



FAMILY ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG YOUTHS IN AWKA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Substance abuse among youths is an important public health and social concern because of its implications for physical and mental health, educational development, social functioning, and future productivity. Environmental conditions within the family constitute important influences on young people's vulnerability to substance use. This study examined family environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised youths aged 15–24 years residing in Awka South Local Government Area, estimated at approximately 45,000. A sample of 450 youths was initially determined using the Taro Yamane formula and adjusted for anticipated attrition. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select participants from in-school, out-of-school, and unemployed youth populations. Data were collected using the Environmental Factors and Substance Abuse Among Youths Questionnaire (EFASAYQ). The instrument was validated by three experts and yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .84, .81, .79, and .82 for the family, peer, community, and school subscales, respectively, with an overall coefficient of .87. Of the questionnaires administered, 438 were properly completed and used for analysis, representing a 97.3% response rate. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation, with a criterion mean of 2.50. The findings showed that all five family environmental factors assessed were associated with substance abuse among youths. Poor parental supervision and monitoring recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.836$), followed by family conflict, domestic violence and an unstable home environment ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.863$), history of substance abuse among siblings or close family members ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.857$), poor emotional bonding and lack of parental affection ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.872$), and parental or guardian substance use in the home ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.873$). The grand mean of 3.17 indicated overall agreement that family environmental factors were associated with substance abuse among youths. The study concludes that family-centred prevention should emphasise effective parental monitoring, positive parent–youth relationships, family stability, and early intervention where substance use occurs within the household.

Keywords: family environment, substance abuse, youths, parental monitoring, family conflict, parental substance use, Awka South, Nigeria



Introduction

Substance abuse among young people has become an important public health concern globally and in Nigeria. Substance use during adolescence and emerging adulthood can have consequences for physical health, mental health, educational attainment, interpersonal relationships, and later social and occupational functioning. The developmental period of adolescence and emerging adulthood is particularly important because young people experience increasing independence, changing peer relationships, experimentation, and developing decision-making capacities. These characteristics may increase exposure to risky behaviours, including substance use.

The development of substance-use behaviour is not determined solely by individual characteristics. Evidence indicates that substance use is shaped by multiple interacting environmental systems, including the family, peer group, school, community, socioeconomic environment, and broader cultural and media contexts. Ecological perspectives therefore provide a useful framework for understanding substance abuse as a behaviour embedded within social environments rather than as an exclusively individual problem.

The family represents one of the most immediate environmental contexts influencing young people's behaviour. Family-related risk factors include parental substance use, inadequate parental monitoring, family conflict, favourable family attitudes towards substance use, neglect, abuse, and household instability. Conversely, strong parent–child attachment, effective supervision, supportive communication, and clear behavioural expectations can provide protective influences against substance use (Felitti et al., 1998; Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003; Ryan et al., 2010).

Parental substance use is particularly important because it may influence young people through behavioural modelling, normalisation of substance use, increased access to substances within the household, and family-level stress. Children exposed to parental alcohol or other substance-use problems may consequently experience increased vulnerability to substance-use behaviours (Chassin et al., 2013; Lieb et al., 2002; Sher, 1991).

Parental monitoring is another important family-level factor. Effective monitoring involves parents' knowledge of their children's whereabouts, activities, friends, and behaviour. Research has consistently associated effective parental monitoring with lower levels of adolescent problem behaviour and substance use (Barnes et al., 2006; Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Steinberg et al., 1994). In contrast, inadequate supervision can increase opportunities for young people to engage in risky activities without parental awareness.

The emotional quality of family relationships also matters. Positive parent–child relationships can provide emotional security, support, and healthy coping mechanisms. Conversely, weak emotional bonds, rejection, neglect, and persistent family conflict may increase psychological vulnerability. Attachment-based research indicates that insecure family relationships can be associated with increased susceptibility to substance-use behaviours (Schindler & Bröning, 2015; Wills et al., 2004).



Family conflict and household instability constitute additional concerns. Exposure to domestic violence, persistent conflict, abuse, and household dysfunction can produce stress and undermine the protective functions of the family. The Adverse Childhood Experiences literature has demonstrated associations between household dysfunction and later substance-use problems (Dube et al., 2003; Felitti et al., 1998).

These issues are particularly relevant in Nigeria, where social and economic changes have altered traditional family structures and patterns of parental supervision. Urbanisation, economic pressures, parental migration, changing household structures, unemployment, and limited social-support resources may affect the capacity of families to supervise and support young people effectively.

Previous Nigerian studies provide evidence of environmental influences on youth substance use. Adelekan and Ndom (1997) documented changes in substance-use patterns among secondary school students in Ilorin and linked these patterns to changing social and economic conditions. Fatoye and Morakinyo (2002) reported higher substance-use prevalence among students in urban than rural communities, highlighting the role of urban environmental conditions. Igwe et al. (2009) found that parental substance use, peer substance use, broken family structure, and poor academic performance were associated with psychoactive substance use among secondary school students in Enugu.

Similarly, Owoaje and Uchendu (2009) reported associations between substance use and peer substance use, availability of substances around schools, parental substance use, and poor parent–child relationships. Babalola et al. (2014) found that inadequate parental monitoring was associated with increased risks of alcohol, smoking, and drug use among adolescents in urban Lagos. Amadi et al. (2016) also identified parenting style, family structure, and family conflict as factors associated with substance-use disorder.

Awka South Local Government Area provides a relevant context for examining these environmental influences. The area is a rapidly developing semi-urban setting and includes Awka, the capital city of Anambra State, together with Amawbia, Nibo, Nise, Mbaukwu, and other communities. It hosts major educational institutions, including Nnamdi Azikiwe University, as well as commercial and residential areas that bring together diverse youth populations.

The changing social environment of Awka South may create both opportunities and risks for young people. Commercial activities, educational institutions, peer networks, changing family structures, and access to alcohol and other psychoactive substances create a context in which environmental influences on youth substance use warrant systematic investigation. Although existing studies provide evidence on environmental determinants of substance use in Nigeria, there is limited local evidence concerning the family conditions associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area. Generating such evidence is important for designing contextually appropriate prevention and health-promotion interventions. The present study therefore examined



family environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area.

Problem Statement

Substance abuse among youths poses substantial challenges for public health, education, families, and communities. The consequences may include impaired academic performance, behavioural problems, interpersonal difficulties, mental-health problems, dependence, and other health-related complications. While substance use is often discussed as an individual behavioural problem, environmental conditions can significantly influence whether young people initiate or continue substance use. The family is particularly important because it is the primary social environment in which young people acquire values, behavioural patterns, coping strategies, and expectations.

Inadequate parental supervision, parental substance use, family conflict, domestic violence, poor emotional relationships, and household instability may reduce the protective capacity of the family. However, there remains insufficient local evidence regarding the relative prominence of these family conditions among youths in Awka South Local Government Area. The absence of such evidence limits the ability of health educators, families, schools, community organisations, and policymakers to design targeted interventions. General warnings about the dangers of substance use may have limited effectiveness when the environmental conditions contributing to young people's vulnerability remain unaddressed. The study therefore investigated the family environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area.

Purpose of the Study

The study examined environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. For the empirical component reported in this article, the specific objective was to determine the family environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question:

What are the family environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area?

Theoretical Perspective

The study is anchored in the **Ecological Systems Theory** developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) and extended through the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The ecological perspective proposes that human behaviour develops within multiple interconnected environmental systems. At the microsystem level, the family represents an immediate setting in which young people experience relationships, supervision, communication, behavioural modelling, and emotional support. Other environmental systems, including peer groups, schools, communities, and broader social structures, interact with the family environment.



The theory is relevant to substance abuse because young people's behaviour is shaped by the interaction between personal characteristics and environmental opportunities, expectations, relationships, and constraints. Within the family, parental substance use can provide a behavioural model, inadequate monitoring can increase opportunities for risky behaviour, while family conflict may generate stress. Conversely, emotional support, effective supervision, communication, and clear family rules may provide protection. The ecological perspective therefore provides an appropriate framework for examining family environmental factors associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a **descriptive survey research design**. The design was appropriate because information concerning environmental factors associated with substance abuse was obtained directly from youths in their natural settings without manipulating the variables.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. The Local Government Area has its headquarters in Isiagu and includes Awka, Amawbia, Nibo, Nise, Mbaukwu, and other communities. According to the population information reported in the original study, the area had a population of 189,049 based on the 2006 census. Awka South is characterised by educational, commercial, residential, and administrative activities. The presence of tertiary institutions and a substantial youth population makes the area appropriate for investigating environmental factors associated with substance abuse.

Population of the Study

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

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula:

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

where $N = 45,000$ and $e = .05$.

The resulting sample size was approximately 397. This was increased to 450 to accommodate anticipated attrition. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted. Youths were first stratified into in-school, out-of-school, and unemployed categories. Proportionate allocation was then used, with the initial allocation comprising 250 in-school youths, 130 out-of-school youths, and 70 unemployed youths. Participants were subsequently selected from schools, markets, residential areas, and other relevant locations.



Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using the Family Environmental Factors and Substance Abuse Among Youths Questionnaire (FEFSAAYQ).

The questionnaire employed a four-point Likert scale:

- Strongly Agree = 4
- Agree = 3
- Disagree = 2
- Strongly Disagree = 1.

The family section contained items addressing parental substance use, parental supervision and monitoring, family history of substance use, family conflict and domestic violence, and emotional bonding and parental affection.

Validity of the Instrument

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, comprising two experts in Health Promotion and one in Educational Foundations. Their observations concerning clarity, relevance, wording, and content coverage were incorporated into the final instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot test was conducted among 50 youths in Awka North Local Government Area, which was outside the study area. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .84 for family factors, .81 for peer factors, .79 for community factors, and .82 for school factors. The overall reliability coefficient was .87, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through both printed questionnaires and an electronic Google Form. Ethical clearance was obtained from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, and informed consent was obtained from participants. For in-school youths, questionnaires were administered during school hours. Out-of-school and unemployed youths were reached through markets, residential areas, and WhatsApp. Data collection lasted four weeks. A total of 438 properly completed questionnaires were retrieved and used for analysis, giving a response rate of 97.3%.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted for decision-making.

Mean scores of 2.50 and above indicated agreement that the factor was associated with substance abuse, while mean scores below 2.50 indicated disagreement.

The interpretation ranges were:

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

The data were analysed using SPSS version 25.0.



Results

Family Environmental Factors Associated with Substance Abuse

Table 1. Family Environmental Factors Associated with Substance Abuse among Youths (N = 438)

S/N	Family environmental factor	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD	Decision
1	Growing up in a home where parents or guardians use alcohol, tobacco, or other substances encourages youth substance abuse.	162	183	63	30	3.09	0.873	Agree
2	Poor parental supervision and monitoring of youth activities predisposes young people to substance abuse.	198	176	44	20	3.26	0.836	Agree
3	A history of substance abuse among siblings or close family members increases the likelihood of a youth engaging in substance abuse.	173	182	55	28	3.18	0.857	Agree
4	Family conflicts, domestic violence, and an unstable home environment are associated with substance abuse among youths.	185	178	50	25	3.19	0.863	Agree
5	Youths from homes characterised by poor emotional bonding and lack of parental affection are more vulnerable to substance abuse.	176	181	52	29	3.15	0.872	Agree
Grand Mean						3.17		Agree

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025.

Table 1 shows that all five family environmental factors recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The grand mean of 3.17 indicates that respondents generally agreed that the assessed family environmental factors were associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area.

Poor parental supervision and monitoring recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.836$). Family conflicts, domestic violence, and an unstable home environment ranked second ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.863$), followed by a history of substance abuse among siblings or close family members ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.857$). Poor emotional bonding and lack of parental affection recorded a mean of 3.15 ($SD = 0.872$), while parental or guardian substance use in the home recorded the lowest, although still substantial, mean of 3.09 ($SD = 0.873$). All five factors were therefore accepted.

Discussion

The study found that family environmental factors were associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area, as demonstrated by the grand mean of 3.17. All five family-level factors assessed in the study recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. This finding supports the ecological perspective that young people's behaviour is shaped by conditions within their immediate social environments.



Parental Supervision and Monitoring

Poor parental supervision and monitoring recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.26$). This indicates that inadequate parental awareness of youths' activities, whereabouts, and social relationships was perceived as the most prominent family-level factor associated with substance abuse. The finding is consistent with Dishion and McMahon (1998), who identified parental monitoring as an important protective mechanism against adolescent problem behaviour. Steinberg et al. (1994) similarly reported that parental monitoring is associated with adolescent substance-use behaviour. Arah (2025); Barnes et al. (2006) further demonstrated the importance of parental monitoring in relation to peer deviance, substance use, and delinquency.

The Nigerian evidence also supports the finding. Babalola et al. (2014) found that low parental monitoring was associated with increased odds of alcohol use, smoking, and drug use among adolescents in urban Lagos. The consistency of these findings suggests that parental monitoring is an important target for family-based substance-abuse prevention.

Family Conflict, Domestic Violence, and Household Instability

Family conflict, domestic violence, and an unstable home environment recorded the second-highest mean ($M = 3.19$). This finding indicates that young people exposed to persistent household conflict or instability may experience circumstances associated with greater vulnerability to substance use. The result is consistent with Felitti et al. (1998), whose Adverse Childhood Experiences study demonstrated relationships between household dysfunction and later health-risk behaviours. Arah (2025); Dube et al. (2003) similarly identified childhood abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction as risk factors associated with later illicit drug use. El-Sheikh and Flanagan (2001) also found that parental problem drinking, family conflict, and parental depression can interact in ways that influence children's adjustment. These findings provide a plausible explanation for why unstable and conflict-ridden households may be associated with substance-use vulnerability among youths.

Family History of Substance Abuse

A history of substance abuse among siblings or close family members recorded a mean of **3.18**. This finding indicates that exposure to substance use among family members may contribute to young people's vulnerability. The result is consistent with Chassin et al. (2013), who described both environmental and developmental pathways linking parental substance use with offspring substance-use outcomes. Lieb et al. (2002) likewise found that parental alcohol-use disorders were associated with increased risk of alcohol use and alcohol-use disorders among offspring. The influence may arise partly through behavioural modelling and normalisation. When young people repeatedly observe substance use within their households, they may perceive such behaviour as more acceptable or ordinary. Family members who use substances may also inadvertently increase young people's access to substances.



Emotional Bonding and Parental Affection

Poor emotional bonding and lack of parental affection recorded a mean of 3.15. The finding highlights the importance of the emotional dimension of family relationships. Schindler and Bröning (2015) identified attachment as an important factor in adolescent substance-use vulnerability. Arah (2020); Wills et al. (2004) similarly emphasised the role of parent support in adolescent substance-use behaviour. A supportive parent–youth relationship can provide emotional security and alternative coping resources, whereas weak attachment may leave young people more vulnerable to negative peer influences and maladaptive coping behaviours. The finding therefore suggests that family-centred prevention should extend beyond supervision and behavioural control to include emotional support, communication, affection, and relationship quality.

Parental or Guardian Substance Use

Parental or guardian substance use in the home recorded a mean of 3.09. Although this was the lowest-rated family factor, it remained above the criterion mean and was therefore accepted. This finding is consistent with the social-learning perspective. Young people learn behavioural patterns partly through observing significant others. Where substance use occurs openly within the home, it may influence attitudes towards substances and reduce perceived social barriers to use. Lieb et al. (2002) and Chassin et al. (2013) provide evidence supporting the relationship between parental substance use and offspring substance-use vulnerability. Nigerian studies by Babalola et al. (2014) and Amadi et al. (2016) similarly identified family-related conditions, including parental substance use and dysfunctional parenting, as important correlates of substance-use behaviour.

Conclusion

The study established that family environmental factors are associated with substance abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area. All five family-level factors assessed recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, producing a grand mean of 3.17. Poor parental supervision and monitoring was the highest-rated factor, followed by family conflict, domestic violence and household instability; family history of substance abuse; poor emotional bonding and lack of parental affection; and parental or guardian substance use in the home. The findings demonstrate that family-centred prevention is an important component of addressing substance abuse among youths. Effective prevention should therefore extend beyond individual-level knowledge and behaviour modification to include parenting practices, family relationships, supervision, emotional support, and the management of substance use within households.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents and guardians should strengthen monitoring and supervision of youths. Parents should maintain appropriate knowledge of young people's activities, whereabouts, friendships, and social environments.
2. Parenting education programmes should be strengthened. Health educators, social workers, schools, and community organisations should provide programmes that equip parents with



- practical skills in communication, monitoring, positive discipline, and substance-use prevention.
3. Family communication should be improved. Parents should create supportive relationships that encourage youths to discuss peer pressure, emotional problems, substance exposure, and other challenges.
 4. Families experiencing persistent conflict should receive appropriate support. Counselling and family-support services should be made accessible to households experiencing domestic conflict, violence, or instability.
 5. Substance use within households should be addressed early. Parents or guardians who use psychoactive substances should be encouraged to access appropriate counselling, treatment, and rehabilitation services.
 6. Family-based prevention should be integrated into youth substance-abuse programmes. Public health agencies should include parents and caregivers in prevention initiatives rather than targeting youths alone.
 7. Schools and community organisations should collaborate with families. Prevention programmes should establish communication channels among parents, schools, health professionals, community leaders, and youth-serving organisations.
 8. Local health authorities should develop context-specific prevention programmes. Interventions in Awka South should reflect the family, social, cultural, and economic circumstances of local youths.

Public Health Implications

The findings have several implications for public health practice. First, youth substance abuse should be approached as a social-ecological problem rather than solely as an individual behavioural problem. Second, parental monitoring and positive family relationships should form part of preventive health education. Third, family-based interventions should be incorporated into community substance-abuse programmes.

Health educators can use the findings to develop parent-focused educational programmes addressing supervision, communication, emotional support, recognition of early substance-use behaviours, and appropriate referral for professional assistance.

The findings also suggest the need for collaboration between families, schools, health professionals, community organisations, and relevant government agencies. Such collaboration can strengthen early identification and intervention while reducing the social conditions that increase vulnerability to substance abuse.

Limitations of the Study

The study adopted a descriptive survey design; therefore, the findings demonstrate respondents' perceptions of associations rather than causal relationships. The use of self-reported questionnaire data may also introduce response and social-desirability biases, particularly because substance use is a sensitive topic.



The final analysis was based on 438 valid responses obtained from the selected youth population. Although the response rate was high, the use of purposive and convenience procedures at some stages of participant selection limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised to all youths in Anambra State.

Finally, although the broader research framework considered family, peer, community, and school environmental factors, the empirical results supplied in the study and reported in this article contain the detailed results for the **family-environment component**. Consequently, this article does not claim empirical findings for the other environmental domains that are not supported by reported tables.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study contributes local evidence concerning family environmental factors associated with youth substance abuse in Awka South Local Government Area. It demonstrates that inadequate parental supervision, family conflict and instability, family history of substance use, weak emotional bonding, and parental substance use are important family-level concerns.

The study also extends the application of ecological approaches to substance-abuse prevention within a semi-urban Nigerian setting. Its findings provide a basis for developing family-centred interventions that address the environmental conditions surrounding young people rather than focusing exclusively on individual behaviour.

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Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from Nnamdi Azikiwe University before data collection. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and respondents' information was treated confidentially.

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