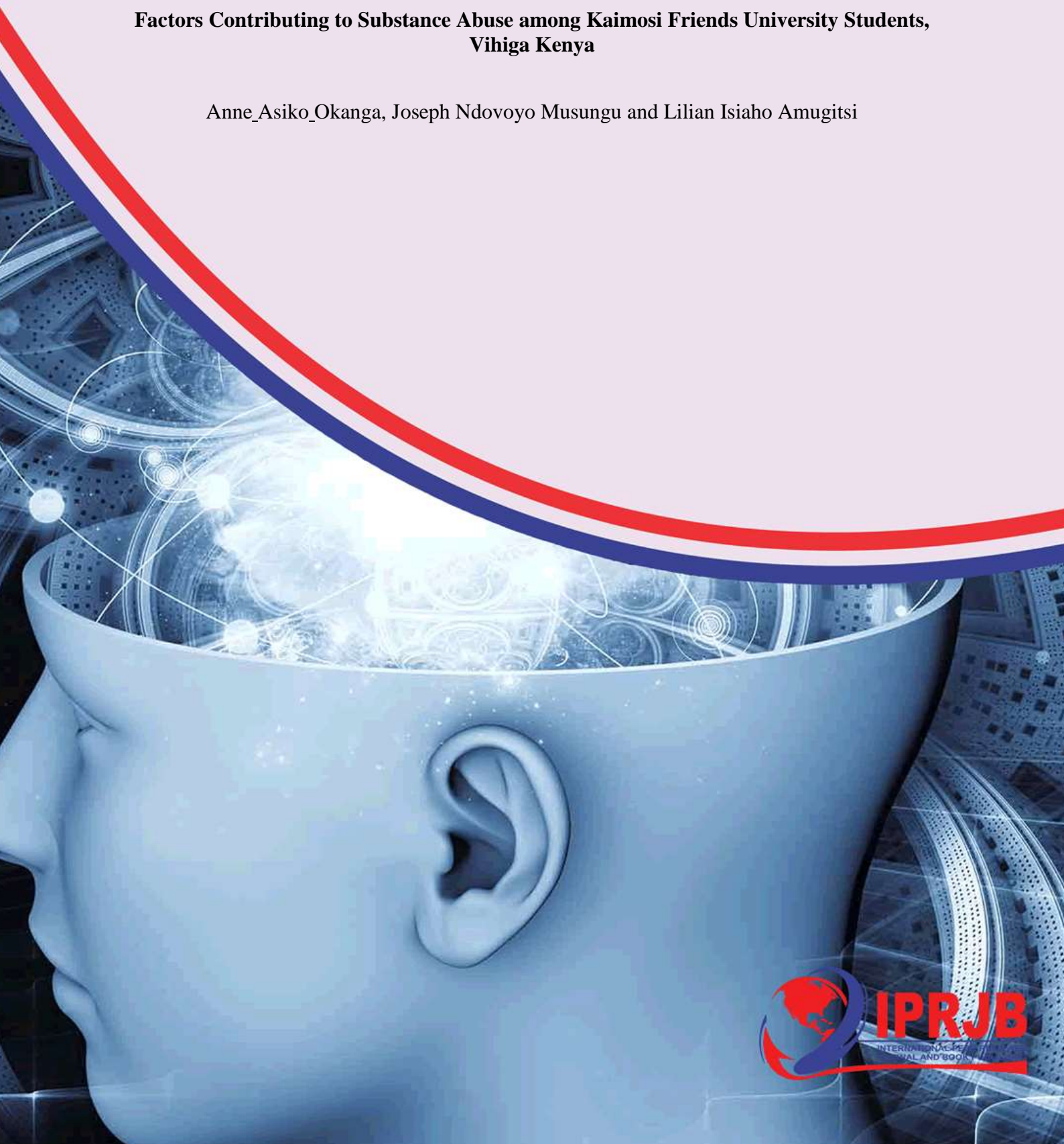


International Journal of Psychology (IJP)

**Factors Contributing to Substance Abuse among Kaimosi Friends University Students,
Vihiga Kenya**

Anne_Asiko_Okanga, Joseph Ndovoyo Musungu and Lilian Isiaho Amugitsi



**Factors Contributing to Substance Abuse
among Kaimosi Friends University Students,
Vihiga Kenya**



¹*Anne_Asiko_Okanga

Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences,
Kaimosi Friends University



²Joseph Ndovoyo Musungu

Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences,
Kaimosi Friends University



³Lilian Isiaho Amugitsi

Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences,
Kaimosi Friends University

Article History

Received 15th April 2025

Received in Revised Form 19th May 2025

Accepted 23th June 2025



How to cite in APA format:

Okanga, A., Musungu, J., & Amugitsi, L. (2025). Factors Contributing to Substance Abuse among Kaimosi Friends University Students, Vihiga Kenya. *International Journal of Psychology*, 10(2), 48–60. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ijp.3398>

Abstract

Purpose: Substance abuse among university students is a global public health concern, largely due to their vulnerability during the transition to independence, with serious implications for personal growth and national development. The goal of the study was to investigate the contributing factors to substance abuse among students at Kaimosi Friends University (KAFU).

Methodology: A descriptive cross-sectional design was used where a total of 350 undergraduate students were selected through stratified random sampling, and data were collected in May 2025 using a structured questionnaire adapted from NACADA. Analysis was conducted thematically and using SPSS version 25. Ethical approval was obtained from MMUST, and confidentiality and informed consent were upheld.

Findings: The study revealed that social media was the main source of information on substance abuse. A significant portion of students (65%) frequently experienced stress or anxiety, with 50% using substances as a coping mechanism. Academic pressure, perceived unfair grading, and personal issues were major stressors. Peer influence was notable, with 55% having friends who used drugs and 45.1% reporting peer encouragement to try substances, although some emphasized personal choice. Easy access to substances (60%) and media glorification of drug use (50%) were also reported. Family influences played a role, with 55.1% citing substance use by fathers or brothers and others noting emotional neglect and family challenges. The study concluded that substance abuse at KAFU is driven by a complex set of interconnected factors.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: It recommends strengthening mental health services, promoting peer education, advocating for family engagement, controlling substance availability, and creating a supportive academic environment to mitigate the issue.

Keywords: *Substance Abuse, University Students, Factors*

©2025 by the Authors. This Article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

INTRODUCTION

Drug and substance abuse, particularly involving alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and other psychoactive substances, continues to pose a serious threat to the health, academic performance, and overall well-being of young people globally. In university settings, students often face newfound independence, peer pressure, and stress, making them more vulnerable to experimenting with and regularly using drugs and alcohol (Patrick et al, 2021).

Studies globally and locally have consistently reported high rates of substance use among university students. In the United States, for example, research from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) (2023) revealed that nearly 60% of college students reported past-year alcohol use, while over 40% had used marijuana. These substances were often associated with negative outcomes, including poor academic performance, absenteeism, and increased involvement in risky sexual or criminal behavior. Similar patterns have been noted in African contexts and in Kenya, studies such as those by Mutiso et al. (2022) report that 48.6% to 84% of university students have engaged in substance use, with alcohol being the most commonly abused, followed by marijuana and tobacco.

Local studies also highlight that accessibility, peer pressure, stress from academic demands, and lack of parental supervision are key factors driving substance use among students (Mbatia, 2017). Moreover, male students and those living off-campus appear to have higher usage rates, as they encounter less institutional oversight and more exposure to environments where drugs are readily available (Kamba, 2014). While some universities have implemented drug awareness and counseling programs, the lack of specific, institution-based research limits their effectiveness.

Parental influence plays a critical role in either deterring or facilitating substance abuse among students. Research consistently shows that lack of parental supervision, poor parent-child communication, and parental substance use significantly increase the likelihood of youth engaging in drug and alcohol abuse. For instance, Nyaga and Mwai (2016) found that adolescents from families with minimal parental monitoring were more likely to experiment with drugs, often as a coping mechanism or due to peer influence. Similarly, Muthoka and Mwenje (2020) observed that permissive parenting styles and inconsistent discipline were associated with higher substance use among students in Kenyan secondary schools. Furthermore, Barasa (2013) highlighted that students who came from homes where parents abused substances were more inclined to replicate such behavior, citing it as normal or acceptable. These findings underscore the pivotal role of parental engagement, structure, and modeling in shaping students' attitudes toward drug use. Witnessing parental substance abuse increases the likelihood of adolescents engaging in similar behavior, indicating that positive family relationships and role models are crucial in preventing substance misuse (Wanyonyi et al, 2019).

Peer pressure is a significant factor according to Mohamad et al., (2024), with studies such as Otieno, et al., (2017) in Vihiga Sub-county showing a strong correlation between peer influence and alcohol consumption. Adolescents surrounded by peers who drink are more likely to initiate or continue substance use themselves (Nyaga & Mwai, 2016). Additionally, lack of economic opportunities poor economic status further contribute to substance abuse. Research by Mayanja et al, (2020) found a significant correlation between unemployment and alcohol dependence, suggesting that individuals facing economic difficulties may turn to substances as a coping mechanism for stress and boredom.

Sociocultural factors also play a critical role in shaping substance abuse behaviors. Studies exploring the influence of cultural practices in Vihiga and found that certain cultural ceremonies and celebrations normalize alcohol consumption, which may encourage excessive use or dependence (Otieno et al. 2023; Nyongesa et al, 2022). According to Makau (2021), students often engage in substance use to conform to societal expectations in peer groups, especially in university environments where independence and social exploration are prominent. Muthoka and Mwenje (2020) also reported that cultural acceptance of alcohol in social events and family settings normalize its use, making it more likely for students' to engage without perceiving it as harmful. Subsequently, Nyaga and Mwai (2016) underscored the role of social media and popular culture in glamorizing substance use, creating an impression among students that drug use is a trendy and desirable behavior and these sociocultural dynamics collectively foster an environment where substance use is not only accessible but also reinforced.

Alcohol remains the most commonly abused substance in Kenya (NACADA, 2022). Cheap, unregulated alcohol, such as chang'aa, readily available spirits as well as cannabis is also widely available in many communities contribute significantly to substance abuse with (Njenga et al, 2021) indicating its presence in various regions, and Mwachoka et al, (2020) further noting the ease of access for adolescents and young adults. Heroin and other opioids, especially injectable forms, are increasingly available, as highlighted by Kariuki et al, (2023), who found a rising trend of injecting drug use.

In areas such as Vihiga County, accessibility to cheap and unregulated substances further exacerbates the problem. The consequences of substance abuse among students are far-reaching, contributing to poor academic achievement, school dropout, risky sexual behaviors, and mental health issues, all of which undermine both personal development and national progress.

Statement of the Problem

Despite various awareness initiatives and policy efforts, substance use among university students remains alarmingly high especially off campus where supervision is limited. Alcohol remains the most widely used substance, followed by marijuana, miraa (khat), tobacco, and increasingly, prescription drugs and vape products. Yet, institutions often lack comprehensive, localized data to inform targeted interventions. At Kaimosi Friends University (KAFU), anecdotal evidence and rising concerns suggest substance abuse is prevalent, particularly among students living off-campus. This gap underscores the need for contextualized studies like the current one at KAFU, which will inform more focused and relevant interventions.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by investigating the personal, familial, socio-cultural, and environmental factors contributing to substance abuse among students at KAFU. The findings will inform targeted interventions to reduce substance abuse and promote student well-being and academic success. The study findings will also provide evidence-based recommendations for institutional policies and student support systems to mitigate this growing problem.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the personal factors contributing to substance abuse among KAFU students.
2. To assess family dynamics contributing to substance abuse among KAFU students
3. To examine social cultural factors contributing to substance abuse among KAFU students.
4. To identify availability and access to information and substances of abuse among KAFU students.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive cross sectional research design which was suitable for collecting data at a single point in time allowing the researcher to assess the prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse among university students. The study focused on understanding the relationship between personal, social, and environmental factors and substance abuse among students. The study targeted 4,800 undergraduate students enrolled at KAFU and this included students from various academic disciplines, years of study, and demographic backgrounds.

Given the size of the population of 4,800 students, a stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure that students from different schools, academic years, and demographic backgrounds were adequately represented. Stratified sampling divides the population into distinct subgroups (strata) and then randomly selects participants from each subgroup. This method will help achieve a balanced sample and ensure diversity in the student responses. Using Cochran's formula for sample size determination, the sample size was calculated at a 95% confidence level, with a 5% margin of error. Given the total student population of 4,800, the ample size was 350 students. Pilot study was conducted on 35 respondents from a similar institution.

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire adapted from the National Authority for Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) to ensure the questions are culturally relevant and consistent with standard measurement tools for substance abuse. The study was conducted in May and the questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 25 and involving descriptive statistics where frequencies, percentages and means were used to summarize demographic information and the factors contributing to alcohol and substance use.

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the safety and rights of participants that included approval from institutional research ethics committee of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology(MMUST)-(MMUST/ISERC/042/2025). Informed consent of the participants was sought and they were provided with detailed information about the study. Participation was voluntary, personal information and responses were kept confidential and data anonymized to protect the identity of participants who retained the right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any penalties.

RESULTS

Overview

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Sociodemographic information of the participants was captured to include age, gender and religion, school, year of study among others. *Table 1* presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. The findings show that a majority of the participants were male (65.1%, $n=228$), while females accounted for 34.9% ($n=122$). The respondents' ages ranged between 18 and 28 years, with a mean age of 21.8 years, indicating that the sample primarily consisted of young adults typical of university populations.

In terms of religious affiliation, Protestants made up the largest group, comprising 55.1% ($n=193$) of the respondents. This was followed by Catholics at 30.0% ($n=105$) and Muslims at 10.0% ($n=35$). A smaller proportion, 4.9% ($n=17$), identified with other religions. These demographics provide important context for understanding the social and cultural factors that may influence alcohol and drug use behaviors among students at KAFU.

Regarding the year of study, the largest group of respondents were in their second year of study, accounting for 105 (30%). This was followed by the first year and third year students, each representing 88 respondents (25.00%). Students in the fourth year of study and above comprised the smallest group at 69 respondents (20%). This distribution suggests a relatively balanced representation across academic years, with a slight concentration in the earlier years of study.

In terms of school of affiliation, the highest proportion of students came from the School of Education and Social Sciences (SESS) contributing 238 (68.00%) through a proportionate allocation. The School of Health Sciences (SOHES), followed in a distant far with 40 (11.42%) participants. School of Science (SOSCI) had 29 (8.28%) participants while School of Business and Economics (SOBE) had 25 (7.14%) with SCIT coming least with 18 (5.14%). These findings indicate that the sample was well proportionally distributed across the various academic disciplines offered at the institution, with a notable concentration in the social sciences followed by health-related programs.

The accommodation data reveals that a significant proportion of students at KAFU, 43%, reside within the institution's accommodation facilities. This group benefits from the convenience and proximity to campus, potentially reducing commute time and increasing access to campus resources. In contrast, the majority of students, 57% live off-campus. Among those living off-campus, the largest group resides in Cheptulu (28.0%), followed by Jivuye (16.0%) and Maganda and others in the environment being at 13.0%. A smaller percentage of students live in other locations, accounting for 5.0%. Off-campus living may reflect preferences for more private or affordable housing options, but it could also indicate challenges related to accessibility, such as longer commutes or the need to manage accommodation independently.

In terms of sponsorship, the data indicates that the majority of students at KAFU were government sponsored comprising of 76% of the respondents. This includes funding from sources like Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) or other government schemes, which suggests that a significant portion of the student body relies on government support to finance their education. On the other hand, the self-sponsored students made up of 20% of the sample, indicating a considerable proportion of students bear the full financial responsibility for their education. A smaller percentage of only 4% reported having other forms of sponsorship, which may include support from private entities or scholarships.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents, (n = 350)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	Mean Age	-	21.8 years
	Age Range	-	18 – 28 years
Gender	Male	228	65.1%
	Female	122	34.9%
Religion	Protestant	193	55.1%
	Catholic	105	30.0%
	Muslim	35	10.0%
	Other	17	4.9%
Year of Study	First Year	88	25.0%
	Second Year	105	30.0%
	Third Year	88	25.0%
	Fourth Year and Above	69	20.0%
School Affiliation	SESS	238	68.00%
	SCIT	18	5.14%
	SOBE	25	7.14%
	SOSCI	29	8.28%
	SOHES	40	11.42%
Accommodation	Within the institution	151	43.0%
	Off-campus	199	57.0%
	- Maganda	46	13.0%
	- Jivuye	56	16.0%
	- Cheptulu	98	28.0%
Sponsorship	- Other	20	5.0%
	Government Sponsored	266	76.0%
	Self-Sponsored	70	20.0%
	Other	14	4.0%

Factors Contributing to Substance Abuse among KAFU Students

The study identified several personal, social, environmental, and family-related factors contributing to substance use among students at KAFU as shown in table 1. One key question was asked on what was the primary reason why students use substances of abuse and 123 (35%) said it was peer pressure, 105 (30%) named stress, 70 (20%) cited curiosity with only 35 (10%) attributing it to academic pressure while all other reasons accounted for only 16 (5%).

Personal Factors Contributing to Substance Abuse Among KAFU Students

From a personal perspective, 228 (65%) of the residents reported experiencing frequent stress or anxiety. Among these, 175 (50%) acknowledged that these emotional struggles often led them to consider or use substances as a coping mechanism. Most of the respondents' in FGD, indicated that the causes of stress for them were so many and dynamic causing hopelessness in them. Key to this was the feeling that they were not being heard nor understood by all around them including the family, the government and even their teachers. There was a perceived generational gap in the generations leading to differences in their perception on key issues they hold dear to their hearts and similarly causes of the daily stressors. Their internal inability to handle their issues and the feeling that the challenges were cutting across most of the levels of the learners compounded to the stress and the exit was to resort to drugs since this allowed them divert their attention from the problem. A respondent said

“For me, I can’t tell what my problem is.... I am just stressed at nothing...sometimes even my friends don’t understand me...then ...I cool myself with weed.... after all, started taking them long time ago” p5c.

Some students experienced low self-esteem and one of the affected said... *“I always felt like I didn’t belong here. I’m not as smart or confident as others, so I started drinking just to fit in and not feel left out.”* . these similar feeling was echoed by another respondent who said...

“People think I’m outgoing, but deep down, I feel invisible. Taking something just gives me that temporary confidence to talk or be noticed.”6b

Talking about lack of self-control and purpose in life, one respondent ..looking at the friend said....

“I know it’s wrong, but when the stress hits, I just grab a bottle without thinking. I don’t really plan to drink—it just happens.” And to these, the other said... *“Sometimes I promise myself I won’t smoke again, but then my friends bring it and I can’t say no. I just don’t have the willpower.”p2*

One of the third year students demonstrating defective coping mechanisms and emotional instability said....

“When I get overwhelmed, it feels like the end of the world, I don’t know how to deal with it. I cry, I isolate myself, or I use drugs. That’s how I cope—it’s easier than facing the problem Substances give me a way to escape my emotions, even if just for a while.”p13

Another respondent said....

“You see, ...people keep talking and complaining about us...it’s like ...you don’t complain of anything...even when things are bad...so...we let them think the way they want...but we retreat to our small world...alone” p1

Family Factors Contributing to Substance Abuse among KAFU Students

Family background also contributed to substance use patterns and this was demonstrated when 105 (30%) of the respondents reporting of having fathers who used substances, while 88 (25.1%) identified brothers as users. A smaller proportion of less than 10%, reported substance use by mothers or sisters. However, of most importance is the revelation that 50% of the respondents believed that family-related challenges or issues influenced their substance use behavior and this was strongly reiterated among the FGD participants. One participant said...

“If my dad takes alcohol...praises it...and is doing well... who am I not to use?”. P7

Sociocultural Factors Contributing to Substance Abuse among KAFU Students

Social dynamics also played a significant role. More than half of the respondents totaling to 193 (55%) indicated that they had friends who used drugs or alcohol. Furthermore, 158 (45.1%) reported having been encouraged by their peers to try substances of abuse thus emphasizing the strong influence of peer pressure. Similarly, respondents in the Focused group discussions were divided in opinion with some feeling that it depended solely on the individual and their personal strength and abilities or weakness as opposed to the pressure. One respondent said...

“You just believe in yourself, why would someone just convince you like that and you follow... to me, those who follow are weak and of course...just a handful” p12

On the other hand, other respondents said...

*"There are days I wake up feeling like the world is collapsing around me. I have so many deadlines, but no motivation. That's when a friend introduced me to weed—just to 'clear' my mind.' It's become a pattern now."*1C

Another said...

*"Stress is constant here. Between tuition issues and keeping up with academic expectations, I sometimes find it hard to sleep. A roommate once gave me some pills to help me 'relax.' That was the start."*7C

P13c said.....

*"It started as something casual at a party. Everyone was doing it, so I thought why not? But over time, I realized I was using it to deal with my stress and loneliness."*p2

Talking of peer pressure resulting from personal indecisiveness and weak boundaries, a respondent said.....

*"I never really had strong opinions. If someone suggests something, I usually just go with it. That's how I ended up in this mess—I didn't say no when I should have...I knew it was wrong, but I didn't want to disappoint my friends. I always put others first, even when it's harmful to me."*p11

Social status also played a key role on the use or lack of use of substances of abuse. One participant said...

*"Some students from wealthier backgrounds feel pressure to maintain a certain image. You'll often find them in social circles where using expensive alcohol or even certain drugs is seen as trendy or a sign of status. It's like if you don't join in, you're left out or seen as boring."*p5

Another said...

*"I think low social status can also push students to drug use. Some students come from very humble backgrounds and use substances to cope with stress or to fit in with peers who seem more 'urban' or exposed. It's like using drugs helps them feel equal, even if just for a moment."*4d

Placing a comparison between the two, a participant said...

*"There's definitely a class element. Those who have more money can afford certain drugs and alcohol, and it becomes a way of showing off. Meanwhile, others might use cheaper or more dangerous substances just to experience the same thing or feel included."*p16

Similarly, another said....

*"Social media plays a role too. Influencers or even fellow students with higher status post pictures partying, drinking, and using substances. It sets a kind of standard or expectation that to be popular or cool, you need to do the same."*p5

Last but not least, another participant said...

*"We can't ignore that peer influence is stronger when it comes from someone who is respected or admired. If a 'popular' student is using drugs, it influences others. Their social status makes others think it's acceptable or even desirable."*p12

Some of the respondents were able to relate academic matters to their social life and drug use. Participant discussions pointed to the direction that issues of missing marks and unapproachable lectures. One of the participants said...

*"Lecturers here don't give you a second chance. Once you miss a test or assignment, that's it. It's like they don't care what you're going through. After a while, you just give up and look for something to numb the pain."*9C

Another participant said...

*"The grading feels unfair sometimes, ...maybe I am just not bright enough for the course.... You try your best but the results don't reflect your effort. It makes you feel worthless. Some of us just take alcohol to forget about it for a while."*6b

Availability and Access to Information and Substances of Abuse among KAFU Students

Availability of substances of abuse was notable with 210 (60%) of the respondents agreeing that substances of abuse were easily accessible in or around the institution. However, the external access was higher compared to internally. Respondents felt that the nature of environment provided opportunity for students to easily access and consume their substances unnoticed especially on normal days where no major events were being conducted in the university. To worsen the matter, it appeared that the surroundings outside the university were more liberal to drug and alcohol use as even the vendors displayed their substances in open. Several kiosks in the shopping centers were named by the respondents as areas where one would access drugs without any struggle and at the prize one could afford. One of the respondents said...

"Just stand at the gate there and you will not miss to see a motorbike with so many litters of Chang'aa. Who follows to know where that illicit alcohol goes? ...Nobody! it just ends being consumed by these comrades outside there" p15

Affordability of the substances was another major boost to their access. Student were able to afford bhang from the university with as low as ten Kenya shillings as reported by majority of the respondents in the FGD. One respondent said...

*"Weed is way cheaper than something like cocaine. If you only have a little cash, you'll go for what gets you high and doesn't break the bank. That's usually cannabis or even alcohol. Cocaine is for people with more money to blow."*p1

Another participant said...

*"Tobacco and alcohol are easy to get and affordable because they're legal. But once someone starts on hard stuff like ...eh..., the cost just skyrockets. People end up stealing or doing anything to afford it."*p19

Another said....

"With soft drugs, you can get high on a budget. Even if you're broke, you can still get a joint or some cheap spirits. But hard drugs? You need serious money; Affordability plays a huge role in what people choose. A lot of us started with weed because it was cheap and always around.... You can get a cigarette for a few shillings. You can't say the hard drugs...once you're addicted....he! your struggle is real...and hard." P11

Another said....

"Where I live, weed is cheaper than alcohol. So comrades go for it. I pray that they never taste the hard stuff...coz... once they try.... they can't stop, even if it costs their liver or lung."p3

Regarding sources of information on drugs and alcohol, 140 (40%) said that they had come across information on substances of abuse through social media, followed by 105 (30%) who said that they learned from their peers while only 70 (20%) of the received information from mainstream media such as television and radio. Additionally, 175 (50%) of the respondents reported that media platforms often glorified substance use while 158 (45.1%) believed that drugs and alcohol were affordable and thus more accessible to students. One respondent said....

"Just imagine the biggest billboards on entry to every town is 'Tusker'...even if you don't want... you may just want to taste ...just once... then you continue" P4.

These findings illustrated that substance use among KAFU students was shaped by a complex interplay of internal emotions, peer influence, environmental exposure, and family dynamics.

Table 1: Factors Contributing to Substance Abuse Among KAFU Students (n = 350)

Category	Indicator / Response	n	Percentage
Personal Factors	Felt stressed or anxious often	228	65.0%
	Reported stress/anxiety led to substance use	175	50.0%
Family Factors	Father uses drugs or alcohol	105	30.0%
	Brother uses drugs or alcohol	88	25.1%
	Mother or sister uses drugs or alcohol	<35	<10.0%
	Believed family issues affect substance use behavior	175	50.0%
Social Factors	Had friends who use drugs or alcohol	193	55.0%
	Encouraged by peers to try substances	158	45.1%
Access to substances and information	Reported substances easily available	210	60.0%
	Got substance information from social media	140	40.0%
	Got substance information from peers	105	30.0%
	Got substance information from TV	70	20.0%
	Saw substance use glorified in media	175	50.0%
	Believed drugs and alcohol were affordable	158	45.1%

Discussion

Substance abuse among KAFU students was found to be driven by various challenges that were personal such as stress, anxiety and low self-esteem, academic challenges as well as social challenges, a finding that concurs with the findings of Starkey et al., (2019) that highlighted several social and personal factors that lead to substance use among the young population. Similarly, social factors such as having friends who abuse alcohol and substances was reported by majority of the participants thus indicating a strong peer influence similar to the findings of (McLellan et al., 2021). Majority of the students reported using substances to cope with overwhelming emotions, and due to inability to manage academic and social pressures, findings which are consistent with studies that link psychological distress to increased substance use among university students (Eisenberg et al., 2019; McHugh et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2018).

Family background also emerged as a strong predictor of substance use behavior. Students who reported that their parents or siblings used drugs or alcohol were more likely to engage in similar behaviors as fathers and brothers similarly accounted for 55% of family members who influenced substance use among university students thus supporting literature that implicated family history as a key factor in the substance use onset (Whiteside et al., 2020).

The findings are in line with contemporary research that emphasizes the role of intergenerational behavior modeling and adverse family dynamics in youth substance abuse (Van Ryzin et al., 2020). It is evident that normalization of substance use within the family can lower the perceived risk and reinforce a maladaptive coping strategies especially in areas where open communication or mental health support is lacking.

Additionally, social and environmental influences further exacerbates substance use among KAFU students. Reports by students that 55% of the students reported that their friends used substances of abuse while 60% said that these drugs were easily accessible is a key indicator that social environment plays a critical role in shaping behavior. These findings concur with findings of other researchers that peer networks, social media and drug availability, the affordability of substances, all are contributors to substance use among the students (Farrelly et al., 2023; Gizaw et al., 2020)

Parker et al., (2020) reported that media portrayal of substance use appeared to normalize the use and implicated risky behavior and this corroborated with the findings of the current study where majority of the participants felt that the media information eventually glorified alcohol and substance abuse.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Personal factors, such as stress and anxiety, were identified as key drivers for substance use, with majority of the students acknowledging frequent emotional distress. This underscores the role that mental health plays in shaping students' behaviors and highlights the need for addressing mental health issues as part of any substance use prevention or intervention efforts. Social factors, such as peer influence and the encouragement of substance use by friends, were also prevalent, with more than half of the respondents reporting that they were in social circles where substance use was common.

REFERENCES

- Barasa, M. M. (2013). Factors influencing drug abuse among students in public secondary schools in Mombasa District, Mombasa County, Kenya. *University of Nairobi Repository*. <http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/55950>
- Bhatia, G., & Gupta, S. (2024). Drug Use and Road Traffic Injuries— Shots in the Dark. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 46(3), 264–267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02537176231166144>
- Eisenberg, D., Lipson, S. K., Zhou, S., & Duffy, A. (2019). *Mental health service utilization among college students in the United States*. The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 207(1), 8–14. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0000000000000931>
- Farrelly KN, Wardell JD, Marsden E, Scarfe ML, Najdzionek P, Turna J, MacKillop J. The Impact of Recreational Cannabis Legalization on Cannabis Use and Associated Outcomes: A Systematic Review. *Subst Abuse*. 2023 May 9;17:11782218231172054. doi: 10.1177/11782218231172054. PMID: 37187466; PMCID: PMC10176789.
- Gizaw, A.T., Amdisa, D. & Lemu, Y.K. Predictors of substance use among Jimma University instructors, Southwest Ethiopia. *Subst Abuse Treat Prev Policy* 15, 2 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-019-0248-8>
- Kamba, P. M. (2014). *Factors contributing to drug abuse among the Kenya Polytechnic University College students, Nairobi*. Academia.edu. https://www.academia.edu/10359805/Factors_Contributing_To_Drug_Abuse_Among_The_Kenya_Polytechnic_University_College_Students_Nairobi
- Kariuki, C. K., Ndegwa, P., & Otieno, A. (2023). Heroin and opioid use among youth in Kenya: A growing health threa. *Journal of Substance Use and Abuse*, 10(2), 117–124.
- Makau, P. (2021). Social factors influencing substance and drug abuse in universities in Machakos County, Kenya. *Academia.edu*. https://www.academia.edu/78108718/Social_Factors_Influencing_Substance_and_Drug_Abuse_in_Universities_in_Machakos_County_Kenya
- Mbatia, C. (2017). *Role of peer influence on substance abuse among teenagers in Kenya*. European Journal of Sociology, 8(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.47672/ejs.2374>
- McHugh, R. K., Votaw, V. R., Sugarman, D. E., & Greenfield, S. F. (2021). *Sex and gender differences in substance use disorders*. Clinical Psychology Review, 86, 102096. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2021.102096>
- McLellan, A., et al. (2021). The role of peers in substance use among college students. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 56(5), 413–423.
- Mohamad Kamal, N. F. binti, bin Shafie, A. A. H., Othman, K. binti, bin Mokhtar, A. N., & bin Wahab, S. (2024). Drug and Substance Abuse among Youth: Factors, Effects and Prevention Methods. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(7), 981–998. <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v14-i7/21939>
- Muthoka, P. M. (2017). Factors influencing drug and substance abuse by students in public secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub-county, Embu County, Kenya. *University of Nairobi Repository*. <http://hdl.handle.net/11295/74911>

- Muthoka, P. M., & Mwenje, M. (2020). Risk factors leading to the prevalence of drugs and substance abuse among secondary school students in Nzau Sub-county, Makueni County, Kenya. *African Journal of Emerging Issues*, 2(1), 1–15. <https://ajoeijournals.org/sys/index.php/ajoei/article/view/109>
- Mutiso, V. N., Ndeti, D. M., N.Muia, E., Musyimi, C., Osborn, T. L., Kasike, R., Onsinyo, L., Mbijjiwe, J., Karambu, P., Sounders, A., Weisz, J. R., Swahn, M. H., & Mamah, D. (2022). Prevalence and perception of substance abuse and associated economic indicators and mental health disorders in a large cohort of Kenyan students: towards integrated public health approach and clinical management. *BMC Psychiatry*, 22(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-022-03817-2>
- Mwachoka, S., Ngugi, J., & Mutua, M. (2020). Access to cannabis and alcohol among adolescents: A study of university students in Kenya. *Kenya Journal of Health Studies*, 3(2), 88–95.
- NACADA. (2022). Nacada 2022. *Research Report*.
- Nyaga, M. N., & Mwai, K. (2016). Contributions of selected family factors to drug abuse among adolescents in secondary schools in Manyatta Sub-county, Embu County, Kenya. *Science Journal of Education*, 4(2), 19–26. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.sjedu.20160402.11>
- Nyongesa, R., Khamis, N., & Ochieng, L. (2022). The impact of cultural practices on alcohol consumption among youth in Vihiga County, Kenya. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(1), 89–94.
- Omor, T., Gray, S. C., Otieno, G., Mbede, C., Phillips-Howard, P. A., Hayes, T., ... Gust, D. A. (2017). Teen pregnancy in rural western Kenya: a public health issue. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 23(4), 399–408. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2017.1402794>
- Parker, E., et al. (2020). Media influence and substance use among young adults. *Journal of Media Studies*, 15(4), 245–257.
- Patrick, M. E., & Terry-McElrath, Y. M. (2021). High-intensity substance use and social contexts among young adults in the United States. *Addictive Behaviors*, 114, 106724. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106724>
- Van Ryzin, M. J., Fosco, G. M., & Dishion, T. J. (2020). *Family and peer predictors of substance use from early adolescence to early adulthood: An 11-year prospective analysis*. *Addictive Behaviors*, 102, 106139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2019.106139>
- Wanyonyi, S., Ochieng, J., & Mayanja, S. (2019). Family dynamics and substance abuse among youth in Vihiga County, Kenya. *Journal of Family and Substance Use*, 7(1), 58–64.
- Whiteside, E., et al. (2020). Family and environmental factors in adolescent substance use. *Family Relations*, 69(2), 255–263.