Patterns and Demographic Correlates of Drug Use Among Undergraduates In Akwa Ibom State

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ABSTRACT
The aim of this study was to investigate the patterns and predictors of drug use among undergraduates in Akwa Ibom state. A cross-sectional study of 600 randomly selected students was conducted, using standard measures of drug use and a section to measure drug use and demographic variables. Respondents' mean age was 21.05 years (SD = 4.24) while age at drug use debut was 16.15 (SD = 2.01). Results showed that, overall, mean score on DUDIT was 27.55 (7.46). A comparison of respondents from the 3 universities showed no significant difference in drug use: 27.16, 28.55 and 26.95 for UniUyo, AKSU and RU respectively. Results also showed that while 22.66% of respondents never used drugs other than alcohol, about 77% had used drugs other than alcohol ranging from between twice a month to about twice a week. Results also indicated that about 45% of respondents were poly drug users of varying degrees. The most significant correlates of drug use were male sex (r = -.43; p<.01), earlier age at drug use debut (r = -. 42; p<.01), Off-campus residential status (r = .37; p<.01); and current age (r = -.29: p<.01). It is recommended that intervention aimed at reducing high risk drug use and provision of services in universities should be put in place. Drug education could be built into the university orientation programs with a view toward providing information-based intervention.

I. INTRODUCTION

Drug use among young people, especially school-going youths is becoming increasingly problematic because of its serious health, developmental and social-economic consequences (Abikoye et al., 2021; Balsa et al., 2011; Banzer et al. 2017; Orford, 2001; Parlmer et al. 2009; Park et al. 2005; Petry, 2007; Sussman et al., 2011). In a survey conducted by the Narcotics Division of the Hong Kong Security Bureau (NDHKSB, 2019), the proportions of lifetime drug, tobacco, and alcohol use among all participating students were 2.5%, 7.0%, and 56.7%, respectively. Research also revealed that substance users started consuming psychoactive substances during junior secondary school years (Kyei & Ramagoma, 2013), highlighting the importance of focusing research and intervention efforts on drug use among young persons.

Studies have demonstrated that university students are particularly vulnerable to drug use, given the freedom from parental guidance and the tendency to experiment that typify the lives of many university students. Kyei and Ramagoma (2013) found a 65% prevalence rate of alcohol use university students and fingered peer pressure as the main predictor of alcohol consumption. Other studies (e.g. Abikoye & Adekoya, 2010; Abikoye et al., 2014; Ajao, 2014; Osuafor & Okoli, 2018; Peltzer & Ramlgan, 2009) have reported similarly high prevalence of alcohol and drug use among university students.

While empirical evidence appears to be consistent regarding the high prevalence of drug use among university students, findings have been rather mixed with regards to predictors of drug use among this vulnerable population, especially in Akwa Ibom state where recent studies have indicated worrisome trends in drug use (Abikoye et al., 2021). Mudavanhu and Schenck (2014) attributed drug use to cultural activities and rituals which make substance use unavoidable among students. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHS, 2006), for instance, demonstrated that youths aged between 21 and 23 years are at particularly high risk for substance abuse. Other findings have corroborated the conclusion that drug use is associated with younger age (Abikoye & Adekoya, 2010; White et al., 2000; Sax et al., 2002), easy access, family history of substance abuse, peer influences and developmental stage (Alhyas et al., 2015; Mudavanhu & Schenck, 2014). Evidence also indicates that drug use is higher among students far from their families compared to those who live in close proximity with their families (Abikoye & Adekoya, 2010; Biratu & Deyno, 2014).

Drug use among students has also been linked to rapid urbanization, economic development, increased availability, corporate targeting, and weak policy implementation (Ferreira-Borges et al., 2015). Despite the multiplicity of patterns and predictors of drug use, there is a paucity of empirical evidence regarding predictors of drug use among university students in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria.

The pervasive use of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other psychoactive substances remains a major concern among young people globally. Nearly 25% of the total death toll among people aged 25-39 years was related to alcohol use in 2014 (WHO, 2015). This percentage is higher than that of the global alcohol related deaths which is recorded as 7.6% and 4.0% for men and women respectively. The United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (2015) reported about 187,100 drug-related deaths among this population in 2013. Given the huge costs to individuals, families and societies that are attributable to drug use among young persons, especially university students who are expected to drive socio-economic and political activities in Nigeria, it is necessary to examine the issue more critically with a view to shaping interventions aimed at mitigating the adverse effects in various universities.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the patterns of drug use among undergraduate students in universities in Akwa Ibom state. The study also aims at examining some demographic correlates of drug use among undergraduate students in universities in Akwa Ibom state. Findings of the study are expected to pave the way for authorities in various universities in Akwa Ibom state (and by extension, Nigeria) to be guided by evidence-based understanding of prevalence and correlates of drug use, and explore ameliorative strategies aimed at curbing drug use in universities.

II.   METHOD

Settings and Participants

Three universities in Akwa Ibom state were used in this study: University of Uyo (UniUyo), Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU), and Ritman University (RU). The universities are owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria, Akwa Ibom State, and the Private sector respectively. Akwa Ibom state is located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. With 31 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and an estimated population of over 5 million people (World Bank, 2020), the state shares contiguous boundaries with three other states - Cross River state (to the East), Rivers state (to the West), Abia State (to the North) and the Atlantic Ocean (to the South). The core languages of Akwa Ibom state are Ibibio, Annang, Efik and Oro. The state is predominantly Christians (over 95%).

A total of four- hundred and fifty nine participants consisting of 300 males and 159 females were selected from three universities in Akwa Ibom state namely: AKSU, UniUyo, and RU. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 25 years with a mean age of 21.05 years (SD = 4.24) while age at drug use debut was 16.15 (SD = 2.01).

Instrument

Relevant data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Background information on age, level of study in the university, residential status ("On-campus" versus "Off-campus"), and age at drug use debut were collected in the first section of the questionnaire.

Drug use was assessed using the *Drug Use Disorders Identification Test (DUDIT)* (Berman et al., 2003) which consists of 11 items. Items 1-9 are scored 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4; while items 10-11 are scored 0, 2, and 4. The minimum scorable point on DUDIT is 0 and maximum scorable point is 44. When the DUDIT is used in a group where one does not expect to find many drug users, a cut-off point of 6 or more for men with drug-related problems and a cut-off point of 2 or more for women are stipulated (Berman et al., 2003). Empirical evidence supports the psychometric adequacy of DUDIT (Abikoye & Awopetu, 2017; Berman et al., 2003). In the present study, a high internal consistency (α 0.91) was obtained for DUDIT.

Procedure

Four target Faculties were randomly selected (before data collection to ensure uniformity). Data were subsequently collected from four identical Faculties across the three universities. Approval was obtained from the Research / Linkage Board of the Department of Psychology of UniUyo after considering the study's protocols. Permission was also sought and obtained from Management of the three universities after necessary assurances regarding informed consent, safety, confidentiality and anonymity had been given. Having pre-identified the faculties to be covered, purposive sampling technique was used to administer 600 questionnaires (200 per University, 50 per Faculty) to students in their classrooms, hostels and "sit-outs" over a period of select three weeks At the end of the three-week period, 459 copies of the questionnaire were returned with usable data, representing a 76.50% response rate. Participation in the study was voluntary and all participants signed a consent form. Participants were informed that they were at liberty to opt out of the interview or not answer any question if they so chose. Confidentiality and anonymity were also guaranteed.

III. RESULTS

Patterns Drug Use

Respondents' mean age was 21.05 years (SD = 4.24) while age at drug use debut was 16.15 (SD = 2.01). Results showed that, overall, mean score on DUDIT was 27.55 (7.46). This is considerably higher than the expected average score in normal populations (Berman et al., 2003). A comparison of respondents from the 3 universities showed no significant difference in drug use: 27.16, 28.55 and 26.95 for UniUyo, AKSU and RU respectively.

Results also showed that while 22.66% of respondents never used drugs other than alcohol, about 77% had used drugs other than alcohol ranging from between twice a month to about twice a week. Results also indicated that about 45% of respondents were poly drug users of varying degrees. Number of times that respondents used drugs on a typical day varied but over 50% used drugs at least once or twice daily. These and other results, including influence of drug use, craving for drugs, how drug use has affected other activities, guilt feelings as a result of drug use, as well as concerns by significant others about drug use, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant's responses on DUDIT items

DUDIT Items	Responses	n	%
How often do you use drugs other than alcohol?	Never	104	22.66
	Once a month or less	77	16.78
	2-4 times a month	65	14.16
	2-3 times a week	128	27.89
	4 times a week or more	85	18.52
Do you use more than 1 type of drug on the same occasion?	Never	249	54.25
	Once a month or less	98	21.35
	2-4 times a month	51	11.10
	2-3 times a week	28	6.10
	4 times a week/more	33	7.19
How many times do you take drugs on a typical day when you use drugs?	0 times	219	47.71
	1-2 times	184	40.09
	3-4 times	56	12.20
	5-6 times	00	0.00
	7 or more times	00	0.00
How often are you influenced heavily by drugs?	Never	168	36.60
	Less than once a month	127	27.67
	Every month	69	15.03
	Every week	44	9.59
	Daily/almost every day	51	11.10
Over the past year, have you felt that your longing for drugs was so strong that you could not resist it?	Never	251	54.68
	Less than once a month	78	16.99
	Every month	35	7.63
	Every week	43	9.37
	Daily/almost every day	52	11.33
Has it happened, over the past year, have you felt that you have not been able to stop taking drugs once you started?	Never	281	61.22
	Less than once a month	97	21.13
	Every month	00	0.00
	Every week	45	9.80
	Daily/almost every day	36	7.84
How often over the past year have you taken drugs and then neglected to do something you should have done?	Never	151	32.90
	Less than once a month	93	20.26
	Every month	68	14.81
	Every week	82	17.84
	Daily/almost every day	65	14.16
How often over the past year have you needed to take a drug the morning after heavy drug use the day before?	Never	188	40.96
	Less than once a month	152	33.12
	Every month	129	28.10

	Every week	59	12.85
	Daily/almost every day	68	14.81
How often over the past year have you had guilt feelings or a bad conscience because you used drugs?	Never	125	27.23
	Less than once a month	119	25.93
	Every month	106	23.09
	Every week	67	14.60
	Daily/almost every day	42	9.15
Have you or anyone else been hurt (mentally or physically) because you used drugs?	No	185	40.31
	Yes, but not over the past year	122	26.58
	Yes, over the past year	152	33.12
Has a relative or a friend, a doctor or a nurse, or anyone else, been worried about your drug use or said to you that you should stop using drugs?	No	251	54.68
	Yes, but not over the past year	102	22.20
	Yes, over the past year	96	20.92

Results of the inter-correlation analyses are presented in Table 2. The most significant correlates of drug use were male sex (r = -.43; p<.01), earlier age at drug use debut (r = -. 42; p<.01), Off-campus residential status (r = .37; p<.01); and current age (r = -.29: p<.01).

Table 2: Inter-correlation analyses of relationships among age, sex, residential status, age at drug use debut,level in the university and drug use.

Variable	Age	Sex	Residential Status	Age at drug use debut	Level in the university	Drug use
Age	-	-.24*	.47**	-.42**	-.21*	-.29**
[+]Sex		-	.23*	-.27**	.13	-.43**
[+]Residential status			-	-.23*	-11	.37**
Age at drug use debut				-	.13	-.42**
Level in the university					-	-.19*
Drug use						-

[+]Coding of categorical variables: Sex (male = 1, female = 2), Residential status (ón-campus" = 1, Off-campus = 2)

*Correlation significant at 0.05 level

**Correlation significant at 0.01 level

IV. DISCUSSION

The study explored prevalence and demographic correlates of drug use among undergraduate students. Findings indicated that drug use was quite high among the respondents, with majority indicating problematic patterns of drug use. Apart from respondents' high scores (well above the cut-off point for substance abuse as stipulated in the test manual), tItem-by-item analyses of responses to the drug use measure indicate worrisome trends with regard to extent of use, poly substance use, impairments in social and other relationships, harms to self and others and continued used despite warning by significant others. These findings are consistent with empirical evidence indicating that drug use among young people, especially university students, is assuming increasing and worrisome patterns (Abikoye & Adekoya, 2010; Alhyas et al., 2015; Mudavanhu & Schenck, 2014).

Age was significantly associated with drug use, with relatively younger students more likely to abuse substances than their older counterparts. Relatively younger students may not be as capable of resisting peer pressure as their relatively older, more matures counterparts. Moreover, it is quite possible that the excitement of leaving home/parents for a "freer environment" might be too much for the younger students to control. Many young students feel "caged" by their parents (especially children of over-protective parents) and they yearn for opportunities to be "freed". The SAMHS reports had earlier reported that substance abuse, especially drinking, among college students is more pervasive among the relatively younger ones, peaking at age 21–23 years (SAMHS, 2006). The finding of the present study with regards to age is also consistent with that of White et al. (2000) and Sax et al. (2002) reporting more substance abuse among younger students relative to older students. Although these researchers did not adduce possible reasons why more substance abuse was found among

younger students, it is intuitively plausible to opine that being in school at a somewhat younger age brings a great deal of responsibility and stress which allows peer pressure to play a role in drug use due to the desire to fit in and be socially successful.

As demonstrated by previous studies (Abikoye & Adekoya, 2010; Abikoye et al., 2021; Mudavanhu & Schenck, 2014), age at drug use debut was also found to be a significant correlate of drug use. This finding is consistent with previous empirical evidence (Abikoye & Adekoya, 2010; Biratu & Deyno, 2014) indicating that earlier drug use debut indicating with more drug use. Being a male was found to be associated with more drug use, a finding that has been consistently reported in previous studies (Abikoye et al., 2021; Alhyas et al., 2015; Ferreira-Borges et al., 2015; Mudavanhu & Schenck, 2014). Although drug use is on the increase and is becoming increasingly normal, female users are still perceived as deviants by most cultures in the sub-Sahara Africa, especially in Nigeria. Findings of the present study indicating an association between being male and drug use, therefore, appear plausible.

Given the patterns of drug use and other findings of the present study, we recommend policy and intervention aimed at reducing high risk drug use and provision of services in universities and other schools in Akwa Ibom state. Males, relatively younger students and those in the early years of their study should be particularly targeted for intervention. Drug education could be built into the university orientation programs with a view toward providing information-based intervention. As with other problems, the earlier intervention is offered educating students about drug use and addiction, the greater the likelihood of positive outcomes. Like other non-experimental studies, the study utilized self-reported information that are susceptible to certain person-related influences, especially when sensitive issues are involved. The research team, however, took cognizance of these potential limitations and put in place strategies aimed at mitigating their influence on the study.

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