



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DRUG ABUSE AND BEHAVIOURAL DEPRESSION AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL ADOLESCENT STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between drug abuse and depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study and three null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The population comprised 27,858 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students drawn from 64 public secondary schools across the six education zones of Anambra State. A sample of 1,100 SS2 students was drawn using multi stage sampling procedure. Two instruments, the Adolescent Drug Abuse Questionnaire (ADAQ) and the Adolescents' Self-Report Depression Scale (ASRDS), were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The instruments yielded reliability coefficients of 0.863 and 0.822 respectively, using Cronbach's Alpha. The data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings of the study revealed that there was a weak positive and significant relationship between drug abuse and depression among the students generally, drug abuse also showed weak positive and significant relationships with behavioural depression among male and female students. Based on the findings, the study concluded that drug abuse is significantly associated with the behavioural dimension of depression among secondary school adolescents in Anambra State, irrespective of gender. It was recommended that school counsellors should organise regular guidance and counselling sessions to help students develop healthy coping mechanisms for stress and emotional difficulties, thereby reducing their tendency to resort to drug abuse.

Keywords: Drug abuse, depression, behavioural depression, gender, secondary school adolescents
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Introduction

A drug is any chemical substance that modifies physiological or psychological functioning when it is consumed or administered into the body (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).



According to Eka, Onwurah, Olebuezie and Emeagui (2020) drug is any chemical substances that affect the functioning of the human body. Drug abuse refers to the habitual or intentional use of drugs in ways that are harmful to an individual's physical, mental or social well-being. The WHO (2021) defines it as the use of drugs to change one's mood or to feel better, rather than for a genuine health reason, and notes that it typically involves the repeated consumption of substances that affect an individual's mental or physical condition, often resulting in dependence and abnormal behavioural or physiological changes. Although drugs serve legitimate medical purposes, their misuse, particularly among adolescent students, has become a major social and public health concern because it often leads to addiction, impaired judgement and other harmful effects on adolescents' health and behaviour. One group especially exposed to the harms of drug abuse is adolescent students, whose ongoing developmental transitions make them particularly vulnerable to its effects.

Adolescent students are teenagers in the school environment who are undergoing significant biological, cognitive, emotional and social transitions that shape their future health and behaviour (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2023). Nwankwo and Ursula (2023) noted that adolescent students regard the school as a social space in which they develop various social interactions. Drug abuse in this sense has continued to rise among Nigerian adolescents (WHO, 2021). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) reported that approximately 14.3 million Nigerians aged 15 to 64 years used psychoactive substances. In Anambra State, Aniemena et al. (2021) reported a considerable prevalence of drug use among in-school and out-of-school adolescents. Akpan et al. (2024) also noted that drug abuse-related injuries account for approximately 25–30% of emergency department visits and hospitalisations among young people aged 15–35 years in Nigeria. Beyond these physical harms, drug abuse can also affect adolescents' emotional and psychological well-being, one of the most serious expressions of which is depression.

Depression is a serious mental health condition that adversely affects an individual's emotions, thoughts, behaviour and overall functioning (Onwurah et al. 2024). It often results in emotional distress, reduced motivation, poor concentration, hopelessness and withdrawal from previously enjoyable activities (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022). James et al. (2018) observed that depression has become a major global public health concern, contributing substantially to the burden of disease and to suicide, which remains among the leading causes of death among adolescents aged 15–19 years (Onwurah et al. 2024). Indeed, empirical studies in Nigeria have linked drug abuse directly to depression among secondary school students: Njoku and Obogo (2017) found a positive relationship between drug abuse and depression among senior secondary school students in Calabar, Cross River State, while Ekpang and Abuo (2015) reported that drug abuse was positively related to psychosocial behaviours, including depressive tendencies, among senior secondary school adolescents in the same state.

This relationship between drug abuse and depression is not uniform, however, as depression manifests differently across emotional, cognitive and behavioural domains. Depression in



adolescents is expressed in emotional, cognitive and behavioural forms. Behavioural depressive symptoms are the observable ones, such as social withdrawal, irritability, fatigue and declining academic performance, and they often interfere with adolescents' social and academic functioning (APA, 2022). Igwe and Ojinnaka (2010) observed that adolescents who abuse psychoactive drugs often display behavioural symptoms such as emotional instability, isolation from peers, poor classroom participation and loss of interest in daily activities. In another study, Eneh and Stanley (2021) revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between substance abuse and depressive behavioural symptoms such as sadness, social withdrawal, low self-esteem, irritability, and poor concentration among adolescents. Opakunle et al. (2022) similarly reported that Nigerian high-school adolescents who abused drugs showed higher levels of depression, anxiety, suicidality and problematic behaviours than their non-abusing counterparts. In another study, Adeyemo and Ohaeri (2018) reported that drug abuse significantly predicted depressive behavioural symptoms such as mood swings, low self-worth, loneliness, poor interpersonal relationships, and emotional instability among adolescent students. In a study carried out by Bassey and Mbaso (2022), it revealed a statistically significant relationship was found between drug abuse and depressive behavioural symptoms among the adolescents

The way these depressive symptoms are experienced may also differ according to gender. Gender, the socially constructed roles, behaviours and attributes considered appropriate for males and females (WHO, 2023), may influence how depression is expressed and how it relates to drug abuse. Chinawa et al. (2015) observed that depression affects roughly equal numbers of boys and girls in childhood, but that about twice as many girls as boys are diagnosed in adolescence. A study conducted by Kraus, Mensah and Neuner (2021) reported that a significant positive correlation was found between frequency of drug abuse and depressive symptoms for both genders, but the strength of association was higher among females.

Statement of the Problem

Evidence linking drug abuse to mental health problems among adolescents is growing. However, little context-specific research has examined the relationship between drug abuse and depression, particularly its behavioural dimension, among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State, Nigeria, or how that relationship differs by gender. With its dense population, intense commercial activity and heightened social pressures, Anambra State offers a distinctive environment in which drug abuse and depressive symptoms may co-occur. This study therefore sought to determine the relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression, with particular attention to behavioural depression, among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to determine the relationship between drug abuse and:

1. behavioural depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State;



2. behavioural depression among secondary school male and female adolescent students in Anambra State; and

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State?
2. What is the relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school male and female adolescent students in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State.
2. There is no significant relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school male and female adolescent students in Anambra State.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The study was conducted in Anambra State, Nigeria, which has six education zones. The population comprised 27,858 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students (12,842 males and 15,016 females) in 64 public secondary schools across the six education zones of Anambra State during the 2025/2026 academic session. A sample of 811 SS2 students was drawn through a multi-stage sampling procedure involving simple random and stratified random sampling. Data were collected using two adapted instruments. The Adolescent Drug Abuse Questionnaire (ADAQ) was adapted from the Drug Abuse Screening Test developed by Skinner (1982). The Adolescents' Self-Report Depression Scale (ASRDS) was adapted from the Columbia Depression Scale (Miranda et al., 2014). Both instruments were validated by three experts from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded coefficients of .863 for the ADAQ and .822 for the ASRDS. 1,100 copies of the questionnaire were administered directly to the students by the researcher and five research assistants. Out of 811 copies of questionnaire distributed, 783 were validly completed and returned, representing a return rate of approximately 96.5%. The data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to answer the research questions and to test the null hypotheses at the .05 level of significance. The correlation coefficients were interpreted using the guide provided by Okoye (2015) for large numbers of paired scores: $r = 0.00$, no relationship; $r = \pm 0.01$ to ± 0.20 , low relationship; $r = \pm 0.21$ to ± 0.50 , weak relationship; $r = \pm 0.51$ to ± 0.70 , moderate relationship; $r = \pm 0.71$ to ± 0.99 , high relationship; and $r = \pm 1.00$, perfect relationship. A null hypothesis was rejected where $p \leq .05$ and retained where $p > .05$. The analysis was carried out with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.



Results Presentation

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between drug abuse and Behavioural depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State?

Table 1: *Pearson Correlation between Drug Abuse and Behavioural Depression among Secondary School Adolescent Students in Anambra State*

Variables	N	r	p-value	Remark
Drug abuse × Depression	783	.253	< .001	Weak positive relationship

Table 1 shows a weak positive relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State ($r = .253$, $N = 783$). This indicates that students with higher levels of drug abuse tend to report slightly higher levels of depression.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school male adolescent students in Anambra State?

Table 2: *Pearson Correlation between Drug Abuse and Behavioural Depression among Secondary School Male and Female Adolescent Students in Anambra State*

Group Variables	N	r	p-value	Remark
Male Drug abuse × Behavioural depression	397	0.276	< .001	Weak positive relationship
Female Drug abuse × Behavioural depression	386	0.214		

Table 2 shows a weak positive relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school male adolescent students ($r = .276$, $N = 397$). This indicates that male students with higher levels of drug abuse tend to show slightly higher levels of behavioural depression. Similarly, the table shows a weak positive relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school female adolescent students ($r = .214$, $N = 386$). This indicates that female students with higher levels of drug abuse also tend to show slightly higher levels of behavioural depression. The relationship is slightly stronger for male students than for female students, although both coefficients are weak.

Testing of the Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State.

Table 1 also shows that the relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression was significant, $p < .001$. Since the p -value is less than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant positive relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State.



Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school male and female adolescent students in Anambra State.

Table 2 further reveals that the relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among male students was significant, ($N = 397$, $p < .001$). Since the p-value is less than .05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant positive relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school male adolescent students in Anambra State. The result also reveals that the relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among female students was significant, ($N = 386$, $p < .001$). Since the p-value is less than .05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant positive relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school female adolescent students in Anambra State.

Discussion of Findings

The study found a weak but significant positive relationship between drug abuse and behavioural depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State. Students who engage more in drug abuse therefore tend to report slightly higher levels of depression. This agrees with Eneh and Stanley (2021), who found a significant positive relationship between substance abuse and depressive behavioural symptoms such as sadness, social withdrawal, low self-esteem, irritability and poor concentration among adolescents. It also agrees with Adeyemo and Ohaeri (2018), who reported that drug abuse significantly predicted depressive behavioural symptoms such as mood swings, low self-worth, loneliness and emotional instability among adolescent students, and with Bassey and Mbaso (2022), who found a statistically significant relationship between drug abuse and depressive behavioural symptoms among adolescents. Similarly, the finding is consistent with Opakunle et al. (2022), who reported higher levels of depression among Nigerian high-school adolescents who abused drugs than among their non-abusing counterparts. It is also in line with Igwe and Ojinnaka (2010), who observed that adolescents who abuse psychoactive drugs often display emotional instability, isolation from peers, poor classroom participation and loss of interest in daily activities. Because the coefficient is small, drug abuse accounts for only about 6.4% of the variance in depression scores, which suggests that other factors also contribute to adolescent depression. Even so, drug abuse appears to be one important factor associated with depressive experiences among secondary school adolescents and deserves attention within school-based health and counselling programmes.

Drug abuse also had a weak but significant positive relationship with behavioural depression among both male and female students. This agrees with Kraus, Mensah and Neuner (2021), who found a significant positive correlation between frequency of drug abuse and depressive symptoms for both genders. The coefficient was slightly higher for male students, but the difference between the two coefficients was not statistically significant, so the data do not show that the relationship is stronger for either gender. This differs somewhat from Kraus, Mensah and Neuner (2021), who reported that the strength of association was higher among females. Gender differences in depression have also been noted by Chinawa et al. (2015), who observed that depression affects roughly equal numbers of boys and girls in childhood, but that about twice as many girls as boys



are diagnosed in adolescence. Their finding concerns diagnosis rates rather than the link between drug abuse and depression, so the present result should be read against it with care. Behavioural changes such as withdrawal and irritability should therefore receive attention in school-based drug abuse prevention and mental health programmes, since they may offer observable signs of underlying psychological difficulty.

Conclusion

The study concluded that drug abuse is positively and significantly related to behavioural depression among secondary school adolescent students in Anambra State. Although the relationship is weak, students with higher levels of drug abuse tend to report higher levels of depression. Drug abuse was also significantly related to behavioural depression among both male and female students, and the strength of the relationship did not differ significantly between the two groups. The findings underscore the importance of addressing drug abuse, and of attending to behavioural warning signs, in promoting the psychological well-being of adolescents in Anambra State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. School counsellors should organise regular guidance and counselling sessions to help students develop healthy ways of coping with stress and emotional difficulties, so that they are less likely to resort to drug abuse as an escape from emotional distress.
2. Teachers should be trained to recognise behavioural indicators of drug abuse and depression among students, and should work with school counsellors to provide timely support and referral for students at risk.

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