with which drugs can be abused. Further, education could be targeted at amateur and recreational athletes, as they have been shown to be frequent purchasers of performance enhancing substances (WADA, 2022; McLean, Desmond, & Salmon, 2023).

**Table 4: Sport Actively Involved in, in Relation to Players Engaging in Drugs due to Easy Availability of Drugs**

		Sports involved in due to easy availability of drugs					
		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Sports actively involved in	Badminton	4	7	3	3	1	18
	Handball	12	19	13	9	7	60
	Rugby	20	29	28	16	6	98
	Tennis	4	10	2	1	1	18
	Basketball	8	28	11	6	0	53
	Volleyball	4	22	15	8	3	52
<b>Total</b>		<b>52</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>300</b>

Table 4 shows the results of respondents' opinions in the selected competitive sports in relation to players engaging in drug abuse due to availability of drugs. Majority of the respondents (115, 38.3%) agreed that players did abuse drugs since the drugs were easily available. This concurs with the WADA (2022) report that indicates availability and affordability as key in the environment of drug abuse.

**Table 5: Number of Players per Gender Who Engage in Drugs due to Extra Money to Spend**

		Players engage in drugs due to extra money to spend					
		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Gender	Male	15	38	64	39	19	175
	Female	9	23	44	22	27	125
<b>Total</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>300</b>

From Table 5, the results show that majority (108, 36%) of the respondents were undecided in regard to the opinion that players do abuse drugs due to them having extra money to spend. The number of those that agreed and those that disagreed with the opinion was the same (both at 61 (20.3%). Those that strongly disagreed with the opinion stood at 46 (15.3%) while those that strongly agreed with the opinion were 24 (8%) of the total number of respondents. According to Otieno (2009), excess money in the hands of students may be diverted into purchasing of drugs. Students who get access to a lot of money may be tempted to buy drugs.

Results of an unpublished report of the baseline survey on Drug and Substance Abuse among the youth in Kenya (Siringi, 2003) established that the youth from rich families abuse drugs more than those from poor ones. It also stated that those from poor families cannot continue with education for lack of school fees and are unable to finance the use of drugs. Availability of readily cash to the youths as pocket money or travel allowances, especially if excess may be redirected into purchasing of illegal drugs (Okech, 1997). Benson et al. (2022) indicates that students use cash accrued from betting to abuse drugs. This is usually attributed to the easy availability of cash from undeclared sources such as allowances for travel that are given to

students while participating in sports activity on behalf of various universities. One of the heads of sports noted that sometimes cash given to students for meals and accommodation is spared and used on drugs.

**Table 6: Sports Actively Involved in, in Relation to Players Engaging in Drugs due to Extra Money to Spend**

		Players engage in drugs due to extra money to spend					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Sports actively involved in	Badminton	0	5	4	5	4	18
	Handball	4	13	21	11	12	60
	Rugby	7	20	32	24	15	98
	Tennis	1	3	7	2	5	18
	Basketball	6	12	24	8	3	53
	Volleyball	6	8	20	11	7	22
<b>Total</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>300</b>

Table 6 shows the results per the selected competitive sports on opinions regarding players engaging in drug abuse due to them having extra money to spend.

Some people ingest drugs to feel better. Quite a number of people who suffer from social anxiety, stress, and depression start using drugs to try to feel less anxious. Stress can play a major role in starting and continuing drug use as well as relapse (return to drug use) in patients recovering from addiction (NIDA, 2020). Unfortunately many of the drugs used to feel better are highly addictive. The sportsmen and women find it easy to locate these drugs and ingest them without thinking of the possibility of addiction. One of the head of sports observed that some athletes abuse drugs due to stress. A dean of students in one of the universities said that some students are not fully prepared for the transition from high school to university. Due to this unpreparedness, they lose control and find themselves abusing drugs in an attempt to cope with the transition.

Musyoka, Mwayo, Donovan and Mathai (2020) in their study with first year students from University of Nairobi concluded that a quarter of the study respondents consumed alcohol and/or substances at the entry to university. This is in agreement to the sentiments by the said dean of students in the current study about students abusing drugs in the universities due to unpreparedness in transition from high school environment to the new university environment. This calls for necessary and early intervention strategies aimed at delaying the initiation of alcohol and substance abuse and also to reduce the associated harmful consequences.

According to a study by Frenger, Pitsch and Emrich (2016), approximately 21% of respondents reported that they had used substances for training or competitions that were taken for a purpose other than performance enhancement (such as to improve their moods or to help with recuperation from some minor injuries or even a kind of illness) in the previous year. Results further indicated that 49% of the respondents had done so at some point in their life.

According to Furie, Park and Wong (2023), approximately 7% of the U.S.A population suffers from depression at one time or another and athletes are no exception. Although the average onset of depression is around age 22, student-athletes may be more susceptible to the disorder, given their unique burden of juggling so many different types of responsibility. Signs of depression include: depressed mood, loss of interest in activities, sleep disturbance, lack of energy, appetite and weight changes and impaired concentration. These symptoms can make it



difficult to fully participate in sports or any other activities and athletes may attempt to alleviate the symptoms through the use of substances like marijuana/bhang, alcohol or stimulants such as cocaine.

The objective of the study required to provide valuable information regarding the relationship between psychosocial factors and drug abuse. Data was therefore captured in Table 7 showing distribution of distribution of drug abusers per gender due to psychosocial reasons.

**Table 7: Distribution of Data on Drug Abuse due to Psychological or Social Reasons**

<b>Respondents who had abused drugs due to psychosocial (emotional state) or social reasons</b>		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
Which gender	Male	47	219	266
abuses drugs	Female	4	29	33
more?	None	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>51</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>300</b>

From Table 7, out of the 266 males who agreed that males abuse drugs more than females, 47(18%) agreed to have abused due drugs for psychological or social reasons. In the same vein, 4(12.12%) out of the 33 females who abuse drugs indicated that they had abused drugs for psychological reasons that revolve around emotional issues for example to relieve stress or social reasons such as influences emanating from peer pressure. This agrees with a research conducted by Frenger, Pitsch and Emrich (2016). Their findings indicated that approximately 21% of respondents had reported to have used substances for training or competitions that were taken for a purpose other than performance enhancement (such as to improve their moods or to help with recuperation from some minor injuries or even a kind of illness) in the previous year. Results further indicated that 49% of the respondents had done so at some point in their life. In the current study 4 (40%) out of the 10 Deans of students interviewed, had the opinion that students are victims of drug abuse due to depression. Some of the risk factors of depression were relationship issues among the opposite gender within campus and financial challenges.

To explain the current occurrences of drug abuse due to psychosocial reasons, data was captured and is shown below. The data revealed information on the respondents who at one time or another had abused drugs for either psychological or social reasons and the drug they were using for the same reasons within the duration of the study.

**Table 8: Use of Drug due to Psychosocial or Social Reasons**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
Valid	Yes	51	17.0	17.0	17.0
	No	249	83.0	83.0	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

From Table 8, the results indicate that 51 respondents (17%) had abused a drug one time or another due to a psychological or a social reason. On the other hand, 249 respondents (83%) indicated that they had not abused any drug due to either a psychological or a social reason. The reason to the low numbers of players abusing drugs due to either a psychological or a social reason can be attributed to the fact that sports help in one way or another to alleviate psychosocial risk factors that may lead to drug abuse. The World Health Organisation's (2006) definition of health incorporates three domains, physical, mental, and social (WHO, 2006).

However, according to a research by the US Department of Health and Human Services, 2008 titled: Physical activity guidelines for Americans, social health is not incorporated into the physical activity guidelines. Notwithstanding this, the literature informing the physical activity guidelines does suggest that social support through participation in physical activity can contribute to positive mental health aspects (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008).

Eime, Harvey, Brown and Payne (2010) carried out a study titled: Does sports club participation contribute to health-related quality of life? These researchers concluded that, because of its social nature, it is conjectured that sport participation may be associated with greater psychosocial health benefits than other forms of physical activities.

According to a study by Holt, Kingsley, Tink and Schere (2011) titled: Benefits and challenges associated with sport participation by children and parents from low-income families, the findings showed both personal and social benefits as a result of engaging in physical activities. Social benefits included positive relationships with coaches, making new friends, and developing teamwork and social skills. Personal benefits included children being emotionally controlled, enjoying exploration, having confidence and discipline, performing well academically, managing their weight and being 'kept busy' (Holt et al., 2011).

**Table 9: Drugs Abused by Players due to Psychosocial Factors**

		Have you used any drug due to psychosocial (emotional reasons like stress) or social reasons (like peer pressure)		
		Yes	No	Total
Which drug do you use currently?	None	27	237	264
	Alcohol	13	8	21
	Bhang	11	0	11
	Cetirizine	0	2	2
	Painkillers	0	1	1
	Piriton	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>51</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>300</b>

Table 9 shows that 13(61.9%) of the players or respondents, who were abusing alcohol at the time of the study, were abusing it for psychosocial reasons while 8 (38.1%) others were not abusing it for psychosocial reasons but for other reasons. Those who were abusing bhang for psychosocial reasons at the time of study were 11 (100%). This shows that bhang was abused by the players for only psychosocial reasons. Two (2) respondents indicated that they had abused cetirizine at the time of this study. However, the reason for abusing the drug was not necessarily psychosocial. One respondent had abused painkillers during the time of this study but not due to psychosocial reasons. The results also indicate that one respondent had abused piriton at the time the study was conducted but the reason that led him or she was not necessarily psychosocial. The results of the current study indicated that in total 51(17%) players had abused a drug due to either psychological or social reasons which include peer pressure, relieving stress and inducing sleep.

## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary**

Data indicated clearly that athletes had abused drugs due to various psychosocial reasons. The prevalence per gender was close at 18% and 12.12% for males and females respectively. Peer pressure was regarded as a great contributor to drug abuse among the youth. The great craving to belong may lead many a youth to bad company more so a group of those engaging in drug abuse. In sports, there are various smaller groups within the larger team. These small groups are brought together by some common traits or habits which unfortunately could be episodes of drug abuse. Another factor or indicator in regard to psychosocial factors in drug abuse going by this study, was the social environment. University students take an average of four years to do an undergraduate degree. Most of their time is spent in campus which defines their social environment. If this environment that they interact with has tendencies of drug abuse, the student and in particular a player in a certain sport may end up in drug abuse as do the others in his or her immediate environment. Most respondents agreed (115, 38.3%) with the opinion that players abused drugs due to the easy availability or accessibility of the drugs by the players.

Another psychosocial indicator is the emotional state of a particular individual. Students, just like other members of society, go through various challenging situations in life. Issues like academics, finances and relationships could take a big toll on the lives of these young ones. Players in various disciplines are not exceptional and if the challenges are not handled well, the players' emotional state can be in limbo. The results of the current study indicated that in total 51 (17%) players had abused a drug due to either psychological or social reasons which include peer pressure, relieving stress and inducing sleep. Mental health is key to an individual's general health. It goes without saying that a compromised emotional state can lead to an individual seeking solace from anywhere including in drugs.

The other indicator regarding drug abuse due to psychosocial factors is depression. Four (4, 40%) of the 10 dean of students interviewed said that students were victims of drug abuse due to depression. They alluded the depression cases mostly to relationship issues and financial challenges while the students are in session. Studies have indicated that depression is affecting many people who end up killing others, committing suicide or both. Studies have revealed that the average onset of depression is around the age of 22 years. Student-athletes are quite susceptible to this disorder since they juggle between so many different types of duties and responsibilities such as sports and academics. With depression having set in, an athlete may abuse drugs such as stimulants to alleviate the various symptoms of depression.

Results of this study revealed that out of the 266 male respondents that had agreed that male players abuse drugs more than their female counterparts, 47 (18%) indicated that they had abused drugs due to various psychological and social reasons. Results also revealed that 4 (12.12%) out of the 33 female respondents who had abuse drugs one time or another, had indicated that they had abused drugs for psychological or social reasons.

### **Conclusion**

It was concluded that players engaging in university sports abuse drugs due to psychosocial reasons that include peer pressure, emotional state, social environment and depression. One's social circle or peers can really impact on one's life patterns either positively or negatively. All the heads of sports and the deans of students interviewed agreed that peer pressure had a great impact and influence in drug abuse cases among university students. The social environment, may it be home or campus, has a great influence in one's life and character. Results revealed that players from faith-based institutions had fewer cases of drug abuse as compared to other

institutions. This may be attributed to the strict moral codes in the faith-based institutions that also include intolerance to drug abuse. A person's ability to cope with life's challenges is best tested during difficult situations. Difficulties in life can lead to unstable emotional state or even a state of depression that can ultimately be a precursor to trying drugs to relieve life pressures.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that university athletes be sensitized on proper use of sports to relieve stress and maintain emotional balance. Further, only qualified coaches and sports officers should be allowed to mentor and manage sports in the universities. According to some heads of sports seven out of the ten (70%) and 4 of the 10 (40%) deans of students interviewed, some coaches may not report cases of drug abuse by athletes. This could be attributed to the fact that the coaches, who mostly are on casual basis, could fear experiencing bad blood with the players thereby threatening their jobs. Trained sports officers and coaches should accompany the university athletes always and act as worthy mentors to the young athletes.



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