

The Influence of Substance Abuse on Students' Academic Performance in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract- Substance abuse refers to the harmful or excessive use of drugs or alcohol that leads to negative consequences on an individual's physical, mental, and social well-being. It involves the misuse or overuse of substances, such as illegal drugs, prescription medications or alcohol, in a way that impacts one's daily functioning, relationships, and overall health. Substance use has been on the increase in many parts of the world for quite some time now and many stakeholders have expressed their concerns on how this can adversely affect the users. Students in various institutions have also taken up this act which is causing school authorities to implement rules to curb the menace. The alarming evidence in the prevalence of drug abuse, the effects and consequences of substance abuse among students has called for concern and challenge to all helping professions to mount strategies of equipping youths with skills of living devoid of substance abuse. This paper therefore discusses the influence of substance abuse on students' academic performance in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. The writer relied on context analysis and secondary data such as published and unpublished materials like text books, journals, newspapers and internet materials to gather and analyse the required data. The writer recommends among others that Counsellors are required to provide drug abuse education to the adolescent in Nigerian tertiary institutions. There is also the need for the establishment of counselling centres for drug control in the schools, community and private organisations.

Keywords: *Substance abuse, academic performance, tertiary institutions*

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescent substance use is common and has been linked to poor academic achievement. Few researchers have looked at the relationship between academic success and complete abstinence from all substances. Adolescent drug users at Nigerian higher education institutions are a source of embarrassment to parents, educators, government officials, and the general public. This student body's ongoing drug addiction has the potential to lead to psycho-social issues in society. It is hoped that this cruel habit and the issues it raises won't result in the next generation of young people becoming deranged. Because of the

frequent and widespread drug crises at many Nigerian educational institutions, this issue is not hypothetical.

The transitional stage between childhood and adulthood known as adolescence is characterized by a number of changes in the body, mind, and social structure. Adolescents are a demographic group that comprises individuals ages 14 to 25. In Nigeria, the majority of students attending post-secondary institutions are typically adolescents between the ages of 14 and 25 (Olugbenga-Bello, Adebipe, & Abodurin, 2019). Adolescence is a period of experimentation, discovery, inquisitiveness, and identity quest. A portion of this pursuit is taking risks, such as the use and abuse of psychoactive substances, which are medicines that primarily affect the brain to provide sleepiness, encouragement, or mood swings among users. The enormous responsibility of forging an identity falls to adolescents. Adolescents who are maturing have the opportunity to reflect on their identity and distinctive qualities and this can reflect on their newly developed cognitive capacities. Self-concept and self-esteem are the two parts that make up identity (American Psychological Association, 2022).

Self-esteem refers to an individual's feelings regarding their self-concept, whereas self-concept is a collection of beliefs about oneself, including characteristics, roles, objectives, interests, values, and political and religious views. Teens are ready to try out new behaviours because of all the developmental changes they go through. Risk-taking, which is a natural aspect of teenage development, is the outcome of this experimenting (Alimi & Olayiwola, 2015). Adolescents who take risks can experiment with new decision-making techniques, develop their personalities, and win the respect and acceptance of their peers (Agunlana, 2019).

Regretfully, a number of the risks that teenagers take could seriously endanger their health and welfare. These include abusing drugs, smoking cigarettes,

drinking too much alcohol, and becoming pregnant. According to Odejide (2020), a substance is considered abused when its usage is not pharmacologically essential, particularly when it is used in defiance of a law that prohibits it or when an excessive amount of a socially acceptable beverage is consumed. According to Kamal; Huq, Mali, Akter, and Arafat (2018), adolescents' physical and psychological development might suffer significant, occasionally irreparable harm from long-term substance use.

Any molecule that has the potential to alter biological function through its chemical effects is considered a drug (Okoye, 2021). According to Mohiuddin (2019), it is also regarded as a drug that alters perceptions, cognition, emotion, behaviour, and general bodily functioning. According to Mohammedpoorasl et al. (2024), this might be viewed as chemical modifications of living tissues that have the potential to alter behaviour and psychology.

For instance, in Kwara State today, the consequences of substance use are diverse and include disruption of interpersonal relationships, particularly within the family, criminal behaviour, school failure, vocational problems, and failure to achieve normal adolescent milestones. Despite this, these adolescents are expected to be the future leaders of the country, despite the alarming evidence regarding the prevalence of drug abuse and the effects and consequences of substance abuse among students. This has called for concern and challenged all helping professions to mount strategies of equipping youths with skills of living devoid of substance abuse. Omege (2015) and Oshiokeya and Alli (2016) conducted several researches among Benin City college of education students and discovered that students and young people from easy-going backgrounds engage in the usage of cannabis and other stimulants like amphetamines. Therefore, it appears that young people are also heavily involved in substance misuse. Drug addiction has grown to be such a serious issue for all well-meaning Nigerians, especially the Federal Government, that an agency such as National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has been set up to fight the social ill with the goal of either completely eliminating or drastically curbing its spread. Substance misuse is a significant issue in Nigerian schools, colleges, and universities, according to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) of Nigeria (NDLEA,

2023). The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency has stated that Kwara State is leading the North Central States in drug and substance usage (NDLEA, 2024). The state has 13%, the states of Nasarawa and Benue have 11.8 and 11.6 percent respectively, according to the agency. The announcement was made in Ilorin, the state capital, during an event hosted by the Government Secondary School (GSS), Ilorin, Old Boys Association, 82 set, by Ajanaku Babaoye, the Assistant Commander of the NDLEA for Kwara State.

Since students pick up behaviour from and emulate their liked and respected peers, a large portion of these students' actions are strongly influenced by their peer culture. Adolescents' strong desire to be aesthetically pleasing to others plays a major role in the emergence of eating disorders, drinking alcohol, using drugs and tobacco, tanning, engaging in unsafe sexual behaviour, and being more prone to injury, among other behaviours. Adolescents who participate in risky behaviour frequently have poor self-control and high levels of conflict with their parents, which may indicate that they use this behaviour as a coping mechanism for their stressful lives. Substance-abusing adolescents usually perform worse academically. By influencing attitudes toward alcohol and serving as role models, parents and friends have an impact on teenage drinking (Ajala, 2022). However, there is also a strong correlation between drug usage and parental deprivation brought on by divorce, death, separation, or conflict (Odejide, 2016). Therefore, the influence of drug addiction on students' academic performance at Nigerian tertiary institutions is covered in this study.

Concept of Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is defined as the excessive and continuous self-administration of a substance without respect to the medically or culturally approved patterns, according to NAFDAC (2024), as referenced by Haladu (2023). It could also be understood as drug use to the point where it impedes a person's ability to maintain their health and engage in social interactions. The dangerous or excessive use of drugs or alcohol that has an adverse effect on a person's physical, mental, or social well-being is referred to as substance abuse (Alimi & Olayiwola, 2015). It is the abuse or overuse of drugs, alcohol, or prescription medicines in a way that interferes with day-to-day activities, interpersonal relationships, or general health.

One of the main causes of human self-destruction is drug misuse, and this has spread to every corner of the globe, especially to South Asian nations like Bangladesh (Rahman et al. 2016). Drug misuse has been recognized as a global public health concern in recent years (Alimi & Olayiwola, 2015). In Bangladesh for example, where the majority of abusers are claimed to be young, between the ages of 18 and 30, it is the most worrisome and an increasingly prevalent issue (Islam & Hossain, 2017). According to a previous report, over 80% of drug abusers in Bangladesh are young people (between the ages of 16 and 35), with 33% of abusers beginning their drug consumption between the ages of 15 and 19; it also indicated that 50% abusers are educated people (Mohiuddin, 2019).

Worldwide, substance misuse is a serious public health issue (Mohiuddin, 2019). In Nigeria and other parts of the world, teenage drug use and misuse has emerged as one of the most alarming health-related issues (NDLEA, 2023). Many teenagers who attend school have mental health issues, either momentarily or chronically. Some go nuts, struggle to conform to educational settings, and ultimately give up on education. In order to prevent fatal diseases, Odejide (2016) cautioned that drug abusers exhibiting stress, anxiety, depression, behavioural changes, exhaustion, and changes in appetite should receive treatment from medical professionals and counsellors.

Substance misuse can occur for a number of reasons, such as hedonistic intent, stress relief, emotional or psychological problems, or social pressure. Prolonged substance abuse, however, can result in addiction, a condition where a person develops a physical and psychological dependence on the substance.

Substances Students Frequently Use

Undergraduate students had the highest rate of drug addiction during the difficult developmental stage that occurs between adolescence and adulthood. This stage is characterized by a variety of physical, psychological, and social changes (Akanbi et al., 2015).

i. Hard drugs and alcohol are substances that are frequently utilized. These substances fall into three categories: stimulants (cocaine, crack, amphetamines), depressants (heroin, barbiturates),

and hallucinogens (marijuana, cannabis, ecstasy). These narcotics have been observed to be consumed, inhaled, smoked, injected, or snorted, whilst alcohol is available in a variety of brands and types of hard liquor.

ii. Tobacco, Indian hemp, cocaine, morphine, heroine, alcohol, ephedrine, caffeine, glue, barbiturates, and other substances are other examples of commonly used drugs or substance misuse.

iii. Other substances refers to the abuse or overuse of drugs, alcohol, prescription pills, or illicit substances in a way that negatively affects a person's relationships, day-to-day activities, and general health.

Reasons for Substance Abuse among Students

Students from all over the nation, with varying cultural backgrounds, values, and traditions, converge on universities to pursue their education. Students living in dorms or hostels without parental supervision interact with people from a variety of backgrounds, which could affect their habits and behaviours. Fresh students may experience loneliness, insecurity, depression, and be more prone to dangerous decisions, such as choosing the wrong companions and engaging with the wrong people, due to their unfamiliarity with the university environment (Hossain et al. 2019). According to Akankbi et al. (2015), these dangerous behaviours also lead to drug abuse, excessive alcohol drinking, and cigarette smoking.

There are several reasons why some students may turn to substance abuse:

i. Peer pressure: Students may feel pressured to conform to social norms and engage in substance use to fit in with their peers.

ii. Stress and academic pressure: The demands of school, homework, examinations, and extracurricular activities can create a high level of stress for students. Some may turn to substances as a way to cope with this pressure.

iii. Emotional struggles: Students may use substances as a way to escape or numb emotional pain, such as depression, anxiety, or trauma.

iv. Curiosity and experimentation: Some students may be curious about the effects of drugs and alcohol and choose to experiment with them.

v. Lack of information or awareness: Students may abuse substances because they are unaware of the dangers and repercussions involved. This ignorance could cause them to act in this way.

vi. Family history: Students who have a history of substance misuse in their family are more likely to experience substance abuse problems themselves.

vii. Availability and accessibility: Substance usage may increase if they are readily available to students in their surroundings.

viii. Poverty: Easy access to drugs, relational difficulties, mental stress from family issues, and poverty are additional causes of drug misuse (Star, 2023). Unsafe sex (Mohammadpoorasl et al. 2024), subpar academic performance (Bajwa et al. 2023), clinical depression, academic discontinuity, and other troubling consequences of drug usage are among the alarming effects.

It has been proven that drug abuse is an indicator of poor academic achievement (Bajwa et al. 2023) and leads to a high rate of probability of becoming dropout, as most often the abuser students miss classes (Akanbi et al. 2015) and tutorials and are even absent in examinations (Shazzad et al. 2023). It's important to note that each student's situation is unique and individual factors may contribute to substance abuse. It is crucial to provide education and support to help students make healthier choices.

Substance Abuse's Effects on Students' Academic Achievement

a. Students' academic performance can suffer greatly from substance addiction. Students that utilize drugs have trouble concentrating, staying focused, and remembering what they have learned. As a result, there may be low engagement in class, incomplete assignments, and bad marks (Balogun, 2016).

b. Abuse of substances can also result in a decline in motivation, an increase in absenteeism, and trouble finishing assignments.

c. Students who abuse substances may experience cognitive impairments and impaired decision-making, which may result in poor judgment and unsafe behaviour. This may make it more difficult for them to succeed academically and generally in school (Okoye, 2021).

d. Drug abusers not only become unwilling to follow administrative rules, but their health also deteriorates as a result of skipping meals, sleeping late at night, getting too little or too much sleep, and engaging in less physical activity (Rahman, Ahmad & Ali, 2016).

e. Substance abuse may also contribute to psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which can further impact students' ability to perform well academically.

f. Students who abuse drugs suffer from some underlying medical conditions (e.g., cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, heart disease, etc.) and mental health conditions (e.g., bipolar disorder, anti-social personality disorder, anxiety disorder) (Schulte & Hser, 2023).

g. The quality of life of drug abusers often drops; abusers get sick more often than non-abusers. They sleep longer than the normal sleeping time, and drug abusers are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases and higher levels of depression than non-abusers (Islam & Hossain, 2017).

h. Due to their regular sleeping patterns and physical activity, non-abusers have a surprisingly low sickness rate compared to drug abusers, who are physically sedentary and suffer from a variety of chronic ailments (Omaga, 2015).

i. Substance abusers' personal lives, as well as their relationships with friends, family, and teachers, are greatly impacted by their addiction. Studies revealed that drug addicts were unable to keep up regular ties with their lecturers and frequently had bad relationships because of their low attendance records and inability to pay attention during lectures (Balogun, 2016).

j. Abuse of substances might interfere with a student's participation in extracurricular activities and social relationships, which can make them feel alone and worse off academically. Addicting substances can also result in disciplinary measures for students, which can have long-term effects on their academic career (Okoye, 2021).

Strategies to Support Students Taking Substance Abuse

There are numerous approaches to support kids in abstaining from drugs:

i. Education and awareness: Giving students a thorough education on the dangers and repercussions of substance usage can provide them with the information they need to make wise decisions.

ii. Positive role models and peer support: Students who surround themselves with supportive and upbeat peers are less likely to be influenced by those who might promote substance misuse. Teachers, therapists, and community leaders are examples of positive role models who can have a big influence on students' decisions (Fayombo, 2020).

iii. Supporting mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress can help students deal with emotional struggles without turning to drugs (Cook & Moore, 2023).

iv. Developing resilience and coping skills: Equipping students with healthy coping mechanisms, stress management techniques, and problem-solving skills can help them deal with challenges in a productive way, reducing the likelihood that they will turn to drugs for relief.

v. Parental involvement: It is important to involve parents in prevention efforts. By teaching parents about the warning signs of substance abuse, encouraging open communication, and providing resources for support, parents can help students develop a strong support system (Alladu, 2023).

vi. Creating a supportive school environment: Schools can implement policies and programmes that promote a safe and drug-free environment, such as random drug testing, counselling services, and extracurricular activities that encourage healthy lifestyles.

vii. Community involvement: Working together with healthcare practitioners, law enforcement, and community organizations can help give students access to more resources, support, and preventative programmes.

A comprehensive strategy including education, prevention, intervention, and support is needed to address substance abuse. In order to increase awareness of the dangers and repercussions of substance abuse, communities, parents, and schools can work together to provide resources, counselling services, and prevention programmes (Cook & Moore, 2023). Effectively resolving substance misuse can aid students in regaining focus, enhancing their academic achievement, and guaranteeing a more promising future. Recall that preventative initiatives ought to be continuous, diverse, and inclusive of all relevant parties in the student's life.

II. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the worst threats Nigerians face today is adolescent substance misuse. It is a recognized social vice that needs to be eliminated. Despite the government's present support of the fight against drug addiction, drug addicts' dependence on substances causes students to behave abnormally. Counselling practitioners/Psychologists can assist students in resolving their issues in the following ways:

i. In Nigerian tertiary institutions, counsellors are mandated to educate adolescents on drug abuse. Therefore, it is advised that drug misuse counselling

be taught in schools as a core subject. This kind of counselling concentrates on particular issues that arise from drug usage.

ii. Substance abuse appears to be one potential contributing element to the many health-related reasons why students may not perform well academically. Thus, school health programmes which address a variety of factors contributing to academic challenges, including substance abuse play a critical role in enhancing academic achievement.

iii. Adopting a holistic strategy to address substance use necessitates a range of tactics, such as education, screening, intervention, and referral-making. Schools should prioritize this approach to support both student health and academic performance.

iv. Health education courses at post-secondary institutions should include campaigns against substance use, with a particular emphasis on the negative effects of the substances used.

v. The creation of counselling centres for drug control is also necessary. Every community should have this either built by government or private sector.

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