Letter to the Editor

Substance abuse among young people in Namibia, harbinger for retrogression

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To the Editor,

Substance abuse has been described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and drugs" [1]. There has been a growing concern of substance abuse among the youth, especially, the growing abuse of marijuana in Namibia [2]. In an epidemiological review carried out in South Africa, the prevalence of illicit drugs’ use and drug abuse among adolescents was significant [3]. The level of youth empowerment, both within home and classrooms, will determine the progress of a nation. It is known that adolescents are prone to different vices while growing up. A nation that does not invest in the formal and informal developmental needs of its youth may have a bleak future. The youths of a nation are the future of the nation, jeopardizing their future through neglect of their needs may be a basis for the ruin of the future development plans of the nation.

Namibian population is made up of about 50% youth i.e. those under the age of 29, warranting a very important input into this sector of the population [4].

It is estimated that in Namibia,

a) Half of the children aged 11-16 are believed to be experimenting with alcohol;  
b) 4% of the children aged 12 smoke cigarettes daily, as well as 17% of the 13-year-olds and 20% of the 16-year-olds;  
c) 3% of the 12-year-olds use mandrax occasionally as well as 7% of the 15-year-olds;  
d) Cannabis (marijuana/dagga) is the most abused drug in Namibia, with about 10% of the 15-year-olds and 8% of youth between the ages 17 and 30, abusing the drug.

Substance abuse remains a challenge in Namibia and the African continent as a whole (NAMPA, 2015). Substance abuse that starts at a very tender age can be attributed to parental or peer group influence. Life expectancy reduces when one indulges in drug abuse [5]. There has been a gradual reduction in the prevalence and incidence of HIV infection and HIV/AIDS, but from some studies, it is shown that education of the youth has not translated into a lifestyle change. Substance abuse is believed to be one of the drivers of new HIV infections.

Debilitating effects of substance abuse

• Dementia (mental disorder).

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Liver cirrhosis, due to excessive intake of alcohol.

- Vehicle accidents or collisions.
- Unwanted pregnancies and babies. Sexually transmitted diseases can be contracted because of unprotected sex.
- Drug abuse impairs the functioning of the mind and subsequent addiction can be fatal.

Measures to control problems associated with drug abuse

- Quitting.
- Counseling by the social workers.
- A therapeutic and counseling approach by medical personnel.
- Awareness creation about the dangers posed by substance abuse through different media e.g. inclusion of living a healthy life in the school curriculum.

Multisectoral approach to combating substance abuse, which predisposes the younger generation to sexually transmitted diseases is important.

Conflict of interest

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References