

SUBSTANCE USE AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG STUDENTS OF NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY AWKA: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Substance use is a critical issue affecting students' well-being, academic engagement and success. This review is targeted to synthesize existing literature for purposes of understanding the causes, nature of substances currently being misused, their effects or consequences, especially as applicable to students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Several physical and online database sources, including government and non-governmental agency publications were consulted. The review showed that substances mostly used by students are alcohol and marijuana, while key factors leading to substance use are peer pressure, stress, lack of academic motivation, among others. Scholars generally held that substance use adversely affect academic engagement. Hence, it was recommended that urgent interventions to address substance use and academic engagement among students be put in place by school administration, government and NGOs to forestall further deleterious effects on students and society at large.

KEYWORDS: Substance, Substance use, Academic, Engagement, Students, Nnamdi Azikiwe University

INTRODUCTION

Substance use among students is a growing concern globally, with fundamental implications for academic engagement and overall well-being (World Health Organization, 2018). In Nigeria, the prevalence of substance use among students is alarming, with studies suggesting that up to 40% of students engage in substance use (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

According to American Psychological Association (2020), Substance use refers to the consumption and use of psychoactive substances, such as alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and other illicit drugs, for non-medical purposes. Substance use can lead to substance use, dependence, and addiction, which can have negative consequences on an individual's physical and mental health, relationships, and academic performance. With the above definition, one can deduce that substance use can also be referred as the continued use of alcohol, illegal drugs, or the misuse of prescription or over the counter medicines with negative consequences.

On the other hand, Academic engagement refers to the degree to which students are actively involved in and committed to their academic pursuits (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris (2004), they further

explained that academic engagement include various aspects: academic motivation, classroom participation, time on task, academic achievement and academic progress. Academic engagement is critical for students' academic success, personal growth, and future career prospects.

Substance use in Nigeria dates back to the pre-colonial era, with the use of traditional substances such as kola nuts, palm wine, and cannabis (Obot, 2004). However, the problem of substance use escalated with the introduction of modern substances such as heroin, cocaine, and amphetamines during the colonial era (Adelekan et al., 2015). In the 1980s, Nigeria experienced a significant increase in substance use, particularly among young people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This was attributed to factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of education as reported by Obot (2004).

Substance use among students in Nigeria has been a growing concern over the years. Studies done by (Adelekan et al., 2015) have shown that students in Nigerian universities engage in substance use for various reasons, including peer pressure, stress, and curiosity. Furthermore, a study conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (2019) found that 35.4% of students in Nigerian universities reported using substances, with cannabis being the most commonly used substance. Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Awka, established in 1991 with a multi-campus structure and currently having a student population of over 30,000 (NAU, 2022) is not immune to the challenges of substance use among its students,

Indeed, substance use among students of NAU, Awka, has been a concern for the university administration and stakeholders. A study conducted by Chika. and Odiral (2024) found that 42.1% of students in NAU, Awka, reported using substances, with alcohol being the most commonly used substance. Another study conducted by Eze et al. (2020) found that substance use among students of NAU, Awka, was associated with poor academic performance, mental health problems, and social problems. However, like many institutions, it grapples with challenges: of inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, and resource scarcity (National Universities Commission, 2020). These difficulties can be incredibly stressful, potentially exacerbating existing mental health issues and increasing vulnerability to substance use.

However, in Nigeria particularly, research has highlighted the preponderance of substance use among students, particularly among males (Abiodun et al., 2014; Adelekan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, a study done by Adelekan et al. (2015) among undergraduate students in some selected Universities in Nigeria, found that 35.4% of students in a Nigerian university reported using substances, with cannabis being the most commonly used substance. Similarly, another study by Abiodun et al. (2014) found that 42.1% of students in a Nigerian polytechnic reported using substances, with alcohol being the most commonly used substance. These studies focused heavily on identifying substances used by students and how it affects their academic performance. A research gap was discovered that the study did not look how gender and family background could be a factor on substance use.

Chike (2024), examined the individual-level factors associated with substance use and academic engagement but, there is still a need for more research on the contextual factors, such as university policies, peer norms, and community influences. Researches on substance use and academic engagement among Nigeria students mentioned above largely focused on the general undergraduate students population, with limited attention to diversity and inclusivity issues, such as the experiences of students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, or students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore it was discovered that there is a need for more qualitative research. While quantitative studies have dominated the literature on substance use and academic engagement among students, there is a need for more qualitative research to provide a deeper understanding of the complex issues involved.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

With students of Nnamdi Azikwe University at the center point of focus, while not limiting overall data search terrain, this review paper has the following study objectives:

- i. To ascertain the prevailing situation of substance use
- ii. To determine the types of substances mostly used by students
- iii. To find out the causes of substance use among students
- iv. To examine the effects of substance use on academic engagement of students
- v. To explore measures that can be put in place to control substance use among students

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Behavioral theory is adopted as the theoretical thrust of this paper. The theory highlights the role of reinforcement and punishment in shaping substance use behaviors (Centennial College, 2023). This theory, rooted in the principles of behaviorism, posits that behaviors are learned through interactions with the environment and are influenced by the consequences that follow them. Operant-learning techniques are used to enforce behaviors in accordance with community goals, providing positive feedback for desired behaviors and negative feedback for undesired behaviors (Centennial College, 2023).

Reinforcement

Reinforcement is a key concept in Behavioral Theory, referring to any consequence that strengthens or increases the likelihood of a behavior. There are two types of reinforcement: positive and negative.

- **Positive Reinforcement:** This involves presenting a rewarding stimulus after a desired behavior, thereby increasing the likelihood of that behavior being repeated. In the context of substance use, positive reinforcement can occur when the use of a substance leads to pleasurable effects, such as euphoria or relaxation. For example, a student who drinks alcohol at a party and experiences social acceptance and enjoyment may be more likely to drink again in similar situations (Skinner, 1953).
- **Negative Reinforcement:** This involves removing an aversive stimulus after a desired behavior, which also increases the likelihood of that behavior being repeated. In the case of substance use, negative reinforcement can occur when the use of a substance alleviates negative emotions or physical discomfort. For instance, a student who uses marijuana to relieve anxiety or stress may continue to use it to avoid these unpleasant feelings (Skinner, 1953).

Punishment

Punishment, on the other hand, refers to any consequence that weakens or decreases the likelihood of a behavior. There are two types of punishment: positive and negative.

- **Positive Punishment:** This involves presenting an aversive stimulus after an undesired behavior, thereby decreasing the likelihood of that behavior being repeated. For example, a student who experiences severe hangovers or legal consequences after drinking alcohol may be less likely to engage in heavy drinking in the future (Skinner, 1953).
- **Negative Punishment:** This involves removing a rewarding stimulus after an undesired behavior, which also decreases the likelihood of that behavior being repeated. For instance, a student who loses privileges, such as participation in extracurricular activities, due to substance use may be less likely to use substances again (Skinner, 1953).

Operant Conditioning

Operant conditioning, a central concept in Behavioral Theory, involves learning through the consequences of behavior. Skinner (1953), a prominent behaviorist, developed the theory of operant conditioning, which emphasizes the role of reinforcement and punishment in shaping behavior (Skinner, 1953). According to Skinner, behaviors that are followed by reinforcing consequences are more likely to be repeated, while behaviors followed by punishing consequences are less likely to be repeated (Skinner, 1953).

In the context of substance use, operant conditioning can explain how individuals develop and maintain substance use behaviors. For example, if a student receives positive reinforcement (e.g., social acceptance, pleasure) for using substances, they are more likely to continue using them. Conversely, if students or other users experience punishment, (e.g. negative health effects, legal issues), they may be less likely to use substances (Skinner, 1953).

Application of Behavioral Theory in Interventions

Behavioral Theory provides a valuable framework for developing interventions to address substance use. By manipulating reinforcement and punishment, interventions can effectively modify substance use behaviors (Skinner, 1953). For example, contingency management programs use positive reinforcement to encourage abstinence from substances by providing tangible rewards, such as vouchers or prizes, for drug-free urine samples (Petry, 2012). These programs have been shown to be effective in reducing substance use and promoting recovery (Petry, 2012).

Another application of Behavioral Theory is the use of behavioral therapy techniques, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT helps individuals identify and change maladaptive thought patterns and behaviors related to substance use (Beck, 2011). By teaching coping skills and strategies for managing triggers and cravings, CBT can help individuals reduce their substance use and achieve long-term recovery (Beck, 2011).

By integrating these theories, we can better understand the complex interplay of factors influencing substance use among university students and develop effective interventions to address this issue. Each theory provides unique insights into the various dimensions of substance use.

Social Cognitive Theory focuses on the role of observational learning, social experiences, and reciprocal determinism in shaping substance use behaviors. Observational learning explains how individuals acquire substance use behaviors by observing and imitating others, particularly those they consider role models (Bandura, 1986). Social experiences highlight the influence of interactions within social networks; including family, friends, and community, on attitudes and behaviors towards substance use (Bandura, 1999). Reciprocal determinism emphasizes the dynamic interplay between personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior, suggesting that individuals actively shape their environment through their choices and actions (Bandura, 1986).

Behavioral Theory highlights the role of reinforcement and punishment in shaping substance use behaviors. Positive reinforcement, such as pleasurable effects and social acceptance, increases the likelihood of substance use, while negative reinforcement, such as relief from negative emotions or physical discomfort, also encourages continued use (Skinner, 1953). Conversely, positive punishment, such as negative health effects or legal consequences, and negative punishment, such as loss of privileges, can decrease the likelihood of substance use (Skinner, 1953). Operant conditioning techniques, including contingency management and cognitive-behavioral therapy, can effectively modify substance use behaviors through reinforcement and punishment (Petry, 2012).

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Some theoretical and empirical literature which will guide us to properly situate substance use and academic engagement among Unizik students were critically reviewed hereunder in reference to themes drawn from the study objectives.

Concept of Substance

A substance refers to a substance that could bring about change in the biological function through its chemical actions (Okoye, 2014:67). It is also considered as a substance that modifies perceptions, cognition, mood, behaviour and general body function (Balogun, 2016:44). They could thus, be considered as chemical modifiers of the living tissues that could bring about physiological and behavioural changes (Nnachi, 2013). According to Fawa (2012:124), substance is defined as any substance, which is used for treatment or prevention of a disease in man and animals. Substance alters the body functions either positively or otherwise depending on the body composition of the user, the type of substance used, the amount used and whether used singly or with other substances at the same time. Operationally, a substance refers to any product other than food or water that affects the way people feel, think, see and behave and which due to its chemical nature, affects physical, mental and emotional functioning of the body.

Concept of Substance Use

Durg use is a major public health problem all over the world (Charles, 2013). Substance use refers to the misuse of any psychotropic substances resulting in changes in bodily functions, thus affecting the individual socially, cognitively or physically. Social effects may be reflected in an individual's enhanced tendency to engage in conflicts with friends, teachers and other school authorities. Cognitive effects can be seen in the individual's lack of concentration on academic work and memory loss (Peter, 2015).

Haladu (2016:56) defined the term substance use as excessive and persistent self-administration of a substance without regard to the medically or culturally accepted patterns. It could also be viewed as the use of a substance to the extent that it interferes with the health and social function of an individual. In the same vein, Manne (2015:67) defined substance use as the excessive, maladaptive or addictive use of substances for non-medical purpose. Abdulahi (2016) viewed substance use as the use of substances to the extent that interferes with the health and social function of an individual.

In essence, substance use may be defined as the arbitrary overdependence or mis-use of one particular substance with or without a prior medical diagnosis from qualified health practitioners. It can also be viewed as the unlawful overdose in the use of substance(s).

Operationally, substance use is the use of substances without due authorization from formally qualified and registered persons usually the doctors and pharmacists or the use of substances for purposes which it was not intended and/or used in excessive quantities.

Frequency of Substance Use among Students of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

While substances are envisioned to advance the welfare of the people in a society, it can be a source of complicated social disarray if left uncontrolled. Substance use and addiction can cause serious, long-term consequences, including problems with physical and mental health, relationships, employment, and even the law. Substance use has always been an international problem (Nwankwo, 2013). This is because it has "never been possible to confine substances to their places of origin (Uche, 2014). Moreover, modern means of transportation, communication and technology have increased

and facilitated the spread of substance. More people than ever are exposed to substance practices or cultures. This applies to licit and illicit substances though attention tends to be focused on the illicit spread and use of substances such as heroin, cocaine and cannabis (Eze, 2013).

There is also a vast global trade on legal, recreational substances like tobacco and alcohol as well as other products like tranquilizers and hypnotics which have legitimate medical uses but are also used. Thus, we have substances that prevent conception, others that calms one when she/he is nervous, excite one when bored, slim one down when fat, put one to sleep and even make one sick when he/she is well, (Jaff,2010). Substance in this context can be used if they are taken without prescription from a qualified physician.

Over the years, public concern has greatly increased over the use of substance; this concern has been evoked by numerous reports coming from individuals, the police and other government agencies. In the years past, substance use had been perceived only as a personal problem with the individual concerned being seen as an unfortunate victim.

However presently, it is seen as a societal problem and this is linked with the work of NAFDAC by late Professor Dora Nkem Akunyili, the former Director General.

Downey (2010:54) is of the view that substance and substance use involves the repeated and excessive use of a substance to produce pleasure or escape reality despite its destructive effects. A substance may be said to be used when one or more of the following is done, the substance is obtained illegally or a legally obtained substance is misused. The substance is self administered rather than being administered under medical supervision. This shows that not only illegal substances are used; legal substances can also be used if not used under the accepted medical practice.

Nwegbu (2009:12) described substance use as taking any substance for any purpose other than that for which it is meant for in any way that could damage the users' health and ability. He stressed further that substance use is when substances are intentionally or accidentally, inappropriately consumed or are administered in improper dosage. There are many examples of substance use, which include taking substances in excessive recommended dosages, taking substances without consulting a physician, driving under the influence of substance, taking illegal substances etc.

Substances commonly used by Undergraduates of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Going away to college is often the first time young adults are away from home for any stretch of time. Students are keen to fit in, prove themselves, and often overjoyed with their newfound freedom (Adebola, 2014). These freedoms are often taken too far, however, as college campuses tend toward a higher frequency of partying and illegal substances (Kainde, 2014). Many college administrators according to Ndilechi (2013) look the other way, thinking of binge drinking and illicit substance use as rites of passage. Fraternities and sororities are famous for episodes of hazing, which quite often include drinking and other substances.

In addition, college students may be overly worried about image, and some substances may work as weight regulators to help combat that "Freshman 15," even though these substances may be harmful in other ways (Anderson, 2013).

Realistically, Onu (2012), Nkwa (2013) & Okwara (2016) stated clearly that substances in form of substances commonly used by students in college include: Alcohol, Marijuana Prescription medications (including stimulants, central nervous system depressants, and narcotics), Over-the-counter substances, Cocaine, Heroin and Ecstasy. In developed societies half of the fulltime college students admit to binge drinking or using substances at least once a month. However, the most used

substance on college campuses is alcohol.

The National Institute on Alcohol use and Alcoholism (2014), reported that four out of five college students drink alcohol. This may not seem like that big of a deal, but keep in mind that three-quarters of this population is under the legal drinking age. College students are traditionally between 18 and 22 years old, with 21 being the legal drinking age in America. Even more important, half of these drinkers engage in binge drinking, which is consuming more than three or four drinks in a sitting in an attempt to get drunk. Many factors, in addition to its easy access, make alcohol the substance of choice for students. Upperclassmen over age 21 can buy alcohol legally and distribute it to younger students, and it is relatively inexpensive.

Some of the reasons college students drink are: to relax, in an attempt to fit in, as a response to peer pressure, to party or have fun, as a stress reliever, to lower inhibitions and to reduce anxiety or depression (Wilfred, 2011)

Based on the foregoing, it is expedient to conclude that undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria and the world at large use different forms of substances.

Effects of Substance Use on Learning Effectiveness of Undergraduate of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Learning has been defined by the educational psychologist in different ways and meanings. It has been explained as a quantitative increase in knowledge, memorizing of facts, skills and methods that can be retained and used as necessary (Onukwufor, 2013). It is also viewed as making sense or abstracting meaning, relating parts of the subject matter to each other and to the real world, interpreting and understanding reality and comprehending the world by reinterpreting knowledge (Smith, 2013). According Francis (2010:122), learning can be defined as the process by which we acquire and retain attitudes, knowledge, understanding, skills capabilities that cannot be attributed to inherited behavior pattern or physical growth.

Effective learning therefore requires more than just making multiple connections of new ideas to old ones; it sometimes require that students restructure their thinking radically that is, to incorporate some new ideas, learners must change the connections among the things they already know or even discard some long-held beliefs about the world (Samuelson, 2014). However, Oni (2011:78) lamented that substance use breeds disappointment, frustration, emotional and psychological trauma, unpreparedness on the part of the students and lack of motivation which sum up to non-conducive environment for effective learning in Nigerian tertiary institutions resulting in poor learning ability of the students.

In this regard, Okafor (2014:332) reported that substance use affects students' academic engagement in terms of their learning effectiveness. In the view of Samuelson, (2012), substance use affects student's learning in the following ways:

- ❖ Leads to poor impartation of knowledge.
- ❖ Students who use substances often lose interest in their studies.
- ❖ Students do not engage in practical learning due to substance misuse.
- ❖ Students often lack proper academic guide.

Nonetheless, the situation witnessed in tertiary institutions in Nigeria due to the issue of substance use has resulted in the turning out of half-baked graduates into the labor market (Wilson, 2016). These half-baked products cannot live up to expectation in their various chosen professions. This is as a result of poor learning necessitated by substance use. Nkemjikaku (2012) noted that substance use

affects students learning effectiveness. This is because substance use results in poor impartation of knowledge among students, make students lose interest in their studies. In this regard, Nwafor (2014:67) posited that substance use is a major problem bedeviling the students learning effectiveness in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Okoro (2011:90) also opined that substance use has negative effect on students' learning effectiveness in Nigerian tertiary institutions. This is because students do not acquire suitable knowledge due to substance use, prevents them from learning in school, makes them lose interest in reading, prevents them from acquiring needed skills, prevents them from interacting with quality educators in school for academic purpose, prevent educators from attending to their questions for proper understanding after their private reading and also prevent them from getting suitable reading materials. In addition, Adebola (2015:67) averred that substance use affects students learning effectiveness because most of the students fail to acquire suitable or adequate knowledge because they utilize their study time on substances.

Similarly, Okeagu (2013:15) also posited that the issue of substance use lowers the standard of learning in tertiary institutions, reduces the quality of skilled manpower, increases the level of dependence on external assistance and retards technological advancement. Hence, effective learning is usually hindered in the case of substance use. Chukwuemeka (2013) also posited that the issue of substance use has depreciated educational standard in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Hence ineffective learning has been the order of the day. By way of synthesis, the researcher stated that substance use has negative impact on learning effectiveness.

Effect of Substance Use on Academic Engagement of Undergraduates in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

It is pertinent to mention here that substance use has continued to do some havoc by shattering the hopes and aspirations of most students, especially, the very ambitious ones. Many students have desired to become specialists in one field of knowledge or the other but could not make the grade in the basic examinations. Onah (2014:97) affirmed that in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, students do not have suitable time to study for exams due to the problem of substance use. The question of substance use in tertiary institutions appears to be a problem, when one remembers that Nigeria is saturated with trained educators.

Uduma (2014:21) affirmed that substance use has negative effects on students' final grade in tertiary institutions. This is because substance use makes them loose interest in their studies; they are not usually encouraged to engage in intense study for their exams and also make them lose focus in most of the courses they offer. It also makes them find it difficult to attend quality classes or lectures which make them perform poorly in the examination grade as well as preventing them from covering the contents of their course while reading before their various examinations. Also, substance use makes them to find it difficult in getting relevant academic materials from their lecturers on time for excellent grades in their examinations, make them lose interest in finding measures that will improve their academic engagements.

Consequences of Substance Use

Substance use can have social, economic and health consequences on the users. The social consequences of substance are not farfetched. When this occurs, it can have drastic effects on the consumer. Excessive use of substance can have adverse impact not only on the individual user, but also on the general community. Heavy substance use has been implicated in increased incidents of

violent crime.

Family units are often affected if one member of the family is a heavy substance user (Osuala, 2011:88). Family issues such as marital breakup, domestic violence and spouse use are strongly tied to high use of substance (Skrtic, Karlovic, Kruljac, 2013; Ogborne, 2010). Risk behaviour such as drinking and driving and inappropriate sexual behaviour are also common practices linked to substance use. Substance is also considered to be a causal factor in most motor vehicle accidents. Financial problems and job loss are also associated with high risk substance use (Shand, Gates, Fawcett & Mattick, 2013). The work force is impacted as personality and poor judgments deteriorate due to excessive use of substance.

World Health Organization (WHO) (2009) also reported that drinkers experience a range of social harms because of their own drinking, including family disruption, problems at the workplace, criminal convictions, and financial problems. Unfortunately, assessment of these problems is much less standardized than assessment of health problems, and many of these harms are not reported continuously.

People who consume excessive amounts of substance have increased chances of dying prematurely (Mba, 2012). In some cases, the underlying source of problems is short-term, or acute. In other cases, long-term or chronic problems lead to fatal outcomes. Common acute causes of substance-related death include Motor vehicle accidents, suicide, homicide, substance poisoning, fall-related injuries and fire-related injuries (Smith, 2013). Periodically, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) release statistics on the total number of people who die each year from short- and long-term substance-related causes. The most recent CDC figures point to a death toll of roughly 88,000. In that regard, one can infer that excessive substance consumption has devastating social consequences.

In terms of health, substance consumption has been identified as an important risk factor for illness, disability, and mortality (Rehm, Mathers & Popova 2009). One of the ways through which substance increases risk for diseases is through the immune system and this is adversely affected by substance consumption especially heavy drinking (Rehm, Samokhvalov & Neuman, 2009).

In addition, substance consumption can result to poorer outcomes as well as infectious disease more particularly among drinkers by way of social factors. Thus, people with substance dependence often are stigmatized and have a higher chance of becoming unemployed and destitute; as a result, they tend to live in more crowded quarters with higher chances for infection and lower chances of recovery (Lönnroth, 2012). According to Orjinta (2013:60), substance consumption can cause major health problems such as anemia. This is because heavy drinking can cause the number of oxygen-carrying red blood cells to be abnormally low. This condition, known as anemia, can trigger a host of symptoms, including fatigue, shortness of breath, and lightheadedness.

In addition, it can also lead to cancer. Thus, habitual drinking increases the risk of cancer, (Rehm, 2009). Scientists believe the increased risk comes when the body converts substance into acetaldehyde, a potent carcinogen. Cancer sites linked to substance use include the mouth, pharynx (throat), larynx (voice box), esophagus, liver, breast, and colorectal region. Cancer risk rises even higher in heavy drinkers who also use tobacco. The next is cardiovascular disease. In that regard Iwu (2009:144), affirmed that heavy drinking, especially bingeing, makes platelets more likely to clump together into blood clots, which can lead to heart attack or stroke. In words of Brown (2013), binge

drinking is likely to double the risk of death among people who initially survived a heart attack.

Measures to Ameliorate the Problem of Substance Use

Moderate substance consumption may not harm the body but misuse engenders severe consequences which might not just affect the drinker but also others (Wechsler, 2012). That some Nigerian youths use substance for sexual pleasure (Chikere & Mayowa, 2011; Klein, 2011; Sunmola, Olley, & Oso, 2017) may lead to none or inconsistent use of contraception such as condoms due to lack of inhibition (Sunday, 2017) and may engender the contraction of sexually transmitted illness. In the same vein, Nigeria's higher education (due to substance misuse among some students) has witnessed several clashes due to secret cult activities, and many innocent students have been killed by stray bullets (Rotimi, 2015:45). Other substance-related problems reported among Nigerian students include: depression, anxiety (Adewuyet, 2016), substance dependence (Abikoye & Osinowo, 2011), and poor academic engagement (Ihezue, 2013). However, to proffer solutions to the increasing substance misuse among Nigerian students, policies should be formulated and implemented to regulate the physical availability of substances by partial or total ban, regulating retail outlet, hour and days of retail sale, restriction on eligibility to purchase and sell substance, minimum purchasing age laws, promotion of substance free activities on campuses and community mobilization approach'' (Umoh, 2012).

In addition, Okenwa (2013:55), posited that brewers should be banned from sponsoring faculty activities and the giveaway of branded paraphernalia should be reconsidered. There is also an urgent need to address the sale of substance to minors. In order to achieve this objective, the government has to issue the citizens national identity cards as this has been effective for identifying minors in developed countries (Okwuofu, 2011:32). Similarly, there is need to designate on and off license sale points and strictly enforce it because many of the studies reviewed reported that substance can be purchased anywhere. In the meantime, the parents, religious organizations and nongovernmental organizations should assist in reorienting Nigerian youths (Ozoemela, 2011:66). This is because as the government has eschewed every attempt to formulate and implement substance policies, orientation and social marketing should be adopted for value reorientation (Akindele, 2013).

Nonetheless, every University should establish different spheres of intervention ranging from counseling centers to treatment of substances. This will help in informing students about the health and social consequences of using substance as a means of reducing stress, managing academic difficulties and harmful substance use (Akachukwu, 2013:40). It is also vital that the screening of individuals/students for hazardous and harmful substance consumption, brief intervention and referral to treatment (SBRIT) should as a matter of urgency be periodically performed by trained experts with instruments such as AUDIT and CAGE questionnaire in various campuses (Nwankwo, 2013:6). More so, hostels should be constructed by many Universities where such is lacking, and students should be encouraged to live on campus because substance sale is prohibited in most Nigerian Universities' hostels (Nwosu, 2011). It is equally recommended by Sani (2014), that parents should desist from sending minors to buy substance beverages for them and should not give their wards too much money that can lead to spending such in frivolities.

The researcher is of the opinion that until these scholarly views is implemented, the growing culture of intoxication may continue, and other motives for consuming substance will emerge.

DISCUSSION

Substance use among students has emerged as a critical concern due to its significant impact on academic engagement and overall well-being. Research findings consistently reveal a high prevalence

of substance use among university students, with alcohol being the most commonly used substance, followed by tobacco and illicit drugs. According to Odira (2024), socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, peer influence, and academic stress are closely linked to substance use patterns, with younger students and males being more susceptible.

The findings indicate that substance use has profound negative effects on academic engagement. As outlined by Uduma (2014), students who engage in substance use often exhibit lower academic self-efficacy, diminished class attendance, poor academic performance, and a greater likelihood of academic failure. Stress and academic challenges are identified as key drivers of substance use, as many students rely on substances as a coping mechanism. However, students with higher academic self-efficacy tend to manage stress more effectively without resorting to substance use.

These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address substance use among students. Implementing awareness campaigns, providing accessible counselling services, and enforcing strict policies on substance use can play a vital role in mitigating its impact. Additionally, academic mentorship programs and stress management workshops can equip students with healthier coping strategies, fostering better academic engagement and success.

In summary, the relationship between substance use and academic engagement is complex and multifaceted, highlighting the importance of a proactive and holistic approach to address these challenges and support students' educational and personal growth.

CONCLUSION

This study on Substance Use and Academic Engagement among Students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka highlights the pressing need for institutions to address substance-related challenges to foster a conducive academic environment. Substance use poses significant risks to students' academic performance, mental well-being, and social development. By understanding the underlying causes and consequences, stakeholders—including university administrators, policymakers, educators, and counselors—can develop comprehensive strategies to combat substance use and enhance academic engagement.

This research underscores the importance of targeted interventions such as awareness campaigns, counseling services, and community partnerships to mitigate the impact of substance use. Through collaborative efforts and evidence-based solutions, universities can empower students to achieve their academic potential and build healthier, substance-free communities. Let this research serve as a foundation for continuous inquiry and action, promoting academic success and personal growth among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research the following recommendations are made;

- 1. Awareness Campaigns-** The School authority and government should develop and implement awareness programs to educate students about the negative effects of substance use on academic engagement and overall well-being. They should also collaborate with student organizations and health services to organize workshops, seminars, and peer-led discussions.
- 2. Counseling and Support Services-** Accessible counseling centers should be established within the university to provide support for students struggling with substance use. Also counselors

should be trained to address the specific challenges faced by students, including academic stress and peer pressure.

3. Policy Implementation- School authorities should strengthen university policies on substance use by enforcing strict regulations and penalties for violations. They should also introduce mandatory orientation sessions for new students to familiarize them with these policies.

4. Academic Support Programs – They should create academic mentorship programs to help students develop better study habits and time management skills, reducing the likelihood of resorting to substance use. They should also offer stress management workshops to equip students with healthy coping mechanisms.

5. Research and Monitoring - Regular surveys and studies should be conducted to monitor trends in substance use and its impact on academic engagement. They should use the findings to refine intervention strategies and ensure they remain effective and relevant.

6. Community Engagement- School authorities should Partner with local organizations and healthcare providers to extend support beyond the university. They should also encourage community-based initiatives that promote a substance-free lifestyle among young people.

7. Peer Education Programs- Student leaders should be trained to act as peer educators, promoting positive behaviors and serving as role models. Also they should establish peer support groups where students can support each other mentally

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