

Substance Abuse Behaviour among Youths: The Predictive Effects of Social Media and Peer Pressure

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Abstract: *Substance abuse behaviour has caused harm to individuals, families and the larger society. Studies linking social media and peer pressure to substance abuse behaviour among youths in Rivers State are scarce. Therefore, this study investigated social media and peer pressure as predictors of substance abuse behaviour among youths in Ahoada-East and Port Harcourt metropolis. Cross-sectional survey design was adopted while data were collected from 234 participants using validated scales. Data were analyzed using multiple regression and independent samples t-test to test two hypotheses at $p = .001$ level of significance. The result revealed that social media and peer pressure jointly predicted substance abuse behaviour among study participants ($R^2 = .730$, $F = 6.724$, $p = .001$). Further result showed that peer pressure independently predicted substance abuse behaviour among youths in the study samples ($\beta = -.147$, $t = -2.088$, $p = .026$) while social media did not ($\beta = -.841$, $t = -1.118$, $p > .05$). It is concluded that social media and peer pressure are good predictors of substance abuse behaviour. Therefore, the study concluded that parents, governmental agencies and other stakeholders should work in unison to reduce factors that increase substance abuse behaviour among youths in the study population.*

Keywords: *Social media, Peer pressure, Substance abuse behaviour, Gender*

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Introduction

Substance abuse behaviour (or drug abuse behaviour) involves the use of drugs in amounts or by methods which are harmful to the individuals or others.¹ Also, it is the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances which when ingested affect mental functions. These substances include alcohol, caffeine, glue, barbiturates, tobacco, hallucinogens (alpha-methyltryptamine, ketamine, phencyclidine, D-lysergic acid) and illicit drugs.² Studies have confirmed high prevalence of substance abuse among Nigerian population. For example, the prevalence of substance abuse in Nigeria is estimated at 14.4% or 14.3 million among people aged between 15 and 64 years.³ Aside the North-west geopolitical zone in Nigeria which has 13.4% prevalence of substance abuse, other five geopolitical zones are reported to have as higher as 33.6% prevalence of substance abuse among in-school adolescents.⁴ In Rivers State, the prevalence of substance abuse for the urban population was 37% and for the rural population was 38% this raises cause for concern.⁵

Substance abuse behaviour has been considered as a major contributor to suicide, homicide, poisoning, sexual assault and the spread of infectious disease among youths around the world.⁶ The consequences of substance abuse among youths and adolescents include mental disorder, drop out from school, cultism, social violence, Internet frauds, gang formation, destructions of normal academic activities, armed robbery, 419 syndrome, social miscreants (area boys and girls), lawlessness among youths, lack of respect for elders, rape, instant death and wasting of precious and innocent lives, etc.⁷

Some factors have been implicated as predictors of substance abuse behaviour among youths. The first factor considered is social media which is described as an interactive computer-mediated technology that facilitates the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks.⁸ social media provides a vibrant new digital arena for peer pressure and influence. While social media have a variety of

¹ F A Yusuf, "Factors Influencing Substance Abuse among Undergraduate Students in Osun State, Nigeria," *African Research Review* 4, no. 4 (2010): 1–13.

² C B Duru et al., "Socio-Demographic Determinants of Psychoactive Substance Use among Students of Tertiary Institutions in Imo State, Nigeria," *Journal of Addiction Research & Therapy* 8, no. 5 (2017): 1–9; W.H.O., "Mental Health. World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe," 2022, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our->.

³ J Olanrewaju et al., "An Assessment of Drug and Substance Abuse Prevalence: A Cross- Sectional Study among Undergraduates in Selected South-Western Universities in Nigeria," *Journal of International Medical Research* 50, no. 10 (2022): 1–11.

⁴ Onigbogi O., Ojo O., and Babalola O, "Prevalence of Substance Abuse among Secondary School Students in Lagos State of Nigeria," *European Scientific Journal, ESJ* 19, no. 15 (2023): 67.

⁵ I N Ojule and H B Te-Erbe, "Prevalence and Predictors of Substance Use Disorder among Urban and Rural Secondary School Students of Khana, Rivers State, Nigeria," *European Journal of Public Health Studies*, 5((2022): 83–97, www.ejphs.com.

⁶ T Frey and T N Friemel, "Adolescents' Drinking Behaviour off- and Online: Disentangling Exposure Effects and Selective Exposure in Networked Communication Structures," *Journal of Health Communication* 28, no. 1 (2023): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2023.2275124>; C Salas-Wright et al., "Attacks Intended to Seriously Harm and Co-Occurring Drug Use among Youth in the United States," *Substance Use Misuse* 51, no. 13 (2016): 1681–1692, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2016.1191516>.

⁷ C E Eze, "Effect of Social Media Use on Drug Abuse among Youths in Nigeria," *Implications for Youth Education. IAA Journal of Management* 10, no. 1 (2023): 20–26, www.iaajournals.org.

⁸ H Weber, "Age Structure and Political Violence: A Re-Assessment of the 'Youth Bulge' Hypothesis," *International Interactions* 45, no. 1 (2019): 80–112.

benefits such as increased socialization, exposure to ideas, and greater self-confidence, it is also known to generate negative effects such as advertising pressure, exposure to inappropriate behaviour and dialogue, and fake news. Some studies have found social media as a predictor of substance abuse among youths and adolescents.⁹

The second factor considered in this study is peer pressure which is described as an emotional or mental force from individuals that belong to the same social group (such as age, grade or status) to act or behave in a manner like themselves.¹⁰ Also, Jones (2010) conceived peer pressure as the ability of individuals from the same social group or age to influence another of the same age bracket. Peer pressure is usually common among adolescents who are experimenting with risk-taking behaviour such as sexual behaviour, cyberbullying, stealing, cheating, substance abuse, etc.¹¹ Several studies have revealed peer pressure as consistent predictor of substance abuse behaviour among different populations and samples.¹²

Finally, gender is considered in this study to influence substance abuse behaviour. That is whether the youths are males or females would determine how much they engage in substance abuse behaviour. Studies have produced contradictory results on the influence of gender in substance abuse behaviour among youth populations. For example, some studies.¹³ Have found gender to have significant influence on substance abuse behaviour among youths. However, other studies have found more male youths to engage in substance abuse than their female counterparts.¹⁴

Specifically, Anderberg and Dahlberg found more females to have problems related to family, more serious substance abuse and health related problems than their male counterparts.¹⁵ Generally, youths are vulnerable to substance abuse behaviour. This is because their physical and

⁹ Eze, "Effect of Social Media Use on Drug Abuse among Youths in Nigeria"; J Nesi et al., "Friends' Alcohol-Related Social Networking Site Activity Predicts Escalations in Adolescent Drinking: Mediation by Peer Norms," *Journal of Adolescents Health* 60, no. 6 (2017): 641–647, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.01.009>; S.I & Igwebuike O. Nwafor, K.A., Ezema, "Social Media Use and Substance Abuse among Young People in South-East, Nigeria," *Sau Journal of Management & Social Sciences* 3 (2022): 7–14; E M Winpenny, T M Marteau, and E Nolte, "Exposure of Children and Adolescents to Alcohol Marketing on Social Media Websites," *Alcohol & Alcoholism* 49, no. 2 (2013): 154–159.

¹⁰ L Weinfield, "Remembering the 3rd Wave," 2010.

¹¹ C Eremie and M Okwulehie, "Factors Affecting Career Choice among Senior Secondary School Students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State (Implication to Counseling)," *International Journal of Innovative Education Research* 6, no. 2 (2021): 27–39.

¹² A.P.& Aina Akindipe and J.O., "Factors Influencing Substance Abuse among Patients Admitted to the Two Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospitals in the South-West of Nigeria," *African Journal of Health Nursing & Midwifery* 4, no. 2 (2021): 38–66, <https://doi.org/10.52589/AJHNM-IEQS9BNQG>; A F O Chukwuemeka et al., "Assessing Alcohol Abuse in a Sample of Nigerian Undergraduates: Predictive Effects of Peer Pressure and Self-Esteem," *Practicum Psychologia* 9, no. 1 (2019): 103–124, <http://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php.pp>; C T Leshargie et al., "The Impact of Peer Pressure on Cigarette Smoking among High School and University Students in Ethiopia: A Systemic Review and Meta-Analysis," *PLoS ONE* 14, no. 10 (2019): 222572, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0222572>; S Joshua, Peer Pressure, Locus of Control and Substance Abuse among Adolescents. A Dissertation Submitted to the School of Psychology in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of the Bachelor Of (Community Psychology Degree of Makerere University, 2019).

¹³ Yusuf, "Factors Influencing Substance Abuse among Undergraduate Students in Osun State, Nigeria."

¹⁴ P H Dimas, O H Ajayi, and T K Bahijja, "Substance Abuse: Prevalence and the Determinant Factors among Youths in Jigwada Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria," *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace & Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)* 1.4 (3 (2023): 193 – 210; R Oguntayo et al., "Age, Gender, Socio-Economic Status, Attitudes towards Drug Abuse as Determinants of Deviant Behaviour among Undergraduate Students," *European Review of Applied Sociology*, (2020): 38–46, <https://doi.org/10.1515/eras-2020-0009>; K A Oshikoya and A Alli, "Perception of Drug Abuse amongst Nigerian Undergraduates," *World Journal of Medical Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2016): 133–139.

¹⁵ M Anderberg and M Dahlberg, "Gender Differences among Adolescents with Substance Abuse Problems at Maria Clinics in Sweden," *Nordisk Studies on Alcohol & Drugs* 35, no. 3 (2018): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14550725172517751263>.

psychological states of development cause them to be highly susceptible to the negative effects of substance abuse behaviour. Substance abuse behaviour is known to cause harm to individuals, their families and the larger society. The advent and use of social media technology to enhance social interactions to share information both visual and audio has continued to influence social behaviour such as youth engaging in deviant behaviour such as substance abuse behaviour. Studies investigating substance abuse behaviour among youths have produced varied results. Also, studies linking social media and peer pressure to substance abuse behaviour among youths in Rivers State are scarce which leave gaps in knowledge to fill. Therefore, this study investigated social media and peer pressure as predictors of substance abuse behaviour among youths in Rivers State, Nigeria. The research questions raised to guide this study were: Would social media and pressure predict substance abuse behaviour among youths in Rivers State, Nigeria? And would there be gender differences in substance abuse behaviour among youths in Rivers State?

The study would provide a better understanding on the influence of social media and peer pressure on substance abuse behaviour among youths in Rivers State. Also, policymakers and Non-Governmental Organizations who are engaged in policy formulations and advocacy would find the results of this study useful in implementing their various programmes on substance abuse behaviour among youths.

Theoretical constructs

Bandura (1997) developed the Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT) which posits that behaviour is learned by observation, identification and imitation, and assisted by reinforcement (not necessarily direct reinforcement).¹⁶ As individuals interact, they consciously or unconsciously observe and imitate and display behaviour of their models or significant others. When applied to this study, youths learned delinquent behaviour by modeling exposure to friends' delinquent behavior such as substance abuse. In this context, both the "significant others" and the "generalized others" exerted influence on the youths. However, peers' social approval of substance abuse and anticipated rewards for engaging in substance abuse enhances substance addiction when there is weak bonding to the family. The practical example is when youths see others using substances, there is that tendency for them to think and do the same.

The second theory used is the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) which is "a psychological communication perspective that stresses individual use and choice".¹⁷ The theory posits that society, media and its audience develop a relationship and that the more society depends on the media to operate, the more the media have influence on society. The degree to which the society/or audience relies on the media serves as a barometer for measuring and forecasting media effects. Heavy dependency on social media often leads to the conferment of authority that media have over such audiences. UGT has been equated with indirect influence of the social media platforms or websites used by celebrities and personalities to advertise and lure youths into substance abuse that are injurious to their health and the society.¹⁸ The practical

¹⁶ Albert Bandura and C George Boeree, *Albert Bandura [1925 – , Biography An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 2006.

¹⁷ J G Blumler and E Katz, "The Uses of Mass Communication" (Sage, 1974); M Sichach, "Uses and Gratifications Theory- Background, History and Limitations," n.d., <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4729248https://dx.doi.org/102139/ssrn.4729248>.

¹⁸ Nwafor, K.A., Ezema, "Social Media Use and Substance Abuse among Young People in South-East, Nigeria."

example comes when significant others use social media such as X, Instagram, Facebook to show off wealth or riches gotten which can easily be seen as the good way to follow and do, thus increasing the possibility of substance abuse.

Brief Empirical Review

Some studies have been conducted on social media use and substance abuse behaviour among youth populations. For example, Costello and Ramo (2017) found that youths who used social media were more likely to use tobacco, alcohol and marijuana than youths who do not use social media.¹⁹ Also, Costello and Ramo (2017) found youths with disordered online social networking to be more likely to engage in substance abuse behaviour. In addition, Nesi et al. (2017) confirmed that social media increased drinking behaviour which is one form of substance abuse behaviour among youths.²⁰ Finally, Crosier and Marsch (2016) indicated that substance abuse behaviour causes problems such as depression, queer behaviour, sexual and domestic violence at personal, national and indeed global levels.

Also, some studies have been conducted on peer pressure as a predictor of substance abuse behaviour among different populations and samples including youths. For example, Akindipe and Aina (2021) found peer pressure as a significant predictor of substance abuse among patients admitted into the two Neuropsychiatric Hospitals in South-west Nigeria.²¹ Similarly, Lawal and Aliyu (2020) established that 19% of the major cause of substance abuse among youth in Katsina State, Nigeria was due to peer pressure and desire for enjoyment.²² Furthermore, Huba (2019) found peer pressure to exert substance abuse behaviour through initiation and supply while Mamma, Othman and Lian (2017) concluded that substance abuse among youths in Nigeria accounted for gang formation, armed robbery, mental illness and cultism in the society today.

Finally, other studies (Abikoye et al., 2014; Akindipe & Aina, 2021; Chukwuemeka et al., 2019; Leshargie et al., 2019; Joshua, 2019; Wandera, 2018) have confirmed peer pressure as a strong predictor of substance abuse among different populations and across different samples. However, Paul (2019) did not find peer pressure as a predictor of substance abuse.²³

¹⁹ C.R.& Ramo Costello and D., "Social Media and Substance Use: What Should We Be Recommending to Teens and Their Parents?," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 60, no. 6 (2017): 629–630, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.03.017>.

²⁰ Costello and D.

²¹ Akindipe and J.O., "Factors Influencing Substance Abuse among Patients Admitted to the Two Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospitals in the South-West of Nigeria."

²² N Lawal and M A Aliyu, "Assessment of Causes and Effects of Drugs and Substances Abuse among Youths: A Case Study of Katsina Metropolis (North-West, Nigeria)," *International Neuropsychiatric Disease Journal* 219059011 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.9734/indj/2020/v14i130117>.

²³ G E Abikoye, Sholarin A M., and Adekoya J A, "Parenting Styles and Peer Pressure as a Predictor of Substance Abuse among University Students," *Psychology & Behavioral Science* 3, no. 2 (2014); Akindipe and J.O., "Factors Influencing Substance Abuse among Patients Admitted to the Two Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospitals in the South-West of Nigeria"; Chukwuemeka et al., "Assessing Alcohol Abuse in a Sample of Nigerian Undergraduates: Predictive Effects of Peer Pressure and Self-Esteem"; Leshargie et al., "The Impact of Peer Pressure on Cigarette Smoking among High School and University Students in Ethiopia: A Systemic Review and Meta-Analysis"; Joshua, *Peer Pressure, Locus of Control and Substance Abuse among Adolescents. A Dissertation Submitted to the School of Psychology in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of the Bachelor Of*.

Method

Research Design

The research adopted cross-sectional survey design using validated questionnaires for data collection. The independent variables were social media and peer pressure while the dependent variable was substance abuse. The study was conducted among youths in Ahoada- East and Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers State, Nigeria. The participants considered for the study were youths residing in Rivers State. Hence this study population include youths both male and females from 13 years to 30 years old living within the vicinity of Port Harcourt and Ahoada-East, Rivers State Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select Ahoada- East and Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria while convenience sampling technique was adopted to select potential participants for questionnaire distribution. Taro Yamane sampling method: $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ was used to calculate sample size arrived at 281 youths.

Instruments

Three validated questionnaires were adopted for data collection.

The *Reasons for Taking and Factors Influencing Substance Use Scale* (RTFISUS) was used to measure substance abuse among participants.²⁴ RTFISUS has two subscales in which the first sub-scale, Bi, contained 12-item which identifies the commonly used substances/drugs and frequency of use, while the second subscale, Bii, contained 8-item used to identify the reasons for taking and factors influencing the use of drugs/substances. The items in Bi, are responded to in a "Yes", "Often", "Occasional" or "No" format, while items in Bii, are responded to in a "Yes" or "No" format. Sample items include: "Poor teaching/parental example and upbringing influenced taking drugs" and "Peer group/peer pressure influenced taking drugs". The scale reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 and for this study Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 was obtained.

This was followed by *Peer Pressure Scale-Revised* (PPS-R, Saini & Singh, 2016) which was used to assess peer pressure among youth participants. It is a 25-item scale rated on a 5-point Likert's format with responses ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Sample items include: "What I do is determined by my friends" and "I have friends who smoke or drink alcohol". Authors obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 and in this study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 was obtained.²⁵

Finally, *Social Media Engagement Questionnaire* (SMEQ, Przybylski et al., 2013) was used to evaluate social media usage by youth participants. It provides a solution to this problem, measuring the extent to which people's key daily activities tend to involve social media. SMEQ scale consisted of five items on a 6-response format ranging from "Never" to "Seven" times sample items include: "How often did you use social media in the 15 minutes before you go to sleep?" Cronbach's alpha of 0.76 was obtained.²⁶

²⁴ O., O., and O, "Prevalence of Substance Abuse among Secondary School Students in Lagos State of Nigeria."

²⁵ S. & Singh Saini and S., *Peer Pressure Questionnaire-Revised* (Educational Research, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.10861.79842>.

²⁶ A K Przybylski et al., "Motivational, Emotional, and Behavioral Correlates of Fear of Missing Out," *Computers in Human Behavior* 29 (2013): 1814–1848.

Procedure for data collection

Letter of identification was collected from the Department of Psychology, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria where potential participants were approached in several places including football viewing centres, hang out places, road site joints, cybercafé and by cursory interaction by the researchers. Once rapport was established, the researchers introduced them and solicited participation. Those who were obliged to participate were assured of confidentiality of their responses. They were told the voluntariness of participation, and they can stop filling in the questionnaires at any point they feel uncomfortable. No financial incentive was offered. A total of 281 questionnaires were distributed and retrieved on the spot in the period of 11 days. During screening and coding, six questionnaires had missed vital items and were subsequently removed leaving 275 used for the analysis.

Data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. Multiple regressions analysis was used to test hypothesis 1 while independent samples t-test was used to test hypothesis 2. All hypotheses were accepted at $p = .001$ level of significance.

Result

Participants’ Socio-demographic Data

A total of 275 participants completed the questionnaires. Descriptive analysis revealed that 168 (61%) of the participants were males while 103(39%) were females. In terms of the age bracket, 53 (19%) of the participants were between 13-15 years old, 64(23%) were between 16-18 age bracket, 87 (32%) were between 16 -18 years old and 71 (26%) were between 26-30 years age bracket. With respect to their religious faiths, 113 (41%) were Christians, 80 (29%) were Muslims while 82 (30%) declared unspecified religious faiths.

Table 1. Regression analysis of the joint and independent predictors of social media and peer pressure on substance abuse behaviour among youths in Ahoada-East and Port Harcourt metropolis

Variables	R	R²	F	β	t	p
Constant	.954	.730	6.724			
Social media			6.411	.841	1.118	.035
Peer Pressure			4.359	.147	2.088	.026*

*) Significant at $p = .001$

Table 1 shows the result of multiple regression analysis of social media and peer pressure as joint predictors of substance abuse behaviour among youths in Ahoada-East and Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers State. The result revealed that social media and peer pressure jointly predicted substance abuse behaviour among study participants ($R^2 = .730$, $F = 6.724$, $p = .001$)

which explained 73% variance in substance abuse behaviour among study participants. Rivers State is the second vibrant City in Nigeria where youths are engaged in many activities including used of and abused of drugs as stimulant enhancement substances. Activities such as bunkering, pipe vandalism, cyber fraud, and crude oil theft constitute activities that would influence social abuse among study participants. The result further revealed that peer pressure independently predicted substance abuse behaviour among study participants ($\beta = -.147$, $t = -2.088$, $p = .026$). However, social media did not independently predict substance abuse behaviour ($\beta = -.841$, $t = -1.118$, $p > .05$). The hypothesis was partially supported.

Table 2: Independent samples t-test of gender differences on substance abuse behaviour among youths in Ahoada-East and Port Harcourt metropolis

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	p
Male	168	31.24	9.85	273	-1.683	>.05
Female	107	26.95	9.41			

Dependent variable: Substance abuse behaviour

Table 2 shows gender difference on substance abuse behaviour among youths in Ahoada-East and Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers State, Nigeria. The result indicated no significant difference between male and female in substance abuse behaviour [$t(273) = -1.683$, $p > .05$]. However, observation of mean statistics revealed that male youths scored higher in substance abuse behaviour ($X = 31.24$, $SD = 9.85$) than female youths ($X = 26.95$, $SD = 9.41$). Therefore, the hypothesis was partially supported.

Discussion

The study investigated social media and peer pressure as predictors of substance abuse behaviour among youths in Ahoada-East and Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State. It also examined gender differences in substance abuse behaviour. Two hypotheses were tested. The hypothesis that social media and peer pressure would jointly predict substance abuse behaviour was supported. This accounted for 73% of variance explained in substance abuse behaviour. This means that interactions of social media and peer pressure significantly influenced the rate participants' abuse of different substances in their possession. This means social media use significantly influenced youths to go into substance abuse behaviour among study participants. This result supported the finding by Jena that youths who usually experimented with psychoactive substances (e.g., alcohol, cigarette, etc) when visiting social networking sites would be exposed to new and dangerous ways of substance abuse behaviour.²⁷

It is here stated that youths are more vulnerable to the consequences of what they see on social media because they are more receptive to peer pressure and peer influences. Frequent visits

²⁷ H Jena, "The Influence of Social Media on Teen Drug Use," *Addiction Centre*, 2019, <https://www.addictioncenter.com/community/social-mediateen-drug-use/>.

to Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat provide an environment where youths are exposed to famous and normal people alike engaging in risky behaviours involving substance use and substance abuse. Also, youths are particularly vulnerable to the effects of social media and digital communication because they are early adopters, almost ubiquitous users, and very subject to peer pressure.²⁸ When wealth is flaunted around by significant orders and these youths are seeing them is more like an open invitation to be like them. Peer pressure and social media synergistically predict substance abuse among youths in the study area. This finding further supported the result obtained by Akindipe and Aina that found social media as a strong predictor of substance abuse behaviour among their study participants.²⁹ Furthermore, the findings of Eremie and Okwulehi supported this result that peer pressure was a significant predictor of substance abuse behaviour among their study participants.³⁰ Extant study by Scull et al. supported the present finding that social media usage and peer pressure significantly contributed to substance abuse behaviour among youths.³¹

Finally, the hypothesis that gender would influence substance abuse behaviour among study participants was partially supported. Although on the face value, male and female youths were found to indulge in substance abuse behaviour which tends to support Ajibade et al.³² finding, however, the mean difference clearly indicated that male youths were more into substance abuse behaviour than their female counterparts which supported finding by Oshikoya and Alli who found more male youths engaging in substance abuse behaviour than their female counterparts.³³ However, the study contradicted the finding that gender did not influence substance abuse behaviour. This finding would be seen as being influenced by the culture and the level of technology experienced by the present study participants.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate social media and peer pressure as predictors of substance abuse behaviour among youths in Rivers State. It also examines gender differences in substance abuse behaviour. The results confirmed joint prediction of substance abuse behaviour by social media and peer pressure that peer pressure independently predicted substance abuse behaviour among study participants. The study supported previous studies that male youths were more into substance abuse behaviour than their female counterparts.

²⁸ A Lenhart, "Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015," 2015.

²⁹ Akindipe and J.O., "Factors Influencing Substance Abuse among Patients Admitted to the Two Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospitals in the South-West of Nigeria."

³⁰ Eremie and Okwulehi, "Factors Affecting Career Choice among Senior Secondary School Students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State (Implication to Counseling)."

³¹ T M Scull et al., "Adolescents' Media-Related Cognitions and Substance Use in the Context of Parental and Peer Influences," *Journal of Youth & Adolescence* 39 (2010): 981–998.

³² A Oladeji et al., "Substance Use among Adolescent's High School Students in Nigeria and Its Relationship with Psychosocial Factors," *Journal of Research in Health Science* 20, no. 2 (2020): 480, <https://doi.org/10.34172/jrhs.2020.15>.

³³ Oshikoya and Alli, "Perception of Drug Abuse amongst Nigerian Undergraduates."

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were put forward: Parents, guardians and other stakeholders should build strong self confidence among youths to prevent them from going into substance abuse behaviour. Government and Health Bodies should enforce laws and policies that would discourage youths from going into substance abuse behaviour and regulate social media contents carrying unhealthy advertisements that promote substance abuse behaviour.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

This study suffered some shortcomings that need to be remedied in subsequent studies. To begin with, self-reported questionnaires were used to gather data which was subjected to social desirability bias. Further study would benefit from focus group discussions and participant observation to triangulate data collected from self-reported questionnaires. In addition, the selection of youth from two LGAs with the sample size of 275 hindered generalization of study findings. Further study should increase the number of LGAs and sample size to enhance generation of study findings. In conclusion, two independent variables in this study were not exhaustive. Further study would benefit by including personality traits, self-esteem and social support to study substance abuse behaviour among youths.

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