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PEER ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDIA ARTS, PERFORMANCE ARTS AND FILM STUDIES IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Substance abuse among youths remains an important public health and social concern because of its implications for physical and psychological wellbeing, educational attainment, social relationships and community development. The peer environment is particularly important because young people interact closely with friends and social groups whose behaviours, attitudes and norms may influence their behavioural choices. This study examined peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Anambra State and considered the implications of the findings for Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised youths aged 15–24 years residing in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, estimated at 45,000. A sample of 450 youths was selected through a multistage sampling procedure involving in-school, out-of-school and unemployed youths. Data were obtained from 438 respondents, representing a 97.3% valid response rate, using the Peer Environmental Factors and Substance Abuse among Youths Questionnaire (PEFSAYQ). The instrument contained 15 items and was validated by three experts. Its reliability coefficient was 0.81 using Cronbach's alpha. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation, with a criterion mean of 2.50. The findings showed that all five peer environmental factors examined were rated above the criterion mean, with a grand mean of 3.34. Peer pressure and the desire to gain acceptance within a social group that uses substances recorded a mean of 3.39, followed by association with friends who regularly use drugs, alcohol or tobacco (M = 3.36), normalization of substance use within peer groups (M = 3.33), introduction to substances by peers or close friends (M = 3.31), and association with peers involved in risk-taking behaviours such as truancy, gang affiliation and delinquency (M = 3.29). The findings indicate that peer-related social experiences are important contextual factors associated with substance abuse among youths. The study further argues that Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies can provide creative platforms for addressing peer norms, social acceptance, substance-use narratives and youth decision-making. The study recommends the development of evidence-informed films, theatre productions, peer-oriented media campaigns, digital storytelling and participatory creative-arts programmes for substance-abuse prevention among youths in Anambra State.

Keywords: Peer environment, substance abuse, youths, peer influence, Media Arts, Performance Arts, Film Studies, Anambra State

Introduction

Substance abuse among youths has become an important public health and social concern because of its implications for physical and psychological wellbeing, education, interpersonal relationships and community development. The consequences extend beyond the immediate effects of psychoactive substances to include behavioural difficulties, risky practices, impaired social functioning and reduced opportunities for productive participation in society. The American Psychiatric Association (2022) recognizes clinically significant substance-related problems in terms of patterns of use associated with impairment or distress. The prevention of harmful substance use among young people is therefore an important component of public health and youth development.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to substance-related behaviours because adolescence and early adulthood involve significant biological, psychological and social changes. Brain development continues during adolescence, particularly in systems associated with decision-making, impulse control and reward processing (Gogtay et al., 2004). The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2022) similarly emphasizes adolescence as an important period for preventing substance-related problems. Although individual characteristics contribute to substance-related behaviour, young people's decisions and experiences are also influenced by the social environments in which they live.

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological perspective emphasizes that human behaviour develops within interconnected environmental systems. Among youths, these systems include family, school, community and peer environments. Peer relationships become increasingly significant during adolescence and early adulthood because young people spend substantial amounts of time interacting with friends and social groups. Through these interactions, youths may encounter behavioural models, expectations, norms and opportunities that can either discourage or facilitate substance use.

Peer influence may operate directly through pressure to conform or indirectly through observation and perceived social norms. Trucco et al. (2011) observed that peer relationships can influence adolescent substance use through social learning and perceived norms, while Petraitis et al. (1995) identified peer influence as an important social mechanism associated with adolescent substance use. Thus, the influence of peers extends beyond explicit encouragement to include the broader social environment in which behaviours are interpreted and reinforced.

Kandel (1978) explained that young people often associate with others who exhibit similar behavioural characteristics, a process commonly described as peer selection or homophily. The relationship between peer groups and substance use may therefore operate in both directions. Young people may select friends with similar behavioural tendencies, while peer groups may subsequently reinforce those tendencies. Dishion and Owen (2002) also emphasized the role of deviant peer processes in the development and maintenance of problematic adolescent behaviours. Perceived peer norms are another important dimension of peer influence. Young people may be more willing to participate in substance use when they believe that such behaviour is common or socially acceptable among their friends. Santor et al. (2000) identified peer pressure and social

approval as important influences on adolescent risk-taking, while Neighbors et al. (2007) demonstrated the relevance of perceived social norms to substance-related behaviour.
The Nigerian context presents similar concerns. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) documented substantial psychoactive substance use in Nigeria, while Jatau et al. (2021) identified alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, pharmaceutical products and opioids among substances of concern. Nigerian studies have also documented substance use among young people and have highlighted issues relating to early initiation and pharmaceutical substance misuse (Abdulmalik et al., 2019; Fatoye & Morakinyo, 2002; Oshikoya & Alli, 2006). Peer groups can create environments in which substance use is normalized, discussed, demonstrated and socially reinforced. Conversely, positive peer networks can support healthy choices and discourage harmful behaviour. This makes the peer environment an important area for prevention.

The significance of the peer environment also creates opportunities for disciplines concerned with communication, representation, performance and storytelling. Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies provide creative means through which social issues can be represented, discussed and communicated to young audiences. Film can portray the consequences of peer pressure and substance use through narrative and visual storytelling. Performance arts can dramatize peer interactions and provide spaces for discussion and reflection. Media arts can support the production and dissemination of youth-oriented messages through audiovisual, digital and interactive platforms.

The relevance of these creative disciplines does not mean that artistic interventions automatically prevent substance abuse. Rather, the findings of the present study identify peer-related issues—pressure, social acceptance, normalization, peer initiation and risk-oriented peer networks—that can become themes for evidence-informed creative communication and educational interventions. Anambra State provides a useful context for examining these issues because of its youth population, educational institutions, urbanizing communities and diverse social networks. Awka South Local Government Area, where the study was conducted, contains urban and semi-urban communities, educational institutions and commercial activities that provide extensive opportunities for youth interaction.

Despite the growing literature on substance abuse among Nigerian youths, there remains a need for context-specific evidence on peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse and for consideration of how creative disciplines can contribute to communicating prevention messages. This study therefore examined peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Anambra State and considered the implications of the findings for Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies.

Statement of the Problem

Substance abuse among youths is a significant concern because of its potential consequences for health, education, social relationships and future participation in productive activities. Young people who engage in harmful substance use may experience behavioural difficulties, academic problems, impaired interpersonal relationships and increased exposure to other forms of risk-taking behaviour.

The peer environment is particularly relevant because young people interact extensively with friends and social groups. Peer pressure, the desire for acceptance, association with substance-using friends, normalization of substance use, introduction to substances by peers and association with risk-oriented peer groups may expose youths to social circumstances in which substance use is viewed as acceptable or accessible.

Although studies have examined substance use among young people in Nigeria, there remains a need for context-specific evidence concerning the peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Anambra State. Without such evidence, interventions may focus primarily on individual knowledge while giving insufficient attention to the social environments within which young people make behavioural choices.

There is also a need to consider creative approaches to communicating prevention messages. Traditional health education approaches may be strengthened when combined with forms of communication that reflect young people's social and cultural experiences. Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies offer platforms for presenting realistic peer situations, challenging harmful social norms, encouraging dialogue and communicating preventive messages in forms accessible to young audiences. The problem addressed by this study is therefore twofold: the need to identify peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths and the need to consider how these findings can inform creative communication and educational practices in Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Anambra State and determine their implications for Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies.

Specifically, the study examined:

1. peer pressure and the desire for social acceptance as peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths;
2. association with friends who regularly use substances as a peer environmental factor associated with substance abuse;
3. introduction to substances by peers or close friends as a peer environmental factor associated with substance abuse;
4. normalization of substance use within peer groups as a peer environmental factor associated with substance abuse; and
5. association with peers involved in risk-taking behaviours as a peer environmental factor associated with substance abuse.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

What are the peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Anambra State?

Conceptual Review

Substance Abuse among Youths

Substance abuse refers broadly to harmful or problematic patterns of psychoactive substance use. Such substances may include alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, opioids and pharmaceutical products. The American Psychiatric Association (2022) identifies clinically significant substance-related problems in terms of patterns of use associated with impairment or distress. Substance use during adolescence is of particular concern because young people are still undergoing substantial physical, psychological and social development. Early exposure may be associated with subsequent behavioural and educational difficulties. Townsend et al. (2007) and Silins et al. (2014) reported associations between adolescent substance use and adverse outcomes extending into later life.

Nigerian evidence similarly indicates that young people use a range of psychoactive substances. Abdulmalik et al. (2019) reported alcohol and cannabis use among secondary school students, while Oshikoya and Alli (2006) highlighted concerns relating to pharmaceutical substance misuse among young people. Fatoye and Morakinyo (2002) also documented substance use among secondary school students in Nigeria. The social context of substance use is therefore important. Young people do not make behavioural choices in isolation; their choices are influenced by relationships, expectations, opportunities and social norms.

Peer Environmental Factors and Substance Abuse

Peer environmental factors refer to the social conditions, relationships, behavioural norms and interactions within a young person's peer network that may be associated with behavioural choices. These factors include peer pressure, peer modelling, social approval, perceived norms, opportunities for access and association with risk-oriented groups. Peer pressure represents one direct form of peer influence. Young people may feel compelled to participate in behaviours that are common among their friends because they seek acceptance or fear social rejection. Steinberg and Monahan (2007) identified peer influence as an important component of adolescent social development.

Association with substance-using peers provides another potential pathway. Young people who regularly interact with friends who use substances may experience greater exposure to substance-related behaviours and opportunities. Maxwell (2002) found a close relationship between peer substance use and individual substance use. Normalization is also relevant. When substance use becomes ordinary or socially acceptable within a peer group, young people may perceive fewer social barriers to participation. Neighbors et al. (2007) demonstrated the importance of perceived social norms in substance-related behaviour. Peer initiation refers to situations in which a young person first encounters a substance through a friend or peer. Such exposure may occur during social activities where substances are offered or shared.

Association with risk-oriented peer groups constitutes another dimension. Youths who interact with peers involved in truancy, delinquency or gang-related activities may encounter broader social environments characterized by multiple risk behaviours. Oetting and Beauvais (1987) emphasized the importance of peer-group socialization in adolescent drug use.

Media, Performance and Film as Social Communication Platforms

Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies are concerned with forms of communication through visual representation, performance, storytelling and mediated experience. These disciplines can provide platforms for exploring social problems and communicating information to particular audiences. For the present study, their relevance arises from the nature of the peer factors identified. Peer pressure can be represented through film and dramatic performance by portraying realistic situations in which young people face pressure to use substances. Social acceptance and normalization can similarly be explored through narratives showing how group expectations influence individual choices.

Performance arts, as noted by Arah (2020) can create interactive spaces in which young people observe, discuss and respond to dramatized social situations. Theatre-based approaches may allow audiences to consider alternative responses to peer pressure and social conflict. Film provides another avenue for representing the experiences and consequences associated with substance use (Arah, 2025). Short films, documentaries and narrative productions can present peer relationships and substance-related decisions in forms that are accessible to young audiences. Film can also provide opportunities for local stories, languages, settings and cultural experiences to be incorporated into prevention communication.

Media arts extend these possibilities through digital content, social-media-oriented communication, animation, graphic design, audiovisual campaigns and other forms of mediated expression. Such approaches can facilitate the dissemination of prevention messages within the same broad communication environments where young people interact (Arah, 2017). The present study does not empirically test the effectiveness of these creative approaches. Rather, the identified peer environmental factors provide evidence concerning themes that can be addressed through creative communication and educational production.

Theoretical Perspective

The study is anchored in the social learning perspective, which explains behaviour partly through observation, imitation, reinforcement and interaction with significant others. Applied to substance use, social learning suggests that youths may observe peers using substances and develop perceptions about the social consequences of such behaviour. If substance use appears to result in social acceptance or status within a peer group, the behaviour may be reinforced. Conversely, peer groups that discourage substance use can reinforce healthier behavioural choices.

The theory is relevant to Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies because creative representations can provide alternative behavioural models. A film, dramatic performance or media production can portray both risky peer interactions and alternative ways of responding to peer pressure. Such representations can therefore provide opportunities for audiences to observe social situations and consider different behavioural responses.

Method

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was appropriate because the study sought to obtain information concerning youths' perceptions of peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse without manipulating the study variables.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. The headquarters of the Local Government Area is Isiagu. The area includes communities such as Awka, Amawbia, Nibo, Nise and Mbaukwu. The 2006 population census recorded a population of 189,049 for the Local Government Area. Awka South has urban and semi-urban characteristics and contains educational institutions, commercial activities and residential communities. The presence of Nnamdi Azikiwe University and other educational institutions contributes to extensive interaction among young people from different social backgrounds.

Population of the Study

The population comprised youths aged 15–24 years residing in Awka South Local Government Area. The estimated population for the study was approximately 45,000 youths, comprising in-school, out-of-school and unemployed youths.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula:

[n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}]

where:

- (n) = required sample size;
- (N) = population size; and
- (e) = level of precision.

Using a population of 45,000 and a 0.05 level of precision, the calculated minimum sample was approximately 397 respondents. This was increased to 450 respondents to provide allowance for non-response and incomplete returns. A multistage sampling procedure was used. The respondents were drawn from three broad groups: in-school youths, out-of-school youths and unemployed youths. The planned allocation comprised 250 in-school youths, 130 out-of-school youths and 70 unemployed youths. Participants were selected from schools, markets and residential/community locations.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using the Peer Environmental Factors and Substance Abuse among Youths Questionnaire (PEFSAYQ). The instrument contained 15 items designed to obtain information concerning peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse. Responses were structured on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Validity of the Instrument

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts from Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Two experts were from Health Promotion and one was from Educational Foundations. The experts examined the items for relevance, clarity, appropriateness and adequacy.

Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot test was conducted among 50 youths in Awka North Local Government Area, outside the study area. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of **0.81** was obtained.

Data Collection Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant authority at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and participation was based on informed consent. Questionnaires were administered in printed form and through Google Forms over a period of four weeks. Of the 450 questionnaires administered, 438 were properly completed and used for analysis, representing a 97.3% valid response rate.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted. Mean scores of 2.50 or above indicated agreement, while scores below 2.50 indicated disagreement.

The decision rules were:

- 3.50–4.00 = Strongly Agree
- 2.50–3.49 = Agree
- 1.50–2.49 = Disagree
- 1.00–1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25.

Results

Research Question

What are the peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Peer Environmental Factors Associated with Substance Abuse among Youths

S/N	Peer environmental factor	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Peer pressure and the desire to gain acceptance within a social group that uses substances significantly influence youth substance abuse.	221	172	32	13	3.39	0.762	Agree
2	Youths who closely associate with friends who regularly use drugs, alcohol or tobacco are more likely to engage in substance abuse.	218	174	33	13	3.36	0.770	Agree
3	Being introduced to substances first by a peer or close friend is a key gateway to sustained substance abuse.	207	176	38	17	3.31	0.799	Agree
4	Normalization of substance use within a peer group where drug or alcohol use is fashionable or socially acceptable promotes substance abuse.	211	175	36	16	3.33	0.789	Agree
5	Youths whose peer networks engage in risk-taking behaviours such as truancy, gang affiliation and delinquency are more susceptible to substance abuse.	203	177	40	18	3.29	0.807	Agree
	Grand Mean					**3.34**		**Agree**

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2025)

The results indicate that all five peer environmental factors recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The grand mean of 3.34 indicates that respondents generally agreed that the identified peer environmental factors were associated with substance abuse among youths.
Peer pressure and the desire to gain acceptance within a social group that uses substances recorded a mean of 3.39. Association with friends who regularly use drugs, alcohol or tobacco recorded 3.36. Normalization of substance use within peer groups recorded 3.33, while introduction to substances by peers or close friends recorded 3.31. Association with peers involved in risk-taking behaviours recorded 3.29. The results therefore indicate agreement across all five dimensions examined rather than concentration of responses around a single peer factor.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that peer pressure and the desire to gain acceptance within a social group that uses substances were associated with substance abuse among youths, with a mean score of 3.39. This finding highlights social acceptance as an important dimension of the peer environment. Young people may participate in behaviours that are valued within their immediate peer groups in order to maintain relationships or gain social recognition. The finding is consistent with Santor et al. (2000), who emphasized the relevance of peer pressure and social approval to adolescent risk-taking behaviour. It also corresponds with Steinberg and Monahan (2007), who examined adolescents' resistance to peer influence. The result suggests that peer influence may operate through social reinforcement and expectations rather than through explicit pressure alone. The finding also has implications for creative communication. Media and performance productions can portray realistic situations involving peer pressure and demonstrate alternative responses to social pressure. For example, a short film or dramatic production can depict a young person confronted with substance use within a friendship group and explore the consequences of different choices. Such productions can provide discussion points for schools, youth organizations and community programmes.

The study further found that close association with friends who regularly use drugs, alcohol or tobacco was associated with substance abuse, with a mean of 3.36. This emphasizes the behavioural characteristics of immediate peer networks. When substance use occurs regularly within a peer group, young people may experience increased exposure to substance-related behaviours and opportunities. This finding agrees with Maxwell (2002), who reported a close relationship between peer substance use and individual substance use. It is also compatible with the social learning perspective, which emphasizes observation and interaction with significant others.

For Film Studies and Performance Arts, this finding highlights the value of examining how peer relationships are represented in narratives concerning youth substance use. Creative productions can portray the complexity of friendship relationships rather than reducing substance abuse to individual moral failure. Such representation can help audiences consider the social circumstances surrounding youth decisions. Normalization of substance use within peer groups was also associated with substance abuse, with a mean of 3.33. The finding suggests that respondents perceived social acceptance of substance use within a peer group as relevant to youth substance-related behaviour.

This finding corresponds with literature on perceived social norms. Arah (2020) and Neighbors et al. (2007) emphasized the relevance of perceived norms to substance-related behaviour, while Trucco et al. (2011) highlighted social learning and peer norms.

The finding is particularly relevant to Media Arts because media productions can either reproduce or challenge social norms. Consequently, creative productions addressing substance abuse should carefully consider the messages communicated about the prevalence, acceptability and consequences of substance use. Media practitioners can develop narratives that avoid inadvertently presenting substance use as fashionable, socially desirable or necessary for peer acceptance. The study also found that being introduced to substances by peers or close friends was associated with substance abuse, with a mean of 3.31. This finding suggests that peer relationships may provide opportunities for first exposure to substances.

Oetting and Beauvais (1987) emphasized the importance of peer-group socialization in adolescent drug use. The present finding therefore reinforces the need for prevention messages that address situations involving first exposure and experimentation. Film and performance productions can represent such situations through carefully constructed narratives. A production can show how a seemingly ordinary social interaction may result in exposure to substances and can subsequently explore possible responses, consequences and sources of support.

Finally, association with peers involved in risk-taking behaviours such as truancy, gang affiliation and delinquency recorded a mean of 3.29. The result suggests that substance-related behaviour may exist within broader patterns of peer-associated risk behaviour. This finding is consistent with Esbensen et al. (2010), who emphasized the relevance of peer associations to youth risk behaviour, and Dishion and Owen (2002), who discussed deviant peer processes. Again, the present study identifies a perceived association rather than demonstrating a causal relationship.

From the perspective of Performance Arts and Film Studies, the finding creates opportunities to develop narratives that address clusters of youth experiences rather than portraying substance abuse in isolation. Productions can explore relationships among friendship, identity, belonging, delinquency, education and substance use within recognizable social settings.

Implications for Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies

The findings have several implications for Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies in Anambra State. These implications arise from the five peer environmental factors identified in the study and should be understood as applications of the findings rather than as effects directly tested by the research.

Media Arts and Peer-Oriented Prevention Communication

The finding on peer pressure suggests that prevention communication should address the desire for acceptance and belonging. Media artists can develop posters, animations, digital stories, social-media content and audiovisual campaigns that portray situations involving peer pressure and communicate practical alternatives.

Such productions can use locally recognizable settings and youth-oriented communication styles. The objective should be to communicate prevention information without stigmatizing youths who have experienced substance-related problems.

Performance Arts and Experiential Learning

Performance arts can provide opportunities for young people to observe and discuss peer-related situations. Theatre, drama, role-play and other performance forms can present scenarios involving peer pressure, first exposure, normalization and friendship choices. Interactive performance can also encourage audience participation and reflection. A performance may present a peer-pressure situation and subsequently invite participants to consider alternative responses. This approach can connect substance-abuse education with communication, creativity and experiential learning.

Film Studies and Narrative Representation

Film Studies can contribute to the development and analysis of narratives concerning youth substance abuse. The findings suggest several narrative themes, including friendship, peer acceptance, substance initiation, social normalization and risk-oriented peer networks. Film productions can explore these issues through short films, documentaries, fictional narratives and educational films. Such productions should be evidence-informed and avoid portraying harmful substance use in ways that inadvertently glamorize or normalize it. Film scholars can also examine how Nigerian and African films represent youth substance use, friendship, peer pressure and social consequences. Such analysis can contribute to understanding how audiovisual narratives construct meanings around substance use.

Creative Media for Challenging Harmful Peer Norms

Because normalization of substance use was identified as an associated factor, creative communication can be used to challenge misconceptions about peer behaviour. Media productions can communicate that substance use is not necessarily universal or socially required for belonging. The emphasis should be on accurate information, healthy alternatives and positive social identities rather than fear-based messaging.

Youth Participation in Creative Production

The findings also support greater involvement of youths in the development of prevention-oriented media and performance materials. Young people can participate as scriptwriters, actors, filmmakers, designers, storytellers, interviewers and digital content creators. Such participation may help ensure that prevention messages reflect the language, experiences and communication preferences of their intended audiences.

Collaboration between Creative Disciplines and Health Education

Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies can collaborate with health educators, counsellors, psychologists, schools and community organizations in developing substance-abuse prevention materials. Creative practitioners contribute communication and storytelling expertise, while health professionals can provide evidence-based information concerning substance use and prevention. Such collaboration can improve the accuracy and social relevance of creative productions.

Conclusion

The study found that peer pressure and the desire for social acceptance, association with substance-using friends, normalization of substance use, introduction to substances by peers, and association with risk-oriented peer networks were all perceived by respondents as peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Anambra State.

The findings demonstrate the importance of considering the social context of youth substance abuse. They also provide a basis for considering how creative disciplines can contribute to prevention communication. Media Arts can provide visual and digital communication platforms; Performance Arts can create experiential and participatory learning environments; and Film Studies can support the development and critical analysis of narratives concerning youth, peer relationships and substance use.

The study does not establish that Media Arts, Performance Arts or Film Studies interventions reduce substance abuse because such interventions were not empirically tested. Rather, the identified peer factors provide evidence-based themes that these disciplines can address in future prevention-oriented creative work.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. **Media Arts programmes** should encourage the development of evidence-informed audiovisual and digital materials addressing peer pressure, social acceptance and substance-use norms.
2. **Performance Arts practitioners and educators** should develop drama, theatre and participatory performance activities that enable youths to explore realistic peer-pressure situations and alternative responses.
3. **Film Studies programmes** should encourage students and practitioners to produce and critically examine films addressing youth substance use, friendship, peer influence and social consequences.
4. **Youth-oriented media campaigns** should avoid presenting substance use as fashionable, socially desirable or necessary for peer acceptance.
5. **Creative-arts educators** should collaborate with health educators, counsellors and relevant professionals when developing substance-abuse prevention materials.
6. **Youth participation** should be incorporated into the development of media, film and performance productions so that prevention messages reflect young people's experiences and communication environments.
7. **Schools and community organizations** should provide opportunities for youths to participate in positive creative, cultural and recreational peer networks.
8. **Future research** should empirically evaluate the effectiveness of specific media, performance and film-based interventions in improving youths' knowledge, attitudes, peer norms and substance-use behaviours.

Limitations of the Study

The study adopted a descriptive survey design and relied on respondents' perceptions. Consequently, the findings indicate perceived associations and do not establish causal relationships between peer environmental factors and substance abuse.

The study was conducted in Awka South Local Government Area, although the title refers to youths in Anambra State. Consequently, generalization to all youths in the state should be made cautiously.

The sampling procedure also incorporated purposive and convenience elements. Although efforts were made to include in-school, out-of-school and unemployed youths, the procedure may limit the representativeness of the sample.

Finally, the study did not empirically test the effectiveness of Media Arts, Performance Arts or Film Studies interventions. The implications presented in this article should therefore be regarded as practice-oriented applications of the findings and as directions for subsequent research.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study contributes context-specific evidence on peer environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Anambra State. It identifies five relevant dimensions: peer pressure and social acceptance, association with substance-using friends, normalization of substance use, peer initiation and association with risk-oriented peer networks.

Beyond identifying these factors, the study connects the findings with the creative disciplines of Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies. It demonstrates how empirical evidence concerning peer environments can inform the themes, narratives and communication strategies used in creative approaches to youth substance-abuse prevention.

The study therefore provides a basis for interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers and practitioners in health education, counselling, Media Arts, Performance Arts and Film Studies in addressing youth substance-related challenges.

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