



THE EMERGING AND TRENDING ISSUES ON DRUGS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG YOUTHS DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY OF MBARE, HARARE.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research study was to investigate the changes and rising issues on drug and substance abuse among youths as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic in Mbare. The research highlights an overview of the changes of drug types abused by young people during the pandemic as well as mitigation measures to drugs and substance abuse in the event of pandemics. The study was conducted in Mbare Matapi, High Density Suburb in Harare Zimbabwe. The objectives of the study were to explore community perceptions towards drug and substance abuse during the Covid 19 pandemic, to identify the trends and emerging issues on drug and substance abuse by youths during the Covid 19 pandemic in Mbare community and to come up with mitigation measures to drugs and substance abuse among youths in the event of pandemics. The study employed a qualitative research approach. The researcher selected 6 youths who are into drug and substance abuse in Mbare, and also targeted 2 key informants who are members of an organisation that rehabilitates youths engaging into drug and substance abuse and 2 participants who are community members. Data was collected through the use of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The researcher used the resilience theory to explain how young people are trying to cope with life during the pandemic as a result of drug and substance abuse. Research results showed that Covid 19 pandemic restrictions changed the pattern of drug and substance abuse among youths. The Covid 19 resulted in an increased number of youths turning into drug and substance abuse. The study also reviewed that community view drug and substance abuse differently. Recommendations to reduce drug and substance abuse in the event of pandemics include increasing drug rehabilitation centres in urban areas, social workers and non-governmental organisations intervention.

KEY TERMS: Trend, Drug abuse, Pandemic, Substance abuse, Youths, Covid19.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Drug and substance abuse is a major concern being discussed worldwide. The social problem can be best understood after having a close examination of Covid 19 cases from the year 2019 up to 2020 basing on the changes and strength of the pandemic. According to UNODC (2010), around 275 million people misused drugs worldwide in the last year of prioritizing and paying attention to sudden changes caused by the Covid 19 pandemic up by 22% from 2010. UNODC cited in the World Drug Report (2021) that the Covid 19 related difficulties has pushed more than 100 million people into serious poverty and increased unemployment and inequality as the world lost 255 million jobs in 2020. Mental health conditions are also increasing worldwide, and as a result, these variables may contribute to an increase in drug use problems. Cannabis, cocaine, and heroin are only a few of the drugs and chemicals that were misused on a global scale and the majority of them were smuggled. The Covid 19 pandemic changed the trends in the drug and substance misuse. UNODC (2021) asserts that the Covid 19 epidemic had a significant influence on drug markets and the supply of drug services, despite the fact that consumption of psychoactive substances increased. Global drug manufacturing was mainly unaffected by Covid 19 throughout 2020. According to UNODC (2021), following initial interruptions since the overall drug supply and trafficking proved robust to Covid 19-related changes. The Covid 19 epidemic had a significant influence on drug markets and the supply of drug services, despite the fact that consumption of

psychoactive substances increased. Global drug manufacturing was mainly unaffected by Covid 19 throughout 2020,(UNODC, 2021).

Changes also occurred in the incidence of drug and substance usage, particularly among young people across the African continent. According to Covid Induced Drug Abuse Rise in Africa (2021),it states that while drug abuse and drug use have been a problem in Southern Africa, the Covid 19 pandemic has caused an increase in drug use due to the introduction of measures like travel restrictions, social isolation, quarantine, and government directives that change supply chains, patterns of use, unavailability, and a rise on price of the drugs . The Corona virus epidemic negatively impacted the nation's mental health, particularly by worsening use of alcohol or drugs among those who had used drugs in the previous year, according to data from the 2020 national survey on drug use and health issues , (SAMHSA ,2020).

The covid19 epidemic has significantly altered Zimbabwe's drug and substance use, according to ZIMFACT (2021). Glue, bronclear, "mangemba," cane spirit, marijuana, cocaine, and crystal meth are among the narcotics that are often misused in Zimbabwe. Due to the fact that drug production expanded during the pandemic, young people began producing drugs including musombodia (an ethanol-based intoxicant), mangemba, "kambwa", and intoxicating substances created from TV tubes, and other substances (Dzinamarira2021). However, due to extremely high unemployment rates, poverty, and despair, more young people are turning to drug use as a form of entertainment. Drug and substance abuse was once a common practice among homeless youths who did it to cope with stressful situations and boost their courage in criminal activities (ZIMFACT,2021). There is evidence that methamphetamine (mutoriro) use in Zimbabwe increased significantly during the pandemic. Because this drug affects the central nervous system and can put users in a coma, hence there has been a sharp increase in the number of hospital admissions for methamphetamine use among youths, according to(UNICEF, 2021). This demonstrates how young people have changed their pattern on how they take drugs and substances through innovation and production of new drug types during the pandemic.

A study area is an area of land chosen or available as an object of study (Oxford Lexico, 1930).The researcher used Mbare Matapi as the research area for the study. Mbare is a high density residential suburb in the South of Harare Zimbabwe. Mbare is the center of many informal businesses which is densely populated and a place where people engage in selling activities in order to earn a living, however despite the fact that Mbare is known for its high population density it is also a place where drug and substances are highly sold and are on demand especially among young people. The researcher found the area relevant to conduct a study since there is a large number of a youth in the informal business who were affected by the pandemic hence there is much information on changes taking place on drugs and substance abuse especially in relation to Covid 19 pandemic.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There are limited studies on drug and substance abuse in relation to the Covid 19 pandemic. During the events of outbreaks and pandemics in the past years families could unite and create a sense of closeness in caring as well as protecting each other's mental health through showing love and giving each other a sense of belonging to the family through formulation of family laws and good morals. However Covid 19 seems to have brought more harm to families through restrictions like staying indoors banning of public gatherings maintaining social distancing and closure of schools. Lack of entertainment, loss of jobs and banning of frequents visits to family members and friends resulted in mental health problems like stress and depression among many people which resulted in increased social problems like new trends on drug and substance abuse among young people and domestic violence. Hence this gave a room for social workers to conduct a meaningful research on the context of specific changes on drug and substance abuse among youths in the event of the Covid 19 pandemic, in order for them to conduct a well-informed anti-drug awareness campaign and provide meaningful contribution in the policy making process.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY.

There are many research studies that have been conducted which address the issue of drug and substance abuse among youths in Zimbabwe. The focus of this study shows a research gap from the previous studies in the

sense that it is addressing drug and substance abuse in relation to the Covid 19 pandemic. The types of drugs and substances being abused by young people in urban areas are changing from time to time depending on the affordability and accessibility to young people. Many researchers in the past years have articulated the different types of drugs and substances that were abused by youths such as cocaine, bronclear, marijuana alcohol among others and most of them were imported to Zimbabwe. However basing on this study there are many changes that has taken place on the types of drugs that are being abuse as a results of the Covid 19 pandemic. The unavailability and unaffordability of drugs lead young people to become more innovative since they stated manufacturing their own drug types such as *guka*, *dombo*, *musombodhia*, boiled pads, boiled diapers, TV tubes among others. The study aims at identifying what motivated youths to increasingly engage into drug and substance abuse during lockdown and better interventions to ameliorate such problems. The study is aimed to benefit the population of young people by clearly enlightening them on the side effects and impact of drugs and substance abuse in their lives, increase the knowledge base of social workers on drug and substance abuse in the context of pandemics, the drug and substance literature in the context of pandemics, the government of Zimbabwe since findings from the study can be useful in policy making process and also useful at an institutional level especially institutions that deals with youths abusing drugs for example the "I AM ZIMBABWE TRUST".

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore community perceptions towards drug and substance abuse during Covid 19 pandemic.
- To identify trends and emerging issues on drugs and substances abused by youths during the Covid 19 pandemic in Mbare community.
- To proffer mitigation measures to drug and substance abuse among youths in the event of pandemics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach was employed in the study. Qualitative research is generally characterized by inductive approaches to knowledge building aimed at generating meaning (Leavy, 2014). The study found it necessary to employ a qualitative research methodology in order to capture people's narratives regarding their experiences and observations on the trending and emerging issues on drugs and substance abuse among youths during the Covid 19 pandemic and try to make meaning out of the information provided. The study employed a qualitative method through the use of case study from the interpretivist paradigm. The research study also identified that the research topic of trends and emerging issues on drugs and substance abuse among youths during the Covid 19 pandemic requires participants with experience on the issue, thus many of the participants in this research study were into drug and substance abuse, therefore the information provided is based on experience. The researcher collected data from different participants and key informants using focus group discussions and face to face in-depth interviews. Stroh (2000) argues that qualitative research methodologies do not aim to produce generalizations, rather, they seek to understand people's life worlds. Therefore, this study critically aimed at gathering information specifically on the trending and emerging issues on drug and substance abuse among youths during the pandemic.

Qualitative analysis of interviews can range from summarizing discussion to identify themes and elaborate coding schemes (Fane, 2001). This study is based on the qualitative method of thematic analysis to undertake the data in this survey. Thematic analysis identifies themes that generates from the qualitative data and try to make sense of the raw information in the light of these themes. "Themes are identified by bringing together components or fragrance of ideas or experiences which often meaningless when viewed alone" (Leinenger, 2014). The researcher generated themes through coding the information gathered in the research study. The researcher used thematic analysis because it gives clear meaning to the information gathered in the field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the Resilience theory. The researchers finds it suitable to use the Resilience theory because it explains very well about how people engage into drug and substance abuse as a result of trying to cope and adapt to their social problems during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Over the past few decades, social workers, psychologists, sociologists, educators, and many other professionals have all studied resilience in its various facets. Resilience theory focuses on the qualities that individuals and systems have that allow them to overcome adversity (Van Breda, 2001). The fundamental idea behind the resilience theory is that, in most cases, how we respond to a difficult situation is more important than the nature of the situation itself. As a result, when people encounter challenging circumstances, misfortune, or frustration, resilience helps them recover in the face of misfortune. Many young people in Zimbabwe had challenges and concerns as a result of the Covid 19 outbreak; some of the regulations outlawed meetings and closed informal business and this had a great impact on the vulnerability of many people resulting in stress and depression and young people turning into drug and substance misuse. However through resilience people started operating small businesses in residential homes and young people became innovative and they started to manufacture their own drugs locally that were affordable and available all the time.

The resilience hypothesis enables young people to adjust to the challenging circumstances they encounter during times of crises. People who are resilient may deal with a pandemic that has caused them to feel powerless, unsure, and despairing in a good way (Shaw, 2020). The activation and interplay of protective and vulnerability elements following adversity constitutes the resilience process (Bolton et al., 2016). Resilient individuals have the capacity to enhance their coping, adapting, and well-being mechanisms in the face of risks, stresses, or adversity (Luthar et al, 2015). Many young people lost their jobs as a result of the Covid 19 lockdown's numerous limitations because the majority of them relied on tiny, unauthorized companies. However, they learned to adapt and found other options, such as selling alcohol inside homes and groceries. Many young people in Mbare were forced out of the Mupedzanhamo market place, where they had previously operated, and they set up their businesses in homes.

This showed the resilience of youth during the pandemic in coping with their business operation. Resilience levels, on the other hand, are lower among those with higher education levels, which may suggest that using more cognitive tactics is less beneficial than emotional training (Neylon et al, 2013). This clarifies why persons who can generate good emotions, moods, sentiments, thoughts, and adjust to difficult conditions have greater resilience levels. Since the properties of the virus may cause extreme panic in high-risk groups, resilience levels are also lower in those with cardiovascular issues (Neylon et al, 2013).

In light of the fact that the Covid 19 pandemic caused fear in the hearts of many, the sudden changes brought on by the pandemic led to stress and depression in young people, who then turned to drug and alcohol abuse as a coping mechanism for the issues they faced, proving the resilience theory to be applicable. Young people needed resilience to adjust to the present environment, and it is our job and obligation to empower individuals and give them courage in the face of grave crises.

Conceptualizing Youths and Drug and Substance Abuse in the Context of Covid19 Pandemic

In accordance with Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20 Act of 2013 Section 20, a youth is defined as a person who is between the ages of 15 and 35. According to Jakaza (2018), this age group is thought to be the most active group abusing drugs and alcohol, particularly those who live on the streets or in densely populated regions like Mbare Matapi. Drug and substance abuse is the excessive use of psychoactive chemicals in a way that is harmful to oneself, society, or both, according to (McLellan, 2017). Drug abuse is the maladaptive or addicted use of drugs for reasons other than those of medicine, despite the potential social, psychological, and bodily consequences of such use. Substance abuse is the risky or dangerous use of any drug, according to WHO (2020).

Legal Frameworks

The 2019 Western African drug legislation model affirms that drug users should not be punished but instead get treatment and support. They are stigmatized and locked up in ever-increasing numbers, which only makes their health problems worse and puts a tremendous amount of strain on the already overburdened criminal justice systems. The 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances broadens the scope of the control regime to include precursors. It also aims to

strengthen the framework for international cooperation in criminal matters, including extradition and mutual legal assistance, and to enact measures to combat illicit drug trafficking and associated money-laundering. The repeal of laws or regulations that classify a behavior, item, or situation as illegal is part of Zimbabwe's national drug master plan. The phrase is used in reference to both illegal drugs and crime of public drunkenness. On Narcotic Drugs of 1961 .This Convention aims to combat drug abuse by coordinated international action. There are two forms of intervention and control that work together. First, it seeks to limit the possession, use, trade in, distribution, import, export, manufacture and production of drugs. It may also refer to a decrease in the gravity of a crime or in the consequences it carries, such as when marijuana possession is reduced from a criminal that calls for an arrest and a jail sentence. Around the world, legislative framework for drug and substance misuse have been suggested, one of which is the Single Convention, which is only applicable to medical and scientific reasons. The Convention creates a global framework for the regulation of psychoactive drugs. It implemented regulations over a number of synthetic compounds based on their potential for misuse and their therapeutic usefulness on the one hand, in response to the diversity and growth of the spectrum of illicit drug use. The importation, manufacturing, sale, distribution, and use of hazardous pharmaceuticals are all subject to severe regulation, according to Chapter 15:02 of the Dangerous Drugs Act.

Research Gap

Despite the fact that there are many studies that were done in terms of drug and substance abuse as well as factors behind drug abuse internationally, regionally and nationally and in Zimbabwe, most of the studies were conducted outside the context of Covid 19. As such, most studies did not concentrate or address the exclusive impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on drug and substance abuse among the youths. However, with this study the observed gap is filled by analyzing the trends and emerging issues on drug and substance abuse during Covid 19 pandemic.

Community Perceptions Towards Drug and Substance Among Youths During Covid19 Pandemic.

People with substance use disorders (SUDs) have been influenced by the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. This explains why the global usage of drugs and other substances increased as a result of the Coronavirus. Radfar et al, (2021) state that there is a global worry about how the COVID-19 pandemic and associated limitations would affect persons with SUDs. This shows that throughout the Covid 19 epidemic, many people had varying perspectives on and interpretations of drug and substance usage. Numerous studies have shown and illustrated that people with SUDs use alcohol and other drugs more frequently to deal with the stress and uncertainty brought on by pandemics. In addition, changes in the drug market supply brought on by border closures, stricter alcohol regulations, and movement restrictions may cause people with SUDs to engage in drug use,(Sallie ,2020). Most health policy attention has been focused on stopping the spread of the Covid 19 virus, which has distracted policymakers from other social issues like drug and substance abuse. As a result, it has weakened the urgency of addressing alcohol and substance use as well as mental health issues, especially substance abuse among young people, according to Demarest (2020). By strengthening regulations related to limitation, policymakers moved their attention to the epidemic and forgot about the risks and harms of drug and substance misuse on young generations' mental health. Due to the older adolescent population's increased risk for increases in alcohol and other substance use, Covid 19 also had a greater impact on substance and drug misuse, this is because older adolescents' compliance with mask wearing and social distancing guidelines is likely to be affected,(Demarest, 2020).

Another epidemic has been erupting with catastrophic repercussions in Africa, where COVID-19 is still wreaking havoc on economies, destroying livelihoods, and changing lifestyles. People are becoming more depressed and resorting to drugs and alcohol for solace. (Koigi, 2021) , indicates that the Covid 19 epidemic was seen as a concern by individuals on the African continent who considered drug and alcohol misuse as a sign of the epidemic. Koigi (2021) claims that while countries increase border monitoring to limit the epidemic, physicians and psychiatrists and social workers have raised concerns about rising drug consumption during the pandemic time and denounced the thriving trade despite the disruption of conventional supply channels. To lessen the impact of the drug and alcohol issue, a number of important players are engaged in combat that includes social workers to provide counseling services.

While drug and alcohol abuse has long been a problem in Africa, the pandemic's impact on drug use has reached epidemic levels as a result of travel restrictions, social exclusion, quarantine, and governmental directives that change the substance's supply chains, patterns of use, availability, and cost. Consequently, international authorities claimed that a rise in drug use in Africa demonstrates that the continent is not just a transit region (the ports of Tanzania, Kenya, and Nigeria have historically been used to ship drugs to the US and Europe), but has instead emerged as a significant market in its own right as demand rises, Koigi (2021). This shows that, in addition to being a location of transit for drugs and substances, Africans are more interested in abusing them. The simplicity with which home delivery of different items is being done to reduce human interaction to restrict the spread, has witnessed a jump in demand for alcohol and drugs, which is having an adverse impact on families and society.

Families became fractured as a result of drug and alcohol misuse during the Covid 19 epidemic. That change in lifestyle has had an impact on the family structure. Children and young people who look up to their parents are as a result doing what their parents are doing, which is fanning the drug abuse cycle, alcohol and drug abuse occurring in homes and people attempting to deal with the uncertainties that have come with the pandemic, Koigi (2021). The social learning hypothesis, which says that behavior is taught by imitation and observation, can be used to further understand this issue McLeod (2016). We've also seen a concerning rise in domestic violence incidents, which is related to the drug usage issue. As a result, one might claim that the Covid 19 pandemic increased the vulnerability of both young people and women.

During the COVID19 epidemic, Zimbabwe's drug and substance use has been altered significantly, according to ZIMFACT (2021). In Zimbabwe, narcotics including glue, bronclear, "mangemba," cane spirit, marijuana, cocaine, and crystal meth are often misused. The Covid 19 pandemic altered local drug production since it rose throughout the outbreak. Youths began producing drugs including musombodia (an ethanol-based intoxicant), mangemba, kambwa, and intoxicants created from TV tubes, and other substances (Dzinamarira et al, 2021) In the past, drug and substance abuse was a common practice among homeless youths who did it to cope with stressful situations and boost their courage in criminal activity. However, due to extremely high unemployment rates, poverty, and despair, more and more youths are now turning to drug use as a form of entertainment, (ZIMFACT ,2021). There is evidence that methamphetamine (mutoriro) use in Zimbabwe increased dramatically during the pandemic. Because this drug affects the central nervous system and can put users in a coma, hence there has been a sharp increase in the number of hospital admissions for methamphetamine use in young people during the Covid 19 pandemic, according to (UNICEF,2021).There is few literature towards the perceptions on drug and substance abuse among the youths during Covid 19 hence it gives a gap for the researcher to study on the topic.

Emerging Trends on Drug and Substance Abused by Youths During Covid19.

Depending on accessibility and pricing, the drugs and substances that young people misuse change throughout time. In order to address the public health concern in the initial months of 2020, governments enacted a number of limitations. This had an influence on the typical patterns of drug misuse among youths throughout the world, (Zaami 2019). Due to the temporary border closure, which disrupted the regular route of illicit drug shipping from one nation to another, traditional street narcotics are in short supply. Opioids, depressants, and stimulants make up three broad groups that may be used to classify the majority of drugs that young people take across the world. Kasper (2017). Cannabis, also known as marijuana, is the name for the dried leaves, flowers, stems, and seeds of the Cannabis sativa or Cannabis indica plant. It is the most widely used illicit substance, and is now legal for both medical and recreational use in some states. However, while some people use marijuana for the enjoyable high it produces, it also has negative effects on short-term memory, learning, the ability to concentrate, and coordination. Additionally, it raises heart rate, may damage the lungs, and may make sensitive individuals more susceptible to psychosis. Prior to the Covid 19 lockdown's first announcement, drugs and chemicals were widely available around the world. However, due to international restrictions enacted by some nations, it was essential to close all of the typical recreational settings where stimulants are used, this resulted in the abuse of drugs and substances in homes (UNODC,2021).

There are various emerging and trending issues that arise in the African continent on the issue of drug and substance abuse among youths during Covid 19 pandemic African health groups have warned that the COVID pandemic has led to a rise in drug and alcohol abuse on the continent, but a gap in data is making it hard to monitor. Substance misuse especially alcohol consumption has increased in Africa for years, according to the World Health Organization(2022).The coronavirus epidemic that resulted in unemployment and disruption in school calendars raised problems which resulted in the changes in drug misuse : overall, MDMA, LSD and cocaine were used less as a result of the closure of social and recreational venues; increased stress, boredom, more free time, and changes in financial resources sparked an increase in the use of cannabis as well as in the non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs like benzodiazepines, for instance. A global survey of addiction medicine professionals conducted between April and mid-May 2020 found increased use of pharmaceutical sedatives in 64% of surveyed countries, while increased use of cannabis was found in 68% of countries. The medicine supply networks in Africa are more severely impacted by the Covid 19 epidemic. Overall, it was shown that COVID-19-related adjustments had little effect on drug supply and trafficking. Despite the pandemic's numerous disruptions, COVID-19 had little to no impact on worldwide drug manufacturing in 2020, and as a result, opiate production stayed mostly untouched, according to (UNODC, 2020). Globally opium production in 2020 was mostly unaffected due to the time of harvests in Myanmar and Mexico as well as coping mechanisms used by farmers in Afghanistan, such as a higher reliance on the family labor of women and children and on local laborers. Therefore, there are no signs of any disturbance in the supply of chemicals used to make precursors for heroin, indicating that the pandemic has not had an impact on worldwide manufacturing. Manufacturing of coca leaves was undisturbed; however during the early stages of the outbreak, purchasers in Colombia and Peru were unable to enter areas where coca was being grown. Manufacturing quickly resumed after the COVID-19-related restrictions were lifted. As some people turned to marijuana to relieve stress or manage boredom brought on by stay-at-home orders, COVID-19 may have speeded up pre-existing changes toward rising cannabis use and accessibility in African countries. This, in turn, may have provided new possibilities for cannabis markets due to a developing approval of the drug by the United Nations (2019).

During the COVID19 epidemic, Zimbabwe's drug and substance misuse has been altered significantly,(ZIMFACT ,2021). In Zimbabwe, narcotics like glue, bronclear, "mangemba," cane spirit, marijuana, cocaine, and crystal meth are constantly misused. The Covid 19 epidemic altered local drug manufacturing since it expanded during the epidemic. Youths started manufacturing drugs such as musombodia (an ethanol-based intoxicant), mangemba, kambwa, and intoxicants manufactured from TV tubes, and other substances (Dzinamarira, 2021). In the past, drug and substance misuse was an usual feature among homeless young adults who did it to cope with difficult situations and boost their strength of character in criminal activity, (Dzinamarira, 2021). However, due to extremely high unemployment levels, economic hardships, and hopelessness, more youth are now turning to drug use as a source of entertainment, (ZIMFACT, 2021). There is proof that Zimbabwe experiences an increase in the misuse of methamphetamine or mutoriro during the pandemic.

Mitigation Measures to Drug and Substance Abuse Among Youths

According to, World health organization (2014) ,“there is need to strengthen regulations and guidelines worldwide to ensure continuity of life saving medical supply and commodities and health services for people who use drugs , thus it should be ensured that there are policies in place to facilitate access to opioid antagonist naloxone for all those at risk including monitoring opioids prescribing practices ,curbing inappropriate over the counter sales of opioids and increasing the rate of treatment of opioid dependence” .Therefore those who are caught in possession, use and trade of dangerous drugs should be harshly punished . Long prison sentences can be imposed for possessing illegal substances such as heroin and marijuana as well as using them recreationally such as taking histalix and pethidine without prescription (Zimbabwe civil drug network, 2014).

The increase of rehabilitation and treatment centers in Africa reduces the prevalence of drug and substance abuse among youths during the Covid 19 pandemic. The increase in drug rehabilitation centers that assist the youths in the urban areas with addiction on drug and substance abuse ,social workers help young people in

decision making by giving them self determination to problems that they are facing that is forcing them to engage into drug and substance abuse through group counseling therapies and individual sessions. According to Hilliard (2019), restoration is intended to be given those who are struggling with substance abuse the resources and tools they need to overcome addiction. The main reason for rehabilitation involves therapies provided by case workers to assist clients identify and resolve the challenges that first led to their addiction. In the case of Africa, the major factors that are making a contribution to the serious addiction of drugs and substance abuse are as a result of the Covid 19 restrictions.

Advocating and awareness campaign against drug and substance abuse among youth during the Covid 19 pandemic is also another effective intervention mechanism to the act. The law enforcers, health care workers and advocacy groups say drug and substance misuse among young people has worsened with new drugs like crystal meth coming in Zimbabwe. Newsday (2022), published an anti-drug abuse campaign where a local model has partnered some non-governmental organizations to educate young people on the dangers of drug and substance abuse especially during the pandemic where the prevalence is increasing rapidly since youths are now spending much time at home. There are other organizations and groups that are playing a pivotal role in addressing the issues of drug and substance abuse during lockdown for example the Anti-drug abuse advocacy groups like Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network they are always on the ground fighting the scourge together with the Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa who recently called for a collective fight against drug abuse during the pandemic (Dube, 2022).

Youth empowerment program implementation is also a strategy being used to mitigate drug and substance abuse among youths in Mbare during the Covid 19 pandemic. The” **IAM ZIMBABWE TRUST**” Covid 19 relief article (2022), with the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic, the team **I am Mbare** engaged into a successful **GO FUND ME** fundraising campaign where money was raised for sanitizer distribution and face mask as well as loans for young people to start home based projects. There was also provision of education to youths and residents on Covid 19 awareness and prevention, they also introduced youth empowerment project to reduce drug and substance abuse during lockdown in Mbare. Social protection is one of the major concerns as far as the issue of empowerment us concerned. According to UNDP (2016) Since many youth have become vulnerable to drug and substance abuse since the introduction of the Covid 19, they have all been subject to social protection, which is generally understood as all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance social status and opportunities for the marginalized with the overall objective of reducing economic and social vulnerability and marginalization. Social workers have a crucial role to play in identifying those who qualify for social security programs. Zimbabwe established very harsh and strict laws to the drug and substance abusers.

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Conceptualization of Drug and Substance Abuse

A thorough investigation of the community understanding towards drug and substance abuse in the context of Covid 19 pandemic formed a very important part of the research study. This section of the research study examines how the community views or understands the key themes on drug and substance abuse during the Covid 19 pandemic. The perceptions and understanding of community members on drugs is crucial because it gives a deeper understanding of the cultural values, attitudes, reaction and the knowledge base of people towards that particular issue. The particular understanding of the Mbare community towards drugs, substance abuse and Covid 19 will then be presented and analyzed.

People in different communities understand and conceptualize the issue of drug and substance abuse differently especially during the Covid 19 lock down. The researcher sought to explore on the term drug and substance abuse to see how the community understands the term. Literature explains clearly that people perceives and defines drug and substance abuse differently worldwide,(Radfar, 2021).This was reflected through responses from different participants on their understanding of the term drug and substance abuse. After asking the participants on the term drug and substance abuse, the researcher noticed that only a few participants understood what drug and substance abuse meant young people who are into drug and substance

abuse. Basing from the findings the researcher noticed that many participants who are into drug and substance abuse have limited knowledge or deeper understanding of drug and substance abuse especially during the pandemic. The key informants the organization members and community members proved to have, have better knowledge of what drug and substance abuse is as well as the Covid 19 pandemic. Key informant A exhibits to have better knowledge of Drug and substance abuse as well as Covid 19 pandemic, according to his understanding he defines drug abuse as :

“The overdose or excess use of alcohol, toxic substances and medicine to relief stress and depression without paying attention to the consequences of the act”

One key participant has a better understanding of drug and substance abuse as a member of an organization which is focusing on the rehabilitation of youths who are abusing drug in Mbare. “Substance abuse is the excessive use of psychoactive drugs in such a way that is detrimental to self ,society or both”(McLellan,2017).

Drug and Substance Abuse as Mood Alteration Process

Many youths are engaging into drug and substance abuse during the Covid 19 pandemic for mood alteration and to forget stressing and depressive events. After carrying a group discussion with participants who are youths abusing drugs and substances in Mbare, their definitions or understanding was based on the reasons why they take drug and substances. The answers provided after asking them what they understand by the term drug and substance abuse were as follows:

“Something that makes one to feel dizzy and happy which also enables one to forget life problems like unemployment especially during the Covid 19 pandemic”.

“Drug and substance abuse is the process of boosting immune systems, improving energy content in our bodies, fulfilling sexual desires and mood alteration”

The above statement shows that many youths in Mbare are taking drugs and substances as a way of running away from stress and depression of life problems resulting from the Covid 19 pandemic. The understanding of participant C2 is more related to the causative effect of drugs and substance rather than what drug and substance abuse is all about. Most of the participants defined drug and substance abuse through how they feel after taking those drugs and substances The researcher also noticed that youths who are into drug and substances are ignorant about their health instead they focus on stress coping strategies to different problems they are facing as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. This correlates with theory since the resilience theory explains how young people adapt to difficult situation they are facing in the time of crisis differently. Literature also supports the fact that ,drugs and substance abuse was a common practice among youths who are facing difficult situations like homelessness and other stressful situations for the purposes of mood altering ,boosting courage and coping with stressful situations, (ZIMFACT ,2021).

Addiction

The researcher found out that many young people in Mbare community have a serious addiction towards drug and substances. Though Covid 19 facilitated to the increase in drug and substance abuse among young people, addiction is one of the major contributing factor of increased drug and substance abuse during the pandemic. The answers from participants clearly show that they have serious addiction toward drug and substance and they take drugs as a way of relieving stress and depression, one of the participants answered that :

“ Drug and substance abuse is more like a bible to me because it give me joy and hope that things are going to change in the future that's why I take drugs every day”.

“Once one starts abusing skunk(marijuana)there is high possibility for one to become addicted to it because it contains additional substances that are addictive”

Conceptualizing COVID 19 Pandemic.

This formed a very important part of the research study since researcher found it necessary to confirm on the knowledge of participants on Covid 19 pandemic to ensure their level of understanding and how they can relate Covid 19 pandemic to drug and substance abuse. Basing on the findings after asking what Covid 19 is the response were as follows:

“Covid 19 is a flulike disease that has killed many people and caused the lockdown ..Covid 19 is a virus that is spread through poor hygiene, coughing and poor air ventilation... “Covid 19 is a disease or virus that started in China which is spread through air and the spread can be reduced by washing hands properly, maintaining social distance and wearing face masks all the time ”

Both the participants and key informants seems to have basic knowledge towards the Covid 19 pandemic though some of the responses provided by the participants seems to be shallow. The response from Key informant B2 who is a member of an organization has a great link with literature since the Covid 19 pandemic is defined as “an illness caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2(Cov2; formally called 2019-nCoV), which was first identified amid outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City ,China”,(Cennimo et al ,2021).The response from Key informant A2 correlates with theory in the sense that the idea is based on how people can become resilient and to follow the Covid 19 pandemic related measures. The resilient theory explain that, “when facing threats, stressors or adversity, resilient people have the potential to improve their coping, adaptation and well-being strategies”, (Luthar et al, 2015).

Ignorance Towards Knowledge of the Pandemic

The participants portrayed high level of ignorance towards the Covid 19 pandemic. The findings clearly stated that only a few have basic knowledge concerning the Covid 19 pandemic since some of them knew nothing about the virus, hence there is need to improve the knowledge of youths in relation to the Covid 19 pandemic as well as the drug and substance abuse .The researcher also observed certain attitudinal actions and activities among the youths in a group discussion which shows attitudes towards the pandemic like ignorance of Covid 19 safety precautions measures there was not even one person among the participants wearing a face mask, no hand sanitizers, however sharing of cigarettes ,scissors ,small packets with marijuana and exchanging beer bottles was a common act among the youths which shows that the youths have high ignorance towards Covid 19 restrictions like social distancing ,banning of public gatherings and safety measures like regular sanitization of hands. The answers from participants also exhibited their level of ignorance towards the pandemic, one of the participants said:

“I don’t know anything about Covid 19 and I have never heard anything related to that in this community....Covid 19 is a disease that is made and does not exist when people have fluelike symptoms , they start referring it as Covid besides Covid 19 does not attack people who smoke marijuana (skunk)”.

The above statements show that many people around Mbare community prefers curing measures rather than preventative measures of the coronavirus. They claimed that there are drugs taken for the purposes of boosting the immune system and those drug types protect them against different types of diseases and viruses. This proves lack of knowledge and ignorance among youths on drug and substance abuse and Covid 19 pandemic as supported by literature that “people who abuse drugs are at high risk of contracting the virus, chronic substance use harm or weaken the body in such a way that people who abuse substances becomes more vulnerable to the infection”,(National Drugs Institute 2020). This shows the difference in literature and the findings of the research study. The resilience theory supports this theme in the sense that people adapt differently to difficult life situations in this case young people engages ignorant behaviors as a coping mechanism to Covid 19 related stressors.

COVID 19 as a Disturbance to Daily Activities

Many young people and community members in Mbare viewed the Covid 19 pandemic as a disturbance to their daily life activities through lifestyle changes. Many youths testified that the Covid 19 pandemic is a major cause to the problems they are facing as well as increased poverty in the community. This concurs with the findings of the World health organization (2020) that Covid 19 caused more harm than good especially among the youths. Many youths defined the Covid 19 pandemic through its effects on their daily lifestyle and how it changed their daily activities. One of the participants claimed that:

“There is no Covid in Mbare people are not wearing masks and we have not heard any incident of a person who died because of Covid all that we know are the restrictions and closure of our small informal business”

The above quote reviews the attitude and bitterness of young people towards the Covid 19 pandemic, basing on the understanding of participant D2 the pandemic is viewed as a disturbance to daily activities that includes closure of small businesses which left many youths in poverty. This is in line with literature which asserts that the Covid 19 pandemic has fastly affected the everyday life of the people, business operation and disturbed the world trade and movements, (Jin, 2020). The pandemic disturbed the day to day activities of youths leading them into drug and substance abuse. The resilience theory explains that, “unemployed persons with higher levels of resilience show fewer depressive symptoms than those with lower levels”, (Moorhouse and Caltabiano, 2007). According to Sojo and Guarino (2013), “resilience operates as a moderating factor in the relationship between length of unemployment and social support”. Therefore this shows that young people turned to drug and substance abuse as resilience to the Covid 19 related changes.

TRENDS ON DRUG AND SUBSTANCE DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC.

There are various changes brought by the Covid 19 pandemic on drugs and substance abuse among youths. The direction in which drugs and substances were taken by young people is changing and the types of drugs abused by young people are changing from time to time. Findings shows that Covid 19 pandemic resulted in both positive and negative changes in terms of drug and substance abuse.

● Discovery and Production of New Drug Types

The findings of the research study point out that the Covid 19 pandemic brought many changes and differences on the types of drugs and substances abused by young people before and during the pandemic. Young people in Mbare community began to discover new drug types as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. The researcher found out that the most common types of drugs that were abused by young people before Covid 19 pandemic includes cocaine, bronclear, marijuana and glue. The changes in lifestyle of youths in Mbare as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic also marked a change in the drug and substances abused that resulted in young people becoming innovative and they started to manufacture new drug types that are easily accessible to them. The most common types of drugs abused during the pandemic includes marijuana from green house (skunk), crystal meth, musombodia, “kambwa”, boiled dippers and pads and marijuana imported from Malawi.

The difficulties brought by the Covid 19 pandemic on the importation of drugs and substances to Zimbabwe as well as the rise in prices of drugs and substances resulted in the innovation of young people in manufacturing new drug types. Youths in Mbare are boiling used sanitary pads for liquid to make drugs. The closure of borders resulted in the scarcity and shortage of drugs that are coming to Zimbabwe.

The Covid 19 pandemic resulted in increased poverty among youths to the extent that they are failing to afford different drugs and substances that are cheaper, hence they became resilient and come up with ideas to manufacture their own drugs. The Covid 19 pandemic changed the production of drugs locally and this led to the production of new drugs by youths, (Dzinamarira et al, 2021).

● Marijuana from Malawi

The youths in Mbare discovered a new special kind of marijuana that is grown from Malawi which is stronger as compared to the one grown in Zimbabwe during the pandemic. According to Reuters Staff (2020), “Malawi

cannabis is known as one of the best and finest marijuana in the world .The youths call it Malawi since it is originally from Malawi”. The Malawi’s hemp is known locally in Zimbabwe as “Chamba” among the youths is becoming one of the most trending type of marijuana in Zimbabwe during the pandemic. Basing on the findings from young people during the ongoing of the research study “Chamba” is the most common type of marijuana being misused during the pandemic because it is affordable and young people can afford it from as little as 1USD for a small packet and due to the fact that it is stronger many youths have turned to misuse the Malawi hemp in order to suit their budgets.

According to one research participant, they usually take one cigarette of Malawi cannabis and spend the whole day high. This correlates with the resilience theory since resilience is the ability of people to adapt to difficulty situation, these situations includes financial instability, lack of entertainment and loss of jobs. According to WHO (2020)The Covid 19 pandemic resulted in boredom, more free time and changes in financial resources which later triggered an increase in the use of cannabis, as well as in the non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs.

EMERGING ISSUES ON DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE DURING THE PANDEMIC

● Increased Unemployment

There is high level of job loss as a result of the pandemic lead so many youths into drug and substance abuse. This is supported by literature that unemployment is leading young people to abuse strong drugs like (mutoriro) methamphetamine because they want to forget about their life challenges,(ZIMFACT, 2021).The findings highlighted that the introduction of the Covid 19 lockdown disturbed many youths carrier wise. The closure of Mupedzanhomo market place as a result of the pandemic marked a sharp rise in unemployment rate and increased poverty among young people in Mbare. After asking the youths on the changes they have noticed on their lifestyle since the introduction of the first lockdown they answered that they used to operate some small businesses. The statement explains that the introduction of the Covid 19 lockdown disturbed many young people from operating their small informal businesses which kept them busy all the time and it increased their free time hence they ended up turning into drug and substances abuse as a way of coping to stresses of life.

The above narrative indicates that the Covid 19 lockdown disturbed many people in terms of business operation. This correlates with the findings of the International Monetary Fund (2019) which states that the informal sector contributes about 60% of the current employment, however due to the lockdown measures, the informal business is no longer operating normally.

● Lack of Entertainment During the Pandemic

Covid 19 restrictions measures including the closure of entertainment places increased boredom among youth due to changes in daily activities. The situation was even made worse through banning of daily activities and public entertainment which includes sport and recreation, the banning of beer halls and public gatherings. The pandemic idled young people to the extent that they ended up turning to drug and substance abuse as their source of entertainment, the response from some of the participants were as follows;

“ We used to spend much of our time at the swimming pool at Stodurt residential area but the place is now closed as a result of the pandemic”. The other participant had this to say, “ I preferred to watch soccer at Rufaro stadium but the Covid 19 pandemic changed everything, so the only source of entertainment that is left is to spend my time with friends drinking alcohol at home”.

The above statements from participants highlighted that drug and substance abuse seems to be the only source of entertainment that is left among youths during the pandemic. Drug and substance abuse is becoming their way of life whereby they spend much of their time at prohibited places where they take drugs, and they call these places “bases” and home where there is a high supply and demand of drugs and substances. Literature testifies that, drugs and substance abuse in the past years was a common practice among the homeless youths who engage in this behavior for reasons like coping with stressful situations and boosting courage in criminal activities, however high unemployment rates have increased the number of youths also turning to using drugs as a way of entertainment,(ZIMFACT ,2021).

● **Mental Health Crisis Among Youths During the Pandemic**

The introduction of the first lockdown brought many changes to the lives of many youths in Mbare. The lockdown restrictions caused so many social problems in the community which includes unemployment, domestic violence, discrimination which resulted in many youth to live life that is full of stress and depression. Basing on the responses from the participants many youths indulge themselves to curb stresses and depression that is emanating from the problems they are facing that came as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. They claimed that drugs like crystal meth and skunk makes them to forget their worries about life and the stresses of unemployment since most informal businesses were closed as part of the Covid 19 restrictions, lack of entertainment since beer halls were closed and also closure of schools, hence the only source of entertainment that was left is spending much of their time in looking for drugs and substances. The Covid 19 pandemic increased mental health problems among youths in Mbare, and due to shortage of rehabilitation centers for youth that deals with trauma, stress and depression, hence the issue of drug and substance abuse worsened in the Mbare section.

Basing on the findings from the research study many families were affected by the Covid 19 pandemic because of high unemployment rate which resulted in family breakdown and increased rate of domestic violence which also affected families. The stresses emanating from family break downs also increased young people's indulgence into drug and substance abuse. According to Fergert (2019), "The families with young people who abuse drugs and substances tend to have greater dysfunction, higher cases of domestic violence and child abuse". Many youths commits crimes because sometimes they are misled by the influence of alcohol and other drugs hence resulting in polarization of families.

CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that there are many trending issues on drug and substance abuse as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. The major changes includes the discovery and production of new drugs and substances by youths as a way of trying to cope with Covid 19 related challenges. The new drugs and substances includes mutoriro, Malawi, boiled pads and dippers and kambwa. The emerging issues on drug and substance abuse during the pandemic are also discussed that includes changes in lifestyle patterns of people in Mbare community. The changes includes increased unemployment rate, disruption in school calenders, lack of entertainment among youths during the pandemic, mental health crisis and family dysfunction. The emerging issues and lifestyle changes impacted to drug and substance abuse both positively and negatively.

The study highlighted the mitigation measures to drug and substance abuse among youths in the event of pandemics. The measures includes anti-drug and substance awareness campaigns by social workers, non-governmental organizations and the local government, introducing youth empowerment programs in order to reduce unemployment of youths during the pandemic, establishment of strict laws and policies on drugs and substance abuse and increasing treatment centers as well as rehabilitation centers to cater for the mental health of young people and skills development so that they can sustain themselves and become resilient during times of crisis. The last part of the chapter is a brief summary.

The study revealed that the Covid 19 pandemic increased the number of young people indulging into drug and substance abuse. The pandemic changed the types of drugs and substances abused by youths in Mbare community as a result of Covid 19 related restrictions and lockdown. Drug and substance abuse in the event of pandemics can be mitigated through social work intervention in carrying anti-drug awareness campaigns together with the assistance of non-governmental organization and the government of Zimbabwe.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON MITIGATION MEASURES

● **Awareness Campaigns**

There is need for social workers intervention together with local organizations in Mbare community to advocate against drug and substance abuse as well as awareness campaigns for Covid 19 pandemic. Awareness campaigns are one of the most important intervention strategies to curb drug and substance in the event of pandemics because the main idea is to assist young people to avoid drugs and substances rather than

trying to stop them especially after addiction. Awareness campaigns gives young people a better understanding of both drug and substance abuse and Covid 19 There are non-governmental organizations in Mbare that are carrying anti-drug awareness campaigns for example the I am Mbare Trust at Stodurt .Awareness campaigns are of great importance since they assist youths through improving the knowledge gap of youths concerning drug and substance abuse and the Covid 19 pandemic.

● **Youth Empowerment Programmes and Employment Creation**

There is need to empower youths through introducing income generating projects that creates employment for many youths in Mbare. The Zimbabwean government can assist youths in starting their projects through provision of loans through local banks for example the youth empower bank. The establishment of youths based projects during the Covid 19 pandemic reduces their chances of indulging into drug and substance abuse project keeps them busy most of the time. After asking one of the key informants a question on what can be done to mitigate drug and substance abuse during the Covid 19 pandemic the answer was as follows:

Youth inclusion in the development process is very important in curbing drug and substance abuse during pandemics. Skills training and rehabilitation of youths assist youths to attain life sustaining skills especially during the event of pandemics hence reduced drug and substance abuse. Literature supports that, social protection provision among youths is one of the public and private initiatives that provide income to the vulnerable groups that includes youths,(UNDP, 2016).

● **Strict Laws Policies on Drug and Substance During the Pandemic**

There is need for policy makers to involve and address issues like drug and substance abuse when making bills especially during the pandemic. Basing on the findings, it was discovered that there is need to tighten policies and laws that address the importation, selling of drugs and sentences towards drug crimes. One key participant responded that :

“Drug and substance abuse cannot be reduced until we deal with the main focal point which is the supply chains of drugsThere is need for increased police patrols and thorough raids in the Mbare section to reduce the increment of drug selling. “.

The above responses implores that government should impose harsh sentences to any person caught in possession or supplying dangerous drugs, this can be linked to literature which explains that the possession of dangerous and illegal drugs like cannabis, heroin, histalix and pethodine can attract long jail sentences (Zimbabwe Civil drug network, 2014).

● **Establishment of Rehabilitation and Treatment Centres .**

There is need to increase treatment centres as well as rehabilitation centres for drug addicts especially during the pandemic. It is also important to increase professional personnel at the treatment centres like social workers to provide therapeutic treatment and treatment plans as well as assisting youths in identifying strengths and capabilities.

● **Areas for Future Research**

The research tried to cover the issues to do with drug and substance abuse related changes and the rising issues during the Covid 19 pandemic, however the study cannot conclusively claim that all aspects have been covered, hence the research study triggered interests in further studies related to drug and substance abuse in relation to the pandemic.

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