

Assessment of Substance Abuse on the Health and Productivity of Secondary School Teachers Aged 25 to 65 in Lusaka District, Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Substance abuse refers to the harmful or dangerous use of psychoactive substances such as alcohol and illicit drugs. Illicit drugs have significant negative health effects on members of society, including secondary school teachers. It also places a substantial financial burden on families, individuals, and the wider community. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the effects of substance abuse on the health and productivity of teachers aged 25 to 65 in certain randomly selected secondary schools within Lusaka District of Zambia.

Methods: A cross-sectional study design was utilized to evaluate these effects among secondary school teachers in Lusaka district. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 300 study participants for the study. Ethical approval was obtained from The University of Zambia Biomedical Research Ethics Committee (UNZABREC) -REF. No. 5915-2024, Lusaka Provincial Education Office, and Lusaka District Education Board Secretary (LDEBS) before data collection process commenced. Respondents were informed that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time without any form of coercion. In addition, a written and signed informed consent form was obtained from all study participants before they were given a structured questionnaire to complete. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions and was analysed using SPSS version 28 and the results were presented in tables and pie charts.

Results: The study found that most participants were married (75.0%) and identified as Christians (86.7%). Additionally, the findings revealed that a majority of respondents (70%) abused drugs, while a smaller proportion (30%) did not, indicating a high prevalence of substance abuse among secondary school teachers in Lusaka District. Most respondents (62.2%) reported that substance abuse had severe negative effects on their physical and mental health, while a smaller proportion (22%) stated that it had a moderate negative impact. The study further revealed that a small proportion of respondents (9%) indicated that substance abuse had no effects on the mental and physical health of teachers in the workplace environments. Additionally, 6.8% of the study participants reported mild negative effects on the mental and physical health of secondary school teachers in Lusaka District in Zambia. Moreover, the study demonstrated that substance abuse minimally affected the productivity of most respondents (32.5%), whereas 30.4% of participants indicated that drug abuse significantly impacted their productivity levels at the place of work. The study further found that 29.6% of respondents reported that substance abuse had an extremely negative impact on the productivity of secondary school teachers, while 7% reported a moderate impact. Additionally, 3.5% of study participants indicated that substance abuse had no impact on the productivity of teachers in the workplace environment.

Conclusion: All in all, the study demonstrates a high prevalence of substance abuse among secondary school teachers in Lusaka District, with the majority reporting severe negative effects on their physical and mental health as well as substantial reductions in workplace productivity. Although a small proportion of respondents perceived minimal or no impact, the overall findings indicate that substance abuse poses a significant occupational and public health concern within the teaching profession. The researcher therefore recommends that the Lusaka District Education Board Secretary (LDEBS) and the Ministry of Education in Zambia, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) should implement comprehensive stress management programs in secondary schools to help teachers cope with the pressures of their profession. The investigator further recommends that, Lusaka District Education Board Secretary, Lusaka District Health Office, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Health in Zambia, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), should embark on conducting awareness campaigns for teachers in secondary schools on the effects of substance abuse through health education, health communication, community engagement, and social mobilization.

Keywords: Effects, Substance Abuse, Health, Productivity, Secondary School Teachers, Lusaka District, Zambia

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Introduction

Substance abuse encompasses the harmful consumption of psychoactive substances, including illicit drugs and alcohol. A major societal impact of illicit drug use lies in the significant adverse health outcomes experienced by affected populations. In addition, drug abuse imposes substantial economic strain on individuals, families, and communities. Within the African Region, cannabis continues to be the most commonly consumed illicit drug, with the highest prevalence and rising trends observed in West and Central Africa, where usage rates range from 5.2% to 13.5%. Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), including substances such as “ecstasy” and methamphetamine, have emerged as the second most commonly misused drug category on the continent [1].

Findings from surveys conducted among children and youth in Sierra Leone further indicate the use of benzodiazepines—including diazepam and chlorpromazine—as well as various inhalants, with approximately 3.7% of respondents reporting injection drug use. Injection practices present heightened risks for acquiring blood borne infections such as HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C, particularly due to the sharing of contaminated needles and syringes, which remains a critical route of transmission.

One study examined the association between alcohol use disorder and Body Mass Index (BMI) among school teachers in Korea found that male teachers aged forty years and above exhibited elevated rates of alcohol use disorder as well as higher levels of obesity. Similarly, research conducted in Lithuania reported rising trends in smoking and alcohol consumption among both students and teachers, underscoring the urgent need for strengthened substance abuse education and preventive interventions.

The author further explained that high prevalence of alcohol use disorder was found to be linked with increased BMI among male teachers, with this association becoming more pronounced with advancing age. These findings indicate the need for comprehensive health-promotion initiatives and effective monitoring systems to support and safeguard teachers’ well-being in secondary schools. The study also reported an increase in smoking and alcohol use among students and teachers highlighting the need for substance abuse education [2].

Existing evidence shows that tobacco use is a major global cause of mortality, with approximately 80% of smokers residing in low- and middle-income countries such as Zambia. A study conducted in Botswana reported a relatively low prevalence of smoking among school teachers. Among the 1,732 participants, 3.2% were current smokers, 5.3% were former smokers, and 91.5% had never smoked. Smoking was significantly more prevalent among male teachers (10.8%) compared to their female counterparts (0.4%). The study further identified school level, marital status, and body mass index as factors positively associated with tobacco use, while age, duration of employment, and weekly working hours showed no significant association [3].

A Malaysian study examining the prevalence of smoking and its associated risk factors among secondary school teachers showed

that most participants were female (81.6%), aged 30–39 years (44%), Malay (90.1%), married (89.7%), and held a university degree (85.1%). Approximately one-third had a monthly income of 3000–3999 Ringgit Malaysia (33.5%), the vast majority lived in urban areas (94.7%), many specialized in social studies (33.9%), and most reported no family history of cancer (83.6%). Overall, 7.8% of the teachers were identified as current smokers. In terms of reasons for beginning to smoke, relaxation was the most frequently cited factor (33.3%), followed by stress relief (28.2%).

Univariate analysis showed significant relationships between smoking and sex, education level, income, and place of residence ($p < 0.001$, $p = 0.004$, $p = 0.031$, and $p = 0.010$, respectively). Multivariate analysis further indicated that gender and marital status were key predictors of smoking behaviour among teachers ($p < 0.001$ and $p = 0.033$, respectively). Therefore, this study aimed to assess the effects of substance abuse on the health and productivity of secondary school teachers aged 25 to 65 in Lusaka District in Zambia [4].

Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional study design was utilised to evaluate the effects of substance abuse on the health and productivity of secondary school teachers aged 25 to 65 in Lusaka district, Zambia. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 300 study participants for this study. Ethical approval was obtained from The University of Zambia Biomedical Research Ethics Committee (UNZABREC -REF. No. 5915-2024), Lusaka Provincial Education Office (LPEO), Lusaka District Education Board Secretary (LDEBS), and the National Health Research Authority (NHRA) before data collection process commenced. Respondents were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time without any form of coercion. All information collected from study participants (teachers) was kept confidential and was not disclosed to anyone.

In addition, a written and signed informed consent form was obtained from all study participants before they were given a structured questionnaire to complete. The authors did not have access to any information that could identify individual participants during or after data collection. Participants received a clear written explanation of the study’s aims, objectives, procedures, potential personal benefits, and risks, delivered either in a group setting or individually as appropriate. The researcher also ensured that participants understood that no identifying information such as names, phone numbers, passport numbers, or residential addresses would be collected or recorded at any stage, thereby protecting confidentiality, respect, confidence, and trust among the respondents.

All study materials were securely stored, with access limited solely to the researcher, to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. This measure ensured that sensitive information related to teachers’ substance use, health status, and productivity could not be accessed, altered, or misused by unauthorized individuals. Maintaining strict control of data storage also upheld ethical research standards, promoted participant trust, and minimized the risk of breaches that could

lead to stigma, workplace consequences, or other forms of harm. To ensure the validity of the study, a comprehensive review of existing literature and data collection instruments from similar studies conducted locally and internationally was undertaken during the instrument design phase.

This review allowed the incorporation of established findings, best practices, and proven methodologies relevant to substance abuse, teacher health, and workplace productivity. The questionnaires were subjected to rigorous content validity assessment by the researcher’s supervisor to ensure that the items effectively measured the intended constructs, such as teachers’ patterns of substance use, associated health outcomes, and effects on professional performance. Furthermore, the study instruments and research design were reviewed by experts within the School of Business at The University of Zambia.

Feedback from these experts helped refine the tools, validate the methodological approach, and strengthen the credibility and robustness of the study. The reliability of the data was ensured through the conduct of a pilot study in selected schools within Lusaka District. The pilot assessed the clarity, coherence, and practicality of the questionnaires using a small sample of secondary school teachers who were not included in the main study to prevent selection bias. This process helped identify ambiguities, misinterpretations, and logistical challenges in the instruments, enabling necessary revisions before full-scale data collection. Additionally, Cronbach’s alpha was employed to assess the internal consistency of survey items related to substance use behaviours, health effects, and productivity indicators. This statistical measure ensured that the questions reliably captured the intended concepts, thereby supporting accurate, consistent, and trustworthy data collection for the main study. All these helped to maintain validity and reliability of the study. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions from 20/11/2024 to 30/12/2024.

Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires to randomly selected participants in selected secondary schools, ensuring consistency and reliability in the questions asked. The expected time commitment of the participants in this study was about ten to fifteen minutes. The collected primary data was cleaned and examined to ensure its accuracy and completeness. The data was then coded, organized, and entered into a master sheet. The collected primary data was analysed using SPSS version 28 and the results were presented in tables and pie charts.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Data

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (Years)	25-34	33	11.0%
	35-44	106	35.3%
	45-54	127	42.3%
	55-65	34	11.3%
Marital status	Divorced	6	2.0%
	Married	225	75.0%
	Separated	40	13.3%
	Single	29	9.7%

Social class	Lower Class	12	4%
	Middle Class	130	43.3%
	Upper Class	158	52.7%
Religion	Christian	260	86.7%
	Muslim	40	13.3%
Level of education	Diploma	19	6.3%
	Bachelor degree	250	83.3%
	Masters degree	31	10.3%
Number of children	Five	26	8.7%
	Four	71	23.7%
	One	91	30.3%
	Three	12	4.0%
	Two	38	12.7%
	Zero	62	20.7%

Table 1 illustrates that, most participants were married (75.0%) and identified as Christians (86.7%). Regarding education, a significant proportion of respondents held a bachelor's degree (83.3%) while 10.3% of study participants held masters degrees. In terms of social class, 52.7% were in the upper class, with an additional 43.3% in the middle class, making up 96.0% collectively. The study also found that 30.3% had one child.

Figure 1 demonstrates that, most of the study participants (70%) abused drugs while a small proportion of respondents (30%) did not abuse drugs in secondary schools in Lusaka district of Zambia. This clearly shows that, the prevalence of substance abuse among secondary school teachers in Lusaka district is high (70%).

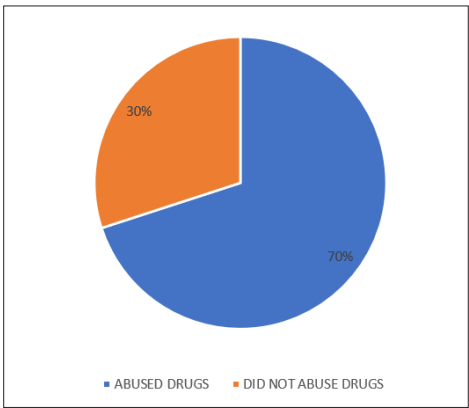


Figure 1: Prevalence of Substance Abuse Among Secondary School Teachers in Lusaka District

Figure 2 shows that most of the respondents (62.2%) indicated that substance abuse had severe negative impact on the physical and mental health of secondary school teachers. More so, the results in this figure demonstrate that, a small proportion of study participants (22%) reported that, drug abuse had a moderate negative impact on the physical and mental health of

teachers in secondary schools. The study further revealed that a small proportion of respondents (9%) indicated that substance abuse had no effects on the health and productivity of teachers. It was also found that 6.8% reported mild negative effects on the health and productivity of secondary school teachers in Lusaka District, Zambia

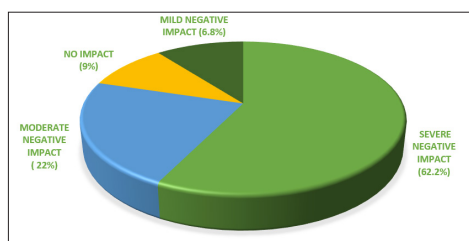


Figure 2: Effects of Substance Abuse on the Physical and Mental Health of Secondary School Teachers

Figure 3 illustrates that, most of the respondents (32.5%) reported that substance abuse had minimal negative impact on the productivity of the teachers in secondary schools. The results in Figure 3 also shows that, a small proportion of study participants (30.4%) indicated that abusing drugs had significant negative impact on the productivity levels of secondary school teachers. The study found that 29.6% of respondents reported that substance abuse had an extremely negative impact on the productivity levels of secondary school teachers, while 7% stated that it had a moderate impact. Additionally, 3.5% of study participants indicated that substance abuse had no impact on the productivity of teachers in the workplace environment.

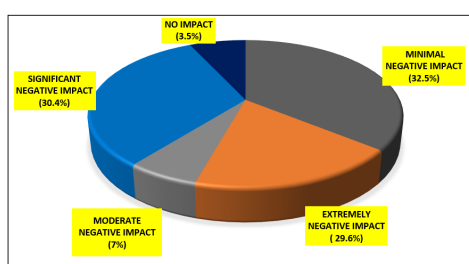


Figure 3: Relationship Between Substance Abuse and The Productivity Levels of Secondary School Teachers.

Figure 3 illustrates that, most of the respondents (32.5%) reported that substance abuse had minimal negative impact on the productivity of the teachers in secondary schools. The results in Figure 3 also shows that, a small proportion of study participants (30.4%) indicated that abusing drugs had significant negative impact on the productivity levels of secondary school teachers. The study found that 29.6% of respondents reported that substance abuse had an extremely negative impact on the productivity levels of secondary school teachers, while 7% stated that it had a moderate impact. Additionally, 3.5% of study participants indicated that substance abuse had no impact on the productivity of teachers in the workplace environment

Discussion of the Findings

Demographic Data

The demographic profile presented in Table 1 where most participants were married (75.0%), identified as Christians (86.7%), held at least a bachelor's degree (83.3%), and belonged predominantly to the middle or upper social classes (96.0%)—is in line with the characteristics often reported in studies of

secondary school teachers across Africa. For example, in South Africa both described teacher populations as socially stable, professionally qualified, and embedded in strong community networks, yet still vulnerable to alcohol misuse. These results resonate with the notion that substance abuse among teachers is not confined to marginalized groups but can occur within socially advantaged and educated cohorts [5,6].

Other than that, the high proportion of married participants is consistent with findings from where marital and family responsibilities were seen as both protective and stress-inducing. Marriage and parenthood can provide social support that discourages substance misuse, but they can also introduce role strain that encourages alcohol use as a coping mechanism. The finding that 30.3% of participants had one child is similar to patterns observed in Lusaka, where teachers balanced professional and family roles, often reporting stress linked to dual responsibilities. Religious affiliation, with 86.7% identifying as Christians, is in line with broader African teacher demographics, where Christianity is dominant. However, these results diverge from global contexts such as Brazil or the United States, where teacher populations are more religiously diverse. While religious affiliation can act as a protective factor against substance abuse, African studies show that Christian identity does not necessarily prevent alcohol misuse, suggesting that cultural drinking norms may override religious prohibitions [7].

Moreover, educational attainment, with 83.3% holding bachelor's degrees and 10.3% master's degrees, is consistent with global teacher populations, particularly in the UK and US, where teaching requires advanced qualifications. These results resonate well with findings from Education Support's Teacher Wellbeing Index (2023), which reported that highly educated teachers still experience high stress, which in turn causes them to resort to alcohol consumption as a coping mechanism. Thus, education alone does not insulate against substance misuse. The predominance of middle and upper-class participants (96.0%) is similar to occupational data from SAMHSA in the US, which show that education professionals often belong to higher socioeconomic strata compared to other sectors. Yet, these results are in line with WHO's global alcohol reports, which note that higher socioeconomic status can correlate with greater affordability and accessibility of alcohol, thereby increasing the risk of harmful use despite social stability [8].

Prevalence of Substance Abuse Among Secondary School Teachers in Lusaka District, Zambia

The results from the present study found that 70% of secondary school teachers in Lusaka district abused drugs, while only 30% did not. This prevalence is exceptionally high and signals a serious concern within the Zambian education system. When compared with other African studies, the Lusaka findings appear even more severe. For instance, a study conducted in Kaduna State, Nigeria, reported a drug abuse prevalence of 58.6% among teachers, which, although high, remains lower than the 70% observed in Lusaka. The Kaduna study also found that female teachers were more likely to abuse drugs than males, and that the mean age of drug-using teachers ranged between 16 and 19 years. Although the current study did not examine gender or age differences, the comparison suggests that Lusaka teachers

may be exposed to stronger or more widespread risk factors that promote substance use [9].

A further contrast emerges when comparing Lusaka with Botswana. A study conducted among 1,732 teachers in Botswana found that only 3.2% were current smokers, 5.3% were former smokers, and 91.5% had never smoked. This extremely low prevalence of substance use among teachers stands in sharp contrast to the 70% drug abuse rate in Lusaka. The Botswana study also identified school level, marital status, and body mass index as factors associated with tobacco use, while age, duration of employment, and weekly working hours showed no significant association. These findings suggest that Botswana's school environment may have stronger regulatory systems, cultural norms, or health-promotion structures that discourage teacher substance use, unlike the Lusaka context where drug abuse appears more widespread [3].

Within Zambia itself, the Lusaka findings align with concerns raised in a study conducted in Kabompo District, which reported notable levels of alcohol abuse among teachers. The Kabompo study found that easy availability of alcohol within communities contributed to teacher drinking, with some teachers consuming alcohol during working hours, thereby reducing teacher–pupil contact time and negatively affecting curriculum delivery. When considered alongside the 70% drug abuse prevalence in Lusaka, these findings suggest that teacher substance use may be a broader national challenge influenced by community norms, accessibility of substances, and limited access to counselling or rehabilitation services [5].

Apart from that, several lines of research from North America show that alcohol misuse is common, with approximately 26.9% of adults reporting monthly binge drinking and 7% reporting heavy alcohol consumption. These figures remain far below the 70% drug-abuse prevalence observed among teachers in Lusaka. Global alcohol-use statistics also indicate that while alcohol consumption is widespread in many regions, including South America and Oceania, the proportion of individuals meeting criteria for alcohol use disorder is substantially lower than the levels reported among Lusaka teachers. These comparisons suggest that although substance use is a global issue, the magnitude of drug abuse among teachers in Lusaka significantly exceeds general population norms reported in other world regions [10,11].

Effects of Substance Abuse on the Physical and Mental Health of Teachers in Secondary Schools in Lusaka District, Zambia

The results of the study show that a majority of respondents (62.2%) believed that substance abuse had a severe negative impact on the physical and mental health of secondary school teachers in Lusaka District. It usually causes absenteeism, impaired classroom performance, diminished authority, and psychosocial strain. This perception aligns with existing African literature, which consistently reports that substance abuse among teachers contributes to deteriorating health, emotional instability, and reduced professional functioning. For example, a study in Kabompo District found that alcohol abuse among teachers led to significant health challenges and impaired their ability

to effectively deliver lessons, demonstrating that substance use directly undermines teacher wellbeing and performance in the workplace environment [5].

In addition to the severe impacts reported, 22% of respondents indicated that substance abuse had a moderate negative effect on teachers' health and productivity, a finding that aligns with research from Nigeria and Kenya showing that drug and alcohol misuse among teachers contributes to noticeable declines in physical wellbeing, psychological resilience, and classroom effectiveness. Evidence from Kenya further demonstrates that substance abuse among teachers leads to psychological distress, reduced motivation, and heightened vulnerability to stress-related disorders, reinforcing the idea that even moderate use can compromise professional functioning. Comparable patterns have been observed in South America, Asia, and Oceania, where substance abuse among workers is associated with stress-related illnesses, reduced productivity, and diminished workplace engagement. Although prevalence levels vary across regions, the global consensus remains that substance use undermines both physical and mental health. The Lusaka findings therefore fit within this broader international understanding, even though the perceived severity of impact appears particularly high compared to some regions where teacher substance use is less prevalent [12].

Moreover, interestingly, 9% of respondents believed that substance abuse had no effect on teachers' health or productivity. This contrasts sharply with the broader body of evidence, which consistently demonstrates that substance abuse—whether mild, moderate, or severe—has measurable negative consequences on physical health, mental wellbeing, and workplace performance. Studies from Zambia and Kenya show that even low-level alcohol or drug use can impair concentration, reduce teaching quality, and increase absenteeism, suggesting that the perception of “no effect” may stem from limited awareness or personal bias rather than empirical evidence [5,12].

When compared with findings from other continents, the Lusaka results align with global research showing that substance abuse negatively affects worker health and productivity across professions, with studies from North America and Europe consistently linking alcohol and drug misuse to increased absenteeism, workplace accidents, mental health disorders, and reduced job performance. Such mechanisms as impaired cognition, emotional dysregulation, and reduced motivation are directly relevant to the teaching profession and help explain why most respondents in Lusaka perceived substance abuse as having severe or moderate negative effects on teacher wellbeing.

At the same time, a smaller proportion of respondents (6.8%) reported only mild negative effects, a perception that mirrors findings from other African contexts where some teachers underestimate the risks of substance use due to cultural normalisation of alcohol, personal coping strategies, or limited awareness of long-term health consequences. Research from South Africa similarly shows that some educators view their alcohol use as manageable or harmless, even when it subtly undermines emotional stability and classroom engagement, reinforcing the idea that while the harmful effects of substance

abuse are widely recognised, a minority of secondary school teachers still downplays its impact [13].

Moreover, the results from this study are akin to findings from a study done in South Africa which consistently show that substance abuse undermines the health, wellbeing, and professional performance of educators at the places of work in secondary schools. While most respondents in Lusaka perceived substance abuse as having severe or moderate negative effects on teachers' physical and mental health, similar patterns have been documented in a study from the University of Zululand which revealed that some teachers in Uthungulu District struggled with their own substance use—particularly alcohol—while simultaneously attempting to manage substance-related problems among learners. This dual burden created significant stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced effectiveness in providing guidance to school-going children.

The Zululand findings reinforce the Lusaka results by demonstrating that teacher substance abuse not only harms individual wellbeing but also compromises classroom performance and the broader learning environment. Importantly, the South African study recommended strengthening psychosocial support systems for educators, highlighting a shared need across both contexts for targeted interventions that address teacher wellbeing and reduce substance-related harm within schools [6].

Relationship Between Substance Abuse and the Productivity Levels of Secondary School Teachers in Lusaka District, Zambia. Figure 3 illustrates that, most of the respondents (32.5%) reported that substance abuse had minimal negative impact on the productivity of the teachers in secondary schools. The results in Figure 3 also shows that, a small proportion of study participants (30.4%) indicated that abusing drugs had significant negative impact on the productivity levels of secondary school teachers. The study found that 29.6% of respondents reported that substance abuse had an extremely negative impact on the productivity levels of secondary school teachers, while 7% stated that it had a moderate impact. Additionally, 3.5% of study participants indicated that substance abuse had no impact on the productivity of teachers in the workplace environment.

The current study found that substance abuse among secondary school teachers was perceived to have varying effects on the productivity of these workers, with 30.4% reporting significant effects and 29.6% extreme effects. These results are in line with findings from the United States, where workplace studies consistently show that substance use disorders reduce concentration, punctuality, and reliability. Research by the National Institute on Drug Abuse highlights that employees with substance use problems are more likely to miss work, perform poorly, and struggle with decision-making. In educational settings especially among secondary school teachers, these impairments translate into reduced instructional quality, diminished classroom management, and lower student outcomes [14].

These results are also similar to studies in the United Kingdom, where school policies explicitly prohibit drug and alcohol use to safeguard productivity and safety in the workplace environment.

The UK Department for Education emphasizes that impairment at work compromises both teaching effectiveness, resilience and student welfare. Teacher unions have also reported that substance-related issues disrupt classroom management and school climate, creating stress and lowering morale. These institutional stances resonate with the 29.6% of respondents in the current study who perceived extreme impacts, demonstrating concordance between the UK context and the severe productivity losses identified here [15].

In addition, these findings are also akin to Nigerian research, which demonstrates that substance abuse negatively affects psychological and emotional functioning and organizational productivity found that substance use among secondary school teachers leads to maladaptive behaviors, including chronic lateness and absenteeism, which disrupt teaching schedules and reduce contact hours with learners. The study further revealed that teachers often exhibit a noticeable decline in job performance, characterized by poor lesson preparation, weakened classroom management, and failure to meet professional obligations [16].

Substance use was also associated with reduced teacher–pupil interaction, where teachers avoided meaningful engagement with students and delivered shortened or poorly structured lessons. In addition, impaired judgment and poor decision-making were observed, resulting in inappropriate classroom responses and difficulties adhering to school policies. Teachers struggling with substance use were also more likely to display irritability, mood instability, and social withdrawal, which strained relationships with colleagues and the learners. Other maladaptive behaviors included interpersonal conflicts, neglect of personal appearance, financial struggles that affected workplace functioning, and a tendency to engage in unprofessional or risky conduct within the school environment.

All these undermine organizational efficiency among secondary school teachers in the workplace environment. Nigerian studies further highlight that substance abuse among teachers or students creates barriers to effective guidance and achievement. This is in concordance with the severe productivity impacts reported by nearly 60% of respondents in the present study, showing that the consequences of substance abuse extend beyond individual impairment to institutional decline.

Moreover, these results are in concordance with evidence from India, where national prevention programs emphasize the risks of tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, and opioids among youth, and highlight the burden placed on secondary school teachers in managing substance-related challenges. The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment's National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction stresses the importance of prevention and skill-building for teachers to counter these risks. To achieve this, teachers need a range of essential skills, including stress-management and emotional regulation skills to help them cope with work-related pressures in healthy ways.

They also require strong communication and interpersonal skills to promote positive relationships with colleagues and learners, reducing the likelihood of conflict and isolation. Decision-making and problem-solving skills are important for enabling teachers to navigate challenges effectively without resorting to harmful

coping mechanisms. Additionally, self-awareness and self-management skills help teachers recognize early signs of stress, burnout, or unhealthy behaviors. Resilience-building skills, such as adopting healthy coping strategies and maintaining work-life balance, further support teachers in managing demanding work environments.

Finally, skills in peer support, help-seeking, and participation in continuous professional development enable teachers to access assistance, encourage one another, and maintain a healthy, productive school environment. This suggests that environments with strong prevention programs may correspond with the 32.5% of respondents in the current study who reported minimal impacts, while weaker support systems align with the “significant” and “extreme” categories [17].

In addition, these results are similar to Australian findings, where education departments enforce zero tolerance for impairment at work to protect productivity. Workplace analyses in Australia show that drug and alcohol misuse undermines accuracy, attendance, and safety, while preventive education resources for teachers emphasize early interventions. This resonates with the majority perception in the current study that substance abuse is a serious impediment to teacher productivity. At the same time, the minority reporting “moderate” or “no impact” may reflect contexts where preventive infrastructures are robust, echoing Australia’s emphasis on proactive workplace health policies [18].

Furthermore, these findings in the current study are akin to Brazilian studies, which explore teachers’ conceptions of student substance use in public schools. Brazilian teachers report that substance abuse disrupts classroom management and learning conditions, while national policy emphasizes prevention, treatment, and harm reduction. Although focused more on student use, these findings highlight the systemic challenges substance abuse creates for educators, paralleling the severe-impact categories in the current study. This concordance suggests that whether substance abuse occurs among teachers or students, the broader school ecosystem suffers, leading to diminished productivity and effectiveness [19-23].

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that the Lusaka District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) and the Ministry of Education in Zambia, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) should implement comprehensive stress management programs in secondary schools to help teachers cope with the pressures of their profession.

The investigator further recommends that the Lusaka District Education Board Secretary (DEBS), the Lusaka District Health Office, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health in Zambia, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), should embark on conducting community awareness campaigns for secondary school teachers on the effects of substance abuse through health education, health communication, community engagement, and social mobilization.

The researcher further suggests that Lusaka District Education Board Secretary (LDEBS) should establish robust teacher support systems, including peer mentorship and professional guidance programs. These initiatives can provide emotional support, enhance job satisfaction, and reduce the likelihood of teachers turning to substances to manage work-related stress. The researcher also recommends that Lusaka District Education Board Secretary (LDEBS) should continue capacity building teachers with regular training on the dangers of substance abuse and its impact on personal health and professional performance. This training should include information on recognizing the signs of substance misuse, its effects and creating a supportive, non-stigmatizing environment for those seeking help.

Limitations of the Study

The study relied on self-reported information regarding substance use, health outcomes, and productivity levels, which may have been influenced by social desirability bias, fear of judgment, or underreporting due to the sensitive nature of the topic among professionals. Additionally, the cross-sectional design, which involved collecting data at a single point in time, limited the ability to establish causal relationships between substance abuse and its effects on health and productivity, allowing only for associations rather than cause-and-effect conclusions. Furthermore, because the study focused solely on public secondary school teachers aged 25 to 65 in Lusaka District, the findings may not be fully generalizable to teachers in rural areas, private schools, other districts, or those outside the specified age group, as contextual differences may influence the patterns and extent of substance abuse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights a significantly high prevalence of substance abuse (70%) among secondary school teachers in Lusaka District, Zambia, a figure notably higher than that reported in similar studies in other regions. This high rate of substance misuse is linked to various negative outcomes, including severe physical and mental health effects, absenteeism, and reduced productivity. These findings align with global studies, which consistently show that substance abuse among teachers leads to diminished teaching effectiveness, lower morale, and impaired cognitive and physical health. The results emphasize the urgent need for targeted interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of substance abuse, such as stress, lack of mental health support, and inadequate professional networks. The findings also indicate that addressing these issues could lead to a healthier, more productive teaching workforce, ultimately benefiting the educational outcomes of the learners. Additionally, the study suggests that tailored programs, including stress management initiatives, access to mental health services, and substance abuse prevention health education, are crucial to improving teachers' well-being and professional performance in the workplace environment. The researcher recommends that the Lusaka District Education Board Secretary (DEBS), the Lusaka District Health Office, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health in Zambia, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), should embark on conducting community awareness campaigns for secondary school teachers on the effects of substance abuse

through health education, health communication, community engagement, and social mobilization.

Declaration by Authors

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Zambia Biomedical Research Ethics Committee (UNZABREC), the Lusaka Provincial Education Office (LPEO), and the Lusaka District Education Board Secretary (LDEBS) before data collection commenced.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interest related to the conduct of this study.

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