

Depression Levels Among Undergraduate Students Using Drugs And Substance From The University Of Eldoret.

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Abstract

Drug and substance use among university students is becoming common and can result in a range of academic, physical, mental, and social challenges. The relationship between depression, drugs and substance use among undergraduate students is complex and multifaceted, and more research is needed to understand the nature of this relationship fully. Therefore, this study sought to analyse the depression levels among undergraduate students using drugs and substance from the University of Eldoret. The study used psychodynamic theory. This study used descriptive survey research design. The study targeted 14,000 students enrolled at the University of Eldoret and 7 departmental heads. Snowballing approach was used to select the students who use drugs and substances, and all the 7 departmental heads were selected. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The quantitative data from questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics using Scientific Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0. Descriptive statistics included frequency, mean, standard deviation, and percentages. The study findings revealed that most respondents (71.1%) reported experiencing symptoms of depression and mental distress before they started using drugs and substances. A considerable proportion of respondents (94.5%) reported having someone express concern about their drinking habits or advise them to reduce consumption. The study concluded that most students (71.1%) experience depression before engaging in drug and substance use, emphasizing the need for early detection and intervention strategies. The study recommended that universities should prioritize Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) initiatives to address depression symptoms among students. Universities should foster a supportive environment, promoting well-being and academic success through support groups and policies to promote the students' mental health and psychosocial well-being.

Keywords: depression levels, undergraduate students, drugs and substance, university

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I. Introduction

Drug and substance use, particularly among young people, is one of the largest problems the nation is currently confronting. Over the past few years, there has been a significant rise in drug and substance use as well as the related antisocial behaviour. The government, parents, educators, non-governmental groups, and all other pertinent entities are now concerned about this. Studies show that drug and substance use occurs more frequently than parents think (Rose, Peter & Samwel, 2019). Drug and substance use are not only a problem among young people in specific geographic locations or with specific socioeconomic backgrounds. All across the globe, it has an effect on both rural and urban areas. People are not merely poor and miserable in slum or low-income areas, the issue cuts across all social classes.

Despite the prevalence of depression as a significant health issue, there is a dearth of research in Kenya that specifically examines the mental health challenges faced by students in Kenyan universities. According to Whiteford et al. (2013), mental, neurological, and substance use disorders contribute to approximately 13% of the overall global burden of disease. Furthermore, it has been observed that depression alone constitutes more than 40% of the mental disabilities. In addition, individuals diagnosed with depression face a heightened risk of premature mortality, with a probability ranging from 40% to 60% higher than that of the overall population. The incidence of depression exhibits significant variation across diverse cultural contexts, with developed nations reporting higher rates compared to developing nations (Kessler et al., 2017).

The prevalence of depression among undergraduate students at universities in Kenya is a significant concern, as evidenced by several research studies. The prevalence of moderate depressive symptoms was found to be 35.7% in the overall population. Specifically, the prevalence was 33.5% among males and 39.0% among females. Furthermore, a study conducted by Othieno et al. (2014) revealed that 5.6% of the student population

experienced symptoms indicative of severe depression. This underscores the significant prevalence of depression among university students in Kenya.

According to a study conducted by Atwoli et al. (2021), a significant prevalence rate of 68% was observed among public universities in Uasin Gishu County. A massive portion of individuals who consume alcohol have reported experiencing severe negative consequences. This highlights the need for specific interventions aimed at mitigating the risk of developing substance dependence and other harmful outcomes. Ngure and Omulemba (2019) highlighted the high prevalence of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and emerging substances such as shisha among university students in Kenya. Additionally, the public universities tend to have higher prevalence rates of substance use compared to private universities (Musyoka et al., 2020). The findings from these studies underscore the importance of addressing drug and substance use among university students in Kenya and support the need for further research and interventions in this area. The effectiveness of prevention programs in reducing risk at all levels has not been investigated, even though substance use has detrimental consequences.

Theoretical Framework

This investigation made use of the psychodynamic theory developed by Sigmund Freud in 1930s. The primary focus of psychodynamic therapy was on the subconscious mind as it appeared in the client's present behaviour. In psychodynamic therapy, the client was expected to comprehend both their own identity and how their conduct had evolved over time. In its most basic form, a psychodynamic method enabled the client to look at unresolved issues and symptoms from past dysfunctional relationships that showed up as a want or urge for drugs. This theory helped with the examination of the connection between the learners' current Substance use and their past history of depression.

Additionally, this study used cognitive behavioral treatment (CBT). This theory was created by Albert (1957), who noted that CBT was predicated on the notion that our thoughts (cognition), feelings (emotion), and actions (behaviour) all interacted with one another (Ellis, 1980). In other words, our feelings and actions were influenced by the thoughts we had. With the aid of this theory, the researcher was able to comprehend the respondents' motivations for engaging in drug and substance use.

II. Literature Review

According to Veena and Shailaja (2016), stress has a detrimental effect on pupils' academic performance. This shows that pupils with low levels of stress outperformed their peers who have elevated levels of stress in terms of academic performance. The consequence is that stressed students who struggle to perform well in class may experience chronic stress because of their ongoing efforts to do so. These students' efforts to raise their academic performance will put them under more stress and lead to depression. Students are more likely to experience stress in higher educational institutions such as universities because of the workload placed on them and the pressure to perform well under pressure in tests or exams (Maajida Aafreen, Vishnu Priya & Gayathri, 2018).

Extreme and protracted stress can harm students' academic performance and general health. Students who believe they are under a lot of stress may frequently experience depression, and stress can also cause other mental health issues like binge drinking or careless use of other drugs (Yikealo, Tareke & Karvinen, 2018). More than half of college students surveyed in a study reported having at least one mental health issue, with eating disorders and depression being the two most common (18%–19%) and 13%–15%. Long-term, intense stress can lead to psychiatric disorders like depression, mental anguish, burnout, and suicidal thoughts in university students.

Students face a variety of academic pressures, including the belief that they must perform well in their studies and uncertainty about the future. The belief among students that a high-grade point average, particularly in Malaysia, is crucial adds to the continued pressure on students and/or that grades are required to secure a better job in the future. Academic stress will eventually develop among university students because of the demands of university life in the form of emotional and mental pressure, tension, or stress. According to a study by Ramachandiran and Dhanapal (2018), 78% of respondents reported having moderate levels of stress, and 88% agreed that their studies were the primary source of their rising academic stress. Academic stress can have a number of serious physical and emotional negative effects if it is not addressed. Academic stress and students' sense of desire and competitiveness are often linked.

Individuals may experience challenges in their interpersonal relationships when engaging with peers, university personnel, professors, and roommates. The combination of academic demands and the psychological fatigue associated with adapting to the university environment often give rise to these issues. The intrapersonal, albeit broad, is typically the result of how the pupils felt they could manage the pressure. One of the primary reasons of stress is related to lecturers since they have elevated expectations for college students while oblivious to the fact that first-year students are still adjusting and unable to handle such demands (Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022). This circumstance could become worse if there is fierce competition among students to gain the favour of

the professors. Also, when peer or relational pressures are less prevalent, homophily and belongingness may create an environment where demotivated students are disengaged.

III. Methodology

This study used a descriptive study reveal details on university students' innate health status, behaviour, attitudes, or other traits. The study population comprised of 14000 undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Eldoret. The sample size of 183 students arrived at using saturation point. The researcher used questionnaires as the key instruments for data collection. The analysis of the quantitative data involved the utilization of descriptive statistics, facilitated by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0. The descriptive statistics employed in the analysis consisted of frequency and percentage calculations. Tables were used to exhibit the data and describe it in terms of frequencies, percentages, and means. The respondents were informed that they were free to decline to answer any questions or participate in discussions that might have made them uncomfortable or to decline to participate in the study entirely if they felt uncomfortable sharing their opinions or experiences about drug and substance use.

IV. Findings And Discussions

The study evaluated depression levels among students and findings were presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Depression Levels Among Students

Depression Levels Among Students		All the days	More than half the days	Several Days	Not at all
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things?	F	38	45	84	16
	%	20.8	24.6	45.9	8.7
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?	F	53	54	55	21
	%	29.0	29.5	30.1	11.5
3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much?	F	42	45	30	66
	%	23.0	24.6	16.4	36.1
4. Feeling tired or having little energy?	F	75	24	49	35
	%	41.0	13.1	26.8	19.1
5. Poor appetite or overeating?	F	27	23	40	93
	%	14.8	12.6	21.9	50.8
6. Feeling bad about yourself - or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down?	F	18	58	78	29
	%	9.8	31.7	42.6	15.8
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television?	F	38	41	86	18
	%	20.8	22.4	47.0	9.8
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite - being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual?	F	20	21	75	67
	%	10.9	11.5	41.0	36.6
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself in some way?	F	22	16	44	101
	%	12.0	8.7	24.0	55.2
Total number of Respondents=183					

Source: Field data (2023)

Study findings in Table 1 revealed that, Among the respondents, 38(20.8%) reported feeling little interest or pleasure in doing things before they started using drugs and substances. Additionally, 45(24.6%) of the respondents experienced this feeling for several days, 84(45.9%) of them for more than half the days, and 16(8.7%) of the respondents experienced this feeling every day.

Regarding feeling down, depressed, or hopeless, 53(29.0%) of the respondents experienced this feeling before substance use for a few days, 54(29.5%) of the respondents for several days, 55(30.1%) for more than half the days, and 21(11.5%) of the respondents experienced this feeling every day.

In terms of difficulty falling or staying asleep, 42(23.0%) of the respondents faced this issue before substance use for a few days, 45(24.6%) of them for several days, 30(16.4%) of the respondents for more than half the days, and 66(36.1%) of the respondents experienced this problem every day.

Regarding feeling tired or having little energy, 75(41.0%) of the respondents reported experiencing this feeling before substance use for a few days, 24(13.1%) of the respondents for several days, 49(26.8%) of them for more than half the days, and 35 (19.1%) of them experienced this feeling every day.

Concerning poor appetite or overeating, 27 (14.8%) of the participants faced this issue for a few days, 23 (12.6%) of them for several days, 40(21.9%) for more than half the days, and 93(50.8%) of the respondents experienced this problem every day before they started using drugs and substances.

Among the respondents, 18(9.8%) of them reported feeling bad about themselves for a few days, 58(31.7%) of them for several days, 78(42.6%) of the respondents for more than half the days, and 29(15.8%) experienced this feeling every day before substance use.

In terms of trouble concentrating on things, 38(20.8%) of the respondents faced this issue for a few days, 41(22.4%) of them for several days, 86(47.0%) of the respondents for more than half the days, and 18(9.8%) of them experienced this problem every day before substance use.

Regarding moving or speaking slowly that others could have noticed or being fidgety or restless, 20(10.9%) of the respondents experienced this for a few days, 21(11.5%) of them for several days, 75(41.0%) for more than half the days, and 67(36.6%) of the respondents experienced this every day before they started using drugs and substances.

Finally, 22 (12.0%) of the respondents had thoughts of being better off dead or of hurting themselves for a few days, 16(8.7%) of the respondents for several days, 44(24.0%) of them for more than half the days, and 101(55.2%) of them experienced these thoughts every day before substance use.

V. Discussions

The study reveals that a considerable number of students (71.1%) , before substance use, experienced symptoms of depression. These included lack of interest in activities, sleep-related issues, fatigue, disrupted appetite patterns, low self-esteem, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide. These symptoms underscore the significant burden of depression experienced by students before substance use. Universities should address these mental health challenges, provide appropriate interventions, and support mechanisms to create a conducive environment for students' overall health and academic success. This finding correlates with study done by Copeland et al. (2020), who revealed that people who feel sad, depressed, or hopeless might use drugs to deal with their feelings. This gives background and support for the correlations found in this study. This is in line with Ingram et al. (2020) who found that there is a strong link between less involvement in social activities and using unhealthy ways to deal with problems, like using drugs. This supports the results of a study by Kavitha, Sivakrishnan and Srinivasan (2022) who found that people who constantly feel tired or low on energy might be more likely to use drugs to self-medicate or briefly ease their emotional pain. This is similar with a study done by Rodríguez-Arias (2021) who found that there is a strong link between poor eating and starting to use drug or other substance later. Their results suggest that people who have trouble eating or who eat too much might be more likely to use drugs to deal with their emotions or to help them feel better. These results are like what Martinez et al. (2020), in their study, found about the link between low self-esteem and the desire to use drugs. Their study found that people who have a bad opinion of themselves may turn to drug or other substance to deal with their feelings or briefly improve how they see themselves.

These findings align with a study by Parvaz et al. (2021), who found that individuals who encounter trouble concentrating on tasks may be more susceptible to turning to substances as a means of improving their focus or managing their attention-related challenges. The above findings correspond to the results of a study by Rogers et al. (2020), which focused on the link between how a person looks and how soon after that they start using drugs. Their research found that people who move slowly, speak slowly, or are fidgety and restless might be more likely to use drugs to manage their physical complaints or find relief from their pain. These results are similar to those of a study by Koob (2021) which shows the strong link between mental pain and starting to use drugs. Their findings found that people who have these kinds of upsetting thoughts may be more likely to turn to drugs to deal with their emotional pain or get brief relief from their psychological problems.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, was evident that a considerable proportion of students experienced symptoms of depression prior to their engagement in drug and substance use. This highlights the need for early detection and intervention strategies to address mental health challenges among students. Additionally, concerns about drinking habits and the prevalence of drug and substance use indicate the importance of promoting responsible drinking behaviours and raising awareness about the risks associated with excessive drug and substance intake.

VII. Recommendations

The study found that a significant proportion of students reported experiencing symptoms of depression prior to their use of drugs and substances. The study highlights the need for addressing the mental health challenges faced by students and providing appropriate interventions and support mechanisms. This suggests a gap in the current support systems and interventions available to students in addressing their mental well-being and preventing substance use as a coping mechanism. Firstly, universities should prioritize Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) initiatives, such as counselling programs, peer support groups, social relational activities, psychoeducation, among MHPSS based activities to address the high prevalence of depression symptoms among students. This includes raising awareness about mental health, providing accessible resources, and implementing early intervention strategies.

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