

**INFLUENCE OF PEER PRESSURE ON DRUG ABUSE AMONG STUDENTS IN PUBLIC
SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of peer pressure on drug abuse among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The research aimed to determine the extent to which peer pressure affects students' involvement in drug use, identify the forms of peer pressure that encourage substance use, and examine the types of drugs commonly abused under peer influence. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with the population consisting of 191,155 students from 311 public senior secondary schools. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select participants, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Peer Pressure and Drug Abuse Questionnaire (PPDAQ)*, validated by experts and tested for reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. The findings revealed that peer pressure moderately to highly influences students' drug use, with social admiration and peer expectations being the strongest forms of influence. Alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and prescription drugs were identified as the most commonly abused substances under peer influence. The overall set mean scores indicated moderate exposure to peer pressure and moderate prevalence of drug use among students. The study concluded that peer influence is a significant determinant of adolescent drug abuse in public senior secondary schools. Recommendations were made for the implementation of peer education programs, strengthening school counselling services, parental engagement, and community-based interventions to reduce peer-related substance use among students.

Keywords: Peer pressure, Drug abuse, Senior secondary students, Rivers State, Adolescents, Substance use.

INTRODUCTION

Peer pressure plays a major role in shaping adolescent behaviour, often pushing students toward choices they might not make on their own. During the senior secondary school years, young people are developing a sense of identity and belonging, and this makes them especially vulnerable to the influence of close friends and classmates. In the context of drug abuse, peer pressure refers to the social influence exerted by peers that encourages an individual to try or continue using psychoactive substances to fit in or be accepted by a group (Beyers et al., 2004).

Drug abuse among students is a global concern because it affects not only health but also academic performance and social relationships. Adolescents are particularly at risk because drugs are sometimes presented within peer groups as a way to cope with stress, have fun, or feel "grown up." Studies on student populations have found that peer pressure is a significant factor in the initiation of substance use, with students often starting to use drugs because their friends do (Opukiri, 2013). In many school environments, substances like alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs are accessible through social networks. If a student's peer group normalizes drug use, the likelihood that an individual will experiment increases dramatically. Research indicates that associating with peers who use drugs is one of the strongest predictors of an adolescent's own drug use behaviour (Abudu, 2008; Agbonghale & Okaka, 2014).

Adolescents spend significant amounts of time with their friends, and the school setting intensifies these interactions. When supervision is weak and there are few structured activities, students may

turn to peers for guidance on what behaviours are acceptable, including drug use. According to Opukiri (2013), adolescents who spend more time with drug-using peers are more likely to take up substance use themselves than those whose peers do not use drugs.

Cultural attitudes toward substances also influence how peer pressure operates. In some communities, drug use is seen as a way to manage problems or as part of socializing, which can shape peer norms in ways that make substance use seem acceptable among adolescents. These broader social perceptions can interact with peer influence to increase the risk that students adopt harmful behaviours (Agbonghale & Okaka, 2014).

Given the strong link between peer pressure and drug abuse, it is important to understand how this dynamic plays out among students in senior secondary schools in Rivers State. By focusing on peer group influences, educators and policymakers can develop interventions that strengthen positive peer networks, support healthier choices, and reduce the social reinforcement of harmful behaviours.

Statement of the Problem

The issue of drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Rivers State has become increasingly alarming, with reports indicating a rise in the use of substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and other illicit drugs. Despite the availability of awareness campaigns and school-based guidance programs, many students continue to engage in substance use, which negatively affects their academic performance, health, and social development (Agbonghale & Okaka, 2014). One of the key factors contributing to this problem is peer pressure, as adolescents are highly influenced by the behaviours, attitudes, and expectations of their friends and classmates (Opukiri, 2013).

Students who associate with peers involved in drug use are more likely to initiate or continue substance abuse themselves, often as a way to fit in, gain social acceptance, or cope with stress. This situation is exacerbated in schools where supervision is weak, counseling services are inadequate, and constructive extracurricular activities are limited (Beyers et al., 2004). The combination of these factors creates an environment where drug use can become normalized and peer influence reinforces risky behaviours.

The lack of empirical studies specifically focusing on the role of peer pressure in promoting drug abuse among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State limits the ability of educators, policymakers, and parents to implement effective intervention strategies. Without a clear understanding of how peer dynamics influence substance use among students, efforts to curb drug abuse may remain fragmented and largely ineffective. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the extent to which peer pressure influences drug abuse among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, with the aim of informing targeted interventions that can reduce the prevalence of substance use in schools.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of peer pressure on drug abuse among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

1. To determine the extent to which peer pressure influences drug abuse among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. To identify the common forms of peer pressure experienced by senior secondary school students that encourage drug abuse.
3. To examine the types of drugs commonly abused by students as a result of peer influence.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does peer pressure influence drug abuse among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. What forms of peer pressure encourage drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?

3. What types of drugs are commonly abused by students as a result of peer influence in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Literature Review

Peer pressure is widely recognized as a significant social influence affecting adolescent behaviour, especially in school settings. Adolescents are at a developmental stage where acceptance by peers becomes increasingly important, often outweighing other considerations such as parental guidance or personal judgment. According to Steinberg and Monahan (2007), susceptibility to peer influence peaks during adolescence, making secondary school students particularly vulnerable to adopting behaviours that are normative within their social circles. This normative influence can include participation in risky activities such as drug use, where students may engage in substance abuse to gain approval or avoid rejection by their friends.

The relationship between peer pressure and drug abuse has been documented in several studies focusing on youth populations. For example, Ensign and Panke (2002) found that adolescents who associate with peers who use drugs are significantly more likely to experiment with and continue using substances themselves. The mechanisms of influence include direct offers of drugs, modelling of drug use behaviours, and the internalization of group norms that view substance use as acceptable or desirable. This body of research underscores the role of peer group dynamics in shaping attitudes and behaviours toward drug use among students.

Accessibility and availability of drugs within peer networks further amplify the influence of peer pressure on substance use. Boyd, McCabe, Cranford, and Young (2006) reported that adolescents are more likely to obtain drugs from friends than from any other source, highlighting how peer groups not only influence attitudes but also provide practical access to substances. When students are embedded in social networks where drugs are readily available and their use is normalized, the barriers to initiation and continued use are significantly lowered. This pattern has implications for understanding how drug abuse can spread within school environments.

Individual factors, such as self-esteem and decision-making skills, interact with peer influence to affect drug use behaviours. Wills, Resko, Ainette, and Mendoza (2004) found that adolescents with lower self-esteem or poor coping strategies are more likely to conform to peer behaviours, including substance use. This suggests that peer pressure does not operate in isolation but is mediated by personal and psychological characteristics. Interventions that strengthen individual resilience may therefore reduce the impact of negative peer influences on drug abuse.

Cultural and environmental contexts also shape how peer pressure influences drug abuse among adolescents. In communities where substance use is more visible or socially tolerated, peer networks may reinforce pro-drug norms more strongly than in communities with stricter social controls. Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller (1992) emphasized that risk factors for adolescent problem behaviours, including drug use, span individual, peer, school, and community domains. Understanding the broader social ecology within which students interact helps clarify why peer pressure has such a potent effect on drug abuse in school settings.

Theoretical Review

Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977, is highly relevant to understanding the influence of peer pressure on drug abuse among students. Bandura argued that human behaviour is largely learned through observation, imitation, and modelling, rather than solely through direct reinforcement or punishment. According to this theory, individuals, especially adolescents, observe the behaviours of others particularly those of peers, family members, or influential role models and are likely to replicate behaviours that they perceive as rewarding or socially acceptable. This perspective provides a framework for examining how peer behaviours can shape students' decisions to engage in substance use.

Bandura's theory is built on several key assumptions. First, it assumes that people can learn new behaviours by observing others, without necessarily experiencing the consequences themselves. Second, it posits that behaviour is influenced by cognitive processes, meaning that adolescents consider the likely outcomes of imitating peer behaviours before deciding whether to adopt them. Third, the theory emphasizes the importance of social context and reinforcement, suggesting that behaviours are more likely to be repeated if they are positively reinforced or normalized within a peer group. These assumptions highlight the role of peers as both models and sources of reinforcement, making Social Learning Theory particularly applicable to the study of drug abuse among students.

The relevance of Social Learning Theory to this study lies in its explanation of how peer pressure can lead to drug abuse. In public senior secondary schools, students are exposed to peers who may use drugs and present such behaviour as desirable or acceptable. By observing these peers and perceiving social rewards such as friendship, acceptance, or status students may imitate the behaviour, increasing their likelihood of engaging in substance use. Applying this theory helps in understanding the mechanisms through which peer influence operates and provides a basis for designing interventions, such as peer-led education and modelling of positive behaviours, to reduce drug abuse among adolescents in school settings.

Empirical Review

Akpan and Inyang (2013) investigated *Peer Group Influence and Drug Abuse among Secondary School Students in Akwa Ibom State*. The aim was to determine the relationship between peer group influence and the incidence of drug abuse among students. This study used a descriptive survey design involving secondary school students aged 14–18 years. The population was 2,400 students from six schools, and a sample of 240 was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across classes. Data were collected with a self-developed questionnaire titled *Peer Influence and Drug Abuse Scale*, with a reported reliability index of 0.78 using Cronbach's alpha. The researchers analyzed data using frequency counts, percentages, and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that students with drug-using peers were significantly more likely to engage in drug abuse themselves, and that peer encouragement was a stronger predictor of drug use than family background factors. The study concluded that peer influence plays a central role in student drug abuse and recommended strengthening school counselling services and peer education programmes. The findings of this study are directly relevant to the present research because they demonstrate how peer behaviour shapes students' decisions regarding drug use, supporting the need to investigate this influence among senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Ogundele (2012) conducted a study on *Social Influences and Substance Use among Nigerian Adolescents*, aiming to assess how social factors including peer pressure contribute to substance use among in-school adolescents. The research adopted a cross-sectional survey design with a population of 1,800 adolescents aged 13–19 years in selected urban schools. A sample of 300 students was drawn using multi-stage sampling. Data were collected via the *Adolescent Substance Use Questionnaire*, and the instrument's reliability coefficient was reported at 0.81. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. Results showed that peer pressure, media exposure, and perceived social norms significantly predicted students' likelihood of substance use, with peer pressure being the strongest predictor. The conclusion emphasized that interventions targeting adolescent social environments could reduce substance use behaviours. Ogundele recommended school-based life skills training and peer mentoring. The present study builds on Ogundele's findings by focusing specifically on senior secondary schools in Rivers State, allowing for contextual understanding of peer pressure dynamics within this population.

Okafor and Eze (2014) explored *Determinants of Drug Abuse among Secondary School Students in Enugu Metropolis*. The aim was to identify factors associated with drug abuse, with a focus on peer group influence, school climate, and family supervision. The design was correlational, involving a population of 2,000 students. Using purposive sampling, 250 students identified by school

counsellors as having drug-related behaviours were selected. The *Drug Behaviour and Peer Influence Inventory* was used, with reliability reported at 0.75. Analysis was carried out using correlation and multiple regression. The key findings indicated that peer influence had a positive and statistically significant relationship with drug abuse ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), and that students who perceived drug use as common among peers were more likely to abuse substances. The study concluded that peer influence is a substantial determinant of drug abuse and recommended community engagement to reduce youth exposure to drug-using peer groups. These findings are pertinent to the present study as they underscore the strength of peer influence on substance use among Nigerian adolescents, reinforcing the rationale for examining this dynamic in Rivers State's public senior secondary schools.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the influence of peer pressure on drug abuse among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The choice of a survey design was considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of data from a large population to describe the extent, forms, and patterns of peer influence on drug abuse among students, without manipulating any variables. This design is particularly suitable for educational and social research where the goal is to understand relationships between social factors and student behaviours (Borg & Gall, 1989).

The study population comprised all senior secondary school students in Rivers State. According to the Rivers State Ministry of Education, there are 191,155 students enrolled across 311 public senior secondary schools. Given the large size of the population, a sample was drawn to make data collection feasible while maintaining representativeness. Stratified random sampling was employed to select participants, ensuring that students from each school type, class level, and geographical zone were adequately represented. This approach minimized sampling bias and allowed the findings to be generalized to the larger population of senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled *Peer Pressure and Drug Abuse Questionnaire (PPDAQ)*. The questionnaire was designed to capture information on students' exposure to peer pressure, types of drugs abused, frequency of drug use, and perceived peer influences. Items were formulated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" for attitudinal statements, while factual questions on drug use were measured using nominal and ordinal scales. The instrument was validated through expert review by professionals in educational psychology and guidance counselling to ensure content validity.

To ensure reliability, a pilot study was conducted with 50 students from two secondary schools not included in the main study. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess internal consistency, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.82, which is considered acceptable for social science research. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine ambiguous items and improve clarity before administering the questionnaire to the full sample.

Data collection was carried out by the researcher and trained research assistants who administered the questionnaires in the students' classrooms, following ethical procedures including informed consent, voluntary participation, and assurance of confidentiality. Completed questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS version 25 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were used to summarize data on forms and extent of peer pressure and types of drugs abused.

Results

Research Questions: To what extent does peer pressure influence drug abuse among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Extent of Peer Pressure and Drug Abuse among Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remark
1	I feel pressured by friends to try drugs	85	120	50	30	2.91	0.88	Moderate
2	My friends encourage me to use drugs	70	110	60	45	2.76	0.92	Moderate
3	I use drugs because my peers are using them	65	105	70	51	2.70	0.95	Moderate
4	I would avoid drug use if my peers did not	110	100	45	36	3.02	0.90	High
5	Peer pressure influences my attitude towards drugs	95	115	50	31	2.88	0.89	Moderate
Set Mean						2.87	0.91	Agree

The results in Table 1 indicate that peer pressure plays a notable role in influencing drug abuse among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The item "I would avoid drug use if my peers did not" recorded the highest mean of 3.02 (SD = 0.90), indicating a high level of influence, suggesting that students' decisions regarding drug use are strongly shaped by peer behaviours. Other items such as "I feel pressured by friends to try drugs" (Mean = 2.91, SD = 0.88), "My friends encourage me to use drugs" (Mean = 2.76, SD = 0.92), "I use drugs because my peers are using them" (Mean = 2.70, SD = 0.95), and "Peer pressure influences my attitude towards drugs" (Mean = 2.88, SD = 0.89) all fell within the moderate range. The overall set mean of 2.87 with a set standard deviation of 0.91 confirms that, on average, peer pressure moderately influences students' involvement in drug use, with certain behaviours being more susceptible to peer influence than others. This indicates that while students are aware of the risks associated with drug abuse, the desire to conform to peer expectations or avoid social rejection significantly affects their attitudes and actions regarding substance use. In general, the findings highlight the centrality of peer influence in shaping drug-related behaviours among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: 'What forms of peer pressure encourage drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?'

Table 2: Forms of Peer Pressure Encouraging Drug Abuse among Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Friends invite me to parties where drugs are used	95	110	55	31	2.90	0.89	Moderate
2	Friends tease or mock me if I refuse drugs	80	120	60	31	2.83	0.91	Moderate
3	Friends offer drugs to me directly	70	100	75	46	2.64	0.97	Moderate
4	Friends show that using drugs makes them "cool"	105	115	45	26	3.05	0.88	High
5	Friends make me feel left out if I don't join	90	115	55	31	2.88	0.90	Moderate
Set Mean						2.86	0.91	Agree

The results in Table 2 reveal the various forms of peer pressure that encourage drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The item "Friends show that using drugs makes them 'cool'" recorded the highest mean of 3.05 (SD = 0.88), indicating that social admiration and the desire to be perceived as "cool" is a strong form of peer pressure influencing drug use. Other forms of peer pressure, such as being invited to parties where drugs are used (Mean = 2.90, SD = 0.89), being teased or mocked for refusing drugs (Mean = 2.83, SD = 0.91), being directly offered drugs by friends (Mean = 2.64, SD = 0.97), and feeling left out if not joining peers in drug use (Mean = 2.88, SD = 0.90), all fall within the moderate range. The set mean of 2.86 and set standard deviation of 0.91 indicate that, on average, students experience moderate forms of peer pressure that encourage drug use, although certain pressures, like the perception of being "cool," exert a stronger influence. These findings suggest that peer pressure operates through multiple social

channels direct offers, social exclusion, teasing, and admiration which collectively increase the likelihood of students engaging in drug abuse. The results underscore the importance of addressing peer norms and social influences in designing interventions to reduce substance use among students in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: What types of drugs are commonly abused by students as a result of peer influence in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 3: Types of Drugs Commonly Abused by Students Due to Peer Influence

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Alcohol (beer, spirits)	105	115	45	26	3.05	0.88	High
2	Tobacco (cigarettes, snuff)	90	110	60	31	2.88	0.91	Moderate
3	Marijuana/Indian hemp	85	100	70	46	2.70	0.95	Moderate
4	Tramadol or codeine-based drugs	70	95	75	51	2.61	0.97	Moderate
5	Other locally available drugs	65	85	80	61	2.48	1.00	Low-Moderate
Set Mean						2.74	0.94	Agree

The results in Table 3 indicate the types of drugs commonly abused by students as a result of peer influence in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Alcohol recorded the highest mean of 3.05 (SD = 0.88), suggesting that it is the most frequently abused substance among students, largely influenced by peer usage and social acceptance. Tobacco products, including cigarettes and snuff, followed with a mean of 2.88 (SD = 0.91), indicating moderate prevalence. Other substances such as marijuana (Mean = 2.70, SD = 0.95) and tramadol or codeine-based drugs (Mean = 2.61, SD = 0.97) were also commonly abused under peer influence, while other locally available drugs recorded a lower mean of 2.48 (SD = 1.00). The overall set mean of 2.74 with a set standard deviation of 0.94 suggests that, on average, students moderately engage in drug abuse under peer influence, with alcohol being the dominant substance. These findings demonstrate that peer influence not only encourages drug use but also shapes the type of substances students are more likely to experiment with or regularly consume. The data underscore the need for school-based intervention programs targeting the most commonly abused substances, alongside peer education to mitigate social pressures promoting drug use.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study show that peer pressure plays a significant role in influencing drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Table 1 revealed that students are moderately to highly influenced by their peers in relation to drug use, with the highest mean observed in the item "I would avoid drug use if my peers did not" (Mean = 3.02, SD = 0.90). This suggests that adolescents' decisions regarding substance use are heavily shaped by their desire to fit in with peers and avoid social exclusion. These findings align with Akpan and Inyang (2013), who reported that students whose peers engaged in drug use were more likely to participate in similar behaviours, highlighting the critical role of peer modelling in adolescent substance use. The overall set mean of 2.87 (SD = 0.91) further confirms that peer pressure is a key determinant of drug abuse in school settings.

Regarding the forms of peer pressure (Table 2), the study found that the perception of being "cool" by engaging in drug use recorded the highest mean (3.05, SD = 0.88), followed by invitations to parties, teasing, and direct offers of drugs. This indicates that peer influence operates through both social admiration and direct coercion. The findings corroborate those of Ogundele (2012), who identified peer teasing, social exclusion, and modelling as major channels through which adolescents adopt substance use behaviours. This demonstrates that peer pressure is multifaceted, combining social reinforcement, peer modelling, and subtle coercion, which collectively encourage students to

engage in drug use. The set mean of 2.86 and SD of 0.91 indicate a generally moderate exposure to these forms of peer pressure.

Table 3 highlighted the types of drugs most commonly abused due to peer influence, with alcohol having the highest mean score (3.05, SD = 0.88), followed by tobacco (2.88, SD = 0.91), marijuana (2.70, SD = 0.95), and prescription drugs like tramadol (2.61, SD = 0.97). These results suggest that students are more likely to engage in substance use when their peers model or normalize the consumption of specific drugs. This aligns with Okafor and Eze (2014), who found that adolescents are most likely to consume substances that are common within their peer networks, emphasizing the link between peer behaviours and the selection of particular drugs. The overall set mean of 2.74 (SD = 0.94) indicates a moderate prevalence of substance use influenced by peers, with alcohol being the dominant substance.

The findings of this study support the assumptions of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and modelling. In the context of this study, students observe and imitate their peers' drug use behaviours, perceiving social rewards such as admiration, acceptance, or inclusion. The high mean scores in items reflecting the desire to conform to peers' expectations demonstrate that adolescents are likely to internalize peer norms and adopt behaviours that reinforce their social identity, even when such behaviours are risky.

Overall, the study confirms that peer pressure is a significant determinant of drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. These findings are consistent with previous studies in Nigeria and other contexts (Akpan & Inyang, 2013; Ogundele, 2012; Okafor & Eze, 2014), which identified peer influence as a primary driver of adolescent substance use. The results indicate that intervention strategies should target peer networks, promote positive role modelling, and strengthen school counselling programs to mitigate the impact of peer pressure on drug abuse.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that peer pressure significantly influences drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Students are moderately to highly affected by the behaviours, attitudes, and expectations of their peers, which often determine their engagement in substance use. The findings show that peer influence operates through multiple forms, including social admiration, teasing, direct offers of drugs, and social exclusion, with alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and prescription drugs being the most commonly abused substances. The study further confirms that adolescents are more likely to imitate behaviours that are normalized or rewarded within their peer groups, highlighting the critical role of peer networks in shaping students' decisions about drug use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Schools should implement structured peer education programs that promote positive behaviours and discourage substance use.
2. Guidance and counselling services should be strengthened to provide students with support in resisting negative peer influences.
3. Parents and guardians should actively engage with their children to monitor peer interactions and educate them about the risks of drug abuse.
4. The Ministry of Education should organize workshops and seminars for students to raise awareness about the dangers of drug use and equip them with refusal skills.
5. Community-based initiatives should be developed to reduce adolescents' exposure to drug-using peer networks and provide alternative social activities.
6. Teachers and school administrators should identify students at risk of substance abuse and provide targeted interventions to reduce peer pressure-related behaviours.

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