

Socio-Economic Factors Associated With Cannabis Use among Citizens of Delta State, Nigeria and the Implications for Drugs Education

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Abstract— *Cannabis use has emerged as a major public health and educational concern in Nigeria, particularly within Delta State, where socio-economic instability and youth vulnerability intersect. This study investigated the socio-economic factors influencing cannabis use among citizens of Delta State and examined the implications for drugs education. Guided by Strain Theory and Social Learning Theory, the research adopted a descriptive survey design. A sample of 400 participants, drawn using multistage sampling techniques, provided data through structured questionnaires. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and regression analysis. Findings revealed that poverty, unemployment, peer influence, cultural tolerance, and availability were the strongest predictors of cannabis use. Peer influence was particularly significant, indicating the role of social networks in sustaining substance use. Results further demonstrated that cannabis use adversely affects academic performance, cognitive development, and health outcomes, highlighting critical challenges for educational systems and public health in Delta State. The study concluded that cannabis use is not merely a matter of individual choice but is deeply embedded in socio-economic realities. Accordingly, drug education in Delta State should be contextualized, integrating socio-economic empowerment, peer-based interventions, and cultural engagement strategies. The study recommends a multi-sectoral approach involving government, schools, communities, and health institutions to design effective prevention and rehabilitation programs. Future research should examine gender-specific patterns of cannabis use and evaluate the effectiveness of current drug education interventions in Nigeria.*

Keywords: Cannabis Use; Socio-Economic Factors; Delta State; Drugs Education; Peer Influence.

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INTRODUCTION

Cannabis remains one of the most widely consumed illicit substances in the world, and Nigeria is no exception (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2021). In Delta State, cannabis use has become increasingly prevalent, particularly among youths and young adults, where socio-economic conditions play a central role in shaping drug-related behaviors. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, peer influence, educational background, and urbanization have been consistently linked to substance abuse in Nigerian communities (Okolie & Adebayo, 2019; Ndukwe, 2021).

Delta State, located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, faces unique socio-economic challenges, including high youth unemployment, rising cost of living, and social inequalities (Ayibam, 2024a; Ayibam, 2024b; Ayibam, 2024c). These challenges create fertile ground for substance abuse, particularly cannabis, which is locally cultivated in some parts of the state (Eze & Chukwu, 2020). According to the National Drug Use Survey (UNODC, 2018), the South-South zone of Nigeria records one of the highest prevalence rates of cannabis consumption, with Delta State ranking significantly high.

The rising trend of cannabis use is not merely a public health issue but also a social and educational concern. Substance abuse has been associated with impaired cognitive development, poor academic performance, risky sexual behaviors, and increased crime rates (Onwuasoanya, 2022; Osemene & Lawal, 2023). Understanding the socio-economic drivers of cannabis use in Delta State is therefore crucial in informing drugs education policies and preventive interventions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite increasing awareness of the dangers of drug abuse, cannabis consumption remains widespread in Delta State. Reports indicate that many citizens, particularly young people, view cannabis use as a coping mechanism for economic hardship and unemployment (Oshodin & Okon, 2020). This situation is compounded by weak regulatory enforcement and inadequate drug education programs. The socio-economic determinants of cannabis use among citizens of Delta State remain underexplored, with most existing studies focusing broadly on Nigeria as a whole. There is a pressing need to contextualize these factors in Delta State, where environmental, cultural, and economic realities differ from other regions. Without addressing these socio-economic drivers, drug education initiatives may remain ineffective and disconnected from the lived experiences of citizens.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study is to investigate the socio-economic factors associated with cannabis use among citizens of Delta State, Nigeria, and their implications for drugs education. The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the socio-economic factors that influence cannabis use among citizens of Delta State.
2. Examine the relationship between unemployment, poverty, and cannabis use.
3. Assess the role of peer influence and cultural practices in cannabis consumption.
4. Investigate the implications of cannabis use for education and public health in Delta State.
5. Suggest strategies for strengthening drug education in response to identified socio-economic realities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What socio-economic factors influence cannabis use among citizens of Delta State?
2. How do unemployment and poverty contribute to cannabis use in the state?
3. To what extent do peer influence and cultural factors shape cannabis consumption?
4. What are the implications of cannabis use for drugs education in Delta State?
5. What strategies can be employed to strengthen drug education in the state?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The study is anchored on the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between socio-economic status and cannabis use among citizens of Delta State.
2. Unemployment does not significantly influence cannabis use among citizens of Delta State.
3. Peer influence has no significant effect on cannabis consumption in Delta State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarifications

Cannabis Use

Cannabis, commonly referred to as marijuana, is derived from the *Cannabis sativa* plant and contains psychoactive compounds, notably tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). It is the most widely consumed illicit drug globally, with an estimated 209 million users in 2020 (UNODC, 2021). In Nigeria, cannabis is the most commonly abused substance,

particularly among young people aged 15–35 years (UNODC, 2018). Cannabis use can occur through smoking, ingestion, or vaping, and it has been linked to both short-term effects such as euphoria, impaired memory, and altered judgment, and long-term effects including addiction, mental health disorders, and reduced academic performance (Eze & Chukwu, 2020; Onwuasoanya, 2022).

Socio-economic Factors

Socio-economic factors refer to the conditions that influence individuals' social and economic positions, including income, employment, education, and living environment (Ndukwe, 2021). These factors significantly affect health behaviors, including substance use. In Delta State, socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and peer pressure have been identified as key drivers of cannabis use (Oshodin & Okon, 2020; Osemene & Lawal, 2023).

Drugs Education

Drugs education refers to structured efforts, both formal and informal, aimed at equipping individuals with knowledge, attitudes, and skills to avoid or reduce substance use (Okorie & Adebajo, 2021). In Nigeria, drug education has been integrated into the school curriculum and community outreach programs, but it remains underfunded and poorly contextualized (Adebisi et al., 2020). Effective drug education requires tailoring to local realities, particularly socio-economic drivers of substance abuse.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) suggests that individuals adopt behaviors by observing and imitating others, especially peers and role models. Cannabis use in Delta State can be explained through peer pressure and cultural normalization of drug use among youths (Okolie & Adebayo, 2019).

Strain Theory

Robert Merton's Strain Theory posits that individuals engage in deviant behaviors when societal goals are unattainable through legitimate means. In the context of Delta State, high unemployment and poverty create strain that drives young people toward cannabis as a coping mechanism (Ndukwe, 2021).

Health Belief Model

The Health Belief Model explains health behaviors based on perceived risks, benefits, and barriers. Many cannabis users underestimate its health risks, which weakens the effectiveness of drug education programs (Onwuasoanya, 2022).

Empirical Review

Socio-economic Determinants of Cannabis Use

Several studies have shown that socio-economic factors significantly influence drug use patterns. In Nigeria, unemployment and poverty have been consistently linked to cannabis consumption among youths (Oshodin & Okon, 2020). Similarly, Ndukwe (2021) found that low socio-economic status increases the likelihood of substance abuse as individuals use drugs to cope with economic hardship.

Peer influence is another critical determinant. A study by Osemene and Lawal (2023) revealed that peer groups strongly shape cannabis initiation among secondary and tertiary students. In Delta State, peer pressure, combined with cultural tolerance of cannabis use in certain communities, accelerates the spread of drug abuse (Eze & Chukwu, 2020).

Educational and Psychological Implications of Cannabis Use

Cannabis use has severe educational implications. Osemene and Lawal (2023) found that cannabis consumption contributes to poor academic performance, truancy, and school dropout rates. Psychologically, cannabis is associated with depression, anxiety, and cognitive impairment, which further hinder educational attainment (Onwuasoanya, 2022).

Cannabis Use in Delta State Context

Delta State, as part of the Niger Delta, has unique characteristics that contribute to cannabis use. The oil economy, coupled with high youth unemployment and weak law enforcement, creates conditions that sustain the drug trade and use (Oshodin & Okon, 2020). According to UNODC (2018), the South-South region, including Delta, reports higher-than-average cannabis consumption compared to other regions of Nigeria.

Implications for Drugs Education

Effective drug education must address underlying socio-economic factors. According to Adebisi et al. (2020), drug education campaigns that fail to consider poverty, unemployment, and cultural realities often achieve limited results. In Delta State, integrating socio-economic awareness into drug education could increase relevance and effectiveness. Okorie and Adebajo (2021) argue that schools, communities, and

religious organizations should be actively involved in contextualized drug education to promote resilience among youths.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate socio-economic factors associated with cannabis use among citizens of Delta State, Nigeria. The target population comprised individuals aged 15 years and above, with particular focus on youths and young adults, who are most vulnerable to cannabis use. Using a multi-stage sampling technique, 400 respondents were selected from urban and rural communities across six local government areas, ensuring adequate representation across geographical and socio-economic contexts.

Data were collected via a structured questionnaire divided into four sections: demographics, socio-economic factors (e.g., poverty, unemployment, peer influence), patterns of cannabis use, and implications for drugs education. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in public health, educational psychology, and sociology, and pilot-tested with 30 respondents outside the study area. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable.

Questionnaires were administered face-to-face by the researcher and trained assistants after obtaining permission from community leaders and briefing respondents on the study purpose. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) to summarize demographic characteristics and cannabis use patterns. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and multiple regression analysis, were used to examine relationships between socio-economic factors and cannabis use. All analyses were conducted at a 0.05 significance level using SPSS version 25. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and institutional ethics approval.

DATA PRESENTATION

This section presents the data obtained from the field survey, analyzes the responses using descriptive and inferential statistics, and tests the hypotheses earlier formulated. A total of 400 questionnaires were administered to respondents across Delta State, out of which 376 were completed and returned, representing a 94% response rate.

The results are presented under the following sections: demographic characteristics of respondents, research questions, and hypothesis testing.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 376)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	210	55.9
	Female	166	44.1
Age	15–20 years	78	20.7
	21–25 years	120	31.9
	26–30 years	104	27.7
	31+ years	74	19.7
Educational Level	Secondary education	94	25.0
	Tertiary education	220	58.5
	Others (Vocational)	62	16.5
Occupation	Student	148	39.4
	Unemployed	102	27.1
	Self-employed	78	20.7
	Civil servant	48	12.8

Interpretation:

The results in Table 4.1 show that the majority of respondents were male (55.9%), aged between 21–25 years (31.9%), and mostly had tertiary education (58.5%). Students and unemployed individuals formed the largest occupational categories, reflecting the youth-heavy population of Delta State.

Research Question One

What socio-economic factors influence cannabis use among citizens of Delta State?

Table 2

Mean Ratings of Socio-economic Factors Influencing Cannabis Use

Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision*
Poverty increases the likelihood of cannabis use	4.21	0.82	Agree
Unemployment drives youths into cannabis consumption	4.35	0.77	Agree
Peer influence encourages initiation of cannabis use	4.41	0.69	Agree
Cultural acceptance of cannabis affects its consumption	3.96	0.88	Agree
Easy availability/accessibility promotes cannabis use	4.28	0.73	Agree

*Decision rule: ≥ 3.00 = Agree; < 3.00 = Disagree

Interpretation:

The findings indicate that unemployment (M = 4.35), peer influence (M = 4.41), and accessibility (M = 4.28) are the most significant socio-economic drivers of cannabis use in Delta State.

Research Question Two

How do unemployment and poverty contribute to cannabis use in the state?

Table 3

Regression Analysis of Unemployment and Poverty on Cannabis Use

Predictor	β	t	p	Remark
Unemployment	.42	7.68	.000	Significant
Poverty	.36	6.11	.000	Significant

R² = 0.41; F(2,373) = 128.3; p < .05

Interpretation:

Regression results show that unemployment ($\beta = .42, p < .05$) and poverty ($\beta = .36, p < .05$) significantly predict cannabis use, accounting for **41% of the variance**.

Research Question Three

To what extent do peer influence and cultural factors shape cannabis consumption?

Table 4

Chi-Square Test of Peer Influence and Cannabis Use

Variable	χ^2	df	P	Decision
Peer influence	45.82	2	.000	Significant
Cultural acceptance	32.14	2	.001	Significant

Interpretation:

The chi-square analysis revealed that both peer influence ($\chi^2 = 45.82, p < .05$) and cultural acceptance ($\chi^2 = 32.14, p < .05$) have significant associations with cannabis use in Delta State.

Research Question Four

What are the implications of cannabis use for drugs education in Delta State?

Findings from respondents revealed that cannabis use is associated with declining academic performance, increased school dropout rates, risky health behaviors, and

reduced receptivity to drug education programs. Respondents suggested that drug education should be **integrated into school curricula, community sensitization, and peer mentoring programs.**

TEST OF HYPOTHESES

- **H01:** There is no significant relationship between socio-economic status and cannabis use among citizens of Delta State.
 - Regression analysis (Table 4.3) shows unemployment and poverty significantly predicted cannabis use ($p < .05$).
 - **Decision:** Null hypothesis rejected.
- **H02:** Unemployment does not significantly influence cannabis use among citizens of Delta State.
 - Unemployment had a significant effect ($\beta = .42, p < .05$).
 - **Decision:** Null hypothesis rejected.
- **H03:** Peer influence has no significant effect on cannabis consumption in Delta State.
 - Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 45.82, p < .05$) indicated significant association.
 - **Decision:** Null hypothesis rejected.

Summary of Findings

1. Poverty, unemployment, peer influence, cultural practices, and easy accessibility significantly influence cannabis use in Delta State.
2. Regression analysis showed that unemployment and poverty account for 41% of the variance in cannabis use.
3. Peer influence and cultural acceptance have significant associations with cannabis consumption patterns.
4. Cannabis use negatively affects academic performance and public health, with major implications for drugs education in Delta State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide important insights into the socio-economic factors associated with cannabis use among citizens of Delta State. The results revealed that poverty, unemployment, peer influence, cultural acceptance, and accessibility are the key determinants of cannabis consumption. These findings align with the results of earlier studies, which have shown that socio-economic instability often drives individuals toward substance use as a coping mechanism (Ndukwe, 2021; Oshodin & Okon, 2020).

The regression analysis demonstrated that unemployment and poverty together accounted for 41% of the variance in cannabis use. This finding is consistent with Strain

Theory, which posits that individuals experiencing blocked opportunities often turn to deviant behaviors to manage frustrations (Merton, 1938/2018). In the context of Delta State, persistent unemployment and economic deprivation among youths provide fertile ground for substance abuse. Peer influence emerged as one of the strongest predictors of cannabis initiation. This is in line with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which suggests that behaviors are learned through observation and reinforcement (Okolie & Adebayo, 2019). Cannabis use among peers not only normalizes the behavior but also creates group pressure that sustains consumption.

Cultural factors also played a significant role, with respondents indicating that certain communities tolerate or even tacitly endorse cannabis use. This finding agrees with Eze and Chukwu (2020), who noted that cultural acceptance and local cultivation in some parts of Nigeria reinforce availability and consumption. The study further revealed that cannabis use negatively affects academic performance, cognitive abilities, and health outcomes, thereby posing serious challenges to education and public health systems. These findings support previous research that linked cannabis use with poor school attendance, risky health behaviors, and weakened educational outcomes (Onwuasoanya, 2022; Osemene & Lawal, 2023).

Overall, the results underscore the need for context-specific drugs education that not only warns against cannabis use but also addresses underlying socio-economic drivers.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that cannabis use among citizens of Delta State is significantly influenced by socio-economic factors, particularly poverty, unemployment, peer pressure, cultural tolerance, and availability. The findings confirm that cannabis use has far-reaching implications on education, public health, and community safety.

The study further establishes that drug education efforts in Delta State must go beyond general awareness campaigns. For such programs to be effective, they must:

1. Recognize the socio-economic conditions that predispose individuals to cannabis use.
2. Incorporate peer-to-peer mentoring and community sensitization.
3. Engage schools, religious institutions, and families in preventive strategies.

Without a multidimensional approach, cannabis use will continue to undermine the educational and social development of Delta State citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government and private stakeholders should intensify poverty alleviation and job creation initiatives, particularly for youths, to reduce economic pressures that drive drug use.

2. Schools and community organizations should adopt peer mentoring models in which youths educate their peers on the dangers of cannabis use, leveraging the influence of social groups.
3. The Ministry of Education should revise school curricula to include locally relevant drug education content that addresses socio-economic realities of Delta State.
4. Traditional leaders, religious organizations, and community associations should be actively involved in sensitization campaigns that address cultural tolerance of cannabis use.
5. While education is key, law enforcement agencies should also improve monitoring of cannabis cultivation and distribution, ensuring that interventions focus more on rehabilitation than punishment.
6. Stakeholders in education, health, and social development should collaborate to design integrated drug prevention programs tailored to urban and rural communities in Delta State.

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