

Role of Guidance and Counseling in Addressing Commonly Used Forms of Cannabis among University Students in the South Rift Region of Kenya

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Abstract

According to the World Drug Report (2005), the use of illicit drugs has increased throughout the world in recent years. The report further states that a major world trend is the increasing availability of many kinds of drugs to an ever-widening socio-economic spectrum of consumers. In Kenya, cannabis has been found to be the most widely used narcotic drug. According to a study done by NACADA (2015) it found that use of narcotics especially bhang was very high among the youth and the problem was endemic across the country. This study was guided by the following objectives: to find out the forms of cannabis used frequently by university students in the South Rift Region of Kenya and to investigate the role of guidance and counselling in managing the commonly abused forms of cannabis use. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to investigate the role of guidance and counselling in addressing commonly used forms of cannabis. The theory guiding the study was the Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura (1961). Quantitative data was collected through a structured questionnaire while qualitative data was collected through interviews and focused group discussions. The population of the study consisted of 13,603 students in five universities in the south rift region of Kenya. The sample was identified using random and purposive sampling techniques. The data obtained was analysed by use of descriptive statistics using frequencies, means and standard deviations and inferential statistics using Pearson Correlation Coefficient and multiple regression. The study unveiled four consumption methods common with the youth and that includes: smoking, vaping, dabbing and vaporization. It was found that the most common method of consuming cannabis is through smoking. The results of the study showed that guidance and counselling has not played a significant role in addressing the most commonly used forms of cannabis ($r=0.485$ and $p=0.490$). It has contributed 11.2% in handling the different forms of cannabis used by the students. The study recommends that guidance and counselling services should be strengthened to address the most common forms of cannabis used by students. There was also need to initiate prevention and interventions of drug use in primary and secondary levels so as to address the root cause of the problem and students who are affected should be identified and supported through guidance and counselling. Lastly, there is need to introduce compulsory courses that reflect new emerging trends of drug use in institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: Guidance and counselling, commonly used forms, cannabis, university students

DOI: 10.7176/DCS/13-3-01

Publication date: May 31st 2023

1. Introduction

Globally, it is estimated that in 2012, between 162 million and 324 million people, corresponding to between 3.5 percent and 7.0 percent of the world population aged 15-64, had used an illicit drug - mainly a substance belonging to the cannabis, opioid, cocaine or Amphetamine-type stimulants group - at least once in the previous year (UNODC, 2014). United Nations Drug Control programme (UNDCP) released a report in 2004 which estimated that 3.3 to 4.1 percent of the global population consumes drugs. In the report, the UNDCP executive director noted that those hooked to drugs are getting younger and younger every year. In Pakistan for example, it was reported that the share of those who started heroin use at 15 - 20 years had doubled to almost 24 percent of those surveyed (UNDCP, 2004). In China, it was reported that drug use was going up while the age of new users was going down; for example, a survey in the Czech Republic showed that 37 percent of new drug users were teenagers between 15 and 19 years old. These statistics emphasize the need for intervention that target the young people and especially

in institutions so that the impact can be felt in the larger communities.

The government of Kenya has recognized the threat posed by illicit drug use and has sought to enact a legal and constitutional framework within which the vice can be fought. Kenya is a signatory to the single convention on narcotics Drugs of 1961 which is an international treaty to prohibit production and supply of specific (nominally narcotic) drugs and drugs with similar effects except under licence for specific purposes such as medical treatment and research (NACADA, 2015). The government of Kenya formed the Anti-Narcotics Police Unit (ANU) in 1983 as a way of combating the illicit drug problem in Kenya having realized that Kenya was increasingly becoming a transit point for narcotic drugs destined to other world markets. Despite these efforts, Kenya has continued to witness a rise in illicit drug use.

In Kenya, cannabis has been found to be the most widely used narcotic drug. For example, according to a survey conducted by NACADA in 2012, 1.0% of the population aged 15-65 years was found to be using the illicit drug (NACADA, 2012). In terms of regional variation, Nyanza had the highest prevalence of marijuana/bhang users at 1.7% followed by Nairobi (1.3%), Coast (1.3%), North Eastern (1.1%), Central (1.1%), Rift Valley (0.9%) and Eastern (0.8%). Other commonly used narcotic drugs in Kenya include heroin (0.1%) and hashish (0.1%). In terms of regional variation, Coast had the highest prevalence of hashish (0.8%), heroin (0.4%) and cocaine (0.4%) users (NACADA, 2012). A follow-up survey in 2015 by NACADA showed that narcotic laced confectionaries especially “*weed cookies*” and “*weed cakes*” were more prevalent among the youth especially in higher institutions of higher learning. This study was therefore interested in finding out the forms of cannabis used in universities in the South Rift Region of Kenya and the role of guidance and counselling in addressing the most commonly used forms of cannabis among university students.

2. Problem Statement

In Kenya, Ongwae, (2016) noted that the youth have to contend with joblessness and as a result are idle most of the time. To while away the time, they end up turning to drugs and other socially deviant behaviour. Students are shown to be susceptible to drug abuse because they are naive and of tender age, and may not be able to avoid or refuse to use. Caday (2017) noted that these students have not internalized value and the behavioural norms which could help them cope with the social and personal problems within the framework of socially, legally, and morally acceptable standards. Research has shown annual marijuana use has continued to increase over the past five years for college students, reaching the highest level in over three-and-a-half decades in 2020. Among college students, 44% reported using marijuana in the past year in 2020, compared to 38% in 2015, representing a significant increase. For young adults not in college, annual marijuana use in 2020 remained at 43% (Olungah & Muga, 2021). According to the NIDA. Monitoring the Future survey, which tracks substance abuse trends among teens, marijuana has become the most commonly abused illegal drug in the survey’s history in US among 10th and 12th Grade (NIDA, 2020). Marijuana's effects on the user depend on the strength or potency of the THC it contains. This research was aimed at identifying the commonly used forms of marijuana so as to be able to put in place appropriate interventions to address cannabis use among university students.

According to a study done by NACADA (2015) it found that use of narcotics especially bhang was very high among the youth and the problem was endemic across the country. Marijuana can be used in more ways than simply smoking it as a cigarette. Newmeyer et al (2017) found that different methods of administration produce different physiological and psychological effects. Cannabis can be smoked, eaten or vaporised and comes in different forms. Although the most prevalent form of using bhang was through smoking, NACADA (2015) found that other emerging modes like oral use with narcotic laced edibles e.g. confectioneries was gaining popularity among the youth. From the study findings, bhang was the most commonly used narcotic drug to lace confectioneries like cookies and cakes (NACADA 2015).

3. Literature Review

Literature reviewed in Kenya showed that students use a wide range of substances in secondary schools although the magnitude of use varied with types of substances (Botvin, Griffin & Gilchrist, 2013). For instance, all forms of marijuana have been found to alter the mind but the subjective effects of cannabis vary significantly depending on the form consumed. In other words, they change how your brain works by attaching to molecules on the brain and activating them, typically creating the effects of euphoria, relaxation, and sharper perception of things like colors, smells, and sounds. Buddy (2020) discusses seven ways that a person can use cannabis. They include

3.1 Smoking

The most common method, shown in literature of using marijuana is smoking it. A person rolls it into a cigarette (or joint) using tobacco rolling papers or smoked in a pipe or a bong (which is a filtration device that uses water). Marijuana can also be smoked in a blunt, which is a cigar that has been hollowed out to replace the tobacco with marijuana or a mixture of tobacco and marijuana. Some smoke marijuana in bubblers, which are mini-bongs about the size of a pipe or smoked with a hookah. It has been shown that marijuana users are known for their creativity and ingenuity, especially when they run out of rolling papers. They can fashion bongs and pipes out of soda bottles or cans, corn cobs, and even pieces of fruit.

3.2 Vaping

Buddy, (2020) noted that a relatively new method of consuming marijuana is by vaporization. Research has shown that vaporizers produce less marijuana smell than smoking and vaporizers are usually small and easy to conceal so that is why it is mostly preferred by students. Individual who prefer vaporizing, heat the marijuana to a point just below the point of combustion and the active ingredients is inhaled as a vapor, rather than as more harmful smoke. Monitoring the Future survey (2020) recorded a halt between 2017 and 2019 in the dramatic increases in vaping marijuana and nicotine among college-aged adults observed. During this time, the percentage of college-aged adults who reported vaping marijuana in the past 30 days more than doubled, from 5% to 14% for college students, and 8% to 17% for non-college respondents. In 2020, these increases levelled off, with 12% of college students and 14% of non-college respondents reporting vaping marijuana in the past 30 days. Similarly, there was a non-significant change for vaping nicotine in 2020, with 19% of college students and 24% of non-college respondents reporting vaping nicotine in the past 30 days compared to 22% and 18% in 2019, and 6% and 8% in 2017, respectively (NIDA, 2020).

3.3 Dabbing

Dabbing is a method similar to vaping but uses tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) resins extracted from the marijuana plant (Grotenhermen, 2003). It may be in oil form (hash oil or honey oil), a soft solid form (wax), or a hard solid (shatter). A glass pipe or bong is heated with a blowtorch. When the resin extract is placed into the pipe, it creates vapor almost immediately. Dabbing is thought to produce a greater high than smoking marijuana.

3.4 Edibles

It has been shown that marijuana is being baked or added to many common beverages. Oils extracted from marijuana plants can be used in cooking, baking, or simply mixing with food to create a variety of products that can be ingested orally or taken in capsule form. For orally administered marijuana/ bhang to be effective, the plant material must be heated to decarboxylate or transform the inactive tetrahydro-cannabinolic acids into δ -9-tetrahydrocannabinol (Grotenhermen, 2003). Potency and efficacy of cannabis products is significantly increased by cooking or baking the material (Grotenhermen, 2003). Marijuana oil can also be added to types of food. It may be added in teas, sodas, and even beer and sold and this may hide what was added. Since the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act, 1994 prohibits possession of, and trafficking in, narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. One of the emerging trends of hiding narcotic drugs is adding to confectioneries where drugs like cannabis/bhang is used as an ingredient when baking cookies and cakes (NACADA, 2015). As a result, lack of a distinctive smell of these narcotic laced confectioneries makes it more difficult to tell the difference between the ordinary baked foods and the illegal narcotic laced products making them very attractive to the youth (NACADA, 2015).

3.5 Sprays

Another relatively new method of using marijuana involves infusing liquids with THC or cannabidiol (CBD) to make sprays that users can spray under the tongue (Buddy, 2010). A systematic review of cannabis use among youth has been shown to cause diarrhoea, dizziness, increased appetite and drowsiness. Sprays are chosen by users to avoid the harmful effects of smoke and are difficult to detect. Studies have shown that cannabis use is related to mood and anxiety disorders. For example in a meta-analysis of 11 studies on 23,317 adolescents, cannabis use was associated with increased adulthood risk of depression (Gobbi et.al, 2019)

3.6 Tinctures

A marijuana tincture is a cannabis plant material that has been soaked in a solution of alcohol or alcohol and water. The user places a few drops of the solution under the tongue and it is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream (Buddy, 2020). This form of marijuana is highly concentrated, highly potent, and fast-acting and it is generally used for medical purposes, but because it produces an intense high, it is often abused. Research has shown that many youth use them because it is easily made and it gives them the 'high' feeling.

3.7 Topical

Topical oils are extracts from the marijuana plant placed on the skin and are absorbed to relieve muscle pain and soreness. Because marijuana topical do not produce a high, they are usually used for medicinal purposes only for pain relief for wound patients. Evidence supports the fact that topical methods have been used to suppress pain in spine and itching. Since topical effects do not provide cerebral stimulation that occurs from inhalation or oral delivery methods, youth do not use it for recreational purposes.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Information of Respondents

Section A of the student's questionnaires sought information on the demographic characteristics of the participants. This information was helpful in identifying factors that could intervene or confound on cannabis use. These include gender, year of study and ease of finding cannabis by the respondents. The study involved 1736 students as respondents

Table 1. Gender of the Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	1156	66.6
	Female	580	33.4
	Total	1736	100.0

From Table 1 the majority of the respondents were male (66.6%) and the female were 33.4%. This agrees with the gender disparities in enrolment in the universities since there are more males than females. Next, the respondents were requested to give their year of study:

Table 2 Year of Study of the Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Year of study		N	%
Valid	First Year	376	21.7
	Second Year	512	29.5
	Third Year	464	26.7
	Fourth year and above	384	22.1
	Total	1736	100.0

Results in Table 2 revealed that there was no significant variation displayed between first to fourth year respondents in their perspective to questions. The second-year respondents were slightly more than the rest at 29.5 %. This was followed by the third years (26.7%), fourth years (22.1%) and the first years (21.7%). This uniformity in response to questions could be attributed to the fact that the unit system in the university shrinks the vast variation that would exist if students in different academic years had independent classes and experience. It also indicates common application of guidance and counselling methods to all the students irrespective of their year of study (Mutai & Wosyanju, 2019). Mora, (2005) argue that all the populations in a community of drug abuse prevention should be reached with appropriate programs

Table 3: Ease of Finding Cannabis		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very Easy	296	17.1
	Slightly easy	188	10.8
	Easy	280	16.1
	Difficult	460	26.5
	Very Difficult	512	29.5
	Total	1736	100.0

The majority of the respondents were of the opinion that it is very difficult (29.5%) and difficult (26.5%) to find cannabis. This could be because they do not use it and so do not know how to access it. This is followed by the participants who think that it is very easy (17.1%) and easy (16.1%). When a drug is easily accessible then it is easily abused.

3.2 Forms and Frequency of Cannabis Use

In objective one, the study sought to find out the commonly used forms of cannabis among the students. Table 5 summarizes the findings

Table 5: Forms of Use

Forms used	N	Percent
Smoking/Hookah	184	10.6
Dabbing/heating and inhaling	22	1.3
Vaping/Vaporizing and inhaling	40	2.3
Baking/cookies/ Adding in food	18	1.0
Sprays	8	0.5
Placing under the tongue	8	0.5
Total	264	15.2

The majority of the respondents who have used cannabis prefer to smoke it (10.6%). This is followed by those who vaporize it and inhale the contents (2.3%). These findings are also shared by those who interviewed, who confessed that many of the students prefer smoking it because the effects are fast. One respondent shared that:

‘I prefer to smoke because it makes me high in a short time, It is also not very easy to be identified’

The findings also revealed that there are respondents who boil and inhale and others boil and add to food. Some respondent had this to share:

‘During parties we may boil cannabis in tea or lace it with a drink like Vodka. When our friends come we share the drinks and they enjoy. It makes them to be in ‘party’ mood’

‘Today it is boiled and added to juice or tea’

‘I add to cakes while baking, you can’t recognize’

These findings are similar to others found in studies, for example, a survey done by NACADA in 2016 showed that one of the emerging trends of concealing narcotic drugs is lacing with confectionaries. Other studies like Lindsay et al (2021) also found that cannabis is used in foods in a wide range of products such as candies, baked products, and beverages. Lindsay et al (2021) noted that the global cannabis edible markets has seen significant growth in recent years and is projected to grow substantially over the years. Several factors have been attributed to the expansion of cannabis use, one it is not easily detected, secondly, the effects are not very obvious and thirdly they can be produced at home, convenient to carry and a believe that it does not present health challenges.

The respondents were also requested to give the frequency of cannabis use and Table 5 gives the findings:

Table 5: Frequency of Using Cannabis

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Once a month	80	9.2
	Once in two weeks	50	5.8
	3 to 4 times in a week	52	6.0
	Daily	46	5.3
	Not applicable	20	2.3
	Total	248	28.6

From Table 5, it is evident that the majority of the students who use cannabis use it once a month (9.2%), followed by those who use it 3-4 times in a week (6.0%). Those who use daily are 5.3%. This means that many users are seasonal users and so if prevention is heightened then they may not graduate to addiction stage. That is why guidance and counselling if strengthened then it can address the frequency of use and the commonly used forms in institutions of higher learning and among the youths. Lander, Howsare, Byrne (2013), in their study proved that the effects of a substance use disorder touches the whole person. Substance use disorders have negative effects on emotional, behavioral, social, and occupational patterns of the client, causing poor consequences for the whole family and for the community.

3.2 Role of Guidance and Counselling in Addressing the Prevalent Forms of Cannabis

Guidance and counselling need to address both prevention and treatment. Boutwell and Myrick (2006) contend that guidance and counselling plays a major role of promoting students' success through a focus on social and emotional adjustment by means of prevention and intervention services. The study sought to explore whether guidance and counselling had influenced the use of cannabis among the students in the universities in the South Rift Region of Kenya. A multiple regression was used to show the role of guidance and counselling on the commonly used forms of cannabis by university students and Table 6 summarizes the findings:

Table 6: Role of Guidance and Counselling on commonly used Forms of Cannabis among Students

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	.150	1	.150	.485	.490 ^b
Residual	11.750	38	.309		
Total	11.900	39			

{Citation}

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.313	.216		6.073	.000
	Forms cannabis is taken	.125	.179	.112	.696	.490

From Table 6, it is evident that guidance and counselling has had no significant role in addressing the prevalent forms of cannabis among university students ($F=0.485$ and $p=0.490$). It shows that it has contributed 11.2% to addressing commonly abused forms of cannabis among university students. Research has shown that Behavioural therapies which includes use of motivational interviewing, contingency management and cognitive behavioural therapy may help treat cannabis disorder. However it emerged that many counsellors are not trained to deal with

the disorders because they have not gone through courses like Universal Treatment Curriculum (UTC) that prepare them to handle cannabis and the common forms used by the students. Findings revealed that guidance and counselling has been used in the following ways: firstly, peer counsellors are used to create awareness on the effects of drugs on health, academics and the consequences of being found out using drugs. This is done through in reach programs where they visit their peers in the hostels and classes and in the process refer the ones affected on where to be helped. Secondly, individual counselling has also been offered to those who come out to be assisted and lastly group therapy has also been used effectively to support those in the process of recovery. The challenges faced in implementing guidance and counselling include the fear of stigma for those who are using it especially because of disciplinary action taken if found out and the weak laws in identifying and prosecuting drug peddlers who sell illicit drugs to students. The focused group discussion also emphasized the need to involve the parents in guiding and counselling the students so as to be able to manage cannabis use.

5. Conclusion

The study unveiled four consumption methods common with the youth and that includes: smoking, vaping, dabbing and vaporization. It was found that the most common method of consuming cannabis is through smoking. Smoking accounted for about 10.6 % of the respondents use, followed by vaping and then dapping and being inserted in cookies or other food items. Nacada has noted that this new consumption patterns have implications for initiation of use, repeat use and the development of disorders and timing and severity of intoxication (NACADA, 2015) that is why it is important to strengthen guidance and counselling to manage the cannabis use. Once the youth are aware of the consequences early enough before they are addicted, they can be supported to stop its use before it is too late.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Universities need to make the fight against drugs and substance use as a collective responsibility
2. Students who are affected should be identified and supported through guidance and counselling
3. There is need to start prevention and treatment in primary and secondary schools so as to address the root cause of the problem
4. There is need to introduce compulsory life skills courses that reflect new emerging trends of drug use in institutions of higher learning
5. ADA sensitization programs that targets first years students should be enhanced
6. There is need to strengthen on guidance and counselling so as to address commonly used forms of illicit drugs

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