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## **“HANGING OUT”, TRENDS IN SUBSTANCE USE AMONG YOUTH IN A PRIVATE TERTIARY INSTITUTION IN NIGERIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

*Substance use among undergraduate students has intensified and is now considered a major public health problem in Nigeria. Majority of research on substance use has been quantitative and has not extensively considered the social context in which interactions occur. This study explored some critical social factors that might promote substance use among undergraduates in a private tertiary institution. The method was a cross sectional study conducted among thirty-one female and male students aged 17 – 27 years using FGDs, KIIS and IDIs. The instrument for the qualitative study was derived from the World Health Organization guidelines for substance use among students. Content analysis of five themes was interpreted, triangulating information from the various sources. Escalation of substance use was validated. Students' preferred mode of fun and leisure was hanging out over a substance of choice and clubbing. Females preferred the use of psychoactive drugs while males preferred strong spirits and champagne. Abuse of cough*

*syrup with codeine was very common among participants. Interestingly both male and female students reported that females surpass males in the use of substances. Female students were also more prone to sexual risk-taking behaviour than males. Students in their first and second year of studies engage more in the behaviour than students in their final year. Clubbing has increased considerably with students competing to outdo peers in buying the most expensive spirits and champagne. Movies, songs and musical videos glamourizing substance use were reported to have further reinforced the behaviour. Preventive strategies designed to increase self-esteem of students, assertiveness training to resist peer influence and programmes to increase youth's knowledge and consequences of substance use is strongly recommended.*

### **Keywords**

Substance use, Codeine abuse, Clubbing, Hanging – out

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## **1. Introduction**

Substance use has been a persistent problem in many African countries for decades. However, the situation is reported to have worsened and substance use among undergraduate students in Nigeria is now considered to be a major public health problem. (Duru, Okafor & Iwu, 2017, Nwachukwu, 2017, Opejobi, 2017, Obot, 2016, Ashiru, 2016, Adamson, et.al, 2015). According to the 2017 World drug report, substance use is dangerous, affects user's health and can result in disability and even death (UNODC, 2017) The rapidly rising trend among youths needs to be checked as it has implications for their physical and mental wellbeing and life expectancy. Indeed, it is imperative to identify and address critical issues in young people's lives that have implications for character formation and national development.

Much of substance use in youths is experimental. Navigating this stage of their lives can be confusing, since it is a period of cognitive, behavioural and emotional changes. If appropriate guidance is lacking, they may rely on peers for support and guidance. Consequently, this makes them vulnerable to negative peer influence and risk-taking behaviours (Ogwoh, 2013, Nolen - Hoeksema, Fredrickson, Loftus & Wagenaar, 2009;). Students in tertiary institutions are generally more affluent; free from parental control, and excited with their newfound independence, they may be more inclined to experiment with substance use in the process of socializing. The sudden proliferation of clubs and lounges in many urban cities in recent times,

may further exacerbate substance use since these clubs are frequented more by youths, and are bound to come with some attendant social pitfalls.

Two theories that may explain substance use are Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Psychoanalytic Theory. Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory explained that people learn behaviour by observing the behaviour of others and the environment in which behaviour occurs, if the environment is conducive to promoting the behaviour., they may adopt the behaviour. (Schultz & Schultz, 2009) Thus, in an environment free from parental control and observing peers indulging in substances, young adults might feel the urge to do the same. Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory explains that much of behaviour is informed by unconscious fears and desires. The psychological and emotional stress of a new environment, compounded by the unconscious need to fit in may lead students to substance use (Adewuyi & Akinsola, 2013).

## **1.2 Related Research**

The prevalence of substance use in Nigeria is well documented (Obot, 2016; Adamson et al, 2015, Oputeh, 2015, Osinowo, 2015). According to Obot, (2016, 2015, 2013), substances of choice in Nigeria include cannabis, cocaine, heroin, amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) and injection drug use (IDU). Obot (2016), also states that the problem of drug use is not new. What is new is the diverse addictive substances that are evolving and to which young people are gravitating toward. Furthermore, the escalating use of substances is leading to substance use disorder with attendant health implications (UNODC, 2017). Findings from Adamson, et al's (2015) national survey of substances available in Nigeria are consistent with Obot's observations. Adamson, et al (2015) also noted the high prevalence of substance use across Nigeria.

Nalah & Audu, (2014) reported a relationship between substance abuse and violent behaviour among students. According to them over 80% of students in their study perceived drugs to be a serious problem in the institution of study. Likewise, Ndom, Igbokwe & Ekerua (2012) in their assessment of students' perceptions of substance use in a public university in Nigeria reported that many of the students observed that substance use was pervasive and degenerated into violent behaviour. Other studies have noted the prevalence of substance use among undergraduate students (Osinowo, 2016; Adekeye, et al,2015; Eze & Uzoeghe, 2015; Abasiubong et al, 2014; Adegoke, Olasupo & Ayeni, 2014), These studies reported a high use of

substances among adolescents and students in tertiary institutions across Nigeria. The studies were mainly descriptive, cross sectional quantitative surveys.

Omigbodun and Babalola (2004), however explored the qualitative dynamics of substance use among a student population. They reported that drug use was more common among male adolescents than their female counterparts. However, there is some evidence to show increasing female substance use (UNODC, 2017, Awoyinfa, 2012; Room & Selin, 2005).

Peer pressure, poor parental guidance, exposure to and availability of drugs were some of the reasons given by these authors for substance use. Other explanations include need for acceptance, curiosity, access to more funds, availability and easy access of substances (Oputeh, 2015, Obot, 2013). Adewuyi & Akinsola, (2013) in their study on gender and substance abuse among undergraduate students in a public university in the southwest region of Nigeria found that majority of undergraduates use one substance or the other and that peer influence was a significant. They reported that more male more than female students used substances. Duru, Okafor & Iwu, (2017) attribute the pervasiveness of substance use to economic, social and cultural changes. Nalah and Audu also pointed out that substance use was carried over from secondary school

### **1.3 Objectives**

Most studies on substance use have been quantitative in their approach. Quantitative research restricts the possible ways in which a person can express social behaviour. They are inadequate in considering the social context in which interactions and relationships with others occur. For instance, they have not adequately addressed the dynamics of how thoughts and behaviour are influenced by the social context in which they occur. These were some of the aspects that this study delved into. The specific objectives were as follows:

- Examine gender differences in the patterns of substance use among undergraduates
- Identify some critical social factors that promote substance use among undergraduates
- Examine the influence of substance use on academic performance
- Investigate the effect of substance use on sexual behaviour
- Describe the influence of substance use on personality

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Design**

The design for the study was cross sectional. Participants for the study comprised male and female students of a private tertiary institution, ranging from 17 - 27 years of age. The choice of a private university was informed by the fact that tuition fees in private institutions are considerably higher than those of public institutions. It is therefore assumed that such students come from relatively more affluent homes than students in public universities, with access to more pocket money. Students were stratified across level of study, department and faculty.

### **2.2 Data collection**

The study adopted a qualitative approach because it allowed for more in-depth examination of substance use. It also better captured experiences, perceptions, thoughts and feelings than a quantitative approach. To obtain insight from the various sources, focus group discussion, key informant interview and in-depth interview were used to collect data from different categories of students. The instrument for the qualitative study was derived from the World Health Organization guidelines for substance use among students. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, informed consent was obtained from participants before commencing the study. The sensitivity of the topic also accounted for the small number of students who consented to participate in the study., However, those who participated were willing to talk and gave very rich and detailed information. Two focus group discussions were held, one with male users and a second with female non-users who are close friends of users. This is significant in that apart from users providing information, there was also data from the perspective of how others perceive them. Two key informant interviews were also held with two males, who were mentors of students, while eight in-depth interviews, four with male students and four with female students who were users, were conducted.

Several activities led to the finalization of the research instrument and data collection among students. These included the following:

- Researchers' identification of potential key players in the institution
- Researchers planning meetings, and meetings with the student's representative aimed at obtaining critical information in order to get useful data on substance use, as well as to seek for best approaches to accessing the cooperation of students who used substances, and key informants

- Design of qualitative guide
- Training of field assistants (moderator and note-taker)

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Content analysis of the data was done focusing on five themes of interest in the study. Findings from the different sources of the study were triangulated, synthesized and are presented in the findings. The advantage of triangulating data from the different sources was that since the non-user respondents themselves are students who dwell among the student population, they were able to give detailed information on behavioural patterns of substance users in their midst.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 Gender differences in patterns of substance use

Prominent amongst activities that students engage in for fun and leisure are hanging out and clubbing. Clubbing takes place from Thursdays through Sundays. Majority of male students hang out regularly to discuss various issues over drinks. Favourite hang-out spots on campus include the sport's field, 'underground' classrooms and 'underground bars' in hostels. These underground bars are run by students. As some male FGD participants put it:

*"We get together to drink and to talk politics or football and gossip about girls"* (Male, FGD Participant)

Another participant also confirmed the above. According to him:

*"What we do for fun is to go clubbing, drinking..."*

(Male, FGD Participant)

A male IDI participant substantiated the above. As stated by him:

*"We drink and smoke and romance just for fun"*

(Male, IDI participant, Age 23)

Male students generally prefer the consumption of alcohol to the use of drugs. According to majority of male FGD participants, they estimated that 70 – 80% of males in their institution consume alcohol regularly. Majority of participants admitted to regular intake of alcohol, although a few conceded to occasionally smoking marijuana (cannabis) or skunk. According to a female participant:

*"For me I can say 90% of boys drink and 50% of girls drink"*

(Female, FGD Participant)

The above assertion was confirmed by the in-depth interviews. According to an IDI participant:

*“The guys drink more than the girls ... 65:35% ratio are heavy drinkers’ they prioritize drink over food... 70% of feeding allowance goes to alcohol”.*

(Female, IDI Participant, Age 22)

Female students’ observations were consistent with that of males. Female students prefer psychoactive substances to alcohol when they hang out. Substances favoured by female students include marijuana, skunk, rohypnol, tramadol, shisha laced with drugs and codeine (in cough syrup). Very few female students take cocaine or drink alcohol, those that drink do so to please their boyfriends.

Male FGD participants reported that girls have surpassed boys in the use of substances in their institution. As stated by them:

*“Female students have taken over the baton from the boys. The saying that what a man can do, a woman can do better applies to girls in this university”.*

(Male, FGD Participant)

Another participant also noted:

*“Women are outperforming in the use of drugs in this institution.*

*What is trending is codeine mixed with coke, roache, rohypnol, to make them feel high”*

(Male, FGD Participant)

The FGD with female participants also validated this trend among female students. According to one of them:

*“Benylin with codeine..., makes you sleep... they can take the whole bottle and pour it into a bottle of coke”*

(Female, FGD Participant)

As noted by another participant:

*“They can take the whole bottle (Benylin)*

*They pour it into coke”*

(Female, FGD Participant)

Key Informants also observed that female students have indeed surpassed males in the use of substances. For instance, one of them also noted:

*“They take Benylin with codeine...it is a kind of special package...”*

(Male Key Informant, 25)

Another key informant also confirmed that:

*“Many of them take codeine cough syrup, tramadol and ref (rohypnol). They do it to have fun... they gather in groups, ref leaves a blue stain on their tongue”.*

(Male, KII Participant 27 years)

This view was supported by findings from the IDIs. According to a participant:

*“girls in this school prefer drugs, most girls that drink, it is because they are going out with a guy that drinks”.*

She went on to add:

*“I take weed, ref, codeine and crack... I stopped taking codeine when I started having seizures ... I was taking up to seven bottles a day”*

(Female, IDI participant, 18 years)

Across FGDs, KIIs and IDIs, participants confirmed that marijuana, skunk, codeine (in cough syrup), rohypnol and tramadol are favourite substances for many female and some male students. Codeine is usually mixed in a bottle of soft drink, preferably coke, and sipped until it is finished and then topped up. Some prefer to drink it neat. The average daily consumption was reported to be about one and a half bottles. Students, who indulge in psychoactive substances, do so as soon as they wake up. They even take bathroom breaks during lectures for a quick fix. The habit then continues in the evening. Those who indulge in the consumption of alcohol also indulge on a daily basis, culminating in further consumption at clubs from Thursdays through Sundays. Substance users meet in groups of about 10 – 15. Substance use started as early as ages 10 and 13 when students were still in primary or secondary school. In this study, younger students in their first and second year of study engage more in substance use than those in their third and final year. Such students have only been in the institution for a couple of months. Data from the male FGD confirmed this statement as one of the participants asserted:

*“... Our generation started drinking from age 16, some 17... but now young people are drinking from age 10 or 11; ...we have students here who are 16 years old and they are already drunks”*

(Male, FGD Participant).

Data from the female FGD further confirmed this

*“Funny enough, the 100L in this school now, presently, are worse”*

(Female, FGD Participant)

Another participant also endorsed that:



*“Ahh no, they are worse; they are worse than 300L or 400L. “I have a friend that started right from secondary school... most of them started at age 13”.*

(Female, FGD Participant)

### **3.2 Some critical social factors that promote substance use among adolescents**

Peer pressure, need for acceptance, need to impress, being around substance users and experimental curiosity were some of the major reasons given for substance use. According to participants, this is especially so for new students who are in a strange environment and are pressured into joining a clique. Compelled by the need for acceptance, they gravitate towards one of the cliques or ‘families’ within the university. Indeed, there are students waiting to indoctrinate new students into substance use. Previous users who are new to the university, in turn gravitate towards users within the university, sometimes offering financial incentive to be introduced to ‘students of like mind’. Information from the FGDs, IDIs and KIIs among males and females, also ascribed substance use to idleness and boredom. Other reasons stated were to calm nerves, especially after a difficult class. According to a participant:

*“Peer pressure is the number one thing (reason)... I have seen in this school, new students, when they first come in, the peer pressure is so much that they feel they need to belong to something and that leads them to it”*

(Male, FGD Participant)

Another participant also stated that:

*“You join a particular group where most people smoke so you feel it is a normal thing and if you don’t smoke with them, it is as if you don’t belong”*

(Male, FGD Participant)

This was further corroborated by the IDIs

*“If I come in newly and I ask for those who smoke and I drop N1-1500 (approx. \$5 – 7) you have a family already... (there are) families of weed smokers and drug takers and sometimes they mix... There are people who teach you new things....”*

(Female, FGD Participant)

Male and female FGD, IDI and KII participants also stated that substance use was mainly as a result of not being productively engaged. For instance, according to a participant:

*“I used to smoke because I was very idle, now my drink is stout (Guinness Stout)... my limit is five small bottles”*

(Male, FGD Participant)

Availability and easy access to alcohol and drugs on campus are factors that also promote substance use among students. For instance, both male and female participants reported that a variety of alcoholic drinks are easily accessed on campus, or at nearby shops outside campus. Alcoholic drinks sold on campus include spirits such as whisky, brandy, gin, alcoholic energy and herbal drinks. As noted by one of the participants:

*“Students don’t need to go far to buy alcohol”. I have a bar in my room so after my class; I use it (alcohol) to wind down”*  
(Male, FGD Participant)

Another participant also stated that:

*“You can find drinks on the shelves right here in the supermarket and pharmacy on campus”*  
(Female, FGD Participant)

This was further supported by information from the IDIs. A participant stated as follows:

*“There is a place called School Two outside school... students drink and smoke on credit... you can owe up to N10,000 (approx. \$45)”*  
(Male, IDI participant, Age 24 Years)

A key informant also verified easy access to substances; In his words, he stated that:

*“There is a shop in the boy’s hostel that has alcohol... there is also a bar in the boy’s hostel, called Zanga, boys and girls are allowed in Zanga”*  
(Male, KII Participant, 25 Years)

The proliferation of clubs and lounges in many urban cities in Nigeria in recent times is another factor that has aided access to alcohol. Indeed, clubbing promotes indiscriminate consumption of alcohol. Clubbing starts from Thursday through the weekend. According to male participants, for some students, clubbing is a business; such students attract patronage to clubs because of their popular standing with other students. They are extravagant and spend lavishly, buying several rounds of drinks for friends. Such students are celebrated by the club’s in-house disc jockey who beams the spotlight on them and announce their names. This information compels other students to compete to outdo the individual. Champagne is one of the drinks favoured by students when they go clubbing; because it is expensive, it is bought to impress or intimidate peers rather than for consumption. According to a participant:

*“There are some students we call ‘big spenders’. Such students attract many people to clubs. In those clubs, the deejay lets everyone know that the ‘big spender’ has just spent one million naira (approx. \$4,500) on drinks. This now*

*makes other students want to outperform the 'big spender' or spend close to the amount"*

(Male, FGD Participant)

An IDI participant confirmed the over the top, extravagant trend in clubs to show off.

According to her:

*"When they are in the club, the guys actually want to show off. They pop a casket...a big container that has expensive alcohol and they put this light on them... most guys do it to show off. Those guys that 'pop' casket are in the VIP section of the club. If you pop casket, even the MC will start hailing you...and praising you and the light comes on you when the waiters come with the casket "*

(Female, IDI Participant, Age 19 Years)

Champagne is bought only in the clubs, and the more expensive the champagne, the better.

"Champagne costs between N150,000 to N200,000 (approx \$682 – \$818) in the clubs. A KII participant confirmed the behaviour in clubs:

*"A casket is a huge container that holds a variety of drinks and most times, it is the most expensive drinks. Like Moet, A student bought a bottle of very expensive champagne at a club and used it to wash his hands simply to impress his colleagues. They sometimes pour the champagne on each other"*

(Male, KII Participant, Age 25 Years)

The media, has to a large extent, reinforced substance use. Youth watch movies and musical videos glamourizing substance use, are curious and want to try it out. Songs and musical videos by popular Nigerian music artistes celebrating 'big spenders', popping of champagne and substance use, youth aspire to be like such artistes. Such songs get a lot of airplay on cable television channels, they are also the trending songs at clubs. A male FGD participant narrated how they started using substances:

*"First when it came out, foreign artistes showed it in a video and (students) tried it and they said whoa, so it works"*

(Male, FGD Participant)

The above statement was further authenticated by the explanation of one of the key informants who said:

*"The song 'story for the gods' is about how he (the artiste) took aphrodisiac and is ready to have an orgy... there is a particular song by another popular artiste ...that song is talking about sniffing drugs..."*

(Male, KII Participant, 25 years)

Psychoactive substances in the form of prescription pills are illicitly obtained from pharmacies in town. Sometimes, students forge prescriptions in order to obtain the drugs. One of the KII participants who work closely with students, mentoring them in extracurricular sporting activities, reported that use of psychoactive drugs was very common among that category of students. As he put it:

*“A lot of them (students) in sports are doing it... I have just spoken to the father of one of the students whose drug habit was getting too serious”*

(Male, KII Participant, 27 Years)

### **3.3 Influence of substance use on students’ academic performance**

Substance use adversely affects students’ academic performance. For students who indulge daily, they skip classes and as a result miss tests and assignments. They are also not prepared for their end of semester examinations. Consequently, they make frantic last-minute efforts on the morning of the examination, to seek help from fellow students, or resort to cheating during examinations. Usually, such students end up having to repeat. Some students make an attempt to attend lectures but are influenced by members of their ‘cliques’ who persuade them to hang out with them. Drug users more than alcoholics, miss their lectures because they spend all day sleeping to garner up energy to hang out again with friends in the evening when their activities (use of substances) peak. This attitude was further confirmed by several of the participants. For example: One of the key informants reported that:

*“A lot of promising students who join these “cliques’ perform very poorly in their academic work”*

(Male, KII Participant, 27 Years)

Focus Group Participants also confirmed the above:

*“When they see members of their clique going to hang out during lectures, they feel they have to go and join them, they miss their lectures. That is why many of them don’t graduate when their classmates are graduating...”*

(Male, FGD Participant)

Another participant further reported the negative effect of substance use on students’ academic performance. She said:

*“A lot of these smokers do not graduate on time, They end up with many carry-overs”*

(Female, FGD Participant)

Yet another participant stated that:

*“Those who do well are very low compared to those it has ruined”*  
(Female, FGD Participant)

An IDI participant who is a substance user also stated that:

*“For those that take drugs, night is the best time to take drugs, some take from morning till night and the next morning instead of them to go to class, they use that time to sleep”*  
(Female, IDI Participant, 18 years)

### **3.4 Effect of substance use on sexual behaviour**

Substance use tends to rid students of their inhibitions. For some users, it is a trigger for sexual activities and sometimes lead to homosexual interactions among female students. Indeed, according to female participants, rophynol and ecstasy are taken mostly for their aphrodisiac effect, although the use of ecstasy is not very common. Many male students persuade their girlfriends to drink alcohol to make them more susceptible to seduction. According to a male participant, there is a shop he goes to regularly where the shop owner has condoms on prominent display. He thought that the shop owner was not making any sales from the condoms since the display always seemed to remain the same. In his own words:

*“...Out of curiosity I asked him why he continues to display the CDs (condoms). To my surprise, he said the CDs sell very very fast and what I see are new stock; that he was always stocking new ones that is why I think that he is not selling”.*  
(Male, FGD Participant)

Another participant commented that:

*“Some guys know their girl’s weak point, when they get drunk, they have the urge for sex. So guys will always try that experiment and most of the time, at least 6/10 times it works”.*  
(Male, FGD Participant)

This finding is further supported by the key informants. One of them said:

*“I know of people who drink and get horny”*  
(Male, KII Participant 25 years)

The other key informant also stated that:

*“People drink and smoke and romance each other”*  
(Male, KII Participant 27 Years)

The effect of substance use on sexual behaviour is further supported by the In-depth Interviews with substance users. For example; a participant stated that:

*“Sex is part of the fun for both alcohol and drug users”  
“Drinking of alcohol and smoking of marijuana and skunk  
gives you this power, you are charged (aroused)”*  
(Male, IDI Participant 23 years.)

Another participant also commented that:

*“Drugs make you have several rounds of sex...  
I feel like having sex when I take it”*  
(Female, IDI Participant, Age 22 Years)

According to yet another participant:

*“When I take it (drugs) I am on ‘Control P’ (A floating euphoric feeling)”*  
(Female, IDI Participant, 18 years)

Findings on sexual behaviour as a result of substance use are consistent from the various sources of data collection. When girls use substances and are sexually aroused, they turn to each other, right there in the open and have sex. Sometimes, it turns into threesomes. Male students, however, prefer heterosexual sex and go to great lengths for a girl. For instance, a participant, reported that a male student who was hitting on her broke into the supermarket on campus and stole top-up credit for mobile phones worth about N60,000 (approx. \$273) to buy her cocaine. The same boy also traded his iPhone 6S worth about N150, 000 (approx. \$660) to buy her ‘crack’. In her own words she said:

*“The males in this institution like girls and can do anything for girls...,  
a boy in this school dropped his iPhone 6S for crack for me...  
more girls take crack than boys”*  
(Female, IDI participant, Age 18 Years)

### **3.5 Influence of substance use on student’s personality**

Alcohol and psychoactive substances have different behavioural effects. Some users undergo a personality change. While alcohol loosens the tongue, and makes for loose lips, making users more vocal, psychoactive substances make users more subdued. Male participants agreed that alcohol leads to divulging of confidential information. When they or their friends are intoxicated, they are more prone to let slip information. Users of alcohol, in addition to being more vocal also tend to raise their voices when holding a conversation. Sometimes they become violent and abusive. At other times they are rude and insulting and get into verbal and physical altercations without cause. Alcohol also gives them Dutch courage to ask a girl out. Most of the

male participants claimed that they could handle their drinks. According to some of the male participants:

*“Alcohol is a secrets revealer”  
“Some people ...when  
they get drunk, they become violent...they want to fight,  
they want to attack somebody”  
(Male, FGD Participant)*

Another male FGD participant also reported what he has observed about a user. He said:

*“I have seen a student in this school who ripped off his own water closet ...and slammed  
it into the ground. When we broke into his room, we found a lot of drugs, pills... But  
there are a lot of users who can control themselves”  
(Male, FGD Participant)*

Females too have behavioural reactions, albeit, somewhat differently to males. A female FGD participant, who is a non-user, described the behaviour of a friend of hers that goes through a total personality change when she drinks. According to her,

*“one of my friends when she gets drunk, she passes out and lies on the floor for hours,  
practically unconscious (comatose). Another friend gets over excited and goes up to  
people that she would not normally talk to and be all over them”  
(Female, FGD Participant)*

She further commented that:

*“The girls sleep a lot, some urinate on themselves. Some become very excitable. Drinkers  
don't see the harmful effects of drink. They just live for that moment; it makes them  
carefree. . According to them what happens under alcohol stays under alcohol.”  
(Female FGD Participant)*

The influence of drug use on behaviour also varies from individual to individual. Generally, indications are that psychoactive drugs make users more subdued or spaced out, some individuals are belligerent. Users are in a world of their own. Drug users tend to lose their inhibitions making them more susceptible to indiscriminate sex. Drugs, according to users increase sexual arousal and prowess. Female participants observation of female students who use drugs say that it is because they want to feel high and have fun. Drugs enable them to have several rounds of sex. Codeine, Rophynol and Tramadol are taken to suppress problems. These drugs repress their senses and help them sleep. In fact, drug users are said to sleep a lot. However, there are some students who take alcohol or drugs and are not affected; they are still very much in control of themselves. Generally, participants reported that it is difficult to tell that

a student indulges in substance use as there is a formal dress code in the institution that compels students to comply. For example, a female FGD participant noted that:

*“It depends on the type of drug, I have seen people, take ref, they are really calm...they just walk on their own, they are in their own world. Same goes for codeine”*  
(Female IDI participant, 17 Years)

This was confirmed by the comment of another FGD participant who said:

*“I have people around me who smoke (marijuana) but you won’t know they smoke until you catch them”*  
(Female, FGD Participant)

#### **4. Discussion**

This study validates the findings of quantitative studies of the pervasiveness of substance use among undergraduate students. Some of the social factors accounting for substance use, mentioned in this study were peer pressure, need for acceptance, being around substance users, curiosity, idleness and boredom, availability and easy access of substances. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Obot, 2016, Osinowo, 2016; Adekeye, et al, 2015; Eze & Uzoeghe, 2015; Abasiubong et al, 2014; Adegoke, Olasupo & Ayeni, 2014; Adewuyi & Akinsola, 2013). The findings in this study, are also indicative of indiscriminate use of alcohol and licit and illicit drugs by a considerable number of undergraduate students. An interesting trend is the escalating use of codeine in analgesics and cough syrup, and alcohol laced shisa and herbal drinks. This suggests the search for newer ‘highs’ as stated by Obot (2016). The findings are also consistent with Nalah & Audu, (2014), and Ndom, et al (2012) that substance use leads to violent behaviour and that students from affluent homes were more likely to use substances.

However, unlike previous studies which reported that substance use was more prevalent in males than females and in older students (Duru, et al, 2017, Adamson, et al 2015 Osinowo, 2016, Adewuyi & Adesola, 2013, Omigbodun & Babalola, 2004), this study found that substance use was practiced more by female students than males at the institution of study and more by younger students than older students. Where previous studies found that males were more likely to resort to sexual aggressive behaviour, it was female students that were more prone to sexual risk taking behaviour and homosexual relationships as a result of substance use. The quantity of alcohol consumed on a regular basis is disturbing, especially the competitive nature, exorbitantly high cost of drinks and the ‘champagne culture’ favoured by students. It has



implications for how these habits are sustained as well as long term health repercussions and life expectancy. The proliferation of lounges, which are more upscale in concept than regular clubs, certainly has not helped. Media promotion of songs, and musical videos by artists celebrating big spenders, popping of champagne and drug use, to a large extent reinforces the habit and the behaviour of these youths. The need to outdrink and outspend peers is further driven by celebrating of the behaviour; impressionable youth may perceive it as 'acceptable' and 'sophisticated' behaviour.

The findings that substance use was practiced more by younger students than older students has serious implications for parental monitoring and parent child communication. The line between use and abuse is very thin. A closer parent-child relationship may lead to early detection of substance use and perhaps, more effective management of the behaviour.

This deviation from previous findings may be attributed to mass media, social marketing, acculturation and infiltration of Western values.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study showed robust dynamics of substance use related behaviour. It was interesting to note the willingness of users to disclose, and their forthrightness. What was also clearly evident, was how well informed all the participants were about substance use and the number of friends and close associates they know that indulge in substances; even first year students who have only been in the institution for only a couple of months. This is indicative of the pervasiveness of the habit. Despite knowing the harmful effects, the behaviour persists. According to a male FGD participant, they go to church to pray against the harmful effects.

Young people require appropriate guidance in order to develop a healthy sense of self and make informed choices. As substance use starts as young as age 10, parents and primary caregivers need to be more attentive to their children and their wards. High-profile media reports of substance related deaths of youth confirm escalation of substance use (Ben-Nwankwo and Olonilua, 2017; Nwachukwu 2017, Sahara Reporters, 2017; Nwachukwu, 2017; Opejobi, 2017). If indeed, as the media reports, that 40%, almost half, of the youth population are dependent on one substance or the other, it is imperative that urgent and coordinated measures need to be made not only by parents, but also by school authorities, community leaders, media and government to curb the use of substances. Peer pressure is one of the main reasons for substance use.

Programmes should focus on improving self-esteem and assertiveness training to resist peer influence. In addition, intensive drug abuse programmes should address social and psychological implications and should be organized regularly. Such programmes should focus on providing comprehensive and accurate information about the consequences of substance use.

Limitations of sample size is noted. Because of the limited number of participants in the qualitative study, better percentages of students who use the various substances need to be validated using a quantitative study which would be useful in providing more definitive figures as well as what accounts for individual differences for use. Consequently, future research can increase the depth and breadth of the study by applying a mixed methods explanatory approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the deeper underlying reasons for substance use.

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