

Analysis of Drugs and Alcohol Usage among Undergraduate Students in Rivers State: Implications for Counselling

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Abstract

This study, guided by four research questions, examined drug and alcohol usage among undergraduate students in Rivers State, Nigeria and the implications for counselling. The study was a cross sectional descriptive study. 105 undergraduate students were sampled randomly from two universities. The instrument for data collection was a 40-item, four point likert scale questionnaire titled “Drug and Alcohol Usage by Undergraduate Students Inventory (DAUUSI); it had a reliability coefficient of 0.79. Data analysis was done using mean and standard deviation. The study revealed, that marijuana, cigarette, caffeine, alcohol and tramadol were the major drugs and alcohol used by undergraduates in Rivers State; that students use drugs and alcohol to enable them blend and be accepted by their peers and friends, have fun and enjoy life, and to imitate what they see in movies and on social media; that drugs and alcohol use helps to reduce examination stress, but increases the risk of involvement in cult activities as well as poor academic performance among others. On the basis of these findings, some implications for counselling were highlighted. It was recommended, among others, that the effects of drugs and alcohol consumption should be made known to undergraduates through enlightenment programmes.

Keywords: alcohol, drugs, undergraduate, students, counselling

Introduction

Adolescence is the most complex and often critical stage in the development of an individual. This is the period when young adults are faced with a myriad of problems and challenges as they journey through this very important phase of life, especially as regards their developmental tasks (Uzoeshi, 2002). When they eventually scale through the senior secondary school hurdle and get admitted into an institution of higher learning after sitting for the pre-qualifying examinations, be it a university, polytechnic or college of education, they come face to face with the complexities of life in an academic institution. Okoro and Lahai (2021) noted that individuals in this age bracket are more often found in institutions of higher learning in the country. They are often at a stage between subservience and autonomy. Thus they are faced with making choices between two or more alternatives. This gives rise to a dilemma. One of such is the challenge of drugs and alcohol usage. Adekeye et al. (2015) stated that the use of drugs, alcohol and other substances by youths is now quite alarming. The problem of drugs and

alcohol abuse seems to be an issue of great concern both locally and internationally. This is because research has shown that the intake of alcohol and drugs by youth decreases their Intelligence Quotient, reduces their academic pursuits, encourages health risks and also makes them susceptible to engage in criminal activities (Masenga, 2017).

What actually is a drug? Dorwick and Maline (2007) described a drug as any substance, either made by nature or produced by man, which has the ability to change the normal functioning of the human body due to its chemical and/or physical properties. Similarly, Lewinsohn et al. (2007) stated that a drug is any substance beside water and food which when ingested controls the user's pattern of thought, sight, behaviour and feelings. It modifies and controls emotional, mental and physical functioning and coordination of its users. It can find its way into the human body through various avenues such as through smoking, chewing, drinking, injections, inhalation and application on the skin through rubbing. The World Health Organization (2002) defines a drug as any substance or product that is used or intended to be used to modify or explore the physiological system or pathological state in the benefit of the recipient. These substances could be in liquid, solid or gaseous form.

Drug abuse, on the other hand, is the non-medical use of drugs by an individual in a way which affects them physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively (Tuwei, 2014). Non-medical in the sense that it was not prescribed by a certified medical personnel before its consumption. It has been observed that many undergraduate students make use of licit and socially acceptable drugs such as tobacco, alcohol and nicotine without much concern. It is pertinent to note that the use of these substances is a worldwide occurrence. There is the general belief that adolescents graduate from licit to illicit drugs, and from mild to more harmful substances in the long run. They ingest these substances intentionally with the aim of deriving some form of satisfaction from them. Mandal (2021) asserts that addiction to drugs is a terrible problem which is pronounced among many people in contemporary society. Often times, youthful undergraduate students are seriously addicted to drugs. Lately, an unpleasant increase in the use of drugs and substances by undergraduates have been noticed. It has been argued that drug consumption by students are not only meant for pleasure purposes, but also to tackle emotional issues such as anxiety, bad peer associates, depression and household problems (Adelekan, et al. 1992).

Ukwayi et al. (2013) and Ajayi et al. (2019) noted that at present, alcohol is the most widely abused drug by adolescents worldwide. Arguing further, the researchers assert that alcohol misuse leads to students missing classes, performing woefully in examinations, discontinuing schooling and generally dismantling the age-long goal of academic institutions. Some of the negative health consequences of heavy alcohol consumption, according to the researchers, include: babalaas, syncope, mugging, over-reliance on alcohol and even loss of life. Aside this, there are also psychological and physiological repercussions it has on students. Ngesu et al. (2008) noted that students who abuse substances are quarrelsome, moody, and rebellious in nature, unhappy, perplexed, and disruptive in behaviour and adversely react to criticism. Obiechina and Isiguzo (2016) classified the drugs and substances commonly abused by students into seven groups namely: narcotics, depressants, stimulants, inhalants, cannabis,

hallucinogens and aphrodisiacs. The continuous sale and consumption of these drugs is posing serious challenges both in the Nigerian society and the world in general.

Two theories served as a framework for this study: Reinforcement Theory of Alcohol Use propounded by John Janeway Conger in 1956; and the Gateway Drug Theory (GDT) of Denise Kandel propounded in 1975. Reinforcement theory of alcohol use is based on the assumption that individuals begin to take-in alcohol, consume it in large quantities and become addicted to alcohol because they derive some benefits, either long or short term, from the regular intake of the substance. Such benefits could be in the form of eradication of uneasiness and discomfort, reduction of stress and depression as well as other psychosocial changes such as reducing the atmosphere of a boring day, enhancing productivity and stimulating the feeling of independence. It was also noted that approval of peers was also a reinforcing factor in the consumption of alcohol (Prakash et al., 2020).

The second theory on which this study is hinged on is the Gateway Drug Theory (GDT). This theory, a medical hypothesis, argues that most people graduate from the use of softer drugs to harder drugs as time goes on. It argues that the use of soft, legal drugs such as alcohol regularly could gradually lead to the risk of involvement in hard and illicit drug use. The four drugs which are often referred to as gateway drugs are nicotine, alcohol, marijuana and prescription pills (Pudney, 2002; Choo et al., 2008).

Numerous research studies have been carried out on alcohol and substance abuse in tertiary institutions in and outside Nigeria with varying but informative results and conclusion on this subject. For instance, Adekeye et al. (2015) carried out a study on the assessment of alcohol and substance use among undergraduates in selected private universities in southwest Nigeria. 431 students were randomly sampled from four private institutions in southwest Nigeria. The study found out that tobacco, alcohol, energy drinks, tranquilizers and inhalants were the prominent substances used by students. The study emphasized the need for an urgent public health prevention and intervention programme in Nigerian campuses.

Okorie et al. (2020) initiated an empirical study on the effect of drug abuse on the academic performance of students. The study sampled 215 students in tertiary institutions in Wukari, Taraba State. The findings of the study showed that drug abuse significantly impacted negatively on the academic performance of students. Similarly, Ukwaiyi et al. (2013) also examined how poor academic performance of students is influenced by alcohol and drug abuse. The research concluded that alcohol abuse not only led to poor academic performance, but also encouraged risky sexual behaviour and violence. Daily counselling was recommended to aid the victims overcome this habit. Amongin (2017) arrived at the conclusion that alcohol and drug abuse is detrimental to the smooth academic progress of students who make use of it.

Okoro and Lahai (2021) found out that the use of drugs and other substances was prevalent among students in tertiary institutions; with dire consequences for their academics, health and general wellbeing. Masenga (2017) observed that majority of students agreed that drug use and abuse was a common thing in institutions of learning; and that marijuana, alcohol and cigarettes were the most abused drug by undergraduates. Awoyinfa (2012) in his study of female

undergraduate students revealed that there was a significant relationship between the use/abuse of alcohol and their morals, as well as social relationships. However, no significant negative effect was observed in the academic performance of the female students. Lastly, Obiechina and Isiguzo (2016) and Nevadomsky (1985) also noted that drugs are quite deadly and lethal if used carelessly.

The purpose of this study was to examine drug and alcohol usage among undergraduate students in Rivers State, and the implications for counselling.

The following objectives were derived:

- 1) To find out the major drugs available for use by undergraduate students in Rivers State.
- 2) To identify the reasons responsible for the use of drugs and alcohol by students in Rivers State.
- 3) To determine when undergraduate students are more likely to use drugs and alcohol.
- 4) To itemize the effects of drugs and alcohol use on undergraduate students.

Research questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

- 1) Which drugs and substances are frequently used by undergraduate students in Rivers State?
- 2) Why do undergraduate students use drugs and alcohol?
- 3) At what time are undergraduate students more likely to engage in alcohol and drug use?
- 4) What are the perceived effects of the use of drugs and alcohol by undergraduates?

Methodology

This study was a cross-sectional descriptive study. Aggarwal and Ranganathan (2019) explained that a cross sectional study has to do with the collection of data on the availability of one or more variables of interest, whether exposure or outcome as they are found in a given population of concern at any given point in time. The target population of this study was all undergraduate students in the five National Universities Commission (NUC) approved universities in Rivers State namely: Rivers State University, University of Port Harcourt, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, PAMO University of Medical Sciences, and Rhema University. Two randomly picked universities namely: Rivers State University (RSU) and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) were sampled for the study. Both institutions are state-owned. The two universities accounted for 30% of the universities in Rivers State derived through the Taro Yamane statistics.

The simple random sampling technique was adopted to select 105 undergraduate students for this study from the two universities. To cater for ethical considerations, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and what was required of them. Respondents who obliged participated voluntarily without any form of incentives. Participants were told not to give their names in order to keep their responses anonymous.

The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire tagged “Drug and Alcohol use by Undergraduates Students Inventory (DAUUSI)”. It was a four Likert scale instrument of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The

questionnaire had two sections: A and B. Section A focused on the background information of the respondents such as name of institution, gender, age, level of study, residency and religion. While Section B contained the four research questions. Each research question had ten items, making a total of forty items. The validity of the instrument was ascertained by the use of face and content validation techniques by three lecturers of the Department of Educational Foundations, Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State. The experts made some corrections and suggestions which were incorporated into the final copy of the instrument used for the survey. The reliability of the instrument was established by administering the instrument on 20 students of Bayelsa State College of Education, Sagbama. This was done through test-re-test method at an interval of one week. Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of 0.79 was derived. The researchers personally administered the instrument to the respondents. Proper completion and retrieval of the 105 copies of the questionnaire administered was achieved, thereby giving a 100% return rate.

The research questions were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. 2.50 was adopted as the cut-off mark. Any item which scored 2.50 and above was deciphered as “Agree” while any item which scored below 2.50 was deciphered as “Disagree”. The analysis was carried out using IBM statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 25.

Presentation of results

Research question one: Which drugs and substances are frequently used by undergraduate students in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation ratings of the respondents on drugs and substances frequently used by undergraduate students in Rivers State (n = 105)

S/N	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	SD	Remarks
1	Marijuana	28	39	21	17	2.74	1.03	A
2	Cigarette	35	56	14	-	3.20	.66	A
3	Cocaine	15	23	40	27	2.25	1.00	D
4	Heroin	16	19	42	28	2.22	1.01	D
5	Caffeine	29	47	20	09	3.10	1.98	A
6	Manpower	20	47	22	16	2.68	.96	A
7	Alcohol	43	37	10	15	3.03	1.04	A
8	Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD)	08	07	63	27	1.96	.80	D
9	Shisha	11	17	58	19	2.19	.96	D
10	Tramadol	19	41	29	16	2.60		A
Aggregate						2.60	1.03	A

\bar{x} = mean; SD = standard deviation; A = Agree; D = Disagree

The result in table 1 revealed that item 1 (2.74), item 2 (3.20), item 5 (3.10), item 6 (2.68), item 7 (3.03) and item 10 (2.60) had mean ratings greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 on a four point rating scale. This indicates that these items are the agreed substances (drugs and alcohol)

used by undergraduate students in Rivers State. The aggregate mean of 2.60 and standard deviation range of .66 and 1.98 indicates that the responses of the respondents was close to the mean but not close to one another.

Research question two: Why do undergraduate students use drugs and alcohol?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation ratings of the respondents on why undergraduate students use drugs and alcohol (n = 105)

S/N	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
1	To enable them blend and be accepted by their peers and mates	20	61	22	02	3.26	.90	A
2	To overcome the stress and rigours of university life.	15	18	41	31	2.12	1.02	D
3	Just to have fun, relax and enjoy life	18	43	29	15	2.63	.92	A
4	To make one sexier and attractive to the opposite sex	10	22	55	18	2.23	.85	D
5	It makes one bold, fearless and courageous	26	55	10	14	2.89	.93	A
6	Out of curiosity and the spirit of adventure	14	38	41	12	2.51	.87	A
7	My parents and elderly relations smoke and drink	21	24	49	11	2.52	.93	A
8	To imitate what they see on movies and the social media	39	27	19	20	2.81	1.14	A
9	Boredom and the need to keep one busy during free periods	23	10	50	22	2.32	1.04	D
10	To improve their academic performance and grades	10	23	39	33	2.10	.96	D
Aggregate						2.54	.96	A

\bar{x} =mean; SD = standard deviation; A = Agree; D = Disagree

The result in table 2 revealed that item 1 (3.26), item 3 (2.63), item 5 (2.89), item 6 (2.51), item 7 (2.52) and item 8 (2.81) scored above the criterion mean of 2.50 on a four point rating scale. This indicates that these items are the agreed reasons by undergraduate students on why they use drugs and alcohol. The aggregate mean of 2.54, as well as the standard deviation range of .87 and 1.14 indicated that the responses of the respondents were not only close to the mean but was also close to one another.

Research question three: At what time are undergraduate students more likely to engage in alcohol and drug use?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation ratings of the respondents on the time undergraduates are more likely to engage in alcohol and drug use (n = 105)

S/N	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
1	Early in the morning	05	19	56	25	2.04	.78	D
2	During examination periods	09	26	42	28	2.15	.92	D
3	When they want to have sex	27	44	28	06	2.88	.86	A
4	During break time or lecture free periods	41	50	04	10	3.16	.89	A
5	Late at night when others are asleep	02	12	68	23	1.93	.64	D
6	During night parties on campus	44	49	12	-	3.30	.67	A
7	Anytime of the day	55	26	20	04	3.26	.90	A
8	When on semester breaks or long holidays	70	07	11	17	3.24	1.17	A
9	During inter-institutions competitions	11	25	43	26	2.20	.93	D
10	Before taking a meal	20	17	48	18	2.36	.99	D
Aggregate						2.65	.88	A

\bar{x} = mean: (SD) = standard deviation: A = Agree: D = Disagree

From the results presented in table 3, the mean ratings of respondents on item 3 (2.88), item 4 (3.16), item 6 (3.30), item 7 (3.26) and item 8 (3.24) exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50 on a 4 point scale. They are therefore accepted as the time undergraduate students are more likely to partake in drugs and alcohol use. The aggregate mean of 2.65, as well as the standard deviation range of .64 to 1.17, indicated that the responses of the respondents were both close to the mean and to one another.

Research question four: What are the perceived effects of the use of drugs and alcohol by undergraduates?

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation ratings of the respondents on the perceived effects of the use of drugs and alcohol by undergraduates (n = 105)

S/N	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
1	It improves the academic performance of students	17	29	33	26	2.35	1.03	D
2	It makes them violent and disruptive	43	31	11	20	2.93	1.13	A
3	It encourages other students to do drugs and consume alcohol	26	41	20	18	2.71	1.03	A
4	It facilitates bonding between males and females	09	18	49	29	2.07	.90	D
5	It reduces stress and tension during examination periods	27	52	19	07	2.92	.86	A
6	It improves memory and alertness during classes	09	27	43	26	2.16	.92	D

7	It brings about poor academic performance	13	53	13	16	2.65	.90	A
8	It makes students become lazy and lethargic towards their studies	15	18	41	31	2.16	1.01	D
9	It increases the risk of involvement in cult and violent activities	76	11	13	05	3.49	.90	A
10	It makes the users respected and feared on campus	16	37	27	25	2.40	1.02	D
Aggregate						2.58	.97	A

\bar{x} = mean; SD = standard deviation; A = Agree; D = Disagree

The result in table 4 revealed that the following items had a mean rating above the criterion mean of 2.50: item 2 (2.93), item 3 (2.71), item 5 (2.92), item 7 (2.65) and item 9 (3.49). They are therefore accepted as the perceived effects of drugs and alcohol use by undergraduates. The aggregate mean of 2.58 and the standard deviation values of the 10 items in the table range from .86 to 1.13 which indicated that the responses of the respondents are not only close to the mean but also close to one another.

Discussion of the findings

The result in table 1 showed that marijuana, cigarette, caffeine, alcohol and tramadol are the major drugs and substance used by undergraduate students in Rivers State. The table also revealed that cocaine, heroin, shisha and LSD are not prominent substances used or abused by undergraduates. This study is in line with those carried out by Adekeye et al. (2015), and Okoro and Lahai (2021) which showed that alcohol, cigarettes, coffee and Indian hemp were among the core substances associated with undergraduates.

The result in table 2 indicates that undergraduate students use drugs and alcohol in order to: enable them blend and be accepted by their peers and friends; have fun and enjoy life, and to imitate what they see in movies and on social media, out of curiosity and influence from their parents/relatives. The findings of this study agree with those of Ukwanyi et al. (2013), and Adekeye et al. (2015) which pointed out that students take drugs and alcohol for fun, use by parents and peers, as well as to boost their courage.

The result in table 3 revealed that undergraduates use drugs and alcohol more when they want to have sex, during break or free periods, during night parties on campus and when on semester or long breaks. This is in line with the study conducted by Ajayi et al. (2019), Nevadomsky (1985), Adelekan et al. (1992) which noted that alcohol and drugs use by undergraduates was more prevalent during holidays and on a daily basis.

The result in table 4 shows that some of the perceived effects of alcohol and drug usage on undergraduates include: violent and disruptive behaviour, encourages others to do drugs and alcohol, reduces stress and tension during examination periods, and increases the risk of involvement in cult activities. This study agrees with the study of Okorie et al. (2020) which noted that students who use alcohol and drugs are prone to indiscipline and mental imbalance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that marijuana, cigarette, caffeine, alcohol and tramadol are the major drugs and substance used by undergraduate students; undergraduate students use drugs and alcohol because of a number of reasons as identified by this study; and that there are negative effects of use of drugs and alcohol by undergraduates as identified in this study.

Implications for Counselling

Based on the outcome of the study, the following are the implications for counselling:

1. Guidance counsellors in tertiary institutions should be trained specially to handle alcohol and drugs addiction cases.
2. As a helping profession, counsellors need to put in more effort to discourage the reckless abuse of alcohol and drugs by undergraduates in universities.
3. Counsellors need to understand that some undergraduates are into drugs not willingly, but due to some external factors. Thus they need self-esteem counselling.
4. Finally, counselling practitioners should come up with new strategies and techniques on how to handle this vexing issue of alcohol and drug use among undergraduates.

Recommendations

From the results obtained, the following are recommended:

1. The effects of the consumption and abuse of drugs and alcohol should be made known to undergraduate students in the universities through sensitization and students' enlightenment programmes.
2. University authorities should enact stringent rules and regulations to prohibit and regulate the use and accessibility of undergraduate students to drugs and alcohol on campus.
3. Parents and older relatives should also play their part by cautioning their undergraduate wards on the dangers of drug and alcohol use and misuse.
4. Guidance and counselling services should be initiated in all university campuses in Rivers State to partake in peer counselling and other substance abuse related scenarios.

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