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# THE MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT IN SUBSTANCE USE AND INTERNET ADDICTION AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN NKANU WEST LGA

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**Abstract**

*This study investigates the moderating role of social support in the relationship between substance use and internet addiction among adolescents in Nkanu West Local Government Area (LGA), Enugu State, Nigeria. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage often marked by increased vulnerability to risky behaviors, including substance use and problematic internet use. The purpose of this study was to examine whether perceived social support moderates the relationship between substance use and internet addiction. Different hypotheses were formulated to achieve this aim. Participants in study were two hundred and twenty (220) adolescents (male=100; female=120) drawn from Community Secondary School Nkanu West Local Government Umueze and God's Kid Primary and Secondary School both in Nkanu West Local Government. The age of the participants ranged from 15 to 19 years (Mean age=17.40, SD=1.41). Three scales were used for data collection and they include: The Psychoactive Substance Use Questionnaire (PSUQ), Internet Addiction Test (IAI), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and a demographic data questionnaire was used to obtain information about the participant`s demography. The findings of the research underscore the protective role of social support systems in curbing addictive behaviors among adolescents. The study recommends that interventions targeting adolescent addiction should incorporate strategies that enhance social support networks, particularly within family and school environments.*

**Keywords: Substance use, Social Support, Internet addiction, Adolescents.**

## INTRODUCTION

Life is full of stages. It includes infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. This article is more interested in the adolescent stage. The term adolescence is considered as a period of transition between childhood and maturity (Newman & Newman, 2020). This is a critical and complex period. It is said to be critical because at this stage the adolescence begin to think in logically, abstractly, and even in a complex way. In addition, adolescence stage is

a period when young people are more vulnerable to internet addiction and substance use. The internet is an important tool which helps the adolescent to connect to the world and learn a lot of things. In this present generation, internet has come to stay. It is part of our everyday lives, with work, education, and even our social life is shifting to virtual platforms (Aziz, 2022). However, "excessive internet use is a behavioral addiction which not only threatens the physical and psychological health of individuals but also has negative effects on their social life" (Bilge et al., 2022, 2).

Adolescence stage is a period that teens are prone to risk-taking especially trying to take drugs. They use drugs for different reasons and they include the following: peer pressure, curiosity and experimentation, to feel good, to fit in, feel grown up, isolation, etc. Substance abuse by adolescents remains a major public health problem in Nkanu West Local Government Area. In fact, the use and abuse of substances is relatively common during the adolescent years, as are use-related consequences and disorders. Most adolescents are not even aware that the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs creates an unhealthy development to the mental development of a child (Williams, 2011). What some of the adolescents do not know is that drug abuse has effects on health and life expectancy; it is associated with multifarious problems including psychological crisis. It can also be said that drug abuse affects one's level of understanding and proper decision. It is also likely to cause anger leading to poor social interaction. Adolescents who become drug addicts can therefore easily express their frustration leading to aggression (Adoga, 2018).

With all these challenges, adolescents need social support to cope with the stressors of life. Social support is "the positive and tangible assistance drawn from the social network" (Fillit et al., 2010, 226). Social support can be provided by members of one's own social network, including family, friends, and coworkers, or from more formal helping systems such as social workers or case managers employed by a health care organization. Adolescents need social support by their parents, teachers, and classmates (Baum et al., 2012). Social eases loneliness (Ugwuanyi & Formella, 2024). "Social support is provided in the context of relationships with other people. Thus, a person who is completely socially isolated lacks social support. A person's social network consists of the people with whom he or she interacts and who influence his or her life" (Christensen et al., 2004, 281).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine whether perceived social support moderates the relationship between substance use and internet addiction among adolescents in Nkanu West Local Government Area. "Adolescent is not just a pass-through interval between childhood and adulthood. It is a time of emergence, of rapid change, of consolidation. It is a time of awkwardness for some and flowering for others. It is a period of dynamic interaction of the individual with the social world, at the same time as it is one where significant biological change, at multiple levels, is taking place" (Zuker & Brown, 2019). Most adolescents misuse prescription drugs, drink excess alcohol, use tobacco and marijuana. Some adolescents use the internet in an excessive and uncontrollable manner. It is pertinent to note that most adolescents have an obsessive web surfing. These group of teens feel that they must get on the internet constantly throughout the day, and this interferes with their productivity and real-life responsibilities. Again, they become obsessed with online friends and prefer visual reality to real-life friendships. Most often, these friends are those who engage in substance

abuse (Sharmila, 2020). However, social support has a way of moderating these problems that the adolescents encounter in life.

To this effect, this study seeks to: examine whether substance use will significantly predict internet addiction among adolescent in Nkanu West Local Government, examine whether social support will significantly predict internet addiction among adolescents in Nkanu West Local Government, and examine whether perceived social support will significantly moderate the relationship between substance use and internet addiction among adolescent in Nkanu West Local Government.

**Literature Review**

Numerous studies have shown interests in our variables of study but we would like to limit ourselves to three theories namely Uses and Gratifications theory, social learning theory and social relationships and social provisions theory.

The Uses and Gratifications theory was developed in the 1970s by American media scholars Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler. The theory is grounded in five assumptions: "people are motivated and purposive in their communication behaviour. People actively select and use media to satisfy felt needs and wants. People are influenced by social and psychological factors when selecting among communication alternatives. The media have to compete with other forms of communication for attention, selection and use. People are able to articulate their reasons for using media" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, 633). This theory explains that adolescents have different uses for, and gain different gratification from the media they choose to use. They include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, etc. In fact, this theory assumes that psychological motives drive people to use media in order to satisfy their needs and seek gratification (Kurtin & McCormick, 2023). It is pertinent to note that as adolescents continues to seek for gratification, addition begins to develop.

Social learning theory was developed by Albert Bandura. "It is the process of acquiring new behaviors or knowledge through the observation of others. This theory posits that individuals learn not only through direct experience but also through observing the actions and consequences of others. The key aspects of observational learning include the following: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura 1977). This theory explains how individuals learn substance use behaviors through observation, modeling, and reinforcements from peers. "Individuals learn new behaviors by observing others, particularly those they perceive as role models or authority figures. In the context of addiction, individuals may observe and imitate the substance use behavior of family members, peers, or media figures" (Swargiary, 2024, 204). To this effect, if an individual observes someone using substances and experiencing immediate pleasure, relief, or social approval, they are more likely to imitate that behavior, believing that the same rewards will follow.

Social relationships and social provisions theory was developed by John Weiss. "He identified six provisions in his theory of social relationships. According to this theory, these six provisions-guidance, reliable alliances, reassurance of worth, attachment, social integration, and opportunity for nurturance reflect what people receive from relationships with others" (Dilorio, 2005, 115). The theory emphasizes the fundamental human need for interaction and connection, and it differentiates between primary relationships such as those with family and

close friends, and secondary relationships, which include work and casual social relationships with less emotional intimacy but significant functional value. "Weiss' concept of social provisions includes the functioning of social networks; that certain types of relationships usually provide each of the social provisions-attachment, social integration, opportunity for nurturance, reassurance of worth, guidance, and reliable alliance" (Haugan & Erikson, 2021, 139). Adolescents lacking this interaction and connection may experience low self-esteem, which may make the person use the internet or substances as coping mechanisms.

**Hypotheses**

1. Substance use will significantly predict internet addiction among adolescent in Nkanu West Local Government Area.
2. Social support will significantly predict internet addiction among adolescent in Nkanu West Local Government Area.
3. Social support will moderate the relationship between substance use and internet addiction among adolescent in Nkanu West Local Government Area.

**Participants**

Participants in study were two hundred and twenty (220) adolescents (male=100; female=120). The participants are from Community Secondary School Nkanu West Local Government Area, Umueze and God's Kid primary and secondary school. The two schools are in Nkanu West Local Government Area. The participants were selected using random sampling technique. The age of the participants ranged from 15 to 19 years, with a mean age of 17.40 and standard deviation of 1.41. Based on class, those who were in SS1 are 53 (24.1%), those in SS2 are 79 (35.7%), and those in SS3 are 88 (40.0%). Based on ethnicity, the participants were predominantly Igbo 170 (76.9%), followed Hausa 40 (18.2%), then Yoruba 9 (4.1%) and Others 1 (.5%). Based on religion, the participants were predominantly Christians 167 (75.9%), Muslim 40 (18.1%), Others 12 (5.4%), and Traditional 1 (.5%).

**Instruments**

The instruments used to gather data on this study includes: The Psychoactive Substance Use Questionnaire, Internet Addiction Test, and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support.

**Procedure**

Letter of identification was collected from the Department of Psychology, Enugu State University of Science and Technology and submitted to the principal of Community Secondary School Nkanu West Local Government Area for approval for data collection. The researchers adapted a convenience sampling techniques to select the schools. The principal assigned one teacher to assist the researcher and take the researcher to different class rooms. A multistage sampling was first adapted. This was a cluster the participants into smaller groups based on their classes. The researchers approached the participants in their classroom, and were asked to participate in the study. Those who consented were given copies of the questionnaires to fill through the help of a research assistant. The researcher explained the nature of the study to the participants and what they were required to do. Participants were informed that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the study without any prejudice and that their personal information would be confidential. Each section has a clear instruction on what to do and was written in a simple English language. The questionnaire was returned

immediately after completion by some participants. Some other participants requested to take it home and return it the next day which they did. A total of two hundred and fifty (250) questionnaires were shared and two hundred and thirty-six (236) were returned and sixteen (16) was filled incorrectly and fourteen (14) went missing.

**Design Statistics**

The design adopted for the study was a cross-sectional survey design. The PROCESS macro, which is available for statistics package for the social science (SPSS) was employed.

**Results**

**Table 1:** ***Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables***

| S/N | Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Age | 17.41 | 1.41 | | | | | | | | | |
| **2** | Gender | | | .01 | | | | | | | | |
| **3** | Religion | | | .30** | -.02 | | | | | | | |
| **4** | Ethnic Group | | | .08 | -.04 | .37** | | | | | | |
| **5** | Class | | | .19** | -.01 | .07 | -.02 | | | | | |
| **6** | PSUG | 20.71 | 9.4 | .26** | -.01 | .37** | .30** | .14** | | | | |
| **7** | Significant order | 17.53 | 5.35 | -.10 | .20** | -.11* | -.11* | -.06 | -.12* | | | |
| **8** | Family | 18.29 | 5.03 | -.08 | .13* | -.10 | -.10 | -.03 | -.11* | .65** | | |
| **9** | Friends | 16.85 | 5.19 | -.06 | .12* | -.01 | -.12 | -.13 | -.18** | .63** | .52** | |
| **10** | IDT | 53.78 | 26.47 | .04 | -.20** | -.01 | -.01 | -.02 | -.08 | -.19** | -.24** | -.04 |

*Note.* $N = 220$, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$. Gender: male=1, female=2; Age was coded direct; Religion: Christian=1, Islam=2, Traditional=3, Others=4. IDT=Internet Addiction; PSUG = Substance Use.

Results in Table 1 showed that internet addiction is negatively significantly related to family social support (r = -.24, p< .001), significant order social support (r = -.19, p< .01), and gender (r = -.20, p< .001), but non-significantly related to age (r = .04, p> .05), religion (r = -.01, p> .05), ethnic group (r = -.01, p> .05), class (r = -.02, p> .05), substance use (r = -.08, p> .05). This means that an increase in internet addiction of among adolescents is associated with decreases in family and significant order social support as well with both genders. Age is significantly

related to, religion (r = .30, p< .001), class (r = .19, p< .01) and substance use (r = .26, p< .001). Gender is significantly related to family social support (r = .20, p< .01), significant order social support (r = .13, p< .05), and friends social support (r = .12, p< .05). Religion is significantly related to ethnic group (r = .37, p< .001), substance use (r = .37, p< .001), and significant order social support (r = .11, p< .05). Ethnic group is significantly related to substance use (r = .30, p< .001), and significant order social support (r = -.11, p< .05). Class is significantly related to substance use (r = .37, p< .001). Substance use is significantly related to significant order social support (r = -.12, p< .05), family social support (r = -.11, p< .05), and friends social support (r = -.18, p< .01). Significant order social support is significantly related to family social support (r = -.11, p< .001), and friends social support (r = .53, p< .001). Family social support is significantly related to friends' social support (r = -.52, p< .01).

**Table 2: Results from the Hayes PROCESS macro examining how substance use predicts internet addiction with significant order social support as a moderator.**

| **Variable** | **Internet Addiction** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***B*** | ***T*** | ***p*-level** | **95%*CI*** |
| Substance Use | -.97 | -1.60 | .110 | [-2.15, .22] |
| Significant Order Social Support | -1.84 | -2.32 | .021 | [-3.40, -.27] |
| Substance Use X Significant Order | .04 | 1.81 | .240 | [-.03, .10] |

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

In Table 2, it was found that substance use was not significantly associated with internet addiction among adolescents ($B$ = -.97, $p$ = .110). This finding did not confirm the hypothesis tested in the study, that substance use will significantly relate to internet addiction among adolescents. Significant order dimension of social support was negatively associated with internet addiction among adolescents ($B$ = -1.84, $p$ = .021). Decrease in significant order social support increases internet addiction of adolescents. This finding confirmed the hypothesis tested in the study, that social support (significant order) will significantly relate to internet addiction. The interaction of significant order social support and substance use was not significant ($B$ = .04, $p$ < .240), indicating that significant order social support did not moderate the relationship between substance use and internet addiction.

**Table 3: Results from the Hayes PROCESS macro examining how substance use predicts internet addiction with family social support as a moderator.**

| **Variable** | **Internet Addiction** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***B*** | ***T*** | ***p*-level** | **95%*CI*** |
| Substance Use | -1.95 | -3.41 | .000 | [-3.08, -.83] |
| Family Social Support | -3.57 | -4.40 | .000 | [-5.17, -1.97] |
| Substance Use X Family | .10 | 3.05 | .002 | [.35, .16] |

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

In Table 2, it was found that substance use was negatively significantly associated with internet addiction among adolescents ($B$ = -1.95, $p$ = .000). Hence, internet addiction among adolescents increases with a decrease in substance use. This finding confirmed the hypothesis tested in the study, that substance use will significantly relate to internet addiction. Family dimension of social support was negatively associated with internet addiction among adolescents ($B$ = -3.57, $p$ = .000). Internet addiction among adolescents increases with a

decrease in family dimension of social support. This finding confirmed the hypothesis tested in the study, that social support (family) will significantly relate to internet addiction. The interaction of family social support and substance use was significant ($B$ = .10, $p$ < .002), indicating that family social support moderated the relationship between substance use and internet addiction. This finding confirmed the hypothesis tested in the study, that social support (family) will significantly moderate the relationship between substance use and internet addiction among adolescents.

The slope of the interaction (see figure 1 below) indicated that family social support was significantly associated with internet addiction at low level of substance use ($B$ = -.56, $p$ = .005), but not at moderate level of substance use ($B$ = -.11, $p$ < .556); and high level of substance use among adolescents ($B$ = -.44, $p$ < .149). The model explained about 4% of the variance in internet addiction, $R^2$ = .04, $F$ (1, 216) = 9.27, $p$ < .002.

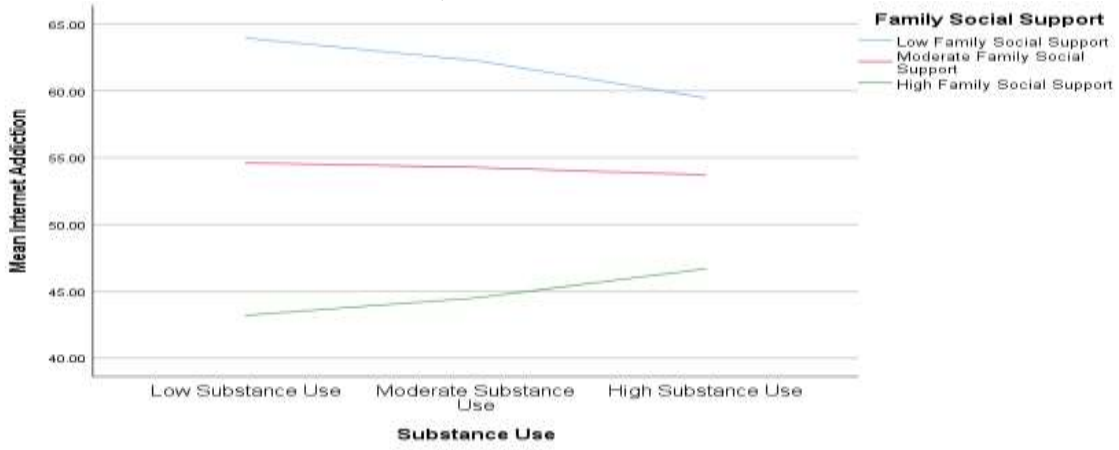



**Figure 2: Interaction slope showing the moderating effect of family social support on risk substance use and internet addiction**

**Table 4: Results from the Hayes PROCESS macro examining how substance use predicts internet addiction with Friends social support as a moderator.**

| Variable | Internet Addiction | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***B*** | ***T*** | ***p*-level** | **95%*CI*** |
| Substance Use | -.93 | -1.56 | .121 | [-2.12, .25] |
| Friends Social Support | -1.28 | -1.44 | .151 | [-3.04, .48] |
| Substance Use X Friends | .04 | 1.19 | .234 | [-.03, .12] |

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

In Table 4, it was found that substance use was not significantly associated with internet addiction among adolescents ($B$ = -.93, $p$ = .111). This finding did not confirm the hypothesis tested in the study, that substance use will significantly relate to internet addiction among adolescents. Friends dimension of social support was not significantly associated with internet addiction among adolescents ($B$ = -1.28, $p$ = .151). This finding did not confirm the hypothesis tested in the study, that social support (friends) will significantly relate to internet addiction. The interaction of friends social support and substance use was not significant ($B$ = .04, $p$ < .234), indicating that friends social support did not moderate the relationship between substance use and internet addiction.

**Summary of the Findings**

1. Internet addiction is negatively significantly related to family social support, significant order social support, and gender, but non-significantly related to age, religion, ethnic group, class, friends social support and substance use.
2. Substance use was negatively significantly associated with internet addiction among adolescents.
3. Family dimension of social support was negatively associated with internet addiction among adolescents.
4. The interaction of family social support and substance use was significant, indicating that family social support moderated the relationship between substance use and internet addiction.
5. Significant order dimension of social support was not associated with internet addiction among adolescents.
6. Friends dimension of social support was negatively associated with internet addiction among adolescents.
7. The interaction of significant order social support and substance use was not significant, indicating that significant order social support did not moderate the relationship between substance use and internet addiction.
8. The interaction of friend's social support and substance use was not significant, indicating that friends social support did not moderate the relationship between substance use and internet addiction.

**Implication of the Findings**

The outcomes of this study have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. Theoretically, this study contributed to the understanding of internet addiction, substance use and social support of adolescents. To this end, the findings of this study, have given credence to the problematic internet use theory by Young (1998) which posits that for certain users, the internet becomes a problematic form of escape, leading them to spend increasingly excessive amounts of time online at the expense of real-world obligations and relationships; which provides insight into how the internet, a tool that is intended to enhance communication and productivity, can instead contribute to distress and dysfunction for certain individuals.

Empirically, the findings of this study are in tandem with previous findings (Lee et al., 2013) which found that substance significantly predicts internet addiction. In addition, the present findings are also in line with previous studies (Hatun & Kurtça, 2023) which found significant relationship between social support and internet addiction.

Practically, the results highlight the importance of keeping young people busy with skill acquisitions. This will help to reduce the excessive use of the internet which leads to internet addiction. Skill acquisition training will make them not to be idle and will prevent them from being exposed to substance use. Social support should be encouraged among adolescent to address the problems associated with internet addiction. Psychologists should also add to their management techniques the activities that help in discouraging substance use and building social support, especially when working with young people as adolescent.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has some flaws which include difficulty encountered during data collection. In some schools the participants because of their mid-term quiz were not keen to respond to the questionnaire as they complained of the time constraint of not allowing them to prepare well for their quiz.

The study was limited to some secondary school students within Nkanu West LGA. It would be nice to visit many other secondary schools to know if the findings will be the same.

**Suggestion for Further Studies**

Considering the limitations of the study, future studies in this area should go beyond adolescents in secondary school to other categories of adolescents for example in apprenticeship in order to understand whether same factors play role in their internet addiction. Again, to obtain more objective data resulting in more robust findings, a longitudinal approach should be considered by future studies in this area.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The issue of substance use and internet addiction is of major concern to both the family and the society. In most families, adolescents prefer to discuss with their friends online and avoid the traditional face to face interaction. The same ugly phenomenon is witnessed in the society. It is important for families to recognize this problem. Most importantly, families should enhance adolescent's social support. This will help the adolescents not to seek social support though social media platforms. When a strong social support is created, they will explain to the adolescents the potential risks of substance use and internet addiction.

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