

## An exploration into Nyaope users and interventions to curb drug abuse in Gauteng, South Africa

Richard Wayne Charlton, Azwihangwisi Negota, Duxita Mistry

Gauteng Department of Community Safety  
Street Address: 64 Prichard Street, Johannesburg, 2000  
Corresponding Author: Richard Wayne Charlton

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**ABSTRACT:** South Africa is confronted with a high prevalence of substance abuse, comparatively speaking. It has been established that drug use affects not only individual users but also their families, friends, co-workers and communities at large. Additionally, children whose parents take drugs are themselves at greater risk of drug use and other risky behaviors. Other ramifications of illicit drug use include unemployment, poverty, an increase in contact crimes such as assault and property crimes, for instance, theft, and other social issues. In some regions, illicit drug use contributes to the rapid spread of infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis. The picture painted above implies that there is a need to intensify efforts to deal with the habit of using illicit drugs through awareness, prevention, treatment, as well as aftercare support. In addition, there is a need to enhance coordination and alignment of strategies between different role players involved in addressing the scourge of drug abuse in the Gauteng province. The **aim** of this paper is to explore drug use in the Gauteng province and to ascertain whether interventions implemented in the City of Tshwane to curb substance abuse have indeed reduced usage of drugs and crimes related thereto. The **Method** of the study was qualitative in nature, where themes were identified i.e. the drugs of choice, methods of ingesting drugs, the motive for drug use, drug accessibility and funding, interventions intended to curb drug abuse and effects of drug use on the users, family members and community members.

**KEYWORDS:** Drugs, Nyaope, Substance Abuse, Social Learning Theory and Interventions.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse is a devastating problem both globally and in South Africa. It presents itself with complicated challenges that threaten the social fabric of society and has severe complications for both users and non-users alike. Alcohol and substance abuse are the main contributors to health costs, social problems such as crime, gangsterism, domestic violence, unemployment and other social menaces (Henkel, 2011; Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). In fact, substance dependency statistics show that drug consumption (cannabis, cocaine and tik) in South Africa is approximately twice the global average and is the top in Africa (UNODC, 2014). Countries around the world are facing a crisis when it comes to the proliferation of drugs and its effects on social challenges. In South Africa, a new drug that has become popular and fashionable among young South Africans is a call for real concern. This drug, called Nyaope, is a relatively new designer drug which is used in many Black townships in South Africa (Mokwena, 2016). It emerged between the year 2000 and 2006 and has found its home in many areas across the country including the Tshwane townships of Soshanguve, Atteridgeville and Mamelodi (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014).

Nyaope has been cited as being the 'drug of choice' among thousands of young people across South Africa (Tau, 2013; Mokwena, 2016). The increased use of Nyaope has many implications for policing and social crime prevention within South Africa. According to the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (GDSC) (2014), there is a recurring debate among the schools of thought over the cause and etiology of substance abuse amidst the youth. The first view is that people abuse drugs and alcohol due to pleasure seeking tendencies, whilst the other view explains substance abuse due to external factors that predispose individuals to abuse alcohol and drugs (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). In the past decade, researchers, Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and community members have established a link between Nyaope and social ills such as crime, school dropout rates and broken family relationships. It is for this reason that it is important to explore the underlying factors that influence the spread of Nyaope among the youth in Gauteng. This paper explores the characteristics of Nyaope users in Gauteng and aims to evaluate interventions that are in place to prevent its use and assist in the recovery of users.

## **II. THE DEFINITION OF NYAOPE**

Nyaope is a drug that is sold in powder form which is often rolled and smoked with cannabis (Mokwena, 2016). The full composition of Nyaope is generally not known, however, most researchers agree that heroin is the main ingredient and the inclusion of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) has been documented (Davis & Steslow, 2014; Grelotti, et al., 2014; Thomas & Velaphi, 2014). According to the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (2014, p. 5), Nyaope refers to a drug that is made from cannabis (dagga), third-grade heroin, crystal meth, rat poison, bicarbonate of soda, detergent power, crushed ARVs, battery acid, milk powder and pool cleaner. Although Nyaope is mixed with many of the above mentioned illegal drugs, it was only classified as an illegal substance in March 2014, with the amendment of the Drugs and Trafficking Act of 2014 (Republic of South Africa, 2014). Before the amendment, large numbers of dealers and users freely sold and bought Nyaope with minimal fear of being arrested (Moeng, 2013).

## **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The purpose of including a theoretical framework in this article is to understand why many individuals are turning to substance abuse. In addition, by understanding the theoretical backing of substance abuse one can assist managers, researchers and policy developers to create programs to prevent substance abuse (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). According to Bahr and Hoffmann (2015), there are 11 social theories that have been used to explain drug use and abuse, namely: social learning theory, social control theory, strain theory, cognitive transformation theory, life course theory, the social development model, rational choice theories, community-level theories, personality theories, cognitive-behavioral theory and biosocial theories. In addition to the above-mentioned theories, theories of self-esteem or self-derogation, moral development, conflict labeling and various combinations of these have been used to describe the etiology of drug use and abuse (Bahr & Hoffmann, 2015). For the purpose of this article, however, only social learning theory will be outlined as it is the most notable theory that relates to substance abuse.

Social learning theory was first developed by Albert Bandura and states that people learn through observing other people's behavior, attitude and outcomes of those behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) stated that most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling, where one observes others, then forms an idea of how behaviors are performed and finally uses this information as a guide for action. When relating social learning theory to crime and deviance, one needs to look at Ronald Akers criminological theory of social learning theory of crime. In this theory, Akers (1977) attempted to explain how the learning process happens and how it produces crime or deviance. Social learning theory consists of four components, the first of which is differentially associated which refers to groups of people with whom one spends a lot of time with and provides the context in which learning occurs (Pedalono & Frailing, 2018). The second is definitions, which is related to one's attitude about certain behaviors (Pedalono & Frailing, 2018). The third is differential reinforcement and pertains to the rewards or punishments that are expected to follow certain behaviors. Finally, the fourth is imitation where one engages in the same or similar behavior as another upon observing that behavior (Pedalono & Frailing, 2018).

There have been numerous studies which have found empirical support for social learning theory as an explanatory theory of crime and deviance (Frailing & Harper, 2016). Social learning theory is often used in empirical studies as an explanation for alcohol and drug abuse and has found strong support (Pedalono & Frailing, 2018). In fact, according to Bahr and Hoffmann (2015, p. 200), social learning theorists suggest that motivations to use drugs are "learned through associations with significant others in small, informal groups such as peer groups and families". In these settings, individuals can acquire attitudes regarding drugs, their use and observe the behavior of others. The individuals then observe what others do, copy them and often begin taking drugs after seeing others do it (Bahr & Hoffmann, 2015).

## **IV. METHODOLOGY**

For this article, the researchers used secondary data that was obtained from two sources. Secondary data is data that is already available, has been collected and analyzed by someone else and can be published or unpublished data (Payne & Payne, 2004). The two reports where the data were collected from is the "Profile of Nyaope Users and Implications for Policing" (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014) and "Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Interventions to Curb Substance Abuse in the City of Tshwane" (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). The following section will discuss the research methods used in each original report.

The report on the effectiveness of interventions to curb substance abuse in the city of Tshwane used a mixed-method research design. However, for this article, only the qualitative data collection from both reports was extracted and used. Qualitative research includes the collection of data through participant interviews. One method is to use open-ended in-depth interviews or questions which allows the participants to provide answers in their own words (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Qualitative research is utilized when one may have little

knowledge on the subject or where little is known about the problem (Ebrahim & Sullivan, 1995, p. 196). When it comes to illegal substances, Nyaope is a relatively new drug on the market and little is known about the drug in terms of its users and what crimes are committed due to taking it (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). It is for this reason that a qualitative research design is best suited for both original reports and the current study in question. Finally, Tewksbury (2009, p. 38) argued that information that is gathered through qualitative research is richer, more informative and offers an enhanced understanding of a problem when compared to quantitative research (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014).

In-depth interviews were conducted with members of the South African Police Service (SAPS), including members of the Visible Policing Unit (VISPOL) as well as investigating officers who had investigated cases where Nyaope was used (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). In addition to police officers, other participants included, Non-Government Organization's (NGO's), Faith-Based Organizations (FBO's), drug users and recovered drug users (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014; Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). The participants were interviewed in the following areas: Atteridgeville, Berea, Derdepoort, Joubert Park, Eldorado Park, Hammanskraal, Meadowlands, Rustevaai, Mamelodi East, Mamelodi West, Soshanguve, Sunnyside, Temba, Laudium and Katlehong in Gauteng, South Africa (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014; Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). In the original research, there were two different categories of Nyaope users that were interviewed to compare their lifestyles and habits. These included habitual and non-habitual users of Nyaope. Non-habitual users can still live and function without smoking Nyaope, whilst habitual users cannot (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). In addition, counselors who were based at rehabilitation centers that work with Nyaope users were interviewed. Finally, family members of Nyaope users were also interviewed to understand the daily challenges faced by parents and siblings of Nyaope users (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014).

In both reports, the researchers used purposive sampling which is a non-probability sampling technique. Purposive sampling was used in both reports as the researchers had a specific set of characteristics that the participants ought to have. The participants in both reports needed to have been affected by or have knowledge about substance abuse and Nyaope (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014; Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Purposive sampling is best used when a researcher wants the participants to have a specific set of characteristics that will best be able to answer the research questions (Maxfield & Babbie, 2012; Palinkas, et al., 2015). The first study on the profile of Nyaope users included 49 participants. For this section of the study, the participants included six police officers, 30 Nyaope users, three counselors and 10 family members (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). The second report evaluated the interventions in place to reduce drug abuse in the province. For this section, the research included 31 respondents (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Therefore, for the analysis of this article, there were 80 participants involved in the research.

## **V. DISCUSSION**

To better understand the effects of Nyaope, it is important to understand the typical symptoms of a Nyaope user. The following are commonly seen symptoms of Nyaope users:

- Users of Nyaope separate themselves from loved ones, including family and friends
- Users are often argumentative, confrontational and resent authority
- Users do not have a well-considered sense of wrong or right and have been seen to have lost their moral bearings
- Users are sloppy and do not care about their outward appearance. It has been documented that some users do not change their clothes or clean themselves for weeks on end
- Users usually have dilated pupils; their eyes are red and have runny noses
- In terms of physiological effects, some users resemble walking zombies who in time are thin and the use of the drug affects their skin color. This is a result of the harmful ingredients in the drug (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014).

## **VI. FINDINGS OF NYAOPE USERS**

### **a. Age onset:**

The research found that users of Nyaope were between the ages of 15 and 29, where the majority of the participants stated that they started using the drug around the age of 15 (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). The findings of the research are consistent with another study by O'Connell, Boat and Warner (2009), which found that drug abuse tends to begin in mid-to-late adolescence. In addition, the findings show that Nyaope users are young people from different backgrounds, racial groups, ethnic groups, languages and socio-economic backgrounds.

**b. Gender:**

For the purpose of this article, gender will be defined as either male or female. Gender is an important category when researching substance abuse as it enables better design of interventions that are gender sensitive and appropriate. Previous studies have significantly focused on males as the main abusers of drugs and have cited the influence of culture, psychosocial, environmental and personality factors as the main reasons for male substance abuse as compared to females (Holden, McGregor, Blanks, & Mahaffey, 2012).

It is commonly assumed that substance abuse is predominantly a male issue. Confirming this view, the research found that most users of Nyaope were male (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). The study found that some female participants stated that their boyfriend or other male users introduced them to Nyaope and other drugs. While other female users stated they openly agreed to smoke Nyaope due to their own choice. Due to the methodological limitations of the research, one cannot deduce that Nyaope use is mainly a male drug, however, owing to the informative qualitative aspect of the research one can get a better understanding of why and how males and females turn to drugs.

**c. Academic Level:**

Due to the age of most Nyaope users (15-29), it is assumed that most users should either be in high school or have completed matric (Grade 12). A concerning theme emerged during the research which was that many of the respondents had not finished high school and had dropped out of school, citing Nyaope as the reason (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). The respondents mentioned that using the drug makes it difficult to concentrate and perform at school. The respondents stated that their need to satisfy their cravings made them resort to three things. First, the users stated they would skip classes to buy drugs. Second, they would then work with drug dealers to sell Nyaope in the schools for money or Nyaope. Finally, they would completely drop out of school, so they can permanently focus on their Nyaope addiction (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). The findings of the research could not determine whether the Nyaope users drop out of school because of failing grades, but the evidence points to the excessive use of Nyaope as the principle reason for dropping out of school. According to the research conducted by the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (2014), most of the respondents stated that they had lost hope and aspirations of returning to school.

**d. Methods of taking drugs:**

The participants were requested to explain how they ingest Nyaope. Most of the respondents indicated that they smoke dagga and Nyaope (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Another common method of ingesting Nyaope is through the "Bluetooth" method. This method includes injecting Nyaope-laced blood from one drug user into another user's arm (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Another common form of taking drugs is using needles (syringes). According to the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (2018), this suggests that the use of intravenous substances seems to be popular in the studied areas.

**e. Factors influencing the youth to turn to Nyaope:**

The factors that influence members of society to turn to Nyaope is important to understand as it can assist in the development of evidence-based prevention policies and programs. Some explanations for the use of Nyaope provided appeared to be external factors that were out of the user's control (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). In fact, the participants cited many reasons for the use of Nyaope, however, for the article only personal, experimental and environmental factors will be discussed.

**i. Personal Factors:**

Personal factors are those factors that individuals have power over and the capacity to act on them (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). Examples of personal factors include peer pressure and experimentation. Peer pressure is cited as one of the strongest predictors of youth behavior and is an influencing factor in young people's experimentation of drugs (Cheung & Cheung, 2006). Most of the participants in the study by the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (2014) cited peer pressure as the main reason they engaged in drug abuse. Additionally, most of the participants stated that they started experimenting with Nyaope in high school and were introduced to it by a friend. One participant stated that he originally started using Nyaope for entertainment and to impress his peers to avoid being stigmatized, however, he became a habitual user and eventually an addict (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). These findings are consistent with the findings of Boyd (2017), who found that young people tend to experiment with drugs to gain respect among their peers. It is important to note, however, that not all the Nyaope users stated they were coerced into using the drug, in fact, some admitted to using the drug voluntarily.

ii. Experimentation and Curiosity Factors:

Another aspect identified in the research was that some Nyaope users stated they wanted to experiment with Nyaope for thrill-seeking purposes(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). In the original report, it was pointed out that teenagers who have thrill-seeking behavior are at a higher risk of drug abuse due to the “high” that results from substance abuse (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). It is important to note, however, that many of the responses for using Nyaope are more individualistic than external or societal. Most of the respondents stated that their reason for using Nyaope was an intrinsic factor, such as experimentation, rather than an extrinsic reward(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014).

iii. Environmental Factors:

Environmental factors are factors which users have no control over and include dysfunctional families, poor parenting skills, poverty and unemployment. The following sections will highlight some environmental factors that users of Nyaope face in the Gauteng province.

**f. Easy Access and Availability of Drugs:**

Easy access to Nyaope is one of the main reasons why the participants stated they started using the drug. Compared to other drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, Nyaope is readily available and users know where and how to find it around Gauteng (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). One participant stated that the Nyaope business is flourishing, and it is increasing at a fast rate as it is easy to obtain without too much effort (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014).

One notorious hotspot for Nyaope in Gauteng is on the corner of Fife and Prospect Roads in Berea (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). This area is regarded as a drug haven where people in Gauteng and other provinces can purchase Nyaope at wholesale prices. During the research, it became evident that addicts live in the Berea Park nearby as it is easy for them to access the drug when need be. It was established in the research that drug dealers and traffickers in this area are notorious and have functional relationships with the users(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). One user stated that some addicts are given Nyaope to sell to other users in different areas like townships. One police officer mentioned that the operations aimed to clamp down on Nyaope in their areas are becoming less effective and unsuccessful. The reason for this is due to the drug lords and pushers being forewarned about police operations, through corruption within the SAPS(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014).

Importantly, both drug users and recovered users stated that the availability of their drug of choice was not a problem(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). The participants from Hammanskraal and Soshanguve reported that Dagga and Nyaope are commonly found from their neighbors, at train stations or on their way to schools (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).The study also identified that illicit drugs are also sold in the following locations: liquor outlets, supermarkets, spaza shops, taverns and unlicensed liquor outlets (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

According to the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (2018), despite the codes of conduct of schools to regulate and monitor the behavior of learners, the problem of substance abuse is still prevalent in the research areas. The findings of the study are corroborated with the results of a study conducted by Burnhams (2016) which indicated that drug abuse is widespread within school premises. The results found that students are offered or given illicit drugs at school and have confirmed to attending classes after using drugs (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

**g. Price of Nyaope:**

One of the notable attractions of Nyaope is the affordability of the drug. When compared to other psychoactive drugs such as cocaine and marijuana, Nyaope, is cheap and affordable for most young people, including the unemployed, school dropouts and impoverished families(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). One of the biggest pull factors of teenagers to the drug is the cost of it. The price of the drug differs in the locations it is found, in Berea one would expect to pay around R20 (\$1.34)<sup>1</sup> for a straw of Nyaope, whereas in Joubert Park it is R25 (\$1.68) and in townships it can cost up to R40 (\$2.68) for a straw of Nyaope(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). The fact that Nyaope is so cheap allows users to steal minor household goods and sell them at low prices so they can get their “fix”.

**h. Socio-economic Factors**

According to Sutherland (2012), users of drugs with a low socio-economic status are susceptible to substance abuse as a way of coping and escaping harsh realities coming from unemployment and a poor background. The current study investigated whether employment status, occupational class, parental education

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<sup>1</sup>Price of the rand-dollar exchange as of 18 September 2018, \$1 = R14.91

and household income of a user’s parent or guardian are influencing factors in determining the usage of Nyaope. The responses obtained from the participants varied and no solid conclusion could be established. Some participants stated that their parents were employed, however, earned a low salary. Other respondents stated that none of their parents were employed and others stated that both their parents had a stable job or were professionals and earned a very good salary(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). The research findings show that the employment status of a parent or guardian is not a determining factor in becoming a Nyaope user. In fact, Nyaope users came from various backgrounds and socio-economic strata. The current study did not set out to establish a direct link between socio-economic status and Nyaope usage and could not establish a causal link. It was clear from the findings, however, that even children from affluent families are susceptible to Nyaope usage and once addicted to the drug, Nyaope consumes the user’s entire life. Therefore, the majority of Nyaope users are high school dropouts and are unemployed which influences their own socio-economic status.

**i. Types of Crimes Committed by Nyaope Users:**

It is a well-documented fact that there is a link between substance abuse and criminal activity. Drugs and crime are two of the most stubborn and prominent social problems that South African communities face. Most of the participants who were interviewed stated that they were unemployed and do not have sufficient resources to maintain their lifestyles. Due to their circumstances and addiction, many of the participants admitted to engaging in crime to feed their habit. The common crimes that were identified include housebreakings, theft, stealing of appliances or steel, robbery, shoplifting, jewelry theft and theft of other household utensils(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). The participants confirmed that Nyaope users steal whatever they can get their hands on like water faucets, electric cables, copper and aluminum wires. Once they have obtained these items, they will sell them at scrap yards for cash and use the money for their next “hit”. Most respondents stated they prefer to commit minor crimes as these types of crimes require less energy, effort, planning and are easy to commit. It became clear that many of the participants were not concerned about being caught by the police when committing a crime as they are obtaining money for their drug habit.

Table I below shows the crimes that are commonly committed in the specific areas. The crimes listed below are the perceptions given by the participants who live in the following communities. From the crimes listed in Table I, participants were requested to identify drug-related crimes in each area. In Mamelodi and Soshanguve, the participants mentioned house robbery and rape, while in Hammanskraal pick-pocketing and shoplifting were cited(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Finally, in Derdepoort the participants mentioned assault and rape as the most common drug-related crime. The study further established that drug users are less inclined to commit serious crimes such as car hijacking and murder as they are in most instances “passive”(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

Atteridgeville	Mamelodi	Soshanguve	Hammanskraal	Derdepoort	Sunnyside
Car hijacking	House robberies	House robberies	Pick-Pocketing	Theft	Car hijacking
Assault	House burglary	Rape	Common Robbery	Prostitution	Assault
Robbery	Hijackings,	Murders	Shoplifting	Assault	Robbery
Rape	Rape	Car hijacking			Rape

**Table I: Common crimes committed per area**

Due to the findings of this research, it has become evident that there is a strong linkage between Nyaope use and crimes such as robbery, housebreakings and other petty crimes. It is evident that due to the low cost of Nyaope, users resort to minor crimes to obtain the drug. In fact, the linkage between Nyaope usage and crime has been verified by the SAPS. These findings suggest that social crime prevention strategies need to be improved and include the issues relating to Nyaope usage(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014).

**j. Family Relations:**

Nyaope, like other illicit drugs, affects not only the user but society as a whole. The findings of the research suggest that Nyaope negatively impacts the families and significant others of users. Most of the participants in the study highlighted that due to them being an addict or user, their relationship with their parents, siblings and other family members has collapsed or is non-existent(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). Reasons for the diminished relationship is due to the user’s deviant behavior, including stealing money and appliances from family and friends to maintain their habit. Likewise, the family members of the users confirmed this information and stated that the users have become an embarrassment and humiliation in the community. Some signs that family members noticed when the user started taking Nyaope included strange behaviors like stealing, lying, inconsistent eating patterns, poor hygiene and poor academic performance(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014).

**k. The lifestyle of Nyaope Users:**

The research identified four themes that were evident in the lifestyles of Nyaope users. These themes included the frequency of use, physical appearance, eating patterns and hobbies or extramural activities. The following section will briefly highlight some important aspects of each theme.

The study found that there are two types of Nyaope users known as habitual and non-habitual users (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). Habitual users, who made up the majority of respondents, are those who smoke Nyaope whenever that can. Non-habitual users are those who smoke Nyaope occasionally, this can be from once per day or four times per week. These users can live normal lives and can function without smoking Nyaope. The smoking patterns of habitual users ranged from three to ten times per day, however, some users indicated that they had smoked Nyaope 15 times in a day (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). It was clear from the research that the use of Nyaope increased as individuals got addicted to the drug where they would need to smoke a minimum of several times a day.

The physical appearance of most Nyaope users is a sore sight. They look as if they have not showered or bathed for several days. In fact, some participants stated that “Nyaope and water do not mix” (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). In other words, stating that by cleaning themselves, they can affect the effects of the drug. Users that were interviewed in Berea (Johannesburg), stated that they stay at the park where the drugs are sold and no longer return to their homes (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). Some users appeared emaciated and disengaged from day-to-day activities. The user’s nails are thin and damaged, their thumbs and little fingers are burnt, and they have reddish brown eyes. It was evident that many of the users appeared physically tired, apathetic and that many of the participants had a monotonous way of speaking. Finally, their speech was slow, incomprehensible and slurred at times (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014).

Eating habits differ from user to user, however, some of the habitual users mentioned that they would eat about two times per day if they could. One user mentioned that if he obtained R100, he would spend R95 on Nyaope and another R5 on something to eat (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). The food the users eat would consist of a packet of biscuits and snacks for R5. It is evident that Nyaope users do not eat healthily and do not have a fixed eating pattern. The users often share food with one another and will share with others who split their Nyaope with them. It shows a team effort or bond that Nyaope users are part of, where one needs to be part of a team to obtain both Nyaope and food (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). One participant also mentioned that she can spend up to three days without eating food and will rely on Nyaope to curb her hunger. Finally, appetite levels of users seem to be determined by the addiction stage of the user, as some prioritize Nyaope over food.

The final theme that was identified was that of extramural activities or hobbies. Non-habitual users mentioned that they played sports such as soccer in their spare time and most of the non-habitual participants attend church with their families over weekends (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). Habitual users, on the other hand, stated that they do not play any sport and do not participate in any activities. Some of the habitual users stated they would clean cars or become car guards to obtain money to buy Nyaope. It is clear from the findings that non-habitual users can lead normal lives, have hobbies and continue with their daily duties. What is also clear, however, is once the drug gets a hold of an individual, their whole life revolves around the drug and their focus is on how to get the drugs through whatever means necessary.

**l. Social Learning Theory and Nyaope Users:**

Social learning theory was discussed earlier in the article and resonates with the findings of the research. A large majority of participants indicated that they used Nyaope because of seeing family or friends using the drug. The participants mentioned that they developed an immense interest in the drug after witnessing a family member or friend smoking Nyaope. One participant mentioned that he experimented with the drug after witnessing a friend smoking Nyaope at school looking “cool and appealing” (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014). It is evident that Nyaope users observed their peers smoking the drug and witnessed nothing harmful, dire or dangerous about it. The social learning theory is closely related to other forms of deviant behavior and is therefore closely linked to Nyaope use.

**VII. FINDINGS OF THE DRUG ABUSE INTERVENTIONS EVALUATION:**

The findings for this section of the article are presented in terms of the four subsets of respondents interviewed. These include the current and the recovered drug users, non-governmental organizations and faith-based organizations, sector departments as well as community members. The research outlined some motives for drug use among the participants. The motives include pressures due to development stages from childhood to adulthood; poverty and unemployment; expectations from using drugs; lack of recreation amenities and development from childhood to adulthood (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

Children encounter dramatic physical, emotional and lifestyle changes as they develop from adolescence to young adulthood. During the research, it was established that developmental transitions like puberty and independence are strongly associated with drug abuse (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Likewise, a study conducted by Rocha-Silva (1997) states that youth use drugs to gain confidence to deal with their peers and daily stressors. In another study by Mohasoa (2010), the author argued that youth abuse substances because they are overwhelmed by challenges in their own lives, families or society at large.

The results of the study found that the participants attempted drugs due to curiosity (users wanted to experiment or explore or experience the feeling of drugs), to deal with stress, peer pressure, boredom, or to cope with strict parents (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Research indicates that the youth prefer to discuss issues with their peers more than they would their parents, family members, teachers or medical practitioners (Hoberg, 2001). According to Hoberg (2001), young people value the opinion or support of their peers more than any other social structure and it is argued that this increased pressure for recognition and acceptance from one's peers can lead the youth to use drugs (Ungar, 2006).

**a. Poverty and unemployment:**

The main factor behind drug abuse, according to the participants, is the high youth unemployment rate found in South Africa (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Respondents from Hammanskraal indicated that there are "lots of firms" in their area (especially at the Babelegi industrial township), but they remain unemployed, hence they resort to using drugs. Van der Vorst, Vermulst, Meeus, Deković and Engels (2009) share the same sentiments and it was revealed that community disorganization, poverty and high levels of unemployment are risk factors for illegal drug abuse. In the same study by Van der Vorst et al. (2009), the authors indicated that when a community is well organized, very few social problems tend to occur, and young people are less likely to turn to illicit drugs.

**b. Expectations from drug abuse:**

The study conducted by the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (2018) revealed that perceptions about drugs and its effects influence usage. According to Kadalie and Thomas (2013), adolescents who decide to use drugs as a pleasurable experience are more of a risk of becoming addicts later in their lives than those who choose not to. The research also discovered that alcohol use in early adolescence leads to drug abuse, where most of the participants stated that they started using alcohol and drugs in their high school days (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). It is apparent that such groups are disruptive, hyperactive, aggressive and commonly labeled by community members as antisocial or criminal (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

**c. Lack of recreation amenities:**

The researchers found that the participants believed one of the leading factors as to the high prevalence of drug abuse among the youth was the lack of recreation amenities in the researched areas. The participants stated that sporting facilities, among other amenities, would likely reduce boredom among young people. This would reduce the chances of the youth turning to drugs to reduce their boredom. The research identified that youth who partake in extracurricular activities are less likely to indulge in illicit drugs (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

**d. Interventions intended to curb drug abuse:**

Participants, mainly from Mamelodi, indicated that they are aware of programs or interventions intended to reduce drug abuse in their area. One of the most cited interventions is "Ke Moja, No, thanks I am fine without drugs" implemented by the Department of Social Development (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). The participants mentioned that attending rehabilitation centers allows them the opportunity to attend the "Ke Moja" workshops. A concerning fact is that the youth are not aware of any other initiatives dealing with drug abuse, other than the "Ke Moja" program.

Other participants from the Hammanskraal and Soshanguve areas indicated that they know of rehabilitation centers in their areas, however, they are unaware of any anti-drug abuse programs (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Overall, most of the participants stated that the anti-drug abuse programs in their areas, if any, are ineffective. They are regarded as a waste of time and money as most of the public is unaware of them and they are not doing anything to curb the drug abuse problem in their area (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).



**e. Non-governmental and Faith-based organizations:**

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs) offer drug rehabilitation services and implement initiatives to prevent drug use in the researched areas. This section identifies some of the anti-drug abuse interventions that are in place.

The participants from the NGOs and FBOs were requested to supply any information on interventions implemented by their organization to curb drug abuse. One FBO from Derdepoort (East Pretoria), stated that the organization accommodates drug addicts from all over South Africa to help them overcome their addiction. The organization teaches the addicts about the word of God and prays for them. The organization is well known for the support they give their patients throughout the rehabilitation process, offer patients counseling and direct them to appropriate activities to perform within the center (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). One member of the organization stated that the center has helped many drug users by motivating and advising them to manage and give up their drug lifestyle. It was also noted that many of the organization's previous patients are now gainfully employed. The organization stated that they supply pamphlets at local schools and shopping centers to warn people of the danger of using drugs as well as to inform the community of the services they offer.

It was apparent that all the rehabilitation centers that were visited had professionals (social workers) who provide drug users with counseling on a daily basis. It was established that most of the social workers in the organizations are from the local communities in which the centers are found. One member from a rehabilitation center in Soshanguve has a degree in social work and left her career to help drug addicts at the center with counseling and emotional support. Most of the NGOs interviewed, stated that they refer patients to social workers if they cannot address their problem (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

**f. Involvement by the police and other stakeholders:**

The research revealed that most organizations are working together to reduce substance abuse. One organization in Mamelodi indicated that they have a good working relationship with the Department of Education (especially principles of schools), as well as the provincial and national Departments of Social Development. Another center in Hammanskraal mentioned that they work closely with the Gauteng Department of Community Safety as they share the same offices. In addition, the same center stated that they work closely with the SAPS at different schools in the area (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). The centers in the researched areas stated that they often receive calls from school principles to conduct drug tests when they suspect a student of using drugs. Finally, the SAPS involvement includes doing outreach programs by conducting search and seizure operations at schools. What is clear from the information provided above is that the various organizations are willing to work together for a greater cause and reduce the statistics of drug abuse among the youth.

**g. Sector Departments interventions:**

The research established that it was not only NGOs and FBOs that have interventions to curb substance abuse, but various public-sector departments are implementing strategies to reduce it. The Gauteng Department of Community Safety has interventions aimed at the reduction of substance abuse in the City of Tshwane. Participants interviewed stated that the role of the department was to raise awareness by conducting campaigns and outreach programs to refer addicts to social development. In addition, the department aimed to reduce supply and demand through law enforcement initiatives with the Gauteng Traffic Police and Tshwane Metro Police Department (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). The department has also conducted substance abuse boot camps where their goal was to spend more time with drug users and get their experiences on substance abuse. It was noted, however, that due to a lack of funds the department is no longer running such campaigns.

Participants from the department stated that due to a lack of capacity they cannot determine if the interventions in place were effective or not due to the department not having the capacity to manage the increase or decrease of the rate of drug usage. Another halting effect on the evaluation of the programs is that the department could not locate substance abusers who took part in boot camps to evaluate if the interventions had worked (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

**h. Challenges faced by the sector departments during implementing interventions:**

There were numerous challenges faced by the department during the implementation of the interventions. These included budget, capacity and expertise in the substance abuse field. Regarding the budget, the respondent mentioned that they would like to assist drug addicts by sending them to rehabilitation centers. Unfortunately, these centers have an admission fee and the department could not help with fees due to a lack of budget allocated for such activities (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Likewise, the lack of capacity and expertise were mentioned as a challenge and the participant mentioned that the Gauteng

Department of Community Safety does not have the capacity or expertise in the form of social workers and psychologists to rehabilitate users, as it is not the mandate of the department.

**i. Challenges experienced by Non-governmental/Faith-based organizations in implementing drug abuse interventions:**

The research established that programs by the provincial government and municipalities alone cannot stop the demand for and supply of drugs. It is further highlighted to see real progress in the fight against drug abuse, active support and participation of leaders, professionals and concerned citizens are key (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Most of the participants stated that they do not receive adequate resources to provide support to drug users. One organization in Soshanguve indicated that they are not generating adequate income and the organization is sometimes unable to pay the social workers in the establishment. This NGO stated that patient relapse is one of the biggest concerns facing rehabilitation centers and to address this problem they have requested social workers to refer recovered drug users from other rehabilitation centers for aftercare services (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

One participant stated that many recovered drug users return to the habit of using drugs due to peer pressure and a lack of support from society and their families. The lack of support after rehabilitation is a major concern for the organizations as it means that many of the patients will soon return into their care. One respondent from a FBO mentioned that some patients discontinue their rehabilitation due to their urge for drugs. They then go out on the street and find ways of generating money to feed their habit. This is commonly found with Nyaope users (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014; Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

**j. Suggestions for future interventions:**

NGOs and FBOs who were part of the original study by the Gauteng Department of Community Safety were offered the opportunity to suggest interventions that could reduce substance abuse. The suggestions are presented as follows:

- Organizing drug prevention programs at schools to create awareness and teach the learners about the dangers of illicit drug abuse as a starting point.
- Development of recreational amenities such as sporting and entertainment facilities in localities to keep youth busy. They also mentioned that the availability of free WIFI in the areas is more likely to shift the focus away from the abuse of illicit substances.
- Creation of jobs and community development projects in order to keep youth busy came out very strongly from all participants.
- The government must provide NGOs/NPOs (non-profit organizations) with facilities and equipment to improve the lives of community members.
- Creation of after-school care centers.
- Conducting search and seizures, as well as random urine tests in schools on a daily basis.
- Conducting more drug awareness and prevention campaigns by government and NGO/Faith-based organizations in communities.
- Implementation of outreach programs especially at the illicit drug hotspots (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).

## **VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Substance abuse is a growing concern in the Gauteng province and there is a need to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to reduce it. It is recommended that the government, the private sector, communities, civil society organizations and academics work together to reduce substance abuse. The following recommendations are provided with the aim to reduce substance abuse:

- Provision of drug abuse health promotion activities, programs and services

The promotion of health activities and support programs should be geared towards supportive environments to support communities. Additionally, a re-orientation of health services with an emphasis on prevention as opposed to treatment and care is required. Anti-drug campaigns should include inter-sectoral collaboration and inter-organizational partnerships, including community participation and engagement (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018). Finally, the Department of Health should intensify its drug abuse interventions into the health promotion programs and alert citizens on the effects of drug abuse.

- Constructive media-based public education campaigns

The media needs to play a positive role in preventing substance abuse amongst the youth and ensure that the appropriate messages are designed and communicated through audience targeting (Gauteng Department of

Community Safety, 2018). This can be done by informing the public on substance abuse intervention programs that are found within different cities or areas.

- Development and implementation of school-based substance abuse programs

It is recommended that the Departments of Social Development and Education should improve the implementation of school-based prevention programs with a special focus on reinforcing the “Ke Moja, No, thanks I am fine without drugs” program. This can be achieved through the following:

- Programs offering active learning sessions to create awareness about the effect of drugs on citizens.
- Empowering youth with skills to resist media temptation and, deconstructing media messages that promote drug abuse.
- Youth involvement in the implementation of interventions.
- Improve the quality and number of intervention programs and make them accessible to the community.
- Involve the community in awareness campaigns(Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2018).
- Provision of recreational facilities

Through the research conducted it is apparent that there is a lack of recreational facilities in the areas studied. It is recommended that recreational facilities should be developed in these areas to keep youth engaged and as a substitute for focusing on illicit drugs. In addition, the distances that community members need to travel to access rehabilitation centers or drug abuse support needs to be shortened in order to give all members of society equal access.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

The findings show that there is limited knowledge about the consequences of drug use among the users. It is apparent that the majority of drug users are the youth and begin to abuse substance around the age of 15. Even with various programs in place, such as “Ke Moja, No, thanks I am fine without drugs”, more and more youth are turning to drugs.

The study identified that academic advancement of the youth reduces the likelihood of one turning to drugs. Additionally, the research established that the use of illicit substances is higher amongst teenagers (under 16) as compared to youth above 19 years old. These findings call for the intensification of interventions at stages early on in life and especially in schools.

The media have an important role to play by diminishing the use of drugs, particularly Nyaope and dagga which has the potential for disastrous outcomes in society. If used correctly mass media will be an effective tool in preventing drug use among the youth. Overall, the study identified that there is a wealth of knowledge in ways to reduce substance abuse, however, the implementation and community awareness is lacking.

Finally, it is apparent that the social learning theory has an important role to play in understanding substance abuse. It is important to identify the root causes of substance abuse and by linking it to a specific theory, one can identify viable programs to reduce substance abuse in society. The findings of the study closely link the social learning theory with substance abuse as many of the respondents mentioned that their reasons for turning to drugs were due to learning or copying others.

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