



## PEER INFLUENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AS DETERMINANTS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigated peer influence and psychological distress as determinants of substance abuse among University Students in Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey research design was used to select a sample of 150 substance abusers. Their demographic characteristics stands as male 107(70.5%), and female 44 (29.5%). Also, their age ranges from 19-46 years old. In addition to providing demographic data, participants responded to (3) standardized self-report, including socio-demographic questionnaires. Data was analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics. On the whole, three hypotheses were formulated and inferentially tested at 0.05 level of significant, using simple linear and multiple regression analysis. Findings revealed that peer influence significantly predict substance abuse ( $\beta = .299$ ,  $t = 3.890$ ;  $p < .000$ ). In addition to the finding, psychological distress significantly predicts substance abuse ( $\beta = .389$ ,  $t = 5.233$ ;  $p < .000$ ). Lastly, result showed that peer influence and psychological distress predict substance abuse ( $R^2 = .325$ ;  $F(3, 152) = 24.362$ ;  $p < .000$ ). Furtherance to this result, observation of coefficient of determination accounted for 32.5% of the total variance observed in substance abuse among University students in Nigeria. Given these results, the study concluded that peer influence and psychological distress significantly predict substance abuse among University students in Nigeria. In this light, workshops should be organized for students in Nigeria on psychosocial factors like peer influence and psychological distress in order to equip students with better life skills.*

**Key words:** Peer pressure, Psychological distress, Substance Use, University Students

### INTRODUCTION

Substance use and abuse remain one of the major global public health challenges. The problem of substance abuse has grown to become an integral part of our contemporary society, and more worrisome is the recent surge in the rate of involvement of the young population in this damaging phenomenon. Before now, cases of substance use and abuse are commonly associated with the older population, but current findings have established the spread of psychoactive substance use to the younger populations potentially leading to addiction (Agberotimi, 2018; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, 2019; Chisom et al., 2022).

For the purpose of this study, substance or drug can be defined as anything that has the potential of causing addiction, habituation or altered consciousness. It can also be defined as any chemicals that can change the structure or function of the body. According to the DSM-IV, substance abuse is the recurrent use of substance that may cause physical or social harm to the user or others but not associated with any symptoms when the substance is stopped. Substance abuse is the taking of substances or a deliberate use of substances for the purposes other than its intended purpose without the supervision of a physician or a medical practitioner (Odeside, 2006).

Globally, research findings revealed that, there are about 190 million substance abusers, and out of these substance abusers, around 40 million serious illnesses or injuries were identified each year (Rapeah et al., 2018). This menace among young people often leads to decreased academic performance, increased risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, and or other psychiatric disorders such as lethargy, hopelessness, and insomnia (Volkow et al., 2018). For instance, chat and alcohol use are linked to unprotected sex, putting young people at risk of unwanted pregnancy, abortion and HIV/ ADIS infection (United Nations and drug abuse control, 1987). Several studies indicate that substance use among Nigerian adolescents is considerably

rising (Deliens et al., 2014; Rodríguez, 2020). Of the young segment of the Nigerian population, College and University students are the most at risk of using alcohol and other substances such as tutolin and tobacco. Most often stimulant medications are increasingly used by College and University students as a means to improve academic performance (Obiechina & Isiguzo, 2016).

### **Statement of the problem**

Drug abuse has been found to be one of the major health problems among university students (NDLEA, 2020). According to the report above, abuse of drug among youths constitutes one of the problematic issues facing the Nigerian nation today. The abuse of substance is so rampant that about 50 million people who use alcohol, hemp and tranquilizer were estimated to be three times addicts in the world (Obiechina & Isiguzo, 2016). Another report from United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) indicated that 30% of the global populations are involved in substance abuse.

Studies conducted by various scholars from different walks of life on drug use and abuse reveal that about 20% of university students in USA consume alcohol mixed energy drinks regularly while marijuana, ecstasy, and cocaine abuse is also common in those who consume alcohol mixed energy drinks (Snipes & Benotsch 2013). From the epidemiological studies, the commonly used psychoactive substances among Nigerian adolescent are alcohol, hypno-sedatives, tobacco and psychostimulants (Igwe et al., 2009).

Besides, varieties of drugs are used and abused as identified by Adegoke et al. (2014) such that rate of consumption of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and cocaine among male are 13.4%, 23.3%, 6.6% and 4.8% respectively. This was attributed to availability of drug and free access to it by the youths, most especially male ones (Adebiyi et al., 2010; Chikere and Mayowa, 2011).

A number of factors have been identified by researchers such as; peer group or encouragement from friends (Enang, 2007; Vishal et al., 2008) stress reduction and frustration minimisation, inquisitiveness and search for exhilaration (Raphael et al., 2017) academic rigour (Makinde, 2004) fast asleep and sexual pleasure, with their multi-dimensional attendant effects such as truancy and absenteeism (Mercken et al., 2009; Osarenren, 2002); cultism (Okirika, 2000; Atere, 2003; Raufu, 2003); armed robbery and organized crime, prostitution, high risk sexual behaviour, and hostility (Bassey et al., 2013); personality disorders (Makinde, 2004); involvement in examination misconduct and indiscipline (Obot, 1989, Abikoye et al., 2014; Adelakan, 1989). The dimensions of these consequences are so disturbing to the individual, families, schools and society at large. Although, previous studies have shown that the problems connected with drug abuse are multi-dimensional in nature across the globe.

However, the drivers of substance use and abuse are not limited to the aforementioned factors. Various factors have been implicated in substance addiction, and these include: stress, frustration, personality traits like high impulsivity, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, personality and other psychiatric disorders (Adeyemo et al., 2016; World Drug Report, 2019). Other factors are, availability of drugs, social status, peer pressure, drug awareness like advertisement, sexual abuse or addiction in the family (Freek et al., 2005; O'Brien et al., 1998; Botvin et al., 2001; Barrett et al., 2008; Alimi & Olayiwola, 2015).

Psychological factors such as psychological distress may contribute to the nature of substance use and abuse. Psychological distress is considered in this study. Meanwhile, psychological distress is largely defined as a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of depression (e.g., lost of interest; sadness; hopelessness) and anxiety (e.g., restlessness; feeling tense) (Mirowsky & Ross 2002). It's also viewed as an emotional disturbance that may impact on the social functioning and day-to-day living of individuals (Wheaton 2007). The self-medication hypothesis postulates that some individuals are predisposed to addiction because they suffer

from negative affective states and psychological distress (Khantzian, 1985). Tension reduction theory (TRT) posits that individuals who are sensitive to stress are more likely to use drugs or alcohol in order to cope than people who are not experiencing high levels of tension or stress (Greeley & Oei, 1999).

Social factors such as peer influence have also been identified to play significant role in influencing substance use and abuse. Peer's influence has also been frequently studied in relation to substance abuse and is included in this study. This is because peers play an important role in influencing emerging adults' substance use behaviors. As a result, previous studies found similarity between peers in terms of substance abuse (Nsofor, 2013; Abikoye et al., 2014), and this similarity has been explained in two ways; socialization and selection process of peers (Abikoye et al., 2014). Peer influence is the outcome of socialization; that is, the peers an individual has influence his or her behavior (Raimi et al., 2029). According to the social development model that explains the growth of pro-social and anti-social behaviour along human's life course, amount of involvement with and reinforcement from individuals who use substance is an influence for a person's increased substance use while the amount of pro-social involvement such as volunteer work is an influence for a person's decreased substance use and abuse (Andrew et al., 2002; Jaccard et al., 2005). Same study suggests that a person's perception of their environment acts as a form of peer pressure, even when peers do not directly exert any pressure (Abikoye et al., 2014).

However, there is a dearth of studies on the combination of psychological and social determinants of substance abuse, especially among students' population. In the view of the above, substance abuse among youths and young adults in Nigeria has been a significant health problem that threatens sustainable human development. Given the number of studies that have looked into drug abuse among different populations, these empirical studies have not sufficiently linked the mentioned factors to drug abuse. It is on this premise, therefore, that this current research aims to investigate the analysis of psychological distress and peer influence as determinants of substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

Given the research problem, the following questions were raised to guide the study: What is the peer influence prediction of substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.

1. To what extent psychological distress predict substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria?
2. What is the self-efficacy prediction in substance abuse among University Students in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria?
3. What is the combine prediction of peer influence, psychological distress and peer influence in substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria?

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to determine the analysis of peer influence, psychological distress, and self-efficacy as determinants of substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. While the specific objectives are as follows:

1. Examine the significant prediction of peer influence on substance abuse among university students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.



2. Evaluate the psychological distress prediction in substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.
3. Find out the significant interactive prediction of peer influence and psychological distress on substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were raised for the study:

1. There will be a significant peer influence relationship on substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.
2. Psychological distress will significantly predict substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.
3. Peer influence and psychological distress will interactively predict substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.

### **METHODS**

#### **Research Design**

Cross-sectional survey design was employed for the study. The design is considered appropriate due to its merit to describe the existing phenomenon. Also, this design provides information on population characteristics, testing of hypothesis, and interpret results in line with the variables of study.

#### **Population, Sample, and Sampling Techniques**

The sample for this study includes students having or showing the behaviour of substance abuse and undergoing substance abuse treatment at each de-addiction & rehabilitation centers Karu, Abuja. Both treatment centers had around 321 substance abusers undergoing treatment. A simple random technique was used to obtain the 156 samples of male and female students from the two treatment centers. The choice of the proposed number of participants was due to the number of both in-patient and out-patient on substance use and abuse disorder cases in the hospitals.

#### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The samples who meet the inclusion criteria were recruited for the study. The inclusion criteria included (1) participants aged 18–46 years old undergoing treatment for amphetamine abuse, (2) being able to understand, read, and write (3) no hearing impairment, (4) exhibiting no withdrawal symptoms like headache, jactitation, or distraction, and (5) willing to participate in the study. Youths with physical and mental disturbance who couldn't provide information were excluded from the study.

#### **Instruments**

The major instrument for collecting data is set of structure questionnaire. This was divided into two sections; section "A" deals with the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while sections The Kessler Psychological Distress (K10): Developed by Kessler et al., (2003) and Peer Influence Questionnaire (PIQ) were used to measure psychological distress and peer influence. Before the administration of the questionnaires, the researcher obtained a letter of approval from the research ethics committee of the two hospitals introducing the researcher as well as the purpose of the questionnaire and the studies. Moreso, the purpose of the study was explained to

the participants as they were also given assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of their identities and responses. A good rapport was also be established with the participants. Participation voluntary and they were encouraged to respond sincerely to all items in the questionnaire.

### Ethical Considerations

A good rapport was established with the participants. Participation was voluntary as they were encouraged to respond sincerely to all items in the questionnaire. The participant's consent was informed before administering the questionnaire as well as the consent of the authority/care giver of participants. The participants was also briefed about the purpose of the questionnaire before and after the administration of the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary as no participant was force or coerced to participate in responding to the questionnaire.

## RESULTS

Multiple regression analysis was employed as the only statistical method in the study.

### Hypothesis One

This hypothesis stated that there will be a significant and positive prediction of peer influence on substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. This was tested using simple linear regression analysis and the result is presented in table 1.

**Table 1:**

**Summary of Simple Linear Regression Showing the Prediction of Peer Influence on Substance Abuse Among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
1		B	Std. Error	$\beta$		
Substance Abuse	Constant	36.611	.937		39.075	.000
	Peer Influence	.052	.013	.299	3.890	.000

Result in table 1 shows that there was a significant positive prediction of peer influence on substance abuse among university students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria ( $\beta = .299$ ,  $t = 3.890$ ;  $p = p < .000$ ). The result showed a positive prediction meaning that as peer influence increases among students, their level of substance abuse also increase and vice versa. Based on this result, hypothesis one which stated that 'there will be a significant prediction of peer influence on substance abuse among university students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria' was therefore accepted.

### Hypothesis Two

This hypothesis stated that psychological distress will significantly predict substance abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. This was tested using simple linear regression analysis and the result is presented in table 2.

**Table 2:**

**Summary of Simple Linear Regression Showing the Prediction of Psychological Distress on Substance Abuse Among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
1		B	Std. Error	B		
Substance Abuse	Constant	22.778	1.959		11.627	.000



Psychological Distress	.318	.061	.389	5.233	.000
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Result in table 2 shows that there was a significant positive prediction of psychological distress on substance abuse among university students in Nigeria ( $\beta = .389$ ,  $t = 5.233$ ;  $p = p < .000$ ). The result showed a positive influence meaning that an increase in the level of psychological distress among students results to an increase in substance abuse and vice versa. Based on this result, hypothesis two which stated that 'psychological distress will significantly and positively predict substance abuse among university students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria' was therefore supported.

### Hypothesis Three

This hypothesis stated that peer influence, psychological distress will interactively predict substance abuse among university students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. This was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is presented in table 3.

**Table 3:**

**Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Prediction of Peer Influence, Psychological Distress and Self-Efficacy on Substance Abuse among University Students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria**

DV	Predictor(s)	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	df	B	t	p
Substance Abuse	Constant	.570	.325	24.362**	3, 152			
	Peer Influence					.272	3.973	.000
	Psychological Distress					.371	5.437	.000

\*\*  $p < .001$

Result in table 3 shows that peer influence, psychological distress significantly and predict substance abuse among university students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria ( $R^2 = .325$ ;  $F(3, 152) = 24.362$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Observation of coefficient of determination shows that peer predict, psychological distress and self-efficacy significantly and jointly accounted for 32.5% of the total variance observed in substance abuse among university students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. Based on this result, hypothesis three which stated that 'peer influence and psychological distress will interactively predict substance abuse among university students in Nigeria' was therefore supported.

### DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The present study aims to investigate psychological distress and peer influence as predictors of substance abuse amongst University Students in Nigeria. Thus, hypothesis one which stated that 'peer influence will significantly influence substance abuse among university students in Nigeria' was therefore accepted. This implies that as peer influence increases among students, their level of substance abuse also increases. The possible explanation for this outcome can be attributed to the important role peers play in influencing emerging adults' substance use behaviours. This is consistent with some results (Andrews et al., 2002; Ary et al., 1999; Bauman & Ennett, 1994; Curran et al., 1997; Dishion et al., 1995; Hawkins et al., 1992; Huba et al., 1980; Kandel & Davies, 1991) who have provided support for the importance of peers in the development of substance use and abuse. In addition, present result agreed with the findings obtained by Santor et al., (2000) in their study with a sample of 148 adolescents wherein peer pressure and peer conformity have been identified as the strong predictors of risk behaviour than other factors. Also, result agreed with the report of (Kandel, & Davies, 1996) who concluded that association with delinquent

peer group as the major determinant of delinquent behaviour among adolescent including substance use. Likewise, result support (Burton et al., 2003) whose findings reported peer pressure as one of the common determinants of undesirable activities among students such as drinking, experimentation with the drugs, vandalism and stealing.

With respect to the second hypothesis which stated that psychological distress will significantly influence substance abuse among students, was therefore accepted. The reason for this result is possibly because of individuals use various substances, including alcohol, marijuana and cocaine to relieve, and of course alleviate symptoms of mental or psychological distress and negative emotions. This corroborates with other recent studies that substance use leads to psychological distress (Oshodi et al., 2010; Matthews & Bruno, 2011; Tschann et al., 1994; Shedler & Block, 1990; Degenhardt et al., 2001). Furthermore, result finding is similar to the findings of (Mirowsky & Ross 2002; Wheaton, 2007) who submitted that substance use, including intoxication and withdrawal, may induce symptoms of depression and anxiety; which may later spontaneously resolve with the cessation of use and abatement of withdrawal symptoms (Davidson, 1995; Hasin et al., 1996). Additionally, current finding is in tandem with (Kleinman, 1991; Kirmayer, 1989; Khantzian, 1985) report that substance use may lead to psychological distress in the long term because the consequences of use may set an individual on a trajectory of long-term disadvantage. It further exemplifies other report that frequent alcohol and marijuana use increases the risk of poor outcomes including educational failure, unemployment, and criminal arrests (Green and Ensminger, 2006; Green et al., 2010; Staff et al., 2008), which over time may induce psychological distress. Finding disagreed with other studies who opines that people often abuse alcohol or drugs to ease the symptoms of an undiagnosed mental disorder, to cope with difficult emotions, or to temporarily change their mood; as such there is insignificant relationship between mental health and drug intakes (Czeisler et al., 2020).

Moreso, hypothesis three which further stated that peer influence and psychological distress will interactively influence substance abuse was therefore supported. The results of this study showed that the three independent variables (peer influence and psychological distress) were effective in predicting substance abuse of university students. The significant F-value of 24.362 indicates that the effectiveness of the independent variables in predicting substance abuse could not have happened by chance. The magnitude of the relationship between substance abuse and a combination of the two independent variables is reflected in the values of the coefficient of multiple regression ( $R = 0.570$ ) and multiple  $R^2$  square ( $R^2 = 0.325$ ), as shown in Table 3. Thus, about 32.5% of the total variance in substance abuse of the respondents is accounted for by a combination of the two independent variables. This depicts that about 67.5% of the variance in the substance abuse of university students could not be explained by this data and are therefore, due to other factors. The explanation for this finding is not far fetch. As psychosocial factors (peer influence and psychological distress) have demonstrated to predict many behavioural tendencies or outcomes. Based on peer influence, youth usually influenced by his/her peer group in order to increase his/her popularity as a member of the pressure group which is in consonance with research outcomes reported by (Trucco et al., 2011; Tucker et al., 2011).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study examined the analysis of peer influence, psychological distress, self-efficacy as determinants of substance abuse among university students in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. The findings of this study established that the abuse of psychoactive substances among adolescents in secondary school remain a problem in the educational system and in our contemporary society. It is quite obvious that psychosocial variables are paramount in the abuse of such substances among university students. Surprisingly, result shows that there was a significant positive influence of peer influence on substance abuse. Moreso, there was a significant positive influence of psychological distress on substance abuse. Self-efficacy was



however not found to be a significant factor in substance abuse. While, result demonstrated significant joint predictors of peer influence, psychological distress and self-efficacy in substance abuse among university students in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Based on this study, I recommend that:

1. Schools' management should be organized for students in Nigeria on psychosocial factors like peer influence, psychological distress, and self-efficacy in order to equip students with better life skills.
2. Government should put in efforts to investigate cases based on the combinations of contributing factors and then plan an individualized plan according to needs to maximize the positive end results.
3. Utilizing the findings of current research, rehabilitation centre could look into each and every substance abuser before implementing a rigid plan for everyone.
4. Future research could study in depth (e.g., longitudinal study) on the mechanisms in which a person ends up abusing drug and the necessary procedures in setting up individualized rehabilitation plan.
5. Finally, regular assessment of substance abuse should be conducted among secondary school students, in order to identify students in need of help, and for proper orientation
6. In addition, there is the need for government active participation in the treatment and management of persons with substance abuse problem.
7. The media should collaborate with the NAFDAC and NDLEA in the awareness and sensitization campaign on the dangers and effects of substance abuse.

### **Strengths of the study**

The strength of this study is that it provides a detailed description of the reasons contributing to drug abuse. Specifically, "peer influence and psychological distress" could mean different things to different individuals. For instance, an individual's peer influence might be in the form of persuasion into abusing drugs while another's is in the form of experimenting with substance in a group.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are several drawbacks in this study that needs to be taken into consideration when reviewing the findings. The main one being the lack of control group. Also, all the information was collected by questionnaires and scales that can be influenced by subjectivity. Furthermore, the participants were all from a rehabilitation centre; therefore, it is not representative of all drug abusers in the country. Finally, the study's sample population's age range was from 19-46, so it remains to be seen whether the results could be duplicated with older participants.



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