Review Article

OPEN ACCESS

Survey of Socio-Economic Factors and Substance Abuse Among Secondary School Students in Cross River State, Nigeria

Ikum Micheal Ikum

Department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

Email: wizzysaint75@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Background: Substance abuse among adolescents is a growing public health concern in Nigeria, with a town like Obubra Local Government Area (LGA), Cross River State, experiencing rising trends of substance abuse.

Objective: This study examined the socio-economic background and Substance abuse among secondary school's students in Cross River State, Nigeria. It explores the awareness, attitude and practice of substance abuse, reasons for substance abuse as well as factors associated with substance abuse among secondary school students Obubra Local Government Area (LGA), Cross River State, Nigeria.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey design was employed. A representative sample of senior secondary students (n ≈ 260) from three secondary schools in Obubra was selected using stratified random sampling method. Data were gathered via a structured questionnaire. The method of data analysis included frequency distributions, and simple percentages.

Results: Around 210 respondents representing 84 percent agreed that they have received lectures on substance abuse at school. Similarly, 115 respondents representing 46 percent agreed that there is drug education awareness program in their schools but they are not effective. 100 respondents representing 40 percent had positive attitude towards drug abuse while 150 respondents representing 60 percent have negative attitude towards drug abuse. A significant number of respondents representing 42.4 percent are said they are involved in substance abuse due to peer pressure. 154 respondents or 61.6 percent says the relationship between their family environment and their behavior towards substance abuse is somewhat supportive, but not strict about substance use. 95 respondents or 38 percent are of the opinion that their friends use drugs and other substances very often. Marijuana is the most abuse substance with 35.6 percent of the respondents abusing it.

Conclusion: The study concluded that a significant number of students engage in the use of substances such as alcohol, marijuana, etc often due to peer pressure, family background, and lack of adequate parental guidance. Thus, interventions should include school-based prevention programs, counseling services, parental education, and community outreach to mitigate peer pressure, strengthen parental engagement, among others.

KEYWORDS: Substance Abuse, Secondary School Students, Obubra, Cross River State, Simple Percentages.

INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse among adolescents, particularly secondary school students, has become a growing public health concern globally and in Nigeria. The World Health Organization (WHO,

2021) defines substance abuse as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. During adolescence, young people are particularly vulnerable to risky behaviors due to rapid psychological, emotional, and physical changes. These factors, coupled with peer pressure, lack of parental guidance, societal influence, and the desire for experimentation, have contributed significantly to substance abuse among secondary school students, (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, (UNODC), 2020).

In Nigeria, the problem is becoming increasingly pronounced, with studies showing that students are experimenting with a wide range of substances including alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, tramadol, codeine, and other prescription drugs (Oshodi, Aina, & Onajole, 2010). Cross River State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, is not immune to this trend. The state's proximity to international borders and the existence of seaports may contribute to the ease of drug trafficking and availability of illicit substances (NDLEA, 2022). Moreover, the influence of popular culture and media has been identified as an enabling factor in encouraging drug use among youths.

Previous studies have highlighted that the abuse of substances among secondary school students often leads to adverse academic, social, and psychological consequences such as poor academic performance, truancy, delinquency, mental health issues, and involvement in criminal activities (Oshiname & Ngom, 2019). Despite the efforts by governmental and non-governmental organizations to curb the menace, substance abuse among adolescents in Cross River State continues to rise, necessitating a comprehensive investigation into the root causes, patterns, and impacts of this behavior.

Substance abuse among secondary school students in Cross River State presents a serious challenge to the educational system, public health, and overall societal well-being. Although several interventions have been initiated at national and state levels, the prevalence of substance abuse in schools remains alarming. Recent reports indicate a rise in the number of students indulging in drug use, with substances such as cannabis, tramadol, and codeine being most commonly abused, (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2022 & Eze, 2021).

There is growing concern that substance abuse is significantly affecting students' academic achievements, mental health, and moral development. Many students who engage in substance use demonstrate poor school attendance, declining academic performance, aggression, and are often at the center of disciplinary cases (Adelekan, 2016). Moreover, the lack of school-based counseling services, limited parental supervision, and inadequate enforcement of drug control policies in school environments appear to exacerbate the problem (Obot, 2013).

In Cross River State, there is a paucity of empirical data on the extent, nature, and underlying factors of substance abuse among secondary school students. Without such data, the formulation and implementation of effective prevention and intervention strategies remain difficult. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the knowledge gap by exploring the awareness, attitude and practice of substance abuse, reasons for substance abuse as well as factors associated with substance abuse among secondary school students in the State, with a view to recommending practical solutions to mitigate the problem.

This study therefore examines socio-economic background and Substance abuse among secondary school's students in Obubra Local Government Area. Cross River State, Nigeria. The paper is structured into five sections. After this introductory section, section two reviews related literature. The methodology is discussed in the third section. Section four comprises

results and discussion of findings, and finally, section five draw conclusions based on the findings and recommends the way forward.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Concept of Substance Abuse:

Substance abuse refers to the misuse of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, prescription medications, and illegal drugs, often resulting in social, psychological, and physical harm (UNODC, 2021). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable due to peer pressure, curiosity, emotional instability, and a desire for social acceptance (Umaru & Umma, 2015). In Nigeria, studies have shown that a significant number of secondary school students engage in substance use, with cannabis, codeine, and alcohol being among the most commonly abused drugs (NDLEA, 2020).

Empirical literature:

Khoza and Shilubane (2021) examined the substance use and associated factors among in-school adolescents in South Africa. The study employed a descriptive research design, and purposive sampling was applied to select the participants. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, and data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 programme. The findings show good financial background (69%), more pocket money (67%), high financial difficulties (67%), availability and accessibility of substances (51%), and psychological factors (low self-esteem, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder) as contributing to learners' involvement in substance use. The study concluded that substance use is a matter of serious concern in secondary schools, and several factors are believed to be perpetuating the behaviour. The government should put strict measures in place to ensure the appropriate use of marijuana and for the purpose indicated. Teachers' inadequate knowledge of contributory factors to substance use by learners could mean that they could not educate them about substance-related harm.

Mbachu *et al*. (2020) examined the rate and socio-demographic profile of psychoactive substance use among secondary school students in selected rural communities in Anambra state, Nigeria using a cross-sectional study in which multistage sampling was used to select 494 students from selected secondary schools in Anambra state. Data on age, gender, socioeconomic status, student status, school category, alcohol, tobacco and intravenous drug use were obtained using pretested semi-structured questionnaires. Analysis of data was done using IBM SPSS statistics software version 20.0, frequency, percentages and means were calculated, with cross-tabulation done for variables (Chi-square and Fishers exact test where applicable). The study concluded that the rate of about 22% alcohol use by secondary school students in rural south eastern Nigeria, which is strongly associated with male gender, low socioeconomic status, day student status and public-school attendance is high.

Oshodi, Aina, and Onajole (2010) conducted a study on substance use among secondary school students in Lagos, Nigeria. The study found that over 20% of students had experimented with one or more psychoactive substances, with cannabis, alcohol, and cigarettes being the most commonly abused. The study also linked substance use to peer pressure, parental neglect, and lack of awareness about the dangers of drug use. Adelekan (2016) investigated self-reported drug use among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria. The research revealed that substance use often begins in early adolescence and increases with age and academic level.

Factors contributing to this trend include the availability of drugs in communities and poor parental supervision. The study emphasized the need for school-based intervention programs.

Eze and Omeje (2018) studied substance abuse among adolescents in Enugu State and found that students involved in substance abuse showed a decline in academic performance, school attendance, and emotional stability. Their study confirmed that friends who use drugs greatly influence the likelihood of a student engaging in similar behavior, consistent with Social Learning Theory. Aliyu and Ibrahim (2020) examined the prevalence and determinants of substance abuse among secondary school students in Kano State. Their findings indicated a high level of experimentation with prescription drugs like tramadol and codeine, mostly due to the influence of social media and peer networks. The study recommended stricter regulation of pharmaceutical sales and youth-targeted awareness campaigns. Agbaje and Alabi (2021) explored drug abuse among secondary school students in Cross River State. Their research reported that students in both urban and rural schools are affected, though urban students had slightly higher usage rates. The authors found that lack of effective guidance and counseling units in schools contributed to the problem. They advocated for stronger school policies and drug education programs.

Theoretical Framework

Overview of the Theory:

Social Learning Theory posits that individuals, especially adolescents, learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling. According to Bandura, learning can occur in a social context even without direct reinforcement. Children and adolescents are particularly impressionable and often mimic the behaviors of parents, peers, teachers, celebrities, and others they perceive as role models.

Application of the Theory to the Study:

The Social Learning Theory provides a strong framework for understanding how environmental factors—such as peer pressure, parental behavior, and media exposure—contribute to the initiation and continuation of substance abuse among secondary school students. It suggests that intervention strategies should focus on changing the social environment, strengthening positive role models, and promoting drug-free behaviors through education and awareness campaigns.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted the survey research design to examine socio-economic background and Substance abuse among secondary school's students in Obubra Local Government Area. Cross River State, Nigeria. The survey research design entails the selection and study of samples chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelations of the variables. The design is used to study both small and large population to discover relative incidence, distribution and interaction between psychological and social variables (Isangedighi, Joshua, Asim & Ekuri, 2004).

Study Area

The study is Obubra Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State. The study was conducted among students in selected public schools in Obubra Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised of 260 senior secondary school students of St. Brendan secondary school, Iyamoyong, and Commercial secondary school, Apiapum in Obubra Local Government Area.

Sampling Technique

The study adopted the stratified random sampling. This is done by dividing the entire population into homogeneous groups called strata. Stratified random sampling allows researcher to obtain a sample population that best represents the entire population being studied. This type of sampling involves statistical inference made using a subset of a population.

In this case, the researcher sampled students in St. Brendan secondary school, Iyamoyong, and Commercial secondary school, Apiapum in Obubra Local Government Area. In these two secondary schools, the researcher sampled 130 students each from each school making it a total of 260 students. The researcher divided the study populations into sub-sets by splitting them into different classes.

Table 1: Sample distribution for the study

A. St. Brendan Secondary School, Iyamoyong	
Classes	Number of Students Sampled
SS1	40
SS2	40
SS3	50
Total A	130
B. Commercial Secondary School, Apiapum	
Classes	Students Sampled
SS1	40
SS2	40
SS3	50
Total B	130
Total sample size (A+B)	260

Inclusion criteria:

Students in senior classes who gave their assent/consent to participate in the study and whose school authority gave us permission were recruited into the study.

Exclusion criteria:

Students with significant physical or mental handicap, which could affect their ability to respond validly to the study instrument, were excluded from the study.

Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire was constructed by the researcher. The instrument was divided into two parts. This instrument was constructed by the researcher using a two-point likert scale with responses of Yes and No. For proper administration of the questionnaire, the researcher met with students' that were selected. The researcher

briefly explained the purpose of the exercise to them and the necessity for them to response objectively to the questionnaire items. With the help of research assistants, copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents at the various secondary schools and collected back the same day.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Data were collected from the field was entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 25.0)12 for analyses. Data were presented using tables and charts. Chi-square test was used to compare categorical variables and level of statistical significance set at p<0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Two hundred and sixty (260) questionnaires were administered but two hundred and fifty (250) were returned satisfactorily completed; giving a response rate of 97.7%. Almost half (49.4%) of the respondents were 14 to 17 years of age, 51.2% were male students, a larger number (40.0%) were in SS3 while 100% of the respondents were Christians. Most (68.8%) of the respondents live with both parents and have their educations jointly sponsored by them (64.8%). Almost half (48.0%) of the fathers attained secondary education.

Table 1: Summary of Respondents

Questionnaire	Responses according to categories	Total	Percentage (%)
No. returned	250	250	97.7
Not returned	10	10	2.3
Total	260	260	100

[Source: Field survey by the Author, 2025]

Table 2: Respondents' Socio-demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Age		
10 – 14	23	9.2
14 – 17	123	49.2
17- 20	104	41.6
Sex		
Male	128	51.2
Female	122	48.8
Class Level		
SS 1	70	28.0
SS 2	80	32.0
SS 3	100	40.0
Religion		
Christianity	250	100.0
Traditional	0	0

Living situation		
Father only	14	5.6
Mother only	43	17.2
Both parents	172	68.8
Siblings	10	4.0
Others (staying alone or with friends)	11	4.4
Father's educational level		
No formal education	15	6.0
Primary	30	12.0
Secondary	90	36.0
Tertiary	115	48.0
Sponsorship		
Father only	38	15.2
Mother only	40	16.0
Both parents	162	64.8
Siblings	5	2.0
Self-sponsorship	5	2.0

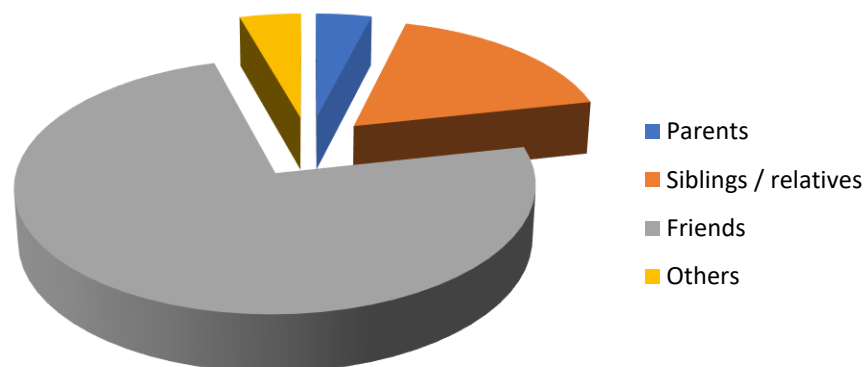*[Source: Researcher's computation,2025]*

In Table 3, 84.0% of the students said they had heard about substance abuse; and friend's introduced 74.0 % of the respondents to substance abused (Figure 1) and a significant number of respondents representing 42.4 percent are said they are involved in substance abuse due to peer pressure (Figure 2).

Table 3: Awareness, Attitude towards and Practice of respondents on substance abuse

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Ever received lectures on substance abuse at school		
Yes	210	84.0
No	40	16.0
Attitude towards substance abuse		
Positive	100	40.0
Negative	150	60.0
Ever consumed alcoholic drink		
Yes	55	22.0
No	195	78.0
Types of alcoholic drinks ever consumed		
Beer	37	14.8
Palm wine	168	67.2
Local gin	45	18.0

Last episode of alcohol consumption		
One day prior to the survey	63	25.2
Within one week ago	108	43.3
Within one month ago	79	31.6
Overall history of substance abuse		
Yes	77	30.8
No	173	68.2
Types of substance ever abused		
Caffeine	30	12.0
Marijuana	89	35.6
Cocaine	0	00.0
Tramadol	27	10.8
Alcohol	62	24.8
Cigarette	42	16.8
Last time any of the substances was abused		
On the day of the survey	47	18.8
One day before the survey	37	14.8
Within the last one week	108	43.2
Within the last one month	58	23.2
Who introduced you to the practice of substance abuse		
Parents	10	4.0
Siblings/relatives	44	17.6
Friends	185	74.0
Others	11	4.4

[Source: Researcher's computation, 2025]

[Source: Researcher's computation,2025]

Figure 1: Respondents' sources of information on substance abuse
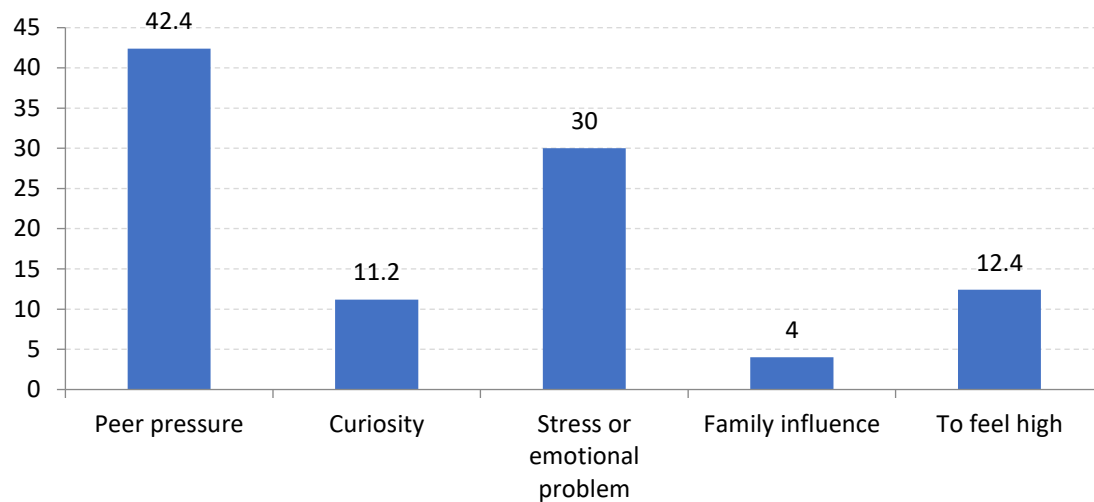
[Source: Researcher's computation,2025]

Figure 2: Reasons for substance abuse among respondents

Table 4: Factors associated with substance abuse among the respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Are they any drug education awareness program in your school?		
Yes, and they are effective	95	38
Yes, but they are not effective	115	46
No	40	16
How would you describe the relationship between your family environment and your behavior towards substance use?		
Very supportive and discourages substance use	57	22.8
Somewhat supportive, but not strict about substance use	154	61.6
Unstable and contributes to my curiosity or use of substances	39	15.6
How often do your friends use drugs or other substances?		
Very often	95	38
Sometimes	48	19.2
Rarely	35	14
Never	45	18
I don't know	27	10.8
What are the main reasons you (or your peers) use substance?		
Peer pressure	106	42.6
Curiosity	28	11.2
Family influence	10	4
Stress or emotional problems	75	30
To feel high	31	12.4

DISCUSSION

In terms of awareness, from the findings of the study, around 210 respondents representing 84 percent agreed that they have received lectures on substance abuse at school. Similarly, 115 respondents representing 46 percent agreed that there are drug education awareness program in their schools but they are not effective. This finding corroborates the finding of Agbaje and Alabi (2021) explored drug abuse among secondary school students in Cross River State and found that lack of effective guidance and counseling units in schools contributed to the problem of substance abuse. In terms of attitudes, 100 respondents representing 40 percent had positive attitude towards drug abuse while 150 respondents representing 60 percent have negative attitude towards drug abuse. 40% of respondents having a positive attitude towards drug/substance abuse indicate a significant minority that may either support, normalize, or be indifferent to the dangers of drug use. It depicts that a significant portion of the population may be vulnerable to drug experimentation, addiction, and related health complications (mental disorders, STDs, overdose). Furthermore, it points to the ineffectiveness or insufficiency of existing drug education, prevention programs, or school curricula. The finding that 100 out of 250 respondents (40%) have a positive attitude toward drug or substance abuse is a significant concern. It reflects potential normalization of drug use, inadequate prevention strategies, and the need for targeted educational, health, and policy interventions. While not a majority, this level of approval can still fuel social acceptance and increased use, especially among vulnerable populations.

In terms of reasons for substance abuse, a significant number of respondents representing 42.4 percent are said they are involved in substance abuse due to peer pressure. This result is in line with the result of Oshodi, Aina and Onajole (2010) which linked substance use to peer pressure. In terms of factors associated with substance abuse among respondents, 154 respondents or 61.6 percent says the relationship between their family environment and their behavior towards substance abuse is somewhat supportive, but not strict about substance use. The finding that 61.4% of respondents describe their family environment as "somewhat supportive but not strict" regarding substance use reflects a permissive parenting style that poses moderate to high risk for drug experimentation and abuse. While not overtly supportive of substance use, this environment lacks the structure and discipline necessary to strongly deter it. Effective prevention must therefore involve strengthening family engagement, communication, and boundary-setting.

Around 95 respondents or 38 percent are of the opinion that their friends use drugs and other substances very often. This outcome reinforces the finding of Eze and Omeje (2018) who studied substance abuse among adolescents in Enugu State and found that friends who use drugs greatly influence the likelihood of a student engaging in similar behavior, which is consistent with the Social Learning Theory. From the findings Marijuana is the most abuse substance with 35.6 percent of the respondents abusing it. This finding is consistent with that of Oshodi, Aina, and Onajole (2010) who conducted a study on substance use among secondary school students in Lagos, Nigeria. The study found that over 20% of students had experimented with one or more psychoactive substances, with cannabis, alcohol, and cigarettes being the most commonly abused.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the socio-economic background and Substance abuse among secondary school's students in Obubra Local Government Area. Cross River State, Nigeria. It explores

the awareness, attitude and practice of substance abuse, reasons for substance abuse as well as factors associated with substance abuse among secondary school students in Obubra Local Government Area in Cross River State. Substance abuse among secondary school students in Obubra, Cross River State, presents a serious social and public health concern with far-reaching implications for the students, their families, and the broader community. The findings of this study reveal that a significant number of students engage in the use of substances such as alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs, often due to peer pressure, family background, and lack of adequate guidance. The consequences include poor academic performance, health complications, increased risk of criminal behavior, and disruption of personal development. To address this challenge, it is essential for stakeholders—including parents, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, and government agencies—to collaborate in creating effective prevention and intervention strategies. These may include implementing comprehensive school-based drug education programs, strengthening parental supervision, promoting youth engagement in positive activities, and enforcing stricter regulations on the sale and distribution of drugs around schools. Ultimately, tackling substance abuse among secondary school students in Obubra requires a holistic and sustained approach aimed at fostering a safe and supportive environment that enables young people to make informed and healthy choices for their future.

REFERENCES

[1] Adelekan, M. L. (2016). Self-reported drug use among secondary school students in Nigeria: A review of recent findings. Nigerian Journal of Psychiatry, 14(1), 15-20.

[2] Agbaje, M. A., & Alabi, O. S. (2021). Drug abuse among secondary school students in Cross River State: Causes and consequences. Nigerian Journal of Educational Research and Evaluation, 20(3), 44–52.

[3] Aliyu, U. M., & Ibrahim, S. (2020). Prevalence and determinants of substance abuse among secondary school students in Kano State. African Journal of Drug and Alcohol Studies, 19(2), 103–117.

[4] Bandura, A. (1977). Social Learning Theory. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

[5] Eze, C. (2021). The prevalence and impact of drug abuse among Nigerian youth. Journal of Youth and Substance Use, 9(2), 75-83.

[6] Eze, J. N., & Omeje, J. C. (2018). Influence of peer group and family background on drug abuse among adolescents in secondary schools. Journal of Educational Research and Development, 12(1), 67–75.

[7] Mbachu, *et al.* (2020). Sociodemographic profile of psychoactive substance use among selected secondary school students in rural Nigeria. International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health https://doi.org/10.1515/ijamh-2020-0086

[8] National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). (2020). Annual report on drug abuse and trafficking in Nigeria. NDLEA Publications.

[9] National Institute on Drug Abuse. (1980). Theories of drug abuse;selected contemporary perspectives. NIDA Re- search Monograph 30. March 1980.

[10] Obot, I. S. (2013). Substance use among students and its implications for drug policy in Nigeria. African Journal of Drug and Alcohol Studies, 12(2), 101-110.

[11] Oshiname, F. O., & Ngom, P. (2019). Understanding youth drug abuse in rural and urban settings in Nigeria. International Journal of Social Sciences, 7(3), 38-45.

[12] Oshodi, O. Y., Aina, O. F., & Onajole, A. T. (2010). Substance use among secondary school students in an urban setting in Nigeria: Prevalence and associated factors. African Journal of Psychiatry, 13(1), 52–57. https://doi.org/10.4314/ajpsy.v13i1.53430

[13] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2021). World Drug Report 2021. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr2021.html

[14]   Umaru, Y., & Umma, A. (2015). Assessment of the effectiveness of drug education programs in Nigerian secondary schools. African Journal of Drug and Alcohol Studies, 14(1), 23–32.

[15]   WHO. (2021). Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health. World Health Organisation.