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ME AND MY BESTIE FOR LIFE: EXPLORING PEER INFLUENCE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study, situated within the frameworks of differential association and social learning theories, delved into the nexus between peer influence and substance abuse amongst Nigerian undergraduate students. Focusing on Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (AE-FUNAI), and a survey design was employed. A representative sample of 392 students were drawn, ensuring statistical validity. Data collection utilised a validated 26-item questionnaire meticulously reviewed by the research supervisor. Descriptive statistical analyses, encompassing frequencies, percentages, and means, illuminated the key findings. The study examined three research objectives, which are to examine the common types of substance abused by AE-FUNAI undergraduate students; to document the relationship between peer influence and substance abuse among undergraduate students; and lastly, to investigate the consequences of substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. Firstly, a statistically significant relationship between peer influence and substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduates was unveiled. Cannabis, alcohol, heroin, ecstasy, tobacco, inhalants, and prescription medications emerged as the most commonly abused substances. Furthermore, the detrimental consequences of substance abuse were laid bare, impacting academic performance, raising the risk of criminal activity, jeopardising health, and straining relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. Mental health concerns were also identified as a potential consequence. The study concluded that peer influence causes AEFUNAI undergraduate students to engage in substance abuse. Also shown the grave danger of substance abuse on academic and health status of users. To combat this concerning trend, the study advocates for a multi-pronged approach. First, educational campaigns are crucial to raising awareness of the dangers associated with substance abuse. Secondly, establishing readily accessible support services for struggling students is paramount. Finally, enacting and rigorously enforcing stringent anti-substance abuse policies within AE-FUNAI would serve as a potent deterrent.

Keywords: Alcohol, Cannabis, Peer influence, Substance abuse, Undergraduate Students.

Introduction

Substance abuse is both an international and national problem, which has led to various studies on the causes of substance abuse. In Nigeria, the problem initially came to the attention of research and health care experts in the early 1960s (Obot, 1993). Substance abuse

is one of the challenges facing students in their academic performance in our Institutions. Drugs and their use have existed since time immemorial, in every culture throughout history. Before the 1800s, drugs were used in their natural form. Alcohol was used in most societies for cultural ceremonies and recreation, and other drugs were used for medicinal purposes (Alavi et al., 2016).

A holistic definition of substance abuse has remained elusive to scholars. This implied that there is no simple definition for substance abuse. A definition of substance abuse that is frequently cited is that in DSM-IV, the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) issued by the American Psychiatric Association. Which defined substance abuse as a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress. It is the use of illegal drugs or the use of prescription or over-the-counter drugs or alcohol for purposes other than those for which they are meant to be used, or in excessive amounts. Substance abuse may lead to social, physical, emotional, and job-related problems (Didarloo & Pourali 2016).

According to the World Health Organization, substance abuse is defined as the harmful use of psycho-active substances, and their repeated use can lead to dependence. The negative consequences of illicit drug use include behavioral, cognitive and physiological disorders. Drug Recognition Experts (DREs) classify drugs in one of seven categories: central nervous system (CNS) depressants, CNS stimulants, hallucinogens, dissociative anesthetics, narcotic analgesics, inhalants, and cannabis. Drugs from each of these categories can affect a person's central nervous system and impair a person's normal faculties, including a person's ability to safely operate a motor vehicle. CNS depressants slow down the operations of the brain and the body. Examples of CNS depressants include alcohol, barbiturates, anti-anxiety tranquilizers (e.g., Valium, Librium, Xanax, Prozac, and Thorazine), GHB (Gamma Hydroxybutyrate), Rohypnol, and many other anti-depressants (e.g., Zoloft, Paxil). CNS stimulants accelerate the heart rate and elevate the blood pressure, and "speed-up," or over-stimulate, the body. Examples of CNS stimulants include cocaine, "crack" cocaine, amphetamines, and methamphetamine ("crank").

Peer influence on the other hand, is the direct or indirect influence on peers, i.e., members of social groups with similar interests, experiences, or social statuses. Members of a peer group are more likely to influence a person's beliefs, values, and behaviour. It is when a person chooses to do something they wouldn't otherwise do, because they want to feel accepted and valued by their peers. It is not just or always about doing something against your will. Peer influence can be said to be a better way to describe how teenagers' behaviour is shaped by wanting to feel they belong to a group of friends or peers. Peer influence can be positive. The influence of peers on young adults, especially those in the institution of higher learning cannot be overemphasized. Youths tend to do some things because they see their friends doing it and because they do not want to feel left out. They do not want to be regarded as timid and they want to gain prestige in the eyes of their peers, therefore the proliferation of negative behaviours which include drug and substance abuse. By associating with friends who smoke, they acquire attitudes favorable to smoking. Peers are believed to contribute to adolescent drug use both directly and indirectly through several complex mechanisms: by modeling drug use; by shaping norms, attitudes, and values; and by providing opportunities and support for drug use (Karl & Susan, 1994).

The young population is a vulnerable social group that is exposed to drug abuse practices and all their disastrous effects. Young people, especially those in institutions of higher learning,

are in a state of rapid physical and psychological change. Because of their freedom, curiosity, enthusiasm and urge to try and see new phenomena, considerable numbers of youth have become addicted to alcohol, smoking and dangerous medical drugs all of which are detrimental to health. These and many similar health hazards challenge young people's proper physical, mental and psychological development (Gowing & Ali 2015). Research interest in drug use stems from its increased frequency in the past decades, making it a worldwide public health problem. The global burden of disease projected that tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs were 2nd, 9th and 20th consecutively the leading cause of mortality globally. It is further projected that tobacco smoking alone would lead to 1 billion deaths globally during the 21st century (Whiteford et al., 2013). A report from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) stated that around 275 million people used drugs worldwide in the last year, while over 36 million people suffered from drug use disorders, according to the 2021 world drug report released by the UNODC (UNODC 2018). As the 2018 National Drug Use Survey revealed, in Nigeria at that time there were around 14.3 million drug users of which close to three million suffered from a drug use disorder (UNODC, 2018). The World Drug Report further noted that in the last 24 years cannabis potency had increased by as much as four times in parts of the world, even as the percentage of young people who perceived the drug as harmful fell by as much as 40 per cent, despite evidence that cannabis use is associated with a variety of health and other harms, especially among regular long-term users. It is a worrisome trend, considering that there are 11 million cannabis users in Nigeria, a third of whom seemed to be regular users with a need for drug counselling.

With the increasing rate of substance abuse, an increasing rate of violence has been observed among high school and university students. It is evident that most students who engage in violence are drug users. Among the highest in the drugs abused by undergraduates in a southern Nigerian university, are: cigarette, brewed alcohol, locally brewed alcohol, kolanut, apsirin and cananbbis (Essien, 2010). Cannabis is by far the most commonly used illicit drug among the world population, followed by tobacco (Essien, 2010). Several factors are involved in the proliferation of substance abuse among students, some of which include poor academic performance, leisure boredom, to alleviate fear and peer influence. With peer influence as the most significant factor. Despite the fact that drug abuse has adverse effects on the youths by changing their brain perception of difficulties and problems, the number of undergraduates that use or abuse stimulants has steadily increased in recent years (Alan, 2003).

Efforts put in place by the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and other governmental agencies to stem the tide of drug and substance abuse in Nigeria has been meet with stiff resistance of users thereby increasing the incidence of drug abuse cases. In spite of their continued destruction of such illicit drugs, the rapid rise in the number of cases of drug abuse among youths whom are mostly students is still on the increase (Akinyemi 2008). It is against this background that the study tries to examine peer influence and substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students.

In Nigeria high institutions today, there is a prevalence of substance abuse, which increase at alarming rate requiring an urgent approach to rectify the problem. Frequent crisis in higher Institutions with activities rampaging in the higher institutions has mostly been linked to students who abuse drugs. Despite the fact that substance abuse is prohibited in Nigeria (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency Act, 2004), and in schools by set of school rules

and regulations (Federal Ministry of Education, 2012), the practice has become rampant and widespread in Nigeria high institutions today (Ogah et al., 2020). When a drug is abused, it causes injury to the brain and often irreversible alterations in the central nervous system. When psychoactive substances destroy several thousand neurons, the consequences are fatal and a number of students end up under performing in their academics when under the control of this mood stimulating and controlling substance and some have died from drug overdoses (Ekpenyong, 2012).

Ebonyi State is rated above 13 percent in the act of drug abuse, according to the United Nations' statistics (UNODC 2018). No wonder in the words of Eze Ude, the coordinator International Society for Substance Use Prevention and Treatment Professionals (ISSUP), "Ebonyi State is the highest in substance abuse in Nigeria". This is both appalling and devastating. In Nigeria, drug abuse is on the rise, with over 40% of students abusing various types of drugs (Ekpenyong, 2012). The consequence of smoking marijuana, taking excessive alcohol and other substances that stimulates one's mind could lead to addiction which may result in negative health implications and adversely affect performance in examination among students who use it (Ogah et al., 2020). Unless we curb the situation and kick out illicit drug use from our schools, we will continue to have trouble with lack of accessibility avenues through which youths can articulate their concerns and engage in substance abuse. As illicit drug use remains a prevalent public health problem impacting young people (UHRN, 2016), research is needed to examine the extent to which peer relationships contribute to illicit drug use among Nigerian undergraduate students and AE-FUNAI undergraduates in particular. Therefore, this work seeks to explore the common types of substance abused by AE-FUNAI undergraduate students, if peer influence causes substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students, and the consequences of substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students.

Literature

Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, prescription drugs, and illicit drugs. It is a significant public health concern with a wide range of negative consequences for individuals, families, and communities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), substance abuse is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by a range of factors, including genetic, environmental, and social factors. The WHO also notes that substance abuse is associated with a range of health and social problems, including mental illness, infectious diseases, violence, and accidents.

The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Control Act (2015) classifies illicit drugs into two categories. The first category is comprised of those drugs that are illegal to process, sell, and consume. These include cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin. The second class includes those drugs that are legal to process, sell, and consume when prescribed by a physician, but are then misused by the person to whom the drugs have been prescribed, or are used by individuals not under a prescribing doctor's care, and who may have obtained the drugs by illegal means. Drugs in the second category can include prescription pain medication and prescription sedatives.

A study by Nevadomsky and Narc (1985), based on a sample of nearly 300 university students in Benin City, Nigeria, shows that, although a wide range of various drugs are readily available and known, the substances most frequently used by university students are coffee, cola nuts, alcohol, spirits and cigarettes. Diazepam and diazepoxide are also used with some frequency. Undergraduate Students tend to use stimulants and depressants sequentially,

mainly during and after sessional examinations. The stimulants keep them awake while they are studying for an examination, and the depressants help them to rest after an examination is over. Cannabis is well-known and has been tried by many undergraduate students in Nigeria. Irrespective of the time at which the study of Nevadomsky and Narc was carried out, it reflects the most used and abused substance in our universities today, in general, and AE-FUNAI in particular. Although many drugs are frequently used, alcohol remains the substance of choice for many college students (Schulenberg et al., 2018). Though, according to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, there is a rapid increase in marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines, and other illicit drug use (McClellan & Stringer, 2011). Almost 30% of students entering college have used marijuana (Suerken et al., 2016), the assertion of which is a truism among AE-FUNAI intakes and undergraduate Students.

Oshikoya and Alli (2006) researched to examined the perception of drug abuse amongst Nigerian undergraduates living off-campus. Students were surveyed at the Lagos State University, Ojo, allowing for a diverse sample that included a large percentage of students from different faculties and departments. They discovered that coffee (43.1%) was the most commonly used substance, followed by alcohol (25.8%) and marijuana (7.4%). Also, Odinka et al., (2019) study to explore the knowledge, attitude, perceptions, and practice of drug abuse among undergraduate of a university in Southeast Nigeria to help develop a preventive health education program for students in tertiary institutions in Southeast Nigeria, and discovered that Alcohol (Beer, Wine, Liquor) was the most abused substance among students with 65%, followed by Marijuana or Hashish (Weed, grass) 10%, Tobacco (Cigarettes, cig) 6%, Heroin, other opiates (smack, ho) 1% and students who never abused drugs were 17%. The findings of the study directly depict the use of drugs in AE-FUNAI and the drugs commonly abused by undergraduate Students of the institution. A wide range of undergraduate students of the school use and abuse alcohol, and a good number also abuse marijuana, which is common among students staying off campus (Odinka et al., 2019). Tobacco products like cigarettes are not commonly abused by undergraduate students in Nigeria as a result of the stereotype associated with them. It is widely expressed among students that cigarettes are for the societal dropouts and elderly people, and not for the youngsters.

Moral behavior is contagious. Observing generous, cooperative, or helpful behavior in peers encourages people to adopt similar behaviors themselves (Dimant, 2019). Many students use alcohol to facilitate social interactions, and using it for this purpose is associated with high levels of use. Social motives for alcohol use (eg, fitting in, increasing one's sense of belonging) are strongly associated with drinking during the first year of college. Heavy drinking is associated with peer acceptance during freshman year. Drinking games are popular during this developmental stage and are associated consistently with higher levels of alcohol consumption. Such games also correlated with first-year alcohol use and are understandably highly influenced by social context (Skidmore et al., 2016).

The World Drug Report indicated that drug users seek approval from their peers to join their habit as a way of seeking acceptance. The majority of the undergraduate students in AE-FUNAI are surrounded by their peers who are experimenting for recreational purposes. This factor is further fueled by the desire to experience something unique. Students in universities are normally in the process of exploring different aspects of their lives in a new environment, and it is common for them to dig deep into drug and substance experimentation. The significance of this proposition is real among undergraduate students of AE-FUNAI. Fresh students who are yet to use any substance at all often feel the need to experiment with these

substances to fit in among their peers that perhaps, who are long long-time drug users. Being away from their friends and families creates a need to fit in with the majority of them, feeling the best way to fit is to be like the rest of the students, attend parties organized in school, and get drunk and high. The lack of guardian monitoring and supervision provides unlimited freedom to most university students to act or behave as they please, making them vulnerable to trying out drugs (Juliana & James, 2021).

Borsari (2001) suggested that peer pressure is a combination of three distinct influences: overt offers of alcohol, modeling, and social norms. Overt offers of alcohol can range from polite gestures to intense goading or commands to drink. Modeling occurs when the student's behaviour corresponds to another student's concurrent drinking behaviour. Perceived social norms can serve to make excessive alcohol use appear common and acceptable to the student. Just as Oshikoya and Alli's (2006) research to examine the perception of drug abuse amongst Nigerian undergraduates living off-campus identified peer influence as the strongest cause of substance abuse, with 25.1% drug abusers abusing drugs because of peer influence. This proves that substance abuse is one of the most significant causes of substance abuse among Nigerian students and AE-FUNAI undergraduates.

A study conducted by Odinka et al. (2019) where 235 students who participated in an awareness program on mental health were approached to participate in. Discovered that 72% of drug abusers were introduced to drugs by their friends, while 6% were from attending parties. This discovery has shown that peer influence is one of the major causes of substance abuse among Undergraduates in South East Nigeria. Odinka et al., (2019) further discovered that many students who used drugs was due to various reasons peculiar to them which include: peer pressure(30%) chronic medical condition(9%) academic challenges(6%) to forget problems(21%) availability and ease of access in the environment(11%). The initiation (Lo & Globetti, 1993) or increase (Leibsohn, 1994; Baer, Kivlahan, & Marlatt, 1995) of alcohol use often occurs during the college years. Individuals entering college show marked increases in alcohol and drug use, compared to those who live at home or get jobs following graduation from high school (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 2000). This is obtainable among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students, as research has indicated that most of them only started engaging in the act of substance abuse in school.

Substance abuse is a major public health concern, particularly among young adults. The prevalence of substance abuse among undergraduate students in Nigeria, including those at AE-FUNAI, has been a growing concern in recent years. Substance abuse can lead to a number of economic problems, including lost productivity, absenteeism, and health care costs (NIDA, 2018). Crime is a serious consequence of substance abuse. People who abuse substances are more likely to engage in criminal activity, such as theft, burglary, and assault. They are also more likely to be victims of crime (NIDA, 2018). There are several factors that can contribute to the link between substance abuse and crime.

Several studies have identified various consequences of substance abuse among undergraduate students. A study by Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller (1992) indicated that a low level of commitment to education and higher truancy rates appear to be related to substance use among students. Observable among undergraduate students of AE-FUNAI, in the first year in the university, a good number tend to give an unwavering focus to academic activities, and in the short run, within the university system, the peer influence, coupled with many engaging in substance abuse, diverts the initial focus. This is seen in the significant reduction in class attendance, poor academic performance, and indifference about school

activities in general, widely associated with second-year and third-year students. Cognitive and behavioral problems experienced by alcohol- and drug-using youth may interfere with their academic performance and also present obstacles to learning for their classmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992).

Mental health problems such as depression, developmental lags, apathy, withdrawal, and other psychosocial dysfunctions are frequently linked to substance abuse among youths. Substance-abusing students are at higher risk than nonusers for mental health problems, including depression, conduct problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and suicide. Suicidal attempts involving students in AE-FUNAI are often reported on the release of semester results. These mental health disorders are common among drug users and substance abusers. Marijuana use, which is prevalent among students in the university, has been shown to interfere with short-term memory, learning, and psychomotor skills. Motivation and psychosexual/emotional development also may be influenced (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992).

A wide range of clinical as well as epidemiological studies have demonstrated the link between substance abuse, particularly alcoholism, and chronic anxiety disorder, which is found to be more common in men than women. In a clinical study by Kushner et al, about 23-70% of alcoholics have anxiety disorders, specifically phobias and neurosis, and about 20-45% of patients with anxiety disorders have a history of alcoholism. Also, elevated rates of anxiety disorder were found in relatives of patients with alcoholism in many family studies. These findings indicate that alcoholism contributes to the development of anxiety disorders (Katherine et al., 1995). The abuse of alcohol and other drugs by youth may result in family crises and jeopardize many aspects of family life, sometimes resulting in family dysfunction. Both siblings and parents are profoundly affected by alcohol- and drug-involved youth (Nowinski, 1990). Substance abuse can drain a family's financial and emotional resources (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992). This finding reflects behaviour associated with substance-abusing students in AE-FUNAI. Once they are addicted to drugs and can no longer afford the drug they abuse, they tend to extort money from parents and guardians to purchase such drugs, thereby leading to loss of family resources.

In a study by Possi (1996), inhalants like Glues are strongly associated with the risk of Lung, brain, and liver damage or even death through suffocation or choking, and anaemia. Whereas Heroin abuse is correlated with risk of brain and liver destruction, drug-induced hepatitis, and embolism (Possi 1996). There are many social implications of substance abuse, ranging from loss of employment, breakup of interpersonal relationships, truancy and dropout from schools, suicidal ideation, road traffic accidents, and unprotected sex (Baker, George, & Sandle, 1996). Students who engage in substance use have a higher probability of dropping out of school at the slightest difficulty.

Many studies have demonstrated a significant relationship between abuse and unemployment, which leads to serious mental problems in addicts, which is thought to be a result of behavioral changes caused by pre-existing psychopathology (Johnson, Reynolds, & Fisher, 2001). Truancy is another aspect of the social implications of substance misuse in which a reciprocal relationship was demonstrated. That is, truancy increases the risk of substance abuse, and on the other hand, substance abuse increases the truancy rate (Chou, Ho, & Chen, 2006). Also, many studies have illustrated the association between the use of illicit drugs and school dropout, in which a high rate of dropout was found in drug abusers (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

In general, the consequences of substance abuse among Nigerian undergraduate students in general and AE-FUNAI in particular include truancy, absenteeism, crime, mental illness, dropouts, Withdrawal from society, difficulty in interpersonal relationships, family problems, physical injuries, and violent behaviours.

Theoretical framework

The study adopts the Differential Association theory of Sutherland 1947 as the theoretical framework. Differential association theory, cited in Maloku (2020), emerged within the lessons of the eminent criminologist Edwin Sutherland. It is one of the criminological theories that seeks to explain criminal behaviour as a behaviour learnt through the process of socialization and contact between members of a social group to which one belongs. Sutherland presented his theory of Differential Association in 1939. His work is based on the assumption that through interaction with others, individuals learn the values, attitudes, techniques, and motives for criminal behaviour. Differential association provides the context in which learning occurs. According to the theory, the most important contexts for learning criminal behavior include peer groups and family units, though varying entities such as schools, neighbors, also provide alternative settings where some learning of criminal and delinquent behavior may ensue. This best explains how peers influence each other. By associating with peers who use drugs, students develop a positive perception about using drugs, and therefore, they use drugs to feel a sense of belonging.

There are two fundamental aspects of differential association, namely the behavioural-interactive and normative dimensions. The behavioral-interactive dimension refers to the direct and indirect interactions and associations with individuals who engage in delinquent activities. The normative dimension refers to the values that one is exposed to as a result of one's associations and interactions with others. The theory suggests that individuals with a greater proportion of their peers who engage in criminal behaviour will be exposed to more delinquent models, they will be subjected to a greater number of definitions favourable to delinquency, and they will perceive more rewards and benefits associated with criminal and delinquent conduct. In turn, these individuals will be likely to engage in criminal or delinquent behaviour, which could include substance abuse.

In applying the theory to this study, the amount of time that a person is exposed to a particular definition and at what point the interaction began are both crucial for deviant behaviour. This insinuates that a person who spends most time with peers who abuse substances is more likely to learn the behaviour as compared to a person who has no close contact with substance abusers. The process of learning criminal behavior is not any different from the process involved in learning any other type of behavior. Sutherland maintains that there is no unique learning process associated with acquiring non-normative ways of behaving. The theory has been as much criticized as it has been praised. According to Cressey (1952), the theory ignores cases where people can be self-motivated and individualistic and still be moved to crime. It also ignores cases where the motivation may be psychological/biological, such as kleptomania or crimes of passion (Cressey, 1952).

Methodology

For this study, the survey design is adopted. The choice of this design is based on the fact that the entire population cannot be covered; therefore, a sample representative was used. The study is conducted in Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo. The University is located in Ikwo, Ebonyi State. Ikwo is the largest Local Government Area in Ebonyi State.

It is situated in the eastern part of the state. The location (school) was chosen because of the rate of prevalence of drug use among the students of the institution and as well as being a federal university that converges students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds across the federation. The population of this study consists of undergraduate students who are currently enrolled at Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. According to the AE-FUNAI Directorate of Admissions, the total number of undergraduates admitted into AE-FUNAI from the 2019/2020 academic session to the 2022/2023 academic session are 19,383 (AE-FUNAI Directorate of Admissions, 2023). A sample size of 392 was derived from the population of the study using the Taro Yamane formula (1967) $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$. The sample is drawn from twelve (12) faculties within the university. The number of students that will be selected from each faculty is as follows:

S/N	Faculty	Number of Students
1	Agriculture	20
2	Basic Medical Sciences	30
3	Education	30
4	Engineering and Technology	20
5	Environmental Science	20
6	Humanities	50
7	Law	22
8	Management Sciences	40
9	Biological Sciences	40
10	Physical Sciences	40
11	College of Medical Sciences	30
12	Social Sciences	60 (it houses the largest number of students in the school)

Furthermore, the sampling technique adopted in this study is the simple random sampling technique. This technique allows us to randomly select participants from different faculties and departments within the university in proportion to their representation in the undergraduate population. This approach will help ensure that the sample is representative of the entire undergraduate population at AE-FUNAI and will allow us to generalize the results to the larger population of undergraduate students at the university. In addition, this approach will help reduce the potential for selection bias, as all eligible participants within each stratum will have an equal chance of being selected for the study. Data was collected through the use of a self-structured questionnaire. The questions were structured on a Likert five (5) scale. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics using Mean and Mean of Mean. Approval was sought and given from the school management before embarking on the research in the school. Also, verbal consent was obtained from the participants before administering the questionnaire to them. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were also guaranteed.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

		Gender Distribution of Respondents			
	Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	158	40.3	40.3	40.3
	Male	234	59.7	59.7	100
	Total	392	100.0	100.0	
		Undergraduate Levels of Respondents			
	Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	100	72	18.4	18.4	18.4
	200	50	12.8	12.8	31.2
	300	127	32.4	32.4	63.6
	400	100	25.5	25.5	89.1
	500	43	10.9	10.9	100
	600	0	0	0	
	Total	392	100.0	100.0	
		Age Distribution of Respondents			
	Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16-20years	176	44.9	44.9	44.9
	21-25years	147	37.5	37.5	82.4
	26-30years	68	17.4	17.4	99.8
	31years & above	1	0.2	0.2	100
	Total	392	100	100	
		Marital Status of Respondents			
	Status	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	390	99.5	99.5	99.5
	Married	2	0.5	0.5	100
	Divorced	0	0	0	
	Widowed	0	0	0	
	Total	392	100	100	
		Living Arrangement of Respondents			
	Living Arrangement	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	On-campus housing	109	27.8	27.8	27.8
	Off-campus housing	283	72.2	72.2	100
	Total	392	100	100	

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The respondents were first asked questionnaire items I to V, and the demographic features of the respondents. Table 2 shows the gender distribution of the respondents sampled for the study. 158 respondents, representing 40.3% indicated that they were female, while the other 234 respondents, representing 59.7% indicated that they were male. This clearly shows that male dominated the sample size used for the study as they were more in number than their female counterparts. Table 2 further shows the undergraduate levels of respondents sampled for the study. 72 respondents representing 18.4% are in 100level, 50 respondents representing 12.8% are in 200 level, 127 respondents representing 32.4% are in 300level, 100 respondents representing 25.5% are in 400level, while 43 respondents, 10.9% are in 500level. None of the respondents is currently in the 600-level. The table clearly shows that 300L and 400L undergraduates occupied the majority of the sample used for the study. In terms of their age, Table 2 shows the age distribution of the respondents. 176 respondents representing 44.9% fell in the age bracket of 16-20 years, 147 respondents representing 37.5% fell in the age bracket of 21-25years, and 68 respondents representing 17.4% fell in the age bracket of 26-30 years, while 1 respondent representing 0.2% fell in the age bracket of 31 years and above. This clearly shows that the majority of the respondents sampled for the study fell in the age

bracket 16-25years. Table 2 further shows that 390 respondents, representing 99.5% were married, 2 respondents, representing 0.5% were married, while none of the respondents were divorced or widowed. In terms of their living arrangement, Table 2 shows that 109 respondents, representing 27.8% live on campus (school hostel) while 283 respondents, representing 72.2% live off campus. The table clearly shows that the majority of the respondents live off-campus.

Types of Substance Abused by AE-FUNAI Undergraduate Students

This section focuses on the types of substances abused by AE-FUNAI undergraduate students; respondents' assertions are presented in tables below.

Table 2: Common types of substances abused by AE-FUNAI undergraduate students.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	UD	SD	D	SUM	MEAN	DECISION
1	Cannabis, e.g, marijuana, loud, skunk & Colorado	233	65	14	32	48	1595	4.07	Accepted
2	Alcohol	199	122	54	10	7	1669	4.2	Accepted
3	Tobacco	148	159	52	31	2	1567	3.9	Accepted
4	Heroin	120	73	60	38	101	1312	3.3	Accepted
5	Prescription meds. Such as pain pills & stimulants	165	149	36	24	18	1589	4.05	Accepted
6	Ecstasy	190	82	20	64	36	1474	3.76	Accepted
7	Cocaine	25	31	70	190	76	801	2.04	Unaccepted
8	Inhalants	224	53	24	20	71	1566	3.9	Accepted
	Mean of means							3.7	Accepted

Cut-off point = 3.0. Source: Field work 2024

From table 2, on ascertaining the common types of substances abused by AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. 7 of the items were accepted. While 1 (cocaine) was unacceptable. This implies that the common types of substances abused by AE-FUNAI undergraduate students include cannabis, alcohol, tobacco, heroin, prescription medication, ecstasy, and inhalants.

Relationship between Peer Influence and Substance Abuse among Undergraduate Students.

This section focuses on the relationship between peer influence and substance abuse among undergraduate students of AE-FUNAI. Their responses are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Relationship between peer influence and substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	UD	SD	D	SUM	MEAN	DECISION
9	The influence of friends encourages substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduates	199	127	42	12	12	1665	4.2	Accepted
10	Peer influence is a significant predictor of substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduates	154	130	66	18	24	1554	3.9	Accepted
11	AE-FUNAI undergraduates who lack peer support are less likely to indulge in substance abuse	170	162	24	18	18	1624	4.1	Accepted
12	Undergraduates tend to misuse substances to gain acceptance from their peers and foster a sense of belonging within their social circles	115	69	73	108	27	1232	3.1	Accepted
	Mean of means							3.8	Accepted

Cut-off point = 3.0. Source: Field work 2024

From the result in Table 04, it shows all the items were accepted (Mean of scores>3.0). This implies that influence from friends encourages substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduates. Peer influence is a significant predictor of substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduates. AE-FUNAI undergraduate students who lack peer support are less likely to indulge in substance abuse; students tend to misuse substances to gain acceptance from their peers and foster a sense of belonging within their social circles. In general, the Mean of means on how peer influence causes substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students was accepted (mean>3.0).

Consequences of Substance Abuse among AE-FUNAI Undergraduate Students

This section focuses on the consequences of substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. Respondents' opinions are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: What are the consequences of substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students?

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	UD	D	SD	SUM	MEAN	DECISION
13	Substance abuse leads to academic problems such as poor grades, absenteeism, and dropping out of school.	225	45	54	26	42	1561	3.9	Accepted
14	Substance abuse can increase the risk of involvement in crime and criminal behavior	179	117	54	18	24	1585	4.04	Accepted
15	Substance abuse can lead to health problems, including lung & liver damage, heart disease & cancer	151	139	48	36	18	1545	3.94	Accepted
16	Substance abuse can damage relationships with friends, family & romantic partners	77	85	103	96	31	1257	3.207	Accepted
17	Substance abuse can lead to mental illness	138	159	32	43	20	1528	3.9	Accepted
	Mean of means							3.8	Accepted

Cut off point 3.0. Source: Field work 2024.

From the result in Table 05, all the items were accepted (Mean of scores>3.0). This implies that substance abuse leads to academic problems; increases the risk of involvement in crime and criminal behaviour, health problems; and can damage relationships with friends, family, and romantic partners; and mental illness. In general, the Mean of means was accepted as it was greater than 3.0.

Discussion

The study examines peer influence and substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. Therefore, the discussion is based on the primary data obtained from the field, which was carefully analysed and supported with relevant literature to further substantiate its scientific nature. The discussion of findings was done under the following subheadings in line with the specific objectives of the study:

1. Common types of substances abused by AE-FUNAI undergraduate students.
2. Relationship between peer influence and substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students.
3. The consequences of substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students.

Common Types of Substances Abused by AE-FUNAI undergraduate students.

In Table 03 on ascertaining the common types of substances abused by AE-FUNAI undergraduate students, seven substances were accepted as common types of substances abused, while one substance (cocaine) was identified as uncommon. The accepted substances include cannabis (such as marijuana, loud, skunk, and Colorado), alcohol, tobacco, heroin, prescription medication, ecstasy, and inhalants. These substances encompass a range of illicit drugs, legal substances with potential for abuse, and controlled medications. Cannabis, particularly marijuana, emerges as a prominent substance of abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students.

This finding is in line with the research by Essien (2010), which established that cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug among undergraduates. The use of various cannabis strains, including loud, skunk, and Colorado, highlights the diversity of marijuana consumption patterns among students. Alcohol is another prevalent substance of abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. Its widespread availability, social acceptance, and perceived low risk contribute to its popularity among this population (Suerken et al., 2016). Tobacco use, including cigarette smoking, is also common among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. The addictive nature of nicotine and the influence of peers and stress contribute to its prevalence. Smoking tobacco has detrimental health effects and is associated with an increased risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Heroin, while less prevalent than cannabis, alcohol, and tobacco, still represents a concerning substance of abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. Heroin abuse poses significant health risks, including addiction, overdose, and the transmission of infectious diseases through shared needles.

The misuse of prescription medications, such as opioids, stimulants, and sedatives, is another issue identified among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. The accessibility of prescription drugs and the misconception that they are safer than illicit substances contribute to their abuse (Hari & Griffiths, 2015). The use of ecstasy, a synthetic psychoactive substance, was also identified among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. Ecstasy is known for its stimulant and hallucinogenic effects and is often associated with recreational partying or rave culture. Its use poses risks such as dehydration, impaired judgment, and adverse psychological effects. Inhalant abuse involves the intentional inhalation of volatile substances such as solvents, aerosols, and gases. Although less prevalent than some other substances, inhalant abuse can have severe health consequences, including damage to the brain, liver, kidneys, and other organs. The research findings also indicate that cocaine use is relatively unpopular among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. This aligns with the findings by Suerken et al. (2016), who reported that almost 30% of students entering college have used marijuana, with just a few being able to afford cocaine.

Relationship between peer influence and substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students.

From the result in Table 04, it shows all the items were accepted (Mean score>3.0). This implies that influence from friends encourages substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduates; peer influence is a significant predictor of substance abuse; AE-FUNAI students who lack peer support are less likely to indulge in substance abuse; undergraduates in AE-FUNAI tend to misuse substance to gain acceptance from their peers and foster sense of belonging within their social circle. In general, the Mean of how peer influence causes substance abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate students was accepted (mean scores>3.0).

This finding is in agreement with the submission of Oshikoya and Alli (2006), which examined the causes and perception of substance abuse among Undergraduates.

Moral behaviour is contagious. Observing positive or negative behaviours in peers encourages people to adopt similar behaviours themselves (Dimant, 2019). Undergraduates in AE-FUNAI tend to do some things, which include both positive and negative behaviours, because they see their friends doing it. By associating with friends who smoke, they acquire attitudes favorable to smoking (Karl & Susan, 1994). Further, Borsari and Carey (2003) also supported the position that peer influence causes substance abuse. In their research, Borsari and Carey emphasized the role of peer norms and perceived social approval as key factors in the initiation and maintenance of substance use among college students. They argued that undergraduates often seek acceptance and approval from their peers, which can lead to engaging in risky behaviors, including substance abuse (Borsari & Carey, 2003).

The findings of this research also pay credence to Baer (1993). According to Baer, the presence of peers in social settings can enhance the effects of alcohol and increase the likelihood of excessive drinking. This phenomenon, known as social facilitation, can contribute to the development of alcohol-related problems among undergraduates (Baer, 1993).

Consequences of Substance Abuse among AE-FUNAI undergraduate Students.

From the result in Table 05, all the items were accepted (Mean of scores >3.0). This implies that substance abuse leads to academic problems such as poor grades, absenteeism and dropping out of school; increase in the risk of involvement in crime and criminal behaviour; health problems including lung and liver damage, heart disease and cancer; damaged relationship with friends, family and romantic partners; and mental illness. In general, the mean of means was accepted (mean score >3.0). The finding is in agreement with the position of NIDA (2018), which posited that drugs and alcohol can impair judgment and decision making, which can lead to criminal behaviour: The need for money; people who abuse substances often need money to buy drugs or alcohol. This can lead them to commit crimes for money.

The findings also resonate with the study by Possi (1996). Inhalants like Glues are strongly associated with the risk of Lung, brain, and liver damage. Another study found that substance abuse has many social implications, such as loss of employment, breakup of interpersonal relationships, truancy, and dropout from schools (Baker, George & Sandle, 1996). The findings of this research further affirm the position of Harrison et al. (2007). Substance abuse has been associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in criminal activities among undergraduate students.

According to the research conducted by Harrison et al. (2007), substance abuse, particularly drug use, is correlated with various criminal behaviors among college students. Their findings suggest that substance abuse can contribute to an increased risk of involvement in theft, violence, and other illegal activities (Harrison et al., 2007). Furthermore, the works of Arria et al. (2013) do substantiate the findings of this research. It provides valuable insights into the crime and criminal behaviour, mental illness, health problems, and academic difficulties associated with substance abuse among college students (Arria et al., 2013).

Conclusion/Policy implications

The focus of this study was on how peer influence contributes to substance abuse; every step made in reaching this conclusion was purely empirical. The study was successfully conducted to meet the objectives set at the beginning of the project work. While one cannot

completely rule out one form of limitation or the other, it was a success to a great extent. On the whole, it has afforded the researcher the opportunity to really appraise the situation on the ground and allow one to bring out areas that might need attention to address the menace of substance abuse among Undergraduates in Nigeria. After evaluating the findings of the paper with the findings of other researchers in the empirical literature as reviewed, and the theory used in the work, the paper concluded that peer influence does cause substance abuse among AEFUNAI undergraduate students, with a grave danger on their educational growth/performance, health, and, future. Most undergraduates get involved in substance abuse because they are influenced by their peers, who are probably long-time substance abusers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

The Nigerian government and school managements should develop and implement peer education and mentoring programmes specifically targeting substance abuse prevention. These programmes should focus on equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge to resist negative peer influence and make informed decisions regarding substance use.

Targeted awareness campaigns that highlight the risks and consequences of substance abuse should be conducted. These campaigns should emphasize the role of peer influence in shaping substance use behaviours and promote positive peer pressure to discourage substance abuse.

Campus policies against substance abuse should be enacted and enforced. This should be done by reviewing and enhancing existing campus policies related to substance abuse, ensuring clarity, consistency, and appropriate enforcement measures. This may include implementing stricter consequences for substance abuse infractions and conducting regular monitoring to deter illicit substance use on campus.

Also, the school management of AE-FUNAI should provide substance abuse treatment services. They should establish or enhance partnerships with local treatment facilities and healthcare providers to ensure accessible and evidence-based substance abuse treatment services for AE-FUNAI undergraduate students. This includes offering confidential counseling, referral services, and support for students seeking assistance with substance abuse issues.

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