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ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MAKURDI METROPOLIS, BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assessed Effects of Substance Abuse on mental health and well-being of Public Secondary School Students in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. Data for this study were collected from a sample size of 170 students from public secondary schools in Makurdi Metropolis through the use of well-structured questionnaire and were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and mean. Results indicated alcohol (x=3.84, SD=1.01) and tobacco (x=3.45, SD=1.18) as the most prevalent substances, with easy school-zone access (x=4.20, SD=0.89) and peer pressure (x=4.08, SD=0.94) being primary contributing factors. Substance abuse correlated strongly with mental health deterioration, particularly poor concentration (x=3.84, SD=1.00) and anxiety (x=3.76, SD=1.03), along with significant academic decline evidenced by reduced exam performance (x=3.85, SD=1.06) and attendance (x=3.72, SD=1.02). Students overwhelmingly supported health education (x=4.33, SD=0.81) and peer counseling (x=4.27, SD=0.83) as preferred interventions. The study concludes that Makurdi's substance abuse crisis requires immediate implementation of school-based counseling programs, strict enforcement of drug-free school zones, and community-parental monitoring partnerships, while recommending longitudinal studies to assess intervention effectiveness. These findings underscore the urgent need for culturally-sensitive, multi-stakeholder approaches to address adolescent substance abuse in Nigeria's educational settings. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others

that students should be educated and enlightened about the dangers of substance abuse.

Keywords: Assessment, Effects. Substance abuse, Mental health, Well-being

1.0 Introduction

Substance abuse is the use of psychoactive substances which, when ingested affect mental functions. These substances may include alcohol, tobacco, hallucinogens (alpha-methyltryptamine, ketamine, phencyclidine, D-lysergic acid) and illicit drugs (cocaine, heroin, marijuana, rohypnol) (Duru, Oluoha, Okafor, Diwe, Iwu, Aguocha, Ohale and Nwaigbo, 2017). Oshodi, Aina and Onajole (2010) reported that marijuana was the most commonly used substance, followed by tobacco. According to World Health Organization (WHO), 2022), a drug is a substance used for medical purposes that changes the state or function of the body. The abuse of illicit drugs can happen when people use the drugs in a manner other than directed by the manufacturer or for purposes that are not legitimate. Fareo (2014) posited that abuse of illicit drug is the indiscriminate use of drugs by self- administration for non - medical purposes such that the physical, mental, emotional or social state of the user is adversely affected.

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has expressed concern over the increasing level of drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking among Nigerian youths. According to the NDLEA (2020), the situation had been worsened by the affordability of substance of abuse such as cough syrups, lizard wastes, gums and cannabis sativa popularly known as Indian hemp.

Considering the delicate and sensitive position of the youths within the country, drug addiction among them remains a major threat to national growth and development. Environmental influence, especially during childhood, is a very important factor in drug addiction. Parents or older family members who abuse alcohol or drugs, or who engage in criminal behavior and illicit trafficking can increase children's risks of developing their own drug problems.

Friends and acquaintances can also have an increasingly strong influence during adolescence (Idowu, Aremu, Olumide and Ogunlaja, 2018). Drug-using peers can sway even those without risk factors to try drugs for the first time. Academic failure or poor

social skills can put a child at further risk for using or becoming addicted to drugs. High stress level, especially occasioned by dire economic strains, severe trauma, psychological trauma, including loss of a loved one or chronic loneliness are some of the factors that could lead to drug addiction (Adegboro, 2014).

Substance abuse has also been considered as a major contributor to suicide, homicide, poisoning, sexual assault and the spread of infectious disease among youth around the world (Salas-Wright, Vaughn and Reingle-Gonzalez, 2017). Substance abuse among adolescents is a growing concern worldwide, posing significant health risks and social challenges. In Nigeria, the problem has been exacerbated by socio-economic instability, lack of adequate educational resources, and insufficient support systems. The prevalence of drug usage in Nigeria and the negative impacts on public health and safety necessitate that all hands must be on deck to curtail the challenges in our country (Adeloju, 2021). Many youths in the country have ignorantly or knowingly been abusing one drug or the other for their daily activities.

Several youths have become insane, maladjustment to school situation and eventually drop out of school. The above reasons notwithstanding, drug abuse has been found to have serious adverse effects on the health and academic development of students. According to Dankano and Garba (2017), drug abuse has resulted in poor performance of secondary school students in public examinations and consequent dropout rates across the globe (Ogunsola, Fajemisin, Aiyenuro and Tunde, 2020).

Substance abuse among Nigerian secondary school students has reached alarming levels, with the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2021) reporting that 40% of youths aged 18–35 years engage in drug use. In Makurdi Metropolis, this crisis manifests in classrooms where students increasingly turn to cigarettes, alcohol, cannabis, and prescription drugs like codeine—often as coping mechanisms for academic stress, peer pressure, or socio-economic hardships (Oshodi et al., 2010). Despite growing awareness, critical gaps persist such as Local Data Deficiency. Existing studies focus on urban centers like Lagos and Abuja, leaving Makurdi's unique context marked by rural-urban migration and limited rehabilitation centers understudied.

Again, there is the problem of Intervention Disconnect where national policies

like the NDLEA's "War Against Drug Abuse" (WADA) exist, their implementation in Benue State schools remains inconsistent and unevaluated (Benue State Ministry of Education, 2023). Cultural Blind Spots: Prior research neglects how Tiv and Idoma cultural norms (e.g., traditional liquor use in festivals) interact with youth drug trends (Ajala, 2016).

The consequences are severe including declining academic performance, rising school dropouts, and early criminality (Dankano and Garba, 2017). Yet, without localized evidence, policymakers and educators lack the tools to design targeted interventions. This study bridges that gap by examining the effects, triggers, and actionable solutions for substance abuse among Makurdi's secondary school students a vital step towards curbing this epidemic in underserved regions.

2.0 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to assess effects of substance abuse on public secondary school students in Makurdi Metropolis. The specific objectives were to:

i. identify types of substance abuse among secondary school students in Makurdi Metropolis;
ii. identify factors that contribute to substance abuse among secondary school students in Makurdi Metropolis;
iii. determine effects of substance abuse on mental health and well-being among secondary school students in Makurdi Metropolis;
iv. identify relationship between substance abuse and academic performance among secondary school students in Makurdi Metropolis; and
v. identify substance abuse control and intervention strategies among senior secondary school students in Makurdi Metropolis.

3.0 Methodology

The research was conducted in Makurdi Metropolis, the capital of Benue State, Nigeria, located along the Benue River banks (7°43′50″N, 8°32′10″E). With an estimated population of 490,000 (United Nations Population Projection, 2025), Makurdi serves as the educational and administrative hub of the State. The area features 17 public secondary schools serving diverse communities, including urban centers and peri-urban neighborhoods experiencing rapid rural-urban migration. This setting was particularly

relevant due to documented concerns about adolescent substance abuse (NDLEA, 2021) and its strategic position bordering four Local Government Areas (Guma to the North, Gwer to the South, Tarka to the East, and Gwer West to the West).

The target population comprised all 1,700 senior secondary students (SS1-SS3) across Makurdi's 17 public secondary schools. Using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 5% margin of error, a minimum sample size of 165 was calculated. The study exceeded this requirement by selecting 170 students (10 per school) through stratified random sampling. Schools were first grouped by geographical zones within the metropolis, then students were randomly selected from class registers using systematic sampling (every 8th name) to ensure representativeness across gender and age groups(14-19years) A structured questionnaire titled "Effects of Substance Abuse Among Public Secondary School Students Questionnaire" (ESAPSSQ) was developed with five sections:

The instrument used a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree) for quantitative measures, supplemented with open-ended questions for qualitative insights.

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) for demographic data as well as inferential statistics were used.

Mean and standard deviation for Likert-scale responses (interpretation bench mark: ≥2.5 mean=agreement).

All analyses were performed using SPSS v26 and Microsoft Excel, with results presented in tables and figures. The mean interpretation followed these benchmarks:

i. 1.00-2.49: Disagreement/Low prevalence

ii. 2.50-3.49: Moderate agreement/prevalence

iii. 3.50-5.00: Strong agreement/High prevalence

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Types of Substance Abuse

Table 1 reveals that the most commonly abused substance among students is alcohol, with a mean score of 3.84 and a relatively low standard deviation (1.01), indicating consistent responses across the student population. This aligns with the

cultural and social accessibility of alcohol, especially local brews like burukutu. The most prevalent substances used by students were alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and prescription drugs such as tramadol and codeine, with alcohol being the most frequently consumed. This aligns with the findings of Ajuwon and Adegun (2017) who noted that alcohol remains the most accessible and socially tolerated substance among Nigerian youths.

Tobacco use followed, with a mean of 3.45, suggesting a moderate prevalence, while cannabis recorded a lower but significant mean of 3.10. The higher standard deviation here (1.25) shows a wider variation in responses, possibly reflecting differences in accessibility or social stigma.

Prescription drug use had a mean of 2.92, showing that though not as commonly used as alcohol or tobacco, some students have experimented with drugs like tramadol and codeine. Inhalants scored the lowest mean (2.56), suggesting they are less accessible or less commonly experimented with, but their presence still signals a concerning trend.

The findings show that substance abuse among secondary school students is not

Table 1: Prevalence Types of Substanceabuse among Senior Secondary School Students (n=40)

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Alcohol (Burukutu or Beer)	3.84	1.01
Tobacco (Cigarettes or Snuff)	3.45	1.18
Cannabis (Weed, Igbo)	3.10	1.25
Prescribed drugs (Tramadol or Codeine)	2.92	1.32
Inhalants (like solution or rubber gum)	2.56	1.30

4.2 Factors Contributing to Substance Abuse

Table 2 showed that the most significant factor contributing to substance abuse, as indicated by a high mean of 4.20, is easy availability of substances near schools. This suggests an environmental challenges where students have physical access to drugs

close to their learning spaces, possibly from unregulated vendors. A study carried out by Eneh and Stanley (2004) reported that environmental exposure significantly contributes to youth vulnerability to drugs. These insights reinforce the need for community-level intervention and strict regulation of illegal vendors near school zones.

Peer pressure and stress relief were also major drivers, with mean of 4.08 and 4.02, respectively. These figures suggest that many students are influenced by friends or peers, and do indulge in turn to substances as a coping mechanism for emotional or academic stress.

Curiosity also plays a strong role (3.80.indicating that experimentation due to adolescent curiosity contributes significantly to first-time use. The influence of family members using substances, with a mean of 3.67, reflects the potential of home environments to normalize or indirectly promote drug use among youths. Overall, the data show that both social and environmental factors are deeply intertwined with the onset of substance use among students.

Table2: Factors that contribute to substance abuse among secondary school studer

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation
Peer pressure	4.08	0.94
Family influence	3.67	1.10
Relieving stress	4.02	0.98
Adventure	3.80	1.06
Easy availability	4.20	0.89

4.3 Effects of Substance Abuse

Table 3 shows the respondents reported significant negative psychological outcomes related to substance use. Poor concentration in class had the highest mean of 3.84, suggesting that academic focus is one of the first aspects of a student's life to be affected. Anxiety and depression followed closely with mean scores of 3.76 and 3.68 respectively. These results highlight that the emotional well-being of students is compromised post-substance use, which may further reinforce usage as a misguided coping strategy.

Aggressive behavior, although slightly lower in mean (3.40), still suggests that some students exhibit antisocial behaviors after consumption, which can lead to disciplinary or social issues.

Table 3 underscores how substance abuse among students extends beyond physical health into the mental and emotional domains, potentially affecting classroom engagement and peer relationships.

Table 3: Effects of Substance Abuse on Mental Health and Wellbeing of Senior Secondary School Students

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Anxiety	3.76	1.03
Depression	3.68	1.07
Lack of concentration	3.84	1.00
Aggression	3.40	1.14

4.4 Relationship between Substance Abuse and Academic Performance

Results in Table 4 presents the relationship between substance abuse and academic performance of the students. The results reveal that the students reported their academic performance was better before they started using substances with a mean score of 4.16.This is consistent with the findings of Olley (2006), who reported that substance abuse among students makes them suffer academic setbacks, including lower achievement and school dropout. The impact of substance use on academics is clearly reflected in the high mean scores in Table 4.

A decline in exam results also had a high mean of 3.85, followed by school attendance (3.72) and class participation (3.61). These data affirm that drug use correlates strongly with reduced educational performance and engagement.

The consistent pattern across all indicators suggests that academic decline is one of the most direct and observable consequences of substance use among secondary school students

Table 4: Relationship between Substance Abuse and Academic Performance (n=170)

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Decline in academic performance	4.16	0.88
Poor attendance in school	3.72	1.02
Less participation in class	3.61	1.15
Poor examination results	3.85	1.06

Field Survey (2025).

4.5 Intervention Strategies to Control Substance abuse

Table 5 shows that the respondents widely supported a multi-pronged intervention approach. The highest-rated strategy was health education, with a mean of 4.33, showing that awareness and knowledge programs are viewed as essential in control of substance abuse. The support for peer education and counseling reinforces the effectiveness of youth-led interventions. This view is supported by Adelekan et al. (2012) who demonstrated the success of school counseling in reducing risky behaviors.

Youth recreation centers (4.30) and peer education programs (4.27) also received strong agreement. This suggests that students desire constructive alternatives and peer-led engagement strategies.

Counseling services (4.21) and stricter school policies (4.15) indicating that students recognize the importance of both psychological support and regulatory enforcement.

Overall, students support preventive, educational, and structural measures, suggesting that effective school-based interventions can greatly mitigate substance abuse trends.

Table 5: Intervention Strategies on control of Substance abuse (n=170)

Intervention Strategy	Mean	Standard Deviation
Health education	4.33	0.81
Counseling s ervices	4.21	0.87
Peer education programmes	4.27	0.83
Institutional policies	4.15	0.91
Provision of youth recreation al centers	4.30	0.85

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study revealed that alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and codeine were the most commonly abused substances among students. Peer pressure, stress, curiosity, and easy availability were major drivers of substance use. The study also found that substance abuse had significant negative effects on students' mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, aggression, and poor concentration. Academic performance was adversely affected, with many students reporting a decline in grades, poor attendance, and limited class participation. Furthermore, school-based control strategies were found to be either absent or ineffective, highlighting the need for tailored and well-structured intervention programs.

5.2 Recommendations

The study therefore recommends that Secondary schools should establish regular drug education and mental health programmes to be led by trained counselors to sensitize students on the dangers of substance abuse.

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