

COMBATING SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN SCHOOLS: COUNSELING APPROACHES TO IMPROVE STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract

The study examined Influence of Substance Abuse on Depression and Academic Achievement among Senior Secondary School Students in North-central, Nigeria: Implications for Guidance. The study looked at substance abuse, types of substance abuse, and the cause of substance abuse and effects of substance abuse on academic achievement. The study concluded that schools can effectively address the influence of substance abuse on depression and academic achievement with a holistic approach that involves education, early intervention, strong support systems, policy reinforcement, and collaboration with families and communities. The study therefore recommended that there should be comprehensive education and awareness programmers on the dangers of substance abuse and its correlation with mental health issues like depression, as well as its impact on academic achievement, guidance counsellors should introduce early screening and intervention so as to identify students at risk of substance abuse and depression, government at all level should strengthening support systems by ensuring students have access to counselling services and peer support groups that address both substance abuse and depression, stakeholders should emphasize collaboration between schools, families and communities to reduce substance abuse and its consequences on students, finally, researchers globally should conduct a continuous research and data collection on the prevalence of substance abuse and its correlation with depression and academic achievement of secondary school students.

Keywords: Substance Abuse, Depression, Academic Achievement and Guidance.

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Introduction

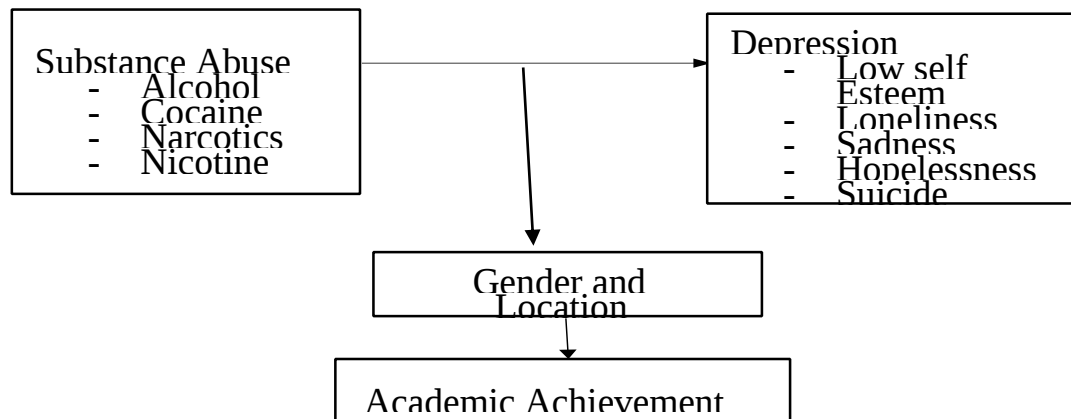
Substance abuse and depression are deeply interconnected, both exacerbating each other in a cyclical relationship. This combination can have a profound impact on various areas of a person's life, particularly in academic achievement. Depression is one of the most prevalent mental health disorders affecting students. It is often associated with a host of negative outcomes, including impaired cognitive function, poor social interaction, low self-esteem, and diminished academic achievement (Misango, Mwaura, & Naftali, 2021). Substance abuse on the other hand, consist of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, or other illicit drugs which significantly exacerbate the risk of depression and academic failure in young individuals. Therefore, substance abuse according to Misango, et al, (2021) refers to a harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, prescription medications, and illicit drugs. It also connotes dependence, addiction, and recurrent use despite adverse consequences. More so, substance abuse according to Okwuikpo, Chionye, Udo, Julius, and Leslie (2021) refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs. They added that, the use of these substances often begins with experimentation, which result into habitual use or abuse.

Senior secondary school students are aged approximately 14-17 years and are often vulnerable due to factors such as; peer influence, lack of awareness, stress and academic pressures. Olanrewaju, Omobola and Babalola (2023) believe that, substance abuse among students is raising serious concerns because it has potential to interfere with their emotional, social, and academic development. It can impair cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and decision-making, which are critical to academic success. Morris, John, Victor, Isaac, Stephen, Felistas and Kahiu (2020) viewed depression as a mood disorder characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, and a range of physical and cognitive symptom. Substance abuse on the other hand, according to Olanrewaju, et al, (2023) often lead to depression and prolonged substance abuse do alter brain chemistry, impairing neurotransmitters which is responsible for regulating mood (e.g., serotonin and dopamine), thereby increasing the risk of developing depressive symptoms. For example, chronic alcohol use has been shown to deplete serotonin levels, contributing to depressive states (Morris, John, Victor, Isaac, Stephen, Felistas & Kahiu 2020). They further stressed that, people suffering from depression may turn to substances abuse as a form of self-medication to alleviate feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or anxiety. Unfortunately, this worsen their depression over time, creating a cycle of dependency and mood instability especially among senior secondary school students (Chikuvadze & Saidi 2023). Surprisingly, depression is often triggered or worsened by academic stress, social relationships, and hormonal changes in students. In severe cases, depression may lead to absenteeism, dropping out of school, and even self-harm or suicidal ideation (Dippyomah, Sramana, Kaushik, Boidik, Debasmita & Chandan, 2023). Students from families according to Odojin and Igabari (2023) with a history of substance abuse or mental health disorders are at higher risk of engaging in similar behaviours. The added that, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds may face additional stressors, such as financial difficulties or a lack of access to mental health resources, which increase the likelihood of substance abuse and depression. Yuen, Gurnam, Peck and Hoe (2016) found that adolescents who engage in substance use are more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other psychological disorders. This connection is largely explained by the fact that drugs can alter brain chemistry, leading to mood swings, emotional instability, and depressive symptoms. Additionally, Uchenna, Roland and Ojinnaka (2016) highlighted that substance use can exacerbate existing mental health conditions or contribute to the development of new ones, creating a vicious cycle between drug use and poor mental health. Moreover, Sotonade, Adekunle and Adeniyi (2020) emphasized that substance use often acts as a coping mechanism for adolescents dealing with emotional stressors, but it typically leads to worsening mental health over time. This maladaptive coping strategy, combined with the physiological effects of substances on the brain, places adolescents at a heightened risk of developing long-term depressive disorders. The relationship between depression and academic achievement has been well-documented in the literature (Frederick, 2023). Depression often impairs cognitive functions such as concentration, memory, and decision-making, which are essential for academic success. According to Saaondo (2022) students who suffer from depression are more likely to experience poor academic performance, low motivation, and disengagement from school activities. This is especially critical in senior secondary school, where academic demands are higher, and students are preparing for crucial examinations. A study by Mitesh, Dipendra and Nuwadatta (2022) found that adolescents with depressive symptoms had lower academic outcomes, primarily because depression interferes with the ability to focus on schoolwork and meet academic expectations. Additionally, students with depression may experience absenteeism, which further compounds the negative effects on their academic performance. The combined influence of substance abuse and depression on academic achievement is particularly

detrimental. Aishwarya, Manali, Varshini, Srinivas, Mahima and Harshith (2023) reported that students who engage in substance use are more likely to experience academic decline, particularly when substance abuse is accompanied by symptoms of depression. The interaction between these two factors can create a negative feedback loop, where poor academic performance leads to greater substance use and worsening mental health, which in turn further deteriorates academic outcomes. The social learning theory by Bandura (1952) also provides insight into how adolescents may develop substance abuse behaviours through peer influence and observation, particularly in environments where academic achievement is not prioritized. Peers who engage in substance use may model these behaviours for others, leading to an increased likelihood of substance use and subsequent academic challenges among their peers. While much research has been conducted on the individual effects of substance abuse and depression on academic performance, there is a need for more comprehensive studies that explore the combined effects of these factors on senior secondary school students. Furthermore, most studies have been conducted in Western contexts, and there is a gap in understanding how these dynamics play out in different cultural and socioeconomic settings, particularly in North central where educational pressures may be more pronounced. Substance abuse among students has become a significant public concern worldwide, with a notable prevalence in senior secondary school. This age group is particularly vulnerable due to the developmental, social, and psychological pressures they face. Among the various consequences of substance abuse, are its influence on mental health, particularly depression, and its detrimental effects on academic achievement. Research indicates a strong correlation between substance abuse and mental health disorders, especially depression. The cyclical nature of this relationship suggests that students may resort to substance use as a coping mechanism for underlying emotional or psychological issues, leading to worsened mental health outcomes. Depression, in turn, impairs cognitive functioning, motivation, and overall well-being, further exacerbating substance use, creating a vicious cycle. Academic achievement, which is a critical determinant of future opportunities for students, is often adversely impacted by substance abuse. The use of drugs or alcohol can impair cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and learning, leading to lower academic performance, poor attendance, and increased dropout rates. Additionally, students struggling with substance abuse often experience behavioral issues, strained relationships with teachers and peers, and decreased participation in academic activities, further hindering their academic success. It is against this background couple with researcher's experience about the destructive effects that this study was focus on investigating the influence of substance abuse on depression and academic achievement among senior secondary school students in North central Nigeria: Implication for Guidance.

Conceptual Framework

This section discussed and explained some concepts that are related and concern this study for better clarification and understanding.



A Framework showing the interconnectedness of substance abuse and depression which in turn affects academic achievement irrespective of gender and location.

Substance Abuse

The word substance abuse means different things to different sets of people especially among the scholars in particular and the world view in general. To this end, Sotonade, Adekunle and Adeniyi (2020) opined that substance abuse occurs when its usage is not pharmacological or physically necessary. It also refers to harmful or hazardous of psychoactive substances including alcohol and illicit substances. In the word of Uchenna, Roland and Ojinnaka (2016) defined substance as any plant or drug either of natural chemical origin which can be used to alter perception, mood or psychological state of an individual. They added that, substance also means chemical modifier of the living tissues that could bring about physiological and behavioural changes. On the other hand, Yuen, Gurnam, Peck & Hoe (2016) defines substance abuse as excessive and persistent self-administration of a drug without regard to the medically or culturally accepted patterns. It could also refer to the use of drugs to the extent that it interferes with the health and social function of an individual. Similarly, Usman, Aminu, Ahmad and Mustapha (2023) defines substance abuse as the excessive, maladaptive and addictive use of drugs for non-medical purpose. In essence, substance abuse may be defined as the arbitrary and over dependence or mis-use of one particular drug with or without a prior medical diagnosis from qualified practitioners. It can also mean the unlawful overdoes in the use of drug. He added that, substance abuse is the excessive use of legally prohibited substance that are detrimental to the health and social well-being of an individual. In addition, substance abuse simply means a compulsive drinking, injection or inhaling of drugs or other substances in quantities and frequencies not medically prescribed. It is no longer news that, many Nigerian youths especially the students both male and female now take substances not prescribed for any ailment. However, what may now be new and more shocking is the array of substance abused indeed, beyond the imagination of the contemporaries many of our youths particularly the students now abuse drugs or substances such as cough syrup and tramadol, they even inhale soak away, exhaust pipes, glue, nail polish remover, petrol, spray, urine and embalming oil (Odofi & Igabari, 2023). However, drugs are typically distinguished from food and substances that provide nutritional support. Consumption of drugs can be via inhalation, injection, smoking, ingestion, absorption via a patch on the skin, or dissolution under the tongue. Drugs are said to be as old as man himself. Use and abuse of drugs had a long history in many cultures and societies (Morris, John, Victor, Isaac, Stephen, Felistas & Kahi, 2020). Natural plants like opium, coca and cannabis among others have been in use for many years. Therefore, drug abuse is the increasing desire to

obtain and use increasing amounts of one or more substances to the exclusion of everything else (Olanrewaju, Omobola & Oluwatoyin, 2023).

Types of Substance Abuse

Substance abuse also called drug abuse is a disorder that is characterized by a destructive pattern of usage that leads to significant problem or distress. The following are some types of substances commonly abuse by students as listed by Oparaduru et al (2022).

- (i) **Alcohol:** Alcohol is one of the commonly abuse substance by the students. Alcoholism can have catastrophic impacts on physical health and the capacity of the alcoholic person to work and have interpersonal relationships. Examples of alcohol include; beer, stout, distilled gin and palm wine.
- (ii) **Cocaine:** A substance that tends to stimulate the nervous system and can be snorted powder form, smoked when in the form of rocks (crack cocaine), or injected when made into a liquid.
- (iii) **Nicotine:** This substance is found in cigarettes and is one of the most abuse substances that exist. Indeed, nicotine abuser is often likened to intense addictiveness associated with opiates like heroin.
- (iv) **Phencyclidine:** This is commonly referred to as PCP, this substance can cause the user to feel extremely paranoid, become quite aggressive and have an unusual amount of physical strength. This usually makes an individual dangerous to others. In other words, it makes the user to be aggressive always and rendering the person very hazardous to whoever offends him or her.
- (v) **Narcotics:** This substance relieves pain, induce sleeping and it is prone for user to abuse it especially among the students just to enable them to be awake either for clubs or other related activities. This drug is found in heroin, codeine and opioids.
- (vi) **Sedatives:** These substances are among the most widely used and abused. This abuse is mainly due to the belief that, they relieve stress and anxiety, and sometimes reduces sleep, eases tension, causes relaxation or helps users forget their problems. They are sourced from valium, alcohol, promethazine and chloroform.
- (vii) **Hallucinogens:** These are substance that alter the sensory processing unit in the brain. Thus, producing distorted perception, feeling of anxiety and euphoria, sadness and inner joy, that generally comes from marijuana and others.

Causes of Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is a complex and multifaceted issue influenced by various factors, including biological, psychological, social and environmental elements. Here are some common causes of substance abuse according to Frederick (2023).

1. **Family History:** Individuals with a family history of substance abuse may have a higher genetic predisposition to developing addictive behaviors. More so, individual genetic has inherent tendency which tend to dictate to behaviour and ultimately control the action and inaction of students.
2. **Personality Traits:** Certain personality traits, such as impulsivity and sensationseeking, may contribute to a higher likelihood of engaging in substance abuse. The adolescents who is faced with this kind of personality traits may unconsciously abuse substances of any kind.
3. **Peer Influence:** A lot of behavioural disorder are traceable to influence of peer pressure. It is commonly believed that, people of likeminded or close associate influence one another either positive or negatively. The influence of friends or peers who engage in substance use can contribute to an individual's initiation into drug or alcohol use.

4. **Trauma and Stress:** Exposure to trauma or chronic stress can be a trigger for substance abuse as individuals seek relief from emotional pain. Individuals lacking effective coping mechanisms for life stressors may turn to substances as a way to cope with challenges and emotions.

5. **Cultural Norms:** Societal attitudes towards substance use, cultural acceptance, and the availability of substances can influence patterns of substance abuse. The environment where substance abuse become a life styles had made many students abusing several substances. On other hand, media portrayal of substance use and glamorization in popular culture can impact perceptions and contribute to experimentation.

6. **Access to Substances:** Easy access to drugs or alcohol, either at home or within the community, can increase the likelihood of experimentation and subsequent abuse.

Effects of Substance Abuse on Students' Academic Achievement

Substance abuse creates a cycle that can severely hinder a student's ability to succeed academically and thrive in school. Substance abuse can significantly impact a student's academic achievement in various ways according to Dippyomah, Sramana, Kaushik, Boidik, Debasmita and Chandan, (2023) as indicated and explain below.

1. **Impair Cognitive Functioning:** Substance abuse impair memory, attention, and decision-making skills. These cognitive deficits hinder a student's ability to learn and retain information, leading to lower grades poor academic achievement.

2. **Attendance Issues:** Students who abuse substances may experience increased absenteeism due to health issues, hangovers, or legal troubles. Frequent absences can disrupt learning and negatively affect overall academic achievement.

3. **Motivation and Engagement:** Substance abuse can diminish a student's motivation and interest in school. This disengagement can lead to a lack of participation in class and extracurricular activities, which are crucial for a well-rounded education.

4. **Mental Health Issues:** Substance abuse is often linked to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. These conditions can further hinder academic achievement by reducing focus and increasing stress.

5. **Social Relationships:** Substance abuse can strain relationships with peers and teachers. Poor social interactions can lead to isolation, which may affect a student's support network and academic collaboration.

6. **Disciplinary Actions:** Engaging in substance abuse can result in disciplinary actions from schools, such as suspensions or expulsions, which disrupt education and negatively impact academic records.

7. **Increased Risk of Dropout:** Students dealing with substance abuse or depression may feel overwhelmed, leading to chronic underperformance and ultimately, dropping out of school. Above all the effects of substance abuse can extend beyond immediate academic performance, leading to lower graduation rates and limited opportunities for higher education and employment.

Theoretical Framework

The study is hinged on Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura (1977)

Social Cognitive Theory

The Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura (1977) emphasizes the importance of observing and modelling the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. The theory agrees with the idea that substance use represents a learned habit and can be changed by applying learning theory principles. Social cognitive theory deals with cognitive and emotional aspects of behaviour. It describes learning in terms

of behavioural, environmental and personal factors. Social cognitive theory explains how people acquire and maintain certain behaviour patterns. Change depends on factors such as environment, personal and behavioural factors which are responsible for human action. The theory emphasizes that one's cognitive is an active force that constructs one's reality. The environmental factors can affect an individual behaviour and this can either be social or physical environment. Social environment may include modeling from friends, family or colleagues. A person may model from these people who use drugs. A physical environment may provide framework for understanding behaviours. Bandura believes a person may observe others and learn their behaviours and reinforce the behaviour. This situation may refer to cognitive or mental representation of the environment that may affect person's behaviour. For example, in a school environment where no one ask students where or what they are doing (behaviour) at any particular time, drugs can then be used without any one asking them. Personal factors mean that humans have the capacity to exercise control over their own lives. The theory believes that people are self-regulating, proactive, self-reflective, selforganizing and have power to influence their own actions to produce desired consequences. This applies to drug use where an individual can use their cognitive processes as a point of reference to either use drug or face the consequences and thus self-direction or self-regulation. Behaviour that is learned through social cognitive learning can be eliminated such as drug use through acquiring new functional behaviour. Social cognitive theory is an insight theory that emphasizes recognizing and changing negative behaviour and thoughts. The abusers can be assisted not to be set back on personal inadequacies and draw negative conclusions about their worth as a person. The theory was used because it assumes that secondary school students who are in their adolescent stage acquire beliefs about drug use from role models, friends and parents. From this perspective the theory can be used to provide students with positive role models and teach them refusal skills.

Implications for Guidance

Guidance programmes play a crucial role in mitigating the negative effects of substance abuse and depression on students' academic achievement.

1. **Early Identification and Intervention:** guidance programmes help identify students at risk of substance abuse or depression early. This ensures timely intervention before these issues escalate, reducing their impact on academic performance. According to Dowling (2020), early interventions through school counselling significantly reduce substance use and depression symptoms among secondary school students.
2. **Counselling and Support Services:** school should employ the services of a counsellor who specialize in mental health and substance abuse. Targeted interventions, such as school counselling and skill-building sessions, enable students to regain motivation, improve their grades and build confidence in their abilities.
3. **Emotional and Psychological Support:** guidance programmes provide a safe space for students to express their emotions and seek help for underlying issues causing depression or substance abuse. Also, access to professional counselling fosters emotional resilience and mental well-being, reducing the likelihood of self-destructive behaviours and improve overall school engagement. According to American School Counsellor Association (ASCA, 2019), counselling services reduce depressive symptoms and improve emotional well-being, leading to greater academic performance.
4. **Improved Social Relationship:** guidance programme encourages healthy peer interactions and improves student-teacher relationships by promoting understanding and reducing stigma around mental

health and substance abuse. Suldo and Shaffer (2008) emphasized the role of positive school relationships in reducing depression symptoms and improving classroom behaviour.

5. **Prevention of Risky Behaviours:** school-based guidance programmes educate students on the dangers of substance abuse, promoting healthier coping strategies for stress and peer pressure. Botvin (2015) found that life skilled training programmes within schools are effective in preventing substance use by equipping students with critical decision-making and problem-solving skills.

Conclusion

Integrating these recommendations, schools can effectively address the influence of substance abuse on depression and academic achievement among senior secondary school students. A holistic approach that involves education, early intervention, strong support systems, policy reinforcement, and collaboration with families and communities will lead to healthier, more academically successful students.

Recommendations

In view of the assertion of various researcher and findings, the following recommendation are made.

1. There should be comprehensive education and awareness programmes about the dangers of substance abuse and its correlation with mental health issues like depression, as well as its impact on academic achievement. Schools should collaborate with mental health professionals and anti-drug organizations to provide regular workshops, seminars, and peer education programmes. These programmes should cover the short- and long-term effects of substance abuse, the link between substance use and mental health (particularly depression), and how poor mental health can result in declining academic achievement.

2. Guidance counsellors at all level should introduce early screening and intervention so as to identify students at risk of substance abuse and depression before their academic achievement is significantly affected. Schools should employ or partner with counselors and psychologists who can screen for signs of substance use, depression, and other mental health issues. Those identified should receive timely and targeted intervention.

3. Government at all level should strengthening support systems by ensuring students have access to counselling services and peer support groups that address both substance abuse and depression. Schools should establish support systems where students can openly discuss their challenges. Peer mentorship programs can be useful in providing relatable experiences and guidance. Additionally, school counselors should work closely with teachers and parents to create a supportive environment for students struggling with substance abuse and depression.

4. Stakeholders should emphasize collaboration between schools, families, and communities to reduce substance abuse and its consequences on students. These can be achieve by organize regular meetings and communication channels between parents, teachers, and mental health professionals. Parents should be educated about signs of substance use and depression, while communities should create youth-friendly spaces free of substances to support students.

5. Researchers both locally and globally should conduct a continuous research and data collection on the prevalence of substance abuse and its correlation with depression and academic achievement. Schools, should partner with local health authorities, and collect data through surveys and research to monitor trends in substance use and mental health among students. This data will help in refining intervention strategies and ensuring they are effective.

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