

Substance Abuse as a Correlate of Poor Health and Crime among Students in Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

This study investigated students' perception of substance abuse as a correlate of poor health and crime in tertiary institutions, using Lagos State University (LASU), Ojo and Lagos State University of Education (LASUED), Oto/Ijanikin, as case studies. The study examined the relationship between substance abuse, poor health outcomes, and criminal behaviour, while also assessing the influence of peer pressure, social environment, and institutional interventions on students' involvement in substance use. Four null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Data were collected through the use of a structured questionnaire administered to selected respondents from the sampled institutions. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools, including frequency distribution, percentages, mean scores, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and Multiple Regression Analysis. Findings revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between substance abuse and poor health among students, whereas a significant relationship existed between substance abuse and criminal behaviour. The study further established that peer pressure and social factors significantly influenced substance abuse among students, while institutional interventions exerted a significant effect on the control of drug-related behaviours. The study concluded that substance abuse constitutes a critical socio-health challenge within tertiary institutions and recommended intensified drug sensitization programmers.

Keywords: Substance abuse, Tertiary institutions, Poor health, Crime

Introduction

Substance abuse has become one of the major social and public health problems affecting students in tertiary institutions across the world. The increasing rate of drug use among youths has generated serious concern among parents, educators, health professionals, and government

agencies due to its negative effects on students' physical health, emotional stability, academic performance, and social behavior. Substance abuse refers to the harmful, excessive, or uncontrolled use of psychoactive substances such as alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, opioids, stimulants, and other illicit drugs in a manner that

negatively affect an individual's well-being and social functioning (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

In tertiary institutions, students are particularly vulnerable to substance abuse because of the transitional stage of life they experience. Many students gain independence for the first time after securing admission into higher institutions and are exposed to peer influence, academic pressure, emotional stress, curiosity, and social expectations. These conditions often increase the likelihood of experimenting with drugs or alcohol as a means of coping with challenges or seeking social acceptance (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). Research has shown that repeated exposure to psychoactive substances may gradually lead to dependency and addiction, thereby affecting students' ability to function effectively in academic and social environments.

Substance abuse among students has been linked to several health-related problems. According to Olatunji and Ibrahim (2023), frequent abuse of psychoactive substances may lead to respiratory illnesses, liver damage, cardiovascular diseases, mental disorders, poor concentration, emotional instability, and weakened immune functioning. Similarly, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2020) noted that substance abuse contributes to anxiety, depression, cognitive impairment, memory loss, and poor decision-making among young people. These health consequences may negatively affect

students' academic achievement, social interaction, and overall quality of life.

Concept of Substance Abuse

Substance abuse refers to the harmful, excessive, or uncontrolled use of psychoactive substances in a way that negatively affects an individual's physical health, mental state, emotional stability, behavior, and social relationships. (World Health Organization, 2021) when a person uses a substance beyond medically approved, legally accepted, or socially safe limits. Substance abuse often leads to impairment in judgment, poor decision-making, reduced productivity, and inability to perform normal daily responsibilities. It is recognized globally as a serious public health concern because of its widespread impact on individuals, families, institutions, and communities.

The concept of substance abuse is broader than simple drug use. National Institute on Drug (2020) opines that not every use of a substance amount to abuse. Some substances are used for medical treatment under professional supervision, while others may be consumed socially in moderate quantities. However, when use becomes excessive, frequent, dangerous, or dependent in nature, it is classified as abuse. For example, taking prescribed pain medication in higher doses than recommended, drinking alcohol to the point of intoxication regularly, or smoking illicit drugs repeatedly are all forms of substance abuse. Therefore, the key issue is not merely use, but misuse and its harmful consequences.

One important aspect of substance abuse is the development of tolerance. Giving to a document published by World Health Organization (2021) tolerance occurs when the body gradually adapts to a substance, causing the user to need larger amounts to experience the same effect. For instance, a student who initially consumes a small quantity of alcohol may later require much more to feel intoxicated. This increasing demand often pushes users into more dangerous patterns of consumption. Tolerance is one of the early warning signs that substance use is becoming problematic and may lead to dependence or addiction.

Crime in Tertiary Institutions

Crime refers to any act, omission, or behavior that violates established legal, institutional, or societal norms and attracts formal punishment or sanctions from relevant authorities in the context of society, crime is viewed as a deviant behavior that threatens public order, safety, and stability. Within tertiary institutions, crime extends beyond national legal definitions to include violations of institutional rules and regulations that disrupt academic activities, compromise safety, and undermine discipline among students (Onifade & Adeleke, 2022; Kolawole, 2024).

Crime in tertiary institutions is not a random occurrence but a product of complex social, psychological, and environmental factors. Students in higher institutions exist in transitional environments where they experience increased independence, reduced parental supervision, peer pressure, and exposure to

diverse social influences. These conditions often create opportunities for deviant behavior, especially when institutional control mechanisms are weak or ineffective (Ilesanmi, 2020; Chukwuemeka & Okoye, 2020).

According to Akinboro (2021) crime can broadly be classified into several categories based on its nature and impact. The first category is violent crime, which includes acts such as assault, rape, armed robbery, and physical intimidation. These crimes directly threaten the safety and psychological well-being of students and staff. Violent crimes in tertiary institutions are often linked to rivalry, emotional instability, substance abuse, and group influence, particularly among students involved in cult-related activities.

The second category is property crime, which involves theft, burglary, vandalism, and destruction of institutional or personal property. These crimes are common in student hostels, lecture halls, and campus environments where security may be insufficient. Property crimes are often motivated by financial need, peer influence, or substance dependency, where students steal to support drug use or personal survival (Ogunlana, 2020; Kolawole, 2024).

Another significant category is academic crime, commonly referred to as examination malpractice. This includes cheating, impersonation, leakage of examination materials, and unauthorized collaboration during assessments. Academic crimes undermine the credibility of educational institutions and reduce the

value of academic qualifications. Such behavior is often influenced by pressure to succeed, inadequate preparation, and unethical peer practices within student communities (Jimoh & Sulaiman 2020).

Substance Abuse and Poor Health

Substance abuse is strongly associated with a wide range of adverse health outcomes that affect the physical, mental, academic, and social well-being of students in tertiary institutions. The use of psychoactive substances such as alcohol, cannabis, opioids, stimulants, and sedatives disrupts normal bodily and psychological functioning, leading to both short-term impairment and long-term health complications the relationship between substance abuse and poor health is well established in public health literature, with evidence showing that increased substance use among young people significantly elevates the risk of disease, disability, and premature death (World Health Organization WHO, 2021; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022).

From a physical health perspective, substance abuse has severe consequences on multiple organ systems in the body. Alcohol abuse, for instance, is linked to liver diseases such as cirrhosis, fatty liver, and hepatitis, while prolonged drug use can damage the heart, lungs, kidneys, and nervous system. Smoking and inhalation of psychoactive substances also increase the risk of respiratory infections and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases in tertiary institutions, students who engage in substance abuse often experience fatigue, poor physical fitness, frequent illness, and

weakened immunity, making them more vulnerable to health complications (Olatunji & Ibrahim, 2023; National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA 2020].

In addition, substance abuse according to World Health Organization 2021 neurological damage that affects coordination, reflexes, and cognitive functioning, drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine, and cannabis alter brain chemistry and interfere with normal neurotransmitter activities. This may result in impaired motor skills, reduced attention span, and difficulty in decision-making. Over time, chronic substance use can cause permanent brain changes that affect learning capacity and behavior regulation, which is particularly harmful to students in academic environments (UNODC, 2023).

Another major physical consequence of substance abuse is the risk of overdose and poisoning. Excessive consumption of drugs or mixing different substances can lead to toxic reactions in the body, sometimes resulting in coma or death. Students who misuse prescription drugs or combine alcohol with other substances are particularly at risk. These health emergencies highlight the dangerous and unpredictable nature of substance abuse among young people (NIDA 2020).

Substance Abuse and Crime

Substance abuse and crime are closely interconnected phenomena, particularly among young people in tertiary institutions. Substance use is widely recognized as a significant risk factor for deviant behavior, as it alters cognitive functioning, reduces

self-control, and impairs judgment. This relationship has been extensively documented in criminological and public health literature, which shows that individuals who abuse psychoactive substances are more likely to engage in antisocial and unlawful behaviors compared to non-users (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022; World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

The relationship between substance use and deviant behavior is largely explained through behavioral and psychological mechanisms. Psychoactive substances affect the brain's reward system, leading to reduced inhibition and increased impulsivity. As a result, individuals under the influence of drugs may engage in behaviors they would normally avoid, including aggression, theft, vandalism, and violence. In tertiary institutions, this manifests in various forms of misconduct, ranging from interpersonal conflicts to serious criminal acts (National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2020; Olatunji & Ibrahim, 2023).

Adebayo and Chukwu (2020) opine that substance abuse also contributes to deviant behavior through reduced moral reasoning and impaired decision-making. Students who regularly use drugs may experience distorted perceptions of risk and consequences, making them more likely to violate institutional rules and societal laws. Over time, repeated exposure to substance use reinforces deviant patterns of behavior, normalizing actions that would otherwise be considered unacceptable.

Substance abuse is a major driver of criminal activities in tertiary institutions. One of the most common manifestations is involvement in violent crimes such as assault and physical confrontation. Students under the influence of alcohol or drugs are more likely to become aggressive and engage in fights or conflicts with peers. These violent behaviours often escalate quickly due to impaired emotional regulation and heightened irritability associated with substance use (UNODC 2023).

It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the perception of students on substance abuse as a correlate of poor health and crime in tertiary institutions with particular reference to Lagos State University (LASU), Ojo, Lagos State and Lagos State University of Education (LASUED), Oto-Ijanikin, Lagos State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine substance abuse as a correlate of poor health and crime among students in tertiary institutions. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the relationship between substance abuse and poor health among students in tertiary institutions;
2. Determine the relationship between substance abuse and crime among students in tertiary institutions;
3. Investigate the influence of peer pressure and social factors on substance abuse among students in tertiary institutions; and

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between substance abuse and poor health among students in tertiary institutions?
2. What is the relationship between substance abuse and crime among students in tertiary institutions?
3. To what extent do peer pressure and social factors influence substance abuse among students in tertiary institutions?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of Significance

1. There is no significant relationship between substance abuse and poor health among students in tertiary institutions;
2. There is no significant relationship between substance abuse and crime among students in tertiary institutions; and
3. There is no significant influence of peer pressure and social factors on substance abuse among students in tertiary institutions.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to obtain information from respondents regarding their perception of substance abuse and its relationship with poor health and crime among students in tertiary institutions. The design also facilitated the assessment of the influence

of peer pressure, social factors, and institutional interventions on substance abuse among students. The population of the study comprised all undergraduate students across all faculties of Lagos State University (LASU), Ojo, Lagos State, and Lagos State University of Education (LASUED), Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos State. A sample of 300 respondents was selected from the two institutions using the simple random sampling technique. Out of the 300 copies of the questionnaire administered, 265 were properly completed, retrieved, and found usable for data analysis, representing an 88.3% response rate. Data for the study were collected using a researcher-designed instrument titled Substance Abuse, Health and Crime Questionnaire (SAHCQ). The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A elicited information on the demographic characteristics (bio-data) of the respondents, while Section B contained items designed to measure the variables of the study and their sub-variables. Responses were structured on a four-point Likert scale as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2; and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts in Health Education. Their observations, comments, and suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire to ensure that the items adequately measured the variables under investigation. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted using 30 students of Yaba College of Technology (YABATECH), Lagos, who were not part

of the main study. The test-retest method was employed and the responses obtained were subjected to Cronbach Alpha analysis. A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained, indicating that the instrument possessed adequate internal consistency and was therefore considered reliable for the study. Procedure for data collection, the researchers personally administered the questionnaires to the respondents by hand. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before the administration of the instrument, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of the information provided. Out of the 300 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 265 were retrieved and found suitable for data analysis. Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential

statistics. Frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were used to describe respondents' characteristics and responses. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to test Hypotheses One and Two, while Multiple Regression Analysis was used to test Hypotheses Three and Four. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between substance abuse and poor health among students in tertiary institutions. This hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and the result is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Relationship between substance abuse and poor health among students

Variables	N	Df	Mean	SD	r-calc	Sig.
Substance abuse	265	263	12.53	1.048	0.030	0.623
Health problem	265		25.33	1.133		

P < 0.05; r-critical = 0.121

The result presented in Table 1 shows that the relationship between substance abuse and health problems among students is not statistically significant, as indicated by the calculated correlation coefficient ($r = 0.030$) and the significance value ($p = 0.623$). Since the p-value is greater than the 0.05 significance level, it means the observed relationship occurred by chance and is not strong enough to be considered meaningful. Furthermore, the calculated correlation ($r = 0.030$) is much lower than the r-critical value of 0.121, which also confirms that the relationship is not

significant. This implies that substance abuse does not have a statistically measurable association with poor health among the respondents in this study. Based on the result, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between substance abuse and poor health among students in tertiary institutions.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between substance abuse and crime among students in tertiary institutions. This hypothesis was tested with Pearson's Product Moment

Correlation coefficient and the result is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Relationship between substance abuse and poor health among students

Variables	N	Df	Mean	SD	r-calc	Sig.
Substance abuse	265	263	12.53	1.048	-0.841	0.000
Crime	265		21.78	1.192		

P < 0.05; r-critical = 0.121

The result presented in Table 2 shows that there is a **strong negative and statistically significant relationship** between substance abuse and crime among students, with a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.841$ and a significance value of $p = 0.000$. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 significance level, the relationship is statistically significant. The magnitude of the correlation (-0.841) indicates a **very strong relationship**, while the negative sign suggests an inverse relationship between the two variables as recorded in the dataset. This means that changes in substance abuse are strongly associated with changes in crime among students in the opposite direction, according to the computed result. Additionally, the calculated correlation ($r =$

-0.841) is far greater in absolute value than the r-critical value of 0.121, further confirming that the relationship is statistically significant. Based on the result, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between substance abuse and crime among students in tertiary institutions.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant influence of peer pressure and social factors on substance abuse among students in tertiary institutions. This hypothesis was tested with regression analysis and the result is presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Regression Analysis of the Influence of Peer Pressure and Social Factors on Substance Abuse among Students

Predictor/Model Fit	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	F	R ²	df	Sig.
Model Fit					49.210	.270	(2, 262)	.000
Constant	22.100	1.020		21.667				.000
Peer Pressure	0.520	0.080	0.450	6.500				.000
Social Factors	0.060	0.055	0.070	1.091				.270

Table 4 indicates that the overall model is statistically significant, with $F(2, 262) = 49.210$, $p = .000$. This implies that, taken together, peer pressure and social factors significantly influence substance abuse among students in tertiary institutions. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .270$)

shows that approximately 27.0% of the variation in substance abuse is explained by peer pressure and social factors, while the remaining 73.0% is accounted for by other variables not included in the model. At the individual level, peer pressure has a significant positive influence on substance abuse ($B = 0.520$, $t = 6.500$, $p = .000$). This

indicates that an increase in peer pressure leads to a corresponding increase in substance abuse among students, making it a strong predictor in the model. However, social factors do not have a significant influence on substance abuse ($B = 0.060$, $t = 1.091$, $p = .270$), as the p-value is greater than 0.05. This suggests that social factors, on their own, do not significantly predict substance abuse among the respondents. Since the overall model is significant and at least one predictor (peer pressure) is significant, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant influence of peer pressure and social factors on substance abuse among students in tertiary institutions.

Discussion of Findings

The first hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between substance abuse and poor health among students in tertiary institutions. The finding revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between substance abuse and poor health among the respondents.

This finding disagrees with the submission of Olatunji and Ibrahim (2023), who stated that substance abuse negatively affects students' physical and mental health through anxiety, depression, fatigue, and emotional instability. Similarly, the finding contradicts the view of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), which maintained that substance abuse contributes significantly to poor health outcomes among young people and students in tertiary institutions.

Despite the statistical outcome of the present study, the researcher believes that prolonged abuse of psychoactive substances may still expose students to several health-related challenges, especially when such habits become excessive and uncontrolled.

There is no significant relationship between substance abuse and crime among students in tertiary institutions. This hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and the result is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Relationship between Substance Abuse and Crime among Students

Variables	N	Mean	Sd	Df	r-cal	Sig.
Substance Abuse	265	12.53	1.048			
Crime	265	21.78	1.192	263	0.841	0.000

P < 0.05; r-critical = 0.121

The result presented in Table 2 shows that there is a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between substance abuse and crime among students, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.841$ and a significance value of $p = 0.000$. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the relationship is statistically

significant. The magnitude of the correlation coefficient indicates a strong positive relationship between substance abuse and crime among students. This implies that increased involvement in substance abuse is associated with increased criminal behavior among students. Furthermore, the calculated correlation coefficient ($r = 0.841$) is greater

than the critical value of 0.121, confirming the significance of the relationship. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. It was concluded that there is a significant relationship between substance abuse and crime among students in tertiary institutions.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of the Influence of Peer Pressure and Social Factors on Substance Abuse among Students

Predictor	B	Std.Error	Beta	t.	Sig.
Constant	22.100	1.020	-	21.66	0.000
Peer pressure	0.520	0.080	0.450	6.500	0.000
Social factors	0.060	0.055	0.070	1.091	0.270
Model Summary					
F-value	R ²	Df	Sig.		
49.210	0.270	(2,262)	0.000		

The result presented in Table 3 indicates that the overall regression model is statistically significant, with $F(2,262) = 49.210$, $p < 0.05$. This implies that peer pressure and social factors jointly exert a significant influence on substance abuse among students in tertiary institutions. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.270$) indicates that approximately 27.0% of the variation in substance abuse among students is explained by peer pressure and social factors, while the remaining 73.0% is attributable to other factors not included in the model.

Further analysis revealed that peer pressure significantly influenced substance abuse among students ($\beta = 0.450$, $t = 6.500$, $p = 0.000$). However, social factors did not independently exert a significant influence on substance abuse ($\beta = 0.070$, $t = 1.091$, $p = 0.270$). Since the overall regression model was significant and at least one predictor variable was significant, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, peer pressure and social factors jointly have a

There is no significant influence of peer pressure and social factors on substance abuse among students in tertiary institutions. This hypothesis was tested using Multiple Regression Analysis, and the result is presented in Table 3 below.

significant influence on substance abuse among students in tertiary institutions.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that substance abuse remains a major social and behavioral problem among students in tertiary institutions. Although the study found no significant relationship between substance abuse and poor health among the respondents, substance abuse was found to have a significant relationship with crime among students.

The study further concluded that peer pressure is a strong contributing factor influencing substance abuse among students, while effective intervention programs by school management and students' unions can help in controlling the problem. Therefore, there is a need for continuous awareness campaigns, counseling services, and strict institutional policies aimed at reducing substance abuse

and its associated consequences in tertiary institutions.

Recommendations

1. University management should organize regular seminars, workshops, and awareness campaigns on the dangers of substance abuse among students;
2. Guidance counselors and health educators should provide counseling services and rehabilitation support for students involved in substance abuse;
3. Parents and guardians should closely monitor their children and provide proper moral upbringing to discourage involvement in substance abuse;
4. Students should avoid negative peer groups capable of influencing them into drug abuse and other risky behaviours; and
5. Government and non-governmental organizations should collaborate with tertiary institutions in implementing anti-drug programmes and policies.

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