

PREVALENCE AND FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUBSTANCE USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN KWANIA DISTRICT, NORTHERN UGANDA.

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Background: Globally, substance use has been identified as a major public health issue. The aim of the study was to determine the prevalence and identify factors associated with substance use among adolescents in Kwanja District, Northern Uganda.

Methods: We conducted a cross-sectional study design using a semi-structured, interviewer-administered questionnaire with 716 randomly selected adolescents from five sub-counties within Kwanja

District using simple random sampling. The sample size was determined using Kish's Leslie formula (1965). Data were entered, cleaned, and analyzed using STATA version 18. Descriptive statistics summarized the data at the univariate level, modified Poisson regression assessed associations between variables at the bivariate level, and at the Multivariate, modified Poisson regression identified factors independently linked to substance use, while controlling for confounders, with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: The prevalence of substance use among adolescents was 64.9% ($n=465$). The most commonly

used substance was alcohol by 52.3% (243/716) of the respondents, followed by prescription drugs by 18.9% (88/716), and tobacco at 18.1% (84/716). The majority of the users (78.8%) reported experimental use, while 21.2% used substances on a daily or weekly basis.

Respondents' employment status (Adjusted PR=1.26; 95% CI: 1.01-1.57; $P=0.042$), use of substances by peers (APR = 2.58; 95% CI: 1.97–3.38; $p < 0.001$) and stress-coping mechanism (Adjusted PR= 1.28; 95% CI: 1.07-1.63; $P < 0.043$) were the factors that significantly influenced substance use among the adolescents in the current study context

Conclusion: Substance use among adolescents in Kwanja District is widespread and influenced by individual and community factors, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that address early adolescence, peer influence, and provide psychosocial support for vulnerable groups.

