

**EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF PEER PRESSURE AND SELF-ESTEEM ON
SUBSTANCE USE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RIVERS SOUTH EAST
SENATORIAL DISTRICT**

Obindah Fortune (PhD) & Obuzor Nyimenka Thankgod
Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counseling. Ignatius Ajuru
University of Education, Port Harcourt.

fortune.obindah@iaue.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The study investigated exploring the influence of peer pressure and self-esteem on substance use amongst public secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District. The study employed a correlational research design. Two (2) research questions and two (2) hypotheses guided the study. The study population comprised 64,784 public secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District. The sample comprised 398 students selected through multistage sampling techniques. The researcher developed a self-structured questionnaire titled "Psycho-Social Determinants and Substance Abuse Questionnaire" (PSDSAQ). The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method, which produced the following coefficients: 0.86 for Substance Abuse Scale, 0.78 for Peer Pressure, 0.84 for Self-esteem; 0.92. The Data obtained were analysed using Simple linear regression analysis. The result showed that there was a strong significant relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students. Also, there was a very strong significant relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students. Among others. It was recommended that parents and teachers should work together to create a supportive environment that fosters positive self-esteem in students, so as to reduce the likelihood of substance abuse.

Keywords: Self-esteem, peer pressure, substance use.

INTRODUCTION

The use of illicit substances has increased throughout the world in recent years. The report further states that a major world trend is the increasing availability of many kinds of substances to an everwidening socio-economic spectrum of consumers. In other words, the widespread use of drugs has not only turned our attention to the dynamics of drug use and its determinants but also made it necessary to weigh the impact of this process on youths and its social charge on future generations (World Substance Report, 2015). The motive behind substance abuse may be sociological, psychological, out of curiosity, boredom, to alleviate fear, derive sexual and physical pleasures, or family background. Despite the fact that substance abuse has adverse effects on the youths by changing their brain perception of difficulties and problems, the number of youths that abuse drugs has steadily increased in recent years (Alan, 2023). Also, some youths who experience dissatisfaction with life due to anger, frustration, academic failure and boredom, consume alcohol to fit in and serve as a consolation. This invariably affects their future endeavors, hence hours that should be used for the pursuit of relevant things in their life are diverted to rest and sleep after its consumption (Alan, 2023).

Efforts of Nigerian National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and other governmental agencies to stem the tide of substance abuse in Nigeria has been meet with stiff resistance of users at different places across the nation thereby increasing the incidence of substance abuse cases in spite of their continued and destruction of such illicit drugs, the rapid rise in the number of cases of substance abuse among youths whom are mostly students is still on the increase.

Substance abuse, as well as its etiopathology (the cause and subsequent development of a disease or abnormal condition.) and possible treatment methods have already been thoroughly studied by

researchers. From the systematic study of substance abuse treatment for the past 30 years, seven factors emerged as the most important. These are: the student's readiness to commit to treatment (i.e. his/her ability to realize the addiction problem and take some steps towards changing), the trust he/she can overcome difficult situations and challenges (self-efficacy), the expectation of the treatment results and the respective satisfaction gained from these results during and at the end of the therapeutic procedure, the social support perceived and experienced by the client, the clinical profile of the patient (i.e. depression or stress levels, negative or positive emotions, which constitute an unexplored field of the study concerning substance abuse) and, finally, the way in which students undergoing treatment realize the meaning of life and search for it (Simbee, 2012). Studies have shown that the afore-mentioned factors both linked to the best and worst possible treatment results for a client. As far as the interaction between each factor and the addiction treatment is concerned, most studies indicate that readiness for therapy, self-efficacy, expectations on the treatment outcome and the perceived social support are directly associated with positive results in treatment, such as longer and more committed engagement in treatment (Simbee, 2012). Series of studies have revealed that patients suffering from co-occurring mental disorders and substance abuse disorders are likely to show poorer treatment results than those patients, who are not presenting psychopathological (mental and behavioural disorder) symptoms, including decreased pace in moderating substance abuse, increased vulnerability to drug relapse and need of more health care services. However, there are some findings indicating that depression and stress can be associated with a better treatment outcome (Joe et al., 2017).

On the other hand, it was suggested that the positive course of therapy is affected by a student's accumulating experience of positive emotions, subjective strength and sense of freedom within the residential treatment programme (Ravenna et al., 2012). Recovery marks the redirection of the self and the way the client relates to the world; it is described as "changing careers" (Marcu, 2016). Bailee (2017) stated that many factors have been identified as influencing students' indulgence in substance abuse; such factors include, personality traits, parenting styles, depression, socioeconomic status, anxiety, peer influence, stress, highness and self-esteem amongst others. But this study focused on peer group and self-esteem as determinants of substance use in the South-eastern part of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Peer pressure (or social pressure) is the direct influence on people by peers, or the effect on an individual who gets encouraged to follow their peers by changing their attitudes, values or behaviours to conform to those of the influencing group or individual. This can result in either a positive or negative effect, or both. Social groups affected include both membership groups, in which individuals are "formally" members (such as political parties and trade unions), and cliques, in which membership is not clearly defined. However, a person does not need to be a member or be seeking membership of a group to be affected by peer pressure.

Peers are considered a primary influence on the behaviour of adolescents, and their importance appears to remain in effect from childhood through emerging adulthood. Numerous studies have provided support for the importance of peers in the development of substance abuse (Andrews et al., 2012). Peer influence is regarded as one of the strongest determinants of juvenile delinquency and particularly adolescent substance use. Peer pressure can decrease one's confidence (Jang, et al. 2016). A commonly held view is that social pressure from friends to use drugs and alcohol is a major contributor to substance use. Yet the notion of peer pressure, implied by the association between peer-group associations and drug behaviour.

Self-esteem is also other factor that will be considered in this research. Self-esteem is an individual's subjective evaluation of his/her own worth. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs about oneself (for example, "I am unloved", "I am worthy") as well as emotional states, such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame. A student with low self-esteem may have trouble overcoming negative thoughts or feelings and therefore turn to outside experiences or activities to change those negative thoughts into positive ones. Drugs can be one of the outside activities they turn to in a negative situation or state of mind. The Mental Health and Counselling Center of the University of Texas (2015) reported

that low self-esteem can lead to lack of development and/or tendency toward drugs or alcohol consumption. This is just one example of the many studies that have discovered some type of connection between low self-esteem and substance abuse (Aneela, 2013).

Empirical studies have consistently highlighted the significant impact of peer networks on adolescent substance use. Rhonda (2016) examined the role of family environment and peer influence in abstinence outcomes for adolescents undergoing treatment for alcohol and other drug (AOD) use. The study, which surveyed 419 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18, found that while family-related factors such as conflict resolution and positive family experiences were not significantly associated with abstinence outcomes, peer networks played a crucial role. Adolescents with fewer than four AOD-using friends were significantly more likely to achieve abstinence after one year compared to those with four or more substance-using friends (65% vs.

41%, $p = .0102$). Furthermore, logistic regression analysis indicated that having fewer than four AOD-using friends at intake was a strong predictor of continued abstinence ($OR = 2.904$, $p = .0102$) and of maintaining a lower number of substance-using peers at one-year follow-up ($OR = 2.557$, $p = 0.0107$). Similarly, Mokoena (2017) explored the broader social factors influencing adolescent substance abuse and found that peer behavior and standards were among the most influential determinants. The study underscored that adolescent substance use is embedded in cultural and social structures, with peer group influence being a dominant factor in shaping behaviors related to substance use.

In addition to peer pressure, self-esteem has also been found to significantly impact substance use among adolescents and young adults. Adewumi (2017) investigated psychosocial factors influencing substance abuse among undergraduates in Ekiti State University, Nigeria. Using a sample of 150 students, the study found that self-esteem significantly influenced substance abuse, with higher levels of self-esteem being associated with lower substance use. Moreover, self-esteem, when analyzed alongside religiosity, was found to be a significant predictor of substance use behavior among the respondents. Similarly, Dike (2010) examined the psychosocial factors influencing drug use among 340 undergraduate students in Rivers State and found that self-esteem, along with depression, peer influence, poverty, and ignorance, significantly affected substance use. These findings suggest that adolescents and young adults with low self-esteem may be more vulnerable to engaging in substance use, often as a coping mechanism for underlying psychological distress. The evidence from these studies highlights the importance of addressing both peer pressure and self-esteem in developing effective interventions for reducing substance abuse among secondary school students.

In Nigeria today, the consequences of substance use are diverse, including acute and chronic health, social as well as psychological problems. There is disruption of interpersonal relationships particularly within the family, marginalization, criminal behaviour, school failure, vocational problems and failure to achieve normal adolescent milestones (Njigwum, 2022). All in all, the interaction of these variables seem to play a major role in the abuse and recovery of addicts. To the best knowledge of the researcher, several studies have been carried out on psycho-social determinant of substance abuse among students in Rivers State, but none known to the researcher has been able to use dimensions of psychosocial determinants as used in this study which necessitated the research.

Statement of the Problem

Substance abuse among adolescents remains a pressing social and public health concern, particularly within public secondary schools in Rivers South East Senatorial District. The increasing prevalence of substance use among students has been attributed to various psychological and social factors, with peer pressure and self-esteem emerging as critical determinants. Peer pressure, a significant influence during adolescence, often compels students to engage in substance use as a means of social conformity and acceptance. Similarly, low self-esteem has been identified as a

predisposing factor that pushes students toward substance abuse as a coping mechanism for feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression.

Adolescents who abuse substances experience severe consequences not only on an individual level but also within their families, schools, and communities. They tend to exhibit behavioral changes, including withdrawal, aggression, and delinquency, which adversely impact their academic performance and social relationships. Academic decline, truancy, and eventual school dropout are common among students involved in substance use. Furthermore, substance-dependent youth often engage in criminal activities, including theft, violence, and drug trafficking, exacerbating the social and economic burdens on the community.

Despite existing research on substance abuse, limited studies have explicitly examined the combined impact of peer pressure and self-esteem on substance use among public secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District. Understanding these psychological and social determinants is essential for developing effective intervention strategies. Without addressing these underlying causes, efforts to mitigate substance abuse may remain ineffective, thereby allowing the crisis to persist and escalate.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the influence of peer pressure and self-esteem on substance use among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District. By investigating these factors, the study aims to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders to develop targeted preventive measures and support systems for adolescents at risk.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District?
2. What is the relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District?

Hypotheses The following null hypotheses were drawn to guide the study and was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District.
2. There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The design for this study is a correlational research design. Kpolovie (2010) defined correlational design as an investigation of the degree and direction or nature of relationship that exist between a dependent variable (criterion variable) and one or more independent variables (predictor variables). In his view it is aimed at understanding the variables by measuring differently and investigating how they changes in agreement with others. Nwankwo (2016) also defined a correlational research design as that type of study which collects data from two or more sets in a group of subjects with the aim of finding out the relationship between those sets of data. This approach was adopted because the researcher carried out the investigation on the psycho-social determinant of and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all 64,784 senior secondary school students (SSS 1 and

2) in the 84 public secondary schools (Andoni LGA—13, Eleme LGA—8, Tai LGA—12, Khana LGA—27, Gokana LGA—14, Oyigbo LGA—10, Opobo LGA—4) in Rivers South East Senatorial District (Rivers State Senior Secondary Schools Board, 2023).

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A sample of 398 secondary school students was employed for the study. This was determined through the Taro Yamene formula for minimum sample size. The multi-stage sampling technique was employed for the study. The procedure involved the application of simple random sampling to draw three (3) LGAs from the Rivers East Senatorial zone, then three public secondary school was drawn from each LGA using simple random sampling. Finally, disproportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed to draw equal number of (45) students from the nine selected public senior secondary schools in Rivers East Senatorial zone.

Instruments for Data Collection

Two instruments were used for the data collection of this study. The first is the substance abuse scale (SAS) adapted from the Drug Use Disorders Identification Test (DUDIT) by Berman et al (2003) in Basedow et al. (2021). The SAS is a 20-item instrument which was answered using a modified 4-point Likert format of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree(A), Disagree(D).

The second instrument is the Psychosocial Determinants Survey which made up of two subsections to cover two independent variables of the study. The variables are: peer pressure scale and self-esteem survey. The Self-esteem scale was adapted from the Rosenberg Self-esteem. While the other variables in the Psychosocial Determinants Survey (PDS) were developed by the researcher. In all, the PDS was composed of eight items which was answered using a modified 4-point Likert format of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree(A), Disagree(D) and strongly disagree (SD) and weighted as 4points,3points,2points and 1point respectively for positive items or 1point, 2points, 3points and 4points for negative items respectively. The scoring of the instrument was done by transforming the weighted 4-point scale, where individuals with a mean below 2.50 were coded zero (0 for absence) while a mean of 2.5 and above was coded one (1 for presence of trait).

Validity of the Instruments

In order to validate the research instrument, the researcher consulted her supervisor and other two experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation, from Department of Psychology, Guidance and Counselling Ignatius Ajuru University of Education for Face and content validity of the instruments. Their suggestions, corrections and modification were integrated into the final version of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instruments

The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using the Cronbach alpha method, which gives the internal consistency measure of an instrument. First, draft copies of the instrument were administered on 30 students who were not part of the selected sample size and then the Cronbach coefficient alpha reliability method was computed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Therefore, reliability coefficients for each sub-sections of the Psychosocial Determinants Survey (PDS) are as follows: 0.86 for Substance Abuse Scale, 0.78 for Peer Pressure and 0.84 for Self-esteem. Based on these coefficients, the instruments were considered highly reliable for carrying out the investigation.

Method of Data Collection

The instruments were administered directly to the students in their respective schools by the researcher with the help of research assistants, after permission has been sought and obtained from the school heads. The instruments were administered on the students after giving uniform instructions. The instruments were collected on the spot immediately to ensure 100% retrieval.

The total of 400 questionnaire were distributed but 398 were retrieved and used for data analysis.

Method of Data Analyses

The data obtained was analysed using simple linear regression analysis to answer all the research questions and test corresponding null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District?

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District.

Table 1a: Model summary of the relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R	Std. Error of the Square Estimate
1	0.744 ^a	0.553	0.552	5.470

a. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Group

Table 1b: Regression coefficients of the relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	31.935	1.149		27.802	0.000
	Peer Group	2.149	0.097	0.744	22.176	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Substance Abuse

Table 1c: ANOVA analysis of the relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14713.912	1	14713.912	491.796	0.000 ^b
	Residual	11877.732	397	29.919		
	Total	26591.644	398			

a. Dependent Variable: Substance Abuse

b. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Group

Table 1a shows the relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District. The result indicates that there is a strong relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District is strong ($R = 0.744$).

The test to hypothesis two in Table 1b and 1c revealed that there is significant relationship between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District ($F_1 = 491.796$, $df = 397$, $p < 0.05$). The implication of this result is that the relationship

that exists between peer group and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District is significant and strong. Thus, hence null hypothesis two is rejected at the 0.05 significance level.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District?

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District.

Table 2a: Model summary of the relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R	Std. Error of the Square Estimate
1	0.811 ^a	0.658	0.657	4.789

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Esteem

Table 2b: Regression coefficients of the relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	26.931	1.104		24.402	0.000
	Self-Esteem	2.538	0.092	0.811	27.610	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Substance Abuse

Table 2c: ANOVA analysis of the relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17485.451	1	17485.451	762.308	0.000 ^b
	Residual	9106.193	397	22.938		
	Total	26591.644	398			

a. Dependent Variable: Substance Abuse

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Esteem

Table 2a shows the relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District. As such, the relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District is very strong (R = 0.811).

The test to hypothesis five in Table 2b and 2c revealed that there is significant relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District ($F_1 = 762.308$, $df = 397$, $p < 0.05$). The implication of this result is that the relationship that exists between self-esteem and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District is significant and very strong. Thus, hence null hypothesis five is rejected at the 0.05 significance level.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study indicate a strong and significant relationship between peer group influence and substance abuse among secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District. This result aligns with existing literature, such as Rhonda (2016) and Mokoena (2017), which emphasize the role of peer networks in adolescent substance use. Rhonda (2016) found that adolescents with fewer substance-using friends were more likely to remain abstinent, highlighting the power of peer group influence in shaping substance use behavior. Similarly, Mokoena (2017) established that family and peer behavior play a crucial role in adolescent substance abuse, reinforcing the idea that peer group influence is a significant factor in substance use initiation and maintenance among young individuals.

Furthermore, this study established a very strong significant relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse. This finding is supported by the empirical studies of Adewumi (2017) and Dike (2010), which revealed that self-esteem is a major psychosocial determinant of substance abuse. Adewumi (2017) found that self-esteem, along with religiosity, significantly influenced substance abuse among undergraduates. Similarly, Dike (2010) identified self-esteem as one of the psychosocial factors influencing drug use among students, along with depression and peer pressure. The findings from this study confirm the notion that students with low self-esteem may resort to substance use as a coping mechanism, further reinforcing the need for interventions targeting self-perception and confidence-building among students.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both peer pressure and self-esteem play significant roles in influencing substance abuse among public secondary school students in Rivers South East Senatorial District. The strong correlation between peer group influence and substance use suggests that adolescents are more likely to engage in substance abuse when surrounded by peers who use drugs. Additionally, the significant relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse implies that students with low self-esteem are at a higher risk of engaging in substance use as a means of coping with emotional and psychological distress. These findings underscore the necessity of targeted interventions that address both peer influence and self-esteem enhancement to mitigate the growing trend of substance abuse among secondary school students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings, discussion and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Schools should establish peer mentorship initiatives that encourage positive peer influence and educate students on the dangers of substance abuse.
2. Parents and teachers should work together to create a supportive environment that fosters positive self-esteem in students, so as to reduce the likelihood of substance abuse.

REFERENCES

- Adewumi, B. O. (2017). Psychosocial factors influencing substance abuse among undergraduates. alcohol consumption among young adults ages 18-24 in the United States. *Alcohol Research & Health, 28*(4), 269-280.
- Anaele, J. (2013). The curse of self-esteem. *News week* 46-51
- Andrews, J. A., & Hops, H. (2010). The influence of peers on substance use. In L. Scheier (Ed.), *Handbook of drug use etiology: Theory, methods, and empirical findings* (pp. 403-420).

- Bailee, G. H (2017). Linking family processes and academic competence among rural African American youths. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 567–579.
- Basedow, L. A., Kuitunen-Paul, S., Eichler, A., Roessner, V., & Golub, Y. (2021). Diagnostic accuracy of the drug use disorder identification test and its short form, the DUDIT-C, in German adolescent psychiatric patients. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 678819.
- Dike, J. D. (2010) substance used among street children in Honduras". In S. Erstein (ed.) Special issues on substance used among homeless Immigrants and Refugee populations: *An international perspective 32(7&8)*, 806-827.
- Jang, K., Park, N. & Song, H. (2016). Social comparison on Facebook: Its antecedents and psychological outcomes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 62(Supplement C), 147–154.
- Joe, G.W., Flynn, P.M., Broome, K.M. & Simpson, D.D. (2017). Pattern of drug use and expectations in methadone patients. *Addictive behaviours*, 32(8), 1640-1656.
- Kpolovie, P. J. (2010). *Advanced research methods*. Springfield Publishers.
- Nwankwo, O. C. (2016). *A practical guide to research writing for students of research enterprise* (Revised 6th ed). University of Port Harcourt Press Limited.
- Ravenna, M., Hölzl, E., Kirshler, E., Palmonari, A. & Costarelli, S. (2012). Drug addicts in therapy- Changes in life space in the course of one year. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 12, 353–368.
- Simbee, D. (2012). Prevalence of substance use and psychosocial influencing factors among secondary school students in Dodoma municipality. Published dissertation for Master of Medicine (Psychiatry), Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences.
- Rhonda, L. (2016). The role of family environment and peer networks in adolescent substance use. *Journal of Substance Use & Misuse*, 51(5), 609-618. <https://doi.org/>
- University of Texas Mental Health and Counseling Center. (2015). Low self-esteem and substance abuse: A psychological perspective. University of Texas.
- World Substance Report. (2015). Global trends in substance abuse and addiction treatment. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.