

Attitudes of public school learners to under-age drinking and illegal substance abuse: A threat to social stability?

J. Prinsloo* and A. Ladikos

Institute for Criminological Sciences, University of South Africa, PO Box 392, Pretoria 0003
e-mail: PRINSJH@unisa.ac.za

J Nesor

Department of Criminology, University of South Africa

Substance abuse and dependence are considered critical problems facing South Africa. An apparent increase in substance abuse among adolescents is cause for concern in view of the negative consequences of substance abuse and dependence: e.g., involvement in crime and other antisocial activities, impairment of academic and occupational performance, as well as an increased risk of suicide, accidents, contagious diseases and psychological distress. The most important interpersonal variables mentioned in the literature pertaining to substance abuse include peer groups (and more specifically the need to be accepted during adolescence), parental and family-related factors (e.g., modelling, communication and conflict), and environmental factors. A structured survey questionnaire was prepared by the researchers to identify the extent of under-age drinking and substance abuse by young persons in public schools. A non-probability sample was compiled by means of the convenience sampling technique, consisting of Grade 7, 10 and 11 learners from 35 primary and secondary schools in the N-3 district in Tshwane (now District 4 - Tshwane South), who successfully completed a total of 2 003 questionnaires. The major objectives of the study were to identify key concerns regarding under-age drinking and the use of illegal drugs in schools, and to make information available to legitimate and interested stakeholders for the development of problem-solving strategies.

*To whom correspondence should be addressed

The study of human behaviour, such as crime, places emphasis on contextual aspects and deals *inter alia* with the interactions of individuals with one another and with their environment. Illegal activity, which can also be seen as a way in which people interact with their environment, cannot be examined without reference to the context in which it occurs.

Furthermore, the study of perception constitutes a vital process in that people, as psycho-physical beings, remain in constant interaction with their physical environment. Blackburn (1994:280,281) confirms that perception is a fundamental philosophical topic both for its central place in any theory of knowledge, and its central place in any theory of consciousness. A perception is not like a sensation because it has a "content" or out-directed nature. To have a perception is to be aware of the world in a particular way rather than to experience a mere modification of sensation. It is a complex process by which an individual selects sensory stimuli and arranges

them in such a way as to form a rational and meaningful image of the world around him/her. These images (perceptions) give rise to certain attitudes and relationships because a person's opinions and points of view are shaped by his/her perceptions. Kerlinger (Prinsloo and Du Preez 1993:31) describes an attitude "as an organised predisposition to think, feel, perceive, and behave towards a referent [physical object, event, behaviour, or construct] or cognitive object". It is an "enduring structure of beliefs that predisposes the individual to behave selectively towards attitude referents". Huysamen (1994:124) concurs with this view, indicating that an attitude is a disposition towards a particular issue or "attitudinal object" (such as political or social issues, an institution, group, or single person) which may be influenced by other persons or events. Attitudes are basically predispositions that enable one to decide for or against things; they represent opinions or perspectives that have become relatively stable.

Against this background, substance abuse/dependence is regarded in some quarters as constituting one of the biggest problems currently facing South Africa (Pretorius, Van den Berg and Louw 2003:1-11). The apparent increase in substance abuse and dependence among adolescents is cause for concern in view of the negative consequences, which include involvement in crime and other anti-social activities, impairment of academic and occupational performance, as well as an increased risk of suicide, accidents, contagious diseases, and psychological distress (Pretorius et al. 2003:1).

Goldstein (Shelden 2001: 61) distinguishes a three-fold causal relationship between serious crime and drugs that clearly questions the notion of so-called "victimless crime":

- Psychopharmacological (i.e., the combined effects of physical, psychological and pharmacological): crimes resulting from the behavioural effects of drugs;
- Economically compulsive: crimes committed by people financially driven to support their drug habits;
- Systemic: crimes related to the marketing and distribution of a drug.

Studies worldwide indicate that 50% to 70% of all victims of violence were under the influence of alcohol at the time of their victimisation (Butchard 1996:10). People under the influence of alcohol or drugs often behave in an irresponsible and reckless manner which can spill over into crime. Kerner, Weitekamp, Stelly and Thomas (1997: 401-420) divide the relationship between alcohol/drug abuse and criminality into five parts which served as the basis for the Tübingen Criminal Behaviour Study (TCBDS):

- Alcohol and drug abuse is regarded as criminal behaviour in itself;
- the criminal activities of chronic abusers/addicted persons;
- abuse among chronic offenders and/or habitual offenders;
- the commitment of crimes under the direct influence of alcohol with regard to penal responsibility (*mens rea*); and
- the influence of abuse on the level of "everyday offences".

The TCBDS demonstrated that a disproportionately high number of abusers be-

come chronic offenders. While a non-delinquent group (who either didn't use, or used very little, alcohol) had no official convictions up to the age of 36, a group of non-serious offenders who had at least one but not more than four official convictions up to the age of 36, were "medium" consumers of alcohol. Of strategic significance is the fact that offenders who became serious offenders in their juvenile years and who were convicted at least once between the ages of 18 and 24 and at least once between the ages of 25 and 36, and who had at least five official convictions up to the age of 36 years, had a history of high alcohol consumption. A close relationship between criminality and lifestyle was furthermore confirmed - the more serious the history of offending, the more a subject appears to be involved in a specific lifestyle, increasing the probability of abuse-related problems. Criminality, a specific lifestyle, and substance abuse "seem to interact and enhance each other in the sense of an increasing spiral", with this association emerging very distinctly in the lives of serious juvenile offenders (Kerner et al. 1997:416,418,419).

The ability to avoid an involvement in criminal behaviour is seriously hampered by persistent abuse. The results also indicate that while serious abuse in the past does not preclude criminal behaviour, the extensive use of alcohol in the present tends to be associated with current levels of criminal behaviour. Frankel and Whitehead, Edwards, McBride and McCoy, and Inciardi (Rocha-Silva and Stahmer 1997) also report a positive relationship between levels of alcohol/drug intake and an alcohol/drug-related precipitation of crime. The behaviour of a person influenced by substance abuse relies not only on that person's level of aggression, but also on the dynamics of the situation and the strength of general cultural and social control mechanisms. "Taking drugs does not necessarily initiate criminal careers, it tends to intensify and perpetuate them. A positive association is thus to be expected between alcohol/drug abuse and recidivism" (Rocha-Silva and Stahmer 1997: 1).

The results of an empirical study conducted in South Africa in 1996 by Rocha-Silva and Stahmer (1997:1-5) revealed that:

- Alcohol was taken in large quantities by offenders during their pre-arrest history in

a social environment conducive to drug taking.

- Tobacco, dagga (cannabis) and white pipe (a mixture of cannabis and Mandrax) were frequently used, while the use of LSD, cocaine and heroin seemed to be greater among the offender population than among the comparable general population.
- “Morning drinking” and (morning) smoking of cannabis were common.
- Drug taking was commonly a group activity (sometimes involving members of a gang), and tended to occur on the premises of traders and/or drug dealers (such as shebeens or taverns), leading to more drug use and trading.
- Participation in drug use and crime contributed to the development of a drugs-and-crime lifestyle characterised by taking drugs immediately before, or during, the committing of an offence; aggression usually resulted from the use of “hard drugs”, and rape and housebreaking were found to be associated with drinking - especially group drinking.
- Property crimes were generally associated with groups smoking cannabis.
- Violent crimes and housebreaking were associated with drinking alcohol to build courage.

In the Northern Cape region of South Africa, Shaw (1997:8,9) established that rates of violent crimes like murder, assault, rape and child abuse can be associated with alcohol abuse. Many incidents of violence occur in the family and community when victims and perpetrators of violent crimes are under the influence of alcohol. Many assaults with knives, broken bottles and blunt instruments “go too far” and end up as murders. As many as 53% of homicide victims in the Cape metropole in 1996, for instance, had “considerably high” blood alcohol levels, while 63% of assault-related injuries caused by interpersonal violence and 68% of cases involving domestic violence against women were alcohol related. A 1998 survey among 16 of the 23 State hospitals in the province of Gauteng found that R340 million was spent on treating more than a million casualty patients for assaults, gun and stab wounds and traffic accidents, with these crimes often being alcohol related (The Pretoria News, 27 Sept-

tember 1999).

As already indicated, the most important interpersonal variables pertaining to substance abuse mentioned in the literature include peer groups (and specifically the need to be accepted during adolescence), parental/family related factors (e.g., modelling, communication, and conflict), and environmental factors such as a lack of stimulating activities. Peer groups, each having their own unique and identifiable characteristics, help to shape adolescents’ attitudes and beliefs about drugs, and to form the rationales that adolescents use to explain and excuse drug use. Adolescents comply with peer standards to achieve status and identity within the peer group, and this could be a critical factor preceding youthful experimentation with substances. The situation is aggravated when learners become part of a drug-using subculture and lose the social skills that would otherwise allow them to return to a non-drug-using environment. What makes the situation particularly problematic is the fact that virtually all abusable substances have a high reward potential. If something either increases the individual’s sense of pleasure or decreases his or her discomfort, the person is likely to repeat that behaviour. It is, therefore, understandable that the pleasurable effect of substances can create a pattern of functioning in which the drug-taking behaviour is reinforced every time the positive (rewarding) effects of substances are experienced (Pretorius et al. 2003:4).

Alcohol is the most commonly used drug among young people, surpassing tobacco and illicit drugs. Alcohol is a very powerful, mood-altering drug, and its use by teenagers poses very serious health risks; it clouds judgement and interferes with the development of social skills and with school achievement. For example, research shows that adolescents who abuse alcohol may recall 10% less of what they have learned than students who do not drink (Brown, Tapert, Granholm and Delis 2000: 164-171). Moreover, children are beginning to drink at a very young age, sometimes before they have completed primary school. Grant and Dawson (1997:103-110) point out that the age at which a person first uses alcohol is a powerful predictor of a lifetime of alcohol abuse and dependence. More than 40% of individuals who begin drinking before the age of 13 stand a good chance of abusing or becoming dependent on alcohol at

some time in their lives.

Cannabis sativa, popularly known as dagga (also called marijuana, pot, weed, grass), is one of the oldest known hallucinogenic drugs. It is cheap and freely available and, therefore, the most commonly used drug in South Africa. It is probably the only mind-altering substance (except alcohol) that is in fairly widespread use by the South African population and it commands a certain social and cultural acceptability. Dagga is a popular substance and although it is easily obtainable and used for a variety of reasons (ranging from health to recreation) it is still an illegal substance in South Africa.

Johnston, O'Malley and Backman (2002:8-9) point out that exposure to dagga is one of the first pressures that teenagers in the United States encounter on their way to adulthood. Bartollas (2003:338) mentions that smoking marijuana (dagga) is a practice that combines the hazardous features of alcohol and nicotine and that it makes users vulnerable to other hard-core drugs (Bartollas, 2003:333,338,339, 343; Regoli and Hewitt 2000:271). Softer drugs create a gateway to the use of hard drugs and, according to Bartollas (2003: 326), this process may be considered a continuum that begins with experimental use, culturally endorsed use, recreational use, and eventually compulsive use when the user becomes dysfunctional and his/her life revolves around obtaining, maintaining and using a supply of drugs.

Dagga is often mixed and inhaled together with other substances such as Mandrax. When Mandrax is added to the dagga in a pipe, it is called a "white pipe". This practice is exclusive to South Africa and is much more dangerous than taking either of these drugs separately.

However, the above mentioned concerns are not shared by everybody. Reiman (2001: 37) contends that although cannabis is addictive, there is little evidence that even heroin is a dangerous drug: "On the basis of available scientific evidence, there is every reason to suspect that we do our bodies more damage, more *irreversible* damage by smoking cigarettes and drinking liquor than by using heroin." In addition, Reiman (2001: 43,195) believes that drug enforcement is not only failing to reduce the availability of illicit drugs, but actually compounding illegal drug-related phenomena, such as property crime to

sustain drug habits, organised drug dealing as a result of an illicit but well-established captive market that thrives on the tension between demand and scarce commodities, systemic violence and corruption, and a dramatic and unsustainable growth in prison populations while the arrested drug dealers are quickly replaced in inner-city neighbourhoods. In contrast to a failing criminal justice approach of deterrence and incapacitation, public education seems to be an efficient means of reducing substance abuse. While acknowledging that certain drugs may be dangerous and may stimulate people to violence, Reiman (2001:194,195) proposes that addiction should be treated as a medical problem and that certain illicit drugs should be decriminalised, starting with marijuana which is virtually harmless (also see Shelden 2001:57).

METHOD

Objectives

The major objectives of the study were to:

- Identify the extent of under-age drinking and illegal substance abuse by young persons in public schools as represented by the research sample;
- identify attitudes towards, and key concerns regarding, under-age drinking and the use of illegal drugs in schools; and
- to make information available to legitimate and interested stakeholders for the development of problem-solving strategies.

Respondents

The researchers were able to generate a non-probability convenience sample of 2 281 learners, consisting of Grade 7, 10 and 11 learners from 35 primary and secondary schools in the N-3 district (now District 4 – Tshwane South) in Tshwane. The sample naturally does not permit generalisations outside the group of sample elements.

Procedure

A structured survey questionnaire was compiled and subjected to the criticism of colleagues, members of the Department of Education in Gauteng, and others familiar with the nature and scope of the study. As part of an exploratory study, the revised draft questionnaire was pilot-tested in consultation with members of the Department of Education

in Gauteng, Lefase la Rena, and learners from District N-3 (now District 4) schools in Tshwane. Based on the ensuing feedback, the draft instrument was revised and drawn up in final form to comprise 11 pages and 46 main questions.

The questionnaire was administered in each school by trained local teachers, with the assistance of lecturers from the Department of Criminology and staff from the Department of Education in Gauteng. Classrooms were used during normal class periods and standardised procedures were followed. Teachers were urged not to walk around in the classrooms, so that learners could answer the questions without fear of being observed. The respondents were requested to seal their completed questionnaires in the envelopes that were provided. The selected learners completed 2 281 questionnaires. Two hundred and seventy-eight questionnaires were not correctly completed and could not be used in the study.

Data analysis

The results were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data processor and analysed by means of frequencies and cross-tabulations utilising chi-squared statistical tests. The statistical meaning attached to the concept “significance” means probably true and/or not due to chance. A research finding may be true without being a significant indicator in a certain context. Levels of significance indicate how likely a result is due to chance.

For example, statistical significance at the 5% (0.05) level or less indicates that a finding has a 95% (or greater) chance of being true. The accepted levels of significance reported in this study are as follows: the 5% level of significance includes all chi-squared values where: $p = <0.05$ but >0.01 ; the 1% level of significance covers all chi-squared values where $p = <0.01$ but >0.001 ; and the 0.1% level, where $p = <0.001$. For the purpose of chi-squared calculations, the age variable was regrouped into two subgroups, namely “under 17 years” and “17 or older”.

RESULTS

Sample characteristics

Table 1 provides an overview of the general demographics of the respondents. Although the sample was generated according to non-

random sampling practices, it clearly reflects an acceptable degree of diversity and representativeness. In other words, the researchers took special care to be as inclusive as possible and to survey the widest possible population of learners.

Table 1. Sample description ($n = 2003$)

Characteristic	%
Age	
<17 years	53.9
17 and older	46.1
Gender	
Male	43.4
Female	56.6
Grade	
7	5.4
10	42.5
11	52.1
Population group	
Black	41.7
Coloured	9.7
Asian	10.7
White	37.9

Drug experimentation

The research group was questioned about whether they had ever previously experimented with drugs, the variety of drugs taken, and the way they took the drugs. From this it emerged that:

- Almost one-quarter (24.6%) of the sample admitted to experimenting in the past in the form of inhaling substances such as glue, petrol, or thinners;
- nearly 22% (21.9%) had previously smoked illegal substances;
- more than one-quarter (27.3%) of the respondents had taken illegal substances orally;
- eight per cent (7.7%) of the sample were already engaged in injecting (“spiking”) themselves with illegal drugs; and
- nearly 17% (16.7%) indicated that they had already used cocaine.

Frequency of alcohol consumption

Nearly four out of 10 learners admitted to drinking alcohol on one to five occasions in

the 30-day period prior to the survey. Close to one-quarter (24.3%) reported drinking alcohol on more than five occasions during the same period. Highly significant differences emerged between the answers of respondents in terms of: age groups, $X^2(6) = 25.09, p = 0.000$; gender, $X^2(6) = 88.79, p = 0.000$; and population groups, $X^2(24) = 413.12, p = 0.000$.

Approximately four out of 10 (40.4%) learners in the younger age category indicated that they had not had a drink in the past 30 days, compared to 34.6% in the 17 years and older age group. Substantially more females (42.7%) than males (31.3%) indicated that they had not consumed alcohol in the last 30 days. More telling, perhaps, is that nearly three times as many male learners (20.0%) as female learners (8.2%) said they had consumed alcohol on at least 10 occasions in the last 30 days. The population subgroups also differed significantly in their reports regarding the frequency of alcohol consumption. Considerably more Coloured (89.9%) than white (69.5%), Asian (60.1%) or black (50.3%) learners reported the consumption of alcohol in the 30 days prior to the survey.

Extent of intoxication

The use of alcohol by the research group only gains proper perspective if it is taken into account that more than 40% (40.6%) admitted to getting drunk at least once a month. The prospect of nearly half of the learners getting inebriated every month ought to be disturbing to teachers and parents in the respective communities. By the time teenagers reached the age of 17 years, 46.1% had been drunk on at least one day in a typical month. In terms of gender, nearly one third (31.8%) of the male respondents admitted to getting drunk at least once a month. The corresponding percentage for female learners was 16.1%. These differences were statistically significant, $X^2(4) = 88.12, p = 0.000$. An analysis of the responses of the population subgroups revealed that a substantial percentage (82.7%) of the Coloured respondents and approximately half (47.9%) of the Asian learners reported incidents of drunkenness in a typical month, in contrast to their white (36.0%) and black (33.4%) counterparts, $X^2(16) = 320.40, p = 0.000$.

Peer group pressure, coinciding with a need to belong and to be accepted, as well as the excitement involved in experimenting with

alcohol and drugs, seems to have influenced the relevant respondents as well. An alarming 47.6% of the respondents indicated that half or more of their friends consume alcohol regularly. Significant trends were noted in terms of age $X^2(4) = 31.61, p = 0.000$; gender, $X^2(4) = 50.04, p = 0.000$; and population group, $X^2(16) = 276.18, p = 0.000$.

More learners in the 17 years or older group (18.6%) admitted that most or all of their friends used alcohol regularly, compared to 11.6% in the younger age group. More than half (54.9%) the male respondents indicated that most of their friends drank alcohol on a regular basis, compared to about 40% (42.1%) of the female respondents. Only 8.4% of the Coloured group indicated that they had no friends who consumed alcohol regularly, with comparative percentages for other groups being much higher: blacks (37.3%), Asians (24.9%) and whites (17.9%).

The availability of alcohol at parties

The social use of alcohol was found to be extensive among learners. Approximately 80% (80.6%) of the learners had attended a party in the past six months where alcohol had been available. More than one third (35.6%) of the research group indicated that alcohol featured at most or at all the parties they had been to in the last six months. More than 40% (42.3%) of the learners in the 17 years and older group reported that alcohol had been available at most or at all of the parties they had attended in the last six months, in contrast to 29.8% of the learners in the younger age group, $X^2(4) = 45.48, p = 0.000$. The differences in responses provided by different population subgroups also reached statistical significance, $X^2(16) = 160.31, p = 0.000$. More than 90% (93.3%) of the Coloured learners had been exposed to alcohol at parties during the last six months, compared to 80.9% of the white, 78.3% of the black and 76.1% of the Asian respondents.

Dagga usage

The research group was questioned about their prior use of, and attitudes pertaining to the use of, dagga. In response to the question "Have you ever smoked dagga?", more than one-third (33.6%) of the group answered in the affirmative. More than two-thirds (38.0%) of the learners who were at least 17 years old indicated that they had smoked dagga before,

compared to 29.9% of the younger respondents ($X^2[1] = 14.59, p = 0.000$). Substantially more males (46.1%) than females (24.1%) had smoked dagga before. The population subgroups also differed significantly in their reports regarding dagga smoking ($X^2[4] = 215.72, p = 0.000$). Considerably more Coloured (79.8%) than white (28.3%) and black (25.6%) respondents reported having smoked dagga. More than one-third (35.0%) of the respondents who admitted to smoking dagga had started at or before the age of 12, and more than half (54.5%) had started smoking at or before the age of 14. Nearly one fifth (18.7%) of the group reported that they were 15 years old when they started using dagga.

The survey results revealed that more than 80% (85.4%) of those using dagga accepted personal responsibility for doing so. There were significant gender differences in respondents' perceptions of their role in the decision to smoke dagga. Approximately 90% (89.2%) of the female learners took the blame on themselves, compared to 83% of the males, $X^2(1) = 49.2, p = 0.027$. Almost three-quarters (74.1%) of the dagga smokers in the group cited their friends as the reason why they started smoking dagga, illustrating the very strong influence of peers in this regard. The second most important reason given by the respondents for starting to use dagga was the influence of siblings (31.9%).

Analysis of the data pertaining to the population subgroups indicated a few statistically significant differences:

- Nearly all (95.0%) the Coloured learners blamed themselves for getting into the habit of using dagga, compared to 78.8% of the black, 85.3% of the Asian and 85.4% of the white respondents; $X^2(4) = 19.05, p = 0.001$.
- A substantial percentage (86%) of the Coloured learners pointed to friends as the major influence in starting to smoke dagga. A relatively low percentage (68.9%) of black learners expressed the same view; $X^2(4) = 21.55, p = 0.000$.
- More than two-thirds (66.7%) of the Coloured group cited siblings as the reason for using dagga, while less than one-fifth (19.8%) of the black learners gave the same reason; $X^2(4) = 124.37, p = 0.000$.

Almost 20% (19.4%) of the respondents indicated that half or more of their close friends used dagga. The differences in the responses of the two age groups were statistically significant at the 1% level; $X^2(4) = 16.08, p = 0.003$. More than twice as many learners who were 17 years or older (4.6%) admitted that most or all their close friends were dagga smokers, in contrast to 2% in the lower age group. More than one-quarter (26.4%) of the male respondents indicated that at least half of their close friends smoked dagga compared to 14% of the female respondents. The differences between the answers of the genders were statistically significant; $X^2(4) = 69.22, p = 0.000$. When the differences in the responses of population subgroups are noted, it is striking that only 21.7% of the Coloured group indicated that they had no close friends who did not use dagga. In contrast, the percentages among the Asian (47.6%), white (65.1%) and black (47.6%) respondents were significantly higher; $X^2(16) = 408.25, p = 0.000$.

However, a substantial percentage of the learners who refrained from experimenting with dagga credited themselves (84.2%) and their parents (67.4%) for their decision. The significance of this finding is that it confirms that parents have an enormous influence over their children's decisions. Parental involvement is a critical protective factor and if parents want to prevent their children from using dagga, they need to develop the child's moral values and individual strength. Children face many opportunities and temptations from the moment they turn 12, if not earlier.

More than half (51.7%) of the respondents who had not used dagga before said that they had abstained because of the influence of friends. From the age of 12 onwards learners become increasingly independent and interact within a broader social circle. They are exposed to older/more worldly teenagers, and at the same time they are subject to less adult supervision than ever before. Learners become more vulnerable to the pressures of a peer group whose influence becomes more prominent as the supervision of parents and teachers diminishes.

Availability of dagga at parties

The social use of dagga is extensive among learners. Nearly one-quarter (23.1%) of the

learners indicated that dagga featured at half or more of the parties they had been to in the last six months. The number of parties where dagga is available increases gradually as the learners get older. Nearly 10% (7.3%) of the learners in the 17 years and older group reported that dagga had been available at most or at all the parties they had attended in the last six months, compared to only 4.4% of the learners in the younger age group. This difference was statistically significant at the 5% level ($p = 0.016$).

Approximately half (47.1%) the male respondents said that dagga had been available at the parties they had attended in the last six months, compared to about one-third (34.6%) of the females in the group. This is a highly significant difference. More than three-quarters of the Coloured learners had been exposed to dagga at parties in the last six months, compared to 51.6% of the Asian, 37.2% of the white and 31.5% of the black respondents. Furthermore, approximately one-third (30.0%) of the research group indicated that dagga could be bought within 30 minutes. Forty percent of the learners indicated that they could obtain dagga within a few hours. Dagga was more easily obtainable by the male respondents than the females. More than half (51.7%) the male learners could obtain dagga within a few hours, compared to fewer than one-third (31.0%) of the female respondents. Almost three-quarters (71.5%) of the Coloured learners indicated that they could obtain dagga within 30 minutes, compared to 33.3% of Asian, 25.2% of whites and 24.8% of blacks; $X^2(28) = 261.29, p = 0.000$.

Attitudes to drug usage

As already indicated, the abovementioned concerns are not shared by everybody. Shelden (2001: 46) maintains that various laws were passed in the USA throughout the nineteenth century to sustain vast differences in wealth and social standing, and adds that "perhaps no area of legislation created more controversy than legislation against the use of certain drugs. The sordid history of anti-drug legislation is filled with emotions and vested interests". For instance, public hysteria was created, "showing the moral decline of innocent young people unwittingly enticed into a deviant subculture of marijuana-smoking youth" (Shelden 2001:47,51). However, there was little concern about the "evils" of

marijuana when it was mainly used by lower-class youths. A conservative social and political context emerged only when middle and upper-class youths began to use marijuana, and according to Shelden (2001:50,51) this renders a clear example of racial and class bias.

The research group was questioned about their knowledge of, and attitudes towards, the use of drugs in general:

Once won't do any harm. Close to one-quarter (24.5%) of the learners confirmed this view, compared to 17% (17.3%) who remained undecided. The response level was highly significant in respect of diverse attitudes based on gender. Just less than 30% (27.7%) of the male learners agreed with this view, compared to 22.1% of the female learners. The majority of female learners (63.2%) disagreed with this statement, compared to 51.7% of their male counterparts; $X^2(4) = 34.46, p = 0.000$. Slightly more than two-thirds (68.2%) of the Coloured learners agreed that taking drugs once would not harm them, compared to 21.8% of the white learners, 22% of the black learners and 15.1% of the Asian learners. The majority of Asian learners (69.3%), 64.2% of white learners, and 57.3% of black learners did not agree with the above statement; $X^2(12) = 270.45, p = 0.000$.

Taking drugs is fun, because it is illegal. Close to one-quarter of the respondents (24.1%) agreed with this statement. Almost 30% (29.7%) of the male learners agreed with this view, compared to 19.9% of the female learners. Almost seven out of ten female learners (69.6%) did not agree with this statement, compared to 57.7% of the male learners; $X^2(4) = 33.54, p = 0.000$. The gender and population subgroup differences emerged as highly significant. Almost three-quarters (73.2%) of the Coloured learners agreed that taking drugs is great fun, compared to 24.1% of the Asian learners, 20% of the white learners, and 17.4% of the black learners; $X^2(12) = 342.87, p = 0.000$.

People who have drug problems need to be helped rather than punished. An overwhelming majority of the learners (84.2%) supported this view. There were no significant differences between the learners with regard to age and gender variables. The majority (93.8%) of Coloured learners agreed with this view, compared to 89.2% of the Asian learners, 82.8% of the white learners and

82.2% of the black learners; $X^2(12) = 79.45, p = 0.000$.

Everybody does it. The majority of respondents (84.1%) supported the view that it is not unusual for young people to take drugs nowadays. Most of the female learners (85.5%) agreed with this statement, compared to 82.4% of the male learners ($X^2[4] = 11.32, p = 0.023$). This difference may also be attributed to the fact that 72% of the female respondents strongly agreed with the statement that “many young people currently take illegal drugs”, compared to 65.2% of their male counterparts. An overwhelming majority of Coloured learners (92.2%) fully agreed with this view, compared to 87.7% of the Asian learners, 82.8% of the white learners, and 82.6% of the black learners. These differences between respondents in terms of population subgroups were statistically significant; $X^2(12) = 47.53, p = 0.000$.

Almost one-quarter of the sample (24.6%) would be very afraid of being caught with, or using, illegal substances. Close to 20% (19.2%) indicated their reaction as “a bit afraid”. When combining the two figures because they represent a common element of “being afraid”, they equal 43.8% which is less than half the total number of respondents. In contrast, nearly 15% (14.7%) of the respondents indicated that they were not afraid of being caught in possession of illegal substances. More than 40% (41.5%) of the respondents were uncertain (“don’t know”) whether legal prohibitions and consequences would actually deter them. The only identifiable trends were that approximately 25% of the research group were apparently deterred from illegal substance abuse based on the possibility that they might be caught, whereas 15% were not at all deterred by the same prospect. Note that there were no significant statistical differences between respondents’ views in terms of age. It is interesting that more males (45.2%) seemed to be afraid of being caught in possession of illegal drugs than were females (42.7%). However, in the final analysis more males (17.2%) remain undeterred than females (12.8%). More females (44.5%) were uncertain (“don’t know”) than males (37.6%); this trend being significant at the 1% level ($p < 0.004$).

Although more than half (56%) of the Coloured learners were not afraid of being caught with, or using, illegal drugs, only 30%

seemed to be deterred by the thought. Similarly, more than half (51%) the white learners were afraid of being caught, compared to 6% of the white learners who seemed undeterred by possible apprehension. Almost one-quarter (23%) of the Asian learners said they were afraid of being caught, compared to 40.1% of the black learners who expressed fear of being caught. This trend emerged as being statistically significant ($p = 0.000$).

A person must be on a ‘high’ to enjoy a rave party. This view was confirmed by 30.6% of the respondents, but refuted by more than half (54%). Significant differences emerged with regard to gender ($X^2[4] = 78.41, p = 0.000$) and population subgroup variables ($X^2[12] = 388.40, p = 0.0000$). Less than two-thirds of the female learners (61.9%) disagreed with the above statement, compared to 43.7% of the male respondents. Furthermore, 77.6% of the Coloured learners and 44.8% of the Asian learners agreed with the statement, compared to 29.4% of the black learners and 16.9% of the white learners.

Steroids improve sport performance. Approximately 15% (15.5%) of respondents agreed with the view that learners should take steroids to improve their sport performance at school. However, this view was strongly rejected by 56.7% of the respondents. There were no significant differences among the learners in terms of age. The statistical differences in terms of all the other variables were significantly high. Just over 17% (17.2%) of the male learners agreed that steroids could enhance their performance, compared to 14.1% of the female learners ($X^2[4] = 40.04, p = 0.000$). It was evident from the research group’s responses that most of the senior learners were opposed to using steroids to improve sport performance. Contrary to other trends, a significant number of black learners (24.3%) believed that steroids should be used to improve sport performance at school; compared to 12.4% of the Coloured learners, 11.8% of the Asian learners and 7.5 % of the white learners supported the use of steroids; $X^2(12) = 364.48, p = 0.001$.

DISCUSSION

The research results confirm that the prevalence of under-age drinking, previous experimenting with a variety of drugs, and the use of dagga and other drugs among members

of the research group are social realities and of great concern, and can be perceived as a threat to the stability of society.

Close to 40% of the learners admitted to drinking alcohol on one to five occasions in the 30 days prior to the survey, while approximately one-quarter (24.3%) reported drinking alcohol on more than five occasions during the same period. The research results confirm that a considerable number of learners (40.6%) admitted to getting drunk at least once in a typical month. A disturbing 47.6% of the respondents indicated that at least half of their friends regularly consumed alcohol which confirms it as a sub-cultural (peer group) activity.

The social use of dagga is equally extensive among learners. A substantial percentage (33.6%) of the group admitted that they had smoked dagga before, close to 20% of the learners indicated that half or more of their close friends used dagga, and nearly one-quarter (23.1%) of the respondents indicated that dagga featured at half or more of the parties they had attended during the past six months. Of those who admitted to the use of dagga, more than one-third (35%) had started to use dagga at or before the age of 12, and more than half (54.5%) had started before the age of 15. Approximately one-fifth (18.7%) of the group reported that they were 15 years old when they started smoking dagga. Approximately one-third (30.0%) of the learners pointed out that they could buy dagga within 30 minutes, while 40% reported that they could obtain dagga within a few hours.

Almost one-quarter of the sample (24.6%) indicated that they would be very afraid of being caught with, or using, illegal drugs, and 20% (19.2%) indicated that they would be "a bit afraid". When combining the two figures because they represent the common element of "being afraid", they equal 43.8% which is less than half of the total number of respondents. In contrast, nearly 15% (14.7%) of the respondents indicated that they were not afraid of being caught in possession of illegal drugs. More than 40% (41.5%) of the respondents were uncertain whether legal prohibitions and consequences actually deterred them. The only identifiable trends were that approximately 25% of the research group were apparently deterred from illegal substance abuse based on the possibility that they might be caught, whereas 15% were not at all deterred by the same prospect. More males

(17.2%) remained undeterred than females (12.8%). Close to one-quarter of the respondents believed that taking an illegal drug once would not harm them, and almost the same number of respondents believed that to experiment with, or to use, drugs was "fun" or exciting, mainly because of the illegal nature of the activity.

CONCLUSION

It would be naive to deny the existence of a huge illegal economy provided by the organised, as well as informal, drug trade in South Africa. Irish and Qhobosheane (2003: 78) estimate the annual South African portion of the illegal organised drug trade to be worth between R50 billion and R75 billion. An illegal niche market can develop among certain classes of marginalised people (see Leggett 2003: 35).

The deterrent effect of apprehension and legal sanction to "fight" illegal drug abuse is not the only way to address a social phenomenon of this nature. Various communities obviously have different views on "drug abuse", and the attitudes of a certain portion of the research group evidently challenge the apparent functionality of a social control model based solely on deterrence.

Deterrence generally refers to any process by which someone is prevented from doing something. According to Beyleveld (1980: 14), a feeling or conviction that an act is wrong serves just as much as a deterrent as a calculation that the commission of the act is likely to be followed by consequences that the perpetrator would prefer to avoid. In criminological terms, deterrence relates best to a judicial approach within the context of the classical school of criminology. The rationale behind the theory of pleasure versus pain is based on the hedonistic principle theory of Bentham, that is, that every rational person strives for pleasure and avoids pain. The assumption is that every person is free to differentiate between what is right and wrong and is able to determine the consequences of his or her actions. They, therefore, remain accountable for their decisions. This implies that a person is able to assess the advantages of pleasure against the disadvantages of pain.

"Individual" and "general" deterrence can be distinguished in the legal context (Schmalleger 2003:96,97,406,407). Individual deterrence refers to punishment meted out to an individual and the way in which the

offender who is undergoing the punishment experiences it. The belief is that the offender will be conditioned by punishment to avoid crime in future, or at least the negative consequences associated with it. It is assumed that the unpleasantness or the disadvantages of punishment will instil the fear needed to deter a specific offender from engaging in criminal behaviour in the future because his or her risk-reward calculation has been altered by the punishment (Schmallegger 2003; Kronenwetter 1993).

General deterrence refers to the experience gained by the populace in general as a result of punishment meted out to a specific individual, thereby serving "as a lesson to others". Broadly speaking, general deterrence implies that the threat and the possibility of punishment, or the perceived risk of being punished, causes those who are about to commit an offence to desist (Hood 1996:182). General deterrence is based on the premise that the individual offender should be punished in a way that would serve as an example and deter a potential criminal from committing a crime. Accordingly, the goal of criminal sentencing is to prevent others from committing crimes similar to the one for which a particular offender is being sentenced or punished. Members of the community at large receive the message that crime is associated with unpleasant consequences (Schmallegger 2003:406, 407).

The following findings question the significance and effects of any deterrence theory to reduce the availability of illegal drugs and their abuse:

- The majority of the respondents (84.1%) confirmed that using illegal drugs is a common, daily occurrence.
- Some 40% of the respondents acknowledged their ability to buy dagga, ranging from within a few hours (9.9%) to less than 30 minutes (30.1%).
- Close to one-quarter (22.1%) of the respondents could gain access to "hard" drugs such as LSD, Ecstasy, cocaine or heroin within a few hours, and 26% (25.6%) admitted that they could access illegal drugs within one day.
- Over 6% (6.4%) of the sample could obtain illegal drugs in less than half an hour, and 5.8% indicated that they could get hold of illegal drugs within an hour. The remaining 12.2% of the respondents

indicated that they could access illegal drugs within a few hours or at least within a single day.

Attempts to combat crime thus cannot be isolated from attempts to reduce the level of drug intake in a community (Rocha-Silva and Stahmer 1997:1). Multifaceted strategies are required to decrease tolerance of alcohol abuse in society in general and to improve public awareness of the health and social risks associated with the use of alcohol and drugs. One issue in this context is the availability and control of alcohol and drugs. This argument is based on the assumption that there is a fixed correlation between the total *per capita* consumption and the extent of alcohol and drug related problems, including under-aged drinking. Proponents of this argument contend that the most effective way of countering these problems is to reduce consumption. This study, therefore, clearly illustrates that despite statutory decrees to keep alcohol out of the reach of minors, they obviously have regular access to it and that it is apparently provided either illegally or by "consenting" adults. Continued official intervention in the lives of young persons is, therefore, clearly justified, despite the fact that the illegal use and abuse of substances may constitute a "victimless crime".

An alternative view advocates the renewed education of young people about the potential problems related to alcohol abuse. The key to this problem is to empower learners and young people with information that would enable them to make an informed decision regarding the appropriate use of alcohol and/or the development of sensible drinking habits. Alcohol and drug abuse prevention approaches should specifically target young people and children at a young age and should focus on the fact that drinking risky quantities is associated with violent behaviour, crime, victimisation, unsafe sexual practices, and the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/Aids).

However, the accessibility of drugs remains a social reality and is a matter of grave concern for parents, teachers, community leaders, professionals, and authority agents charged with social development. The physical and psychosocial consequences that follow on experimenting with drugs - and eventually drug abuse - make it imperative to implement intervention programmes to combat these

problems. Proper training is necessary to detect drug-related behavioural tendencies at primary school level, throughout high school, at home, and in society, thus making schools and communities safe environments in which to learn and live. Appropriate preventive programmes should be made available during the different phases of learner development in order to stimulate, teach, and reinforce pro-social competencies. More extensive policies and programmes aimed at the prevention and treatment of illegal drug use are urgently needed.

Against this background, treatment and education remain important modes of social control, especially in the educational environment where school-based preventive programmes are sensitising learners to the negative consequences of drug use. These programmes would coincide with clearly stated policies on the use, possession, and distribution of drugs, as well as with intervention and treatment programmes. An overwhelming majority of the research group agreed that people who have drug problems should be rehabilitated (helped) rather than punished. However, nearly one in five (17%) of the respondents believed that it was possible to smoke dagga and still do well in school. Given the highly addictive and socially damaging nature of dagga, training teachers and parents to recognise specific symptoms and establishing protocols on dealing with dagga users in school and at home, are of paramount importance. In general, the findings of this study underline the importance of a proactive strategy in addressing underage drinking and the use of dagga in schools.

A proactive strategy of this nature, involving all stakeholders and concerned parties, appears a viable alternative approach to addressing a serious social problem. Moreover, this problem will get worse unless the apparent social apathy is vigorously attacked by all who are involved in the regeneration of youth in our society. For example, most of the learners (85.4%) who smoked dagga accepted personal responsibility for doing so, thereby confirming that they exercised their own choice. Almost three-quarters (74.1%) of the dagga smokers in the group cited friends as the reason for starting, and 31.9% indicated the influence of older siblings as a reason for starting to use dagga. It appears to be a progressive "disease" but

there is a lot of potential for positive intervention. The overall majority of learners who had not yet tried dagga credited themselves (84.2%) and their parents' reinforcement (67.4%) for their decision. Parents, therefore, clearly have a huge influence on their children's decisions. More than half (51.7%) of the respondents who had not used dagga, indicated that they had abstained because of the influence of friends, thus illustrating the very strong influence of peers which can be an asset if used as part of a positive approach.

REFERENCES

- Bartollas, C. 2003. *Juvenile delinquency* (6th Ed). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Beyleveld, D. 1980. *A bibliography on general deterrence*. Great Britain: Saxon House.
- Blackburn, S. 1994. *The Oxford dictionary of philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, S, Tapert, S, Granholm, E & Delis, D. 2000. Neurocognitive functioning of adolescents: effects of protracted alcohol use. *Clinical and Experimental Research* 24(2): 164-171.
- Butchard, A. 1996. Violence prevention in Gauteng: The public health approach. *Acta Criminologica* 9(2):5-15.
- Grant, B & Dawson, D. 1997. Age of onset of alcohol use and association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results of the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9: 103-10.
- Hood, R. 1996. *The death penalty*. USA: Oxford University Press.
- Hoberg, S. 2001. Adolescent substance abuse: Perspectives on club drugs. *Educare* 30 (1): 249-271.
- Hudson, B. 2002. Restorative justice and gendered violence. *British Journal of Criminology* 42(3): 616-633.
- Huysamen, GK. 1994. *Methodology for the social and behavioural sciences*. Halfway House: Southern.
- Irish, J & Qhobosheane, K. 2003. South Africa. In Gastrow, P (Ed.), *Penetrating state and business. Organised crime in Southern Africa*, Volume 2. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
- Johnston, L, O'Malley, P & Backman, J. 2002. *Monitoring the future. National results on adolescent drug use*. Maryland: National

- Institute on Drug Abuse. Obtained on 12 January 2002 at: <http://www.Monitoringthefuture.org>
- Kerner, HJ, Weitekamp, EGM, Stelly, W & Thomas J. 1997. Patterns of criminality and alcohol abuse: Results of the Tuebingen Criminal Behaviour Development Study. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health* 7: 401-420.
- Kronenwetter, M. 1993. *Capital punishment*. Washington (DC): Library of Congress.
- Leggett, T. 2003. On the tuk-tuk express. Has methamphetamine hit the Cape Flats? *SA Crime Quarterly* 6: 33-35.
- Pretorius, C, Van den Berg, HS & Louw, DA. 2003. Psychosocial predictors of substance abuse among adolescents. *Acta Criminologica* 16(4): 1-11.
- Prinsloo, JH & du Preez, GT. 1993. *The internal image of the South African Police*. Unpublished research report. Pretoria, University of South Africa.
- Regoli, RM & Hewitt, JD. 2000. *Delinquency in society* (4th Ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Reiman, J. 2001. *The rich get richer and the poor get prison*. London: Allyn & Bacon.
- Roach, K. 2000. Changing punishment at the turn of the century: Restorative justice on the rise. *Canadian Journal of Criminology* 42(3): 249-279.
- Rocha-Silva, L & Stahmer, I. 1997. Dangerous liaisons. Alcohol, drugs and crime. *Crime & Conflict* 9 (Winter):1-5.
- Rocha-Silva, L. 1998. *Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs: Young South Africans (10-24 years)*. Paper presented at the 10th International Conference on Alcohol, Liverpool: United Kingdom.
- Schmallegger, F. 2003. *Criminal justice today: An introductory text for the 21st century* (7th Ed). Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Shaw, M. 1997. The violence of alcohol: Crime in the Northern Cape. *Crime & Conflict* 9 (Winter): 6-10.
- Shelden, RG. 2001. *Controlling the dangerous classes*. London: Allyn & Bacon.
- The Pretoria News. 27 September 1999.