

PREDICTIVE ROLES OF SELF-ESTEEM AND PEER INFLUENCE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Olubunmi O. James¹, Emmanuel E. Uye^{2*} & Peter O. Olapegba³

^{1,2,3} Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: emmanuel.e.uye@gmail.com

Abstract

*Substance abuse has remained a serious concern to the individual, the family, and society. Of particular concern is the involvement of secondary school students in substance abuse. Studies have investigated different predictors of substance abuse with varied results. Therefore, this study examines the predictive roles of self-esteem and peer influence on substance abuse among secondary school students in Lafía Local Government Area (LGA) of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Cross-sectional survey design was adopted while purposive sampling technique was used to select Lafía LGA. Data were conveniently collected from 414 participants using validated questionnaires and analyzed using multiple regression and independent samples *t*-test. Two hypotheses were tested and accepted at $p < .05$ level of significance. The result revealed that self-esteem and peer influence jointly predicted substance abuse among study participants, $R^2 = .037$, $F(3, 407) = 5.28$, $p < .05$. In addition, self-esteem ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$) and peer influence ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$) independently predicted substance abuse among study participants. Finally, participants high in peer influence reported significantly higher substance abuse ($\bar{x} = 23.67$, $SD = 12.55$) compared to participants with low peer influence ($\bar{x} = 19.10$, $SD = 12.78$). The study concludes that self-esteem and peer influence are excellent predictors of substance abuse among study participants. The study recommends that parents should provide an enabling environment for their children to develop positive self-esteem while the school authority and other stakeholders should design and implement programs to educate students on the danger of substance abuse to their life and future career.*

Keywords: *Self-Esteem, Peer Influence, Substance Abuse, Secondary School Students*

INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse is described as a pattern of compulsive substance use marked by recurrent significant social, occupational, legal, or interpersonal adverse consequences (American Psychological Association, 2023). In addition, substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances such as alcohol and illicit drugs (WHO, 2023). Substance abuse is a major public health issue affecting over 155 million people across the globe and has accounted for the death of over 2.6 million youth population from ages 10-24 yearly globally (UNODC, 2023). The Nigerian Drug and Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2023) reported that 40% of Nigerian youths between 18 and 35 are deeply involved in substance abuse. This is a disturbing issue as many secondary school students are equally involved. Substance abuse among secondary school students causes academic difficulties, health-related problems such as mental health, poor peer relationships and involvement in juvenile criminal behavior (Roberts et al., 2025; Osagiede et al., 2024; Adeloye et al., 2019; Aroh et al., 2021; Idowu et al., 2018; Obadeji et al., 2020)

Some factors have been identified to predict substance abuse among secondary school students. One such factor considered in this study is self-esteem described as how individuals evaluate their self-worth which can be positive (or high) or negative (low) (Roseberg, 1965). It has also been conceived as individuals' global feeling of how other people see them (Tao et al., 2012). Studies on the predictive role of self-esteem on

substance abuse have produced varied results. For example, Okurame et al. (2024) found self-esteem to significantly influence substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Nigeria. Students with low self-esteem were found to be involved in substance abuse compared to their counterparts with high self-esteem. Moreover, Ehondor et al. (2024) found self-esteem as a significant contributor to substance abuse among secondary school students. In addition, James et al. (2023) found in-school adolescents who reported low self-esteem to be highly involved in substance abuse compared to their counterparts who reported high self-esteem. However, Elyamany et al. (2020) a high proportion of their participants with high self-esteem are involved in substance abuse.

The second factor considered in this study to predict secondary school students' substance abuse is peer influence which is described as an emotional or mental force from individuals that belong to the same social group (such as age, grade or status) to act or behave in a manner like themselves (Jena, 2019). In addition, Jones (2010) conceived peer influence as the ability of youths from the same social group or age to influence another of the same age bracket. Peer influence is usually common among adolescents who are experimenting with risk-taking behavior such as sexual behavior, cyberbullying, stealing, cheating, substance abuse, etc. (Eremie & Okwulehie, 2021). Some studies have revealed peer influence as a consistent predictor of substance abuse behavior among different populations and samples. For example, Roberts et al. (2024) found peer influence to be a strong predictor of substance abuse among their study participants. In addition, Akindipe and Aina (2021) found peer influence as a significant predictor of substance abuse among patients admitted into the two Neuropsychiatric Hospitals in South-west Nigeria. A closely related study was that of Lawal and Aliyu (2020) who established that 19% of the major cause of substance abuse among youths in Katsina State, Nigeria was due to peer influence and desire for enjoyment. Furthermore, Huba (2019) found peer influence to exert substance abuse behavior through initiation and supply. Conclusively, Mamma et al. (2017) reported that substance abuse among youths in Nigeria accounted for gang formation, armed robbery, mental illness and cultism in the society today.

Studies investigating substance abuse behavior among secondary school students have produced different results. In addition, studies linking self-esteem and peer influence to substance abuse behavior among secondary school students in Lafia Local Government Area (LGA) tends to be sketchy leaving gaps in knowledge to fill. Therefore, this study investigated self-esteem and peer influence as predictors of substance abuse behavior among secondary school students in Lafia LGA, Nigeria.

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- (1) Will self-esteem and peer influence predict substance abuse behavior among secondary school students in Lafia LGA in Nasarawa State, Nigeria?
- (2) Will peer influence significantly influence substance abuse among secondary school students in Lafia LGA?

The study would provide a better understanding on the influence of self-esteem and peer influence on substance abuse behavior among secondary school students in Lafia LGA. In addition, policymakers and Non-Governmental Organizations who are involved in policy formulations and advocacy would find the results of this study useful in implementing their various programmes on substance abuse behavior among secondary school students.

Theoretical overview

The study was anchored using Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT, Bandura & Boeree, 2006) which postulates that behavior is learned by observation, identification and imitation, and assisted by reinforcement (not necessarily direct reinforcement). This implies that as individuals interact, they consciously or unconsciously observe and imitate and display behavior of their models or significant others. When applied to this study, secondary school students learned delinquent behavior by modeling exposure to friends' delinquent behavior such as substance abuse. In this context, both the "significant others" and the "generalized others" exerted influence on the secondary school students. However, peers' social approval of substance abuse and anticipated rewards for engaging in substance abuse enhances substance addiction when there is weak bonding to the family. The practical example is when youths see others using substances, there is that tendency for them to think and do the same.

Hypotheses

The study tested these hypotheses:

H1: Self-esteem and peer influence will jointly and independently predict substance abuse among secondary school students (in-school adolescents) in Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

H2: Students with high peer influence will report significantly higher substance abuse than students with low peer influence.

METHOD

Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design using validated questionnaires to collect data from study participants. Self-esteem and peer influence were independent variables while substance abuse was the dependent variable.

Setting

The study was carried out among in-school adolescents in Lafia, Niger State, Nigeria. There are 18 public secondary schools in Lafia Local Government Area (LGA) where some schools have junior secondary classes only, while others have both junior and senior classes.

Sampling techniques

Purposive sampling technique was used to select Lafia LGA while simple random sampling technique was used to select four out of nine senior secondary schools in the LGA. The schools selected were: Government Secondary School Tudun Kauri, Government Secondary School Tudun Gwandara, Government Secondary School Mararaba Akunza and Government Secondary School Ombi 1 (Poly campus). Finally, a convenience sampling technique was used to select and distribute questionnaires to the study participants.

Instruments

Three instruments were used for data collection.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES, Rosenberg, 1965) was used to assess participants' overall sense of self-worth. It is a 10-item scale presented on a 4-point Likert's response format ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Sample items include: "I feel that I have a number of good qualities" and "I take a positive attitude toward myself". The RSE has been validated among Nigerian samples

with strong Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$, and in the current study, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$ was obtained.

The Peer Pressure Questionnaire-Revised (Singh et al., 2011) was used to measure the influence of the peer group. The scale has 29 items which are rated on a 5-point Likert's format ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Sample items include: "Sometimes I miss classes because my friends urge me to do so" and "I feel pressure to chat long hours on internet". The authors reported Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$, and in the present study, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$ was obtained.

The Adolescent Drug Involvement Scale (Mayer & Filstead, 1979) was used to evaluate participants' involvement in substance abuse. The scale is a 14-item scale presented on a 5-point Likert's response format ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Sample items include: "How often do you drink?" and "What did you drink?" The original authors reported Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$, and in this present study, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$ was obtained.

Procedure: A letter of introduction from the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan was presented to the Principals for identification and permission to distribute the study questionnaires to the potential participants. Based on the vetting of the items in the questionnaires, a verbal approval was given to the researchers. Potential participants were assembled in the classrooms by the assigned teachers and where the researchers briefed them and sought for their consent. They were duly informed of the voluntary nature of the study and those who were not interested to participate freely excuse themselves. Only those who gave their consent were given the questionnaires to fill which took less than 17 minutes. All questionnaires were collected on the spot. A total of 420 questionnaires were collected, however, during screening and coding, six questionnaires were observed to have inconsistent responses and were removed leaving 414 used for the analysis.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS version 23 was used for data analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. Hypothesis one was tested using multiple regression analysis while hypotheses two and three were tested using independent samples t-test. All hypotheses were accepted at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

Participants

Descriptive statistics showed that 176 (42%) of the participants were males while 238 (58%) were females. Participants' ages indicated that 54(13%) were between 12-14 years old, 258 (62%) were between 15-17 years old, while 102(25%) were between 18 - 20 years old. In terms of the participants' classes, 230(56%) of the participants were in Senior Secondary School (SSS) 2 while 184(44%) were in SSS3. Finally, with respect to their family structures, 337(81%) of the participants were living with their parents while 77(19%) of the participants were living with the non-parents.

Testing the hypotheses

H1: Self-esteem and peer influence will jointly and independently predict substance abuse among secondary school students in Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. This was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is presented in Table1.

Table 1 Multiple Regression Analysis of Joint and Independent Predictors of Substance Abuse

Predictors	β	t	p	R	R^2	F	p
Self-esteem	.19	3.38	<.05				
Substance abuse				.193	.037	5.28	< .05
Peer-influence	.20	4.0	<.05				

Note: N= 414, df =3, 407

Table 1 presents joint and independent predictors of substance abuse among secondary school students in Lafia LGA. The results showed that self-esteem and peer influence jointly predicted substance abuse among study participants, $R^2 = .037$, $F [3, 407] = 5.28$, $p < .05$. This suggests that the predictor variables accounted for 3.7% of variance in substance abuse among study participants. Furthermore, the results revealed that self-esteem ($\beta = .20$, $t = 4.0$, $p < .05$) and peer influence ($\beta = .19$, $t = 3.38$, $p < .05$) independently predicted substance abuse among study participants. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported.

H2: Students with high peer influence will report significantly higher substance abuse than students with low peer influence. The hypothesis was tested with independent samples t-test and the result is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Independent Sample T-Test of the Effect of Peer Influence on Substance Abuse

Peer influence	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
High	206	23.67	12.55			
Low	207	19.10	12.78	411	3.67	<.05

Note: N= 414

Table 2 presents the results of an independent sample t-test of peer influence on substance abuse among secondary school students in Lafia Local Government area of Nasarawa State. The result indicated that peer influence significantly affect substance abuse among study participants [$t (411) = 3.67$, $p < .05$] such that students with high peer influence ($\bar{x} = 23.67$, $SD = 12.55$) reported significantly higher substance abuse compared to students with low peer influence ($\bar{x} = 19.10$, $SD = 12.78$). Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that self-esteem and peer influence will jointly predict substance abuse among secondary school students in Lafia Local Government Area (LGA) of Nasarawa State was supported. This means that the interaction between self-esteem and peer influence contributed to 3.7 % variance in substance abuse among study participants. Students with high self-esteem and low peer influence would not be involved in substance abuse compared to those with low self-esteem and high peer influence. This finding corroborates previous results that self-esteem and peer influence tend to discourage substance abuse among youth populations (James et al., 2023).

In addition, self-esteem and peer influence independently predicted substance abuse among study participants. This means that students' self-esteem and the level of peer influence have direct effects on whether they would engage in substance abuse or not. These results are consistent with previous findings of the contributing factors of self-

esteem and peer influence on substance abuse among youth samples (Ehondor et al., 2024; James et al., 2023; Okurame et al., 2024). Specifically, the finding aligns with that of Iko et al. (2019) who found peer influence as a strong predictor of substance abuse where friend acceptance was rated higher than substance abuse as “a pain reliever” and “enhancing strength” among youth samples in Lafia, Nasarawa State. This supports the socialization theory that peer influence outside the home is not only more important than parental influences, but also the only important relational influences on adolescent behavior that matter in the long run (James et al., 2023).

Finally, the hypothesis that secondary school students with high peer influence will report higher substance abuse compared to those with low peer influence was confirmed. This means participants who were influenced by their counterparts were more likely to engage in substance abuse than their counterparts who were not influenced by their peers. This finding lent credence to the result by James et al. (2023) who found peer influence as a significant contributor to substance abuse among different populations and samples of youths. This also confirms the peer influence as a strong predictor of substance abuse (Iko et al., 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

The study examines the predictive roles of self-esteem and peer influence on substance abuse among secondary school students in Lafia LGA in Nasarawa State. The study confirms that self-esteem and peer influence significantly contributed to substance abuse among study participants.

The study recommends that parents should provide an enabling environment for their children to develop positive self-esteem early in life. Moreover, counsellors and other stakeholders interested in adolescents’ affairs should design and implement psycho-education programs to educate secondary school students on the danger of peer influence and substance abuse in their lives and career paths.

The study has some limitations that need to be addressed in further study. For example, the study was a cross-sectional survey where data were collected once using self-reported questionnaires which was not free of response bias. Further study should be longitudinal and include the use of group discussions and key informant interviews to triangulate data collected from self-reported questionnaires. In addition, the study was conducted only in Lafia LGA with students only from four public secondary schools which hindered generalization of study findings. Further study would benefit from increasing LGAs in the State with increased sample size. Finally, only two independent variables were investigated which was not exhaustive, therefore, further study should include learned helplessness, social support and parenting styles to explore substance abuse.

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