

Epidemiology of Psychoactive Substance Use and Associated Factors among Adolescents: A Descriptive Study of Selected Secondary Schools in South West Education Division, Blantyre, Malawi

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence and associated factors of use of psychoactive substances among adolescent learners in South West Education Division, Blantyre in Malawi. The study was guided by Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Methodology: A descriptive study design was done and simple random sampling technique was used. Data was collected in November (2018), n=191, Adolescent students were involved. Mixed research methodologies were used, in which both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies were employed in data generation and analysis. SPSSv20 and Excel were used in quantitative data analysis and qualitative data was analysed thematically.

Results: The study involved 191 participants and the findings revealed that 24.6% of participants used psychoactive substances.

Conclusion: Adolescent learners who use psychoactive substances like any other user of these substances hence they require help. Accordingly secondary schools have to take the necessary steps to address this problem including introducing counselling and psychotherapy services in secondary schools.

Keywords: Psychoactive substance abuse; Adolescents; Blantyre; Malawi

Introduction

The study sought to discover the prevalence and associated factors of psychoactive substances among adolescent learners in South West Education Division, Blantyre in Malawi. Studies conducted in different countries have shown that adolescents abuse psychoactive substances [1]. Adolescence is a period of

human development when young people start to develop the adult's physiological, psychological, sociological, and emotional functions [2]. Agreeing with Ellis et al. [2] this the adolescence age is a period from 12 to 20 years. This study concentrated on adolescents aged between 12 to 20 years. Adolescent period can be a challenging time, and some adolescent students use psychoactive substances as a result of poor parental control [3]. Due to different challenges that adolescents face when in school, some develop age inappropriate behaviours which are contrary to prevailing norms for social conduct. This is referred to as anti-social behaviours [4]. The anti-social behaviours include psychoactive substance use, social dysfunction (suicidal attempts, aggressiveness) and racism [5]. This study focused on use of psychoactive substances. It was concerned with the abuse of alcohol, cannabis, coffee/caffeine, valium, un-prescribed drugs and tobacco; a too common situation when some students start feeling stressed and depressed [6]. Effects of substance abuse include increased suicide risk in adolescents and young adults.

Literature Review

The Malawi mental health policy [7] and Malawi National Alcohol Policy [8] indicate that young people use psychoactive substances but little is reported in the policies in terms of associated factors and prevalence of psychoactive substance use among adolescent learners in secondary schools. The study intended to discover the prevalence of psychoactive substance use among adolescent learners in secondary schools. It also intended to check associated factors of psychoactive substance use like gender, to discover reasons for using substances, to find out the impact of using substances, to find out if adolescents had friends who were also using substances, to see in terms of gender which sex was using more substances, and if you are male or female are likely to have a friend is using the substances.

The Government of Malawi recognizes that no health system is complete without due consideration of the mental health

needs of the population [7]. In order to address mental health issues like psychoactive substance abuse, the Government of Malawi formulated the first national mental health policy in the year 2000 [7]. However, little is in the policy on the need to screen adolescent learners for substance use in secondary schools and on how to help those identified to need help. Most research studies have concentrated at substance abuse among adult population in general; though some observations in Malawi have associated substance abuse with adolescent and young adult depression [9]. Nonetheless, little research has been done to investigate the prevalence and associated factors of psychoactive substance use among adolescent learners in Malawi's secondary schools. Adolescents have to adapt to various psychosocial changes in coping with academic and social demands during training for their education. It is clear that students' performance in schools is negatively affected by use of psychoactive substances and that it impairs their academic achievement [10]. Hence, the present study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the prevalence and associated factors of psychoactive substance use among adolescent learners in South West Education Division, Blantyre in Malawi.

The prevalence of psychoactive substance abuse and associated factors among adolescent learners

The literature indicates a close relationship between family dynamics and psychoactive substance use among adolescents, and multi-causality among substance use-related problems, including personal adolescent characteristics as potential influential aspects in this relationship. The study results have shown that there is a relationship between family dynamics and the substance use. The proposed mediators are; first through negative emotional symptoms, and then through sensation seeking [11]. A study by Suwala et al. [12] revealed that use of nicotine, alcohol and other psychoactive substances plays an important role in youth death rate and incidence proportion. He further observed that probability of accidents, risky sexual behaviours or interpersonal aggression rises when young people are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs in Poland. The study revealed that within the past 12 months previous to the screening 92.4% of tested student's drunk alcohol, 26.1% smoked marihuana and 10.9% used other psychoactive substances. One half of the students admitted drinking alcohol or using drugs to relax, improve the mood or to fit in. and one in five students was confronted by friends or family members and asked to limit use of alcohol or drugs. A similar study by Igwe et al. [13] found an association between psychiatric morbidity and substance abuse among adolescent. Further the study revealed that the substances most commonly abused were alcohol (31.6%), cola nitida (kola nut) (20.7%) and coffee (15.7%). Studies have also shown that use of substances like alcohol, tobacco and marijuana by adolescents is associated with life satisfaction. Researchers observed that after controlling for numerous variables associated with substance use, individuals reporting low Life Satisfaction were significantly more likely to ever use tobacco, alcohol and marijuana. Additionally, students with low Life Satisfaction were significantly more likely to use two substances and three substances concurrently [14]. However, Pawłowska et al. [1] found that statistically significant

differences as regards the prevalence of psychoactive substances use by the adolescents living in urban and rural areas and as regards the intensity of Internet addiction symptoms in adolescents, both from the urban and rural areas, who use and do not use illegal drugs. Significantly more adolescents living in urban areas as compared to their peers living in rural areas use psychoactive substances, mainly marihuana.

A study by Hawes et al. [15] found that most youth about 74% engage in relatively "low" levels of use, followed by approximately 12% exhibiting an early-initiating "chronic" course, and 14% "escalating" in use cannabis. The further revealed that although boys and girls both experienced increased levels of Cannabis Use across adolescence, boys were more likely to exhibit escalating and chronic patterns of cannabis use. Similarly, Borca et al. [3] revealed that Tobacco and marijuana smoking are very popular in adolescence and there is a high rate of morbidity between them. Parental support and control was observed that it may hinder the involvement in the use of these substances by promoting conventional values among adolescents. As greater parental control and support were directly associated with lower adolescent tobacco and marijuana use. A study by Champion et al. [16] found that in recent years there has been growing concern about new psychoactive substances designed to mimic the effects of established illicit drugs among Australian adolescents. The study additionally found that 3% reported having ever tried new psychoactive substances, 2.4% had used synthetic cannabis and 0.4% had used a synthetic stimulant. It also revealed that new psychoactive substances users were more likely to have had an episode of binge drinking in the past 6 months, tried tobacco and had higher levels of psychological distress and lower perceived self-efficacy to resist peer pressure than non-users.

Similarly, a study by Chan et al. [17] among Australian adolescents found an association of alcohol and poly drug use with risky sexual behaviour in adolescents. There were 7.52% and 2.55% of adolescents who reported having sex and having unprotected sex before 16 years of age, respectively. After adjusting for antisocial behaviours, peers' drug use and family and school risk factors, girls were less likely to have unprotected sex (odds ratio = 0.31, P = 0.003).

Ease of access to substances has been shown to have a direct and significant relationship with substance use for school-aged children in Georgia [18]. The study also found that in general, it appeared the rural-urban differences fell along legal/illicit lines. For middle school students, a significant difference in perceived ease of access was found for each substance, with rural students reporting greater access to smoking tobacco, chewing tobacco, and steroids, and urban students reporting greater access to alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, inhalants, ecstasy, methamphetamine, hallucinogens, and prescription drugs. Rural high school students reported higher access to alcohol, smoking tobacco, chewing tobacco, and steroids, with urban students reporting higher access to marijuana, cocaine, inhalants, ecstasy, and hallucinogens. Because of little or no studies of similar nature is known for Malawi the current study wants to examine whether a similar trend occurs and collate data on it.

Theoretical framework

Icek Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour provides a framework for studying the prevalence of use of psychoactive substances among undergraduate students [19]. Ajzen proposed that the occurrence of a specific behaviour is determined by intentions, attitudes, and subjective norms. Ajzen's theory further proposes that there are three beliefs that are predictive of an individual's behaviour or behavioural outcomes. These are the individual's attitude towards the behaviour, the subjective norm of the behaviour and the individual's perceived control of the behaviour. This theory of planned behaviour has been used by different scholars to explain the behaviours of adolescent learners in health and to assess adolescent students' beliefs [20]. This theory is relevant for this study because it explains causes of unhealthy behaviours among adolescent students. The theory explains that social processes must also be taken into account in evaluating human behaviour. A weakness of the theory is that it is not specific to targeted behaviours or groups hence it is difficult to generalize to other specific behaviours. In the context of this study, the theory allows the researcher to consider the secondary school environment as playing an important role in shaping the behaviours of students. Adolescent students who use substances can have their condition alleviated if proper support systems are put in place.

Theoretical application

Behaviour in this case is the adolescent learner's use of psychoactive substances, while Intention are thoughts about when to use psychoactive substances which could be secondary to the feelings of stress or peer pressure. Attitudes are adolescent's overall evaluation of the behaviour.

Applying the theory of Planned Behaviour to this study would imply that the adolescent student's experience of substance abuse constitutes the behaviour in questions; while thoughts about when to use psychoactive substances, which could be secondary to the feelings of stress, constitutes the intention. Finally, the students' evaluation of the behaviour of using psychoactive substance, that is, his or her beliefs about the need to use it, is based on the benefit of using it, which might be to reduce stress based on the students' beliefs, would constitute attitudes.

The next section attempts to highlight an application of the theory to our research. Subjective norms; Ajzen defines Subjective norms as one's own estimate of the social pressure to perform or not perform the target behaviour. In his theory, he assumed that subjective norms have two components that work in interaction, these are: the person's beliefs about how other people who may be in some way important to them, would like them to behave and how the person's view of himself/herself affects his/her perceptions [19]. In this case student's peer expectations of use of psychoactive substances and adolescent student's perceptions of use of psychoactive substances affect the act of using psychoactive substances. For example, a friend who suggests going out to drink or taking psychoactive substance can make the subject adolescent student use it without him/her having made a considered decision. A student's

feeling of stress can also make him/her perceive that the best way of managing stress is to use psychoactive substances. Perceived behavioural control is the extent to which a person feels able to enact the behaviour [19]. A person's belief of perceived behavioural control has an impact on how s/he responds to certain behaviours. Ajzen's theory assumes two aspects to perceived behavioural control, one being how much power a person has control over the behaviour and the other, how confident a person feels about being able to perform or not perform the behaviours. The first would be the extent to which an adolescent student has control over use of substances when peers or friends urge him or her to be involved in psychoactive substance abuse. The second is the student's ability to make a decision whether or not to involve him/herself in the behaviour. It is determined by the students' powers to say no to friends who want him/her to be involved in anti-social behaviour. Therefore, a student's beliefs of perceived behavioural control plays an important role in decision making process in order to be involved in using substances or resist peer influence.

Research Design and Methodology

The study used mixed methods research design. Both quantitative and qualitative research designs were employed in data collection and analysis. The research design was selected because the research questions of the study required different data collection strategies, hence different research methods. The use of mixed methodology also allowed triangulation and converging of findings. It also helped to clarify the results, discovering the contradiction, as well as extending the breadth of the inquiry [21]. We have adopted a triangulation design with both qualitative and quantitative data collected almost simultaneously to take advantage of strengths of either method and at the same time offset the weaknesses of the other [22]. All our study participants were deemed to be rich with information. During data analysis, quantitative and qualitative methods were used sequentially, taking into account the advantages of the triangulation design ensuring that issues identified through the quantitative data analysis were triangulated using the qualitative data analysis. A hundred and ninety one (191) participants were enrolled in the study, represented as follows; 94 (49.2%) males, and 97(50.8%) females. **Table 1** below shows the details.

Table 1: Demographic statistics.

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	94	49.2
Female	97	50.8
Total	191	100

Participants' characteristics

Adolescent learners attending form one to form three were targeted, from selected public secondary schools in South West Education Division, Blantyre, Malawi (Two Urban and One rural). Possible participants were identified from the school registers.

Following identification, consenting participants were enrolled in the study.

Data collection and instrumentation

The participants involved in this study were the 2017/2018 cohort of adolescent students attending public secondary schools in South West Education Division, Blantyre, Malawi. The structured questionnaire was designed to include demographic details, names of psychoactive substances that are commonly abused and respondents were asked to tick against appropriate response. In addition, respondents were provided with space where they could describe the reasons why they decided to use psychoactive substances and how the psychoactive substance use affected their academic performance. Researchers and three enumerators distributed the study questionnaires randomly to the participants, which were then self-administered by the students. The responses that were obtained were coded for data analysis. Some thematic responses were appropriately quoted.

Data processing and analysis

Quantitative data analysis was done using SPSS and excel while Qualitative data analysis had been done thematically. While these two analyses were done independently of each other, the interpretation was not. In this study, quantitative analysis informed the qualitative analysis and conversely, the quantitative analysis elaborated on the qualitative analysis. This approach provided further insights and points for triangulation and helped to provide a clear meaning to the study findings [23]. Descriptive summaries of quantitative data were based on the statistical means and were presented using relevant data tabulations.

Table 2: Frequency of Use of psychoactive substances.

Use of psychoactive substances	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	47	24.60%
No	144	75.40%
Total	191	100%

Specific psychoactive substances used by participants

The following substances were used by adolescents: Alcohol (5.2%), Cannabis (2.1%), Coffee (5.2%), Un-prescribed drugs (1%), Use of more than one substance (11%). **Table 3** below shows the frequency details per psychoactive substance.

Table 3: Specific Psychoactive substances used by participants.

Psychoactive substances	Frequency	Percentage
Alcohol	10	5.2
Cannabis	4	2.1
Coffee	10	5.2
Un-prescribed drugs	2	1

Ethical considerations

The study proposal was presented and submitted to The University of Malawi, Chancellor College Research and Publications Ethical Committee for approval and was accepted and permission was granted. The informed consent was sought from Regional Education Manager, Head teachers and each participating subject. Adequate information were given to the subjects about the research. After agreeing to participate in the study, subjects enrolled. However, subjects were at liberty whether to participate or not in the study. Issues of confidentiality and privacy were observed as no names were to be indicated on the questionnaires. Codes were used for identification of the instrument. Potential risks and benefits were explained to the study participants. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time during the study.

Results and Discussion

The question that guided this study was: What is the prevalence and associated factors of psychoactive substance use among adolescent learners in selected secondary schools in Blantyre, Malawi?

The prevalence of psychoactive substance use among adolescent learners

191 participants were involved. The study revealed that (47) 24.6% of participants were using psychoactive substances. It further revealed that (144) 75.4% did not use any psychoactive substances. **Table 2** below shows the details.

More than one	21	11
Do not use any substance	144	75.4
Total	191	100

Table 3 indicates that adolescents used substances as follows: Alcohol (5.2%), Cannabis (2.1%), Coffee (5.2%), Un-prescribed drugs (1%), Use of more than one substance (11%). While a high percentage of participants were not using psychoactive substances, the percentage involved was still high enough to cause concern amongst head teachers and education stakeholders. Although lower than what Roderick et al. [24] found; Life-time use of alcohol was reported by 91.7% students and over half the pupils had tried tobacco (52.5%) and about 40.7% reported cannabis use and nearly one-fifth (18.9%) reported using 3, 4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine;

41.1% students reported using 'any drug' and 23.2% were using an illicit drug other than cannabis' and 8.7% reported the use of a novel psychoactive substance in UK. However, our study findings are similar to what Zarrouq et al. [25] found in Morocco; smoking prevalence was 16.1%. Cannabis recorded the highest lifetime prevalence of 8.1%, followed by alcohol 4.3%, inhalants 1.7%, psychotropic substances without medical prescription 1.0, cocaine 0.7, heroine 0.3, and amphetamine with only 0.2%.

The relationship between Sex of participant and use of psychoactive substances among adolescent students

Study revealed that more male participants were using substances 24 (12.6%) of the total population of the study participants while female participants were few who were using substances 23(12%) representing of the total population of the study participants. This was similar to what Zarrouq et al. [25] found in Morocco that psychoactive substance use was associated with males more than females. **Table 4** shows the details.

Table 4: Use of psychoactive substance.

Sex	Yes	No	Total
Male	24	70	94
Female	23	74	97
Total	56	144	191

Psychoactive substances used by adolescent friends

The study observed that study participants had friends who were using psychoactive substances. Specifics; the study discovered that 94(49.2%) of participants had friends who were using more than substance, 62(32.5%) of participants had friends who were not using more than substances, 15(7.9%) of participants had friends who were using alcohol, 10(5.2%) of participants had friends who were using coffee, 5(2.6%) of participants had friends who were using cannabis. 3(1.6%) of participants had friends who were using tobacco, 1(0.5%) of participants had friends who were using valium and 1(0.5%) of participants had friends who were using other psychoactive substances. **Table 5** below shows the details.

Table 5: Psychoactive substances used by friends.

Psychoactive substances used by friends	Frequency	Percentage
Alcohol	15	7.9
Cannabis	5	2.6
Tobacco	3	1.6
Coffee	10	5.2
Valium	1	0.5
Other substances	1	0.5
Use of more than one substance	94	49.2

Not using Psychoactive substance	62	32.5
Total	191	100

Table 5 shows that 94(49.2%) of participants had friends who were using more than substance, 62(32.5%) of participants had friends who were not using more than substances, 15(7.9%) of participants had friends who were using alcohol, 10(5.2%) of participants had friends who were using coffee, 5(2.6%) of participants had friends who were using cannabis. 3(1.6%) of participants had friends who were using tobacco, 1(0.5%) of participants had friends who were using valium and 1(0.5%) of participants had friends who were using other psychoactive substances. Thus, the study participants had more friends who were using psychoactive substances. The data from our research study has revealed that there is a possibility that some of the study's participants may have come under the influence of peers to use psychoactive substances. This shows that there is to some extent the possibility that students' use of psychoactive substances is influenced by peers.

Association of the gender of participant and use of psychoactive substances used by friends

Study discovered that male participants had more friends who were using psychoactive substances as compared to females. 71(37.2%) male participants had friends who were using psychoactive substances of the total population of the study participants while 57(30.4%) female participants had friends who were using psychoactive substances of the total population of the study participants. **Table 6** below shows the details.

Table 6: Number of friends who used psychoactive substances.

Sex	Yes	No	Total
Male	71	23	94
Female	58	39	97
Total	129	62	191

Table 6 shows that 71(37.2%) male participants had friends who were using psychoactive substances of the total population of the study participants while 58(30.4%) female participants had friends who were using psychoactive substances of the total population of the study participants. Thus, the male study participants had more friends who were using psychoactive substances than females. The data from our research study has revealed that there is a possibility that more male study participants may have come under the influence of peers to use psychoactive substances. This shows that there is to some extent the possibility that male students' use of psychoactive substances is influenced by peers.

Reasons for using psychoactive substances among adolescents

Study participants had different reasons of using psychoactive substances. The following were the reasons of using the substances; Peer pressure 14(7.3%), to be intelligent 8(4.2%),

Stress 11(5.8%), Solve sleeping problems 9(4.7%), and Fun 4(2.1%). However, 145(75.9%) thought that there is no need to use substances. **Table 7** below shows the details.

Table 7: Participant reasons for using psychoactive substances.

Reason for using psychoactive substances	Frequency	Percentage
Peer pressure	14	7.3
To be intelligent	8	4.2
Stress	11	5.8
Solve sleeping problems	9	4.7
Fun	4	2.1
Thought no need to use substances	145	75.9
Total	191	100

Table 7 shows that participants had different reasons for using the substances; Peer pressure 14(7.3%), to be intelligent 8(4.2%), Stress 11(5.8%), Solve sleeping problems 9(4.7%), and Fun 4(2.1%). However, 145(75.9%) thought that there is no need to use substances. The data from our research study has

revealed that there is a possibility that participants had more than one reason of using psychoactive substances and those participants were influenced by different factors.

The relationship between sex of participant and reason of using psychoactive substances among adolescent students

The study found that males and female participants had varied reasons of using psychoactive substances. Males were more influenced by peer pressure reported by 9(9.6%) participants while females were less influenced by peer pressure as evidenced by 5 (5.2%). However in terms intelligence both males and females had the same numbers, of thinking that use of substance makes one to be intelligent 4(4%). 4(4%) Males thought use of substances would help to manage stress while 7(7.2%) females thought use of substances would help to manage stress. 4(4.3%) males thought use of substance would help to solve sleeping problems while 5(5.2%) female participants thought use of substances would help to solve sleeping problems. 1(1.1%) male thought to use substance for fun while 3(3.1%) females used substances for fun. **Table 8** shows the details.

Table 8: Sex of participants and reason for using psychoactive substances cross tabulation.

Sex	Reason for using psychoactive substances						Total
	Peer pressure	To be intelligent	Stress	Solve sleeping problems	Fun	Though no need to use substances	
Male	9	4	4	4	1	72	94
Female	5	4	7	5	3	73	97
Total	14	8	11	9	4	145	191

Table 8 shows that males were more influenced by peer pressure (9.6%) participants while females were less influenced by peer pressure as evidenced by 5 (5.2%). However in terms intelligence both males and females had the same numbers, of thinking that use of substance makes one to be intelligent 4(4%). 4(4%) Males thought use of substances would help to manage stress while 7(7.2%) females thought use of substances would help to manage stress. 4(4.3%) males thought use of substance would help to solve sleeping problems while 5(5.2%) female participants thought use of substances would help to solve sleeping problems. 1(1.1%) male thought to use substance for fun while 3(3.1%) females used substances for fun. The data from our research study has revealed that males and females have varied reasons why they use psychoactive substances.

Impact of use psychoactive substance on life style and academic performance of learners

The study observed that participants use psychoactive substances had an impact on life style and academic performance of adolescent learners. 17(8.9%) of participants

were negatively affected in terms of interaction with other people and the relationship with other people worsened. However, 12(6.3%) of participants reported that use of substances positively influenced interaction with other people, they made good relationships because of substance use. 5(6.3%) participants reported that substance use negatively affected their academic performance while 11(5.8%) participants had thoughts that use of substances had positively affected academic performance, because their academic performance had increased. The study further found that 4(2.1%) participants used substances but they had no impact at all on academic performance and interaction with other people. The study further revealed that 142(74.3%) participants never used substances and they had no problems at all on academic performance and interaction with other people. These findings show that use of substances has little impact on academic performance and interaction with other people as evidenced by the figures. The study findings agree with what Vaughan [26] found that there is a relationship between academic factors and past-year alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use in an adolescent sample of Latinos. The study further found that when

adolescents use substances there is poor and personal relationship flops. **Table 9** shows the details.

Table 9: Impact of psychoactive substance on life style and academic performance.

Impact of psychoactive substance	Frequency	Percentage
Negatively affected interaction with other people	17	8.9
Positively affected interaction with other people	12	6.3
Negatively affected academic performance	5	2.6
Positively affected academic performance	11	5.8
Used but no impact at all on academic performance and interaction with other people	4	2.1
Never used and no impact at all on academic performance and interaction with other people	142	74.3
Total	191	100

Table 9 shows that 17(8.9%) of participants were negatively affected in terms of interaction with other people and the relationship with other people worsened. However, 12(6.3%) of participants reported that use of substances positively influenced interaction with other people, they made good relationships because of substance use. 5(6.3%) participants reported that substance use negatively affected their academic performance while 11(5.8%) participants had thoughts that use of substances had positively affected academic performance, because their academic performance had increased. The study further found that 4(2.1%) participants used substances but they had no impact at all on academic performance and interaction with other people. The study further revealed that 142(74.3%) participants never used substances and they had no problems at all on academic performance and interaction with other people. The data from our research study has revealed that use of psychoactive substances is perceived differently by adolescents. However, a big percentage they see no need of using psychoactive substances.

One of the touching written responses includes the following: Participant "I use cannabis in order to be intelligent and study so that I get a very good grade. However, smoking cannabis doesn't have any effect with my interactions with other people that is as far as I know". These responses demonstrate the Theory of Planned Behaviour's component of the person's view of himself/herself affects his/her perceptions. This agrees with this participants' thinking as the participant is perceiving that using psychoactive substance like cannabis will make him intelligent and study hard and hence get a good grade. Therefore, from the above participant's response and Ajzen Theory of Planned Behaviour clearly demonstrates student's reasons for using psychoactive substances.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that adolescent learners in selected secondary schools in Blantyre, Malawi use of psychoactive substances. Therefore, counselling services should be provided to adolescent learners with the problems of use of psychoactive substances at secondary schools. However, it is important to note that use of psychoactive substances is secondary factors.

The study recommends the formulation of a school health policy to include counselling services in secondary schools and an appropriate student counselling service referral system in Malawi. Teachers should be trained to identify symptoms of stress among students so that they can identify them early and refer them appropriately. Students should be encouraged to go for expert routine screening for mental health problems.

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