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Contrasting Influences: An Exploration of the Provision of Support Versus Lack of Support for Substance Abuse Among Learners by Teachers in Selected High Schools in Capricorn District, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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Abstract
Substance abuse among learners is a significant concern that affects their physical, emotional, and academic well-being. It is a complex issue requiring a comprehensive prevention and intervention approach. This study aimed to explore the contrasting influences of support provision and lack of support on substance abuse among learners by teachers at Selected Schools in the Capricorn district of Limpopo Province, South Africa. A qualitative, explorative, descriptive, and contextual research design was utilised. The schools were purposively selected based on the high percentage of learners who abuse substances and learners were conveniently sampled to select teachers to participate in the study. The sample of 23 participants was determined by data saturation. Data was collected through in-depth individual interviews using audiotapes, and field notes were also taken. Data was analyzed using thematic, Tesch's method. Measures of trustworthiness were ensured. Results indicated that learners who received support from their families, teachers, and peers were less likely to engage in substance abuse compared to those who lacked support. Conversely, learners who lack support and experience trauma are more likely to develop substance use disorders. The study recommends that teachers should be trained to identify and support learners who are at risk of substance abuse. Parents should be encouraged to participate in school-based programs and provide support to their children. Policies that prevent substance abuse and provide support to learners should be developed and implemented.

INTRODUCTION
Substance abuse among high school learners is a growing concern globally, with severe consequences on their physical and mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being (Chueng et al., 2021). The provision of support and lack thereof play a crucial role in shaping learners' behaviors and attitudes towards substance abuse. This literature review explores the contrasting influences of support provision and lack of support on substance abuse among high school learners in the Capricorn district, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Studies have shown that substance abuse is a significant problem among high school learners in South Africa. A study by the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (SANCA) found that 30% of learners reported using substances, with cannabis being the most commonly used substance (SANCA, 2019).

Research has consistently shown that support provision is a critical factor in preventing substance abuse among high school learners. Support from family, teachers, and peers can provide learners with a sense of belonging, self-worth, and motivation to make positive choices (Hawkins et al., 2002). A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that learners who received support from their families were less likely to engage in substance abuse (WHO, 2017).

Conversely, a lack of support can exacerbate the problem of substance abuse among high school learners. Learners who lack support may feel isolated, vulnerable, and more likely to engage in risky behaviors (Resnick et al., 1997). A study by the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) found that learners who experienced trauma and lacked support were more likely to develop substance use disorders (SADAG, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

The qualitative exploratory, descriptive, and contextual research design explored the contrasting influences of support provision and lack of support on substance abuse among learners by teachers (Groove et., 2013). Teachers from Mamolemane and Moshubaba High School, Bahlaloga Circuit, Capricorn District, Limpopo Province formed the sample's population (De Vos et al., 2011). A purposive sampling method was used to select the school based on its high percentage of learners who abuse alcohol (Brink, 2012). The convenience sampling technique was used to select 23 participants and was determined by data saturation (Collen, 2014).

Data was collected through in-depth individual interviews using 23 participants who were teachers from Mamolemane and Moshubaba High School and the size of the sample was determined by data saturation. Data were collected through in-depth individual interviews. An audiotape was used to capture information, field notes were also taken. The method was used because it provides a clear set of instructions for interviewers and provides reliable, comparable qualitative data (Bernard, 2006). It has assisted in attaining a high response rate and to give the researcher a chance to make important observations aside from the responses given to the questions asked. Since the study was qualitative in nature, qualitative data analysis was used. This was done by classifying the data into logical thematic categories based on the objectives of the research. The researcher read through all scripts and got a sense of the ideas emanating from data, similar information was clustered into categories and various categories were grouped for themes and sub-themes according to Tesch`s method (Creswell 2009).

Measures to ensure trustworthiness

Four criteria for developing trustworthiness were used: namely, credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability. Credibility was ensured through, prolonged engagement, reflexivity, triangulation, member checking, peer review and structural coherence. Transferability was ensured through the purposive selection of the schools, a description of the demographics of the participants, and a dense description of the results with supporting direct quotations from participants. Consistency was ensured through code and re- code data analysis, a dense description of the research methodology and peer examination, an audit trail, and reflexive notes were used to establish the conformability of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct a study was obtained from the University of Venda ethics committee *(Ethics no: SHS/14/PH/01/1605).* Head of the Department of Education Limpopo Province and from the selected school in Capricorn District, Bahlaloga Circuit; namely, Mamolemane and Moshubaba High School. The aspects applied to ensure that ethical considerations were adhered to were informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and the right to self- determination

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers pointed out that the provision of support versus lack of support for substance abuse among learners at selected secondary schools. This theme emerged from data analysis. Sub-themes that emerged from the provision of support versus lack thereof include counseling by health care professionals to learners, monitoring sessions conducted by educators, educators' role to stamp out substance abuse, creation of support groups, lack of support structures for learners, lack of support from parents, and lack of parent support to educators (Table 1).

Table 1 Theme and sub-themes reflecting the provision of support versus lack of support for substance abuse among learners at selected secondary schools in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province

Main Theme	Sub-Themes
Provision of support versus lack of support about substance abuse by learners	1. Provision of counseling by Health Care Professionals to learners 2. Monitoring sessions conducted by educators 3. Educators' role in stamping out substance abuse 4. Creation of Support Groups 5. Lack of support structures for learners 6. Lack of support from parents 7. Lack of Parents' support to Educators

Theme: Provision of support versus lack of support for substance abuse among learners

Participant teachers postulated that the provision of support versus lack thereof may precipitate substance abuse by learners. This theme emerged from data analysis. Sub-themes that emerged from the provision of support versus lack thereof include counselling by health care professionals to learners, monitoring sessions conducted by educators, educators' role to stamp out substance abuse, creation of support groups, lack of support structures for learners, lack of support from parents, and lack of parent support to educators.

1. Provision of Counselling by Health Care Professionals to Learners

During interviews, teachers elaborated on the provision of counselling by health care professionals to learners. They mentioned that the teacher thus must assume the role of parent and counsellor, both in academic and social matters. Parents expect teachers to guide their children on social norms and values about society's expectations. This assumes that

communication of knowledge, attitudes, and skills will guide the child in the right direction. One school teacher remarked:

> *"We call psychological counselors to give the learners counseling… we also contact social workers to give learners words of encouragement and discouragement about substance use."* (Participant 0014)

There is a world of help and support available if learners who abuse substances need guidance, that is, to get a better picture of where the abuser is right now the family doctor can be contacted. Based on the doctor's assessment of the severity of the problem, the treatment could involve several phases. If the person has become "chemically dependent" upon drugs and alcohol, treatment may include detoxification and taking the doctor's prescribed medications to help prevent a return to the abuse (Mauro, 2007).

Counselling can help learners to identify situations and feelings that trigger the urge to drink or to use a drug and to find new ways to respond, that do not include substance abuse. The involvement of family members is important; so many programs also offer materials for family members to read to become familiar with the problem. Virtually all treatment for alcohol and drug abuse includes meetings with the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (SANCA). SANCA uses a spiritual, but not religious, programme of recovery and has helped literally millions of people find their paths to recovery since its inception in 1935. Other forms of help can be found at welfare agencies or counselling services, e.g., life lines, hospitals or clinics, and any office of the Psychological and Guidance Services of Education Departments.

2. Monitoring Sessions Conducted by Educators

During the interview, teachers indicated sessions conducted by them to monitor learners as provision of support. The teacher thus must take on the role of parent and counsellor, both in academic and social matters. The parents expect the teacher to guide their children on social norms and values in relation to knowledge of societies, attitudes and skills that will steer the child in the right direction. One teacher said:

> *"… and we always make turns at the toilets to avoid too much freedom of the learners - by doing so we will be preventing them from using substance abuse."* (Participant 0021)

According to Steinberg (1991), numerous community-based prevention programs have been thought to help educate children and families about the harm of substance abuse. One example is an organization in New Hampshire that educates, advocates and collaborates to reduce drug and alcohol problems in the state. There are mediating factors of classroom-based substance abuse that have been analyzed through research.

There are specific conclusions that have been generated about effective programs. First, programs that allow students to be interactive and learn skills such as how to refuse drugs are more effective than strictly educational or non-interactive ones. When direct influences (e.g., peers) and indirect influences (e.g., media) are addressed the program is better able to cover broad social influences that most programs do not consider.

Programs that encourage a social commitment to abstaining from drugs show lower rates of drug use. Getting the community outside of the school to participate and using peer leaders to facilitate the interactions tend to be effective facet of these programs. Also, teaching youth and adolescents skills that increase resistance skills in social situations may increase protective factors in that population.

3. Educators' Role to Stamp Out Substance Abuse

It was also revealed that in rural areas, school educators have a special role in stamping out substance abuse by learners. Teachers' role in stamping out substance abuse was underscored in the analysis of the data - that it is particularly important to understand what motivates students to drink and misuse alcohol. This is partly because patterns acquired during this early period frequently carry over into adulthood. The factors that trigger members of this group to misuse and abuse alcohol, however, are particularly complex. The following are some of the responses from the participants:

> *"We sometimes have the program empowers teachers, parents, and school governing bodies to identify youth/learners with substance abuse problems for early intervention."* (Participant 0023)

> *"We monitor the learners when they go on trips and ban them from all kinds of activities if they find learner drinking or smoking."* (Participant 0015)

> *"You know what sir, when we go to the trips, we make sure that the learners are in uniform in order we can identify them to avoid such alcohol use."* (Participant 0016)

The purpose of the teacher's role, as outlined by Sheafor, Horesji and Horesji (2000) is to provide clients or communities with knowledge and skills required to prevent problems or improve social functioning. Zastrow (1991) explains that the role of a teacher involves giving information to clients and teaching them adaptive skills. To accomplish this, counselors

must be well-informed and be good communicators (Zastrow, 2004). The educator's role makes use of learning strategies to improve the client's knowledge framework to empower them for growth. Education is a powerful tool in mastering life's tasks and can help the client system improve role performance (Miley, O'melia, and DuBois, 2004). The three functions of the teacher as outlined by Sheafor et al. (2000) are: to teach social and daily living skills; facilitate behavior change and primary prevention. Specifically for substance abuse services, information is needed to assist learners, families, and community members in general in making informed decisions and help them to overcome the scourge of substance abuse. Detailed information in educating learners, families, and communities about substance abuse should include the causes, effects, and available resources such as substance abuse rehabilitation centers that are available within their communities.

4. Creation of Support Groups

During interviews, teachers explained that the creation of support groups must be considered to facilitate learners. Data analysis indicated that support groups should be community–based services that assist and reinforce parents in their roles as caregivers. Such services can take many different forms depending on the strengths and needs of the teachers. Still, their overarching goal is to help teachers enhance skills and resolve problems to promote optimal child development. They also said that the principles for the creation of a support group should be incorporated into casework across the child welfare service continuum. The participants commented as follows:

> *"The other thing is that the support groups can help the learners work through problems, find support from peers, help the learner to refuse to continue with substance abuse/alcohol."* (Participant 0022)

> *"I think through the role-play and discussions about substance abuse prevention will also contribute in helping learners with substance abuse problems."* (Participant 0017)

Counsellors in community agencies and educational settings play a major role in recognizing and confronting substance abuse among members of their general client population. Appropriate identification and referral of clients with alcohol or drug problems can make the difference between timely treatment of the real problem and hours wasted on therapy that fails to address the primary concern (Lowe, 1993).

The task of the community treatment sector is to identify those individuals within it who have alcohol problems; provide a brief intervention for persons who have mild or moderate alcohol problems; and refer to specialized treatment those persons with substantial or severe alcohol problems, or those for whom a brief intervention has proven insufficient (Levin, 1990).

Thus, counselors working in such diverse arenas as health care, social services, education, and criminal justice have a major role to play, not only in referring clients for specialized treatment but also in providing brief services themselves. The group facilitator performed three functions, namely, creating the group, shaping the group, and maintaining the group (Yalom, 1995). The group facilitator's experience and behavior, as well as the expectations of group members, guide the formation of norms (i.e., rules for behavior in the group). Norms are shaped both directly (by leading discussions of appropriate and inappropriate behavior) and indirectly (by using verbal and non-verbal reinforcement, redirecting questions to the group rather than responding, modeling acceptance, honesty and genuineness). The ideal group has norms that allow the process of change to operate with maximum effectiveness, while respecting all members' uniqueness (Velasquez et al., 2001).

5. Lack of Support Structures for Learners

During the interviews, teachers said that there is a general lack of support structures for learners. The majority of learners are from poor families which makes it difficult for their parents to provide for their needs. These learners become stressed if their needs are not met. This then leads them to abuse substances to forget their problems. They then resort to substance abuse as a way of coping with their problems, not realizing that their use of substances will not solve their problems. The following is an example of a contextual remark from one school teacher:

> *"There is no link between teachers and their parents in as for as forming a team of supporting the children is concerned and most parents that were called know that their children abuse drugs, but they cannot do anything, because other children sell drugs for parents."* (Participant 0022)

Cunningham (1994) found that 94% of high school learners at Pine Ridge Reservation have used alcohol. He indicated that drinking among this age group is considered 'normal' where males are twice as likely as females to drink daily, which disturbs their concentration and their level of performance at school. In South Africa, the problem of learners abusing alcohol is also an issue that needs serious attention since most rural schools are near liquor outlets. Marijuana and cigarettes are easily accessible to learners these days; it becomes even more difficult for educators to control learners who use such substances. The abuse of such substances impairs the learner's ability to learn and respond to questions relating to the learned information. In most cases crimes committed at schools' substance abuse is involved.

Research conducted by Colorado State University (Hodgkinson, 1990) points out that more than a third of the African Americans adolescents use marijuana regularly, compared to only 5% regular users among White Americans. It is assumed that crime and unbecoming behaviour at schools were the result of substance abuse. This problem is becoming a threat to our high school learners because of the accessibility of substances (alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes, and drugs).

6. Lack of Support from Parents

During the interview, teachers disclosed the lack of support from parents. Most of the time, the learners influence other learners to take on bad behavior. They said that many learners have attempted to stop using substances, but they all have failed. This is a clear indication they fail to cease entirely. One school teacher said:

> *"I felt like parents are not supportive is a pointer that the parents do not really work with the school fighting substance abuse in schools."* (Participant 0023)

Martin and Corbeck (1997) have identified the effects of parenting in a situation where either one parent or both are dependent on addiction producing substances. The stress of child rearing can contribute to an increased dependency on alcohol and drugs. In stressed families, where fathers abuse dependency producing substances, the mothers tend to offer inconsistent discipline and are less supportive to their children. The resultant effects are child neglect and abandonment, children assuming adult-like responsibilities at a very young age and children becoming rebellious in order to get attention.

According to Dube (2007), the devastating effects of drug abuse on the family are those that pose the greatest threat to the family at large. When one member of the family abuses substances, every member suffers because it causes disruption and disharmony with the family. Dube (2007) is of the view that when younger children see the older person or parent using drugs, they may wrongly believe that it is normal and acceptable to take drugs. In other words, these authors are indicating that younger children will learn the behavior of using drugs from their parents.

7. Lack of Parent Support to Educators

During interviews, teacher explained the lack of parent support to educators. Most of the time, the parents should work with the school in addressing drug/alcohol problems affecting their children. They do not have anyone to guide them or provide moral support during this challenging. Some youth from rich families abuse substances because they can afford them, while some from poor families, due to frustrations, abuse cheap drugs such as alcohol. One participant remarked:

> *"...parents can support the school by clarifying and explaining positive values to their children, modelling healthy behaviour, taking time to understand their children need and self-concept."* (Participants 0018)

The school is the first large-scale socializing organization of which the child becomes a member (Karechio, 1996). The element of social heterogeneity, coupled with its large size, makes the school a secondary social group. Unlike in the family, its members are mostly unrelated, and in some cases, teachers may not necessarily belong to the child's ethnic community. The implications for teachers are clear. They need to nurture the emotional and social needs of the children under their care, particularly when the family environment for certain children is lacking (Karechio, 1996). It is important to realize that fostering responsible attitudes among students will bring about a greater sense of self-actualization and this can also be a check on drug abuse.

On the other hand, the school environment plays a part in deviant behavior including drug abuse. According to Shoemaker (2009), the effects of low expectations on drug abuse cannot be ignored – even though youth from poor socio-economic backgrounds generally are exposed to dispirited performance expectations compared to their contemporaries in higher social classes. Similarly, Karechio (1996) asserts that low performance in class may lead to misuse of drugs such as marijuana, which is believed to improve understanding and insight. This misconception is based on the belief that people who use or abuse substances will become bold, confident or courageous.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study highlights the importance of implementing school-based interventions that provide support to learners and prevent substance abuse. Teachers should receive training on identifying and supporting learners who are at risk of substance abuse. Parents should be encouraged to participate in school-based programs and provide support to their children. Educational authorities should allocate resources to support school-based interventions and provide counselling services to learners.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study only focused on the teachers at two high schools in the Capricorn district of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study did not include respondents from other schools in Limpopo Province. The study only explores the contrasting influences of support provision and lack of support on substance abuse, without examining other potential factors.

CONCLUSION

The literature review highlights the contrasting influences of support provision and lack of support on substance abuse among high school learners in the Capricorn district, Limpopo Province, South Africa. While support provision can prevent substance abuse, a lack of support can exacerbate the problem. Therefore, providing learners with a supportive environment that promotes positive behaviors and prevents substance abuse is essential.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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