



## **Factors Contributing to Drug Abuse and Violent Crime Among Youths in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Drug abuse and violent crime constitute serious social and security challenges in Nigeria, with youths disproportionately affected. In Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, rising levels of substance abuse have been closely associated with robbery, assault, cultism, and other forms of violent crime. Anchored on General Strain Theory, this study examined how socio-economic factors such as unemployment, poverty, peer pressure, family instability, and limited access to education contribute to youth drug abuse and violent criminal behavior. A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was adopted, with data collected from 400 respondents drawn from selected communities, of which 377 valid responses were analyzed. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data from in-depth interviews provided contextual insights. The findings revealed that unemployment and poverty were the most significant drivers of drug abuse among youths, while peer influence, family dysfunction, and limited educational opportunities further intensified vulnerability to substance use and violent behavior. Interview evidence indicated that drug use often serves as a maladaptive coping mechanism for socio-economic strain, frequently escalating into robbery and assault. The study also found that youth empowerment programs, expanded access to education and vocational training, strengthened family support, community engagement, and sustained awareness campaigns were widely perceived as effective strategies for reducing drug abuse and violent crime. The study concludes that socio-economic deprivation is central to the drug-crime nexus in Jos North and recommends coordinated economic and social interventions targeting youth vulnerability as a sustainable approach to crime prevention.

**Keywords:** Drug abuse, Violent Crime, Socio-economic factors, Youth, Jos

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### **Introduction**

Drug abuse and violent crime are major global concerns with serious implications for public health, social stability, and development. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) estimated that over 275 million people worldwide used drugs in the previous year, with youths identified as the most vulnerable group. In Sub-Saharan Africa, factors such as rapid urbanization, unemployment, and weak regulatory frameworks have contributed to the rise in drug abuse. A recent systematic review by Ebrahim, Adams, and Demant (2024) confirms that substance use among young people in the region is increasingly driven by structural disadvantages, which in turn fuel aggression, delinquency, and violent behavior.

Nigeria is among the worst-affected countries, with the National Bureau of Statistics (2018) reporting that 14.4% of people aged 15–64 years,

representing about 14.3 million individuals, had used psychoactive substances in the previous year, the majority of whom were under 35 years old. National reports further indicate that cannabis is the most commonly abused illicit drug, while tramadol and codeine are widely misused, and their widespread consumption has been linked to rising levels of insecurity and crime (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018; Federal Government of Nigeria & UNODC, 2021). This connection between drug use and criminality is reinforced by Ajiboye and Olademo (2025), who describe a “youth invasion” in Southwest Nigeria, where economic hardship and peer influence have contributed to a surge in drug-associated behaviors such as robbery, cultism, and other forms of violent crime.

In Plateau State, particularly in Jos North Local



Government Area, the situation is increasingly critical. Studies have empirically demonstrated that drug abuse and crime in Jos North are “Siamese twins,” sustained by socio-economic deprivation and limited opportunities for youths, showing a strong association between the prevalence of substance use and offences such as assault and robbery (Hunduh, Izang, & Hunduh, 2024). These findings suggest that structural factors such as poverty, unemployment, and weak family support are central to understanding the nexus between drug abuse and violent crime in the locality.

Despite the prevalence of youth drug abuse and violent crime in Jos North, few empirical studies have simultaneously examined the underlying socio-economic drivers and the practical strategies for mitigating these behaviors. This study bridges this gap by investigating the socio-economic factors contributing to youth drug abuse and violent crime in Jos North Local Government Area and by proposing actionable strategies for addressing these challenges.

### **Objective of the Study**

#### **The objectives of this study are to:**

- Examine the socio-economic factors contributing to drug abuse and violent crime among youths in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State.
- Identify strategies for curbing drug abuse and violent crime among youths in Jos North Local Government Area.

### **Literature Review**

Drug abuse is commonly defined as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including illicit drugs and the non-medical use of prescription medications (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2021). Expanding this definition, Jatau et al. (2021) conceptualize drug abuse not merely as a health problem but as a manifestation of broader socio-economic neglect, where individuals resort to substance use as a coping mechanism for structural disadvantages. Violent crime, which is closely linked to substance abuse, has been

described by Adekunle (2025) as often arising from the psychopharmacological effects of drugs, in which intoxication lowers inhibitions and impairs judgment, thereby increasing the likelihood of aggressive acts such as armed robbery and assault.

Socio-economic factors are widely recognized as major drivers of drug abuse and violent crime, particularly among youths. Egwuaba, Egboh, and Igboanugo (2024), in a study conducted in Awka Metropolis, found that high rates of youth unemployment pushed many young people toward drug use as a survival strategy. Their findings revealed that prolonged idleness creates a vacuum often filled by substance dependence, which subsequently drives involvement in robbery and other criminal activities to sustain addiction. Similarly, Olanrewaju et al. (2022), in a cross-sectional study of undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria, found that more than nine out of ten respondents identified peer pressure as a major determinant of drug involvement, suggesting that the desire for social acceptance often overrides rational decision-making among youths.

Family instability has also been identified as a critical compounding factor. Obande-Ogboanya et al. (2024) empirically established that youths from broken homes and polygamous family settings in South-East Nigeria were significantly more likely to abuse methamphetamine (locally known as Mkpurummiri). Their study further revealed a strong association between the use of this substance and extreme aggression, with a high proportion of users exhibiting violent behavior toward family members. This finding underscores how dysfunctional family environments increase youths' vulnerability to dangerous substances and violent conduct.

The relationship between drug abuse and violent outcomes has been further established in regional studies. Eteng, Ogar, and Ogunka (2025), in their study of youths in Calabar Metropolis, found a significant positive correlation between hard drug consumption and violent behaviors such as sexual assault, cultism, and gang violence. In the specific context of Jos North Local Government Area,



Hunduh, Izang, and Hunduh (2024) confirmed that drug abuse and crime are “Siamese twins,” mutually reinforcing problems sustained by socio-economic deprivation and limited opportunities for youths. Their findings demonstrated that poverty and unemployment in Jos North function not only as economic challenges but also as serious security threats that perpetuate cycles of drug dependence and criminal activity.

Regarding strategies for mitigation, national drug policy documents advocate a balanced approach that combines drug education, counseling, and rehabilitation services to reduce demand for illicit substances, with the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency playing a central implementation role (Federal Government of Nigeria & United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). However, Ajiboye and Olademo (2025) argue that effective interventions must extend beyond individual treatment to address the social networks that facilitate access to drugs. They recommend community-based monitoring systems in which families, traditional leaders, and community stakeholders actively participate in shielding youths from negative peer influences. Similarly, Egwuaba et al. (2024) emphasize that such strategies are most effective when complemented by vocational training and skill-acquisition programs aimed at economically empowering youths and reducing their vulnerability to recruitment into criminal networks.

Overall, the literature demonstrates a clear link between socio-economic deprivation (poverty and unemployment), social vulnerability (peer pressure and family instability), and drug-induced violent crime among youths. Although existing studies, particularly Hunduh et al. (2024), provide important insights into the situation in Jos North, there remains a need for empirical research that integrates these factors with community-based intervention strategies. This study contributes to the literature by examining how the socio-economic drivers of drug abuse and violent crime in Jos North can be addressed through practical and context-specific solutions.

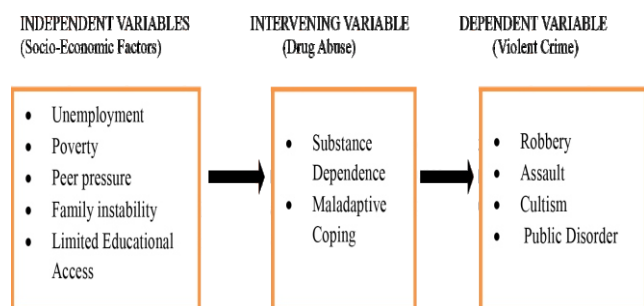
### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) (1992; 2006). The theory posits that deviant behavior arises not from inherent criminal tendencies but from exposure to strain, which generates negative emotional states such as frustration, anger, and resentment. Agnew identifies three major sources of strain: the failure to achieve positively valued goals (e.g., economic success), the removal of positively valued stimuli (e.g., loss of social or family support), and the presentation of negative stimuli (e.g., abuse or persistent conflict).

General Strain Theory provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between drug abuse and violent crime among youths in Jos North Local Government Area. In the context of this study, high youth unemployment and poverty represent a “failure to achieve goals,” causing sustained psychological distress. Consequently, youths adopt drug abuse as a maladaptive coping strategy to escape the stress of idleness. However, substance use impairs judgment and fuels aggression, transforming this coping mechanism into violent criminal behaviors such as robbery and assault, serving either as an outlet for frustration or a means of illegally obtaining economic resources.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study. remain slow in



The conceptual framework illustrates the pathway through which socio-economic factors influence youth involvement in violent crime in Jos North Local Government Area. Socio-economic factors



such as unemployment, poverty, peer pressure, family instability, and limited educational opportunities constitute the independent variables that generate strain and social vulnerability among youths. These conditions increase the likelihood of drug abuse, which serves as an intervening variable by encouraging maladaptive coping behaviors and impairing judgment. Drug abuse, in turn, heightens aggression and impulsivity, thereby increasing youths' involvement in violent crimes such as robbery, assault, cultism, and public disorder. The framework highlights drug abuse as a key mechanism linking socio-economic disadvantage to violent criminal behavior among youths.

**Methodology**

The study employed a survey research design to investigate the socio-economic factors contributing to drug abuse and violent crime among youths in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. This design was appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from a large number of respondents within the study area. The population of the study consisted of individuals living in Jos North, which had a projected population of 643,200 in 2024. Using the help of Yamane's formula for sample size determination, 400 respondents were selected to represent the population. The sample consisted of youths, community leaders, and security personnel, thereby providing diverse perspectives on the subject matter. The research instrument was validated through expert review by scholars in criminology.

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0, with descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) employed to address the research questions. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected key informants, and the qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns consistent with the study objectives.

**Results and Discussion**

The study examined the socio-economic factors that contribute to drug abuse and violent crime

among youths in Jos North Local Government Area, A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to respondents, of which 377 were properly filled and returned, while 23 were incomplete or invalid for analysis. Results presented in this section are based on the 377 valid responses obtained from the field survey.

*Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 377)*

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	221	58.6
	Female	156	41.4
Age	15–20 years	59	15.6
	21–25 years	137	36.3
	26–30 years	89	23.6
	31–35 years	92	24.4
Educational Level	Primary	34	9.0
	Secondary	118	31.3
	Diploma/NCE	98	26.0
	Bachelor's and above	127	33.7
Employment Status	Employed	122	32.4
	Unemployed	255	67.6
Marital Status	Single	220	58.4
	Married	152	40.3
	Divorced	5	1.3

*Table 2: Respondents view on the Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to Youth Drug Abuse and Crime in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State.*

Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Unemployment is a major driver of drug abuse among youths in Jos North.	211 (56.0)	161 (42.7)	5 (1.3)	0 (0.0)
Peer pressure is a significant factor leading to substance abuse.	194 (51.5)	171 (45.4)	9 (2.4)	3 (0.8)
Poverty increases the likelihood of engaging in drug use.	187 (49.6)	180 (47.7)	7 (1.9)	3 (0.8)
Family dysfunction contributes to high prevalence of drug abuse.	162 (43.0)	193 (51.2)	14 (3.7)	8 (2.1)
Drug abuse is influenced by lack of educational opportunities.	149 (39.5)	203 (53.8)	17 (4.5)	8 (2.1)

**Sources: Field Report, 2024**



The data presented in Table 2 reveal that socio-economic deprivation and social instability are the primary drivers of drug abuse and violent crime in Jos North. The analysis shows an overwhelming consensus, with 98.7% of respondents identifying unemployment and 97.3% identifying poverty as major contributors. These findings support General Strain Theory (Agnew, 2006), which argues that the inability to achieve valued goals, such as financial independence, generates strain that may lead youths to adopt deviant coping mechanisms, including drug use. This finding also aligns with Egwuaba, Egboh, and Igboanugo (2024), who observed in Awka Metropolis that prolonged idleness creates an economic vacuum, forcing youths into substance use as a survival strategy. Similarly, Jatau et al. (2021) identify low socio-economic status as a critical risk factor that exposes urban youths to the drug trade as a substitute for legitimate employment.

Furthermore, peer pressure was identified by 96.9% of respondents as a significant factor. This high percentage supports the findings of Olanrewaju et al. (2022), who reported that 93.1% of Nigerian undergraduates cited peer influence as the main driver of substance abuse. Similarly, Ajiboye and Olademo (2025) describe this phenomenon as a "youth invasion," where peer-driven criminal networks exploit the economic desperation of young people to recruit them into drug-fueled gangs.

Additionally, the study established a strong link between family instability and deviant behavior, with 94.2% agreement. Within the framework of GST, this represents the "removal of positively valued stimuli," such as the loss of parental support. This finding is consistent with Obande-Ogbuinya et al. (2024), who empirically established that youths from broken or polygamous homes in South-East Nigeria were significantly more likely to abuse Methamphetamine (Mkpurummiri) and exhibit aggressive tendencies due to a lack of supervision. Finally, 93.3% of respondents indicated that limited educational opportunities influence drug use. Consistent with Jatau et al. (2021), low

educational attainment restricts legitimate avenues for success, increasing the likelihood of youths engaging in crime and deviant coping strategies. These quantitative results are reinforced by qualitative data from key informant interviews. A senior police officer in Rikkos linked these factors school dropout (education), lack of work (unemployment), and association with "bad boys" (peer pressure) in the following remark:

*“Most of the youths we arrest for robbery and assault usually tell us the same story they dropped out of school, couldn't find work, and started hanging around bad boys, from there, drugs use begins. They don't start with crime; it's usually drugs first, then theft or violence comes later.” (IDI: police officer, 42 years, Rikkos – 7th April 2025)*

Table 3: Respondents' Views on Strategies to Curb Youth Drug Abuse and Violent Crime in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State

Item	(SA) (%)	(A) (%)	(D) (%)	(SD) (%)
Youth empowerment programs (skills training, entrepreneurship) can reduce drug abuse	160 (42.5)	190 (50.4)	20 (5.3)	7 (1.8)
Community engagement and mentorship programs can prevent violent crime	150 (39.8)	200 (53.1)	18 (4.8)	9 (2.4)
Increasing access to education and vocational training will decrease youth involvement in drugs and crime	170 (45.1)	180 (47.7)	20 (5.3)	7 (1.9)
Strengthening family support and parental supervision reduces youth drug abuse and violent behavior	155 (41.1)	195 (51.7)	18 (4.8)	9 (2.4)
Awareness campaigns in schools and communities can help prevent drug abuse and crime	140 (37.1)	200 (53.1)	25 (6.6)	12 (3.2)

**Sources: Field Report, 2024**

The findings in Table 3 highlight a strong public consensus on the need for a multi-faceted approach to curbing drug abuse and crime, prioritizing both economic empowerment and social support systems. Respondents overwhelmingly supported Youth Empowerment (92.9%) and Access to Education/Vocational Training (92.8%) as the most effective strategies. This suggests that addressing the root cause, unemployment is perceived as more critical than relying on punitive measures alone. This aligns



with Egwuaba, Egboh, and Igboanugo (2024), who argue that sustainable interventions must be paired with robust vocational training and skill acquisition programs to economically empower youths, thereby removing the "strain" of idleness that can lead to drug dependence.

Furthermore, strategies targeting social structures received high approval, with Community Engagement (92.9%) and Strengthening Family Support (92.8%) being rated highly. This supports the recommendation by Ajiboye and Olademo (2025), who emphasize that effective interventions must address social networks that facilitate drug access, including community-based monitoring systems. Similarly, Obande-Ogbuinya et al. (2024) highlight that strengthening family supervision is essential for identifying early warning signs of aggression among youth.

Finally, 90.2% of respondents agreed that awareness campaigns in schools and communities are effective, validating the approach of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2021), which advocates for rigorous drug education and public enlightenment to reduce the demand for illicit substances among youths.

### **Conclusion**

This study has established that drug abuse and violent crime in Jos North Local Government Area are not isolated social vices but symptoms of deeper socio-economic and structural decay. The findings empirically confirm that high rates of unemployment, poverty, and family instability have created fertile ground for these twin problems to thrive. Consistent with Agnew's General Strain Theory, youths in the area resort to drug use as a maladaptive coping mechanism for economic frustration ("strain"), which subsequently lowers inhibitions and escalates into violent behaviors such as robbery and assault.

Furthermore, the study supports Hunduh, Izang, and Hunduh's (2024) characterization of drug abuse and violent crime in Jos North as "Siamese twins" mutually reinforcing problems that cannot

be addressed in isolation. While peer pressure and family dysfunction initiate the pathway to drug use, the chronic lack of economic opportunities sustains the cycle of crime. Therefore, the study concludes that security strategies focusing solely on punitive measures, without simultaneously addressing youth idleness and poverty, are likely to yield limited results.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made. First, the Plateau State Government, alongside NGOs, should establish vocational training centers in hotspots like Rikkos and Gangare to equip youths with employable skills that reduce the idleness driving drug dependence. Simultaneously, community leaders and parents need to create robust neighborhood watch programs to disrupt drug access and protect youths from the influence of peer-driven gangs. Furthermore, religious and traditional bodies should conduct sensitization programs for parents to strengthen supervision and prevent family neglect, which this study identified as a critical driver of youth aggression. Lastly, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) should collaborate with health authorities to provide rehabilitation services that include psychological counseling specifically designed to manage aggression linked to dangerous substances like Mkpurummiri.

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