

PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF DRUG ABUSE ON UNDERGRADUATES' SUICIDAL TENDENCIES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

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Abstract

*The study investigated the influence of drug abuse on undergraduates' suicidal tendencies in University of Lagos, Lagos State. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Two research hypotheses guided the study. 27 item Researcher-made questionnaire titled Influence of Drug Abuse on Suicidal Tendencies (IDAST) was used to elicit information from one hundred and eighty-three (183) participants randomly selected from three (4) faculties from University of Lagos. The hypotheses were tested using independent t-test statistical tool at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed significant perceived influence of drug abuse on undergraduates' depressive symptoms and suicidal tendencies. It was recommended based on the findings of this study that drug education should be incorporated into the secondary school curriculum so as to teach them the factors that predispose students to drug use and abuse, **consequences** of drug abuse and its perceived influence on depression and suicidal tendencies.*

Keywords: Drug Abuse, undergraduates, depressive symptoms, suicidal tendencies.

Background to the Study

Drug abuse is a global health and social problem, which cut across all ages most especially among undergraduates. Drug abuse is excessive use of psychoactive drug, such as alcohol, non-recommended medications and illegal drugs. Drug abuse is a pattern of compulsive drug use marked by recurrent significant social, occupational, legal, or interpersonal adverse consequences (APA, 2020). Alcohol is the easiest drug undergraduates' abuse because it is readily available. Alcohol has been observed to be the most abused drug for most undergraduates (Hahn & Payne, 1997). Other drugs which undergraduates' abuse include tramadol, marijuana, Indian hemp, cocaine, heroin among others.

Many factors may predispose undergraduates to drug abuse. Notable among such factors include peer pressure, poor interpersonal relationships and adjustments, academic and financial pressures among others. Ofuebe, Adama, Nwankwo, Isiaku, Omeje, Agu & Nweke (2020) revealed that risks factors of drugs abuse among undergraduates includes influence of peer pressure, lack of basic knowledge about the dangers of drugs, lack of parental supervision, poor relationship with parents and poor achievement in school. Nigerian undergraduates abuse drugs because they are going through excruciating experiences such as sexual harassment, rape and unwanted pregnancy; gangsters and cultism, inability to pay their school fees, purchase essential and imposed textbooks/handouts, feed and clothe, cope with the pressure of academic works due to shorter semesters caused by incessant strikes (Eneh1998).

These challenges may make undergraduates to manifest depressive symptoms such as feeling of hopelessness and sadness, anxiety, loss of interest in things enjoyed before, feeling tired, insomnia and loss of appetite among others which may affect their normal functioning. Undergraduates develop depressive symptoms when trying to cope with academic and interpersonal challenges, which is associated with sadness, low spirit, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt, low self -worth and inferiority complex, unpleasant sleep or appetite, low energy, poor concentration, lack of knowledge or

skills, and perceived inability to overcome (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Depression is a situation where an individual perceives hopelessness caused by lower ability to survive in the face of challenges (Kariv & Heiman, 2005). It is a common and ever increasing mental disorder (Scholten, 2013; Adewuya, Ola, Wallace, 2010; Olutayo, Mapayi & Oginni 2006,). Depression is characterized by loss of self-worth (self-esteem), feelings of frustration, lack of motivation, inability to perform social obligations, and general disinterest in socializing.

Some factors such as periods of examinations and the subsequent wait for results; financial pressures, alterations in the patterns of eating and rest; increased workload and academic pressures cause depression among undergraduates. Other reasons include poor or lack of appropriate transportation facilities or system, socio-cultural differences and marginalisation, language incompetency, lack of support from friends and family, unpleasant disruption of academic activities; and campus criminality and violence may expose undergraduates to drug abuse (Jones, Papadakis, Hogan & Strauman 2009; Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley & Whalen 2005; Radcliffe & Lester 2003; Hudd, Dumlao, Erdmann-Sager, Murray, Phan, Soukas & Yokozuka 2000, Ross, Niebling & Heckert 1999, Abouserie 1994).

Undergraduates tend to cope with these depressive symptoms through the use of drugs most especially alcohol in order to suppress the unpleasant emotions and provide ephemeral feeling of goodness. Researchers agree that undergraduates abuse drugs because they provide quick, ephemeral feeling of goodness and a means to gain acceptance in peer relationships and to modify unpleasant feelings, reduce disturbing emotions, alleviate depression, reduce tension, and aid in coping with life pressures. Some undergraduates ingest drugs to feel high and good. Drug abuse can be a devastating problem to the extent that it elicits consequences such as mood swing, mental disorders, suicidal tendencies among others that may affect the normal functioning of undergraduates. Researchers agree that the consequences of drug abuse include difficulty with concentration, mental health illness, sexual abuse, family discord, poor peer relationships, mood swing, poor coordination and judgment, paranoia, hallucinations, agitation, problems with memory, impaired attention span which may lead to school dysfunction (Benoit, Shumka, Phillips, Kennedy & Belle-Isle, 2015; Evans et al., 2004). Risk of suicide is increased among people that abuse drugs (Breet, Goldstone & Bantjes, 2018) and there is an association between drug abuse and suicidal ideation, attempts and suicide (Breet, Goldstone & Bantjes, 2018; Poorolajal, Haghtalab, Farhadi & Darvishi, 2016). Drug abuse may increase risk of suicidal tendencies. Bagge and Sher (2008) noted that drug abuse may induce depressed feelings, decrease abilities of cognitive processing and problem solving, and influence important relationships and school performance. Cross-sectional findings have documented associations between substance use and suicidal ideation (Wong et al., 2013). Suicidal tendencies among undergraduates tend to have been on the increase due to their feeling of depression which may trigger the use of drugs to cope despite the consequences of drug abuse. Goldston (2004) stated that there is a relationship between drug use and suicidal ideation which can be due to impulsivity. Evans, Hawton & Rodham (2004) found that regular smoking/alcohol use increases risk of suicidal ideation, and suicidal ideation increases risk for drug use. Researchers agree that significant risk factors for suicidal tendencies include misuse of drugs, a history of self-harm, attempted suicide and psychiatric disorders (Halladay, Munn, Boyle, Jack and Georgiades, 2019; Chan, Bhatti, Meader, Stockton, Evans, O'Connor, et al. 2016)

The aforementioned issues regarding drug abuse do not only appear gloomy but also highlights drug abuse as a health concern among undergraduates which can influence suicidal tendencies. Therefore, there is need to investigate the perceived influence of drug abuse on undergraduate suicidal tendencies in University of Lagos.

Statement of the problem

The sanity and health of undergraduates coupled with peaceful co-existence in the university environment are key factors in promoting sane society. The prevalence of drug abuse as a social problem among undergraduates has been a worrisome development and a topic of interest among researchers and stakeholders based on its perceived consequences. Undergraduates face a number of challenges as they adjust to campus life such as accommodation problems, coping with course mates, roommates, finances, and lecturers, study habits, time management, sexual harassment, cultism, examination failure among others that may trigger depressive symptoms such as feeling of hopelessness, sadness, anxiety, loss of interest in things enjoyed before, insomnia among others. These depressive symptoms may expose them to drug use and abuse so as to minimize the levels of their challenges which may affect their intra and interpersonal relationships, adjustments and academic performance such as mood swing, mental disorders, depression, anxiety, sexual abuse, family discord, low academic achievement, examination failures, poor peer relationships, irrational decisions among others.

The consequences of drug abuse may lead to suicidal tendencies because some undergraduates are naturally less in control of their emotions due to their developmental stages which is adolescence. They tend to be socially mobile and have permissive lifestyle which may be learned by interacting with their peers in the university environment which sometimes affect their value orientation, encourage experimentation and self-discovery due to peer pressure. The consequences of suicidal tendencies among undergraduates are enormous such as but not limited to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, guilt, low self esteem, negative intra and interpersonal relationships.

Drug abuse may be a risk factor for suicidal tendencies, suicide and deliberate self-harm which may cause poor mental health, negative intra and interpersonal relationships and ultimately premature death. Therefore, this research study tends to investigate the perceived influence of drug abuse on undergraduate suicidal tendencies in University of Lagos.

Purpose of the study

The study examined the perceived influence of drug abuse on undergraduate suicidal tendencies. Specifically, the study will:

1. Examine the perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of undergraduates suicidal tendencies.
2. Establish the perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of undergraduates depressive symptoms

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. There is no significant perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of undergraduates suicidal tendencies.
2. There is no significant perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of undergraduates depressive symptoms.

Methodology

The research study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consist of 7,568 undergraduate students in University of Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria.: A sample size of one hundred and eighty-three (183) participants was randomly selected from. 300 level undergraduates. They were deemed appropriate because they have spent three years on campus and are not in final year like the 400 and or 500 level students who are engrossed in project writing.

A 27 item researcher-made questionnaire titled Drug Abuse and Suicidal Tendencies Questionnaire (DASTQ) was used for the collection of data. The questionnaire was divided into 2 sections: Section A dealt with the bio data of the respondents while Section B has items on variables under study (drug abuse and suicidal tendencies). It was designed on a four point Likert Rating Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument has reliability coefficient of 0.72.

RESULTS

The two (2) research hypotheses for this study were tested using independent t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of undergraduates suicidal tendencies.

Table 1: Independent t-test showing the perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of undergraduates' suicidal tendencies.

Drug abuse	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-Cal	*Significant at 0.05; df=181; t-crit= 1.98
High	97	19.27	12.41	181	3.87	
Low	86	13.31	8.23			

t-crit= 1.98

Table 1 shows a calculated t-value of 3.87 resulted as the perceived influence of drug abuse on undergraduate suicidal tendencies. This calculated t-value of 3.87 is significant since it is higher than the critical t-value of 1.98, given 181 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is a significant perceived influence of drug abuse on Undergraduates' suicidal tendencies. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected.

It could also be inferred that undergraduates' who reported high level of drug abuse had higher mean scores of 19.27 and standard deviation of 12.41 on suicidal tendency against those who reported low level of drug abuse who had mean score of 13.31 and standard deviation of 8.23 on suicidal tendency.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant perceived influence of drug abuse on the levels of depression among undergraduates

Table 2: independent t-test analysis of perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of depression among undergraduates

Drug abuse	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-Cal
High	97	18.52	10.64	181	2.21
Low	86	15.34	8.87+		

*Significant at 0.05; df=181; t-crit= 1.98

Table 2 shows a calculated t-value of 2.21 results as the perceived influence of drug abuse on the levels of depression among undergraduates. This calculated t-value of 2.21 is significant since it is higher than the critical t-value of 1.98, given 181 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is a significant perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of depression among undergraduates. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. It could also be inferred that

undergraduates' who reported high level of drug abuse had higher mean scores of 18.52 and standard deviation of 10.64 on depression against those who reported low level of drug abuse with a mean score of 8.87 and standard deviation of 8.23.

Discussion of the findings

Hypothesis one stated that there is no significant perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of suicidal tendencies among undergraduates. The findings showed that undergraduates' who reported high level of drug abuse had higher suicidal tendencies than those who reported low level of drug abuse. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. The reason for the significant perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of suicidal tendencies could be that undergraduates tend to be socially mobile and have permissive lifestyle which may encourage experimentation due to peer pressure. This finding is in support of the assertion that drug abuse may impact on suicidal behaviour in undergraduates, other family members and spouses (Grøholt, Ekeberg 2000; Kizza, Hjelmeland, 2012; Rossow and Moan 2012). It also collaborated findings of Evans, Hawton & Rodham (2004) who found that regular smoking/alcohol use increases risk of suicidal ideation, and suicidal ideation increases risk for drug use. American Psychological Association (2011) supported the findings as they affirmed that suicide and its related predispositions or ideations are prevalent among youths particularly students in higher institutions of learning across the world. The intake and subsequently abuse of drugs and alcoholic substances may increase the risk of suicidal tendencies in individuals and also lead to likely mechanisms which include the adverse effects of alcohol abuse on other family members such as physical or emotional abuse and financial problems (Room, Ferris 2010), which in turn may increase the risk for suicidal behaviours. Researchers agree that significant risk factors for suicidal tendencies include misuse of drugs, a history of self-harm, attempted suicide and psychiatric disorders (Halladay, Munn, Boyle, Jack and Georgiades, 2019; Chan, Bhatti, Meader, Stockton, Evans, O'Connor RC, et al. 2016). Goldston (2004) stated that there is a relationship between drug use and suicidal ideation which can be due to impulsivity. Risk of suicide is increased among people that abuse drugs (Breet, Goldstone & Bantjes, 2018) there is an association between drug abuse and suicidal ideation, attempts and suicide (Breet, Goldstone & Bantjes, 2018; Poorolajal, Haghtalab, Farhadi & Darvishi, 2016)

Hypothesis two stated that there is no significant perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of depression among undergraduates. The findings showed that undergraduates' who reported high level of drug abuse had higher depression than those who reported low level of drug abuse. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. The reason for the significant perceived influence of drug abuse on the level of depression among undergraduates could be that the depressive symptoms they reported based on their challenges may expose them to drug use and abuse so as to minimize and cope with the levels of their challenges on campus. The finding was in line with the findings of American Psychiatric Association (2000) who stated that undergraduates develop depressive symptoms when trying to cope with academic and interpersonal challenges which is associated with sadness, low spirit, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt, low self-worth and inferiority complex, unpleasant sleep or appetite, low energy, poor concentration, lack of knowledge or skills, and perceived inability to overcome which may expose them to drug abuse.

Depression among undergraduates is caused by some factors as periods of examinations and the subsequent wait for results, financial pressures, alterations in the patterns of eating and rest; increased workload and academic pressures, poor or lack of appropriate transportation facilities or system, socio-cultural differences and marginalisation, language incompetency, lack of support from friends and family, unpleasant disruption of academic activities; and campus criminality and violence may expose undergraduates to drug abuse (Jones, Papadakis, Hogan & Strauman 2009; Dusselier, Dunn, Wang,

Shelley & Whalen 2005; Radcliffe & Lester 2003; Hudd, Dumlao, Erdmann-Sager, Murray, Phan, Soukas&Yokozuka 2000, Ross, Niebling&Heckert 1999, Abouserie 1994).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study it can be concluded that drug abuse influenced depressive symptoms and suicidal tendencies among undergraduates. Therefore, depression and suicidal tendencies should be assessed among undergraduates who use drugs. Thus, there is need for effective physical, psychological and social support from parents, lecturers, course mates, counsellors and university management. The support is considered as a reassurance to the undergraduates that they can share their challenges instead of bottling them up or using drugs to minimize their challenges.

Counselling Implications

1. Counsellors should provide drug education to undergraduates so as to teach them the factors that predispose students to drug use and abuse, consequences of drug abuse and it's perceived influence on *depression and suicidal tendencies*.
2. Counsellors should educate *parents, guardians and lecturers on the need to have good relationship with their children and students in order to note behavioral changes in relation to drug abuse and the manifestation of depressive symptoms and suicidal tendencies*.
3. *Counsellors should educate the university management to understand the factors that predispose undergraduates' to drug abuse, depression and suicidal tendencies thereby removing them from obscurity and validating their experiences so as to minimize their challenges.*

Recommendations

1. Drug education should be incorporated into the secondary school curriculum so as to teach them the factors that predispose students to drug use and abuse, consequences of drug abuse and it's perceived influence on *depression and suicidal tendencies*.
2. *Parents, guardians and lecturers should develop good relationship with their children and students in order to note behavioural changes in relation to drug abuse and the manifestation of depressive symptoms and suicidal tendencies.*
3. *Policy makers and university management should work hand in hand with other authorities to make legislation that will minimize the level of challenges undergraduates go through in order to reduce the level of drug abuse, depression and of suicidal tendencies in our universities.*

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