

# Drug and Substance Abuse: A Key Driver to Criminality

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## Abstract

Drug and substance abuse has emerged as a major social and public health concern globally, with significant implications for crime and societal instability, (WHO 2019). This journal explores the relationship between substance abuse and criminal behaviour, highlighting how addiction, economic pressures, impaired judgment, and social disorganization contribute to increased criminal activities. The paper also discusses the types of crimes associated with drug abuse and proposes intervention strategies aimed at reducing both substance abuse and crime rates.

Imagine a young person, bright with potential, suddenly consumed by paranoia-seeing threats in every shadow, hearing orders to harm or victimize others. This isn't just a health crisis-its substance induced psychosis and its increasingly driving violent crime on our streets. As a Forensic Psychologist Intern, observation of devastating link between drugs and crime are witnessed daily. This calls for a quick address on these issues to curb criminality in the country.

In Zimbabwe, both legally permitted and illicit substances including alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and the non-medical use of certain controlled medications like cough syrups containing codeine and benzodiazepines, are frequently misused. Among young people, common drugs and substances include alcohol, marijuana (cannabis), crystal methamphetamine (known locally as mutoriro, guka, dombo), and Broncleer. According to Zimbabwe Multisectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan 2024-2030 approximately **60%** of the patients admitted in mental health institutions suffer from drug use disorders.

**Keywords:** Drug abuse, Substance abuse, Crime, Criminality, Psychosis, Addiction, Rehabilitation

## Introduction

Adolescents and adults whether male or female are caught at the vulnerability side of using or abusing drugs and substances. Drug and substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. Over the years, there has been growing concern about its link to criminal behaviour. Individuals who abuse drugs are often more likely to engage in illegal activities, either as a direct result of the substance's effects or as a means to sustain their addiction. Understanding this relationship is crucial for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and mental health professionals seeking to address crime effectively.

While we often see public violence linked to alcohol's disinhibiting effects, the stimulants flooding our communities, like crystal meth and cocaine, are particularly dangerous. They fuel intense paranoia and

aggression. This is compounded by the abuse of substance like Broncleer whose addictive nature drives users to commit crimes just to fund the habit. Cannabis use increase the likelihood of violence by exacerbating psychotic symptoms like delusions.

Drugs can cause psychosis- a detachment from reality. This isn't just getting high, it's a state of delusions and hallucinations that can directly lead to violent acts. As I mirrored on the disturbing trend of young men becoming entangled in violent crimes- sometimes raping own grandmother, sister, daughter or even killing a parent- often after being denied money to feed an addiction. It's heart-breaking to see how desperation can drive them to steal cash or petty items from their own homes. Equally alarming is the reckless behaviour on our roads. Commuter omnibus drivers under the influence flout traffic rules- driving against one-way signals, encroaching on pavements, and endangering pedestrian lives. These gut-wrenching acts feel like a clear sign of drug impairment. These incidents force us to ask: How can we intervene earlier to break the cycle of addiction and violence? What support systems- family, community, or institutional – need strengthening to protect both the vulnerable youth and the public on our streets?

### **The Link Between Drug Abuse and Criminality**

Reflecting on how deeply these incidents ripple through our communities- neighbours, friends, even family members feel the sting. Whenever crime spikes or reckless driving escalates, a palpable sense of unsafety settles over everyone. The economic fallout is stark: lost lives, countless injuries, and damaged property drain already-tight resources, driving up medical costs and slashing productivity. It makes one think of the future potential that we are losing- so many youths with talent getting swallowed by crime and addiction, human capital that could have fuelled growth simply evaporating. And the social fabric? Repeated tragedies erode trust, breed fear, and strain the ties that bind us, making cooperation harder than ever.

This crisis also creates a nightmare for our legal system. When someone commits a violent act during a drug or substance induced psychosis, who is responsible? Our criminal law is very clear. You generally can't claim insanity if you chose to take drugs. According to the Mental Health Act one has to be examined by two medical practitioners. This leaves families, victims, and the courts in an incredibly difficult position.

### **Psychopharmacological effects**

Certain drugs alter brain function, impairing judgment, reducing self-control, and increasing aggression. Substances such as alcohol, cocaine, and methamphetamine are particularly associated with violent and impulsive behaviours. Under the influence, individuals may commit crimes they would not ordinarily consider. When one commits a crime, the community, family and neighbours suffer.

### **Economic-Compulsive Crimes**

Drug addiction often leads to financial dependency, pushing individuals to commit crimes such as theft, burglary, and robbery to obtain money for drugs. This is especially prevalent among individuals with severe substance dependence who prioritize drug use over lawful means of income. It comes with costs when one commits crimes, peace becomes a nightmare and also health living is disturbed for both parties.

### **Systemic Crime**

The illegal drug trade itself is a major contributor to criminal activity. This includes drug trafficking, gang

violence, money laundering, and corruption. Organized crime networks thrive on the production and distribution of illicit substances. It is also heart breaking that some respected figures in government structures are also involved in illicit drug trading. This brings hopelessness on curbing and addressing substance and drugs illegality.

### **Social and Environmental Factors**

Substance abuse is often linked to broader social issues such as poverty, unemployment, family instability, and lack of education. These conditions create environments where both drug use and criminal behaviour are more likely to occur. Individuals engaging in substance and drug abuse are at heightened vulnerability to criminal victimization as their behaviours and circumstances often increase exposure to high-risk environments and interactions with perpetrators. This nexus elevates the likelihood of experiencing property crimes (e.g., robbery) and violent offences, including physical assault, homicide, and, for women, sexual violence (rape). The compromised judgement and situational awareness associated with substance use, coupled with potential engagement in high-risk activities (e.g., procuring illicit substances), exacerbate their susceptibility to exploitation and harm.

### **Types of Crimes Associated with Drug and Substance Abuse**

1. Violent Crimes: Assault, domestic violence, homicide
2. Property Crimes: Theft, burglary, shoplifting
3. Drug-related Offenses: Possession, trafficking, manufacturing
4. Order Crimes: Disorderly conduct, driving under the influence

### **Impact on Society**

The relationship between drug abuse and criminality places a heavy burden on society. It leads to overcrowded prisons, increased healthcare costs, reduced productivity, and weakened community safety. Families are also affected through breakdowns in relationships, neglect, and intergenerational cycles of substance abuse and crime. Children also suffer the most when families break due to divorce. There are also vulnerable in the sense that they can be abused physically, emotionally or sexually.

### **Prevention and Intervention Strategies**

1. **Education and Awareness-** Public education campaigns can help individuals understand the risks associated with drug use and its link to crime. Everyone to participate in the awareness campaigns as this will strengthen the process.
2. **Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs-**Providing accessible and effective treatment for substance abuse can reduce dependency and related criminal behaviours. Rehabilitation focuses on both physical recovery and psychological support. We must collaborate across all agencies to educate the public on these specific risks.
3. **Strengthening Law Enforcement-**efforts to combat drug trafficking and distribution networks are essential in reducing systemic crime.
5. **Community-Based Interventions-**Community support programs, youth engagement initiatives, and employment opportunities can help address underlying causes of drug abuse and criminality.
6. **Policy and Legal Reforms-**Governments should adopt policies that balance punishment with rehabilitation, such as drug courts and diversion programs.

## Conclusion

Drug and substance abuse is a significant driver of criminal behaviours, influencing individuals and communities in complex ways. Addressing this issue requires a holistic approach that combines prevention, treatment, law enforcement, and social support systems. By tackling both substance abuse and its root causes, societies can reduce crime rates and promote safer, healthier communities. Parliament must enact stiffer sentences for dangerous drug suppliers. We have to dismantle the syndicates fuelling this scourge because we already have those who are affected, we urgently need affordable, well-equipped rehab centres in all provinces, not just a few. On a positive note, Zimbabwe Multisectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan 2024-2030 recognises treatment and rehabilitation as one of its key pillars.

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