



Knowledge and Attitude Towards Substance Abuse among the Female Undergraduates of University of Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the incidents and factors influencing substance abuse among female undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The research explores students' perceptions of substance abuse, identifies the most commonly abused substances, and examines the psychosocial factors, such as academic stress, peer pressure, and mental health issues, that contribute to substance misuse. Additionally, the study assesses barriers to seeking help, such as fear of stigma and lack of awareness about available services, and evaluates attitudes toward substance abuse prevention and intervention programs. A systematic random sampling technique was employed to select 150 respondents from the Faculty of Social Sciences, ensuring a representative sample. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings reveal a significant prevalence of substance abuse, with prescription drugs and alcohol being the most commonly abused substances. The study also highlights the low awareness and participation in existing intervention programs, pointing to the need for enhanced educational initiatives and improved mental health support services. The research concludes with recommendations for university administrations, mental health professionals, and policymakers to address the identified challenges and promote a healthier campus environment.

Keywords: *Substance, Substance abuse, Female undergraduates, mental health, University of Ilorin*

Introduction

Substance misuse has been a part of human history as well (Simon et al., 2020). The drug's use is not inherently bad (Lees et al., 2020). When used appropriately, medications have been a medical boon. For instance, plants, bark, roots, and herbs have all been used to treat illnesses and soothe pain. Nonetheless, illegal drug usage has increased at a never-before-seen rate over the last few decades, reaching every region of the globe. However, the harm that substance misuse does to individuals, families, and society at large makes it a critical issue that has to be addressed among female undergraduate students in Nigerian colleges. As young adults transition to independence, female undergraduates are more vulnerable than male undergraduates to a variety of situations that may impact substance addiction (Smith & Jones, 2020; Adeyemi, 2018). A

comprehensive understanding of the episodes and contributing factors is necessary for effective prevention and intervention efforts regarding drug use in this group (Johnson et al., 2017; Oladipo, 2019).

According to studies, substance usage is particularly prevalent among female undergraduate students in Nigeria (Ogunsola et al., 2019b, Okoro, 2021). According to a study by Ogunsola et al. (2019a) around 23.6% of female undergraduate students reported misusing drugs. Given its prevalence, it is essential to address the issue and implement targeted strategies to mitigate its adverse impacts. Several incidents lead to and perpetuate substance addiction among female undergraduate students at Nigerian universities. Oliver (2018) asserts that Curiosity, academic stress, peer pressure, and a desire to try



new things were noted as the primary drivers of substance use behaviours (Wiss, 2019).

Scholars revealed that female students are more likely to use drugs if they have easy access to drugs, have less parental monitoring, or have seen substance abuse in their family members (Adeyemo et al., 2016). Moreover, the consequences of substance abuse among female undergraduate students extend beyond their health; they also impact their academic performance, social relationships, and long-term socioeconomic opportunities (Johnson et al., 2017). Therefore, addressing substance misuse in this demographic necessitates a multifaceted approach that includes harm reduction, early intervention, and prevention strategies in the community at large as well as in the educational context.

Among the many factors contributing to substance addiction among female undergraduate students are personal, societal, and environmental factors. According to Oshodi et al. (2017), trauma history, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem are among the psychosocial traits that make female students more prone to substance addiction. According to Ajayi & Somefun (2020), cultural influences and societal norms may also contribute to the persistence of substance misuse behaviours among female students, particularly in environments where drug use is encouraged or accepted.

Substance addiction is a worldwide issue that compromises a nation's security, prosperity, and health (Awosusi & Ogbuleke, 2019). Substance abuse, especially among students, is a major concern worldwide, and it appears to be on the rise in most developing countries, particularly among students attending tertiary institutions. It is estimated that 246 million people worldwide, aged 15 to 64, abuse substances (Kotan et al., 2019). Although research has comprehensively examined the intricacies of substance usage among female undergraduate students in Nigerian

Universities, the issue is still not well recognized (Ogunsola et al., 2019a). Specific in this case is the submission that substance abuse is quite common among university students in Edo, Lagos, Osun, and Ekiti, with rates of 77%, 33%, 80%, and 42%, respectively. It's therefore interesting to note that, despite the growing number of students attending postsecondary institutions and the obvious evidence of students abusing drugs, Kwara State was noticeably underrepresented. This is why the study focuses on the knowledge and attitudes of female students on Substance Abuse in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

This study therefore becomes necessary to provide valuable insights for a full understanding of the complex realities and challenges faced by female students who are struggling with substance misuse. This is because drug addiction among female students may coexist with traditional gender roles and societal expectations, cultural and contextual elements specific to the Nigerian context thereby necessitating therapies that are tailored to the culture.

Methodology

The data for the study is primary and these were sourced through questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was divided into two parts, where the first part focused on the socio-demographic characteristics, while the other had knowledge and attitudes to substance abuse among female undergraduate students as its focus. This study was restricted to the students in 200 Level, 300 Level, and 400 Level of the seven (7) departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ilorin, Nigeria because they have stayed for a couple of semesters within the academic community in the University. The basis of this criterion is for the involvement of students that possess adequate knowledge of female students' involvement in substance abuse for a adequate data that could generate objective and reliable



research outcome. The selection of the respondents involved systematic random sampling of 150 students across 200 to 400 levels in each of the departments within the faculty. The data generated for the study were analysed using frequency distribution and simple percentages to present findings.

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The data from this study shows that the majority of participants (85%) are between the ages of 19 and 24, with a smaller portion (15%) being 25 years or older. The sample is fairly distributed across the second and third years, each representing 35% of the participants. Fourth-year students make up 30% of the sample. This distribution suggests that the study includes a balanced representation of students from the second to fourth years, with slightly fewer fourth-year students. The data further shows that the vast majority of participants (91%) were not married, while a small proportion (9%) were married. The majority of participants (57%) live off-campus, while 38% reside on campus, and a small minority (5%) live with their families.

Knowledge and History of Drug Usage and Abuse
The data further indicated that the majority of participants (89%) are knowledgeable about what substance abuse is all about while the remaining percentage refused to respond to the question. It was further revealed that most participants (68%) have engaged in drug use at some point, while 32% have not. This indicates that drug use is relatively common among the students surveyed. Among those who have not indulged in drug use acknowledged to be aware of colleagues who did. This suggests that drug use is known among peers even if not personally experienced.

Table 1: Definition of Substance Abuse

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Substance dependence is the medical term used to describe the use of drugs or alcohol that continues even when significant problems related to their use have developed.	39	26.0
It refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs.	41	27.3
It is the use of a drug in amounts or by methods that are harmful to the individual or others.	30	20.0
It is a form of substance-related disorder.	19	12.7
It is the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs (prescription drugs or illicit drugs) that could change perception, mood, cognition, and behavior	21	14.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table contains the meaning of substance abuse according to the respondents. Some respondents defined it as the use of drugs or alcohol that continues even when significant problems related to their use have developed (26%). It was also defined as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs (27.3%), the use of a drug in amounts or by methods that are harmful to the individual or others (20%), a form of substance-related disorder (12.7%) and the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs (prescription drugs or illicit drugs) that could change perception, mood, cognition, and behaviour (14%). Data from the study further showed that the majority of respondents (73%) do not consider substance abuse to be a problem among female undergraduates at the University of Ilorin, while a smaller portion (27%) believe that it is an issue. This suggests that most students do not perceive substance abuse as a significant concern within this group.

Table 2: Level of Study at which Female Students first Involved in Substance Abuse

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
200 Level	39	26.0
300 Level	81	54.0
400 Level	30	20.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023



The table shows that the student majorly engaged in drug intake and abuse when they were in the third year of their academic activities in the University (54%). The second year of their educational pursuit also received an appreciable response, followed by the fourth year in the University, where the number drastically dropped to 20%.

Table 3: Appealing factors in Substance Abuse

Response	Frequency	Percentage
It is widely available	47	31.3
It is perceived as low risk	31	20.7
Relatively cheaper to procure	44	29.3
The absence of a capable guardian to discourage it	28	18.7
	150	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table above indicates that the majority of respondents (63%) do not perceive substance abuse as a serious problem among female students at the University of Ilorin, while a smaller group (37%) views it as somewhat serious. This shows that while there is awareness of the issue, many students may not see it as a critical concern.

Table 4: Common reasons for substance abuse among female students

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Peer pressure	28	18.7
Academic stress	55	36.7
Curiosity	46	30.6
Mental health issue	21	14.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table above shows that academic stress is seen as the most common reason for substance abuse among female students, with 38% of respondents identifying it as a key factor. Peer pressure follows with 26%, while mental health issues and curiosity are considered less significant but still relevant, at 20% and 16%, respectively. This suggests that pressures related to academics and social influences are major contributors to substance abuse in this population.

Table 5: Commonly Abused Substances

Response	Substances Commonly Used by Students		Substances Commonly Abused by Students	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Alcohol	32	21.3	58	38.7
Tobacco	41	27.3	17	11.3
Tranquilizers	49	32.7	22	14.7
Spice/K2	17	11.3	14	9.3
Inhalants	11	7.4	39	26.0
	150	100.0	150	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The data above indicates that tranquilizers (32.7%) are the most commonly abused substance among female students. Others included Tobacco (27%), alcohol (21.3%), Spice/K2 (11.3%) and Inhalants (7.4%). Other data from the study revealed the commonly abused substances among the students. These are indicated according to the rate of responses derived from the study. According to the table, alcohol was rated the highest (38.7%). Others included inhalants (26%), tranquilizers (14.7%), tobacco (11.3%), and Spice/K2 (9.3%).

Table 6: Incidents that contribute to substance abuse initiation among female students

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Family issue	25	16.7
Relationship problem	21	14.0
Academic failures	49	32.7
Parties and social gatherings	20	13.3
Influence from celebrities/media	23	15.3
Mental health issues	12	8.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The data above shows that academic failures are perceived as the most significant incident contributing to substance abuse initiation among female students, with 32.7% of respondents identifying it as a primary factor. This is followed by family issues (16.7%), parties and social gatherings (13.3%), and influence from celebrities/media (15.3%). Relationship problems (14%) and mental health issues (8%) are viewed as less influential but still relevant factors. This distribution highlights academic stress as the most pressing issue leading to substance abuse, with social and media influences also playing significant roles.



Perceived Sociopsychological Challenges in Substance Abuse

The data affirmed that 98.2% of the respondents have adequate knowledge about the potential psychological challenges emanating from substance abuse. These challenges are expressed in terms of the effects of the usage of the drugs.

Table 7: Effects of Substance abuse among Female Students

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Poor memory and Problems with learning	25	16.7
Mood changes such as depression or irritability	21	14.0
Poor decision-making skills with the increase in risky behaviour	49	32.7
Decreased physical coordination	20	13.3
Slowed breathing and heart rate	23	15.3
Death from overdose or accident associated with use	12	8.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table indicates that poor memory and problems with learning (16.7%) are part of the known effects of substance abuse among female students. Equally worthy of note among these effects are, mood changes such as depression and irritability (14%), decreased physical coordination (13.3%), slowed breathing and heart rate (15.3%), poor decision-making skills with the increase in risky behaviour (32.7%), and death from overdose/over usage or accident associated with use of drugs (8%). The data from the study stressed further the regularity of the manifestation of these effects. According to the respondents, the effects are experienced daily (38%), occasionally (26%), on weekends only after social events (18%), every day/every minute (7%), and those who are unsure of what to say (11%).

Awareness of Substance abuse Prevention and Intervention Programmes in the University. The majority of respondents (60%) affirmed their awareness of substance abuse prevention and intervention programmes. 23% did not know anything about such programmes while 17% did not respond to the question. While this is indicating a general awareness of these programmes, a significant proportion of the student population still lacks such awareness.

None of those who were aware of these programmes had ever participated in them. However, 47.3% of the respondents agreed to participate in substance abuse prevention and intervention programmes if the avenue arises; 22% of them did not see the possibility of their participation in such programmes while 30.7% was undecided about decision to participate.

Table 8: Factors influencing non-readiness to seek for help through the Programmes

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Fear of Stigma	43	28.7
Lack of awareness about available services	80	53.3
Lack of Confidentiality to seek for involvement	27	18.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The data above indicates that the most commonly identified barriers to seeking help for substance abuse among female students are a lack of awareness about available services (53.3%) and fear of stigma (28.7%). Lack of confidentiality is seen as a less significant barrier, affecting 18% of the sample.

Conclusion

This study has shown a complex interaction of factors leading to substance misuse as revealed by the female undergraduate students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ilorin. Tranquilizers, Tobacco, alcohol, Spice/K2 are the most commonly abused substances among female students. Peer pressure, mental health issues, and academic stress are all recognized as important factors in drug usage. The research highlights a troubling disparity in preventative and intervention program awareness and utilization, which is made worse by obstacles including ignorance of available options and fear of stigma. This necessitates a multipronged strategy to combat drug misuse, including expanded access to support services, increased educational programs, and focused treatments meant to address the root causes. In the end, resolving these problems is crucial to creating a more positive and encouraging academic environment.



Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to address the issue of substance abuse among female undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin, they are as follows;

- (a) Efforts should be made to enhance substance abuse awareness and education programs, targeting female students, focusing on risks and consequences, and integrating them into orientation activities and student life initiatives.
- (b) Mental health support services, which should include counselling, peer support groups, and stress management workshops, to combat academic stress, depression, and anxiety linked to substance abuse should be given the necessary attention.
- (c) Universities should enhance the visibility and accessibility of substance abuse prevention and intervention programs by implementing campus-wide campaigns, partnerships with student organizations, and digital platforms.
- (d) Universities should offer students healthy stress management strategies, such as extracurricular activities, time management workshops, and access to recreational and wellness facilities.
- (e) Universities can reduce stigma by implementing anti-stigma campaigns, empathetic staff training, and strict confidentiality for services, fostering a more open and supportive environment for students.
- (f) Stakeholders, including university administrators, medical experts, legislators, and community leaders, must collaborate to prioritize the needs of female undergraduate students and adopt a proactive approach to drug usage prevention.
- (g) Further research is needed to develop culturally relevant solutions and foster collaborative connections that promote the

wellbeing of female students.

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