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SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE AND PERCEPTION OF DRUG USE RISKS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES OF UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA

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Abstract
Several studies have established the role of social media in shaping young people's perception of issues such as self-esteem and body image. However, scant scholarly attention has been paid to social media exposure and perception of drug use risks among this cohort. Using the social cognitive theory, this study investigated the influence of social media exposure on perception of drug use risks among undergraduates of the University of Abuja. Survey and focus group discussion (FGD) were employed as research designs, while multi stage sampling procedure was used to select the samples for the study. A total of 340 respondents filled the questionnaire, while 7 discussants took part in each of the 8 sessions of the FGD. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were thematically analysed. Findings showed a correlation between social media usage and perception of drug use risks, as increased social media exposure led to perception of higher drug use risks and vice versa. Although majority of the respondents perceived drug use risks to be high, however they were undecided on the specific health consequences for users, especially youths. The study, therefore, recommends that relevant stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental agencies should carry out aggressive advocacy and sensitization campaigns that would aim to educate the youths on the health consequences of drug use and the need to live drug free lives.

Keywords: Drug use risk, youths, University of Abuja, social media usage

Introduction
The emergence and rapid spread of social media platforms have fundamentally changed the dynamics of human interaction and access to information, particularly among the youths. Social media have become such an integral part of youth's daily lives that they are viewed as their oxygen of life. The prevalence of social media among this cohort is no more in doubt as they

continue to be "submerged" in the super high way of technology (Onyechi, 2023). Nigerian youths, like their global peers, are active on various social media platforms and they are known to spend significant time-consuming various forms of online content (Ezeah, Asogwa & Obiorah, 2013; Fasae & Adegbilero-Iwari, 2016).

The social media could be dubbed as a two-edged sword as they may have both positive and negative consequences. Social media platforms serve not only as channels for information exchange and social networking but also as avenues for illicit drug sales and exposure to drug-related content (Adejoh, Adisa, Onome, Anyimukwu & Olorunlana, 2020). In Nigeria, illegal drug sellers have also recognised the opportunity to use social media platforms to advertise and facilitate the sale of illegal drugs (Adejoh *et al.*, 2020).

The crux of the matter is that the dangers of both illicit drug use and abuse have recently generated a global conversation. Drug abuse has become a global phenomenon with far-reaching consequences (Kumar & Kumar, 2020; Dominic *et al.*, 2022), and poses a significant threat to individuals, especially the youths. Approximately 35.6 million people worldwide suffered from drug use disorders in 2019, with young people aged 15 to 24 being the most affected (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime{UNODC}, 2021). The widespread availability and accessibility of drugs, coupled with social and economic factors, contribute to the increasing prevalence of drug abuse in various cultures and societies (Baberi, Mirtorabi, Mahdavi, Hamedi & Nazari, 2023; Zhao, Chen, Feng, Han & Zhang, 2019).

The prevalence of drug use and abuse among young people in Nigeria is becoming alarming. Nigeria has recorded a worrying increase in drug abuse cases (Jatau *et al*., 2021; Lawal and Al Mustapha, 2018). The estimate by UNODC (2018) showed the prevalence of drug abuse in Nigeria to be 14.4% or 14.3million people aged between 15 and 64 years. Sadly, this figure is comparatively high when compared with the 2016 global annual prevalence of any drug use of 5.6% among the adult population (UNODC, 2018). Factors such as unemployment, poverty, lack of access to quality education and healthcare, the presence of drug trafficking networks and inefficient law enforcement measures have further exacerbated the drug problem in Nigeria and highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive prevention and treatment strategies in the country (Okafor, 2020; UNODC, 2017).

Interestingly, the UNODC World Drug Report 2021 highlights that a declining perception of the risks of drug use among young people worldwide is a factor contributing to the increase in drug abuse (UNODC, 2021). Despite the well-documented health risks associated with drug use, the report shows a significant decline in the number of young people who perceive drug use to be harmful.

Several factors, such as personal beliefs, social norms, and media messages are known to influence risk perception. When it comes to drug use, risk perception is particularly influenced by individuals' beliefs about the risks and benefits associated with drug use, as well as their perception of the prevailing social norms surrounding drug use (Hansen & Graham cited in Choi, Krieger & Hecht, 2013). Considering the pervasiveness of social media especially in the lives of youths, it has become imperative to examine the relationship between social media exposure and perception of drug use risks among the youths.

While several studies have demonstrated the role of social media in shaping young people's perceptions of issues such as self-esteem, body image, social comparison, and mental health (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018; Perloff, 2014; Ho, Lee & Liao, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2023), fewer studies have focused on the connection between social media and the prevalence of drug abuse among young people (Guyo, Yu, Muthiani & Kembero, 2018; Ayatalumo & Ukegbu, 2018; Daniels, Sharma & Batra, 2021; Gboyega, 2022). Researchers (Akintayo, Ekeh & Oloruntola, 2021; Chukwujekwu, 2017) observed that the ubiquitous nature of the social media allows for the rapid dissemination of information, including both accurate and misleading content related to drug use, leading to the formation of attitudes and beliefs that could lead to low perceptions of the risks of drug use. It has become very important to interrogate the correlation between social media exposure and perception of drug use risk. This study, therefore, investigated this issue by investigating social media usage and perception of drug use risks among undergraduates of University of Abuja. The study asked the following research questions: 1.) What is the exposure pattern to social media among undergraduates of University of Abuja? 2.) What is the perception of drug use risks among undergraduates of University of Abuja? 3.) What is the relationship between exposure pattern to social media and perception of drug use risks among University of Abuja students? 4.) What is the relationship between gender and perception of drug use risks among undergraduates of University of Abuja?

Perception of drug use risks and gender differences in perception of drug use risks
Risk perception is a strong predictor in understanding human health behaviours such as drug use and abuse. According to Slovic (2016), risk perception refers to the biased, personal conclusions people come to about how dangerous a particular risk is perceived to be. Paek and Hove (2017) describe it as subjective judgments by people about the likelihood of negative events such as injury, illness and even death. Scholars who have examined the nexus between risk perception and drug use and abuse such as Ferrer and Klein (2015) aver that risk perception influences health behaviour, and this applies to drug use and abuse.

The study by O'Callaghan, Reid & Copeland (2006) found that individuals with lower risk perceptions may be less motivated to take precautions and engage in risky behaviours that could negatively impact their health. Study by Okaneku, Vearrier, McKeever, LaSala, and Greenberg (2015), found that reduced risk perception is associated with increases in incidents of casual and regular marijuana use among younger men. They argue that individuals may feel more comfortable experimenting with marijuana or using it regularly as their perception of risk decreases.

Opinions and research outcomes are sometimes at variance as far as gender and perception of drug use risks are concerned. Although drug abuse is often viewed as a male-dominated problem (Khooshabi, Forouzan, Ghassabian & Assari, 2010), some research findings have shown that this assumption may not always be true. According to Hachtel and Armstrong (2019), men perceive lower legal, health, and social risks associated with illicit drug use. However, results from studies of drug abuse patterns show that men are more likely to abuse such drugs as marijuana and cocaine, while the women are more likely to abuse prescription drugs and use of opioids for non-medical purposes (Maremmani et al.,2010; El-Sawy, Abdel Hay & Badawy, 2010; Zolala, Mahdavian, Haghdoost & Karamouzian, 2016).

Study by Park, Yun, Constantino, and Ryu (2022) which examined risk perception and marijuana use in relation to gender found that women had a greater perception of the risks associated with marijuana use and were therefore less inclined to use marijuana compared to men. In another study, Ottu and Umoren (2020) found that, among university students in Nigeria, women were more likely to perceive the risk of drug use compared to their male counterparts.

Theoretical framework

Human beings are by nature social beings who only function optimally through interaction with each other. During such interaction, people learn certain behaviours. This underscores the guiding principle of social cognitive theory, which provided the theoretical underpinning for this study. This theory was propounded by Albert Bandura in 1971. Although its applicability was originally restricted to the field of psychology, but it is currently commonly adopted by several disciplines to help understand or predict human behaviour. According to this theory social behaviour can be learned by observing and emulating others (Bandura, 1986). People observe behaviour either directly through social interaction with others or indirectly by observing behaviour through the media (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). People, therefore, acquire knowledge by observing others who they relate with in the environment, or who they are exposed to in the media space.

The main principles of social cognitive theory rest on three major components that influence human behaviour, which include observational learning, self-efficacy, and modelling media. This theory believes that individuals study the behaviour of others and observe the accompanying rewards or punishments, based on which they decide to either replicate this behaviour or not. If they consider the rewards higher than the punishments, then there is a higher probability of imitating the behaviour, but if the reverse is the case, then any attempts to reinforce this behaviour become futile as they will not be motivated to repeat the behaviour. This study focused on modelling media component of the theory which deals with how people learn behaviours by observing people in the media space. Considering that drug use behaviour is not uncommon on social media platforms, this study focused on this component in an attempt to understand how social media exposure pattern influence perception of drug use risks among undergraduates of University of Abuja.

Materials and method
The study employed mixed-methods approach, comprising of both survey and focus group discussion (FGD). Survey research design was deemed appropriate considering that the study sought opinions of the respondents on their social media behaviour and their perception of drug use risks. Furthermore, FGD provided deeper insights into the students' experiences and perspectives.

The multi-stage sampling procedure was used in selecting those who participated in the study. The first stage involved the stratification of the university into faculties. In the second stage simple random sampling procedure was used to select four faculties.

In the third stage, eight departments were selected from the four faculties using simple random sampling procedure. This sampling procedure gave all the faculties and departments equal chance of being selected. The fourth and final stage involved the actual selection of the respondents for the survey and the discussants for the FGD. Purposive sampling method was used to select only undergraduates who were active social media users. A total of 352 students responded to the questionnaire. For the FGD, seven discussants took part in each of the eight sessions.

The instruments used for data collection are questionnaire and FGD guide. Four trained research assistants helped in the administration of copies of the questionnaire and in conducting the sessions of FGD. The data collection was carried out in the school area because it provided a more organized environment to easily reach the students. This lasted for a period of three weeks. Out of 352 copies of the questionnaire administered, 340 copies were found usable. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data while qualitative data were thematically analysed.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents
A total of 186 females (54.7%) and 154 males (45.3%) participated in the study. The majority of respondents (n=199;58.5%) were in their third year followed by those in second year (n=95;27.9%), the fourth year(n=34;10%), and first year (n=12;3.6%). Most respondents were single (n=216;63.5%), those married (n=61;17.9%) and other categories (n=63; 18.5%).

Research Question 1: What is the exposure pattern to social media among undergraduates of University of Abuja?
In order to answer this research question, respondents were asked to indicate the "frequency of social media use" (measured by average time spent in a day), "the social media platform used the most", "the content accessed the most" and "ever encountered drug related content". Table 1 shows the frequency of social media usage among the respondents.

Table 1: Social media exposure pattern among the respondents.

Average time spent on social media per day	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	36	10.6
2-3 hours	177	52.1
4-5 hours	114	33.5
More than 5 hours	13	3.8
Total	340	100

Majority of the respondents(n=177;52.1%) spent 2-3hours averagely in a day on various social media platforms while lowest number(n=13;3.8%) spent more than 5hours averagely in a day on social media platforms.
The FGD finding shows that the discussants spent more than five hours daily on social media platforms. A 300level female student said that, "I use social media for around 5 to 7 hours a day". Another 300level male student said, "I use it 24/7, almost all the time, and I'm always on social media".

The implication of this finding is that undergraduates of this university at the time of conducting this study spent between 2-5hours averagely on different social media platforms in a day. The finding on the social media platform used the most by the respondents is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Social media platforms mostly used by the respondents

Social media platforms	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	214	62.9
Instagram	256	75.3
X	182	53.5
Snapchat	243	71.5
TikTok	187	55.0
YouTube	225	66.2
WhatsApp	298	87.6
Others	9	2.6

Respondents were allowed to make multiple selections. Finding in Table 2 clearly shows that many of the students are on multiple social media platforms. For instance, majority (n=298;87.6%) are on WhatsApp, Instagram (n=265;75.3%) and Snapchat (n=243;71.5%), respectively. This shows that the respondents are well represented on various social media platforms. This is corroborated by the FGD finding, which shows that the discussants used WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook in that order.

On the type of content that the respondents are exposed to on the social media platforms, finding reveals that respondents are exposed mostly to news and current affairs (n=278;81.8%), personal updates and social interactions(n=248;72.9%) and entertainment(n=247;72.6%) in that order. From these three categories, it appears that respondents keep up with current affairs, maintaining social interactions, and getting entertainment.

However, finding from the FGD shows that the discussants are more interested in maintaining their social interactions and getting entertained. For instance, a final year male student stated; "I use it to watch videos, play games, and do research, and I use it 24 hours, 7 days". Another discussant, a 200level male student said; "I post my content, like pictures, drawings and that sort of thing". Further finding shows that an overwhelming majority (n=270;79.4%) has encountered drug-related contents on social media platforms, while the

remaining respondents(n=70;20.6%) said that they had never. Further probing shows that out of 270 respondents who have encountered drug-related contents on social media platforms, a little above half (n=148; 54.9%) have always encountered. Others (n=122;45.2%) said that they rarely encountered such contents.

Finding from the FGD corroborates the finding from the survey. Most of the discussants acknowledged the prevalence of drug-related contents on social media platforms. A 400level male student stated:

> I have come across so much drug-related content. I watch people smoke Indian hemp, take Molly, and post it on their Facebook stories and their WhatsApp statuses. I don't know, maybe twice a week.

Below is from a 100level female student:

> I always come across any drug-related content. I've always come across it, almost every time on Instagram and everywhere.

Research Question 2: What is the perception of drug use risks among undergraduates of University of Abuja?
In order to answer this research question, respondents' opinion on drug use risks was presented first. Thereafter, their opinion on the issue was used to categorize their perception of drug use risks. These findings are presented in Tables 3 and 4. Respondents' opinion on drug use risks is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Respondents' opinion on drug use risks

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
Drug use poses great risks to users	186 (54.7%)	154 (45.3%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Drugs have health consequences for users, especially	13 (3.8%)	106 (31.2%)	187 (55.0%)	34 (10.0%)	0(0.0%)

youths.				
Drug use can affect the mental health of users.	13 (3.8%)	140 (41.2%)	171 (50.3%)	16 (4.7%)	0(0.0%)
Drug use puts users under a great financial burden.	142 (41.8%)	197 (57.9%)	1 (0.3%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Drug users under the influence of drugs can engage in risky behaviours such as dangerous driving and unprotected sex.	110 (32.4%)	64 (18.8%)	93 (27.4%)	11 (3.2%)	62 (18.2%)
Drug users, especially those who overdose, constitute a great nuisance to society.	37 (10.9%)	81 (23.8%)	190 (55.9%)	32 (9.4%)	0(0.0%)
Drug users can sometimes have emotional problems due to their drug use habits.	45 (13.2%)	114 (33.5%)	172 (50.6%)	9 (2.6%)	0(0.0%)
Drug use can adversely affect cognitive functions (e.g., memory recall, decision-	47 (13.8%)	186 (54.7%)	93 (27.4%)	14 (4.1%)	0(0.0%)

making).					
Drug overdose can result in outcomes such as permanent bodily disability and death.	61 (17.9%)	114 (33.5%)	103 (30.3%)	46 (13.5%)	16 (4.7%)
Drug use can destroy users' (especially youths) future.	82 (24.1%)	122 (35.9%)	99 (29.1%)	10 (2.9%)	21 (6.2%)

It is interesting to note that all the respondents(n=340;100%) believe that drug use poses a great risk. However, there was divergence of opinions in identifying the specific risks, particularly the health consequences. For instance, majority(n=187;55.0%) were undecided while many of the respondents(n=119;35.0%) agreed that drugs have health consequences. Furthermore, many respondents(n=171;50.3%), were undecided about drug use effect on mental health, while a large number of respondents(n=153;45.0%) agreed that drug use can affect mental health. When asked if drug users can sometimes have emotional problems due to their drug use habits, majority (n=172;50.6%) were undecided while many of the respondents (n=159;46.7%) agreed with the statement. The implication of this finding is that although the respondents agreed that drug use poses great risk to users, majority appeared not to know the health consequences.

Based on their opinions, respondents were then categorized according to their perception of drug use risks. See Table 4.

Table 4: Categorization of respondents based on perception of drug use risks

Perception of drug use risks	Frequency	Percentage
High Risk	255	75.0
Low Risk	85	25.0
Total	**340**	**100**

The finding in Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents (n=255;75.0%) perceives drug use risks to be high, whereas those who perceived that drug use risks are low are in the minority(n=85;25.0%). This finding indicates a significant level of concern among respondents regarding the potential risks and consequences associated with drug use.

The finding from FGD reveals that the discussants perceive drug use risks to be very high. The discussants believed that drug use has serious health consequences. A 200level female student noted:

> I agree that drug use poses a great risk because users may suffer from mental illnesses, depression, suicide, and stuff like that.

A 400level male student stated:

> If you are taking all those drugs, especially those ones that have like severe consequences like cocaine and heroin, it can lead to mental illness.

Surprisingly, when respondents were asked if they had ever used drugs in the past, all of them denied any past drug use. The study probed further into plausible reasons for their lack of interest in drug use. The finding is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Reasons for abstaining from drug use by the respondents

Reasons for abstaining	Frequency	Percentage
Family upbringing	103	30.3
No benefits	140	41.2
Fear of addiction	197	57.9
Terrible consequences	187	55.0
Financial implications	82	24.1
No interest	142	41.8

The most common reasons given by respondents for not using drugs are fear of addiction (n=197;57.9%) and terrible consequences associated with drug use (n=187;55.0%).

The finding from FGD shows divergence in discussants' responses about drug use experience. While some said that they have never used drug and not willing to try it out, others said they have, while some said they have never used drug before but may try it out in the future. Below is from a 300level male student who resolved to stay away completely from drugs:

> I stay away totally from drugs. So no, I won't do
> drugs in future to come, in a hundred years, no.

Another discussant, a 200level male student who had used drugs in the past said:

> Yes, I have used drugs but not now. I am a
> social host, a smoker, and a drinker. So
> sometimes, when I am with friends, periodically,
> not all the time, I might partake in such acts.

One of the discussants, a 100level female student who had not used drugs in the past stated:

> I will be willing to try any drug in the future. I
> haven't tried because I am scared. But I want to
> try, and I want to know how it feels.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between exposure pattern to social media and perception of drug use risks among undergraduates of University of Abuja?

This research question probed into the correlation between social media exposure pattern and perception of drug use risks among the respondents. The finding is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Pearson Product-Moment correlation showing the relationship between exposure pattern to social media and perception of drug use risks among undergraduates of University of Abuja

		Social media exposure pattern	Perceived drug use risks
Social media exposure pattern	Pearson Correlation	1	.368**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	340	340

The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). **

The finding shows a statistically significant positive correlation (r = 0.368, p = 0.000) between social media exposure and perception of drug risks among the respondents. This suggests that there is a direct link between social media exposure and the way people perceive the risks of drug use. In other words, the more people are exposed to social media contents, the more likely they are to view drug use as a risky behaviour. Conversely, the less people are exposed to social media, the less likely they will view drug use as a risky behaviour.

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between gender and perception of drug use risks among undergraduates of University of Abuja?
This research question examined the relationship between gender and perception of drug use risks among undergraduates of University of Abuja. The finding is presented in Table 7.

Table 7: T-test showing the relationship between gender and perception of drug use risks among the respondents

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perceived drug use risks	MALE	154	38.2338	3.91376	.31538
	FEMALE	186	38.7097	3.80776	.27920

As reflected in Table 7, the mean perceived drug use risks for men is 38.23 while the standard deviation value is 3.91. The mean perceived drug use risks for women is slightly higher at 38.71 with a slightly lower standard deviation of 3.81. This suggests that on the average, women perception of drug use risks is slightly higher than men perception of drug use risks. An independent sample t-test was carried out in order to determine if the difference in their perception of drug use risks is statistically significant. The result is presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Independent samples t-Test for equality

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Perceived drug use risks	Equal variances assumed	.019	.892	-1.133	338	.258	-.47591
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.130	322.812	.259	-.47591

The independent sample t-test results align with the finding in Table 7. The p-values of 0.258 (equal variances assumed) and 0.259 (unequal variances assumed) indicate no statistically significant difference in the mean perceived drug use risks scores between male and female respondents. Furthermore, the negligible mean difference of -0.47591 underscores the lack of a meaningful gender-based discrepancy in perceptions of drug use risks among the respondents. The implication of this finding is that gender of the respondents did not in any way influence their perception of drug use risks.

Discussion
Previous studies have confirmed the pervasiveness of social media in the lives of young people (Kirik, Arslan, Cetinkaya & Gul, 2015; Vromen, Xenos & Loader cited in Onyechi & Adeniyi, 2019). This tendency has been corroborated by the finding of this current study which showed that the undergraduates of University of Abuja were always exposed to the social media. They spent averagely 2-5 hours per day on popular social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. Additionally, respondents' preference for news and current

events, social interactions, and entertainment contents of the social media points to the role of social media in meeting young people's informational and social needs (Gray, 2018; Wang & Edwards, 2016).

The prevalence of drug-related contents on social media platforms has continued to be a source of worry. Yang and Luo (2017) lamented that illicit drug trade via social media sites, especially photo-oriented Instagram, has become a severe problem in recent years. The finding of this study again give credence to this worry. This current study, consistent with the study of Moorhead et al. (2013), revealed that majority of the students admitted to encountering drug-related content on social media platforms. It is not surprising that the drug cartels are leveraging on social media platforms since young people are active users. This point was aptly captured by Adejoh, Adisa, Onome, Anyimukwu and Olorunlana (2020) when they stated that as social media has gained widespread popularity among youths, illicit drug sellers have also recognised the opportunity to leverage these platforms for advertising and facilitating their trade. The prevalence of drug use and abuse among young people in Nigeria is real. It has been noted earlier that the estimate by UNODC (2018) showed the prevalence of drug abuse in Nigeria to be 14.4% or 14.3million people aged between 15 and 64 years.

The result of this current study showed that majority perceived drug use risks to be high and also claimed not to have ever used drug. This is consistent with previous findings (O'Callaghan et al., 2006; Okaneku., 2015; Terry-McElrath, O'Malley, Patrick & Miech, 2017) which showed that those who perceived drug risks to be high are less likely to use drugs. These result outcomes notwithstanding, drug use among the youths globally, including Nigeria, has remained a challenge. Jatau et al. (2021) have expressed the concern that drug issue has continued to pose a significant burden in Nigeria. Beyond Ferrer & klein's (2015) assertion that perception influences health behaviour, there may be other factors that are driving this tendency in this cohort. For instance, it has been viewed from a moral decadence (Adetiloye & Abel, 2022), peer pressure (Okafor, 2019), unemployment and poverty (Gobir et al., 2017), and lack of access to quality education (Florence, LUO, Xu & Zhou, 2016).

The finding of this study showed that the more people are exposed to social media content, the more likely they are to perceive drug use as a risky behaviour. This result supports the postulation of the social cognitive theory. The theory posits that individuals' perceptions and behaviours are strongly influenced by the social context in which they live. According to Bevelander *et al.* (2018) through repeated exposure to social media content, people developed perceptions and beliefs about the risks associated with drug use.

Although the study by Ottu and Umoren (2020) found that among university students in Nigeria, women were more likely to perceive the risk of drug use

compared to their male counterparts, this current study and other studies (Hachtel & Armstrong, 2019; Ottu & Umoren, 2020) showed that gender of the respondents does not influence their perception of drug use risks. Considering that drug use is a serious public health issue that affected 35.6 million people in 2019 [with young people aged 15 to 24 being the most affected] (UNODC, 2021), the assumption, therefore, is that gender dichotomy does not necessarily determine how one perceives the drug use risks.

Conclusion and recommendation

One of the findings revealed that majority of the students perceived that drug use risks are high. It is to be noted that many of them claimed not to have ever used drug. The prevalence of drug use among the youths suggests, therefore, that there may be other factors such as moral decadence (Adetiloye & Abel, 2022), peer pressure (Okafor, 2019), unemployment and poverty (Gobir et al., 2017), and lack of access to quality education (Florence, LUO, Xu & Zhou, 2016) that are driving this tendency among this cohort. This study, therefore, recommends that governments at both state and federal levels adopt multi sectoral approach to address various socio-economic problems confronting the youth population. Furthermore, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a matter of urgency should carry out aggressive advocacy and sensitization campaigns aimed at educating the youths on the health consequences of drug use and the need to live drug free lives.

Although all the respondents agreed that drug use poses a great risk to users, many of them were undecided on the specific health consequences for users, especially youths. This may point to the gap in knowledge of specific health consequences associated with drug use among these students. Further studies are recommended to examine their knowledge in this area.

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