

# Social Media and Substance Abuse: Implication for Preventive Strategies among Adolescent Students in Urban Schools in Cameroon

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## ABSTRACT

Adolescent substance abuse is a major problem all over the world. Substances are consumed by both male and female adolescents, and pose a serious threat to the consumers and the society as at large. The causes of substance abuse are numerous and varied. It is imperative to seek ways to curb this malice that is threatening the welfare of Cameroonians; individually, economically and even socially. This study sets out to ascertain the extent to which the social media influence substance abuse among adolescents in urban schools in Cameroon, and to determine preventive strategies. The concurrent nested mixed method research design was used to carry out the study. The Simple Random sampling was adopted in the selection of public, mission and private schools from four regions of Cameroon, classrooms in each school and 375 students. Purposive sampling was used to select discipline masters and guidance counsellors. A questionnaire of 10 items was used to collect data from the students and an interview guide to collect data from the discipline masters and guidance counsellors. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using spearman rho test, through SPSS version 25. The findings showed that social media significantly predicted substance abuse among adolescent students ( $R = -0.258^{**}$ ,  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Finally, findings showed that at zero order correlation when the preventive strategies were not involved in the correlation analysis, the coefficient value was -0.374 but, when the correlation was controlled by the preventive strategies, the coefficient value increased from -0.374 to -0.908 of almost a perfect relationship (-1). The study concluded that the social media influence drug abuse among adolescent students in urban schools in Cameroon. From the study it was recommended that research be carried out to determine the effects of drugs on students' performance, health and the society.

**KEYWORDS:** *Adolescents, Substance abuse, drug abuse, social media*

## INTRODUCTION

The use of hard drugs by adolescent students in Cameroon secondary schools has become an embarrassing occurrence to parents, schools, government authorities, and the society at large. The constant abuse of drugs among this group of students can cause psycho-social problems in society. This practice and its associated problems may lead to the breeding of deranged generation of youths. This fear

is not speculative because of what happens to be the frequent and rampant drug crises in many Cameroonian educational institutions.

Adolescence is a period of change from childhood to adulthood and this critical developmental period is marked by several physical, psychological and social changes. Adolescents are a segment of population with age range between 14-25 years. Most students in

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secondary schools in Cameroon are usually within the age range of 14-25 years (Olugbenga-Bello; Adebinspe; Abodurin, 2009). Adolescence is a time of experimentation, exploration, curiosity and identity search. Part of such a quest involves some risk-taking, including the use and abuse of psychoactive substances, which are the drugs that apply their major effects on the brain resulting in sedation, encouragement or change in mood of an individual. Adolescents are faced with the huge task of establishing a sense of identity. The new cognitive skills of maturing adolescents give them the ability to reflect on who they are and what makes them unique. Identity is made up of two components, self-concept and self-esteem (American Psychological Association, 1999). Self-concept is a set of beliefs about oneself, including attributes, roles, goals, interests, values, religious and political beliefs, while self-esteem is how one feels about one's self-concept. All of the developmental changes that adolescents experience prepare them to experiment with new behaviours. This experimentation results in risk-taking, which is a normal part of adolescent development (Sue, et al, 2009). Engaging in risk-taking behaviour helps adolescents to shape their identities, try out their new decision-making skills and gain peer acceptance and respect (Ponyon, 2009).

Unfortunately, some of the risk that adolescents take may pose a real threat to their health and well-being. These include pregnancy, cigarette smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and drug abuse. Odejide (2000) posited that drug is said to be abused when its use is not pharmacologically necessary especially when used in the face of legal prohibition or when a socially acceptable beverage is used excessively. Sambo, (2008) viewed that chronic use of substances can cause serious and sometimes irreversible damage to adolescent's physical and psychological development.

Drug abuse has become such a problem of great concern to all well-meaning Cameroonians and particularly the Government to the extent that the government through the ministry of public health continually calls on young people to desist from the practice, with a view to reducing the spread of drug abuse to the barest minimum or eradicating it totally (Cameroon Tribune, 2018). The media, parents and peers influence adolescents' drinking by their attitude about alcohol and by acting as role models (Taylor, 2003). On the other hand, parental deprivation due to deaths, divorces, separation or conflict has also been strongly associated with drug abuse.

According to the latest WHO data available in 2018, drug abuse in Cameroon caused 0.32% of total

deaths, making the country 16th in the world. Moreover, WHO (2015) reported abusive drug consumption that showed 10% of cannabis and Tramol consumers were school-aged 11-23 and people living in precarious conditions. The drugs consumed range from traditional drugs to imported cocaine, tramadol and heroin. The list of drugs consumed in schools include cigarettes, marijuana, cannabis, tramadol and amphetamine tablets. These years, Cameroon has attracted increased attention in terms of drug trafficking and transit. Substances are increasingly consumed in all regions of the country, including rural areas.

On its part, CRTV News (2022) stated that, Customs officials say Tramadol (an opioid pain medication used as a recreational drug) is one of the most commonly abused drugs in Cameroon, consumed by adult individuals but also quickly making its way into schools from pre-teens to adolescents. The result has been an increase in promiscuity, teenage pregnancies, petty theft and crime perpetrated by students. The drugs are smuggled into the country mainly from neighbouring Nigeria, according to authorities. The custom officials added that most of the drugs seem genuine because they are removed from their original packaging and hidden away in biscuit packs to avoid detection. However, from CRTV News (2022), in the last two years, heavy-duty trucks and mini vans have been intercepted and found with huge shipments of drugs, particularly in Garoua, North Regional capital.

Media has a lot to do with adolescent students' substance abuse. Many times in advertisement, adolescents see people drinking alcohol and having a great time. Media spends a lot on advertisement yearly. Many celebrities are seen smoking or drinking alcohol in movies, TV, and on commercials. This makes adolescents think that drinking, smoking, and taking drugs are cool and will make them popular. Over 5000 deaths yearly are caused by alcohol consumption (Strasburger, 2010).

The Media Practice Model states that adolescents choose and interact with media based on who they are, or who they want to be, in that moment (Brown 2000). This model suggests that media users explore information or display content based on experiences or behaviors they are considering, which may lead to reinforcement or advancement of these ideas. Thus, an adolescent who is considering initiating alcohol consumption may choose to watch a movie depicting drinking at a party, which in turn may influence him or her to attend such a party in the future (Brown 2000).

Lo-oh (2019), says the media portrays young people and the problems that can be part of the adolescents

and transition to adulthood, Gang violence, school shootings, alcohol-related accidents, drug abuse, and suicides involving young people. All these are often reflected in newspaper headlines and movie plots, not only in industrialized societies but also in the developing world today. On his part, (Oluwafisayo et al., 2019) on alcohol and marijuana use in adolescents and young adults are of particular concern because it has been implicated as the primary cause of both unintentional (e.g., motor vehicle crashes, violence victimization) and intentional (eg, self-inflicted) injury. Past studies have described the influence of some disturbing alcoholic related posts on sites such as MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter (Moreno, Briner, Williams, Brockman, Walker & Christakis, 2010). In particular, displays of alcohol use on social media have been found to be indicative of personal use among young people (Moreno, Christakis, Egan, Brockman & Becker, 2012) and are likely to enhance normative perceptions among followers of those posts (Litt & Stock, 2011).

Promotion of alcohol products is also evident on social media. Several alcohol brands have a presence on social media, giving them the opportunity to connect with young people and develop brand loyalty (Jernigan &, Rushman, 2014). Although marketing programs may require age verification before allowing users to access online content, those restrictions are difficult to enforce and can easily be sidestepped (Litt & Stock, 2011). Although not much is known about the online presence of content concerning illegal drugs, there is however growing evidence that marijuana use has increased among both adults and young people. Azofeifa et al. (2016), state that the increasing legalization of marijuana in United States for instance will undoubtedly add to its presence online. While marijuana advertising on social media is currently not allowed, marijuana businesses can create “business pages” to promote content and engage with users on social media, and these business pages are accessible to social media users of any age. A study has examined the presence of marijuana messages in social media, with a focus on Twitter, an online social messaging system that is increasingly popular with young people (Lenhart, 2015). The author of the study found that most of the messages contained favorable sentiments about the substance and that 59% of those tweets were estimated to be sent by youth less than the age of 20. Many of the senders of these messages had large numbers of followers, suggesting that such messages can reach and influence large networks.

Historically also, society has utilized different approaches towards prevention and treatment of

substance use and abuse. One such approach, the public health model, has been separated into prevention and treatment programmes and divided into three categories: primary prevention, secondary prevention, or tertiary prevention (Eggert & Kumpher, 1990; Metzler, 1996). Primary prevention is focused on individuals who have not yet used substances, with the focus of these programmes to prevent future users (Eggert & Kumpher, 1990; Metzler, 1996). These types of programmes in the past were often focused on scare tactics. However, a shift to positive reinforcement and building of self-esteem is beginning (Metzler, 1996). Secondary prevention is also known as the intervention stage and is focused on individuals who are either in the early stages of substance use or have moved towards the beginning stages of abuse (Eggert & Kumpher, 1997; Metzler, 1996). The tertiary prevention or treatment programmes are focused on ending the effects of substance abuse and addiction, and possibly reversing the negative effects that substance abuse can have on an individual's body; mentally, physically, and emotionally (Eggert & Kumpher; Metzler, 1996). These second and third stages have changed over the years from scare tactics and punishment, to now including the use of methadone for heroin addicts, and the use of fresh hypodermic needles to reduce the incidents of HIV (Metzler, 1996).

Many school systems have implemented programs that teach adolescents about the problems of substance abuse that is funded. Among adolescents aged 12 to 17 years, 9.8 % are estimated to be current users of illicit drugs, with 4.9 % using drugs other than marijuana. Nearly three quarters of students have started to drink alcohol and nearly half (47%) have tried using an illicit drug (not including alcohol or tobacco) by the senior year of high school.” (Hassan, Harris, Sherritt, Van Hook, & Brooks, 2009).

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Drug abuse poses a significant health, social and economic threat to families, schools, communities and nations. The extent of worldwide psychoactive drug use, according to World Health Organization (2002), is estimated at 2 billion alcohol users, 1.3 billion smokers and 185 million drug users. Recently, Cameroon has been experiencing and upsurge of illicit drug use in secondary schools, which is a call for concern. Illicit drug use is injurious to adolescent students in their academic performance. No academic institution is immune and no student is safe from it. Some adolescents in Cameroon are involved in the use of illicit drugs because they want to reduce regular pressures around them, while another group just copy from the social media. Drug abuse



symbolizes a protest against set rules, and to explore basic to self. This phenomenon has grave consequences to the individual, family and society at large. In Cameroon, despite measures such as legal restrictions and sensitisation on the dangers of substance abuse, this problem is widespread in the society at large and in many institutions especially schools, colleges, prisons and urban spaces. The damage caused by both licit and illicit drugs and substances of abuse to the society, labor force and the entire economy has been of much concern to the Cameroonian government. The problem of drug and substance abuse among young people/ youth revolves around tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, marijuana, tramadol, stimulants, inhalants and tranquilizers. Cameroon's anti-drug national committee (CNLD) in 2021 released statistics on narcotic consumption in the country, revealing that 21% of the population has already tried a hard drug; and 10% are frequent consumers including 60% of young people aged 20-25. Adolescents' substance consumption does not only have negative effects on their school results, but also results in the increase in criminality and initiation of brain related diseases, juvenile delinquencies, rape, riot, fighting among people and accidents. The law does not provide sufficient prohibition to the cultivation and use of substances. Moreover, the border control system is corrupt and weak, which enables the smuggling of illicit drugs and its cultivation anywhere in the country. Although several researchers have preventive measures suggested, this has not effectively led to the desired results of curbing the menace of substance abuse. This is because apart from the youth facing a lot of challenges as individuals, the family and society including the church and school have not come out wholly to initiate methods of helping the youngsters. It is against this background that this study investigates the social media influence and prevention of drug abuse among adolescents in urban schools in Cameroon.

### Specific objectives

- To verify whether the social media is responsible for adolescents' substance abuse in urban secondary schools in Cameroon.
- To determine preventive strategies against substance abuse among adolescents in urban schools in Cameroon.

### Research Methodology

In this study, the main independent variables are the social media and prevention while drug abuse is the dependent variable criterion. This study made use of the concurrent nested mixed method research design. This study was carried out in Cameroon and specifically in Bamenda, Buea, Yaounde and Maroua urban (regional headquarters). The target population of this study encompasses 1.868982 youths from 12-22 years old, 5659 discipline masters and 799 guidance counselors in the ten regions of Cameroon. The age group 12-22 was preferred since it was assumed that they are at the peak of their adolescence, therefore more conversant with drug related issues in their respective schools and communities. The sample size was 375 adolescents and 28 counsellors and 28 disciplines masters. In this study, the simple random sampling and purposive or judgemental sampling techniques were used. The simple random sampling was used to select the population of the study which enabled the researcher to avoid bias. The regions or the area of study were selected using purposive sampling. This was to enable the four geographical regions of Cameroon (that is the grass field, the forest, the coastal and the Sahel regions) to be represented. The researcher also employed the simple random sampling for selecting the schools and students under study.

Students from form three, four, five and lower sixth were equally selected using purposive sampling techniques. These classes were selected because adolescents are mostly found there. For discipline masters and guidance counsellors, the simple random sampling was used in schools where there were many of them. In schools where there was one counsellor and two discipline masters, purposive sampling was used. The reason for using the purposive sampling technique was to directly meet with the population of interest. The simple random sampling technique was done as follows; Small pieces of papers were cut and folded, and the number cut and folded corresponded to the number of students in each class. The number of folded papers corresponding to the number of the students to be sampled in each class or level had the inscription "student" on it and the others were left empty. The folded papers were then put in a bag and each student was asked to pick up a folded paper and open. Those whose papers had the inscription "student" were asked to answer the questionnaire. Below is a table indicating the number of schools, and adolescent students sampled and used for this study.

**Table 1 Distribution of the sample population**

Regional head quarters	Schools	Adolescence	Sample for adolescents
Maroua	Catholic bilingual college Jacques de Bernon	1512	47
	GBHS Maroua	4050	47
Yaounde	Christ the king Anglo Saxon college Younde	613	31
	Government Bilingual high school Nkol Eton Yaounde (5115)	5115	31
	British college Yaounde	743	32
bamenda	Government High School Atiela (5520)	5520	31
	St Pauls college Nkwen (910)	910	31
	Progressive comprehensive college Bamenda 6533	6533	32
Buea	Presbyterian secondary school Buea (PSS)	476	31
	Government Bilingual Gramar school molyko	5461	31
	Salvation Bilingual grammar school Molyko	1243	31
<b>Total</b>		<b>32167</b>	<b>375</b>

The sample size was calculated using Krecjie and Morgan (1970) table of sample size calculation. This table states that the accessible population of 1,045,652 potential respondents required a sample of 375 respondents, 30 requires 28 respondents. To get the sample size of 94 youth from Adamawa, the accessible population of the Adamawa (3000) was divided by the overall population of the four Regions (12000) and multiplied by the overall sample size (375), this same procedure was done for Central Region, North West Region and South west Region that gave sample sizes of 94, 94 and 93 respectively.

The instrument for data collection for this study was a questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire items are rated on a Likert scale with different statements which measure feelings and opinions of the respondents. The instruments were specially designed for adolescents, guidance counsellors and discipline masters.

The instrument was made up of two parts; part I consisted of five items demanding the demographic data of the respondents and part II was made up of five sections, involving the possible factors that contribute to substance abuse among adolescent students. The close ended questions represented the five specific objectives from the independent variables social media influence and prevention) and the dependent variable (substance abuse) of the study. Sections A to F contained ten items each that are directed towards the answering of the specific research questions and the verification of the specific research hypotheses.

The items were close – ended questions with likert – type response options ranging from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD). The Likert-type close-ended items were used because of the ease of responding and the short time required responding. A four scale response option of strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD) according to the likert scale was used. The respondents will be required to indicate their degree of agreement with a tick (✓) on the appropriate answer of their choice. Options such as never, sometimes, often and very often is also provided on the questionnaire for students. The questionnaire for students was made up of 76 items which are all close ended. There was equally an interview guide for discipline masters and guidance counselors.

The data collected from the field was first processed using EpiData software. This software was used to enter all the quantitative data collected for the study whereby, all the participants' responses were keyed in, in accordance with each of the test items. During this process of data entering, the demographic information and the test items were coded with numbers to facilitate the data entering and the questionnaires were also be assigned with serial numbers. The reason for coding and assigning each questionnaire a serial number was to ensure that on the data base, one should easily trace the individual responses of participants and to ease verification in areas of uncertainty if they arise. After the data were completely entered for all the participants, the data based was exported to SPSS version 25 for further consistency, data range and validation checks with the purpose to first identify invalid codes (data cleaning) with the aid of exploratory statistics. The data was analysed using SPSS version 25. The spearman rho and chi square tests were used to test the hypotheses and consequently to provide answers to the research question.

## RESULTS

Based on the adolescent students' characterization of social media influence, findings showed that 55.2% (207) of them indicated that television advertises substances most. The findings also showed that 16.8% (63) of

adolescent students always feel like taking substance when they see on social media. Also, 22.4% (84) of adolescent students always imagine themselves taking substances when they observe on TV. The findings also showed that 59.5% (223) of adolescent students approved that they always see different substances like alcohol and cigarette through the Newspapers. 26.1% (98) of the participants indicated that the first impression they had about alcohol drinking, cigarette smoking and others was when they saw them being advertised in the media.

Also, the findings showed that 50.9% (191) of adolescent students indicated that they always watch people smoking through the social media with 19.7% (74) of them who imitate things they see on the social media. The findings also showed that 48.3% (181) of adolescent students use social media on a daily bases and, 48.0% (180) of them said most of their models are on social media. Finally, the findings also showed that 7.7% (29) of adolescent students indicated that they tasted drugs due to the social media. In overall, the findings showed that 35.5% of adolescent students are influenced by social media while 64.5% of them are not.

**Table 2 Cross tabulation between social media influence and substance abuse**

Influence by social media		Abuse substance		Total	Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ )
		Accepted	Rejected		
Strongly Agree/Agree	n	53	100	153	$\chi^2=37.96$ df=1 P=0.000
	%	34.6%	65.4%		
Disagree/Strongly Disagree	n	20	202	222	
	%	9.0%	91.0%		
Total	n	73	302	375	

Using the cross tabulation technique, findings showed that more of adolescent students who abuse substances 34.6% significantly are those influence by social media ill ( $\chi^2=37.96$ , df= 1, P= 0.000, < 0.05).

Comparing adolescent students' characterization of social media influence by demographic data, findings showed that male 36.7% are more influenced by social media to take substances than female 34.7%. By age range, a significant proportion of adolescent students aged 12-15 (34.5%), 16-18 (36.2%) and 19-22 (37.8%) accepted to be influenced by social media. By school type, adolescents from Confessional schools 40.6% and Lay Private schools 38.3% are more influenced by social media than those from Government schools 30.8%. By class and religion, findings also showed that a significant proportion of adolescent students are influenced by social media.

### Interview responses on social media and substance abuse among adolescent students

**Table 3 Guidance counsellors and discipline masters opinion on how social media influence on adolescent toward substance abuse**

Themes	Groundings	Quotations
Imitation	31	<p>"They copy or imitate stars who are not role model".</p> <p>"Yes, some adverts and videos have a negative bearing. They also try to imitate things they see on social media".</p> <p>"Many pop stars who consume substances even in the video have accounts and post some of the videos which are watched by some adolescents thus, influencing some of them to consume substances as well".</p> <p>"They want to copy or try whatever they see".</p> <p>"In this part of the world, children turn to copy and imitate everything they see on the social media simply because it was demonstrated by a white".</p>
Advertisement of drugs	3	<p>"The advertisement of drugs on social media"</p> <p>"Some of the substances are advertised in the media, photos along people taking the substances which have negative effect on some adolescents".</p>
Games and pornography videos	2	<p>"Lot of distractions like games and pornography even cyber-crimes like scamming".</p> <p>"Some are engaged into pornography and scamming".</p>
Scamming	1	"Scamming".

Based on interview, many of the people said social media influence some adolescents to consume substance in that they turn to imitate or copy all that they see on social media. They also said some adolescents start

consuming substance after following advertisements on social media that it content was on drug consumption. Finally, the guidance counselors and discipline masters added that the watching of pornography videos, playing of games and scamming on social media had also influence some adolescents to start abusing substances.

### Verification of hypothesis: Social media does not predict substance abuse among adolescents in urban schools in Cameroon.

**Table 4 The effect of social media on substance abuse among adolescent's students**

		Social media	Substance abuse among adolescent students
Spearman's rho	R-value	1.000	-.258**
	P-value	.	.000
	N	375	375

**\*\*.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Statistically, the findings showed that social media significantly predict substance abuse among adolescent students ( $R = -0.258^{**}$ ,  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). The negative sign of the correlation implied that adolescent students are more likely to engage in substance abuse when exposed to social media ills. In support of this, the descriptive findings showed that more of adolescent students who abuse substances 34.6% significantly are those influenced by social media ills ( $\chi^2 = 37.96$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $< 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis that states social media does not predict substance abuse among adolescents in urban schools was rejected.

### Research question Two: What are the preventive strategies against substance abuse among adolescents in urban schools in Cameroon?

Based on adolescent students' characterization of preventive measures against substance abuse, findings showed that a majority of them 89.6% (336) indicated that counseling from guidance counselors can help to reduce or remedy drugs consumption. Also, 89.6% (336) of adolescent students approved that advice from parents can be helpful in preventing adolescents from taking drugs. Similarly, 89.9% (337) of the participants indicated that health education is one way of preventing adolescents from consuming substances. 52.3% (196) of adolescent indicated that punishing adolescents who consume drugs is one way to prevent substance consumption.

Also, 74.1% (278) of adolescents indicated that adolescents' advocates can help in reducing substance consumption. 81.3% (305) of adolescent students approved that the community can help to stop substance abuse among adolescents. Imitating good models was approved by 82.4% (309) of the adolescent students to help reduce substance consumption. The findings also showed that 84.5% (317) of adolescent students indicated that avoidance of temptation and peer pressure can help to curb or stop substance abuse among adolescents. In the same trend, 78.9% (296) of adolescent student indicated that seeking help for mental illness can help to stop substance abuse among adolescents. Finally, 80.3% (301) of adolescent students indicated that practicing stress management skills can help to overcome substance abuse. In aggregate, the findings showed that 80.3% of adolescent students see the above preventive measures; health education, counseling, parental advice, avoidance of temptation and peer

pressure, imitating good models, community involvement, practicing stress and management skills, seeking help from mental illness, adolescent advocates and punishing adolescent who consume drugs to help reduce/stop/curb substance abuse among adolescent students. These preventive measures are also presented on the table below as accepted by the participants.

Comparing adolescent students characterization of preventive strategies to remedy/curb/stop substance abuse by demographic data, findings showed that a majority of the students with percentage ranging from 73.6 to 86.9% irrespective of their sex, age range, class, school type, religion and region accepted that health education, counseling, parental advice, avoidance of temptation and peer pressure, imitating good models, community involvement, practicing stress and management skills, seeking help from mental illness, adolescent advocates and punishing adolescent who consume drugs can significantly reduce/remedy/curb substance abuse among adolescent students.

Statistically, testing the effect of the preventive measures on substance abuse by adolescent students, findings showed that at zero order correlation when the preventive measures were not involved in the correlation analysis, the coefficient value was -0.374 but, when the correlation was controlled by the preventive measures, the coefficient value increase from -0.374 to -0.908 of almost a perfect relationship (-1). This implied that if the above preventive measures are adopted and adequately implemented, substance abuse by adolescent students will significantly reduce.



## Discussion of findings

The findings revealed that the social media significantly predict substance abuse among adolescent students in urban schools in Cameroon. This means that adolescent students are more likely to engage in substance abuse when exposed to social media. Adolescent students who abuse substances are those influenced by the social media. This confirms findings of Hinduja and Patchin (2008) and Litt and Stock (2011) who posited that social media sites are an environment in which alcohol-related content is frequently created and consumed by adolescents and young adults. Displayed alcohol on social media may include information and images pertaining to alcohol that may influence viewers and lead to offline alcohol abuse (Moreno et al., 2011). When most of the adolescent students in urban schools see the content of substances that is displayed on the social media, they imitate, especially if it is from people that they consider as models (like music and film stars).

Furthermore, the adolescent students said television advertises substances sometimes and some of them always feel like taking substance when they see on social media. Some said they always imagine themselves taking substance when they observe on TV. From findings in this study, adolescent students approved that they always see different substances like alcohol and cigarette through the Newspapers and that the first impression they had about alcohol drinking, cigarette smoking and others was when they saw them being advertised in the media. This confirms findings of Alloy et al., (1996) who revealed that adolescents are in a vulnerable stage in which they are likely to be persuaded by messages pertaining to substance abuse. Substance advertisements encourage adolescents to have a desire to use substances. These advertisements are appealing to adolescents and have a persuasive effect on them. Advertisements make adolescents aware of new drugs or substances which they may obviously want to taste. In addition, the adolescent students indicated that they always watch people smoking through the social media and some try to imitate what they see on the social media. Some adolescent students use social media on a daily bases and some said most of their models are on social media. Other adolescent students tasted drugs due to the social media. This is in line with Roberts and Henriksen (1999) who posited that whenever a young person encounters a media depiction or portrayal of a particular behaviour, the potential exists for that behaviour to be imitated. Thus, advertisements do influence adolescents in urban schools to abuse substances. This usually have a negative impact on the lives of the adolescents who

behave awkwardly in their neighbourhoods and the community as a whole. From observation as a secondary school facilitator, the abuse of substances have caused health problems to some of these adolescents in urban schools in Cameroon. Some usually drop out of school due to mental imbalance and inability to concentrate on their studies.

To add, findings according to the guidance counselors and discipline masters' opinions indicated that the social media influence adolescent students toward substance abuse in urban schools in Cameroon. They said the social media influence some adolescents to consume substances as they imitate or copy all what they see on social media. The Council on Communications and Media Policy Statement (2010) confirms by stating that social media usage provides new opportunities for exposure to unhealthy substances because they are advertised more often on digital media, which make adolescents to copy. Guidance counsellors and discipline masters indicated that some adolescents start consuming substances after following advertisements on social media whose content was on drug consumption. This is in congruence with Roberts et al., (1999) who found that young people are more likely to learn and imitate behaviours performed by those who they perceive as attractive, successful, or powerful role models, or when associated with positive outcomes such as social approval. This is also in conformity with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) which purports that the likelihood of imitation depends on the context surrounding the portrayal, particularly the consequences attached to the behaviour. Finally, the guidance counsellors and discipline masters added that the watching of pornographic videos, playing of games and scamming on social media also influence some adolescents to start abusing substances. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) mentioned that while getting acquainted with friends on the social media, adolescents become exposed to deviant characters which are harmful to their well-being.

Demographically, male adolescent students in urban schools in Cameroon are influenced more by the social media to take substances than female adolescents. By age, the perceptions of the adolescents did not significantly differ as most of them accepted that the social media has a lot of influence on them as far as substance abuse is concerned. According to Davies et al. (2015), lifestyle choices and social networks can often influence one's substance use risk. By school type, adolescents from confessional and lay Private schools are more influenced by social media than those from Government schools. By class, and religion, findings



showed that a significant proportion of adolescent students are influenced by social media. Generally, this implies that according to demographic data, a good number of adolescent student in urban schools in Cameroon abuse substances due to the influence of the social media. This is in line with Morojele & Ramsomar (2016) who found that substance abuse often develops in the transitional phase of adolescence, a time when puberty and physical growth are occurring and when a young person seeks independence. Adolescents in this study are at the transitional stage which is a stage of risk taking, exploration and experimentation.

This study found that adolescents who are between 12 and 22 years of age abuse substances. This was also confirmed by previous studies that the mean age for the onset of substance abuse is 12 (Karen Lesly, 2008; Parrot et al. 2004). Some adolescents in this study reported that they wanted to experiment with substances. This was also confirmed by previous studies (Donald et al., 2007; Parrott et al., 2004).

Also, according to findings in this study, a significant number of adolescent students abuse substances. The students indicated that those involved are often aggressive and involved in criminal acts. The results were in accordance with the findings of Sandra et al. (2021) who say adolescents' substance abuse continue to be a growing major public health concern in Africa. This also concurs with Boyd (1995) who is of the opinion that substance abuse in adolescents can be associated with other high risk behaviours such as violence, and destruction of private property. On their part, Olawole et al (2018) stipulate that substance abuse leads to sexual violence (e.g. rape), physical violence, criminal activity, neglect of social responsibilities, disease, injury and even loss of life.

Findings showed that some adolescent students take substances because of frustration/ anxiety/stress while others do so because of boredom/loneliness. Also, some adolescent students take substances because of the need for social acceptance, the need to perform or achieve better and due to instability in the society. This result is confirmed by Romo-Avilés et al. (2016) who state that intermittent or intensive substance use is linked to the adolescent's need for activities that resonate with being 'cool or fun' and unrestrained self-indulgence; for a happy mood and peer sanction as key motivations. When faced with academic or social difficulties, some adolescent students in urban schools in Cameroon rather seek solace from substances. The effect of this is often very unpleasant as some of them end up performing very poorly in school. The findings also showed that adolescent students always experience problems sleeping after

taking substances and at times, substances change their attitudes and personality. This is confirmed by Sandra et al (2013) who emphasise the fact that substance abuse leads to appetite changes, weight loss, headaches, sleep disturbance and depression. Dependent adolescents are absent from school while spending their time abusing substances. They end up obtaining poor marks and failing at the end of the year. This has a negative impact on the budget allocated to schools. In addition, strategies that may be employed to improve academic performance of these adolescents may be costly in terms of time and finances required to implement such strategies. The strategies may include, but not limited to convening meetings, writing letters and contacting parents through telephone calls to discuss learners' behaviour and academic performance.

Findings from the perspectives of those interviewed showed that poverty, personal problems, stress, curiosity, violence, anxiety, phobia and depression caused adolescent students in urban schools in Cameroon to abuse substances. This is in line with Babatunde et al. (2012) who say many factors have been identified to be responsible for drug abuse among young people, which include: experimental curiosity, peer pressure, boredom, poor socio-economic condition at homes and the need for extra energy for daily activities among others. Therefore the general findings showed that the adolescent students in urban schools in Cameroon abuse substances due to a culmination of factors. The students are not aware of the life threatening effects of these substances. The use of substances will shorten their life span and impact negatively on the already depleted scarce health resources. A lot of money will have to be spent in health and rehabilitation centres to help these adolescents to stop consuming substances.

## Conclusion

Secondary school education is regarded as the most important stage in the educational cycle of a child as it is the level at which learners acquire proficiency in both academic and applied subjects. Students sit for an examinations at the end of the five and seven year's secondary education respectively, that is used for certification purposes and selection of those to be admitted for courses in high school and universities or training in post-secondary institutions. A case of drugs and substance abuse among adolescent students has been on the increase in Cameroon. This study examined the influence of social media and prevention of substance abuse among adolescents in urban schools in Cameroon. The study found that the

social media influenced substance abuse among adolescents in urban schools in Cameroon.

The findings showed that majority of the respondents said health education, counseling, parental advice, avoidance of temptation, imitating good models, community involvement, practicing stress and management skills, seeking help from mental illness, adolescent advocates and punishing adolescent who consume drugs can help reduce/stop/curb/assist in controlling the vice. The conclusion drawn from these observations was that guidance and counseling, strict enforcement of school rules and regulations, punishment and effective communication between students and school administration are strategies for curbing substance abuse among adolescent students. This means that controlling substance abuse requires a blend of strategies from the government, school authorities, stakeholders and parents for it to be effective. The need to control the use of social media by the adolescents was imperative in the study.

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