

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG FEMALE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA

I. Egbuonu,¹ C. C. Ezechukwu,¹ J. O. Chukwuka,¹ R. Uwakwe²

*Departments of ¹Paediatrics and ²Internal Medicine, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital Nnewi
Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

Objective: To study the prevalence of substance abuse among female secondary school students in Anambra State.

Design: This is a cross sectional study.

Materials and Methods:

A pre-tested structured questionnaire was used to obtain information on smoking, use of sedatives and alcohol drinking habits from 725 students of nine randomly selected female senior secondary schools, 3 each from the three senatorial zones of the state.

Results: Out of a study population of 725, 34 or 4.7% of the girls smoked tobacco (cigarette) while 69 or 9.5% indulged in alcohol and 109 or 15% took sedatives as a means of inducing sleep. There was no statistical difference between the smokers in the three classes while significant statistical difference existed between the classes in terms of use of alcohol and sedatives ($p < 0.05$). Alcohol consumption peaked in class 2, while the use of sedatives decreased progressively from year 1 to year 3.

Conclusions: Though the over all prevalence of use of tobacco and alcohol was low compared to American society, efforts should be made by guidance counselors and primary care physicians to provide information to female students on the dangers inherent in the use of these substances. Students should also be encouraged to establish drug free clubs at schools to disseminate information on the disadvantages of substance use and discourage their use.

Key Words: Substance abuse, senior secondary students, females

INTRODUCTION

From early times in our traditional society drugs like tobacco and alcohol have traditionally been used for ritual religious and recreational purposes. The acceptance of the use of such drugs stemmed largely from the fact that there was no abuse. Where there was it was severely dealt with. Society had very clearly drawn the line and there was no question of condoning any abuse, more so this was traditionally restricted to adults. With modern culture of television and bill board advertisements, the youth has gotten involved in the use of these drugs. Use of tobacco, marijuana and other drugs of abuse exact a horrific toll on society and the health of the youth world wide.¹⁻³ Youth use drugs for a variety of reasons. Some use drugs as an escape

from environmental chaos, some as a way to mirror adult life, some as a rite of passage into puberty, as a way to cope with adolescent issues, and others as a result of pervasive influence of the media and their peers. They may also use drugs as a way of challenging authority, as a way of dealing with life difficulties or as a way of fitting into a social situation at school or at social clubs outside of school such as being part of a gang.⁴

Most often they start experimenting with tobacco smoking, alcohol and marijuana – the gateway drugs. These substances are called gateway drugs because they form the launching pad of more serious drug experimentation and abuse. These gateway drugs can start the user off on a pathway of drug use and abuse.^{5,6}

Tobacco remains a very popular drug of the modern culture.⁷ it is the most common drug used by youth on a daily basis. American high school seniors

have a life time cigarette use prevalence of 65%.⁸ Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant that can induce a pleasant feeling of euphoria.⁹ Alcohol continues to be one of the common drugs used and abused by adolescent college students and adults.² A life time prevalence for alcohol use is noted in over 80% of American high school seniors.⁴ So far no study has been carried out in our environment to ascertain the level of use of tobacco (cigarette), alcohol and sleep inducing drugs among girls in secondary school. Tobacco (cigarette smoking) and alcohol use are usually thought to be the prerogative of boys. The girls are thought to have more restraint. This study was therefore designed to investigate smoking, alcohol intake and use of sedatives among senior secondary school girls in Anambra State, Southeastern Nigeria.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

This is a cross sectional survey conducted in nine randomly selected female senior secondary schools from the three senatorial zones of Anambra State. A total of 725 students were involved in the study. Data was collected through self administered pre-tested questionnaire in classroom settings. Information collected was on tobacco (cigarette) smoking, alcohol intake, and use of sleep inducing drugs. The study was carried out between September 2001 and July 2002.

Permission for the study was obtained from the State Ministry of Education. While the aims of the study were explained to the students and teachers before the questionnaire was distributed.

The data was analysed using the statistical package SSPS ver 11.5 and Pearson's chi square test was used for test of significance.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the girls studied. In Table 1a, is the age distribution of the girls studied while table 1b shows the class distribution of the

girls. The average age of the study population was 15.6±1.5 years.

Out of a population of 725 girls studied, 4.7 % (34) smoked tobacco, 9.5 % (69) indulged in alcohol use while 15 % (109) took sedatives as a means of inducing sleep.

Table 2 shows the class distribution of the girls that use these substances. There was no statistical difference between the smokers in the three classes while significant statistical difference existed between the classes in terms of use of alcohol and sedatives.

The alcohol use peaked in class (SS) 2 while the use of sedatives decreased progressively from year 1 to year 3.

Table 1a. Characteristics of the study population
Age range of students

Age range (years)	No	Percent
13 – 15	363	50.1
16 – 18	338	46.7
19 – 21	21	2.9
22 – 25	3	0.4
Total	725	100.1

Table 1b. Class distribution of study cohort

Class	Number of students (%)	Mean age(years)
SS1	177(24.4)	14.4
SS2	234(32.3)	15.5
SS3	314(43.3)	16.3
Total	725(100)	

Table 2 Distribution of the use of substances by class

Substance	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Total	P value
	N=177	N=234	N=314	N=725	
Tobacco	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	0.207
	5(2.8)	14(6)	15(4.8)	34(4.7)	
Alcohol	10(5.6)	32(13.7)	27(8.6)	69(9.5)	0.044
Sedatives	46(26)	29(12.4)	34(10.8)	109(15.0)	0.000
Total	61(34.4)	75(32.1)	76(24.2)	212(29.2)	

DISCUSSION

Substance abuse is a major problem for millions of youth worldwide.¹ Often times those that get involved in substance abuse start their journey by experimenting with gate way drugs – tobacco alcohol and marijuana. In our study only 4.7% are involved in smoking despite the fact that tobacco is a very popular drug in modern culture.⁷ This is in contrast to the American society where 25% of the adolescents use cigarette daily.⁸ The low smoking incidence among our female adolescents may be due to the fact that the society frowns at female smoking especially among girls at school. Although the Federal Ministry of Health has enforced warning signs on cigarette advertisements, like ‘Smokers are likely to die young’, the extent to which these warnings impact on female adolescent smoking is yet to be evaluated.

The observed alcohol usage of 9.5% was twice that of cigarette smoking. This could be explained by the societal acceptance of alcohol for recreational purposes, while it is easier to take alcohol in hiding, it is more difficult to restrict the offensive smoke of cigarette. Citing Odejide et al. Ebie¹⁰ observed that nearly 60% of secondary school students in Nigeria abuse alcohol. This view was not supported by our observations. The difference may be due to the fact that the study populations are different. This study population being female the reference population involved both sexes.

One hundred and nine or 15% of the study population has used one or more types of sedatives. This could be accounted for by the desire to sleep after using stimulants to keep awake while reading, a practice that is quite common among secondary school students especially when examinations are approaching.

The high alcohol consumption in SS 2 may be due to the fact that these students have less pressure of work and more time for socialization. On the contrary students in Senior Secondary (SS) 1 and 3 were too busy with their studies – the former to cope with a new educational status while the later to prepare for the on coming senior secondary school (SSE) examination. The progressive fall in the use of sedatives with progression in class is probably age related. As they mature (Table 2) they gain confidence and were able to handle education and social stress without recourse to use of sedatives.

From our study the over all prevalence of use of tobacco and alcohol is quite low. While this is encouraging, efforts should be made by guidance counselors and primary care physicians to provide information to female students on the dangers inherent in the use of these substances. Students should also be

encouraged to establish drug free clubs at schools to disseminate information on the disadvantages of substance use and discourage their use.

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