



Substance Abuse: Awareness and Attitude among Secondary School Students in Sapele, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Substance abuse is an intricate behavior seen to be most prevalent amongst young people across the world. This study assessed the awareness and attitude towards substance abuse among students from selected secondary schools within Sapele, Delta State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional study design was utilized among 315 students who gave informed consent. A well-structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study from participants. Data was presented as simple percentage using descriptive statistics. The mean age of the respondents was 16.95 ± 0.09 SEM. A prevalence of substance abuse was 19.4%, which was seen more with males than the females. About 13.97% of the students had taken alcohol, 10.79% had taken tramadol, and 3.81% had taken rohypnol. School and mass media were the main sources of information on drug abuse, while peer pressure was the most predisposing influence towards substance use. Depression and its use as a confidence booster were main reasons given for the substance use. Adolescent substance use and abuse remains an ongoing challenge with a prevalence rate of 19.4% in this study. The study emphasizes the need for implementing drug abuse information and education in schools' curriculum.

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jasem.v25i3.7>

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Dates: Received: 12 December 2020; Revised: 26 January 2021; Accepted: 12 February 2021

Keywords: Adolescent, alcohol, depression, drug abuse.

Substance use and abuse by the young especially adolescents aged 11 to 19 has been on the increase to the extent it has been labeled a global epidemic by the WHO with far reaching adverse effects on both the individual and society at large (Owoaje and Bello, 2010; Oshodi *et al.*, 2010; Duru *et al.*, 2017). Substance abuse is an intricate behavior seen to be most prevalent amongst young people across the world (Abdulkarim, 2004; Ngesu *et al.*, 2008; Owoaje & Bello, 2010; Wu *et al.*, 2011; Oh *et al.*, 2017; Anyanwu *et al.*, 2016). One of the most imperative risk-taking behaviours among adolescents and young adults in secondary schools comprises of the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other substances (Sadock and Sadock, 2003; Moke *et al.*, 2019; Umukoro *et al.*, 2020). Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, which when ingested affect mental functions. These substances may include alcohol, tobacco, hallucinogens (alpha-methyltryptamine, ketamine, phencyclidine, D-lysergic acid) and illicit drugs (cocaine, heroin, marijuana, rohypnol) (WHO, 2014; Duru *et al.*, 2017; Idowu *et al.*, 2018). Substance abuse has also been considered as a major contributor to suicide, homicide, poisoning, sexual assault and the

spread of infectious disease among youth around the world (Salas-Wright *et al.*, 2017). Adolescents are at risk of experimentation with illicit drugs and behaviours due to peer pressure, curiosity, stress relief and many other factors. Moreover, adolescents who experiment with alcohol and tobacco are at a higher risk for illicit drug abuse later in life (Hamisu *et al.*, 2014). Epidemiological studies have shown startling statistics of substance abuse among Nigerian adolescents and youth (Oshodi *et al.*, 2010, Anyanwu *et al.*, 2016; Duru *et al.*, 2017; Idowu *et al.*, 2018). Despite increasing universal concerns, advocacy and campaigns targeted at stemming the unfortunate trend of drug abuse, a significant proportion of adolescents are still unaware of the harmful effects it could have on their lives and futures (Oshodi *et al.*, 2010). Many studies have attempted to establish the prevalence rate of substance abuse in Nigeria with varying results. In a study conducted in Oyo State, 26.3% of the respondents satisfied the criteria used in defining substance abuse, with 40.0% of them having positive attitude to substance abuse (Idowu *et al.*, 2018). In another study conducted by Bassi *et al.*, (2017) among secondary school students in Kagoro, Kaduna State Nigeria, there was a 21% prevalence of substance

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abuse, and the substances abused were alcohol (52.58%), analgesics (33.7%), marijuana (2.59%), cigarette (1.72%), glue/solution (0.86%) and other local substances (8.62%) respectively. Other prevalence rates across the country include 47.4% in Uyo and 33.7% in Kiru, Kano state (Abasiubong *et al.*, 2014), 69.3% in Oyo state (Lawoyin *et al.*, 2005), 39% in a public secondary school in Lagos (Okonkwo *et al.*, 2010). Anyanwu *et al.*, (2016) reported the prevalence of substance abuse as 32.9% with alcohol being the most commonly abused substance, among adolescent secondary school students in Abakaliki. Despite the persistent problems of substance abuse in Nigeria and the South-South geopolitical zone of the country, there is a paucity of current studies available on substance use and abuse among adolescents in that region. Sapele is a major industrial city in the South-South region of Nigeria and also densely populated. This study set out to assess the extent of awareness and attitude towards substance abuse among students from selected secondary schools within Sapele, Delta State, Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional study design was used to assess the awareness and attitude towards substance abuse among secondary school students within Sapele, Delta state, Nigeria. This study was carried out in March 2019 across three different schools in Sapele town, Delta State, Nigeria with a target population size of 600. Using the Slovin's formula (Galero-Tejero, 2011), an estimate sample size of 240 was gotten, however, 315 students were enrolled for the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the ethical committee of the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. Also, informed consent was obtained from the principals of the schools and the students who participated. A well-structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study from participants. Participants included students of Senior Secondary School 1 (SSS 1), Senior Secondary School 2 (SSS 2), and Senior Secondary School 3 (SSS 3) of the three secondary schools. Information collected comprised the socio-demographic data, drug awareness and use, and attitude of the students to substance abuse. Data was presented as simple percentage using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three hundred and fifteen questionnaires were administered with all completely filled, giving a response rate of 100%. As shown in Table 1, the mean age of the respondents was 16.95 ± 0.09 SEM while the age range was between fourteen and twenty years.

About fifty-seven percent (57.14%) of the respondents were male students, most (91.43%) were Christian, while most (67.30%) were being sponsored by both parents.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Frequency (n=315)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)		
14	16	5.08
15	60	19.05
16	42	13.33
17	87	27.62
18	50	15.87
19	36	11.43
20	24	7.62
Gender		
Male	180	57.14
Female	135	42.86
Class		
SSS 1	105	33.33
SSS 2	105	33.33
SSS 3	105	33.33
Religion		
Christianity	288	91.43
Islam	24	7.62
Traditional	3	0.95
Caregivers/Sponsors		
nts	212	67.30
Father only	7	2.22
nly	62	19.68
	21	6.67
	13	4.13

Table 2 illustrates the awareness and attitude of the respondents towards substance abuse. Majority of the respondents (90.79%) stated that they had been taught about drug abuse in school, while 19.37% had experimented with drugs in the past. Of this number, 72.13% were males and 27.87 females. 13.97% of the students had taken alcohol, 10.79% had taken tramadol, and 3.81% had taken rohypnol. School (86.03%) and mass media (57.78%) were the main sources of information on drug abuse, while peer pressure was the most predisposing influence towards substance use (53.33%). Depression (81.27%) and as a confidence booster (41.90%) were reasons given the most for substance use while to improve memory and learning (30.48%), and because of the need to be happy and have fun (13.97%) accounted for the other reasons. Thirty-four of the respondents (10.79%) had gotten into fights under the influence of alcohol. The plague of substance abuse has become more prominent over the past few years with adolescents being the most affected age group. The prevalence rate of life time substance use in this study was 19.4% which corresponds with the prevalence rates of other studies previously reported as follows; 15.3% in Ibadan (Yisa *et al.*, 2009) 15.0% in Jos (Onoja, 2010), 20.3% in Oshogbo (Eeguranti *et al.*, 2009), 21.7% in Oyo State (Ajibola *et al.*, 2018), and 26.3% in Ogbomoso (Idowu *et al.*, 2018).

Table 2: Respondents' awareness and attitude towards substance abuse

Variable	Frequency (n=315)	Percentage (%)
Have you been taught about drug abuse in school		
Yes	286	90.79
No	29	9.21
Have you ever used drugs other than those required for medical reasons?		
Yes	61	19.37
No	254	80.63
Respondents who have used drug (n=61)		
Male	44	72.13
Female	17	27.87
Which of the following drugs have you taken?*		
Paracetamol	228	72.38
Multivitamins	72	22.86
Antibiotics	102	32.38
Tramadol	34	10.79
Alcohol	44	13.97
Rohypnol	12	3.81
Source of information on drug abuse*		
School	271	86.03
Mass media	182	57.78
Parents	80	25.40
Siblings	73	23.17
Friends	152	48.25
Possible influence on drug abuse		
Friends	168	53.33
Parents/siblings	82	26.03
Relatives	65	20.63
Reasons for drugs abuse*		
To gain confidence	132	41.90
To be happy and have fun	44	13.97
To improve memory and learning	96	30.48
Peer pressure/acceptability by friends	112	35.56
For depression	256	81.27
Have you gotten into fights under the influence of drug?		
Yes	34	10.79
No	281	89.21

*Multiple responses given.

These studies carried out between 2000 and 2017 further tell a story of an unrelenting epidemic, despite the many interventional programs put in place by the WHO and Federal Government when compared with the results of the index study. Other studies, however, showed significantly higher prevalence rates when compared to this study. Ekop *et al* (2014), while studying substance abuse among students in Gwagwalada, Abuja got a prevalence rate of 72.7% for life time substance use, while Eneh and Stanley (2004) discovered a substance use prevalence rate of 87% among a large population of students in four secondary school in Rivers State, Nigeria. The most frequently abused drug with capacity for dependence as per this study was alcohol with 13.9%. Alcohol is the easiest

substance of abuse to obtain with little or no restriction in sales and this possibly explains why it is the most frequently used substance. The alcohol lifetime use rates also relatively correlate with the results of other similar studies in Oyo (Idowu *et al.*, 2018), Lagos (Oshodi *et al.*, 2010) Abakaliki (Anyanwu *et al.*, 2016) with alcohol use rates of 21.7%, 8%, and 29% respectively. Furthermore, the sale of tramadol and other morphine analogues has been restricted since the onset of the opioid crisis. Adolescents use licit and illicit substances for a myriad of reasons which include but is not limited to improved memory and academic performance, confidence in approaching the opposite sex, depressive symptoms, peer pressure, curiosity, fun, self-medication for illness and stress relief (Oshodi *et al.*, 2010). This study found that feelings of unhappiness/depression was the most likely reason an adolescent experimented with substance use (41.90%). This strengthens the case of a correlation between substance use/abuse and depression and other psychopathologies (Wu *et al.*, 2008; Akinbote and Omigbodun, 2018). Eight-nine percent (89%) of respondents in this study however had gotten into fights as a complication of substance use and abuse. Influences to use or abuse drugs could come from a variety of sources in the community. The role of peer pressure has been severally implicated in adolescent vices (Simons-Morton and Farhat, 2010; Karakos, 2014). This study found that most adolescents involved in substance use were induced or convinced to do so by peers (53%) which is in line with a similar study carried out by Ajibola *et al.*, (2009) that found that in 65% of cases, peer pressure was responsible for the initial experimentation with drug use. Not surprisingly however, one of the major sources of information about drugs and drug abuse was also from peers; 43% in this study. This demonstrates the extent to which peer pressure plays a role in values, morals and education. Other sources of both education and inducement were family and relatives. It is worthy of note however, that the school plays a significant role in education and information of adolescents about drug abuse; 86% in this study and 84% according to Ajibola *et al* (2009). Moreover, there has also been a concerted effort at increasing advocacy, information and education via electronic and print media as well as other informal methods of information dissemination. Consequently, this study found that respondents had also gotten information on substance abuse from family (48%) and mass media both electronic and social (48%). This agrees with findings of other researches (Primack *et al.*, 2009; Scull *et al.*, 2014; Anyanwu *et al.*, 2016; Johnson *et al.*, 2017).

Conclusion: Substance use and abuse by adolescents has been and remains an ongoing challenge. This

present study revealed a prevalence rate of 19.4% of substance abuse by adolescents. The different sources by which adolescents come by information and also get exposed to substance abuse can be leveraged upon to make policies and plan intervention programs that will curb the trend. The results of this study further emphasize the need for implementing drug abuse information and education in post primary schools' curriculum.

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