SUBSTANCE ABUSE AS A PREDICTOR OF SCHOOL OUTCOMES AND PSYCHOSOCIALWELLBEING AMONG FEDERAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

Recent reports indicate a steady increase in the use of drugs among students in Nigerian universities. Substances such as cocaine, tramadol, marijuana, codeine, alcohol and other substances are used by students not only for recreational purposes but to cope with the stress and rigours of academic life. This growing trend raises concerns about the effects of these drug uses on the overall wellbeing of the students. This study therefore explored substance abuse as a predictor of school outcomes and psychosocial wellbeing among university students in Anambra State. The study was guided by three research questions and three hypotheses. The study adopted the correlation research design. The population of the study comprised all the undergraduates for the 2024/2025 academic session in the federal university in Anambra State. A total of 493 university students obtained through a Purposive sampling technique made up the sample for the study. Four sets of instruments were used for data collection: Substance Abuse Questionnaire (SAQ), School Outcomes Questionnaire (SOQ), Psychological Well-being Questionnaire (PWQ), and Social Wellbeing Questionnaire (SWQ). These instruments were researcher-constructed, and their validated by experts in the field of Education. The reliability of the instruments was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method and they yielded alpha coefficient indices of 0.71, 0.70, 0.69 and 0.77 for SAQ, SOQ, and PWQ and SWQ respectively. Data collected for the study were analyzed using the co-efficient of determination was used to answer research questions and while simple linear regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses. The study revealed a significant positive correlation between substance abuse and each of the independent variables: school outcomes, psychological and social wellbeing of university students in Anambra State. The study concluded that substance abuse is a significant predictor of school outcomes and psychosocial well-being of university students. The need to address substance abuse among undergraduates in Anambra State was recommended among others.

Keywords: Substance abuse, school outcomes, psychosocial wellbeing, university students

Introduction

The psychosocial well-being and schooling of undergraduates is a global concern, as they could affect not only individual students but also their overall contribution to the development of their society. However, these two are important factors of a student's life and are being threatened by substance use which has been linked to depression, mental health issues among other vices. This is supported by various statistics and findings from literature. For example, a study conducted by the American Psychological Association found that 60% of college students reported experiencing overwhelming anxiety, and 40% reported experiencing depression severe enough to hamper daily functioning (American College Health Association, 2020). Another 2025 study published by the American College health Association-College health Assessment survey found that three in four

college students self-reported feeling stressed while one in five students reported stress related suicidal ideation (Barbayannis, et al,2022).

In Nigeria, there is growing concern about the psychosocial well-being and schooling of undergraduates. This concern is driven by several factors, including the challenges faced by students in their academic pursuits and the impact of these challenges on their mental health and overall well-being. One piece of evidence for this concern is the increasing prevalence of mental health issues among Nigerian students. A study conducted by Dabana and Gobir (2018) found that the prevalence of mental health disorders among university students in Nigeria is significant, with 58% of students experiencing depression with 37.0%,15.7%,3.9% and 1.67% having mild, moderate, moderately severe and severe depression respectively. Orok et al (2023) equally found the prevalence of depression and anxiety, among Afe Babalola University students to be on the rise at 3.1%,1.4% respectively.

Another factor contributing to the concern about the psychosocial wellbeing of undergraduates in Nigeria is the high level of stress and pressures that students experience which could affect their mental health. A study published by Adekale, Oyebade, Adeleke and Atolagbe (2022) found that the majority of university students reported experiencing moderate levels of stress, and persistence susceptibility to such stressful situations could lead to deterioration of academic performance, poor relationship with friends, and health problems among other vices..

Furthermore, the quality of education and support services available to undergraduates in Nigeria is not always sufficient to meet their needs. The majority of students (93%) reported that mental health promotion was not emphasized enough in their curriculum and 74.3% were unaware of support groups related to mental health promotion in school (Okeke et al, 2024),in other places universities students face challenges in assessing adequate mental health support and counseling services due to financial constraints, lack of awareness, negative perceptions of stigma (Fadele, et al, 2024)) among other difficulties which can exacerbate psychosocial issues and hinder academic success. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensuring the wellbeing and academic success of Nigerian undergraduates. This is given that issues of psychosocial health could make a student vulnerable to substances abuse.

Substance abuse refers to the excessive or harmful use of substances such as alcohol, drugs, or other chemicals especially when they were not prescribed by a licensed medical practitioner. Individuals especially students engage in substance abuse due to certain factors such as teenage curiosity, peer pressure, desire to alleviate depression and trauma and to improve self-worth (Ahaneku et al, 2025). Some of these substances include alcohol, cigarette, codeine containing syrup and tramadol (Olarenwaju et al., 2022). Among undergraduates, substance abuse could lead to various issues, including cognitive impairment, decreased motivation, poor academic performance, mental health issues and higher dropout rates (Ajibola &Oluwatoosin,2024). The harmful consequences of substance abuse could equally extend beyond physical health and impact the psychological and social well being of students as demonstrated by several research findings.

Previous studies were consistent in showing that substance abuse always negatively affects the psychological well-being of students. Elom et al (2025) showed that substance abuse has a link with mental health of secondary school students, pointing out that the males abuse substances more than their female counterparts and advocated for a proper sensitization program to fight the social menace. Elijah et al (2025) asserted that substance abuse plays a critical role in shaping the mental health of students, emphasizing that the abuse of cannabis, tobacco, and alcohol significantly leads to serious mental illness among users. According to the findings of Mengistie and Berhanu (2025), depression has a high correlation with substance abuse. Paradoxically, male students were found to abuse substances more than females while the females are more depressed than their male

counterparts. Moreover, substance abuse has a social effect on victims. Some of the social effects of substance abuse include strained relationships, social anxiety and social isolation (Hanafi, 2025). By implication, substance abuse not only negatively affects the mental wellbeing of victims but also deprives them of the company of friends and relationships. In a study conducted by Bobo et al (2024), they reported that dropping out of school, guilt, shame, insomnia, frustration, and embarrassments are associated with substance abuse.

Despite the reported tremendous negative consequences of substances on the health and well-being of adolescents, studies continue to report high rate of substance use among adolescents. Different rates and patterns of different substances have equally been reported depending on the country or region of the country where such a study was carried out. For example, in the US, alcohol is commonly abused (Crowley, Hilden & Beachy,2024). In Africa, the drug use situation appears to vary from what is obtainable in the West. Most drug use cases in Africa revolve around Cannabis and Cannabis related substances (African Policy Brief 2023).The document equally revealed the regional variations in drug use in Africa: Senegal's most abused substances are cocaine at 60.64%; Sierra-Leone reports tramadol as the main substance abused; Alcohol abuse ranked high in Cape Verde while Nigerian has high percentage of treatment entrants citing cocaine as the primary drug(Africa Policy Breif, 2023).In Nigeria, varying rates and patterns of drug use have been reported. In the Southeast part, for example, the lifetime rate of substance use was 84.5%, with alcohol being the most commonly used substance, while stimulants stood at 45.3% lifetime use (Aguocha & Nwefoeh, 2021),in the South West, Drug and substance use was at 45.7% with alcohol followed by cigarettes remaining the most abused substances at 61.5% and 54.5% respectively (Olarenwaju, et al, 2022),in summary: the North report more Cannabis use while the southern cities in general face synthetic drug use epidemic (Abdulmalik, Olayinka & Oshodi,2019). This is worrisome and calls for further studies on the impact of substance abuse on the psychosocial wellbeing and schooling among undergraduates in Nigeria especially in the southeast region.

Schooling as a fundamental human right involves teaching; learning and getting one equipped for a purposeful living which is one of the aims parents enroll their children into various schools (Anierobi, Nwosu, Nwikpo & Okeke, 2020).Schooling aims for sound education and good character during students' academic years. The schooling of undergraduates plays a crucial role in human behaviour, development, and society. By providing students with a broad understanding of their chosen field of study, as well as the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in their future careers, undergraduate education helps to prepare students for their roles in society. This, in turn, can positively impact the overall development of society, as educated individuals are more likely to contribute to their communities, innovate, and drive progress. Schooling here not only covers formal education, but it also encompasses all the things that take place when students learn: their motivation to learn, willingness to attend classes, response to disciplinary actions, their academic engagement and performance, their attitude to academic success, and even skill development. Undergraduate education can help students develop a sense of purpose, build positive relationships, and enhance their selfesteem but sstudents' schooling behaviour and outcome could be affected by many factors including substance use.

Literature showed that substance abuse could be a contributory factor to students' school behaviour and performance. That is to assert that the influence of substance when abused could reduce a student's ability to fully concentrate in studies or class. Moreover, a student experiencing hangover from an abused substance especially illicit drugs could easily skip classes. Validating this perspective, Tifkwah and Moses (2025) linked substance abuse to difficulties in concentration and frequent absenteeism among students. Osuafor (2021) equally affirmedthat high consumption of cannabis and alcohol are factors in absenteeism among students. Substance abuse can also have a

debilitating impact on the academic performance of students. This is because, a student who lacks concentration and absents from school would not be expected to perform well in class. A study by Bugbe, Beck, Fryer and Arria (2019) substance abuse, academic performance and engagement found that substance abuse is associated with poorer grades and increased risk of skipping school. Furthermore, Ajibola and Oluwatusin(2022) equally found that students who abuse drugs tend to have lower academic achievements and higher absenteeism. However, Atinuke and Ojo (2024) found no statistically significant relationship between drug use and students' level of success in external examinations; equally, Umar, Shani and Tersoo (2025) found no significant relationship between drug abuse and academic performance, students equally reported no noticeable decline in academic performance (Umunna &Umunna, 2025).

Psychosocial well-being and schooling outcome of undergraduates could be sustained by various factors such as family support, positive relationships with peers, academic achievement, involvement in extracurricular activities, access to mental health resources, and a supportive school environment. However, it's important to note that substance abuse could have a negative impact on the psychosocial well-being of undergraduates and may interfere with their attitude to schooling (Ajibola & Oluwatosin, 2024). This is because a positive attitude to school and schooling is required for academic excellence. For a student to be successful at school he needs to pay attention, understand his lessons and be in good health of mind and body; however, studies have shown that substance use tampers with the areas of learning needed for good performance; it affects cognition, attendance to school and the general attitude of students to their studies and health (Nwokorie,2024). Some students could lose interest in school, perform poorly and could eventually drop out. It is against this background that this study sought to examine Substance abuse as a determinant of psychosocial well-being and schooling of undergraduates with the following research questions as guide:

1. What is the predictive value of substance abuse on school outcomes of university students in Anambra State?
2. What is the predictive value of substance abuse on psychological wellbeing ofuniversity students in Anambra State?
3. What is the predictive value of substance abuse on social wellbeing of university students in Anambra State?

The following null hypotheses were posed to guide the study:

1. Substance abuse does not significantly predict school outcomes of university students in Anambra State.
2. Substance abuse does not significantly predict psychological wellbeing of university students in Anambra State is not significant.
3. Substance abuse does not significantly predict social wellbeing of university students in Anambra State is not significant.

Methods

Research Design

In this study, the quantitative approach utilizing the correlational design was adopted to determine the relationship that exists between the predictor variable (substance abuse) and each of the outcome variables (school outcomes, psychological and social wellbeing) of undergraduates in Anambra State. This design was considered suitable for the study because it only sought to determine the relationships among the variables without any form of manipulation. The population of the study comprised all the university students in the Federal university in Anambra State from which a sample size of 654 university students were drawn using purposive random sampling technique. This sample was gotten by having only students who abuse any form of substance (prescribed or unprescribed medications

and any form of drug) to be part of the study. The first page of the questionnaires has it that once a student did not fall into that category, the student would discontinue with filling out the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed within three weeks to give an ample time to get the target participants and for a robust sample size. The sample characteristics are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Students' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Age	Freq	(%)	Class Level	Freq	(%)	Gender	Freq	(%)
17-20	14	8.7	100	80	16.2	Male	314	63.7
21-24	171	34.7	200	100	20.3	Female	179	36.3
25-28	199	40.4	300	119	24.1			
29>	80	16.2	400	125	25.4			
			500	69	14.0			
Total	493	100.0	Total	493	100.0	Total	493	100.0

Source: Field Work (2025)

Table 1 revealed that the sample size consists of more males (314, 63.7%) than females (179, 36.3%) undergraduates that participated in the study; a greater number of the students are between 25 to 28 years (199, 40.4%) while minority of them are between 17 and 20 years (14, 8.7%) old. Additionally, majority of the students are in 400 level (25.4%) while those in 500 level recorded the least number (69, 14.0%).

To ensure that the ethical standards in the social sciences and educational research were followed, the researchers, prior to administering the questionnaires, sought the consent of the participants and gave them an opportunity to discontinue responding to the questionnaire items at any moment they might decide to withdraw. 493 students who gave their consent formed the sample for the study.

Instruments for Data Collection

Three sets of researchers-developed instruments titled: Substance Abuse Questionnaire (SAQ), School Outcomes Questionnaire (SOQ), and Psychological Wellbeing Questionnaire (PWQ) and Social Wellbeing Questionnaire (SWQ) were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by experts in the field of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. SAQ is a 5-item questionnaire, used to elicit information from students on their involvement in substance abuse. Substances in this context include prescribed and unprescribed (self-prescribed) medications, and drugs. SOQ is a 7-item questionnaire used to elicit information from students on their school performances. The PWQ is a 6-item questionnaire used to extract information from students on their psychological wellbeing and SWQ is a 6-item questionnaire that elicited information on the social wellbeing of the respondents.

The SAQ, SOQ, PWQ and SWQ were constructed on a 4-point response pattern and with weighted score of Always (A)=4, Occasionally (OC)=3, Rarely (R)=2, and Never (N)=1. The reliability of the instruments was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method and they yielded alpha coefficient indices of 0.71, 0.70, 0.69 and 0.77 for SAQ, SOQ, and PWQ and SWQ respectively.

Method of Data Analysis

The field data were analyzed using inferential statistics. Inferential statistics, such as, the co-efficient of determination was used to answer research questions and while simple linear regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses. The researchers' decision rule for determining the acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses was that any data at < 0.05 is not significant, while any at > 0.50 is considered significant.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the predictive value of substance abuse on school outcomes of university students in Anambra State?

Table 2: Simple Correlation Showing the Predictive Value of Substance Abuse on School Outcomes of University students in Anambra State

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.195[a]	.038	.036	4.350

a. Predictors: (Constant), Substance Abuse

Data in Table 2 reveal that the correlation coefficient between substance abuse and students' academic outcomes is 0.195 with coefficient of determination of .038. This implies that substance abuse affects academic outcomes of students. The coefficient of determination of 0.195 means that 19.5% variation in the students' academic outcomes can be as a result of their abuse of substances. Hence, substance abuse lowly but positively predicted academic outcomes of university students in Anambra State.

Research Question 2: What is the predictive value of substance abuse on psychological wellbeing of university students in Anambra State?

Table 3: Simple Correlation Showing the Predictive Value of Substance Abuse on Psychological Wellbeing of University students in Anambra State

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.199[a]	.040	.038	2.547

a. Predictors: (Constant), Substance Abuse

Data in Table 3show that the correlation coefficient between substance abuse and students' psychological wellbeing is 0.199 with coefficient of determination of .040. This implies that substance abuse affects psychological wellbeing of students. The coefficient of determination of 0.199 means that 19.9% variation in the students' psychological wellbeing can be as a result of their abuse of substances. Hence, substance abuse lowly but positively predicted psychological wellbeing of university students in Anambra State.

Research Question 3: What is the predictive value of substance abuse on social wellbeing of university students in Anambra State?

Table 4: Simple Correlation Showing the Predictive Value of Substance Abuse on Social Wellbeing of University students in Anambra State

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.164[a]	.027	.025	2.913

a. Predictors: (Constant), Substance Abuse

Data in Table 4show that the correlation coefficient between substance abuse and students' social wellbeing is 0.164 with coefficient of determination of .027. This implies that substance abuse affects social wellbeing of students. The coefficient of determination of 0.164 means that 16.4% variation in the students' social wellbeing can be because of their abuse of substances. Hence, substance abuse lowly but positively predicted social wellbeing of university students in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 1: Substance abuse does not significantly predict school outcomes of university students in Anambra State

Table 5: Linear Regression on the Predictive Value of Substance Abuse onAcademic Outcomes of University students in Anambra State

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
			.853			
(Constant)		11.666			13.683	.000
1						
Substance Abuse		.272	.062	.195	4.400	.000
	R	.195[a]				.000
	R^2	.038				.000
	F	19.359				.000[b]

a. Dependent Variable: School Outcomes

Data in Table 5 reveal that the predictive value of substance abuse on university students in Anambra's academic outcomes was ascertained at $\beta = .195$, $p < .05$ ($n = 493$). The pvalue ($p \leq .000$) is less than 0.05, so the null hypothesis was not accepted. Therefore, substance abuse significantly predicted academic outcomes of university students in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 2: Substance abuse does not significantly predict psychological wellbeing of university students in Anambra State

Table 6: Linear Regression on the Predictive Value of Substance Abuse onPsychological Wellbeing of University students in Anambra State

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	
		B		Beta			
1	(Constant)	8.163	.499		16.362	.000	Std.
	Substance Abuse	.163	.036	.199	4.511	.000	
	R	.199[a]				.000	
	R_2	.040				.000	
	F	20.350				.000[b]	

Error

a. Dependent Variable: Psychological Wellbeing

Data in Table 6 reveal that the predictive value of substance abuse on university students in Anambra's psychological wellbeing was ascertained at $\beta = .199$, $p < .05$ ($n = 493$). The p-value ($p \leq .000$) is less than 0.05, so the null hypothesis was not accepted. Therefore, substance abuse significantly predicted psychological wellbeing of university students in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 3: Substance abuse does not significantly predict social wellbeing of university students in Anambra State

Table 7: Linear Regression on the Predictive Value of Substance Abuse on Social Wellbeing of University students in Anambra State

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B		Beta		
			Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	9.074	.571		15.896	.000
	Substance Abuse	.152	.041	.164	3.675	.000
	R	.164[a]				.000
	R_2	.027				.000
	F	13.503				.000[b]

3. Dependent Variable: Social Wellbeing

Data in Table 7 reveal that the predictive value of substance abuse on university students in Anambra's social wellbeing was ascertained at $\beta = .164$, $p < .05$ ($n = 493$). The p-value ($p \leq .000$) is less than 0.05, so the null hypothesis was not accepted. Therefore, substance abuse significantly predicted social wellbeing of university students in Anambra State.

Discussion

The researchers studied substance abuse as a predictor of psychosocial wellbeing of university students in Anambra State. The study found that substance abuse predicted the school outcome of university students in Anambra State. This shows that substance abuse has a ripple effect on the academic outcomes of students. This impact could have direct or indirect impact on the school outcomes of students. This is given that some students abuse some substances to keep awake to study for examinations while others abuse substances for pleasure and to keep up with lifestyles of peers. This implies that the purpose for the abuse and the type of substance abused could have either a positive or deleterious impact on the individual and by extension, the student's academic behaviour and outcomes. This finding validates Tifkwah and Moses (2025) who linked substance abuse to difficulties in concentration and frequent absenteeism among students. The finding agrees with Osuafor (2021) that high consumption of cannabis and alcohol are factors in absenteeism among students which can indirectly have a negative impact on students' academic outcomes. Again, it concurs with Bugbe, Beck, Fryer and Arria (2019) who observed that substance abuse is associated with poorer grades and increased risk of skipping school. The finding aligns with Ajibola and Oluwatusin equally found that students who abuse drugs tend to have lower academic achievements and higher absenteeism. However, this finding disagrees with Atinuke and Ojo (2024) who found no statistically significant relationship between drug use and students' level of success in external examinations. It further contradicts Umar, Shani and Tersoo (2025) who found no significant relationship between drug abuse and academic performance.

Substance abuse was shown to be a significant predictor of psychosocial wellbeing of university students in Anambra State. This shows that substance abuse is a contributing factor to psychological and social issues in abusers. In other words, students who abuse any form of substance overtime would likely develop psychological and social issues such as anxiety, depression, loss of concentration, and their relationships among other psychosocial issues. This finding supports Elom et al (2025) who showed that substance abuse has a link with mental health of secondary school students and advocated for a proper sensitization program to fight the social menace. Elijah et al (2025) asserted that substance abuse plays a critical role in shaping the mental health of students, emphasizing that the abuse of cannabis, tobacco, and alcohol significantly leads to serious mental illness among users. Mengistie and Berhanu (2025) shared similar findings with this study that

depression which is a psychological issue has a high correlation with substance abuse. Moreover, this finding agrees that substance abuse has a social effect on victims. It aligns with Hanafi (2025) that some of the social effects of substance abuse include strained relationships, social anxiety and social isolation. By implication, substance abuse not only negatively affects the mental wellbeing of victims but also deprives them of the company of friends and relationships. Ibobo et al (2024) reported in agreement with this finding that dropping out of school, guilt, shame, insomnia, frustration, and embarrassments which are psychosocial issues are associated with substance abuse.

Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

The study sought to establish the predictive value of substance abuse on the outcome variables (school outcomes and psychosocial wellbeing) of university students in Anambra State. The findings showed that substance abuse predicted school outcomes, psychological and social wellbeing of the students. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that substance abuse is a significant factor hampering academic outcomes and affecting the psychosocial wellbeing of university students in Anambra State. The researchers, therefore, asserted from these findings that school outcomes and psychosocial wellbeing of university studentsare significantly punctured by substance abuse.

This study has significant implications for a healthy psychosocial wellbeing and good academic outcome of university students. It is obvious substance abuse has a tremendous negative impact on psychosocial wellbeing and academic outcomes of students generally. Thus, for a psychologically and socially stable and good performing students, access to and abuse of substances by them should be put in check. Additionally, intervention programme and counselling centres should be accessible for students who are exposed to and use substances for any reason whatsoever, without prescription. Practically, teachers and school counselors should be trained to recognize signs of distress linked to substance abuse.

Although this study has some critical implications, there exist limitations to the generalizations of its findings. The use of only questionnaires for data collection may breed responder-bias and form a limitation to the study. Future studies may consideradopting a mixed method of data collection. Besides, the opinion of 493 university students might not represent the opinion of all the university students in Anambra State. Consequently, there is a need to take caution in generalizing based on the findings of this study.

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