



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17083203>

Perceived Effects of Drug Abuse on Students' Socio-Interaction and Mental Health in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Drug abuse among students in Nigerian tertiary institutions has become a growing concern, with implications for social functioning, mental health, and academic performance. While previous studies have largely focused on prevalence rates and student self-reports, limited attention has been paid to lecturers' perceptions, despite their central role in monitoring and shaping students' learning environments. This study examined lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction and mental health in public and private Colleges of Education in Kwara State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted with a sample of 240 lecturers selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire (PEDASMHQ) and analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and ANOVA. Results showed that lecturers perceived drug abuse as highly detrimental to students' socio-interaction and mental health, manifesting in withdrawal, poor cooperation, aggression, anxiety, depression, and reduced motivation. No significant differences in perceptions were found based on institution type or gender. The study highlights the need for strengthened drug education, counseling services, and lecturer capacity-building to mitigate the negative consequences of drug abuse on students.

Keywords: College, Drug abuse, Mental health, Socio-interaction

INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse among young people in Nigeria has evolved from a largely hidden problem into a visible public-health and campus-safety priority. The most authoritative national estimate, the 2018 National Drug Use Survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), put past year use of psychoactive substances (excluding alcohol) at 14.4% among persons aged 15–64 years, translating to about 14.3 million people (National Bureau of Statistics & UNODC, 2019; UNODC, 2023). Subsequent reviews and regional syntheses confirm that Nigeria remains a high-burden setting in West Africa, with cannabis and non-medical use of prescription opioids (notably tramadol and codeine) featuring prominently in the drug landscape and with young adults disproportionately represented (Jatau et al., 2021; UNODC, 2023). On university and college campuses, Nigerian studies consistently report notable levels of use, typically ranging from about one-fifth to nearly one-half of student samples alongside patterns that implicate both illicit substances and legally available

agents such as alcohol, tobacco, cough syrups, and analgesics (Olanrewaju et al., 2022; Olatunji et al., 2021; Okonkwo et al., 2022; Peter et al., 2022).

The implications for students' social functioning and mental health are profound. International evidence links psychoactive substance use with anxiety, depression, suicidality, and social withdrawal that erodes peer relationships and participation in learning communities (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). Nigerian campus-based studies echo these concerns, documenting associations between drug involvement and elevated symptoms of depression and anxiety, lower self-esteem, problematic internet behaviors, and reduced academic and co-curricular engagement (Olanrewaju et al., 2022; Olatunji et al., 2021; Ajibola et al., 2025). These outcomes reverberate beyond individual pathology: deteriorating socio-interaction (e.g., isolation, conflictual peer dynamics, cult-related risks) undermines classroom climate, weakens student support networks, and complicates pedagogical work, especially in teacher-training contexts where modeling prosocial behavior is integral to professional formation.

The Nigerian drug scene has also been reshaped by the availability of synthetic and diverted pharmaceuticals. Seizure and policy reports highlight tramadol's prominence across West Africa and within Nigeria's domestic markets, reflecting dynamic supply chains and indicating ongoing non-medical consumption among youth (Institute for Security Studies, 2024; UNODC, 2023). While enforcement by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has intensified, campus-level prevention and care infrastructures remain uneven, and services for early identification and referral are often under-resourced—gaps that educators encounter daily in their pastoral and instructional roles (National Bureau of Statistics & UNODC, 2019; UNODC, 2023).

Although a growing corpus of Nigerian scholarship maps prevalence and risk correlates among undergraduates, two limitations persist. First, the literature has focused more on student self-reports and less on the occupational vantage point of lecturers who mediate institutional responses through classroom management, counseling referrals, assessment practices, and disciplinary procedures (Olanrewaju et al., 2022; Okonkwo et al., 2022). Lecturers' perceptions represent an under-utilized evidence stream for understanding how drug abuse manifests in everyday campus interactions, such as lateness, absenteeism, conflict, group-work breakdown, breaches of conduct and how these translate into observable socio-interactional deficits and mental-health concerns. Second, there is a geographic and sectoral skew: most multi-institutional studies concentrate on universities in southwestern and northern zones, while teacher-training colleges, especially Colleges of Education (COEs) that prepare the next generation of classroom teachers—remain under-studied, despite their strategic importance for Nigeria's education system and youth development (Ajibola et al., 2025; Olatunji et al., 2021).

Kwara State provides a pertinent setting to address these gaps. As a transitional state bridging Nigeria's North-Central corridor, Kwara hosts both public and private COEs that enroll diverse student populations from urban and semi-urban catchment areas. Local reports and national data suggest that the mix of cannabis, alcohol, and prescription-opioid misuse seen nationally is mirrored in the state, with the potential for campus-level consequences in teaching practice, group assignments, and peer mentoring core to teacher education (National Bureau of Statistics & UNODC, 2019; UNODC, 2023). Moreover, Colleges of Education emphasize practicum-based learning and collaborative micro-teaching; any impairment in socio-interaction viz. withdrawal, irritability, impulsivity, or conflict—can directly degrade learning outcomes and compromise professional dispositions expected of future teachers.

From a theoretical standpoint, a combined social learning and ecological lens is instructive. Social learning theory highlights how peer norms, modeling, and perceived reinforcement shape substance-use behaviors in tight-knit student networks. Ecological systems perspectives situate these behaviors within multilayered contexts; family stressors, economic precarity, digital/social-media influences, campus culture, and policy enforcement, interacting to affect mental health and social functioning (WHO, 2024; Ajibola et al., 2025). Lecturers, positioned at the mesosystem interface between institutional policy and

student peer groups, observe how these forces play out in classrooms, practicums, and co-curricular spaces, making their perceptions critical for evidence-informed campus interventions.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction and mental health in Nigerian tertiary institutions, focusing on public and private Colleges of Education in Kwara State. By foregrounding educators' perspectives, the study seeks to: (i) illuminate the specific socio-interactional disruptions lecturers encounter among students who use drugs (e.g., reduced collaborative capacity, interpersonal conflicts, absenteeism), (ii) identify mental-health presentations lecturers most commonly perceive (e.g., anxiety, mood swings, attentional difficulties), and (iii) surface context-sensitive implications for prevention, early identification, and referral pathways within COEs. Generating such evidence can inform staff development, student-support programming, and policy alignment with national public-health priorities, complementing prevalence-focused research with practitioner insights essential for sustainable institutional responses (National Bureau of Statistics & UNODC, 2019; UNODC, 2023; WHO, 2024).

Specific Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

- i. Assess lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction in Colleges of Education in Kwara State.
- ii. Examine lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' mental health in Colleges of Education in Kwara State.
- iii. Determine whether lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction and mental health differ by institution type (public/private) and gender.

Research Questions

1. What are lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction in Colleges of Education in Kwara State?
2. What are lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' mental health in Colleges of Education in Kwara State?
3. Do lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction and mental health differ by institution type and gender?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction in Colleges of Education in Kwara State.
2. There is no significant difference in lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' mental health in Colleges of Education in Kwara State.
3. There is no significant difference in lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction and mental health based on institution type (public/private) and gender.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain and analyze lecturers' perceptions on the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction and mental health without manipulating any variables. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the survey design is suitable for educational research that focuses on describing existing conditions, opinions, and perceptions of a target population. The target population comprised all lecturers in public and private Colleges of Education in Kwara State, Nigeria. As at the 2024 academic

session, Kwara State has three Colleges of Education (two public and one private), with an estimated lecturer population of about 620 across different schools and departments (Kwara State Ministry of Tertiary Education, 2024).

A sample of 240 lecturers was selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Stratification was done based on institution type (public vs. private) and gender to ensure representativeness. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was employed to select participants. This sample size was deemed adequate following Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, which recommends a sample of 234 for a population of 600 at a 95% confidence level.

The main instrument for data collection was a researcher-designed questionnaire titled Perceived Effects of Drug Abuse on Students' Socio-Interaction and Mental Health Questionnaire (PEDASMHQ). Items were structured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). Higher scores indicated stronger perceptions of negative effects of drug abuse. The draft questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity by three experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Their suggestions on clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of items were incorporated before final administration. To establish reliability, the instrument was pilot-tested on 30 lecturers from a College of Education in a neighboring state (not included in the main study). Data from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded coefficients of 0.82 for socio-interaction items and 0.85 for mental health items, with an overall reliability index of 0.84. These values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Means and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions on lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on socio-interaction and mental health. While, Hypotheses were tested using independent samples t-test. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study according to the research questions and hypotheses. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics (t-test) were employed to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Research Question 1: What are lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction in Colleges of Education in Kwara State?

Table 1: Lecturers' Perceptions of the Effects of Drug Abuse on Students' Socio-Interaction

Socio-Interaction effects	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
Drug abuse makes students withdraw from group	3.41	0.76	Agree
Drug abuse reduces student's ability to cooperate with colleagues	3.36	0.82	Agree
Drug abuse contributes to conflict and aggressive behavior	3.48	0.71	Agree
Drug abuse increases truancy and absenteeism	3.29	0.80	Agree
Drug abuse leads to stigmatization and poor peer acceptance	3.27	0.77	Agree
Over all	3.36	0.77	Agree

N = 240

The results in Table 1 show that lecturers perceived drug abuse as having negative effects on students' socio-interaction (overall mean = 3.36). Specifically, they agreed that drug-abusing students often withdraw from peers, show reduced cooperation, display aggressive tendencies, and experience stigmatization.

Research Question 2: What are lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' mental health in Colleges of Education in Kwara State?

Table 2: Lecturers' Perceptions of the Effects of Drug Abuse on Students' Mental Health

Mental health effects	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
Drug abuse contributes to anxiety and restlessness	3.44	0.73	Agree
Drug abuse leads to poor concentration and attention span	3.51	0.68	Agree
Drug abuse increases mood swings and irritability	3.47	0.70	Agree
Drug abuse heightens the risk of depression among students	3.32	0.81	Agree
Drug abuse reduces students' academic motivation and confidence	3.38	0.75	Agree
Over all	3.42	0.73	Agree

N = 240

As presented in Table 2, lecturers agreed that drug abuse has serious negative consequences on students' mental health (overall mean = 3.42). They specifically noted links with anxiety, poor concentration, depression, and loss of academic motivation.

Research Question 3: Do lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction and mental health differ by institution type and gender?

Table 3: Independent t-Test of Lecturers' Perceptions by Institution Type

Variable	Institution	N	\bar{X}	SD	t	p	Decision
Socio-Interaction	Public	150	3.39	0.25	1.21	0.227	Not
	Private	90	3.30	0.80			sig
Mental Health	Public	150	3.44	0.70	1.08	0.282	Not
	Private	90	3.38	0.76			sig

Table 3 shows no statistically significant difference between lecturers in public and private Colleges of Education regarding their perceptions of drug abuse effects on socio-interaction ($t = 1.21$, $p > 0.05$) and mental health ($t = 1.08$, $p > 0.05$). This suggests that lecturers across institution types hold similar perceptions.

Table 4: Independent t-Test of Lecturers' Perceptions by Gender

Variable	Institution	N	\bar{X}	SD	t	P	Decision
Socio-Interaction	Male	106	3.34	0.79	-0.52	0.603	Not
	Female	134	3.38	0.76			sig

Mental Health	Male	106	3.39	0.74				Not
	Female	134	3.44	0.72	-0.41	0.682	sig	

Table 4 indicates that there were no significant gender differences in lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on socio-interaction ($t = -0.52$, $p > 0.05$) and mental health ($t = -0.41$, $p > 0.05$). Both male and female lecturers shared similar views.

Discussion

The present study investigated lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction and mental health in Colleges of Education in Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that lecturers strongly perceived drug abuse as detrimental to students' socio-interaction and mental health. Importantly, these perceptions were consistent across institution type (public and private) and gender, suggesting a shared recognition of the problem among educators.

Consistent with the first objective, lecturers reported that drug-abusing students often withdraw from peers, show low cooperation, exhibit aggressive behavior, and face stigmatization. These outcomes resonate with previous studies in Nigeria and beyond which document the social costs of drug use among young people. For instance, Olanrewaju et al. (2022) found that substance-abusing undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria reported higher levels of interpersonal conflict and absenteeism, while Ajibola et al. (2025) highlighted weakened classroom engagement among drug-involved students. These patterns can be understood through social learning perspectives, where maladaptive peer modeling and group dynamics reinforce exclusion and conflict (WHO, 2024).

Regarding mental health, lecturers perceived that drug abuse contributes to anxiety, depression, poor concentration, and mood instability. This aligns with Olatunji et al. (2021), who found strong associations between psychoactive substance use and depressive and anxiety symptoms among Nigerian undergraduates. Similarly, the UNODC (2023) and WHO (2024) emphasize that youth substance use exacerbates psychiatric vulnerability, often manifesting in poor academic motivation and impaired self-regulation. The lecturers' observations therefore corroborate epidemiological and clinical evidence, underscoring that drug abuse is not merely a disciplinary issue but a mental-health and well-being concern with far-reaching consequences for learning outcomes.

Interestingly, the study found no significant differences in perceptions based on gender or institution type. This finding suggests that the adverse effects of student drug abuse are widely recognized and uniformly experienced by lecturers, irrespective of their background. While some prior studies report gendered differences in how teachers interpret or respond to student behavior (Okonkwo et al., 2022), the uniformity observed here may reflect the pervasiveness of drug-related challenges in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It also suggests that institutional type (public or private) does not limit lecturers from encountering similar student behavioral and psychological manifestations.

Taken together, these findings have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they affirm the utility of social-ecological perspectives in understanding substance use, where student behavior is shaped not only by personal choices but also by systemic influences (peer norms, campus culture, availability of drugs, and weak enforcement of drug policies). Practically, the results highlight the urgent need for institutional interventions in Colleges of Education. These could include targeted drug education, counselor-led support services, and capacity-building workshops for lecturers to enhance early identification and referral of students at risk. Given that lecturers across contexts perceive the problem similarly, collaborative multi-institutional strategies may be particularly effective in curbing the problem.

CONCLUSION

This study examined lecturers' perceptions of the effects of drug abuse on students' socio-interaction and mental health in Colleges of Education in Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that lecturers consistently perceived drug abuse as highly detrimental to students' ability to interact positively with peers and to maintain sound mental health. Specifically, drug-abusing students were viewed as prone to withdrawal, poor cooperation, aggression, anxiety, depression, mood swings, and reduced academic motivation.

Importantly, the study found no significant differences in perceptions based on institution type (public versus private) or gender. This suggests that drug abuse is a pervasive challenge across tertiary institutions, cutting across contexts and lecturer demographics. The results underscore the urgent need to strengthen institutional responses to drug abuse within teacher training environments, where the cultivation of prosocial skills and emotional stability is essential to the professional development of future educators.

Overall, the study contributes to the literature by highlighting lecturers' perspectives as an underexplored but crucial dimension in understanding the impacts of drug abuse among students. These insights extend beyond prevalence studies to emphasize the practical realities that educators face in classroom and institutional settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Colleges of Education should integrate comprehensive drug education programs into their curricula and co-curricular activities, sensitizing students on the social and psychological risks of substance abuse.
2. Institutional counseling centers should be strengthened and adequately staffed to provide early identification, psychological support, and referral services for students experiencing drug-related challenges.
3. Regular workshops and training should be organized for lecturers to enhance their ability to recognize drug-related behaviors, manage classroom disruptions effectively, and guide students toward professional help.
4. College management, in collaboration with the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and community stakeholders, should enforce existing drug control policies and create safe, supportive learning environments.

Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Tetfund), Abuja, Nigeria for funding this study through the Institution Based Research (IBR) grant; TETF/DR&D/CE/COE/ILORIN/IBR/2022/VOL. II and thank Centre for Research Development, Innovation, Incubation and In-House Training (CREDIIT), Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin.

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