



PEER PRESSURE AND ITS ROLE IN STUDENTS' DRUG CONSUMPTION: EVIDENCE FROM SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BUEA SUB-DIVISION

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Abstract

Drug consumption among secondary school students has become a major concern in many communities, including Buea Municipality. Despite efforts by educators, parents, and government bodies to address the problem, many students continue to engage in drug use, often influenced by their peers. This study investigates the role of peer pressure in shaping students' drug consumption habits in selected secondary schools within Buea Municipality. This study sought to find out the role of peer influence on drug consumption of students in secondary schools in Buea Municipality. Specifically, this study sought to find out how attachment to friends influence students' drugs consumption in secondary schools Buea Municipality, to investigate how conformity with peers' influence students drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality. A mixed survey method was used which adopted the quantitative and qualitative design to collect data from form four, form five and lowers Sixth students. A total of 65 copies of the questionnaire will be distributed to the selected sample and 10 interview guide questions to 10 students. The sample size was 75 correspondents from three schools. Data were collected through the use of questionnaire and interview. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics with use of tables, percentages, and frequencies and qualitative data analysed thematically using themes and codes. Using Spearman's correlation test, the research is significant at $MRS=(rs(100) = 0.65, p=0.01)$. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between attachment to friends, conformity with peers and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea municipality. Based on the findings, it was concluded that peer influence plays a significant role on drug consumption of students in secondary schools in Buea Municipality. It is therefore recommended that schools should implement peer mentorship programs to foster positive attachments among students. Counsellors should educate students on resisting negative peer pressure and conformity. Schools should promote and expand access to structured extracurricular activities to engage students positively.

Keywords:

Peer Influence, Drugs Consumption, Attachment, Conformity and Extra- Curricular Activities.



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Résumé

La consommation de drogues chez les élèves du secondaire est devenue une préoccupation majeure dans de nombreuses communautés, dont la municipalité de Buea. Malgré les efforts déployés par les enseignants, les parents et les autorités gouvernementales pour lutter contre ce problème, de nombreux élèves continuent de consommer de la drogue, souvent sous l'influence de leurs pairs. Cette étude examine le rôle de la pression des pairs dans la formation des habitudes de consommation de drogues des élèves de certains établissements secondaires de la municipalité de Buea. Cette étude visait à déterminer le rôle de l'influence des pairs sur la consommation de drogues des élèves du secondaire de la municipalité de Buea. Plus précisément, elle visait à déterminer comment l'attachement aux amis influence la consommation de drogues des élèves du secondaire de la municipalité de Buea, et à analyser comment la conformité avec les pairs influence la consommation de drogues des élèves du secondaire de la municipalité de Buea. Une méthode d'enquête mixte, à la fois quantitative et qualitative, a été utilisée pour recueillir des données auprès des élèves de CM1, CM2 et de la 6e. Soixante-cinq exemplaires du questionnaire seront distribués à l'échantillon sélectionné, et dix questions d'entretien seront posées à dix élèves. L'échantillon était composé de 75 correspondants de trois établissements. Les données ont été collectées par questionnaire et entretien. Les données quantitatives ont été analysées à l'aide de statistiques descriptives (tableaux, pourcentages et fréquences), tandis que les données qualitatives ont été analysées thématiquement à l'aide de thèmes et de codes. Le test de corrélation de Spearman a montré que la recherche est significative à $MRS = (rs(100) = 0,65, p = 0,01)$. Les résultats ont révélé une relation significative entre l'attachement aux amis, la conformité avec les pairs et la consommation de drogues des élèves dans les écoles secondaires de la municipalité de Buea. Ces résultats ont permis de conclure que l'influence des pairs joue un rôle significatif sur la consommation de drogues des élèves de ces écoles. Il est donc recommandé aux écoles de mettre en place des programmes de mentorat par les pairs afin de favoriser des liens positifs entre les élèves. Les conseillers devraient apprendre aux élèves à résister à la pression négative et à la conformité de leurs pairs. Les écoles devraient promouvoir et élargir l'accès à des activités parascolaires structurées afin de mobiliser positivement les élèves.

Mots-clés : *Influence des pairs, Consommation de drogues, Attachement, Conformité et Activités parascolaires.*

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by identity formation, experimentation, and a heightened need for social belonging. During this period, young people are often influenced by their peers, whose behaviours, attitudes, and choices can significantly shape their own. In secondary schools, peer pressure plays a pivotal role in determining students' social conduct and lifestyle choices, including engagement in risky behaviours such as drug consumption. Drug use among students has emerged as a growing concern in many educational settings, as it not only affects academic performance but also poses serious threats to physical health, psychological well-being, and social development.

In the context of Buea Municipality, increasing reports of student involvement in drug use have raised alarm among educators, parents, and policymakers. Factors such as curiosity, social acceptance, and the desire to cope with academic or personal stress often intersect with peer influence, making students particularly vulnerable to experimenting with substances. Understanding how peer pressure contributes to this behaviour is therefore essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies within schools.

This study seeks to explore the role of peer pressure in students' drug consumption in selected secondary schools within Buea Municipality. It aims to examine the extent to which peer relationships encourage or discourage drug use among students, identify the underlying social dynamics involved, and propose measures that can help curb this growing menace. Through this inquiry, the research hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the social factors influencing youth behaviour and to inform policies and programs that promote a safer and healthier learning environment.

Understanding Peer Pressure and Its Role In Students' Drug Consumption

The evolution of peer influence has spread interest across psychology, sociology, and education, particularly regarding its significance during adolescence and its impact on behaviour, academic and socialization (Prinstein, 2010). Early studies focused on homophily, where individuals associate with similar peers, as articulated by Kandel (1978), who suggested that adolescents select friends based on shared behaviours (Gifford, 2005). By the late 20th century, researchers like Dishion (1996) explored mechanisms like deviancy training, showing how peers reinforce antisocial behaviours, which highlighted both positive and negative aspects of peer dynamics (Stout, 2013). In the 2000s, Brechwald and Prinstein (2011) proposed a model considering contextual factors that impact peer influence, emphasizing its variability based on individual and situational characteristics.

Drug use, present in all cultures, initially involved natural substances for medicinal and recreational purposes. Alcohol was commonly used in cultural ceremonies, while other drugs served medicinal roles (Alavi et al., 2016). The World Drug Report (2005) noted a global increase in illicit drug use, influenced by the pharmacological effects of these substances (Ngesu et al., 2008). Ancient civilizations utilized various drugs, with the Greeks and Egyptians known for alcohol and opium, respectively. Interestingly, many drugs that are now commonly used were previously banned, and substances such as opium and cocaine were legally accessible during the 19th century (Wolmer, 1990).

In Cameroon, the evolution of drug consumption has been influenced by socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. Prior to colonial rule, local herbs and tobacco were widely used (Ngwanza, 1996). The colonial period introduced alcohol and other substances, changing consumption patterns (Mokoko, 2000). After independence in 1960, cannabis rose in popularity, especially among youth (Tchindjang, 1995). The 1990s saw an increase in hard drug use, facilitated by Cameroon's role as a transit country for drug trafficking (UNODC, 2008). The emergence of synthetic drugs in the early 2000s prompted the

development of harmful reduction strategies and educational initiatives aimed at prevention and treatment (Nguedjeu, 2015; WHO, 2020).

Peer influence being the process by which individuals change their thoughts, feelings, or behaviours as a result of their interactions with peers, often leading them to act in ways they might not have otherwise chosen. This influence can manifest positively or negatively, as it encompasses both adaptive behaviours, such as increased academic motivation, and maladaptive behaviours, such as substance use or delinquency (Laursen, 2018). Peer influence is particularly significant during adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by heightened sensitivity to social feedback and a strong desire for acceptance within peer groups (Prinstein, 2011). It is important to note that peer influence can occur more subtly through social norms and shared values among friends (Brechtwald, 2020). This phenomenon is often influenced by a range of factors, including social pressures, academic stress and the desire for enhanced performance or social acceptance (Caldeira et al., 2017). The prevalence of drug use among students has been linked to negative outcomes such as lower academic performance, increased risk of mental health issues and potential legal consequences (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019). Understanding the patterns and motivations behind peers' drug consumption is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies within educational settings (American College Health Association, 2020).

Attachment to friends also leads to emotional bond and connection that individuals develop with their peers, which can significantly influence their social development and well-being. This type of attachment is characterized by feelings of trust, support, and mutual understanding, and it plays a crucial role in shaping one's identity and social behaviour (Berndt, 2002). The quality of these attachments can vary, with close friendships typically offering greater emotional support and intimacy compared to more casual relationships (Berndt, 2002). Understanding the dynamics of attachment to friends is essential for recognizing its impact on individual development and social interactions which can be negative or positive, throughout life.

Conformity is another means of peer pressure by which individuals adjust their beliefs, attitudes, actions, or perceptions to align with those of a group to which they belong or wish to belong, or to gain approval from others (Sherif, 2016). This adjustment can occur in response to real or imagined group pressure and can manifest in various forms, including public agreement (compliance) and private acceptance (internalization). Research has highlighted the significant influence of social dynamics on conformity which leads to drug consumption (Asch, 2011).

Engagement in extracurricular activities refers to participation in organized activities outside the regular academic curriculum, such as sports, clubs, music, arts, and community service (Eccles & Barber, 2003). Participation in these activities is positively associated with various indicators of student success, but it is also a platform whereby students practice

and consume drugs as they see their friends do (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). As a result, engagement in extracurricular activities can also expose students to illicit consumption of drugs which increases the likelihood of school failure and high dropout rates (Carolina, 2020).

Contextually in Cameroon, the prevalence of drug use among young people is a growing concern, with peer influence identified as a critical factor driving this behaviour. Students often turn to their peers for social validation and acceptance, which can lead to experimentation with drugs as a means of fitting in or gaining approval (Caldeira et al., 2017).

The emotional bonds that young people form with their friends significantly impact their decisions regarding drug consumption. Close friendships can create environments where substance use is normalized, leading to increased likelihood of experimentation with drugs (Brechtwald & Prinstein, 2011). In Buea, especially with the present socio-political crisis, the social context is loaded by various factors, including cultural norms and the availability of substances, which can further exacerbate the influence of peer relationships on drug consumption among secondary school students. Looking at the secondary schools in Buea Municipality, conformity among students significantly influences their behaviour and academic performance. Peer pressure drives many students to align their actions with their peers, leading to both positive and negative outcomes. Conformity results in disruptive behaviours, such as skipping classes, absenteeism, clubbing, substance use, smoking, scamming, failure and high rate of school dropout.

Secondary schools in Buea emphasize the importance of holistic education, integrating academic learning with extracurricular involvement. These extracurricular activities are designed to promote teamwork, leadership, and personal development, aligning with the educational policies that encourage comprehensive student engagement. But during these activities, some students here in Buea are exposed to drugs consumption as they interact with their peers who are drug addicts.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the social learning theory which was used to explain the interplay between peer influence and drug consumption among secondary school students. The Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977) posits that people learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions through observation and imitation of others, rather than solely through direct experience. Bandura emphasized the role of modelling, where individuals observe and imitate behaviours exhibited by others, particularly those they identify with or view as role models.

This theory is relevant to this study in that it highlights how students may adopt drug consumption behaviours by observing their peers engaging in such activities. The presence of peers who use drugs can create a social environment that normalizes drug use, leading to

increased likelihood of similar behaviour among students who seek social acceptance, conformity and validation. Students may feel compelled to use drugs, to fit in or gain acceptance from their peers, especially in situations where they perceive a majority of their friends engaging in such behaviour as their role model. Social learning theory is grounded by this assumption that, people learn through observation and learners can acquire new behaviour and knowledge by merely observing a model. Consequently, this model amongst peers can be a drug addict. This highlights the significant role of peer influence in shaping attitudes and actions related to drug use among adolescents.

Statement of the Problem

Drug consumption among secondary school students has become a pressing social and educational concern in many parts of Cameroon, including the Buea Municipality. Despite continuous efforts by school authorities, parents, and government agencies to curb the menace, the rate of drug use among students appears to be on the rise. Many students are increasingly exposed to substances such as cannabis, tramadol, and other narcotics, which negatively affect their academic performance, health, and behaviour.

One of the major factors contributing to this problem is peer pressure. Adolescents are highly influenced by their peers, often adopting behaviours and attitudes that help them gain acceptance or avoid rejection within their social circles. When peers engage in drug use, others may feel compelled to do the same in order to fit in or appear “mature.” Unfortunately, this desire for social belonging can lead students to make harmful choices that jeopardize their well-being and future prospects.

Although several studies have examined drug use among students, limited attention has been given to the specific role of peer pressure in influencing such behaviours within the secondary schools of Buea Municipality. Understanding how peer influence operates in this context is essential for designing effective school-based interventions and counselling programs. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between peer pressure and students’ drug consumption in selected secondary schools in Buea Municipality, with the aim of providing evidence-based recommendations to reduce the incidence of drug abuse among youths.

Research Method

The descriptive survey design was used as both qualitative and quantitative research approach were utilised. This design is essential for offering a detailed overview of a subject, helping researchers understand context and identify patterns. The purpose of this approach lies on the premise that issues about peer influence on drug consumption of students in secondary schools in Buea are more or less quantitatively and qualitatively measured, so as to find out how drugs affect their participation in academic activities and success in life.

Sampling Technique

The approach used is simple random sampling, where each individual or item in the population has an equal chance of being selected. To determine the sample size, the researcher wrote the names of various schools on separate pieces of paper, folded them, and placed them in a ballot box. The researcher then randomly select three papers to obtain the necessary sample size. The sample size of the study was made up of 75 students from form four, form five and lower sixth students with 65 questionnaire and 10 interview questions was given to 10 students drawn from the three selected secondary schools. These schools were namely government bilingual high school Muea, government technical high school Molyko and St. Theresa international secondary school Molyko, in the Buea municipality.

Procedure

This study used a questionnaire and an interview guide as instruments for data collection. A closed-ended question was used. It was divided into two major parts and six sections. To formulate the closed-ended questions, the researcher made use of a four-point Likert type scale for independent variable. Responses to items was given the following scale scores; Strongly Agree (S A), Agree(A), Strongly Disagree (S A) and Strongly Disagree (D). Respondents were expected to make very honest responses by checking (ticking) one of the options only for each item that best represented their opinion about that specific indicator.

Interviews were also conducted with 10 students who were purposively selected from those who filled the questionnaire (see table 1). The researcher visited the classes in person to obtain consent from the administrators and respondents.

Table 1:

Sample Size distribution for Questionnaire and Interviews

School	Form Four	Form Five	Lower Sixth	Total	Interview
<i>Government Bilingual High School Muea</i>	5	10	15	25	5
<i>Government Technical High School Molyko</i>	8	10	7	25	2
<i>St Theresa International Secondary School Buea</i>	5	10	10	25	3
Total	18	30	32	75	10

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using descriptive statistics where tables, percentages, and frequencies was used. Data was analysed based on nominal scale where percentages were used to explain the outcome. The response given by the respondents (N) was later multiplied by 100 to get the final percentage as shown below.

$$\text{Percentage of response} = \frac{\text{No.of respondents}}{\text{total number of questionnaires given out}} \times 100$$

The interview was analysed thematically using themes and codes on the various respondents where numbers were attribute D to the students who will participate in the exercise. Regarding gender, the sample included 52.3% (34) females and 47.7% (31) males. Cumulatively, age distribution of most students (60.0%, 39 respondents) was aged 16-20, followed by 21.5% (14) aged 21-23, and 18.5% (12) aged 13-15. The data show that 69.2% (45) of the students agreed that their friends often encourage them to try drugs, while 30.8% (20) disagreed.

Similarly, 69.2% (45) also agreed that they feel pressured by their peers to use drugs at social events, while 30.8% (20) disagreed. Furthermore, 70.8% (46) agreed that using drugs was more accepted among friends than adults, while 29.2% (19) disagreed. When asked if they are more likely to try drugs if their friends are using them, 66.2% (43) agreed and 33.8% (22) disagreed. Additionally, 64.6% (42) of the students agreed that their friends often talk about drug use as a fun activity, while 35.4% (23) disagreed. Lastly, 69.2% (45) of respondents agreed that their social circle influences their drug-related decisions, whereas 30.8% (20) disagreed. It was observed that peer pressure influences the consumption of drugs by students with the proportion of agreed ranging from 66.2% (43) to 69.2% (45), demonstrating their high level of interaction and influence for drugs stemming from their peers. This highlights the significant role of peer influence in shaping attitudes and actions related to drug use among adolescents.

Findings and Discussions

Using Spearman's correlation to test the relationship that exist between attachment to friends and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality, it can be concluded that there exists a strong negative relationship ($r_s=0.65$) between attachment to friends, conformity and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality ($r_s(100) = 0.65, p=0.01$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and retained its alternative by concluding that there is a significant relationship between attachment, conformity to friends and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality.

This signifies that a higher percentage of respondents for this study supports the fact that their attachment to friends fully strengthens the desire for drug consumption, which is an indicator of peer pressure. That is MRS = 70.8% (46) agreed that their friends influence their decisions regarding drug use, and 29.2% (19) disagreed. Finally, a total of 255 (69.2%)

of the students agreed that attachment and conformity to friends have negative influence on students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality while 135 (30.2%) disagreed. This implies that peer pressure is a negative predictor, which influence drug consumption among friends.

Table 2:
Influence of Attachment to Friends on Students' Drug Consumption

<i>Test Items</i>	<i>Stretched</i>				<i>Collapsed</i>	
	SA (N/%)	A (N/%)	D (N/%)	SD (N/%)	SA/A (N/%)	SD/D (N/%)
<i>I feel more inclined to try drugs when my friends use them.</i>	19 (29.2%)	26 (40.0%)	12 (18.5%)	8 (12.3%)	45 (69.2%)	20 (30.8%)
<i>My friends influence my decisions regarding drug use.</i>	21 (32.3%)	25 (38.5%)	11 (16.9%)	8 (12.3%)	46 (70.8%)	19 (29.2%)
<i>I value my friendships more than avoiding drug use.</i>	18 (27.7%)	24 (36.9%)	13 (20.0%)	10 (15.4%)	42 (64.6%)	23 (35.4%)
<i>I discuss drug-related topics with my friends frequently.</i>	17 (26.2%)	23 (35.4%)	15 (23.1%)	10 (15.4%)	40 (61.6%)	25 (38.4%)
<i>I feel pressured by my friends to consume drugs.</i>	16 (24.6%)	22 (33.8%)	14 (21.5%)	13 (20.0%)	38 (58.4%)	27 (41.6%)
<i>My attachment to friends affects my choices about drug consumption.</i>	20 (30.8%)	24 (36.9%)	11 (16.9%)	10 (15.4%)	44 (67.7%)	21 (32.3%)
Multiple Response Set	111 (28.5%)	144 (36.9%)	76 (19.5%)	59 (15.2%)	255 (65.4%)	135 (34.6%)

Qualitative Analysis of Data on The Influence of Friends on Drug Consumption

The above-mentioned view was supported more by qualitative data, from a series of questions asked with regards to the above variables. Participants revealed that their relationship with friends sometimes pressurized them to consume drugs.

Table 3: Thematic Analysis on Responses During the Interview With Students
Thematic analysis on responses during the interview with students

<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Sample Responses</i>
<i>How do your friends affect your views on drug use?</i>	Peer views influence caution, curiosity, or reinforcement of anti-drug stance	10	<p>-My friends are mostly support drug usage. help me feel confused in my decision to avoid drugs.</p> <p>-My friends have mixed views. which makes me conscious but also curious.</p> <p>-Some of my friends are against drug use, we talk about the consequences.</p> <p>-My friends are pretty casual about it, I try to stick to my belief despite their influence.</p> <p>-My friends mostly support a drug-free lifestyle, they help me stay firm.</p>
<i>Have you ever felt pressured by friends to try drugs?</i>	Some experience peer pressure at parties or social events but resist	9	<p>-I have felt some pressure, during social gatherings but I remind myself of the risks.</p> <p>-Especially at parties, I have felt some pressured but I usually stand my ground.</p> <p>-I tried experimenting drugs during social events, but I've learned to say no."</p> <p>-Definitely at parties, there's a lot of pressure to fit in.</p> <p>-Yes, especially when they say it's just for fun, I try to avoid those situations.</p>
<i>Are you involved in any school activities? Do some take drugs before they play?</i>	Drug use is rumored in some school activities but rarely seen or encouraged	10	<p>-I'm in the drama club, I have seen some use drugs before performance.</p> <p>-I am on the soccer team... some players use substances, they don't push me.</p> <p>-I'm in the debate club, haven't seen anyone using drugs but some take alchohol.</p> <p>-I'm in the theater program, heard some actors use substances to cope.</p> <p>-I am in the choir, some students in other activities do, they don't pressure me.</p>
<i>How does your school environment influence drug use among students?</i>	School policies and education programs help discourage drug use	10	<p>-Our school has a zero-tolerance policy, creates a serious atmosphere.</p> <p>-Our school educates us about drug risks, helps create awareness.</p> <p>-They promote a drug-free lifestyle through various programs.</p> <p>-Our school has strict policies, but some students still find ways.</p>

<i>Do some take drugs? How do you feel among them?</i>	Students feel 10 uncomfortable, conflicted, or distance themselves	<p>-We have regular workshops on drug education, which really helps but some still drug themselves.</p> <p>-A couple of my friends experiment with drugs, I feel uncomfortable."</p> <p>-Yes, I feel conflicted, I learned to support them but don't agree.</p> <p>-I feel uneasy around them, try to keep a positive distance.</p> <p>-I feel out of place, it makes me reconsider whether to be involved.</p> <p>-I try to stay supportive, but avoid the conversation when they bring it up.</p>
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Concerning the responses to the "how do your friends affect your views on drug use?". All 10 participants acknowledged that their friends' attitudes toward drug use influenced their own views. Some said their friends helped reinforce a drug-free lifestyle, while others mentioned being curious due to peers who openly discussed experimenting. *"My friends sometimes support drug usage, help me feel confused in my decision to avoid drugs."* *"My friends have mixed views, which makes me conscious but also curious to use drugs"*.

The above findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between attachment to friends and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea municipality. Consequently, attachment to friends plays a great role in shaping students' attitudes toward drug use as some students reported that their friends encouraged a drug-free lifestyle, while others became curious due to peers who discussed drug use openly. The finding is also consistent with the finding of Simons-Morton and Farhat (2010), who state that strong attachment to friends significantly impact peer substance use on individual drug consumption. Consequently, Han et al. (2016), also hold that secure attachment was associated with lower levels of substance use, while insecure attachment styles correlated with higher rates of substance use. Muhia (2021) conducted a study on the impact of peer influence on substance abuse in Thika Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. Findings indicated a positive and significant association between peer influence and substance abuse.

With regards to the responses to the question, how does conformity with peers influence students drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea. Nine out of ten participants reported experiencing some form of peer pressure (conformity), particularly during social events like parties. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between conformity with peers and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea municipality. This qualitative finding revealed that peer conformity has a notable effect on students' decisions regarding drugs. The finding is also in line with Gardner and Steinberg

(2005) who states that adolescents were more likely to engage in risky behaviours, including drug use, in the presence of peers, demonstrating the strong influence of peer conformity. The finding is also in line with Leung et al. (2011) who hold that higher levels of peer conformity significantly predicted increased substance use over time, emphasizing the role of peer dynamics. The finding is also in line with Bugbee et al. (2019) who say that adolescents who perceived higher levels of drug use among their peers were more likely to engage in similar behaviours, highlighting the influence of conformity.

Gardner and Steinberg (2005) conducted an experimental study in the United States to assess how peer presence influences risk-taking behaviours, including drug use among adolescents. They found out that adolescents were more likely to engage in risky behaviours, including drug use, in the presence of peers, demonstrating the strong influence of peer conformity. Tajfel and Turner (1979), in their study found out that individuals categorize themselves into social groups, and that identification with such groups significantly influences behaviour, including engaging in drug consumption to align with peer group norms.

Finally, Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977), suggests that social behaviour is learned by observing and imitating the behaviour of others. It further states that people learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions through observation and imitation of others, particularly those they identify with or view as role models. This indicates that students within their peer groups, engage in different activities such as groups discussions, class competition, extra-curricular activities etc, during such moments, they develop new behaviours as a result of attention, retention, reproduction and motivation amidst their friends. Also, the theory considers how both environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence human behaviour. This theory explores how individuals change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours due to what they observe within the real or imagined presence of others.

Recommendations

Since education is the back bone of any nation and the future of every nation depends on the survival of our young people, factors such as counselling, guidance, making the right friends and meaningful participation in social activities, can be taught freely by counsellors, teachers and adults in any environment in which adolescents operate such as school, community, home and among their peers. Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations emerged:

Recommendations

Strengthen Peer Education Programs: Schools should introduce peer education initiatives where trained student leaders serve as role models and advocates against drug use. Such programs can leverage positive peer influence to promote healthy behaviours and discourage substance abuse.

Enhance Guidance and Counselling Services: Guidance counsellors should organize regular sensitization sessions and one-on-one counselling for students facing peer pressure or stress. Counselling units should also be equipped to identify early signs of drug use and provide timely intervention.

Implement Comprehensive Drug Education: The Ministry of Secondary Education should integrate drug education into the school curriculum. Lessons should focus on the dangers of drug abuse, decision-making skills, and strategies for resisting negative peer pressure.

Promote Parental Involvement: Parents should be encouraged to communicate openly with their children about peer relationships and drug use. Regular parent-teacher meetings can help identify at-risk students and ensure consistent monitoring both at home and in school.

Establish Strong Disciplinary and Support Systems: School authorities should enforce clear rules against drug use while ensuring that affected students receive rehabilitation and counselling rather than punishment alone. This balanced approach promotes accountability and recovery.

Organize Extracurricular and Mentorship Activities: Schools should create engaging extracurricular programs such as sports, arts, debate clubs, and mentorship schemes to provide students with positive peer networks and alternatives to drug-related social groups.

Community and Law Enforcement Collaboration: Schools, community leaders, and law enforcement agencies should work together to control the circulation of drugs around school environments and create awareness campaigns targeting youth in the wider community.

Conclusions

Based on the above findings, it is obvious that peer influence in this study, operationalized as (attachment to friends and conformity) significantly fosters drug consumption of secondary school students in Buea. The main aim of this study was to examine the role of peer influence on drug consumption of students in secondary schools in Buea Municipality. Specifically, the study sought to find out how attachment to friends influence students' drugs consumption in secondary schools. It is also to investigate how conformity with peers influence students drug consumption and to investigate how extracurricular activities influence students' drugs consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality. This research proved that drug consumption among adolescents in Buea, was not as a result of inner curiosity but as a result of peer pressure from their friends, coupled with the ability to socialize with friends and others in the community. Based on the finding of this study, it can therefore be concluded that peer influence has a significant role on drug consumption of students in secondary schools in Buea Municipality and this can affect their academic output negatively.

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