

**INFLUENCE OF PEER COUNSELING IN CURBING SUBSTANCE ABUSE:
A CASE OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN IMENTI NORTH
DISTRICT: MERU COUNTY-KENYA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

Substance abuse has become a major challenge among secondary school students in Kenya. A number of studies carried out in the country show that, almost every Kenyan youngster at one time or another has experimented with drugs, especially beer and cigarettes. The major cause of concern is that a significant proportion of these young people eventually get addicted; posing a threat to their health and safety, while creating difficulties to their schools, families and the public at large. Peer pressure plays a major role in influencing students into substance abuse. In fact, peer influence is the main factor in the first stages of substance use and subsequent abuse among secondary school students. Peer counselling is presumed to be the main solution to this menace. The Ministry of Education in Kenya has embarked on the implementation of peer counselling in public secondary schools in order to curb the problem of substance abuse. Despite the implementation of peer counselling in public secondary schools, substance abuse among students persists in Imenti North District. This study therefore, sought to find out the influence of peer counselling in curbing substance abuse among students in public secondary schools in Imenti North District. An *ex-post facto* research design was employed. The study population comprised of all form 2 and 3 students in the 39 public secondary schools in Imenti North District with a total student population of 8951. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 4 public secondary schools that participated in the study. Three hundred and twenty eight (328) form 2 and 3 students were selected through simple random sampling from the 4 public secondary schools. One teacher counsellor from each sampled school was selected to participate in the study. A separate questionnaire for students and another for teacher counsellors was used to collect data. The instrument's validity was enhanced through a pilot study in two public secondary schools outside Imenti North District, while the reliability test was done through test-retest method. The data obtained was coded and analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) computer program. Results were summarized using descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages and means. The results were presented using graphs, tables and pie charts. The study established that peer counselling has a greater influence on students' behavioural change regarding substance abuse and its reduction in secondary schools in Imenti North District. The study concluded that peer counsellors model good behaviour that influences other students towards making responsible decision about their behaviour in order to reduce substance abuse through peer counselling. Consequently, peer counselling has a significant contribution to curbing substance abuse in public secondary schools in Imenti North District