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**INFLUENCE OF PEER GROUPS ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG STUDENTS IN  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MBALE MUNICIPALITY, UGANDA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to find out the influence of peer groups on substance abuse among students in secondary schools in Mbale municipality, Uganda. The objectives of this study were: to find out influence of peer group at school on substance abuse among students in secondary schools, influence of peer group at home on substance abuse among students in secondary schools and influence of peer group in the neighborhood on substance abuse among students in secondary schools in Mbale municipality, Uganda. Cross-sectional survey design was employed in the study. The study population comprised of all public and private secondary schools in Mbale municipality. The sampling was done using stratified sampling to obtain data from categories of schools. The schools were chosen from the strata using stratified sampling method. A head teacher from each sampled school was selected to participate in the study. The total number of respondents was 373 students and 4 head teachers. A Closed-ended Questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents in order to address the objectives of the study. The key findings showed that peer group pressure at school, at home and in the neighborhood contributed to substance abuse among students. Similarly, result from the Pearson correlation revealed that there was a significant, positive and very high relationship between peer group at school ( $r(354) = .723, p (<.05)$ ), at home ( $r(354) = .631, p (<.05)$ ) and in the neighborhood ( $r(354) = .871, p (<.05)$ ). And substance abuse among students. Based on this, it was concluded that exposure to environment which is dominated by crime and drug activities will highly influence students to abuse substance, similarly in the schools where the rules are not properly followed by students. The study recommended that schools should establish strict rules and regulations that will combat the challenges of drug abuse among students so that other students will not imitate this illegal act while in secondary schools, also parents should watch out and monitor their children in order to avoid bad company and bad behaviors like substance abuse. Parents should also watch who their children move and interact with. This can be done by frequently monitoring their children's behavior and movement with other peers.