



The Challenges of Fighting Drug Abuse Among the Youth in Zimbabwe

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(**Received:** January -2023; **Accepted:** July-2023; Available **Online:** August -2023)



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ABSTRACT

Drug and substance abuse is on the rise in Zimbabwe among the youth, to the extent that the rehabilitation centres are reported to be full and unable to cope with the ever-rising demand for patience. This research stems from a 2017–2019 study carried out in two secondary schools in Bulawayo with the aim of exploring the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of school violence, as well as ways to combat the Phenomenon. Five hundred and eighty-one (581) questionnaires were distributed among two classes in two different schools, Mpopoma and Msiteli, and the results were analysed through SPSS. Although other forms of school violence were present, this paper focuses on drug abuse among youth. From a peacebuilding perspective, due to the fact that drugs impact both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of one's life, drug abuse is viewed as a form of violence. Galtung's theory of violence is going to be used to analyse drug abuse. Relevant literature pertaining to drug abuse in Zimbabwe is going to be reviewed. The paper argues that there is no single cause of drug abuse, hence a multi-causal approach; the current methods used to fight drug abuse, such as awareness campaigns, are not yielding expected results, hence drug abuse is on the increase; and in order to end drug abuse, the government needs to play a bigger role than it is playing now as most of the drugs come through porous borders and a lack of enforcement.

Keywords: Drug abuse, Zimbabwe, Youth, Future, Sorrows, Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Drug and substance abuse is on the rise in Zimbabwe among the youth, to the extent that the rehabilitation centres are reported to be full and unable to cope with the ever-rising demand for patience. More than 57% of the youth in Zimbabwe are involved in drug abuse. It is also estimated that tens of thousands are not coming forward for or getting assistance.

This paper stems from a 2017–2019 study on school violence carried out at two schools in Bulawayo, which revealed that even at an early stage, schoolchildren are taking drugs, hence the need to fight drug abuse among the youth. Relevant literature on drug abuse among youth has been reviewed. The paper argues that there is no single cause of drug abuse, hence a multi-causal approach; the current methods used to fight drug abuse,

such as awareness campaigns, are not yielding expected results, hence drug abuse is on the increase; and in order to end drug abuse, the government needs to play a bigger role than it is playing now as most of the drugs come through porous borders and a lack of enforcement.

METHODOLOGY

The initial survey carried out through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions has confirmed that indeed school violence exists in the Mpopoma area, as confirmed by results from both schools. This study was largely qualitative. Three hundred and fifty-six (356) questionnaires were distributed at Mpopoma and two hundred and twenty-five (225) at Msiteli, with a 90% response rate. There was a gap of two days, with the Msiteli questionnaires being the first to be filled in, followed by the Mpopoma High ones. The high response rate was due to the fact that collective administration was used, where I obtained a captive audience (Students in a class).

The questionnaires were administered with the aid of teachers. These questionnaires were followed by interviews with five teachers from each school. In addition, two separate focus group interviews with 10 boys and 10 girls were conducted after the interviews. The major challenge, however, was the time for the students to fill out the questionnaires because these two schools are big and they practise hot sitting with little time to spare as they use the same facilities. This did not in any way compromise the quality of the information obtained. This initial survey has proved that drug abuse is common in these schools, among other forms of violence.

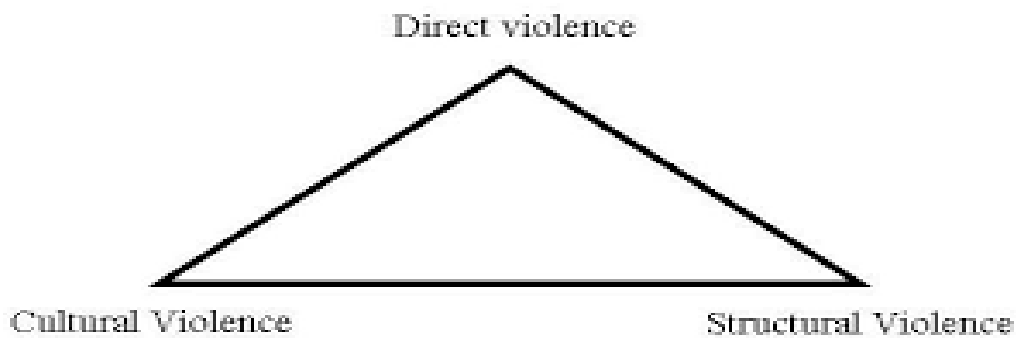
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Galtung's Theory of Violence

I have been greatly influenced by Galtung's theory of violence in my attempt to analyse school violence. According to Galtung, violence is the avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or the impairment of human life that lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible. He also added that the threat of violence is also violence (Galtung 1993: 106). Galtung's definition thus implies that, unlike conflict, violence can be avoided. In fact, people are presented with the opportunity to be violent or not. This definition is similar in meaning to the broader definition of violence by another peace scholar, Reyhler (2005).

According to Reyhler, violence is a situation in which the quantitative and qualitative life expectancies of a particular group(s) within a community, state, region, or the world are significantly lower than those of other groups. This is due to one or more sources of violence: physical, structural, cultural, psychological, bad governance, organised crime, and extra-legal activities (Reyhler 2005; Ignatius et al., 2021). These two definitions of violence are useful when we look at the complexity and subtlety of school violence. The temptation is to look at physical violence, which is easy to observe, while other forms, which are far more detrimental, might go unnoticed.

Figure 1: Galtung's triangle of violence



According to Galtung, there are three types of violence, as shown in Fig. 1 above: cultural, structural, and direct or physical violence. Forms of direct violence are easily recognisable. Direct violence, which can be divided into verbal and physical, includes the use of force, for example, beating, killing, or maiming. Within a school environment, direct violence might manifest in the form of corporal punishment, rape, assault, fist and gun fights, painful postures, and hard labour as punishment. Structural violence is subtle and hidden in structures. It can be structurally economic in the form of exclusion or structurally political in the form of oppression (Galtung 1996: 2). It is very difficult to detect because it is not perpetrated by an individual or individuals.

Galtung (1993) cites the worldwide trade in goods as an example of structural violence that creates more and more starving people every year. In a school setting, the rules and regulations, as well as how power is distributed, might lead to violence. This violence will thus manifest itself in the form of an unequal distribution of power and unequal opportunities (Umotong & Dennis, 2018). It is also manifested when some groups, classes, genders, and nationalities assume they have more access to resources and opportunities than others (Ekpang & Nwanchor, 2021). Within a school setting, structural violence can be seen in the way in which girls and boys are assigned roles according to gender stereotyping. It has been observed that in most schools, girls are cultured to do duties and tasks that are mostly domestic, such as cleaning the classroom, washing utensils, and preparing food, while boys dominate tasks that require occupying public space, e.g., ringing the bell, raising flags, giving speeches, and carrying heavy staff. In the long run, girls may not be able to fully reach their potential, for example, in leadership, where they are not given space (Uchenna et al., 2022). The issue of drugs thus falls under structural violence.

Cultural violence has been defined as those aspects of culture that can be used to justify or legitimise the use of direct or structural violence (Galtung 1993; Egbe & Ushie, 2022). It includes prevailing attitudes and beliefs that people are taught from childhood to adulthood and that are part of their daily lives. Included in this category are symbols, hymns, military parades, hate speech, etc. In schools, the cultural views of the roles of men and women are also reflected, as noted above. Culturally, men are assigned heavier and riskier tasks than women, and both teachers and students may find it difficult to move away from this view (Egbe et al., 2021). Thus, in a school setting, the definition and typologies of violence, according to Galtung, are very relevant.

The interrelatedness of these types of violence is explained by what is popularly known as Galtung's triangle of violence. Direct violence, or physical violence, on Galtung's triangle is visible as behaviour; cultural and structural violence cause direct violence, while direct violence reinforces cultural and structural violence. Hence, there is interdependence between these forms of violence. Understanding the interdependence

of these forms of violence will go a long way towards understanding school violence. As Leach and Machakanja (2007) noted, corporal punishment, which is physical punishment, is still legal in many countries, including Zimbabwe, and this makes it very difficult to fight other forms of violence. This implies that all forms of violence must be dealt with holistically in order to curb school violence.

The peace guru Galtung, no doubt, has managed to come up with a theory that takes into account all forms of violence. However, the theory has been criticised by other scholars. According to Scinkel (2010), Galtung’s theory sets itself up as having too wide a definition. For an ordinary person, violence means people getting beaten, killed, or tortured in a physical sense or visible manner, not the well-meaning, all-encompassing surreal vision that Galtung has provided. As Atack (2009) notes, Boulding has also criticised the broader nature of the theory, especially the structural violence definition. Boulding has referred to structural violence as "anything Galtung doesn’t like" and considers it far too broad to be logically useful. He also thought the interdependence between direct and structural violence was too simplistic and that the economic dynamic behind poverty, even as a structural feature of certain societies, was quite different from the political dynamic behind the use of violence to target specific social groups, for instance. Structural violence is therefore viewed by Boulding as a misleading metaphor because the processes that create and sustain poverty are not at all like the processes that create and sustain violence (Anthony & Essien, 2018). Such a broad and simplistic definition of violence, which refers to any and all sorts of harm against human beings, drains the concept of its analytical and ethical power. According to Boulding, it is more of a rhetorical device aimed at political mobilisation against perceived injustices and does not really belong in academic discourse.

Despite the criticism, Galtung’s theory in the area of peace studies is a stepping stone towards world peace. The theory is well articulated, covers violence in its broadest sense, and will therefore provide a broader approach to violence that covers all aspects of violence. I therefore find this theory very useful in studying school violence, especially the issue of drug abuse. Drug abuse results in both physical and psychological harm, and the consequences are felt not only by the victim but even by their friends, families, and relatives.

THE COMMON DRUGS USED IN ZIMBABWE

There are quite a number of drugs commonly used in Zimbabwe and most of them are listed in the table below

Table 1 Common drugs used in Zimbabwe

Glue	Broncleer
Mangemba	Cane Spirit
Marijuana/Mbanje	Codeine
Methamphetamine (Crystal meth)	Speed
Mutoriro	Cocaine
Solvents-Fembo and Genkem	Chlorpromazine-Maragado

(Facts sheets 2023, Makichi 2023)

EFFECTS OF DRUG ABUSE

Drugs are linked to violence

The link between drug use and violence has been a subject of debate by many scholars, though there is no agreement on the subject. Harrington (1972) cited drugs and alcohol as contributory factors to the violence equation. The same author (Harrington, 1972)

estimated that half of all violent crimes are associated with alcohol intake. Though this estimate is rather high, there is a lot of truth in the fact that alcohol indeed plays an important role in violence.

The challenge of alcohol is that it is not a matter of drinking too much since it reduces one's capacity to commit violence. It is rather a matter of drinking a bit too much at the wrong time, in the wrong place, and in the wrong frame of mind. A critical analysis, as propounded by Harrington (1972), revealed that both drink and violence can be seen as easy solutions to underlying emotional conflicts, as both may help in the discharging of pent-up emotions that have not found any other methods of expression. Other drugs have been associated with violence; for example, hashish is associated with assassinations; the same applies to heroin; but with heroin, it has been largely due to the fact that addicts became violent so as to obtain the drug by any means necessary (Harrington, 1972: 231). Thus, it is important when studying violence to also look at the use of drugs and alcohol, as these play an important role in bringing about violence.

Bulawayo has not been spared of this phenomenon; a 2015 report revealed that at least 47% of teenagers in Bulawayo between the ages of 13 and 20 are active participants in popular wild parties commonly known as Vuzu," where dangerous drugs, alcohol abuse, and sex are held (Bhebhe 2015, Tshili 2015, Makwanise and Masunda 2022). These Vuzu parties are common only in Bulawayo and not in any other city in Zimbabwe. Statistics from the Primary and Secondary Education Ministry have indicated that in 2014–2015, about 310 students were nabbed for drug abuse (Bhebhe 2015), hence the need to further explore this phenomenon and try to provide a possible solution.

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Use of drugs in schools

The use of drugs in these schools was first revealed by the initial questionnaire survey carried out at both schools. Some students, especially boys, revealed that they know someone who brings drugs to school. A focus group discussion revealed some of the drugs used in the area, as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Common drugs used in the Mpopoma Area

Marijuana (Mbanje, imbanje)
Ngoma
Diazepam
Nyaope
Bronco

Signs of Someone Under the Influence of Drugs

Learners in a group interview were also able to identify a person who is under the influence of drugs. Those students sleep in class; sometimes they become violent with red eyes and black lips and hallucinations, and even being still for a long time like a statue gives these students away. One respondent explained that "someone just gets excited and you wonder what is exciting; they will just be laughing." They also lose concentration in class, and they want to be in a fight due to the use of drugs. The tendency to fight is in line with the findings of Harrington (1972), which link drugs to violence.

One student respondent stated that "some children come and they are okay in the morning, but after break you can see that they are changed, even their eyes." These drugs are sold inside the school, and the prices range from 50 cents to one dollar. However, some school leavers and outsiders have been identified as sellers of these drugs, and the

place where they are sold is known. These drugs are sold in Matshobana and also in the park, which has been identified as an unsafe place.

Reasons why some people take drugs at school

Students were also able to identify the reasons why people take drugs. According to the boys' focus group, these drugs are taken so as to improve one's skills, say in sports. Others put them in drinks to make girls drink so that they can sexually exploit them. They are also generally taken to boost the morale of the takers as well as one's confidence when getting into a fight. The use of drugs is common in both schools, and outsiders are responsible for selling the drugs by sending other students to sell them to their peers. Students also pointed out that some fights do occur because of the use of drugs such as mbanje," which is marijuana; this view concurs with Harrington's (1972) views as he linked drugs, especially hashish, to violence.

Some of the bullying involves drugs, like in the case of the Msiteli bullying incident, where the police had to be called because drugs were involved. In the same vein, males seem to know people who use and sell drugs more than females, as well as those who bring weapons to school. The possibility of drug syndicates operating within the school also shocked the school authorities, as the findings revealed that some students know people who bring drugs to school.

In Bulawayo, the whole city was taken aback by "Vuzu" parties organised by teenagers who put their money together and organised parties where they would drink beer, have drugs, and have sex in secluded places.

At the macro level, there is a high tolerance for violence, especially related to guns and drugs; this violence then spills over into schools. This leaves them with no choice but to engage in militarism and other illegal activities like drug trafficking.

Causes of drug abuse among youth in Zimbabwe

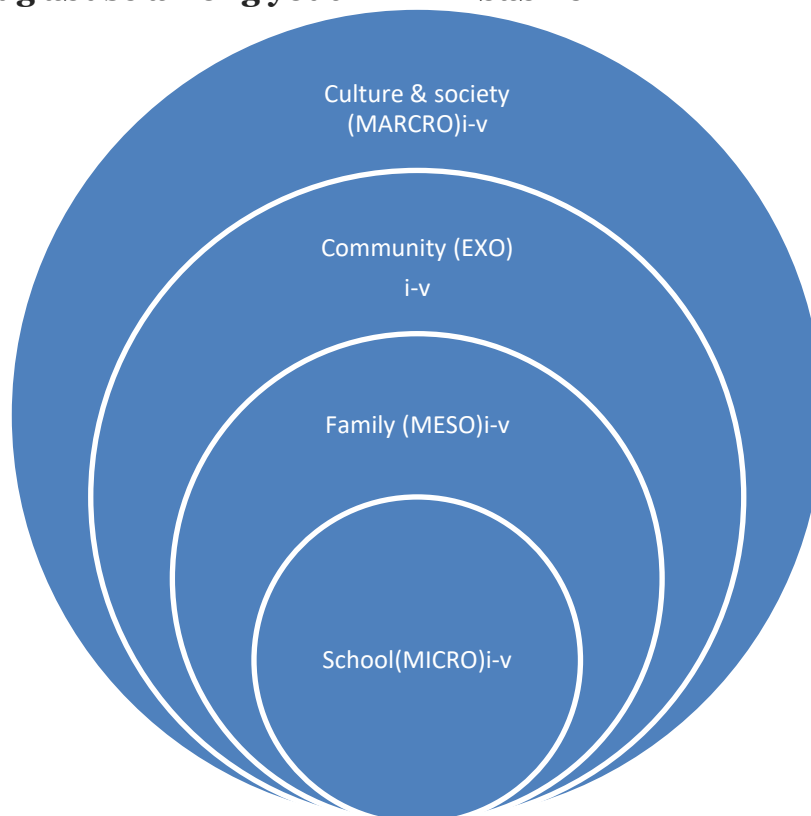


Figure 1: Garner's ecosystem model, Source Garner (2014)

Reviewed literature shows that there is no single cause of school violence, just as there is no single cause of drug abuse among youth. The author therefore uses Garner's (2014) model, which views the causes of drug abuse as interlinked and therefore must be viewed as an ecosystem, as shown in the diagram above.

Macro-Level

Include factors at the national level that have led to the increase in drug abuse. These include the economic meltdown experienced in Zimbabwe, which left many young people hopeless in terms of finding jobs, and the lack of motivation for those pursuing education at higher levels. This has turned the country into a fertile ground for those involved in the drug trade (Makichi 2023; Makosa 2022). The youth, finding themselves with nothing to do, quickly turn to drugs so as to drown their sorrows. A term used to mean escaping reality or to relax (Dzenga 2023, Makosa 2022). There is also a lack of recreational facilities where, under normal circumstances, the youth would go, such as sporting facilities. These sporting activities normally ensure discipline among the youth, but unfortunately, the government has not been paying attention to such activities as more attention has been given to music, which turns out to promote drugs in the sense that the music galas become large markets for drugs. There is also free entry for drugs in transit from Zimbabwe to other countries, especially South Africa. The drugs are smuggled through Beitbridge, Nyamapanda, Forbes border post, Plumtree, and Sango border posts, leading not only to the illegal entry of drugs but also to the illegal entry of both local people and foreigners (Mudadigwa 2016, Matenga, 2021, Zimbabwe Situation 2022) and points of entry in Zimbabwe due to the fact that the borders are porous.

As noted by Chukwuemeka (2021), depression and mental illness can lead to drug abuse among young people. Depression refers to the feeling of hopelessness and emptiness, which often leads to suicide or drug abuse. In order to flee from reality, most adolescents resort to suicide or abusing drugs, which leads to temporary relief. Depression is high among the unemployed youth and people unsatisfied with their lives in general, which is exactly the situation in Zimbabwe among the youth who are largely unemployed because of a lack of jobs and also ageism. The state of not being mentally well is referred to as mental illness, and this also leads to drug abuse in the sense that when these people who are mentally ill are given drugs to help them cope, they end up upping the drugs, thereby sinking into drug abuse. This would make them feel so high that they feel indestructible; the feeling, however, will be short-lived, prompting them to take more drugs. In the same vein, people who have experienced trauma are also likely to take drugs. These are people who have gone through horrible experiences such as rape, sexual harassment or molestation, armed robbery, witnessing war atrocities, etc. In order to escape these horrible things, such people resort to the use of drugs such as narcotics, sedatives, and even alcohol (Zimbabwe situation 2022, Chukwuemeka 2021).

Peer pressure is another cause of drug abuse among the youth; it is pressure from peers that can be negative or positive (Zimbabwe Situation 2022). It becomes negative when someone is pressured to do bad things, like take drugs. Even adults can be victims of peer pressure. Thus, drug abuse can occur when someone feels pressured to be among, to belong to, or to feel affected by peers in society or at work, leading them to participate in taking drugs.

At the family level, a lack of parental guidance is viewed as one of the causes of drug abuse among youth. Parental guidance is lacking for most children due to a number of factors, which include demanding jobs and even the need to work abroad due to economic challenges. The 2017–2019 study carried out by the author in two secondary schools revealed that more than 60% of the learners who participated did not stay with both parents. The economic situation in Zimbabwe has driven many parents to

neighbouring countries, especially South Africa and Botswana, leaving children in the care of relatives who, in most cases, do not have the time or strength to guide them. Children then stray away with no one to guide them, leading to drug abuse (Chukwuemeka 2021). The need to perform at work, in academics, in sports, and in other areas of life has driven people to use drugs, which cause the brain to work faster and also enable them to have strength. Unfortunately, these drugs will end up having negative effects. As noted, there is no single cause of drug abuse among youth.

From a psychological perspective, self-worthlessness is among the major causes of drug abuse in Zimbabwe (Maraire and Chethiyar 2020). This happens when hopes are crushed and there is nothing to look forward to. After graduating from tertiary institutions hoping to find jobs and a better life, the youth are rudely awakened from such dreams by the harsh reality of unemployment and poverty. There is also a lack of empathy and support from guardians and parents, which then forces the youth to engage in drug use. They deserve sympathy, support, and kindness from their parents but get none. As Maraire and Chethiyar (2020) note, the youth in Zimbabwe engage in drug use because of low self-esteem. After training in colleges, they are forced to go to neighbouring countries where they do menial labour, thereby reducing their self-esteem. They were also affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and grew up without parents to help them through life, encouraging and building their self-esteem.

American pop culture has also been blamed for causing youth to abuse drugs. Young people in Africa are often hooked on television, where pop stars glorify drug use. Thus, drug use is depicted as a positive thing and a key ingredient to having fun. (Jaja 2023)

Effects of drug abuse

There is a need to fight drug abuse, as it has so many negative effects not only on the victim but on the whole community and society as a whole. Certain substances are known to cause problems such as risky sexual behaviour, cardiovascular disorders, and other neurological disorders (Makosa 2022, Factsheet 2023). Unfortunately, African countries do not spend much on mental health; only 1% of their budget is allocated to that (Makosa 2022). It can also further lead to short- and long-term psychiatric problems such as addiction, caused by the fact that drug abuse brings a feeling of excitement so sweet that the participants always come back for another experience, thereby leading to addiction. This addiction thus opens the door for death, stress, depression, anxiety, suicide, and psychosis. Stealing and robberies are a result of the victims' desire for more money for drugs, even if they do not have it. They end up spending even what they do not have, leading to them stealing and doing the unthinkable (Chukwuemeka 2021).

For the communities, this has devastating effects such as increased violence, robberies, unemployment, and the need for more rehabilitation centres. Drugs can lead to death and have been linked to deaths. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), on an annual basis, about 500 000 deaths are linked to drugs (Makosa 2022). According to the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), between January and June 2021, 1150 youngsters between the ages of 14 and 18 died of overdose, a 20% increase from that of 2020 (The Standard 2022). It is the ultimate end of all drug abuse. It causes the abuser to ultimately kill someone because of a lack of control over their actions due to mental illness or killing themselves.

Mental illness is one of the effects of drug abuse that results from the drugs damaging the brain. It may start with hallucinations and eventually lead to a lack of memory and the capacity to control one's behaviour. The cure for mental illness at this stage is not there most of the time, and it eventually leads to death (Chukwuemeka 2021).

A study done by the Health Professionals Trust Zimbabwe revealed that 80% of inmates in mental health institutions have drug and substance abuse-induced psychosis (The Standard, 2022). There is also a change in physical looks; most drug abusers can be identified by the fact that they grow lean and their eyes look withdrawn and sullen. This appearance can easily give them away. There is also a sudden change of friends on their part, opting to be surrounded by people who are like them, who take drugs, and who do not judge or condemn them for taking the substance.

Drug abuse among the youth robs the nation of its future as its future leaders spend most of their time on drugs, not being able to do productive thinking and work in the future. Drug abuse has arguably become the greatest threat to the future of Zimbabwe as the youth are turned into "hopeless and helpless zombies and junkies" (Mbofana 2023).

Efforts made to combat drug abuse among the youth in Zimbabwe

The effort to curb drug abuse should be directed at 1) cutting the supplies or minimising them; 2) prevention, which aims at deterring the youth from engaging in drugs; and 3) rehabilitating the already affected youth. Although drugs have been criminalised in Zimbabwe, a lot of work needs to be done to enforce

The government needs to play a bigger role

The use of drugs among youth is increasing at an alarming rate. Although various efforts have been made to curb the drug abuse problem, the results are not showing. This paper argues that the government has to play a bigger role. To curb this drug menace, there is a need to close borders and tighten the lid on suppliers. Unfortunately, the Zimbabwean borders are so porous that not only drugs but even illegal immigrants are finding it easier to enter and exit at will. There is therefore a need to tighten the borders in order to minimise the supply of drugs. Although some of the drugs are grown locally, most of them enter the country through the borders, Nyamapanda, Fox Border Post, and other such points. Due to the fact that youth by nature are experimental, the availability of drugs will always tempt them, yet drugs by nature are addictive, so closing the borders to minimise drug availability should be one of the government's major priorities.

The government has to play a critical role in the enforcement of laws against drugs. The sale, possession, and distribution of drugs in Zimbabwe have been criminalised, but there is low enforcement on the part of the law enforcement agents. Although the recent war on drug lords has been hailed as a positive move, it is far from solving the problem on the ground. As noted by the research on drugs in two schools, the police have been reluctant to arrest the drug dealers. As Mkwapatira (2023) noted, the lack of law enforcement is drawing the war against drugs back. The police officers are known publicly to protect drug lords who pay bribes to get immunity from the law. The police have been competing with the Vehicle Inspection Department (VID) for being the most corrupt government institution, so not much is expected from them. Unfortunately, the net will end up catching small fish while the giant white sharks are left free to roam the oceans undeterred (Matenga 2021). This is due to the fact that the trade in drugs has now become an ecosystem, with many people benefiting from it, from high-ranking politicians to lowly vendors (Makosa 2022).

There is a need for employment creation on the part of the government so that the youth can be gainfully employed. They say an idol's mind is the devil's workshop, and as noted above, one of the causes of drug abuse is the feeling of hopelessness among the youth who go through tertiary education only to be unemployed at the end of the day. As Makosa 2022 noted, the first step is to solve the national question, especially that of

employment creation. As the youth drown their sorrows and their souls, the future of the nation is at stake, as the youth should take over from the older generation.

Although awareness campaigns have been and are still being carried out, there is a lot to be done in this area. Most of these awareness campaigns are dollar- and donor-driven; as soon as the dollar is not there, they stop, and if the donor gets fatigued, the programmes end. This has given birth to another challenge, that of media-oriented programmes. Drugs affect people on farms, in rural areas, mines, towns, and cities, but most of the campaigns are carried out in towns to capture the media, thereby missing the whole point and making the campaigns artificial. There is a need to combine forces; government agencies, NGOs, CBOs, and churches should put all their resources together and plan for a wider and more effective way of preventing the use of drugs among the youth. The trend on the ground is that one organisation gets funding, goes to the media and community, runs out of money, and stops, then a new one comes and does the same thing. There is therefore no continuation in this fight against drugs.

CONCLUSION

The Drug abuse problem in Zimbabwe has reached alarming levels, with most health facilities overwhelmed by the number of patients seeking assistance. Although a lot is being done in terms of awareness campaigns, there is little on the ground to show in terms of improvement. From a peacebuilding perspective, this paper argues that the government needs to play a bigger role than it is doing now.

Most of the drugs reach Zimbabwe through porous borders, the law enforcement is weak to the extent that some of the law officers are said to be connected, and youth are the most affected, mostly because there are no jobs and the only way to drown their sorrows is through the use of drugs, but as shown by the discussion above, they end up drowning their souls, not their sorrows. The future of the nation is at stake as the youth are the ones who are supposed to carry the national vision forward, hence the need to pay attention to drug abuse among the youth.

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