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# PEER PRESSURE AS A CORRELATE OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NNEWI EDUCATION ZONE

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**Abstract**

*This study examined peer pressure as a correlate of drug abuse among public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone. The study was guided by three research questions and one hypothesis tested at 0.05 significance level. Correlation research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 15,369 Nnewi North and Nnewi South public secondary school students in the Nnewi Education Zone. Multi-stage random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 1,398 students representing the entire population. The instrument for data collection were Peer Pressure Questionnaire (PPQ) and Drug Abuse Questionnaire (DAQ). The instruments were validated by three experts Dr Joy Sylvia Obi (Guidance and Counselling), Dr Oguzie Alphonsus Ekejiuba (Guidance and Counselling) and Dr E.I Anierobi (Measurements and Evaluation) in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Using Cronbach alpha reliability index to ascertain the consistency of the instruments which yielded an aggregate coefficient of 0.77 and 0.81 respectively and was considered fit for the study. The administration of the instrument was done through the direct method approach with the help of five research assistants. Summated Scores Statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient were utilized for data analysis. The p-value was used to determine the relationship of the variables at 0.05 level of significance for the hypothesis. The findings of the study revealed that peer pressure has a high positive and significant relationship with drug abuse among public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone. The study recommended amongst others that the government should organize seminars and conferences through the state guidance and counsellors to enlighten the students on the need to apply a sense of confidence to avoid being lured to unacceptable societal values such as indulging in drug abuse.*

**Keywords: peer pressure, correlate, drug abuse, students, Nnewi Education Zone.**

## Introduction

Most times, people believe that health is wealth. Those who are healthy are usually active and capable of being productive and resourceful. It becomes essential to maintain good health, avoiding activities, practices and intake of substances that can be dangerous to health. Drug

abuse is one of such practices that can be dangerous and destructive to human health. Drug abuse can be seen as the misuse of drugs and other substances which can result in physical or psychological harm. Ahmed (2024) asserted drug abuse as the continuous, excessive or maladaptive use of legal or illegal drugs notwithstanding the adverse physical, psychological or social consequences of such use. Drug abuse usually has effects and consequences that can lead to addictions and health problems. Etukudo (2017) observed that drug abuse alters the mind and cloud the user's thought process. Which is dangerous to human health and it affects all those involved both the older and younger.

The recent world drug report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that 271 million (5.5%) of the global population (aged between 15 and 64 years), had used drugs in the previous year. Also, it has been projected that 35 million individuals will be experiencing drug use disorders. The Global Burden of Disease Study estimated that in 2017, there were 585,000 deaths globally, due to the use of drugs (UNODC; 2019). According to the United Nations records (UNODC 2019) the usage of drugs among younger people has also shown to be higher, than amongst older people for most drugs. In Nigeria, the burden of drug abuse is on the rise and also becoming a public health concern. Nigeria, has developed a reputation as a center for drug trafficking and usage mostly among the youth population. For instance, the 2018 UNODC stated that the first large-scale nationwide national drug use in Nigeria, surveyed that one in seven persons (aged 15–64 years) had used a drug in the past year. Also, one in five individuals who had used drugs in the past year is suffering from drug-related disorders. Drug abuse has been a cause of many criminal offences such as theft, burglary, sex work, and shoplifting (Jatau, Sha'aban, Gulma, Shitu, Khalid, Isa, Wada & Mustapha; 2021).

The 2020 substance abuse statistics from the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics (NCDAS), showed that 59.277 million, or 21.4% of aged 12 years adolescents and older have been associated with drug abuse that is drugs without prescriptions, medications and illegal usage of drugs in recent times. This implies that drug abuse is linked to young adults at a higher rate. Sadly, these sets of individuals are within the school age of students in the senior secondary schools who are prone to the risks of influence, pressure and duress especially from their peers. Nawi, Ismail, Ibrahim, Hassan, Manaf, Amit, Ibrahim, and Shafurdin (2021) asserted that drug abuse typically begins during adolescence and its excessive usage is detrimental to the individual and the society thus being alarmed as a global problem. Therefore, secondary school students of adolescents age need to be enlightened. Nawi et al also noted that drug related substances which are mostly abused include narcotics, opioids, psychoactive substances, amphetamines, cannabis, ecstasy, heroin, cocaine, hallucinogens, depressants and stimulants. They were also of the opinion that drugs that are abused can be either off-label drugs or drugs that are medically or non-medically prescribed.

Edward and Arif (2016) opined the abuse of drugs as posing a problem to oneself, the society and all concerned. Thus, inappropriate and excessive use of drugs becomes abusive and may result in issues of health, emotions and psychological problems. Eske (2023) asserted that alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, prescription opioids, prescription stimulants and methamphetamine as common psychoactive drugs being abused. Thus, it gives much concern that some of these abused drugs are readily available and accessible within the environment even among the students. More so, it can be deduced that individuals

who indulge in drug abuse are likely to experience physical or health challenges. Drug abuse and substance use disorder can lead to short and long term negative health effects which can be physical or mental, ranging from moderate to severe depending on the drug or substance the person had been using. It becomes crucial to sensitize the individuals especially secondary school students on the need to minimize drug abuse or complete extinction of drug usage to curtail abuse.

Oluwasanmi (2022) opined drug abuse as those substances that are used without prescription. In other words, drug abuse can be referred to as the use of drugs or substances in a way that is not intended or recommended by medical experts. Nwakanma (2017) asserted that most of those drugs are used regardless of the prone risks and consequences. This implies that through drug abuse the individual is likely to be exposed to dangers of physical and psychological effects. In the context of this study, drug abuse are substances which are taken by methods that are not acceptable and can result in physical, social, psychological and emotional harm. Unfortunately, students run the risk of being lured to drug abuse. They are influenced and out of compulsion indulge in such practices. It has been observed that most of these influences and acts of compulsion come from their peers. Thus, peer pressure is seen as a factor that can relate to drug abuse among public secondary school students, especially in the Nnewi Education Zone.

Peer pressure could be seen as a kind of influence put on a certain peer group, encouraging the individuals to conform to certain actions and activities. Peer pressure can be an overt encouragement to engage in a behaviour. It can also be a kind of subtle cue that influences behaviours. Fehintola, Sinabio and Samaila (2025) observed peer pressure as the influence exerted by a peer group on its members, encouraging them to change their attitudes, behavior or values to conform to the group's norms. Peer pressure can operate with compulsion to involve members into adjusting to the attitudes or behaviours in which the group exhibits. Bhujbal and Verma (2024), opined peer pressure as an influence put on a peer group inducing persons involved to change one's attitude and values. Peer pressure can be a forceful action causing individuals to partake in some kind of activities. Bhujbal and Verma emphasized that peer pressure is a common social phenomenon that affects individuals across all age groups but its impact is particularly significant during adolescence and early adulthood, especially in the educational settings.

Peer pressures can turn out to be positive affecting the peers favourably or negative affecting the peers otherwise. Raypole (2021) noted positive peer pressure to be evidenced with more encouragement, support and motivations devoid of actual pressure or persuasions. Peer pressure can be positive when it encourages, motivates and promotes healthy habits, attitudes and behaviors. Kreidell and Duell (2023) affirmed that positive peer pressure can facilitate prosocial conformity in adolescents to engage the peers in behaviors that could help others. Positive peer pressure could relate constructively on the individual through healthy interactions. Dumbili (2016) opined that peer pressure was responsible for youths' consumption and abuse of drugs for the purpose of stimulating appetite for food. Certainly, to prove rebellious as a teenager or young adult is very common and such can be triggered through influences of drug abuse. In a lot of cases, young adults and teenagers do not fully understand the severity of drug use and addiction. The pressure of being around others who are abusing drugs and can push someone to follow suit.

Peer pressure can lead to engagement in risk taking behaviors, such as drug abuse and substance abuse. Oluwasanmi (2022) asserted that peer pressure is the most common reason for drug use amongst young adults and teenagers. They typically start to use drugs because they want to fit in. The peer who cannot surround oneself with positive influences nor seek support from trusted sources for confidence usually fall victim to peer pressure. In some situations, dangers could arise where peers normalize certain actions and activities as drug use and make it seem acceptable or desirable. Thus, the need for sensitization among students in the secondary schools. Peers may directly offer pressure to the members of the group to try drugs, and due to fear of rejection, they feel pressure to join in drug abuse to fit in or risk social exclusion. To establish clear boundaries, it becomes of immense benefit for the peers to maintain autonomy and live a life devoid of pressures. Laninga, Wijnen and Veenstra (2021) observed that young adults make friends with similar others, join groups of similar others, involving themselves in selection similarity. With such a scenario, peer pressure could influence flow from various dimensions, acting more profusely on them. Students are known to be commonly associated with mood swings, identity formation and increased independence and can easily be influenced by peer pressure. Peer pressure can put a significant influence on secondary school students leading to drug abuse, and other societal vices which could include rape, robbery, cultism, and even killing.

Encouraging positive relationships with peers who promote healthy behaviours can help mitigate the influences on drug abuse. Degenhardt, Stockings, Patton, Hall and Lynskey (2016), asserted that there has been reports on increased global burden due to drug abuse among young adults shown by the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study in 2013 and about 14% of the total health burden in young men being caused by alcohol and drug abuse. Ritchie and Roser (2019), pointed out that younger people are more likely to die from substance use disorders. And these young adults and young people are identified as secondary school students. Luikinga, Kim and Perry (2018) noted that individuals such as school students are the group of people who are the most prone to drug abuse and drug addiction. The United Nations' World Drug Report (2018) also affirmed that the critical age of initiation to drug use and drug abuse begin during the adolescent period and the maximum usage of drugs occurs among young people aged 18–25 years old. This is the stage associated with secondary school students and they usually have a strong inclination toward experimentation, curiosity, susceptibility to peer pressure, rebellion against authority, and low self-worth, which makes them vulnerable to drug abuse. These related activities on drug abuse are not devoid of characters associated with public secondary school's students in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Personal observations showed that drug abuse has been causing distractions from the focus among secondary school students and posing sources of risk within them in Anambra State. Thus, it becomes essential to explore factors that make students prone to drug abuse among public secondary school students in Anambra State especially in the Nnewi Education Zone. More so, personal observations showed that there are still records of drug abuse among public secondary school students in the education zone. These have contributed to disruptive behaviours, unruly attitudes and pollution of the school climate. Some students resort to perambulating, loitering, malingering, absenteeism even dropping out of school among the cohorts.

Most principals and teachers whose students are affected by drug abuse complain bitterly during Parents Teachers Association meetings. Sadly, parents whose children and wards are deeply involved also express displeasures during school open days. Although some researchers have conducted different studies to address the problem of drug abuse among public secondary school students in Anambra State, still the problem has not been fully resolved. It was also observed that some students in public secondary schools in the Nnewi education zone are still struggling with the problem of drug abuse. Due to this problem, the researchers were motivated to examine peer pressure as a correlate of drug abuse among public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine peer pressure as a correlate of drug abuse among public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone. Specifically, the study determined**:**

1. Peer Pressure scores of public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone.
2. Drug Abuse scores of public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone.
3. Relationship between peer pressure and drug abuse of public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the Peer Pressure scores of public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone?
2. What are the Drug Abuse scores of public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone?
3. What is the relationship between peer pressure and drug abuse among public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone?

**Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between peer pressure and drug abuse of public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone.

**METHODS**

Correlation research design was adopted for the study. The correlation research design according to Nworgu (2015), is the one which seeks to establish relationships that exist between variables considered in a study. The design was chosen because the researchers have no control over the variables of the study. The study was carried out in Nnewi Education Zone, Anambra State. The population of the study consisted of 15,369 Nnewi North and Nnewi South public secondary school students in the Nnewi Education Zone. Multiple-stage random sampling techniques were used to select 10% of the entire population of 15,369, comprising 1,537 students, representing sample size of the study.

The instruments for data collection were Peer Pressure Questionnaire (PPQ) and Drug Abuse Questionnaire (DAQ). The Peer Pressure Questionnaire was adapted from the already existing peer pressure inventory (Sunil, S. & Sandeep, S., 2016). Drug Abuse Questionnaire (DAQ) was also adapted from the already existing Drug abuse inventory (Adapted From:

Harvey A. Skinner, 1982). The questionnaire has section A with background information and instructions. Section B is structured in Clusters with each item of Peer Pressure, Self-concept and Drug Abuse assigned a four-point likert scale of: Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD), with corresponding values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The researchers administered the copies of the instruments directly to the respondents. The researchers involved five research assistants, who were instructed on how to assist in the administration and collection of the questionnaire.

Data relating to research questions 1 and 2, were analyzed using aggregate scores. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation coefficient was used to answer the research questions 3, while the hypothesis was tested using regression analysis.

**Results**

**Table 1: Range of scores on peer pressure of public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone.**

| Range of Scores | N | % | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| 23 - 44 | 252 | 18.0 | Low Peer Pressure |
| 45 - 89 | 1146 | 82.0 | High Peer Pressure |

Table 1 shows that a total number of 1146 students being 82.0% of the respondents with the scores ranging from 45 to 89 reported that they experience peer pressure in their schools while 252 students representing 18.0% of the respondents with the scores ranging from 23 to 44 reported that they do not experience peer pressure in their schools in public secondary schools in Nnewi Education Zone.

**Table 2: Range of scores on drug abuse of public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone.**

| Range of Scores | N | % | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| 24 - 44 | 406 | 29.0 | Non-Involvement in Drug Abuse |
| 45 - 88 | 992 | 71.0 | Involvement in Drug Abuse |

Table 2 shows that a total number 992 students being 71.0% of the respondents with the scores ranging from 45 to 88 reported of having involved in drug abuse in schools while 406 students representing 29.0% of the respondents with the scores ranging from 24 to 44 reported of non-involvement in drug abuse in schools in public secondary schools in Nnewi Education Zone.

**Table 3: Pearson (r) correlation on the relationship between peer pressure and drug abuse in public secondary schools in Nnewi Education Zone**

| Source of Variation | N | r | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| Peer Pressure | | | |
| | 1398 | .781 | High Positive Relationship |
| Drug Abuse | | | |

Results in Table 3 showed that Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) of 0.781 was obtained. With reference to the interpretation guide by Okoye (2015) as indicated in the method of data analysis, (r) 0.781 is between 0.61 and 0.80 showing a high positive relationship. This means that there is a high positive relationship existing between peer pressure and drug abuse among public secondary schools in Nnewi Education Zone.

**Table 4: Test of significance of Pearson's correlation between peer pressure and drug abuse in public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone.**

| Source of Variation | N | r | P-value | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Peer Pressure | | | | |
| | 1398 | .781 | 0.000 | Significant |
| Drug Abuse | | | | |

Analysis in table 4 shows that there is a significant relationship between peer pressure and drug abuse among public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone. The calculated r (0.781) had a *P*- value of 0.000 less than 0.05 level of significance level (0.000 < 0.05). The null hypothesis, one which states that there is no significant relationship between peer pressure and drug abuse, was therefore rejected.

**Discussion of Findings**

Table 1 shows the first finding of this study, peer pressure scores of the students that ranged from 45 to 89 were 82.0% while those that ranged from 23 to 44 were 18.0% in public secondary schools in Nnewi Education Zone. This report clearly indicates that the majority of the students in the zone experience pressures from their peers. This implies that the decisions of these students are largely influenced by their peers due to the pressures exerted on them. This may result in succumbing to undesired or unplanned actions. This finding, agreed with Bhujbal and Verma (2024), who emphasized that peer pressure is a common social phenomenon that affects individuals across all age groups but its impact is particularly significant during adolescence and early adulthood, especially in the educational settings. This means that public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone also experience inducement from persons of a peer group to change one's attitude and values through forceful actions, causing the students to partake in some kind of activities.

The findings also indicate that 18.0% of the students in the zone have low peer pressure. This shows that there are still some students in Nnewi Education Zone who do not experience pressure from their peers. This means that they can make their decisions solely devoid of

compulsion or being influenced by others. Although, peer pressure may be positive and could relate constructively on the individual through healthy interactions. However, it depends on the values, behaviours and characters the members of the peer group have to offer. Kreidell and Duell (2023), affirmed that positive peer pressure can facilitate prosocial conformity in adolescents to engage the peers in behaviors that could help others. While Raypole (2021), noted that positive peer pressures are evidenced with more encouragement, support and motivations devoid of persuasions. This means that peer pressures can turn out to be positive affecting the peers favourably or negatively affecting the peers unfavorably.

In Table 2, the finding shows the drug abuse scores of students that ranged from 45 to 88 were 71.0% while those that ranged from 24 to 44 were 29.0% in public secondary schools in Nnewi Education Zone. This finding clearly indicates that the majority of the students in the zone have had involvement in drug abuse. This implies that these students at one point or the other have used drugs or taken some substances by methods that are not acceptable. This drug abuse may result in physical, social, psychological and emotional harm which are dangerous to the health and safety of those around them. This finding agreed with (Edward & Arif, 2016; Oguzie, Chigbu, Ugwuele & Okpala 2026) opined that drug abuse poses a problem to oneself, the society and all concerned. In the same vein, Eske (2023) concurred that inappropriate and excessive use of drugs becomes abusive and may result in issues of health, emotions and psychological problems. This finding implies that the respondents in this study, who are currently in their adolescence stage are susceptible to drug abuse. This could be the more likely reason they become vulnerable and fall victims at random cases. The study of Nawi, Ismail, Ibrahim, Hassan, Manaf, Amit, Ibrahim, and Shafurdin (2021), aligned with this finding and affirmed that drug abuse typically begins during adolescence and its excessive usage is detrimental to the individual and the society at large.

The report of this study also indicates that 29.0% of the students in the zone have non involvement in drug abuse. This shows that there are still some students in Nnewi Education Zone who have not been involved in drug abuse or intake of any substance. This finding on non-involvement in drug abuse is at a very low rate and students in Nnewi Education Zone ought to be enlightened. Onwuka (2016), argued that the high rate of drug abuse among students in Nigeria usually begins from early adolescence and continues into their higher education. This can be traced to precede the time when the students are free from parental supervision Thus their teachers and guidance counsellors ought to step in for them; urging the students to be proactive on bad influences and ugly interactions.

The findings in Table 3 showed that there is a high positive relationship existing between peer pressure and drug abuse among public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone. The null hypothesis testing in Table 4 revealed that there is a significant relationship between peer pressure and drug abuse among public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone.

The result indicates that students who experience peer pressure and influences exerted in their actions are exposed to the risk of drug abuse. This relationship also implies that through peer pressure students can be lured to change their attitude and values to align with the group's norms. This means that peer pressure is capable of throwing the individual out of balance in making fair personal decisions. The finding is in line with Kreidell and Duell (2023), concurred

that peer pressure can also lead to negative outcomes, engaging in substance abuse, bullying and such risky behaviours. One of the reasons in which students tend to prioritize peer approval over their own judgment could be the fear of exclusion and isolation within their peer group. Dumbili (2016), opined that peer pressure was responsible for youths' consumption and abuse of drugs for the purpose of stimulating appetite for food. Meanwhile Pius, Odukwe and Achugbu, (2023), maintained that peer pressures are mostly associated with episodes of students linking to adolescent risk taking such as delinquency, immoral sexual behaviours and drug abuse which occur in the company of peers and should be curtailed. Perhaps, it appears that if negative peer pressures are not curtailed, they are capable of luring the students to indulging in activities which could lead to physical harm, injury or ill health.

Further findings of the study also indicated that there is a significant relationship between peer pressure and drug abuse among public secondary school students in Nnewi Education Zone. Peer pressure could compel the students to be involved in unhealthy norms and attitudes including drug abuse. This implies that students who do not surround themselves with positive influences nor seek support from trusted sources for confidence are capable of falling victims of peer pressure. A series of danger could occur, bullying, harassment and emotional distress due to conforming to drug abuse. This finding, agreed with Onyebuchi and David (2024), revealed that peer pressure has a significant relationship with psychological and physical well-being. In the same vein, Keyzers, Lee and Dworkin (2020), affirmed that peer pressure has a significant influence in substance use among students mostly with adolescence in schools. This means that if peer pressure is not well managed it could become detrimental to those affected especially as it relates to drug abuse.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School administrators should encourage the teachers to educate the students on the dangers of influences from peer pressures to refrain them from falling victims of drug abuse.
2. Anambra State Post Primary School Service Commission should also encourage all education stakeholders in Nnewi Education Zone to educate the students on the need to build up a strong capacity that will enable them to remain firm and confident in the face of peer pressure and duress as related to drug abuse.

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