



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Prevalence of Substance Abuse Among University Undergraduates

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Abstract

The study investigated how many university students in private, state, and federal institutions abuse chemical substances. It also compared the three types of institution to know where abuse of substances is more prevalent. The population for the study were all university undergraduates from Ekiti State. The sample is made up of 450 respondents' selected using simple randomization and purposive sampling technique with 115 participants from private institutions, 165 from state owned institutions and 170 participants from federal institutions. A Google Form questionnaire tagged Prevalence of Substance Abuse Scale (PSAS) was created, validated and used for data collection. Results; No significant difference could be determined in terms of gender on the prevalence of substance abuse among undergraduate students ($F(1, 448) = 0.581, p < .05$). A significant difference was detected in terms of age ($F(3, 447) = 0.088, p < .05$). It revealed a non-significant effect on the prevalence of substance abuse among undergraduates across different universities (private, state, and federal) ($F(2, 447) = 0.084, p < 0.05$).

It was suggested that universities should have an active counselling centre with trained counsellors to help people who struggle with substance abuse. Counsellors should work with the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to hold events like awareness campaigns, seminars, and workshops to enlighten students about the negative effects of substance abuse..

Keywords

Substance Abuse, Undergraduates, Prevalence, Counselling

INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalysts described the affective components of moral development as a product of the Id, ego, and superego. It is believed that a morally mature individual should not get stalked by the irrational id that seeks the immediate gratification of instinctive needs but rather possess a superego that is moralistic enough to monitor the rational ego's thoughts and deeds. Youth with mature personalities are therefore expected to resist the temptations to violate moral or cultural norms and develop a sense of self-esteem that prevents negative behaviours. Unfortunately,

moral decadence and unhealthy habits, which often begin during adolescence (Mangerud et al., 2014), are on the rise, as youth, especially university undergraduates, are getting more involved in social menace or immoral behaviours that deviate them from societal norms. Such deviant behaviours include substance abuse, drug addiction, cybercrime, cultism, gender violence, hooliganism, etc. (Makinde et al., 2020). Some psychoactive substances are used for curative purposes; however, they become abused when they are taken regularly without a medical doctor's prescription (Onoyase, 2019).

Substance abuse is almost becoming a normal phenomenon among adolescents and young adults and the challenges arising from its intake are becoming a prevalent global concern

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([Oparaduru & Okoye, 2022](#)). Substance abuse is mostly acute among the youth; with institutions of higher learning (which was much revered in the past) becoming a fertile ground for substance abusers and drug addicts. Substance abuse is defined as the intentional consumption of chemical substances, mind-bending substances, or performance-enhancing substances for non-therapeutic or non-medical purposes, which may result in physical, mental, emotional, or social harm to the consumer ([Onah, 2023](#), [Onoyase, 2019](#)). They are chemical substances that, when consumed or administered to the body system, it alters mental processes such as perception, consciousness, cognition, mood, and emotions with the proportion of use reaching epidemic levels in some parts of the world with varieties of negative consequences such as accidents, untimely deaths, health issues, cybercrimes, ritual killings, unwanted or untimely pregnancies and poor academic performances among others ([Alozai & Sharma, 2022](#)). They can make them violent, depressed, and behave strangely. Chemical substances are bad for the health of young adults, especially university students. Chemicals can also hurt their breathing and their nerves. Substance-induced disorders happen when someone is intoxicated or going through withdrawal from a substance. These disorders can also cause mental health problems like psychotic disorders, bipolar disorder, depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, sleep disorders, sexual problems, delirium, and problems with thinking and memory. Recently, substance-induced disorders have become more common among college students. This could have a big impact on how they act and feel, and could also make it harder for them to do well in school ([Ho et al., 2019](#))

Studies have shown that substance abuse is a long-lasting issue in tertiary institutions particularly universities because of things that propel students to do it. ([Anyama, Jimoh, 2022](#); [Ofuebe, et al. 2020](#); [Jacob and Adegboyega, 2017](#)) identified availability of substances in the open market, pressure from peers, poor interpersonal relationships with others, adjustment issues, academic and financial pressures, lack of fundamental knowledge about the harmful effects of drugs, lack or poor parental guidance, strained relationship with parents, poor academic achievements in school, teacher's negative attitude

to work and parental illiteracy among other variables as factors predisposing youths to substance abuse. Youths across cultures use substances as a means of reducing tension, having fun, challenging parental and other adults' authority, curing social acceptability, frustration, and poverty, and showcasing their financial capability. Pressure from peers, poor relationships with others, and adjustments to academic and financial pressures are other reasons why youths abuse substances.

Studying substance abuse, researchers found that many tertiary institution students commonly use drugs or alcohol. In a study in Benue State, Nigeria, they looked at how many people in colleges, polytechnics, and universities were abusing drugs. They found that the average amount used was higher than what they expected ([Onoyase, 2019](#)). Marijuana was the substance that people abused the most. The next popular substances were prescription stimulants, hallucinogens, opioids, and cough syrup ([Johnston et al., 2015](#)) ([United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018](#)). On the other hand ([Anyanwu et al., 2016](#)) reported that with a frequency rate of 29.0%, alcohol is the most commonly abused substance. Cocaine had the lowest rate of abuse at 2.1%, while cannabis was the most abused. Following cannabis, tobacco and locally brewed alcohol were also frequently abused according to ([Essien, 2010](#)). The facts sheet from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the drugs most often injected by youth are pharmaceutical opioids, followed by cocaine and heroin. In simple words, more men than women inject drugs. Also, women are more likely to inject heroin than men. When women who abuse drugs by injecting them are more likely to do risky sexual activities than men, so their chances of getting HIV and other infections increase. When people use drugs and alcohol too much, men are more likely to become addicted than women. Men are more likely to try different illegal substances and are also more likely to go to the hospital or die from taking too much of these chemical substances. However, women are more likely to have strong desires for drugs and start using them again after trying to quit. However, men and women are equally likely to develop a substance use disorder ([Fox et al., 2014](#), [National Institute on Drug Agency, 2020](#), [Smith, 2014](#)).

The prevalence of substance abuse across institutions of higher learning is an indication that stakeholders should not cross fingers and allow the monster eat deep into educational system. Therefore, assessing the patronage of counselling services as a preventive measure or intervention for the prevalence of substance abuse in tertiary institutions, **King'ori, (2020)** reported that 78% of counsellors indicated that their students were aware and utilizing counselling services with 22% not aware of counselling services. Report also revealed that students in private owned institutions patronize counselling services than those in public institution (**Omoyemiju, 2022**) a situation which may be linked to the quality control measures that are often put in place by such institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Substance abuse among youths most especially those in the University seems to be a constantly evolving phenomenon that necessitates frequent assessments and reassessments in order to nip the problem in the bud. Smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol, and using illegal drugs can make user sick and can even cause death during teenage years and as one gets older. The university's response to substance abuse problems and understanding the effectiveness of policy and intervention efforts relies on having accurate and trustworthy data. That's why this research is important. This study looks at how common it is for university students in Ekiti State to misuse drugs and alcohol. The research also shows how common substance abuse is among different types of institutions, age groups, and genders.

Research Questions

1. Is substance abuse more prevalent among male university undergraduate students than female undergraduate students?
2. At what age group is substance abuse very prevalent among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions?
3. What is the prevalence level of substance abuse among Universities undergraduate students?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the prevalence of substance abuse among undergraduates based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the prevalence of substance abuse among undergraduates based on age.
3. There is no significant difference in the prevalence of substance abuse among the three types.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive research design was employed for the study, a process that requires gathering data and analyzing information on the current situation of the topic under investigation. The population for the study were all university undergraduates from Ekiti State. A sample of 115 participants from Private institutions, 165 from state owned institutions and 170 participants from federal institutions made up the 450 respondents selected for the study. The researcher used a simple random and purposive sampling technique to select the sample. Simple random in the sense that all participants who were from Ekiti State were given the chance of being selected. Purposive in that only responses from undergraduates from Ekiti State were considered for analysis from the cluster.

The issue of ethical considerations in research is held with high levels of importance, especially when the study involves human beings (**WMA, 2013**). Voluntary participation permission of all the participants was obtained by the researcher from the participants and necessary precautions were taken to protect the rights of the participants. They were duly informed of the purpose of the study. The researcher assured the participants of their anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided. They were instructed not to include their names and matriculation number and that the information provided would be used only for research, and they approved.

A self-developed structured Google form questionnaire tagged: Prevalence of Substance Abuse Scale (PSAS) was created, validated and used for data collection by the researcher. The questionnaire is sectionalized into two, A and B. Section A contains demographic information of the participants while Section B contains questions on the prevalence of substance abuse among university undergraduates. The instrument was

adjudged to have face and content validity by three tests and measurement experts. It was further subjected to a reliability test to determine its consistency for the purpose for which it was developed. The instrument, therefore yielded 0.81 Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. The instrument was sent to different students' online WhatsApp groups to find out how many students were using drugs, and if there were any differences between boys and girls when it came to drug abuse and to establish the difference in substance abuse based on age. The questionnaire items were rated on four scales (1= Strongly Disagreed, 2= Disagreed 3= Agreed and 4 = Strongly Agreed) Responses were received electronically while only responses from undergraduates from Ekiti State were purposively considered for analysis. The data collected were subjected to data analysis using mean, standard deviation, weighted mean, analysis of variance. The reference cutoff was a weighted mean of 2.50 ($4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10/4$). Any mean

below 2.50 is regarded as disagreeing with the item, while any mean above 2.50 is agreeing with the item.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis *Research Question 1*

Is substance abuse more prevalent among male undergraduate students than female undergraduate students in tertiary institutions?

Table 1 details the frequency tabulation of the 450 respondents (male 297 (66%) and 153 (34%) female) selected for the survey. There are 45 (39.1%) female respondents and 70 (60.9%) male respondents from private university, 112 (67.9%) male respondents and 53 (32.1%) female respondents from state university, and 115 (67.6%) male respondents and 55 (32.4%) female respondents from federal university.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics and respondents responses to prevalence of substance abuse in frequency and percentages

Variable		Private	State	Federal	Total
		Frequency/ Percentage (%)	Frequency/ Percentage (%)	Frequency/ Percentage (%)	Frequency/ Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	70 (60.9%)	112 (67.9%)	115 (67.6%)	297 (66%)
	Female	45 (39.1%)	53 (32.1%)	55 (32.4%)	153 (34%)
	Total	115 (100%)	165 (100%)	170 (100%)	450 (100%)
Age	11 – 15	6 (5.2%)	9 (5.5%)	4 (2.3%)	19 (4.2%)
	16 – 25	67 (58.3%)	98 (59.4%)	112 (65.9%)	277 (61.6%)
	26 and above	42 (36.5%)	58 (35.1%)	54 (31.8%)	154 (34.2%)
	Total	115 (100%)	165 (100%)	170 (100%)	450 (100%)

Research Question 2

At what age group is the prevalence of substance abuse very rapt among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions?

According to the respondents' age distribution in Table 1, 19 (4.2%), 277 (61.6%), and 154 (34.2%) of the respondents, were between the ages of 11 - 15, 16 – 25 and 26 and above respectively. The private university has 6 (5.2%) respondents in the 12-15 age group, 67 (58.3%) respondents in the 16 – 25 age group, and 42 (36.5%) respondents in the 26 and above age

group. For the state university, 9 (5.5%) respondents in the 12-15 age group, 98 (59.4%) respondents in the 16 – 25 age group, and 58 (35.1%) respondents in the 26 and above age group. In federal university, respondents from age 11-15 accounted for 4 (2.3%), followed by respondents from age 16-25 which accounted for 112 (65.9%) while those aged 26 and above accounted for 54 (31.8%).

Research Question 3: What is the prevalence of substance abuse among universities undergraduate students?

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation on the prevalence of substance abuse among universities undergraduate students

University	N=115			N=165			N=170		
	Substance	Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD
1. Cocaine/Crack	3.00	0.67	Agreed	2.63	1.18	Agreed	2.97	0.96	Agreed
2. Alcohol	3.23	0.54	Agreed	3.01	0.86	Agreed	3.39	0.67	Agreed
3. Cigarette	2.49	1.08	Disagreed	2.27	0.44	Disagreed	2.43	0.68	Disagreed
4. Caffeine	2.45	1.13	Disagreed	2.44	1.04	Disagreed	2.19	0.78	Disagreed
5. Heroin	2.32	1.26	Disagreed	2.39	0.98	Disagreed	2.23	1.44	Disagreed
6. Opium	2.14	1.29	Disagreed	3.23	0.71	Agreed	2.10	1.61	Disagreed
7. Tramadol	3.09	0.65	Agreed	3.66	0.77	Agreed	3.23	0.54	Agreed
8. Marijuana	2.55	0.98	Agreed	2.42	1.00	Disagreed	2.42	1.04	Disagreed
9. Codine	2.48	1.46	Disagreed	2.33	0.99	Disagreed	2.41	1.22	Disagreed
10. Gegemu	2.71	0.96	Agreed	2.61	0.59	Agreed	3.09	0.59	Agreed
11. Dry feaces	2.00	1.02	Disagreed	2.39	0.98	Disagreed	2.52	0.92	Agreed
12. Formaldehyde	2.46	1.06	Disagreed	2.48	0.97	Disagreed	2.07	0.76	Disagreed
13. Cough Syrup	3.92	0.38	Agreed	2.72	0.89	Agreed	2.81	0.88	Agreed
14. Paint thinner	2.78	0.88	Disagreed	2.46	1.15	Disagreed	2.47	1.08	Disagreed
15. Refnol	2.96	0.57	Agreed	2.75	0.94	Agreed	2.85	0.70	Agreed
16. Shisha	2.65	0.66	Agreed	3.29	0.69	Agreed	3.04	0.92	Agreed
Grand Mean	2.78			3.04			3.12		

The result in Table 2, shows that the grand mean of 2.78 for respondents from private universities, 3.04 for respondents from state universities, and 3.12 for respondents from federal universities indicates the prevalence of substance abuse among the sampled university undergraduates. This means that these students abuse these substances to alter their behaviours or gain acceptability among their colleagues. The abuse of the following substances (alcohol, tramadol, cough syrup, refnol, shisha and gegemu) were found to be highly prevalent. Gegemu is a

local herb cultivated for its effectiveness as anti-termite but when the leave is cut and squeezed, the juice acts as stimulant. The availability and cheapness may attest to why students abuse it. It was also shown that formaldehyde and dry feaces were the least abuse substance among the undergraduates.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the prevalence of substance abuse on the basis of undergraduate students' gender.

Table 3: ANOVA table for prevalence of Substance Abuse on undergraduate gender

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Critical F-ratio
Between Groups	16.107	1	16.107	0.581	3.000
Within Groups	12420.998	448	27.725		
Total	12437.105	449			

*P < 0.05

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a nonsignificant effect of gender on the prevalence of substance abuse among undergraduate students, as indicated by the F-statistic ($F(1, 448) = 0.581, p < .05$).

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in the prevalence of substance abuse on basis of undergraduate students' age group.

Table 4: ANOVA of the prevalence of Substance Abuse among universities students age group

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Critical F-ratio
Between Groups	6.918	3	2.306	0.088	3.000
Within Groups	11712.008	447	26.201		
Total	12437.105	449			

*P < 0.05

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a nonsignificant effect of age on the prevalence of substance abuse among undergraduate students, as indicated by the F-statistic ($F(3, 447) = 0.088, p < .05$).

Table 5. ANOVA table for prevalence of Substance Abuse on university undergraduates

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Cal. F-ratio
Between – Group	4.676	2	2.338	0.084	3.000
Within – Group	12443.368	447	27.838		
Total	12448.044	449			

* $P < 0.05$

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a nonsignificant effect of the type of university (private, state, and federal) attended on the

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference among students in private, state, and federal universities on the prevalence of substance abuse.

prevalence of substance abuse among undergraduate students, as indicated by the F-statistic ($F(2, 447) = 0.084, p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have shown that the abuse of substances is prevalent among undergraduates irrespective of the type of ownership of the institution they attend (Private, State, or Federal) as shown in calculated F-ratio in table 3. The collated results revealed a grand mean of 2.78 for private universities, 3.04 for state universities, and 3.12 for federal universities which were found to be high when compared with the benchmark of 2.50. These results corroborate the findings of (Manzoor et al., 2023; Onoyase, 2019) in her study where she evaluated substance abuse among higher education students in Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, and Universities with a grand mean result of 2.61, 3.33, and 3.07 respectively, findings which were higher than the benchmark of 2.50. The high number of young students abusing substance may happen because they are excited and energetic, and because the influence of their friends who are also doing it and they want to fit in.

They may also do it because they like the feeling of being independent and not having their parents watching over them, which they experience during their time in secondary school. The study found that people abused alcohol the most, followed by tramadol, cough syrup, cocaine, shisha, and gegemu (a local herb). This contradicts what Johnston et al (2015) said. In 2018, UNODC studies found that marijuana was the most commonly used drug, followed by prescription stimulants, hallucinogens, opioids, and cough syrup. The study does not agree with Essien (2010) who found that cannabis, followed by tobacco and locally brewed alcohol, were the

most common illegal drugs used by students. The outcome agrees with Anyanwu et al. (2016) that alcohol was the substance most commonly abused, with a rate of 29.0%. Cocaine was the least abused substance, with a rate of 2.1%. Many people drink alcohol too much because it is easy to find and doesn't cost much.

Examining the variation in how often people misuse drugs or alcohol in different types of places. Table 3 suggests that there was no significant difference between the people who participated from private, state, and federal universities. However, state institutions had the highest average score of 3.33, followed by federal institutions with a score of 3.07, and private institutions with a score of 2.78. Additional findings shows that most of the respondents from public universities live outside of the campus, while those from private universities live on campus where the rules prohibit the use of substances. The research found that there was no significant difference in gender abuse of substances as shown in table 4. Results showed that male undergraduate students are more likely to use drugs and alcohol compared to female undergraduate students. The findings showed that more men than women use alcohol, tramadol, cocaine, gegemu, and refnol. However, female college students from different schools tend to abuse cough syrup, shisha, tramadol, and cocaine more frequently. The findings supports previous studies that found men are more likely to have problems with alcohol and illegal drugs, leading to hospitalization and death. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to struggle with cravings, relapses, and using prescription drugs without a

medical reason (Fox et al., 2014; National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020; Smith, 2014).

The study also showed that the age of undergraduates did not make a big difference in their substance abuse. The study showed that young men and women between 16 and 25 years old use drugs more than older people. The age range mentioned here is from teenage years to early adulthood. During this time, students, usually in university, are curious and eager to try new things. This can make them more likely to engage in harmful behaviours like substance abuse. Additional information from the comments of the participants showed that counselling services in universities are available with patronage at a very low ebb, and many students do not utilize the available counselling services as expected.

Conclusion

The study found that many college students have a serious problem with drug and alcohol use, and it is causing significant health issues for them and the public. Substance abuse is common in different types of places, among both males and females, and across different age groups. Men were more likely to abuse alcohol, tramadol, and refnol, while women were more likely to use cough syrup with codeine and shisha. It was found that younger students, aged 16 to 25, use drugs and alcohol more than older students. Additionally, students who live off campus are more likely to engage in substance abuse compared to those living on campus. Even though people all around the world are worried about drug and alcohol abuse, there is still not enough help and education being provided in counseling services and colleges.

Recommendations

Substance abuse can have serious results if not taken care of properly. To deal with the problem of many undergraduates abusing substances, here are some suggestions that might help.

- The university needs to create a counselling centre right away. This centre would have professional counsellors who would help students with substance abuse problems and also give support to those who have been affected by substance abuse.
- The university should prohibit the sale of illicit substances that can be bought without a prescription, such as cigarettes, codeine, tramadol, and cough syrup, on

campus. Using a cough syrup with an ingredient called dextromethorphan alongside certain medications like monoamine oxidase inhibitors can cause high fever, seeing things that are not real, intense excitement, or being in a deep sleep-like state.

- Guidance counsellors can work together with the University health service providers and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to plan programmes like drug awareness campaigns, seminars, and workshops. These events will help educate and make students aware of the harmful effects of substance abuse on their physical and mental health.
- Each university can adopt the National Drug Laws, such as the Ekiti State Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) law, which allows for punishment of people caught using drugs. There needs to formulate rules that will stop people from selling and using substances at the university and nearby areas.
- The university should try hard to create more housing for students on campus. It is easier to keep an eye on and manage students who live on campus compared to those who live off-campus.
- Regular health check-ups, such as getting a blood test after coming back from holidays, can be done at the university health centre to find out if someone is abusing chemical substances. Knowing about blood screening and the possible punishment can stop some students from abusing substances.

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Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares that in the course of the research, there was no commercial or financial relationships existed that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Ethical Statement

An approval on ethical clearance certificate with reference number CERAD/URTC/ECC-BOUESTI/STA/Vol.010 dated 17th January 2023 was collected from the Centre for Research and Development (CERAD) Ethics Assessment Committee of Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science, and Technology Ikere Ekiti.

Researchers' Contribution Statement

Research Design; Statistical analysis; Preparation of the article; The entire process of Data Collection was carried out by the author.

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