

Peer Pressure and Socioeconomic Factors as Determinants of Substance Abuse among Youths in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Substance abuse among youths remains a growing public health and social welfare concern in Nigeria, with Oyo State recording one of the highest prevalence rates in the South-West region. While peer influence and socioeconomic disadvantage have both been implicated as drivers of youth substance use, much of the existing literature treats these determinants in isolation, leaving a gap in context-specific evidence for urban centres such as Ibadan. This study investigates the individual and combined influence of peer pressure and socioeconomic factors on substance abuse among youths aged 15 to 30 years in Ibadan Metropolis. A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was adopted, and a sample of 384 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula, drawn through a multi-stage sampling technique combining stratified, simple random, and purposive sampling across Ibadan North and Oluyole Local Government Areas. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising a peer pressure scale, a socioeconomic factors scale, and the Substance Abuse Screening Test, and 372 valid responses were retrieved and analysed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and ANOVA were used to test the hypotheses. Findings reveals that peer pressure significantly predicts substance abuse ($R^2 = 0.425$, $p < 0.05$), while socioeconomic factors independently accounts for 49.6% of the variance in substance use ($R^2 = 0.496$, $p < 0.05$). Specific indicators, including family income, parental employment, educational access, and housing conditions, are also significant predictors ($R^2 = 0.609$, $p < 0.05$). When combined, peer pressure and socioeconomic factors jointly explains 53.5% of the variance in substance abuse ($R^2 = 0.535$, $p < 0.05$), with peer pressure exerting a slightly stronger effect. The study concludes that youth substance abuse in Ibadan is a multifactorial phenomenon shaped jointly by social conformity and economic disadvantage, and recommends integrated peer-led education, family support, and poverty-reduction interventions as complementary strategies for prevention.

KEYWORDS: Peer Pressure, Socioeconomic Factors, Substance Abuse, Youths

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INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse among young people has emerged as one of the most pressing public health and social challenges confronting Nigerian society, with far-reaching consequences for individual development, family stability, and community wellbeing. Beyond its physiological toll, substance abuse is deeply embedded in the social fabric of youth life, shaped by the company young people keep and the economic circumstances into which they are born. In Oyo State, prevalence estimates of substance use among young adults range from roughly 19% to 30%, with the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency placing the state's prevalence rate at 23% in 2021, second highest in the South-West region after Lagos State. Alcohol and tramadol remain the most commonly abused substances, alongside cannabis, rohypnol, codeine-

containing cough syrups, and locally brewed spirits, with some students reportedly using stimulant-type substances in the mistaken belief that they enhance academic performance.

The proliferation of substance use among Nigerian youths cannot be understood without reference to the social and economic environments in which young people are embedded. Peer pressure, the perceived or actual influence exerted by age-mates to conform to group behaviour, is a formidable catalyst for substance initiation, particularly during adolescence and early adulthood when the need for social acceptance and belonging is most pronounced. Socioeconomic factors, including family income, parental education, and employment status, similarly shape a young person's vulnerability, creating a backdrop of stress, limited opportunity, and social disadvantage that can push youths toward substance use as a coping mechanism. Importantly, these two forces rarely act in isolation; young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are often more likely to associate with peer groups that normalize substance use as a means of managing stress or asserting identity in the face of limited opportunity.

Existing studies on substance abuse in South-West Nigeria have identified peer pressure, family dysfunction, and low socioeconomic status as recurring contributing factors, yet much of this literature examines these variables independently and offers little context-specific analysis for fast-urbanising centres such as Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State. Few studies have explored how peer networks and socioeconomic conditions interact within Ibadan's particular sociocultural setting to jointly shape patterns of substance use. This study addresses that gap by investigating peer pressure and socioeconomic conditions as determinants of substance abuse among youths aged 15 to 30 years in Ibadan Metropolis, examining both their individual contributions and their combined effect.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Substance Abuse and Its Burden among Nigerian Youths

Substance abuse refers to the maladaptive and often repeated use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, cannabis, tramadol, and codeine, in ways that result in significant impairment or distress. Among Nigerian youths, the substances of concern extend beyond conventional illicit drugs to include prescription medications misused for their psychoactive effects and locally distilled alcoholic beverages, reflecting both the accessibility of substances within communities and the resourcefulness with which young people seek intoxication. The clandestine operations of drug trafficking networks ensure a steady, and increasingly diverse, supply of substances, while the introduction of novel synthetic and designer drugs poses a particularly insidious threat given their unpredictable potency and the limited public awareness of their dangers. Health consequences associated with sustained substance use among youths include mental health disorders, academic decline, involvement in criminal behaviour, and risky sexual practices, underscoring that the burden of substance abuse extends well beyond the individual user to affect families and the broader community.

Youth Vulnerability to Risky Behaviours

Youth, broadly defined as the period between adolescence and early adulthood, is a developmental stage characterised by identity exploration, heightened sensitivity to social feedback, and increased autonomy from parental oversight. These characteristics render young people particularly susceptible to experimentation with risky behaviours, including substance use, as they navigate questions of belonging and self-definition. The developmental and psychosocial challenges typical of this life stage, such as the search for identity, the desire for peer acceptance, and vulnerability to emotional distress, interact with external pressures to heighten the likelihood that a young person will initiate substance use, particularly where protective factors such as parental supervision or institutional support are weak.

Peer Pressure and Youth Substance Use

Peer pressure operates through direct encouragement, observational learning, and the desire to conform to group norms, and has consistently been identified as one of the strongest social predictors of substance use

among young people. Adolescents who report having friends who use drugs are significantly more likely to use drugs themselves, and the influence of peers extends beyond initiation to shape the trajectory of continued use, as friends who use substances can reinforce the behaviour and create social environments in which abstinence becomes difficult. Conversely, positive peer influence, characterised by friends who abstain from substance use and model healthy behaviour, can serve as a protective factor, illustrating the dual nature of peer influence as both a risk factor and a potential resource for prevention.

Socioeconomic Factors and Substance Abuse

Socioeconomic factors, encompassing family income, parental education, employment status, and neighbourhood conditions, exert a profound influence on a young person's vulnerability to substance abuse. Lower family income is frequently associated with heightened risk, as economic hardship increases family stress, reduces access to quality education and healthcare, and raises the likelihood of residing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods with higher rates of crime and drug availability. Parental education level and employment stability similarly shape the home environment; parents with limited education or unstable employment may have reduced capacity to model healthy behaviour, supervise their children effectively, or provide the emotional and material resources that buffer against risk. Financial toxicity associated with poverty compounds these vulnerabilities, as economic constraints can limit parental supervision and heighten young people's exposure to negative peer influences and environmental risk.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model. Social Learning Theory posits that behaviours are acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social contexts; applied to substance use, it suggests that youths who observe peers being rewarded, socially or emotionally, for substance use are more likely to imitate that behaviour, particularly in the absence of competing sources of social control. The Socio-Ecological Model complements this individual-level explanation by situating youth behaviour within nested layers of influence, ranging from the immediate microsystem of family and peers to the broader macrosystem of economic policy and community structure. Together, these frameworks support the study's premise that substance abuse among youths cannot be fully explained by either social or economic factors alone, but rather emerges from the interaction of peer dynamics and structural disadvantage within a given environment.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to investigate peer pressure and socioeconomic conditions as determinants of substance abuse among youths in Ibadan Metropolis. The specific objectives were to:

1. Examine the influence of peer pressure on substance abuse among youths in Ibadan.
2. Investigate how socioeconomic factors affect substance abuse among youths in Ibadan.
3. Assess the relationship between specific socioeconomic indicators (family income, parental education) and substance use behaviour.
4. Determine the joint influence of peer pressure and socioeconomic factors on substance abuse among youths in Ibadan.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey design, appropriate for assessing the prevalence and determinants of specific behaviours within a defined population at a single point in time. The target population comprised youths aged 15 to 30 years residing in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, an age group selected for its heightened vulnerability to peer influence and engagement in risky behaviour. A sample size of 384 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula for large populations, at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. Participants were selected through a multi-stage sampling technique:

Ibadan Metropolis was first stratified by Local Government Area, with Ibadan North and Oluyole selected to reflect the geographical and social diversity of the urban youth population; specific communities within these LGAs were then selected using simple random sampling via the fish bowl technique; and within each community, youths aged 15 to 30 were selected purposively to ensure representation across socioeconomic backgrounds and peer-influence experiences.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising four sections: Section A captured demographic characteristics; Section B applied a Peer Pressure Scale adapted from Santor, Messervey, and Kusumakar to assess the extent and nature of peer influence; Section C examined socioeconomic factors using indicators drawn from the World Health Organization's framework on social determinants of health, including parental income, employment status, and educational attainment; and Section D employed the Substance Abuse Screening Test, adapted from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, to evaluate patterns of substance use. Content and face validity were established through expert review by academics in social work, psychology, and epidemiology, followed by a pilot study involving 30 youths from a non-selected LGA. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with each subscale (peer pressure, socioeconomic factors, and substance abuse) independently tested and found to meet the acceptable threshold of 0.70 or above.

Of the 384 questionnaires distributed, 372 valid copies were retrieved, representing a high response rate. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise demographic characteristics and the levels of peer pressure, socioeconomic factors, and substance abuse. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive power of peer pressure and socioeconomic factors on substance abuse, while ANOVA was used to test the statistical significance of each model. All tests were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance. Ethical approval procedures were observed throughout, with voluntary participation, written informed consent, and strict confidentiality maintained; participants who disclosed problematic substance use were referred to local counselling and rehabilitation services.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The study involved 372 respondents. Slightly more than half were male (53.2%) compared to female (46.8%). The majority of respondents (33.9%) were aged 21 to 23 years, followed by 29.0% aged 18 to 20 years, indicating that most participants were within the late adolescent and emerging adulthood stage. An overwhelming majority (90.3%) were single, consistent with the youthful composition of the sample. Educationally, 45.2% held a Bachelor's degree and 25.0% held a Diploma/NCE qualification, while students constituted the largest occupational group (62.9%), followed by teachers (9.7%) and healthcare workers (7.3%). This demographic profile reflects a sample drawn predominantly from an academic environment where peer interaction and socioeconomic pressures are especially salient.

Research Question One: Influence of Peer Pressure on Substance Abuse

Findings revealed that peer pressure exerts a significant influence on substance abuse among youths in Ibadan, with an overall weighted mean of 2.74 on a 4-point scale. The highest-rated item, "My friends encourage me to try substances like alcohol or drugs" (Mean = 2.92), pointed to direct peer encouragement as a central pathway into substance use, while "I would stop using substances if my friends disapproved" (Mean = 2.91) illustrated the protective potential of peer disapproval. The item "I feel pressured to do what my friends are doing, even if I disagree" (Mean = 2.86) reflected the strength of social conformity, consistent with Social Learning Theory's emphasis on behaviour acquired through observation and imitation. Notably, the comparatively low mean for "Most of my friends disapprove of substance use" (Mean = 2.41) suggests that substance use is, to some extent, normalised within certain youth circles in Ibadan.

Research Question Two: Effect of Socioeconomic Factors on Substance Abuse

Socioeconomic factors were similarly found to exert a considerable influence on substance abuse, with an overall weighted mean of 2.82. The highest mean score was recorded for “I struggle to afford basic necessities (e.g., food, transport)” (Mean = 3.08), highlighting economic deprivation as a dominant challenge, while “My socioeconomic situation limits my career or educational opportunities” (Mean = 2.95) reflected how limited upward mobility can push youths toward substance use as an escape from frustration. Respondents also agreed that their neighbourhoods had high rates of drug use or crime (Mean = 2.86), underscoring the role of environmental exposure, while low scores for access to youth development programmes (Mean = 2.31) and family capacity to afford educational expenses (Mean = 2.53) pointed to widespread inadequacy of social support structures.

Research Question Three: Specific Socioeconomic Indicators and Substance Abuse

Examining specific socioeconomic indicators alongside substance abuse items produced a weighted mean of 2.92, indicating generally high agreement. Items relating to economic hardship, such as struggling to afford basic necessities (Mean = 3.09) and dropping out of school due to financial hardship (Mean = 2.98), point to material deprivation as a driving factor, while 79.3% of respondents agreed that their neighbourhoods had high rates of drug use or crime (Mean = 3.18). On substance abuse indicators specifically, using substances to feel better or escape problems (Mean = 3.19) and continuing use despite known risks (Mean = 3.09) reflected considerable psychological and behavioural dependence, while 73.9% of respondents reported skipping responsibilities or classes due to substance use (Mean = 3.04).

Research Question Four: Combined Influence of Peer Pressure and Socioeconomic Factors

When peer pressure and socioeconomic indicators were assessed together alongside substance abuse items, the data revealed consistently elevated mean scores across both domains, with items such as “My neighborhood has a high rate of drug use or crime” (Mean = 3.18) and “My friends encourage me to try substances like alcohol or drugs” (Mean = 3.07) among the highest-rated, suggesting that social and economic pressures reinforce one another in shaping youth vulnerability to substance abuse in Ibadan.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One (Peer pressure significantly influences substance abuse): Regression analysis revealed a strong, statistically significant relationship, with an R value of 0.652 and an R^2 of 0.425, indicating that peer pressure alone explained 42.5% of the variance in substance abuse behaviour, $F(1, 370) = 190.88$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis Two (Socioeconomic factors have a significant effect on substance abuse): The regression model yielded an R value of 0.704 and an R^2 of 0.496, indicating that socioeconomic factors accounted for 49.6% of the variance in substance abuse, $F(1, 370) = 280.24$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis Three (Specific socioeconomic indicators and substance abuse): A multiple regression model incorporating family income, parental employment status, educational access, and housing condition produced an R^2 of 0.609, $F(4, 367) = 41.832$, $p < .001$. Family income ($\beta = 0.302$, $p < .05$) and parental employment status ($\beta = 0.247$, $p < .05$) positively predicted substance abuse, educational access ($\beta = -0.182$, $p = .003$) showed a protective, negative relationship, and housing condition ($\beta = 0.256$, $p < .05$) was positively associated with substance abuse risk.

Hypothesis Four (Joint influence of peer pressure and socioeconomic factors): The combined regression model produced an R value of 0.731 and an R^2 of 0.535, $F = 153.57$, $p < .001$, indicating that peer pressure and socioeconomic factors together explained 53.5% of the variance in substance abuse. Both predictors were statistically significant, with peer pressure ($\beta = 0.614$, $p < .001$) exerting a slightly stronger effect than socioeconomic factors ($\beta = 0.481$, $p < .001$), confirming that the two determinants jointly and meaningfully shape substance use behaviour among youths in Ibadan.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study confirm that peer pressure is a critical determinant of substance abuse among youths in Ibadan, accounting for a substantial share of the variance in substance use behaviour. This result is consistent with prior Nigerian studies reporting strong correlations between peer influence and substance use among adolescents in similar urban contexts, and reflects the mechanisms described by Social Learning Theory, whereby young people imitate behaviours that appear socially rewarding within their peer groups. The dual nature of peer influence observed in this study, both as a risk factor when peers encourage use and as a protective factor when peers disapprove, points to peer-led interventions as a particularly promising avenue for prevention, since the same social channel that introduces risk can be redirected to reinforce healthy norms.

The strong independent effect of socioeconomic factors similarly aligns with a well-established body of evidence linking poverty, unemployment, and poor housing to elevated substance use risk. Respondents' reports of struggling to afford basic necessities, residing in high-crime neighbourhoods, and having limited access to youth development programmes reflect the structural disadvantage described in strain theory, which holds that individuals under economic pressure may resort to deviant coping behaviours, including substance use, when legitimate avenues for advancement are blocked. The finding that educational access exerted a protective effect, while family income, employment stability, and housing condition increased risk, reinforces the argument that targeted investment in education and economic opportunity can meaningfully reduce youth vulnerability to substance abuse.

Perhaps most significant is the finding that peer pressure and socioeconomic factors, when combined, explained more of the variance in substance abuse than either factor alone, supporting the Socio-Ecological Model's premise that individual behaviour results from the interaction of multiple, nested layers of social and economic influence. This suggests that interventions addressing only one determinant, whether purely social or purely economic, are unlikely to be as effective as integrated approaches that simultaneously reshape peer norms and alleviate structural disadvantage. The relatively high combined R^2 observed in this study, compared to studies examining peer influence alone, indicates that Ibadan's particular combination of intense social interaction and visible socioeconomic inequality may amplify the joint effect of these two determinants on youth substance use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Peer Education and Mentorship:** Schools, community centres, and youth organisations should establish structured peer education and mentorship programmes that train positive peer leaders to model healthy behaviour and provide social support to at-risk youths, alongside opportunities for participation in sports, clubs, and volunteer activities that foster prosocial peer networks.
2. **Socioeconomic Empowerment:** Government agencies and non-governmental organisations should invest in youth empowerment schemes, vocational training, and microenterprise support, alongside expanded social protection measures such as scholarships and financial aid, to reduce the economic stressors that drive substance use.
3. **Family and Community Engagement:** Parents should be supported through guidance on communication, monitoring, and emotional support, while community awareness campaigns led by social workers, religious leaders, and educators should address the risks of peer influence and substance availability.
4. **Strengthening Social Work Practice:** Social workers should institute routine screening for at-risk youths in schools and communities, provide evidence-based counselling such as motivational interviewing and cognitive behavioural therapy, and advocate for youth-friendly policies that expand access to prevention and rehabilitation services.
5. **Coordinated Policy Response:** Government agencies should adopt a multisectoral strategy integrating education, health, and social welfare systems, focusing on regulating access to psychoactive

substances, expanding rehabilitation capacity, and embedding substance abuse prevention within school curricula.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study on substance abuse among adolescents, certain limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study adopted a cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between the identified factors such as peer pressure, socioeconomic background, and substance use patterns. The findings, therefore, reflect associations rather than cause-and-effect relationships. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced response bias, as some participants could have underreported or exaggerated their substance use behaviours due to social desirability or fear of stigma. Moreover, the study did not include qualitative data that might have provided deeper insights into the personal and contextual experiences influencing substance use and recovery. Finally, potential confounding variables such as mental health status, family functioning, and exposure to trauma were not examined in detail. These limitations highlight the need for future longitudinal and mixed-methods studies to enhance the understanding of adolescent substance abuse and its psychosocial determinants in Nigeria.

Suggestion for Further Studies

Future studies should explore longitudinal and qualitative approaches to understand the evolving dynamics between peer pressure, socioeconomic status, and substance abuse among youths. Research could also examine the role of digital peer influence, family functioning, and mental health factors, while expanding to rural contexts to compare patterns and strengthen generalizability of the findings across Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine peer pressure and socioeconomic conditions as determinants of substance abuse among youths in Ibadan Metropolis. The findings demonstrate that both factors independently and significantly predict substance use, and that their combined effect is substantial, underscoring that youth substance abuse in Ibadan is a multifactorial phenomenon shaped jointly by social conformity and economic disadvantage. Addressing this problem sustainably requires a collaborative, multi-sectoral approach involving social workers, educators, policymakers, healthcare professionals, and community stakeholders working in concert. Social workers are particularly well placed to provide psychosocial support and coordinate referral pathways, while educators, policymakers, and community leaders each hold complementary roles in reshaping peer norms and addressing the structural conditions that make substance use an attractive coping mechanism. Ultimately, tackling youth substance abuse in Ibadan is not solely a public health concern but a shared social responsibility, and sustained progress will depend on the extent to which stakeholders integrate peer-focused and economically grounded interventions into a coherent, community-centred response.

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