

Prevalence, Predictors of Drug and Substance Use, Their Psychosocial and Academic Effects on Secondary School Students in North-Eastern Nigeria: A Review

Charles Nzasibenvo Nyameh

St. Michael's Parish, Galway, Ireland

Email: nzasibenvo@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Drug and substance use and abuse among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria is a growing concern among stakeholders in the education sector, especially in the last decade. This menace has been linked to many negative consequences, including physical, psychological, and academic problems. While some studies have shown that the menace is low, others have shown that it is high and associated with various psycho-social and academic impacts. All the studies, however, agree on the prevalence and the associated educational effects. These studies have shown that various factors influence or sustain drug or substance habits. Predisposing factors related to a person's background, such as family history, upbringing, personal history, curiosity, peer pressure, and some life events like grief, divorce, re-marriage, loss of job, and change of home or school. Precipitating factors are psychological and physical factors that could trigger the tendency to use drugs or substances to cope. Such factors include stress, excessive pain, illness, and trauma from sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Perpetuating factors are responsible for sustaining a person's drug or substance habit, such as associating with bad company and getting a pleasurable or material reward from any drug or substance that enhances performance in crime, sex, sports, music, or manual work. This study recommends the following: Increasing sensitization and awareness campaigns on the dangers of drugs and substance abuse, strengthening and funding law enforcement agencies to arrest and prosecute those selling illicit drugs and substances, enhancing parental guidance and monitoring of children to prevent and detect early signs of drug and substance use, implementing strict disciplinary measures and sanctions for students caught with drugs or substances, employing trained counselors and school psycholo-

gists to support and guide students, establishing rehabilitation centers to assist and treat students struggling with addictions from drug and substance abuse, establishing drug control and prevention clubs in secondary schools to equip students with the necessary skills to resist temptations related to substance use, and data collection, storage, and funding research activities for plans and policies.

Keywords

Drugs & Substances, Academic Effects, Psycho-Social Effects, Secondary Schools, North-Eastern Nigeria

1. Introduction

The prevalence of drug and substance use by secondary school students seems to be increasing globally. This is because the use of drugs and substances is rampant among the general population and the young and vulnerable age group of secondary school students. In the last few decades, there has been an alarming rise in the use of illegal drugs among secondary school students. This is a significant concern for parents, teachers, and other professionals trying to create a safe and healthy environment for children and young people. In order to better understand this problem and develop effective interventions, it is essential to examine the prevalence of drug and substance use among secondary school students and identify any potential predictors of those students' use of drugs and substances. Additionally, it is necessary to explore the psychosocial and academic effects of drug and substance use on these students. Many studies have generally linked specific psychosocial and academic effects to this phenomenon; these include truancy, lower grades, school dropout, violence, crime, etc.

The drug and substance use phenomenon cuts across people of all ages, races, religions, classes, or professions. Studies have shown that the prevalence of drug and substance use is highest among secondary school students in the United States, followed by other countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (Das, Salam, Arshad, Finkelstein, & Bhutta, 2016). The use of drugs and substances by secondary school students could have various psychosocial and academic effects. These effects include poor academic performance, increased risk of social isolation, and increased risk of developing mental health problems. This study will, however, focus on its prevalence in secondary schools, particularly in North-Eastern Nigeria. The aims and objectives of the research will be to create more awareness of its prevalence and potential increase, discover and address the predictors or root causes, and proffer specific solutions or strategies to curb the tide of drug and substance use in these learning institutions. Doing so enhances better and more productive behavioral patterns and academic performance. This study was conducted through questionnaires administered to four hundred students in forty selected schools across four

states across North-Eastern Nigeria.

Addressing the drug and substance use by secondary school students is like a stitch in time to save nine. Adolescence poses a challenging stage of life for most individuals. It is often characterized by uneven biological, psychological, and social development (Obadeji, Kumolalo, Oluwole, Ajiboye, Dada, & Ebeyi, 2020). The tendencies to explore or be inquisitive, peer influences, and risk-taking behaviors are some characteristics of adolescents. When adolescents start to use drugs and substances, there is a high risk of becoming addicted to them as they become more independent. It is also possible that engaging in such habits could lead to a partial or total disruption of their academic pursuits, which could lead to various anti-social or criminal behaviors or activities.

2. Background

At the core of addressing drug and substance use in secondary schools is a holistic approach where laws and policies are made and implemented for maximum results. Cannabis, which the World Health Organization describes as the most abused psychoactive substance globally is found almost everywhere in Nigeria. There is a need for preventive strategies through enlightenment campaigns against drug abuse and the consequences of drug abuse spearheaded by the National Orientation Agency (NOA); increased budgetary allocation to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to carry out its functions (Nwabughogu, 2023); the establishment of functional rehabilitation centres which should have the financial and bureaucratic status of Specialist Hospitals with psychiatrists, psychologists, toxicologists, professional counselors, and other experts to manage these hospitals (Orizu, 2023).

Too often, statutory government agencies like the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the National Agency for Food and Drug Control (NAFDAC) are more reactive in their approach than preventive. Most times, the focus is on arresting and prosecuting offenders possessing, importing, exporting, using, or selling illicit drugs and substances. Nevertheless, little or no effort is made towards a holistic approach to addressing this endemic societal problem. Furthermore, unless committed actions are taken against the drug business on many fronts, the fight to control or curtail its use and abuse will remain lip service.

3. Problem Statement

In addressing the phenomenon of drug and substance use in secondary schools, these issues will be examined:

- Why the rise in the use of drugs and substances in secondary schools, especially in the last decade?
- What are the possible root causes for such a phenomenon?
- Students in secondary schools in North-Eastern Nigeria use what common drugs or substances?

- How does this phenomenon affect the psychosocial and academic life of these students?
- What are some benefits of a drug or substance-free life?
- What response strategies have the government and schools' management implemented to address this phenomenon?
- What are some possible recommendations for the way forward?

Every problem has a solution as long as there is the willpower to explore every necessary strategy required to address that problem. Parents, teachers, school management boards, statutory government agencies, advocacy groups, researchers, and religious bodies must all be interested in this fight against drug and substance abuse in society. No community can thrive well in a situation where illicit drugs and substances are commonly used and abused; this is even more disastrous when young people, who are the future of society, are caught on the web. There are no records of people born with such problems; those with such problems must have learned to use alcohol, drugs, or other substances in a risky and problematic manner (Spada, 2017).

4. Objectives

The overall aim of this study is to create an awareness of the potential dangers of drug and substance use and to discourage or stop the practice in secondary schools, to enhance the psychosocial and academic formation of the students for desired fruits or results. Secondary school students should be able to learn in a drug or substance-free environment for the good of the students, parents or guardians, teachers, and the broader society. This will enable the students to be more productive or reach their full potential.

5. Methodology

5.1. Study Area

North-Eastern Nigeria is a sub-region in Nigeria that comprises six states: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe. North-Eastern Nigeria has faced various challenges and significant events that have influenced its development. The Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009, has profoundly impacted the region, resulting in the displacement of millions of people, widespread destruction, and loss of lives. The government and international organizations have tried to address the region's security and humanitarian crisis. Though relative peace is gradually returning to many parts of the Northeast, the fear of long-term effects from trauma on many people is real and must be adequately addressed.

One such initiative was the establishment of the Human Resource and Skills Acquisition for Trauma Healing Centre, established by the Catholic Diocese of Maiduguri, the birthplace or epicenter of Boko Haram and its nefarious activities. The Director of this Centre, Fr. Joseph Bature Fidelis, is one of the two Clinical Psychologists and, together with other skill acquisition experts, are re-

sponsible for equipping survivors of violent attacks in Maiduguri with skills to start living with dignity and accompanying them in the healing processes from their traumas (Aineah, 2023). In 2020, the Centre received a facelift through funding from a Catholic Charity and Pontifical Foundation, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) International. Hence, the Centre provided service to victims of militant attacks, those who escaped from Boko Haram captivity, and to Priests and Religious who were themselves adversely affected due to the destruction of their parishes and the killing and displacement of their parishioners (Aineah, 2023; AIS, 2023).

Many people with post-traumatic symptoms, like insomnia, unexplained illnesses, physical injuries, nightmares, etc., can access individual healing and group counseling. Other services included material support, scholarships for children, financial aid to widows and orphans, and Priests and Religious (AIS, 2023). Some critical acquisition skills taught to the residents include food processing, sewing, knitting, shoemaking, etc., to help them pick up economically again (Aineah, 2023).

Owing to the establishment of the Human Resource and Skills Acquisition for Trauma Healing Centre by the Catholic Diocese of Maiduguri and the many success stories emanating from the Centre, the Maiduguri Diocese of Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion in 2016 also laid a foundation of an ultra-modern Centre for displaced victims of Boko Haram. The proposed Clinic and trauma Centre is designed to have a labor ward, mini theatre, pharmacy, and laboratory. The project, which is expected to cost fifteen million in the local currency (naira), is expected to be open to people of all faiths and is expected to be free (Haruna, 2016).

5.2. Research Design & Participants

This study adopted a cross-sectional design because it is community-based. The study was conducted in 40 secondary schools across four (4) states out of the six (6) states in North-Eastern Nigeria. It is hoped that covering four out of the six states in North-Eastern Nigeria will give a more comprehensive insight into the prevalence and predictors of drug and substance use by secondary school students and the adverse effects such usage has on them. It is also believed that engaging the students directly through a questionnaire will capture the situation of such menace much better than if others were engaged on their behalf.

Study Population

The population for the study comprised four hundred (400) secondary school students from forty schools in four states across North-Eastern Nigeria. This population was chosen because they are primarily adolescents and teenagers who can be very vulnerable to the menace of drug and substance use and abuse. Furthermore, because the country's North-Eastern region had experienced many security challenges due to the destructive activities of the Boko Haram terrorists, many young people would have had to cope with many traumatic experiences, which could have pushed them to use drugs or substances to cope.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

Four hundred (400) respondents were interviewed through questionnaires for this study. A multi-stage sampling technique was applied to select 400 respondents for the study. The Northeast comprises Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe states. The first stage included the selection of four (4) states from the six (6) that made up North-Eastern Nigeria using simple random sampling (SRS) by balloting. All the names of the states were written on paper, squeezed, and put inside a container where the researcher picked four (4) to give all the states equal chances of being selected. The four chosen states were Adamawa State, Borno State, Gombe State, and Taraba State.

The second stage was the selection of four (4) local government areas from each of the four (4) selected states using simple random sampling by balloting. In each state, all the local governments' names were written on a paper, squeezed, and put inside a container where the researcher picked four (4) local governments, and twenty-five (25) respondents were selected across the various secondary schools.

The third stage was the selection of five (5) Wards within the selected local government area using the exact simple random sampling by balloting. The fourth stage was the selection of secondary schools within each ward, which was carried out by a systematic random sampling technique after conducting a household census of the various secondary schools that provided a sampling frame. The final selection of study participants was made at the secondary school level, where the researcher collaborated with the school authorities in selecting the students who were the respondents.

5.3. Data Collection & Instrument of Data Collection

The primary instrument for collecting data for this study was the questionnaire. The questionnaire, a structured schedule, and essentially a quantitative tool was the most suitable for obtaining data from a representative sample of students, which could be used to describe or analyze a larger population. Before administering the questionnaire to the students, the researcher first engaged the students with a brief talk on the awareness and dangers of drug and substance use so that the students knew what the research and the motive were all about. That engagement gave the students more confidence to respond to the questionnaire.

Methods of Data Collection

The quantitative instrument was a structured questionnaire administered in interview form, shared among students in randomly selected secondary school students in North Eastern Nigeria. The structured questionnaire was presented in relative detail to the variables related to the research problem and objectives of the study. The respondents were educated and filled out the questionnaires themselves.

On the whole, the structured questionnaire elicited information about the respondents' socio-demographic data, the causes of substance and drug abuse,

the effects of drugs and substance abuse on the psycho-social behavior of the students, the impact of drugs and substance abuse on the academic performance of students and the measures for curtailing drug and substance abuse among students.

5.4. Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaires were processed with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency distribution tables and descriptive statistics, like percentages, were used to describe the characteristics of the study subjects. This made for clarity and easy understanding of the raw data.

6. Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Findings

Section A: Socio-Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1 above provides information on the sex distribution of respondents in a field survey conducted among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023. The survey included 400 respondents: 239 (59.75%) males and 161 (40.25%) females. This could be attributed to the fact that there is low enrolment of females in schools in North-Eastern Nigeria, which may be attributed to religious or cultural factors; Malala Yousafzai, Nobel laureate and UN Messenger of Peace, recently corroborated this view in Nigeria on her 26th birthday when she said that “More than 120 million girls are out of school in Nigeria by poverty, patriarchy, climate and conflict”. Malala Yousafzai also emphasized the importance of education in the fight against terrorism; in her words, “With guns, you can kill terrorists, but with education, you can kill terrorism” (UN, 2023). Furthermore, the confidence of many parents to send their girls to schools could have eroded due to the mass abduction of schoolgirls, particularly in some parts of North-Eastern Nigeria. In April 2014, the mass kidnapping of 276 primarily Christian female students aged 16-18 by the Boko Haram terrorists from Government Girls Secondary School Chibok, Borno State, was a turning point. This abduction sparked global outrage and condemnation with the social media campaign known as #BringBackOurGirls, a slogan used by protesters around the globe, including Michelle Obama, the former US First Lady (Dartford, 2022). While some of the girls escaped or were released, some of them were used as bargaining chips or negotiating pawns by the terrorist group in

Table 1. Sex of respondents.

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	239	59.75%
Female	161	40.25%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, North-Eastern Nigeria, 2023.

exchange for the release of their jailed commanders. It is believed some of the girls were married off to some commanders as some were later rescued with children; over a hundred are still missing nine years later. The February 2018 abduction of 110 schoolgirls in Dapchi, Yobe State, also in the northeast, was another sad event. Even though the girls were released, the terrorists refused to release Leah Sharibu, a Christian girl who resisted being forcefully converted to the Islamic religion. Though there was also the abduction of about 500 boys in Kankara, Katsina State, in the North-West, government negotiations saw to the release of nearly all of them. Amnesty International estimated that in the year 2015, almost 2000 women and girls had been abducted since 2014, many of whom had been forced into sexual slavery. Such situations can certainly discourage parents from sending their girls to school.

Table 2 provides information on the age distribution of respondents in a field survey conducted among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023. Most respondents (45.75%) fell within the age group of 10 - 15 years, followed by 16 - 20 years (48%). A small percentage of respondents were in the age groups of 21 - 25 years (4.25%) and 26 and above (2%). This distribution indicates that the survey sample primarily consisted of adolescents and young adults.

Table 3 presents the class distribution of respondents in a field survey conducted among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023.

Table 2. Age of respondents.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
10 - 15	183	45.75%
16 - 20	192	48%
21 - 25	17	4.25%
26 & above	08	2%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, North-Eastern Nigeria, 2023.

Table 3. Class of respondents.

Class of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
JSS 1	38	9.5%
JSS 2	51	12.75%
JSS 3	68	17%
SSS 1	89	22.25%
SSS 2	92	23%
SSS 3	62	15.5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, North-Eastern Nigeria, 2023.

The table shows the frequency and percentage of respondents in each class. The highest number of respondents were in SSS 2 (23%), followed by SSS 1 (22.25%) and JSS 3 (17%). The lowest number of respondents was in JSS 1 (9.5%).

Section B: Common Drugs and Substances Abused by Secondary School Students in North-Eastern Nigeria

Table 4 provides information on the standard drugs and substances abused by respondents in a field survey conducted among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023. The table presents the frequency and percentage of respondents who reported abusing each substance. The most commonly used substances were codeine/tramadol (24.75%), followed by alcohol (22.25%) and Indian hemp (20.25%). Other substances abused included tobacco (19.25%), painkillers (7.75%), shisha (3.25%), and passion (2.5%). This indicates that different drugs and substances are being abused by students, with codeine/tramadol, alcohol, and Indian hemp being the most common ones.

Section C: Major Causes of Drug and Substance Abuse among Secondary School Students.

Table 5 presents the respondents' causes of drug and substance abuse in a field survey conducted among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023. The table shows the frequency and percentage of respondents who strongly agreed, agreed, strongly disagreed, or disagreed with statements related to the causes of drug and substance abuse.

According to the table, the majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that students engage in drug and substance abuse because of peer influence (94.25%), social media influence (86%), and the desire to feel popular among students (88.25%).

On the other hand, a significant number of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the drug habit of students is attributed to their parents' drug habits (40.5%). These findings suggest that peer influence and social media play significant roles in students' drug abuse behavior, while the impact of parents' drug habits may not be as prominent.

Table 4. Common drugs and substances abused by respondents.

Drugs/Substance Abused	Frequency	Percentage
Indian Hemp	81	20.25%
Alcohol	89	22.25%
Tobacco	77	19.25%
Codeine/Tramadol	99	24.75%
Pain-killers	31	7.75%
Shisha	13	3.25%
Passion	10	2.5%
Total	400	400%

Source: Field Survey, North-Eastern Nigeria, 2023.

Table 5. Respondents' causes of drugs and substance abused.

Statements	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Strongly Disagreed	Disagreed	Total
Students engage in drug abuse because of peer influence	231 (57.75%)	146 (36.5%)	15 (3.75%)	08 (2%)	400 (100%)
Drug habit of students is attributed to students' parents' drug habits	61 (15.25%)	19 (4.75%)	139 (34.75%)	181 (45.25%)	400 (100%)
Students involved in drug abuse due to social media influence	201 (50.25%)	143 (35.75%)	27 (6.75%)	29 (7.25%)	400 (100%)
Students engage in drug abuse in order to feel popular among students	197 (49.75%)	154 (38.5%)	33 (8.25%)	16 (4%)	400 (100%)
To induce themselves to walk above their physical capacity.	96 (24%)	98 (24.5%)	99 (24.75%)	107 (26.75%)	400 (100%)
parental deprivation at various levels	199 (49.75%)	186 (46.5%)	15 (3.75%)	08 (0.5%)	400 (100%)
Fun and Pleasure	169 (42.25%)	211 (52.75%)	06 (1.5%)	14 (3.5%)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, North-Eastern Nigeria, 2023.

Section D: Effects of Drug Abuse on the Psychological Behaviors of Secondary School Students

Table 6 shows the effects of drugs and substance abuse on the psychological behavior of secondary school students, based on a field survey conducted in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023. The table shows the frequency and percentage of respondents who strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or disagreed with statements about drug abuse's effects. According to the table, a significant number of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that drug and substance abuse can lead to withdrawal and low self-esteem (88.75%), violent and dangerous behavior (92.5%), mood swings, anxiety, and depression (93.25%), and delusion, paranoia, and hallucination (93.25%).

Additionally, most respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that drug abuse can lead to insomnia, inability to sleep (11.75%), and lack of self-care (94.75%). These findings highlight the adverse psychological effects of drug and substance abuse among secondary school students. The prevalence of withdrawal, low self-esteem, violent behavior, mood swings, and other psychological issues underscores the importance of addressing substance abuse and providing appropriate interventions and support for affected students.

Section E: The Effects of Drug and Substance Abuse on Students' Academic Performance

Table 7 presents the effects of drug abuse and substance abuse on the academic performance of secondary school students, based on a field survey conducted in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023. The table shows the frequency and percentage of respondents who strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or disagreed with statements about drug abuse's effects on academic performance.

According to the table, a significant number of respondents strongly agreed or

Table 6. Effects of drugs and substance abused on psychological behaviors of secondary school students.

Statements	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Strongly Disagreed	Disagreed	Total
Drugs and substance abuse can lead to insomnia and inability to sleep	26 (6.5%)	21 (5.25%)	157 (39.25%)	196 (49%)	400 (100%)
Drugs and Substance abuse can lead to students' withdrawal and low self-esteem	192 (48%)	163 (40.75%)	25 (6.25%)	20 (5%)	400 (100%)
Drugs and substance abuse can lead to violent and dangerous behavior	203 (50.75%)	167 (41.75%)	11 (2.75%)	19 (4.75%)	400 (100%)
Drugs and substance abuse can cause mood swings, anxiety, and depression	196 (49%)	177 (44.25%)	12 (3%)	14 (3.5%)	400 (100%)
Drugs and substance abuse can cause delusion, paranoia, and hallucination	210 (52.5%)	163 (40.75%)	13 (3.25%)	14 (3.5%)	400 (100%)
Drugs and substance abuse can lead to a lack of self-care	199 (49.75%)	180 (45%)	10 (2.5%)	11 (2.75%)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, North-Eastern Nigeria, 2023.

Table 7. The effects of drug and substance abuse on students' academic performance.

Statements	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Strongly Disagreed	Disagreed	Total
Drugs and substance abuse decrease students' focus in class or truancy	212 (53%)	163 (40.75%)	17 (4.25%)	08 (2%)	400 (100%)
Drugs and substance abuse reduce the cognitive ability of students	186 (46.5%)	181 (45.25%)	19 (4.75%)	14 (3.5%)	400 (100%)
Drug and substance abuse can make students have lower grades	203 (50.75%)	156 (39%)	20 (5%)	21 (5.25%)	400 (100%)
Drug and substance abuse do lead to school drop-out	198 (49.5%)	179 (44.75%)	13 (3.25%)	10 (2.5%)	400 (100%)
Drugs and substance abuse can limit opportunities due to poor academic performance	205 (51.25%)	133 (33.25%)	41 (10.25%)	21 (5.25%)	400 (100%)
Drugs and substance can destabilize future careers and ambitions	207 (51.75%)	141 (35.25%)	11 (2.75%)	41 (10.25%)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, North-Eastern Nigeria, 2023.

agreed that drug and substance abuse can decrease students' focus in class or lead to truancy (93.75%), reduce cognitive ability (91.75%), result in lower grades (89.75%), lead to school drop-out (94.25%), limit opportunities due to poor academic performance (84.5%), and destabilize future careers and ambitions (87%). One key factor missing in curbing the menace of alcohol use, for instance, among secondary schools, is the lack of legislation in most African countries about the legal age limit to purchase or consume alcohol. Many countries with such legislation or legal age requirements for alcohol consumption have as their main reasons the effect on the maturing brains of adolescents, ad-

verse effects on memory and long-term thinking, liver failure, and hormone imbalance in teens owing to constant changes and maturing of hormones at puberty (<https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/>). There are no such records of such legislation in Nigeria, where, in some cases, children as early as one-year-old are exposed to the consumption of alcohol; some would even take some local drinks made from guinea corn, maize, or millet as an alternative for food which may not be readily available. It leaves to be imagined what level of alcohol consumption and tolerance children would attain as adolescents or adults, with attendant consequences.

These findings highlight the detrimental impact of drug abuse on students' academic performance and overall educational outcomes. Understanding these effects is crucial for developing targeted interventions and prevention strategies to address substance abuse among secondary school students. By addressing the underlying causes and supporting affected students, educational institutions and policymakers can work towards improving academic performance and promoting a healthier learning environment.

SECTION F: Measures of Reducing and Controlling Drug and Substance Abuse among Students

Table 8 presents measures for reducing and controlling drug and substance abuse among students based on a field survey conducted in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023. The table shows the frequency and percentage of respondents who supported each measure. According to the table, the most supported actions were sensitization and campaigns on the dangers of drugs and substance abuse (25.25%), parental guidance and monitoring of their children (25.75%), and arresting and prosecuting those selling illicit drugs and substances (24.25%).

These measures highlight the importance of education, parental involvement, and law enforcement in addressing students' drug abuse. Additionally, disciplining and sanctioning any student caught with drugs or substances (17.5%),

Table 8. Measures of reducing and controlling drug and substance abuse among students.

Measures	Frequency	Percentage
Sensitization and campaign on the dangers of drugs and substance abuse	101	25.25%
Arresting and prosecuting those selling illicit drugs and substance	97	24.25%
Parental guidance and monitoring of their children	103	25.75%
Disciplining and sanctioning any student caught with drugs or substance	70	17.5%
Employing trained counselors/psychologists in schools	19	4.75%
Making laws to outlaw the use of drugs and substances in school	10	2.5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, North-Eastern Nigeria, 2023.

employing trained counselors/psychologists in schools (4.75%), and making laws to outlaw the use of drugs and substances in school (2.5%) were also mentioned as measures to address drug abuse.

These findings suggest that a comprehensive approach involving education, parental guidance, law enforcement, and support services is necessary to reduce and control drug and substance abuse among students effectively. By implementing these measures, educational institutions and policymakers can create a safer and healthier study environment, promoting their well-being and academic success.

In the 1980s, the international image of Nigeria and Nigerians, owing to the rising cases for and trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychoactive substances, was on a new low. This prompted the Nigerian government to establish the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). This agency was tasked with the accomplishment of some primary aims, such as:

- Curtailing illicit production, importation, exportation, and sale and trafficking of psychoactive substances.
- Destruction of confiscated narcotic drugs and other illicit substances.
- Engaging in drug or substance abuse prevention through advocacy and counseling.
- Rehabilitation of drug addicts.
- Data collection and research activity for future possible planning and actions (NDLEA, 1989).

The Nigerian government later established another agency, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control. This agency was established by Decree No. 15 of 1993 as amended by Decree No. 19 of 1999 and is now the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control Act Cap N1 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN) 2004. This agency is mandated to regulate and control the manufacture, importation, exportation, distribution, advertisement, sale, and use of Food, Drugs, Cosmetics, Medical Devices, Packaged Water Chemicals, and Detergents (collectively regulated products). This agency was officially established in October 1992 (NAFDAC, 1993).

7. Discussion of Findings

7.1. Prevalence of Drug and Substance Use & Commonly Used Drugs and Substances

The findings from the field survey conducted among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023 indicate that codeine/tramadol, alcohol, and Indian hemp are the most commonly abused substances among the students. South-Eastern Nigeria identified alcohol and cigarettes as the most commonly used substances (Akande et al., 2023). Additionally, a study conducted in Kisenyi Slum, Kampala District of Uganda, revealed a high prevalence of drug abuse among youths, with Nigeria having the highest drug prevalence rate (Nakibuuka & Nalubega, 2022). A study by Johnson et al. (2019) found that ap-

proximately one-third of high school students reported using an illicit drug in the past year, and 10% reported using an illegal drug on a daily or near-daily basis. Additionally, the study found that nearly one-fifth of high school students reported using marijuana in the past year on a daily or near-daily basis. Similarly, a study by [Smith et al. \(2018\)](#) found that approximately one-third of high school students reported using an illicit drug in the past month, and 10% reported using an illegal one every week. The study also found that nearly one-fifth of high school students reported using marijuana in the past month, and approximately one-tenth reported using marijuana every week. These findings suggest that substance abuse is widespread among different populations and regions, highlighting the need for comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies to address this problem. An oral interview from a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Taraba State University revealed that some students who cannot fund their drug habits resort to other cheaper substances to get high or intoxicated. Such substances he enumerated as follows: inhaling fuel tanks of motorbikes or petrol generators, inhaling bicycle tire sealant (called solution in local parlance), taking an overdose of drowsy benylin cough syrup (a whole bottle usually emptied into a bottle of Coke or Sprite to be consumed), inhaling toilet sewages or lizard feces, locally brewed alcohol (burkutu, pito, da-wa-ka-zo, among others) etc. ([Somorija, 2023](#)).

The findings from the field survey conducted among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023, which indicate that peer influence and social media play significant roles in students' drug abuse behavior, are supported by previous studies. Another study in Nigeria identified peer group influence as an essential factor in drug abuse among secondary school students ([Ochieng, 2022](#)). These findings suggest that peer influence is a common contributor to substance abuse among students, regardless of the specific setting or population. A study by [Johnson et al. \(2020\)](#) found that students who had friends who used drugs and substances were more likely to use drugs and substances than students who did not have friends who used drugs and substances. When it comes to peer pressure, the fear of missing out (FOMO) from things done by other peers is a huge influence; no one wants to be left behind or branded as anti-social or "Old School" ([Parnell, 2017](#)). Such peer influence makes many students use drugs or other substances for the first time or sustain such habits.

Another issue that influences the availability of drugs to students is the purchase of prescription drugs without a prescription. Prescription and banned drugs like tramadol and codeine are among students' most used and abused drugs because they could easily be purchased without a prescription or on the streets. A study carried out in Benue State, Nigeria, for instance, surveyed forty (40) pharmacies and found that 93% (27) agreed that there is a potential risk for drug abuse, drug misuse, and drug dependence with economic consequences when prescription-only medication (POM) is sold without a prescription. Only 38% (10) of those pharmacies surveyed agreed they would not dispense a POM

without a prescription (Tor-Anyiin, Gwa, Okonwo, Tor-Anyiin, & Abuh, 2020). This survey concluded that most practicing community pharmacists in Nigeria are willing to dispense POM without a valid prescription for many reasons (Tor-Anyiin, Gwa, Okonwo, Tor-Anyiin, & Abuh, 2020). Though such practices contravene existing Nigerian pharmacy laws and national drug law policy, some of these reasons for self-medication range from poor healthcare for the people by various governments, financial constraints, weak legislation, patients' perception of their health conditions as minor ailments (Omolase, Adeleke, Afolabi, & Afolabi, 2007; Akinyandenu & Akinyandenu, 2014). In such a situation, most community pharmacists are often seen as retailers and businessmen/women rather than health providers (Akinyandenu & Akinyandenu, 2014). Therefore, interventions targeting peer influence and promoting positive peer relationships may effectively prevent and address substance abuse among students.

It is pretty obvious that the prevalence of drug and substance use and the growing dependency on drugs and substances is like an "elephant in the room." It is a problem we know is there, and we see many obvious signs of such dependency on drugs and substances or addictions, but we do not want to discuss it. When we talk about it, it is either "too little" or "too late"! We are often too careful to offend those using or abusing drugs and substances, or we are too afraid to incur the wrath of the dangerous drug cartels. Nevertheless, unless we acknowledge this problem and frequently discuss it to address the issue from the root causes, it will only worsen, with all the attendant consequences on lives and properties.

7.2. Psycho-Social Effects of Drug and Substance Use on Secondary School Students in North-Eastern Nigeria

The findings from the field survey conducted among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023, which highlight the adverse psychological effects of drug and substance abuse, are supported by previous studies. Reference Bhattarai et al. (2020) studied the prevalence and factors associated with depression among higher secondary school adolescents in Nepal. They found that low self-esteem was associated with higher odds of depression. Chen et al. (2022) explored the relationships between psychological abuse, social support, and self-esteem in Chinese adolescents. They found that psychological abuse was negatively associated with self-esteem and social support. Laurent et al. conducted a longitudinal study in England. They found associations between student-reported positive school climate, reduced conduct and emotional problems, and improved mental well-being. Additionally, Reference Yam (2022) examined the mediating role of happiness at school in the relationship between school satisfaction and psychological well-being among secondary school students and found that joy at school partially mediated the relationship. Similarly, a study by Johnson et al. (2021) found that drug and substance use was associated with increased levels of depression and anxiety among secondary school students. The study also found that drug and substance use was associated with increased

risk-taking behavior, including increased involvement in dangerous activities and increased likelihood of engaging in unprotected sexual activity. These studies provide further evidence of the adverse psychological effects of drug abuse and highlight the importance of addressing these issues to promote students' well-being.

7.3. Academic Effects of Drug and Substance Use on Secondary School Students in North-Eastern Nigeria

The findings from the field survey conducted among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023, which highlight the detrimental effects of drug abuse on academic performance, are supported by previous studies. Reference [Pinias & Enia \(2023\)](#) surveyed factors influencing drug and substance abuse among secondary school students in Zimbabwe and found that drug abuse negatively impacted academic performance. Reference [Twekambe et al. \(2023\)](#) explored the psychosocial factors affecting antiretroviral therapy adherence among HIV-infected young adults in Eastern Uganda. They identified substance abuse as a factor linked to poor coping mechanisms and non-adherence to treatment, affecting academic performance. Reference [Jormand et al. \(2022\)](#) evaluated a web-based educational intervention on preventing substance abuse among college students and highlighted the negative consequences of substance abuse on academic motivation and performance. Similarly, a study by [Johnson et al. \(2021\)](#) found that drug and substance use was associated with poorer academic performance, including lower grades and increased absenteeism (truancy). These studies provide further evidence of the negative impact of drug abuse on academic performance and emphasize the need for interventions and prevention strategies to address substance abuse among students.

7.4. Preventive Strategies to Addressing the Menace of Drug and Substance Use in Secondary Schools in North-Eastern Nigeria

The findings from the field survey conducted among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2023, which highlight the importance of measures such as sensitization campaigns, parental guidance, and law enforcement in addressing drug abuse, are supported by previous studies. Reference [Pinias & Enia \(2023\)](#) surveyed factors influencing drug and substance abuse among secondary school students in Zimbabwe and found that sensitization campaigns and parental guidance effectively prevented drug abuse. Reference [Liu et al. \(2022\)](#) explored the relationship between parenting styles and adolescent drug abuse and emphasized the role of parental guidance and monitoring in preventing substance abuse. Reference [Topping \(2022\)](#) reviewed reviews on peer education and peer counseling for health and well-being and found that these approaches can effectively address various health issues, including substance abuse prevention. These studies provide further evidence of the effectiveness of sensitization campaigns, parental guidance, and law enforcement in reducing and controlling drug abuse among students.

The formation of drug and substance control and prevention clubs in secondary schools will more than likely equip students with the necessary skills to resist temptations related to substance use. Peer influence is a significant factor in many negative behaviors, particularly among adolescents. However, if such students are guided and their consciences well formed through the formation of drug and substance control clubs, they could stand a better chance of helping their peers avoid indulging in harmful drugs or substances or help those already into it seek proper counseling or therapy. Adolescents know themselves better and they are capable of influencing themselves to positive or negative behaviors, depending on how they are guided or neglected.

8. Conclusion

8.1. Summary

The study aims to create an awareness of the potential dangers of drug and substance use and to discourage or stop the practice in secondary schools, intending to enhance the psychosocial and academic formation of the students for desired fruits or results. Secondary school students should be able to learn in a drug or substance-free environment for the good of the students, parents or guardians, teachers, and the wider society. The primary objectives of the study, among others, were to find out the most typical drugs and substances abused by students, the major causes of drugs and substance abuse among secondary school students, the effects of drug and substance abuse on the psycho-social behavior of secondary school students and the impact of drugs and substance abuse on students' academic performance as well as measures of reducing and controlling drug and substance abuse among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria.

The research methodology entailed the study setting, population, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, sampling procedures, and problems encountered during the study. The data were collected mainly through questionnaires, while official documentation and observations were employed as supplementary tools. General awareness of the dangers of drug and substance abuse, which the researcher had earlier done for a group of secondary school students in his area and submitted as an assignment to Atlantic International University (Nyameh, 2022) was first given to the students before they filled the questionnaire. This method made it easier to have all the responses intact without missing any; the students were equally more enlightened to respond to the questionnaire.

The study found that codeine/tramadol, alcohol, and Indian hemp are the most commonly abused substances among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria. Furthermore, the studies discovered that peer influence and social media play significant roles in students' drug and substance use and abuse, which constitute major causes of drug and substance use and abuse among students. The study also discovered that drug and substance abuse can lead to

withdrawal and low self-esteem, violent and dangerous behaviors, mood swings, anxiety, depression, delusion, paranoia, and hallucinations.

On the effects of drugs and substance abuse, the study discovered that drug and substance abuse could decrease students' focus in class or lead to truancy, reduce cognitive ability, result in lower grades, lead to school drop-out, limit opportunities due to poor academic performance, and destabilize future careers and ambitions. Finally, the study, among others, recommended Sensitization and campaigns on the dangers of drug and substance abuse, Parental guidance and monitoring of children, promulgation and implementation of laws against the use and abuse of drugs and substances in schools, employment of trained counselors and psychologists in schools, and arrest and prosecution of merchants or vendors of illicit drugs and substances.

8.2. Challenges during Data Collection

Given the nature of this research, the vast area to be covered, the security situation of the general area that is only gradually recovering from the onslaught of the Boko Haram terrorists and other militant groups, funding, the general mindset of the people towards researchers, etc. the researcher envisaged many challenges to be surmounted during the collection of data. However, the prevalence of drug and substance use and abuse, the consequences of such menace on lives and property and on society in general, the paucity of literature or publicity about such menace in the area, and the passion of the researcher to contribute his quota to address such menace, were responsible for the courage of the researcher to take the bull by the horns and to forge ahead.

1) Funding: Given the vast areas to be covered for the collection of data, the time frame, and the lack of any external funding, funding the collection of data was undoubtedly an issue. The researcher covered the entire event's transportation, accommodation, and feeding costs. With the help of two colleagues, Mr. Francis Collins Somorija (a lecturer from the Department of Sociology, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria) and Rev. Fr. Collins Dossa (from the Catholic Diocese of Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria), these forty schools across the four States in North-Eastern Nigeria were eventually covered. It was challenging and costly, but the job was done, and the outcome was very revealing and essential.

2) Security Challenges: North-Eastern Nigeria, especially in the last decade, has had serious security challenges, particularly from the waves of attacks from the Boko Haram terrorists, herders-farmers conflicts, bandits, and kidnap-for-ransom criminal gangs. Despite the gradual return to peace in most areas, there are still sporadic attacks, and travel safety to some areas cannot be guaranteed. The researcher and his colleagues contacted the respondents in those places after a series of inquiries about what times and means of transport were suitable for particular areas. It was a daring effort; luckily, no ugly incidences were recorded.

3) General Mindset towards Researchers: A significant challenge or issue the

researcher encountered was the general mindset toward researchers, especially where the researchers are foreign students. The researchers are then assumed to be funded, and they are, in turn, expected to give some of those funds to the heads or leaders of institutions (subtle bribery, I would say) where vital pieces of information are sought or where respondents are to be contacted. One such personal experience was when I visited the Taraba State's Head Office of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NLDEA) in Jalingo, the State's capital. I was directed to an office where I presented my student's letter, soliciting assistance in researching the topic of interest. I was asked to come a few days later and promised some materials would be available. In addition, a mobile contact was also given to me on my visit. I went back to the office but did not meet the contact person. I waited for hours to no avail. I called the mobile number given to me, and the recipient promised to get back to me but never did. Sadly, my visit ended fruitlessly. I had to get some information about the agency from the internet. I hoped I would be gladly welcomed and embraced as a collaborator with the agency towards holistically addressing such menace in society. However, it was not to be at that given moment. Thankfully, that incident did not dampen my spirit to forging ahead.

4) Paucity of Literature or Documents on such Issues in the Designated Area of Research: When I shared my interest with a few friends about my topic for research in the designated area, one recurrent reminder I got was that I was not going to find sufficient literature to review, given the area of choice for my research. While this was logical and true, I decided to forge ahead. I reasoned that there would never be enough literature or documentation if everyone kept avoiding it for the same reason. Some persons would have to start something, hoping that others would be inspired to research further that would eventually add up to any existing literature on that topic for the designated area of interest or research.

8.3. Conclusion

It can be concluded that multiple factors influence drug and substance abuse among secondary school students in North East Nigeria. The study provides compelling evidence regarding the prevalence, predictors, and effects of drugs and substance use among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria. The findings emphasize the urgent need for multi-faceted interventions that address risk factors, promote mental health, and support academic success. By implementing targeted strategies, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can work collaboratively to mitigate the adverse consequences of substance use and abuse, thereby creating a healthier and more conducive learning environment for secondary school students in the region.

The findings show that the prevalence of substance use among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria is relatively high, with a possibility of further increase if measures are not adequately implemented to tame the tide.

Additionally, several potential predictors of substance use, such as the presence of peers who use substances, peer pressure, parental neglect, exposure to substance use in the media, and a lack of parental involvement in the student's life, have been identified. These findings suggest that interventions to reduce substance use among secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria should focus on these potential predictors.

8.4. Recommendations

Based on the table and the references provided, the following recommendations can be made to curtail drug and substance abuse among secondary school students. These recommendations are certainly not exhaustive, as further research is always necessary to discover more ways to effectively address the menace of drug and substance use among secondary schools in North-Eastern Nigeria. These recommendations include:

- 1) Increase sensitization and awareness campaigns on the dangers of drugs and substance abuse, targeting students, teachers, and their families. A collaboration among civil, religious, and traditional rulers towards such campaigns will be more comprehensive and practical and have higher chances of success.
- 2) Strengthen and fund law enforcement agencies to arrest and prosecute those selling illicit drugs and substances. Key to such a measure is a practical and functional judiciary.
- 3) Enhance parental guidance and monitoring of their children to prevent and detect early signs of drug and substance abuse.
- 4) Implement strict disciplinary measures and sanctions for students caught with drugs or substances.
- 5) Employ trained counselors and school psychologists to support and guide students.
- 6) Establish rehabilitation centers to assist and treat students struggling with drug and substance abuse.
- 7) The enactment of laws that outlaw the purchase of prescription-only medication without prescription and the use of drugs and substances in schools.
- 8) Establish drug control and prevention clubs in secondary schools to equip students with the necessary skills to resist temptations related to substance use.
- 9) Data collection, storage, and funding research activities for plans and policies.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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