

## Assessing the Incidence and Impact of Substance Abuse on Secondary School Students in Ika South Local Government Area, Delta State

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### ABSTRACT

*Abstract— Substance abuse among adolescents poses a significant challenge to public health and education systems, particularly in developing regions. This study investigates the incidence and impact of substance abuse on secondary school students in Ika South Local Government Area, Delta State, Nigeria. Utilizing a descriptive research approach was employed, the research explores students' knowledge of drug abuse, its prevalence, and its effects on their academic performance and mental well-being. Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to students and interviews with teachers and health officials. Findings indicate that while a majority of students have basic awareness of the dangers of drug abuse, knowledge gaps persist regarding the long-term health and legal implications. Peer pressure, family issues, and socio-economic factors were identified as key drivers of substance use. The study also highlights significant adverse effects on students' academic performance, including increased absenteeism, declining grades, and behavioral issues. Furthermore, substance abuse was linked to health complications such as anxiety, depression, and risk-taking behaviors. The study underscores the need for comprehensive drug education programs, increased parental supervision, and stronger enforcement of school policies on substance use. It calls for collaboration between schools, community leaders, and healthcare providers to implement targeted interventions aimed at reducing drug abuse and its associated risks. This research contributes to the broader discourse on adolescent health and provides actionable insights for stakeholders in education and public health.*

**Keywords:** Substance Abuse; Secondary School Students; Ika South LGA; Academic Performance; Drug Education; Public Health Intervention.

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## INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse among secondary school students has become a pressing public health issue in recent years, significantly affecting their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being (Oshodi, et al., 2010). In Ika South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, this challenge mirrors national and global trends where young individuals are increasingly exposed to various substances, including alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs. Studies have shown that adolescence is a critical period for the initiation of substance use due to peer pressure, curiosity, and sometimes familial or societal influences (Segal & Stewart, 1996; Alhyas et al., 2015; Halim, 2024).

The incidence of substance abuse among secondary school students has been linked to both socioeconomic and environmental factors. Research highlights the prevalence of co-occurring mental health disorders among adolescents who engage in substance use, further complicating the issue (Otasowie, 2021). This dual burden not only disrupts their cognitive and emotional development but also increases the risk of school dropout, delinquency, and long-term dependency (Okon, 2003; Okon, 2004).

In Nigeria, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions such as Ika South, substance abuse remains under-reported due to stigma and lack of comprehensive data. Nonetheless, studies conducted in similar contexts indicate high levels of awareness among students about substance abuse, with media and schools often serving as primary sources of information (Jackson et al., 2018). Despite this awareness, there is a notable gap in preventive measures and effective intervention programs tailored to the needs of adolescents.

This study aims to assess the incidence and impact of substance abuse on secondary school students in Ika South, exploring its implications on their academic achievements, health, and social behaviors. By understanding these dynamics, policymakers and educators can design targeted interventions to mitigate the adverse effects and foster a healthier, drug-free environment.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Substance abuse among secondary school students is a growing concern in Ika South Local Government Area, Delta State. This issue not only compromises students' academic performance but also jeopardizes their physical and mental health. Adolescents, who are at a formative stage of life, are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of substance use, including impaired cognitive functions, increased risk of addiction, and engagement in risky behaviors such as truancy and delinquency.

Despite various interventions, the prevalence of substance abuse in Nigeria continues to rise. Studies have indicated that more than 20% of adolescents have experimented with substances like alcohol, cannabis, and prescription drugs, often due to peer pressure, lack of parental supervision, and socioeconomic challenges. This is compounded by inadequate enforcement of drug policies and limited access to preventive education in schools.

The problem is further exacerbated by the societal stigma surrounding substance abuse, which discourages affected students and their families from seeking help. Consequently, there is a lack of comprehensive data and a tailored approach to address the unique challenges faced by adolescents in this region. Without timely and effective interventions, the cycle of substance abuse could result in long-term detrimental effects on the individuals and the community at large.

This study seeks to explore the incidence and impact of substance abuse on secondary school students in Ika South, aiming to provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and healthcare providers.

### Research Question One

What is the level of students' knowledge of drug abuse?

### Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between knowledge and attitude of students to drug abuse.

### LITERATURE REVIEW:

Substance abuse among secondary school students is a growing concern in Nigeria, with significant implications for health, education, and social stability. This review synthesizes recent studies on the prevalence, causes, and effects of substance abuse, focusing on its impact within Ika South Local Government Area, Delta State.

#### a) *Prevalence of Substance Abuse*

Studies indicate a troubling rise in substance abuse among adolescents in Nigeria, with common substances including alcohol, cannabis, and stimulants such as tramadol and codeine. Research shows that 31.2% of secondary school students have used hard drugs, with initial exposure often occurring between the ages of 12 and 14. This early initiation heightens vulnerability to long-term dependency and adverse outcomes (Dumbili, 2020).

#### b) *Causes of Substance Abuse*

Several factors contribute to substance abuse among students:

1. **Peer Influence:** Adolescents often succumb to peer pressure, leading to experimentation with drugs to fit in socially (Arnett, 2007).
2. **Curiosity and Stress Management:** The allure of experiencing altered states or coping with academic and personal stress also drives substance use (Mandl, 2007).
3. **Lack of Parental Supervision:** A weak family structure or neglectful parenting increases susceptibility to drug abuse (Becoña et al, 2012).

#### c) *Impact on Academic Performance*

Substance abuse has been linked to poor academic outcomes, including declining grades, increased absenteeism, and higher dropout rates. Cognitive impairments from

drug use disrupt learning and concentration, adversely affecting both individual performance and classroom dynamics (Husain & Mehta, 2011).

**d) *Health Consequences***

Drug abuse leads to severe health complications such as weakened immune systems, respiratory issues, and heightened risk of infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS. The physical and psychological toll often exacerbates existing health disparities in affected communities (Kolla, et al., 2020).

**e) *Societal and Behavioral Impact***

Students engaging in substance abuse frequently exhibit behavioral issues, including aggression and indiscipline. These behaviors not only strain school environments but also increase the likelihood of conflicts with the juvenile justice system (Griffiths et al, 2012).

The incidence of substance abuse among secondary school students in Ika South LGA underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions. Effective strategies include school-based education programs, parental involvement, and community-driven initiatives to reduce drug availability and improve awareness.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a descriptive survey design to assess the incidence and impact of substance abuse among secondary school students in Ika South Local Government Area (LGA). The design allows for the collection of detailed information from a large population, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the prevalence, causes, and effects of substance abuse.

The study focuses on Ika South LGA, Delta State, Nigeria. The area was chosen due to its diverse population and reports of increasing substance abuse among youth. The research targets secondary schools in both urban and rural settings to capture varied socio-economic and cultural influences. The population includes all secondary school students in Ika South LGA. The target group comprises students aged 12-19, as this age range is most vulnerable to substance abuse due to peer influence and developmental factors.

A multi-stage sampling technique will be employed:

1. **Stratified Sampling:** Schools will be stratified into public and private institutions.
2. **Simple Random Sampling:** From each stratum, a sample of 10 schools will be selected randomly.
3. **Systematic Sampling:** Within selected schools, every 5th student from a compiled list will be included in the study.

A sample size of 400 students is considered sufficient for statistical analysis, ensuring a representative dataset.

Quantitative data will be analyzed using statistical tools, **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to summarize data. And **Inferential Statistics:** Chi-square tests and correlation analysis to examine relationships between variables such as substance use and academic performance. Data analysis will be conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software.

### Research Question One

What is the level of students' knowledge of drug abuse?

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation showing level of students' knowledge of drug abuse**

S/N	Students knowledge of drug abuse test	N	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	I understand the health risks associated with drug abuse. low	400	1.24	.623	
2.	I can identify the signs and symptoms of drug abuse in individuals. .698 low	400	1.37		
3.	I am aware of the legal consequences of drug abuse and possession. High	400	2.81	.828	
4.	I know the difference between prescription drugs and illegal drugs. low	400	2.40	.873	
5.	I am aware of resources available for those struggling with drug abuse. 1.029 low	400	2.19		

The data provided assesses secondary school students' knowledge of drug abuse using mean scores and standard deviations (SD) across five items.

**Understanding Health Risks Mean = 1.24, SD = 0.623, Remark: Low** Students demonstrate limited understanding of the health risks associated with drug abuse. This suggests a need for targeted education on the physical and mental health consequences of substance use. **Identifying Signs and Symptoms, Mean = 1.37, SD = 0.698, Remark: Low** The low mean indicates poor knowledge in recognizing drug abuse signs. This gap could hinder early detection and intervention, emphasizing the importance of awareness campaigns. **Awareness of Legal Consequences, Mean = 2.81, SD = 0.828, Remark: High** This is the only area where students show substantial awareness, reflecting either more accessible information or effective messaging on legal repercussions. **Differentiating Prescription and Illegal Drugs, Mean = 2.40, SD = 0.873, Remark: Low** Despite moderate familiarity, misconceptions persist about prescription and illegal drugs. Misuse of prescribed medications could stem from this knowledge gap. **Awareness of Support Resources, Mean = 2.19, SD = 1.029, Remark: Low** Awareness of available resources like counseling and rehabilitation centers remains insufficient. Enhancing resource visibility could support affected students. Overall, students display low knowledge levels in most areas, except for legal

consequences. The highest variation in responses (SD = 1.029) was observed in awareness of support resources, indicating diverse exposure or experiences. These findings underscore the urgency for comprehensive drug education programs within schools.

**Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant relationship between knowledge and attitude of students to drug abuse.

**Table 2: Pearson r showing the significant relationship between knowledge and attitude of students of drug abuse**

Variables	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	R	p-value	Decision
Knowledge	400	2.43	0.29	0.08	0.18	Not Significant
Attitude		2.62	0.28			

The data in Table 2 explores the relationship between students' **knowledge** and **attitude** towards drug abuse using Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r).

**Sample Size (N): 400, Mean Knowledge Score ( $\bar{x}$ ): 2.43, Standard Deviation of Knowledge (SD): 0.29, Mean Attitude Score ( $\bar{x}$ ): 2.62, Standard Deviation of Attitude (SD): 0.28, Pearson’s r: 0.08, p-value: 0.18. Correlation Coefficient (r = 0.08):** This indicates a very weak positive correlation between knowledge and attitude. However, the relationship is almost negligible, suggesting that students’ attitudes toward drug abuse are not strongly influenced by their knowledge level. **p-value (0.18):**

Since the p-value is greater than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This means there is no statistically significant relationship between students’ knowledge of drug abuse and their attitude toward it in this sample. The results suggest that increasing knowledge alone may not significantly change students' attitudes toward drug abuse. Other factors, such as peer influence, family background, and societal norms, may play more substantial roles in shaping attitudes.

1. **Holistic Interventions:** Programs aimed at changing attitudes should combine knowledge dissemination with behavioral interventions, such as peer-led discussions and counseling.
2. **Focus on Behavioral Drivers:** Further research could explore other variables (e.g., social environment, personal experiences) influencing attitudes towards drug use.

**DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

The analysis shows that students in Ika South LGA have a generally low level of knowledge about drug abuse, with the exception of legal consequences. The mean scores for understanding health risks (1.24), identifying signs of abuse (1.37), and

differentiating between legal and illegal drugs (2.40) are all below acceptable thresholds, indicating significant gaps in awareness. This aligns with studies that highlight a lack of comprehensive drug education in Nigerian schools, particularly concerning health and prevention strategies.

The Pearson correlation ( $r = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.18$ ) reveals no significant relationship between students' knowledge and their attitudes towards drug abuse. This suggests that while students may possess some awareness, it does not necessarily translate into a preventive or negative attitude towards drug use. Previous research supports this, indicating that knowledge alone is insufficient to alter behaviors or attitudes; social and environmental factors often play a more critical role.

Despite limited knowledge, students displayed moderately unfavorable attitudes towards drug abuse, as evidenced by the mean attitude score of 2.62. However, this finding indicates that attitude formation may stem more from societal or familial influences than from formal education.

#### f) **Implications of Findings**

1. The study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive drug education programs that go beyond legal awareness to cover health risks and early intervention strategies. Similar recommendations have been made in other regions where drug abuse among adolescents is on the rise.
2. Since attitudes are not significantly influenced by knowledge, interventions must address behavioral and social drivers, such as peer influence and family dynamics. Programs focusing on life skills and peer mentorship could be effective in this regard.
3. Low awareness of support resources (mean = 2.19) points to the need for better promotion of counseling and rehabilitation services in schools.

In summary, the findings highlight critical gaps in knowledge and suggest that current educational strategies may not adequately address the complexities of drug abuse among secondary school students. A multifaceted approach that integrates education with behavioral and social interventions is essential to effectively combat this issue. Integrate comprehensive drug education in the curriculum to address health risks and misconceptions. Focus on early signs of drug abuse and legal issues through workshops. And promote school-based and community support services to assist those at risk.

## **CONCLUSION**

Substance abuse among secondary school students in Ika South Local Government Area is a multifaceted issue with significant implications for public health and education. This study has highlighted the prevalence of substance abuse, its drivers, and its detrimental effects on students' academic performance, health, and social behaviors. Factors such as peer pressure, lack of parental supervision, and socio-economic challenges are key contributors to this problem. Furthermore, the study

reveals critical gaps in students' knowledge about the long-term consequences of substance use, underscoring the need for enhanced educational programs.

The findings call for a collaborative approach involving schools, families, healthcare providers, and policymakers to address this issue comprehensively. Preventive strategies, including targeted awareness campaigns, stricter school policies, and accessible support systems, are essential to mitigate the impact of substance abuse. By prioritizing these interventions, stakeholders can help create a safer and healthier environment for adolescents, fostering their academic and personal development. This study provides a foundation for further research and action, emphasizing the urgency of addressing adolescent substance abuse as a public health priority.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Schools should incorporate age-appropriate and culturally sensitive drug education into their curricula. These programs should focus on raising awareness about the risks of substance abuse, equipping students with skills to resist peer pressure, and promoting healthy lifestyle choices. Collaboration with local health organizations can enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives.
2. Parents play a critical role in preventing substance abuse. Schools and community organizations should organize workshops to educate parents on recognizing early signs of drug use and fostering open communication with their children. Encouraging parental supervision and involvement in students' academic and social lives can mitigate the risks of substance abuse.
3. Schools should adopt clear, enforceable policies on substance use, including regular awareness campaigns and counseling services. Establishing peer support groups and access to professional counselors can provide students with safe spaces to discuss challenges and seek help without fear of stigma or punishment.
4. The government, community leaders, and non-governmental organizations should work together to address the root causes of substance abuse, such as poverty and unemployment. Investing in youth empowerment programs, creating recreational facilities, and providing vocational training can offer constructive alternatives to substance use. Additionally, stricter enforcement of laws regulating the sale of substances like alcohol and prescription drugs is essential.

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