

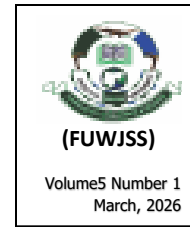
PREVALENCE OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY GASHUA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Drug abuse among undergraduates is a growing concern in Nigerian universities, with implications for health, academic performance, social wellbeing and crime. This study assessed the prevalence, patterns, and predictors of drug abuse among students at Federal University Gashua. A cross-sectional survey of 200 undergraduates was conducted using a structured questionnaire. Data were cleaned, coded, and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results revealed that 50% of respondents reported drug use, with alcohol (45%) and cannabis (22%) being the most commonly abused substances. Male students reported higher prevalence (64%) compared to females (36%), though female daily use was also observed. Drug use increased across academic years, peaking in 300Level, and was strongly associated with peer influence leading to gambling and disobedience to constituted authority. Awareness of anti-drug campaigns through posters and lectures was linked to reduced likelihood of use, though some students aware of such campaigns still reported high levels of abuse. Drug use was also associated with moderate to severe negative impacts on academic performance. The study concludes that drug abuse among undergraduates at Federal University Gashua is prevalent and multifactorial, shaped by demographic, social, and academic factors. It recommends strengthening preventive campaign, introducing early interventions, implementing peer-led initiatives, and adopting gender-inclusive strategies. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on student drug abuse and provide actionable insights for university administrators, policymakers, and health educators.

Keywords: Drug abuse, undergraduate students, security, peer influence, academic performance.

Introduction

Drug abuse among undergraduates is a growing concern in Nigerian universities, with implications for health, academic performance, and institutional integrity. This study aimed to assess the prevalence, patterns, and predictors of drug abuse among students at Federal University Gashua. Drug abuse among young people has become a pressing public health,

educational and security concern worldwide. Universities, as centres of learning and social development, are particularly vulnerable environments where students may be exposed to peer pressure, academic stress, and experimentation with substances. In Nigeria, several studies have documented rising levels of alcohol, cannabis, and prescription drug misuse among undergraduates, with significant consequences for health, academic performance, social wellbeing and crime-free environs (Adekeye & Adeusi, 2017; Aminu, *et.al.*, 2025).

Federal University Gashua, like many tertiary institutions, provides a diverse environment where students from different backgrounds interact. This diversity, while enriching, also creates opportunities for exposure to risky behaviours, including substance abuse. Understanding the prevalence, patterns, and predictors of drug use within this context is essential for designing effective interventions. Despite anecdotal evidence and growing concern among university administrators, there is limited empirical data on the extent and nature of drug abuse among undergraduates at Federal University Gashua. Without reliable data, interventions remain fragmented and reactive rather than evidence-based.

Drug abuse not only undermines students' academic performance but also poses risks to their safety, physical and mental health, potentially affecting the reputation and integrity of the institution. This study seeks to fill this gap by systematically assessing drug abuse among undergraduates, identifying demographic and social predictors, and evaluating the impact on academic performance and secured environment. The study is guided by the following objectives: to determine the prevalence of drug abuse among undergraduate students in Federal University Gashua; identify the types of drugs commonly used by the undergraduate students; examine demographic and social factors (e.g., gender, academic year, peer influence) associated with drug use; assess the impact of drug abuse on students' academic performance; assess the impact of drug abuse on campus safety; and to evaluate the role of awareness programs in mitigating drug abuse.

This research is significant for several reasons. For the university; it will provide evidence-based insights to guide policy formulation, student support services, and preventive programs. For students; it will raise awareness of the risks associated with drug abuse and highlights the importance of peer and institutional support. For policymakers and educators; it will contribute to the broader discourse on youth substance abuse in Nigeria, offering data that can inform national strategies. For researchers; it will add to the growing body of literature on drug abuse in tertiary institutions, serving as a reference for future studies.

Drug Abuse in Universities

Drug abuse among university students is a global phenomenon, often linked to experimentation, peer influence, and academic stress. Studies in the United States, Europe, and Asia consistently report high prevalence of alcohol and cannabis use among college students, with prescription drug misuse emerging as a growing concern. Research highlights that freedom, social networks, and cultural norms shape substance use patterns, while academic consequences include poor performance, absenteeism and dropout rates (Atwoli, et.al.,2011; Johnston et.al., 2015; Bouchrika, 2025).

In Nigeria, drug abuse among undergraduates has become a pressing issue. Alcohol, cannabis, and prescription drugs are the most commonly abused substances. Studies reveal that peer influence, socio-economic background, and lack of effective awareness programs contribute significantly to the problem (Eneh, & Stanley, 2004; Obot, 2013). The impact on academic performance is profound, with drug use linked to declining grades, poor concentration, and increased disciplinary cases. Despite interventions, underreporting and stigma remain challenges (Odejide, 2006)

While global studies emphasize alcohol and cannabis, Nigerian studies highlight the growing misuse of prescription drugs and stimulants. Both contexts underscore peer influence, gambling and involvement in crime as critical factors (World Health Organization, 2006; Bouchrika, 2025). However, Nigerian universities face unique challenges such as limited counselling services, weak enforcement of policies, and socio-economic pressures that exacerbate substance abuse.

Drug abuse is commonly defined as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs (Odejide, 2006). The World Health Organization (2006) describes it as a state of periodic or chronic intoxication detrimental to the individual and society, produced by repeated consumption of natural or synthetic substances. Among youths, drug abuse encompasses patterns of usage—what substances are used, how often, and under what circumstances (World Health Organization, 2006)

Studies across Nigerian universities reveal that drug abuse is widespread among undergraduates, with substances such as alcohol, cannabis, tramadol, and cocaine being commonly reported. Ajibola and Oluwatusin (2024) found that substance abuse significantly affects students' academic performance, cognitive functions, and mental health. Similarly, Ibiyosi et al. (2024) emphasized that drug abuse among undergraduates is not only prevalent but also escalating, with both legal and illegal substances being misused.

Several socio-demographic and environmental factors contribute to drug abuse among students. Peer pressure, academic stress, curiosity, and family background are frequently cited as triggers. Easy accessibility of drugs through peers, street vendors, and pharmacies further exacerbates the problem. Ibiyosi et al. (2024) identified psychological stress, social influences, and lack of awareness as major risk factors.

The consequences of drug abuse among undergraduates are multifaceted. Academically, students who abuse drugs often experience poor performance, absenteeism, and reduced engagement. Health-wise, drug abuse leads to physical complications, mental health disorders, and in severe cases, addiction and criminal predispositions. Socially, it contributes to disciplinary issues, financial strain, and strained family relationships. These findings underscore the urgent need for interventions within university settings (White & Hingson, 2014; Peltzer, & Pengpid, 2016; Patrick & Terry-McElrath, 2017; Likisa, 2019).

Literature suggests that effective strategies for combating drug abuse include awareness campaigns, counselling services, stricter regulations, and peer support programs. Universities that integrate preventive education into orientation programs and provide accessible counselling services have reported reductions in substance abuse prevalence. Peer-led initiatives are particularly effective in addressing the influence of peer pressure (Simons-Morton & Farhat, 2010; Johnston, et.al., 2015; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018).

The reviewed literature demonstrates that drug abuse among undergraduates is a pressing issue with significant academic, health, and social consequences. While prevalence rates vary, the underlying risk factors—peer influence, stress, and accessibility—are consistent across studies. Preventive measures such as awareness campaigns and counselling services are critical. This body of evidence provides a strong rationale for conducting a focused study at Federal University Gashua, to generate institution-specific data and inform tailored interventions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two theories: theory of planned behaviour and psychosocial model of substance abuse. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that behavior is driven by intentions, which are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. For students, positive attitudes toward drug use (e.g., "it helps me relax"), perceived social approval (peer norms), and perceived ease of access (availability on campus) increase the likelihood of drug abuse. TPB provides a framework for understanding how students' beliefs and perceived control over their actions shape drug use decisions

(Ajzen,1991). The psychosocial model integrates psychological vulnerabilities (stress, anxiety, depression) and social influences (peer groups, family background) to explain substance abuse. It emphasizes that drug abuse is not caused by a single factor but by the interaction of multiple psychosocial determinants. This model is particularly relevant for exploring how personal stressors and social environments jointly contribute to drug abuse among students (Periyannanpillai & Rakesh, 2021).

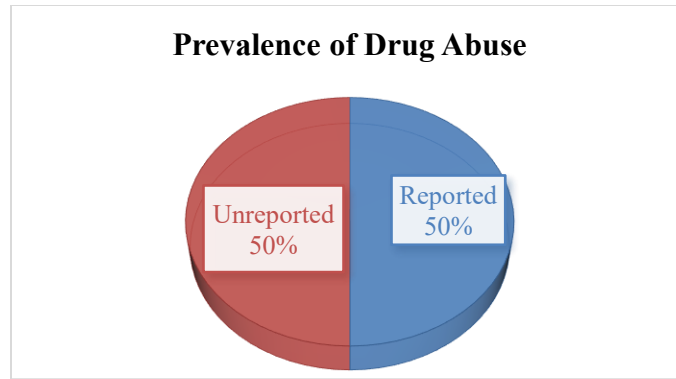
Research Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, which is appropriate for assessing prevalence, patterns, and predictors of drug abuse at a single point in time. The design allowed for the collection of quantitative data from a representative sample of undergraduate students. The target population comprised all undergraduate students enrolled at Federal University Gashua during the 2024/2025 academic session. The university has an estimated undergraduate population of approximately 10,000 students across the current five faculties (Arts, Agriculture, Sciences, Education, Management and Social Sciences) in Federal University Gashua. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across faculties and academic years. Within each stratum, students were randomly selected to participate. Using Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination at a 95% confidence level, a sample size of 200 students was deemed adequate for statistical analysis and generalization.

Results and Findings

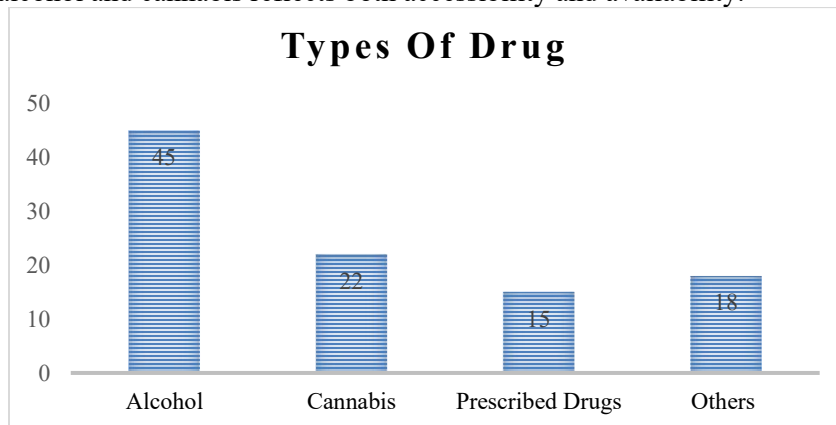
Theme 1: Prevalence of Drug Abuse

The results show that 50% of respondents reported engaging in drug use. This indicates that substance abuse is a significant issue among undergraduates at Federal University Gashua. Peer influence was strongly associated with drug use, while awareness of anti-drug programs reduced likelihood of abuse. Drug use was linked to moderate to severe negative effects on academic performance.



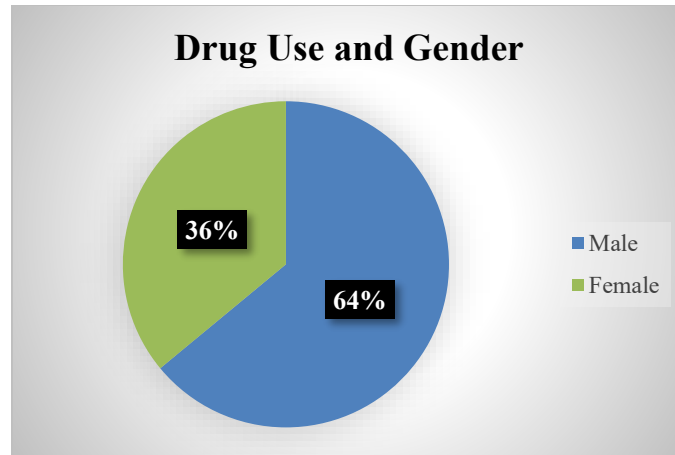
Theme 2: Types of Drugs

Findings align with global and Nigerian studies showing alcohol and cannabis as dominant substances. Alcohol was the most commonly used substance (45%), Cannabis followed at 22%. Prescription drugs (15%) and other substances (18%) were reported at lower levels. The dominance of alcohol and cannabis reflects both accessibility and availability.



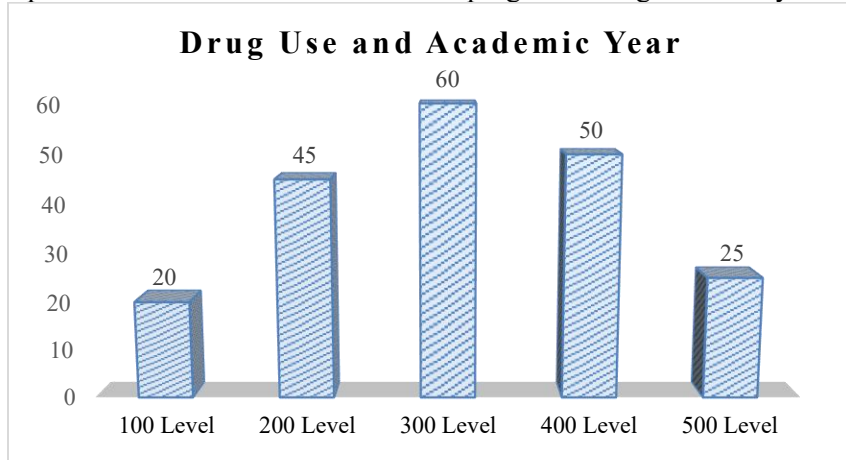
Theme 3: Gender Differences

Gender differences were consistent with literature, though female daily use challenges stereotypes. Male students reported higher prevalence (64%) compared to females (36%). However, female daily use was observed, challenging traditional assumptions that drug abuse is predominantly male.



Theme 4: Academic Year Trends

Drug use increased from 100Level (20 students) to 200Level (45 students) 300Level (60 students), stabilizing in 400Level (50 students) and 500Level (25 students). Academic year trends suggest cumulative exposure and stress factors as students' progress through university.



Theme 5: Peer Influence

Peer influence emerged as a strong predictor of drug use. Students with friends who used substances were significantly more likely to engage in drug abuse themselves.

Theme 6: Awareness of Anti-Drug Programs

Awareness of anti-drug programs reduced likelihood of drug use. However, some students who were aware still reported high levels of abuse, indicating mixed effectiveness of current interventions.

Theme 7: Impact on Academic Performance

Drug use was linked to moderate to severe negative effects on academic performance. Students reported poor concentration, declining grades, and increased absenteeism. This underscores the educational consequences of substance abuse.

Recommendations

The university should prioritize preventive initiatives that specifically target alcohol and cannabis, as these were identified as the most commonly abused substances. Awareness campaigns must be culturally relevant, student-driven, and delivered in engaging formats such as workshops, peer discussions, and social media outreach. By tailoring programs to the realities of student life, prevention efforts will resonate more effectively.

Orientation programs for first-year students should include modules on drug abuse awareness and coping mechanisms for academic stress. Since drug use tends to increase across academic years, early intervention can help reduce exposure and prevent escalation. Counselling services should be made accessible and confidential to encourage students to seek help without fear of stigma.

Peer influence was found to be a strong predictor of drug use. To counteract this, the university should establish peer mentorship and peer education programs. Student associations and clubs can play a vital role in promoting healthy lifestyles, creating a positive peer culture that discourages substance abuse.

Interventions must be designed to address both male and female students. While males reported higher prevalence, female daily use was also observed, challenging traditional assumptions. Awareness campaigns should avoid gender bias and recognize emerging patterns of female substance abuse, ensuring inclusivity in program design.

Drug abuse was linked to negative academic performance, highlighting the need for academic support. The university should provide stress management workshops, time management training, and academic counselling services. By equipping students with healthier coping mechanisms, reliance on substances as a way to manage stress can be reduced.

University policies on drug use should be strengthened and consistently enforced, but enforcement must be balanced with supportive services rather than punitive measures alone. Collaboration with health agencies, NGOs, and community organizations can provide additional resources, expertise, and funding for comprehensive intervention programs.

Addressing drug abuse among undergraduates at Federal University Gashua requires a multifaceted approach that combines prevention, early intervention, peer engagement, gender inclusivity, academic support, and strong institutional policies. By implementing these recommendations, the university can foster a safer, healthier, and more academically productive environment for its students.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that drug abuse among undergraduate students in Federal University Gashua is not only prevalent but also intense in its manifestation and impact. With half of the surveyed population reporting active involvement in substance use, the volume of abuse is alarmingly high. This prevalence underscores the fact that drug abuse has become a normalized aspect of student life for a significant proportion of the undergraduate community. The intensity of this abuse is further highlighted by the frequency and consistency of use, particularly among students who reported daily or near-daily consumption of substances such as alcohol, cannabis, and prescription drugs. Such patterns suggest that drug use is not merely experimental or occasional but entrenched in the lifestyles of many students.

The dominance of alcohol and cannabis reflects both accessibility and peer cultural acceptance, while the growing misuse of prescription drugs points to a troubling trend of self-medication and reliance on stimulants to cope with academic pressures. The intensity of abuse is magnified by the fact that students across all academic years are affected, with a noticeable peak in 300 Level, where cumulative exposure, academic workload, and social pressures converge to create a fertile ground for substance use. This progression demonstrates that drug abuse is not static but evolves with the student's academic journey, intensifying as challenges mount.

Gender differences further illustrate the depth of the problem. While male students reported higher overall prevalence, the presence of daily use among female students challenges traditional assumptions and signals a shift in patterns of abuse. This indicates that drug abuse is cutting across gender lines, intensifying in ways that demand inclusive and targeted interventions. Peer influence emerged as a particularly powerful driver, reinforcing the intensity of abuse by creating environments where drug use is normalized, encouraged, and sustained through social networks.

The consequences of this volume and intensity are profound. Academic performance is significantly undermined, with students reporting poor concentration, declining grades, absenteeism, and in some cases, disciplinary issues. The educational mission of the university is directly threatened, as drug abuse erodes the intellectual capacity and

productivity of its students. Beyond academics, the health implications are severe, ranging from psychological distress to potential long-term dependency, further intensifying the burden on individuals and the institution.

In conclusion, drug abuse among undergraduates in Federal University Gashua is both widespread and deeply entrenched. Its volume reflects a pervasive challenge affecting half of the student body, while its intensity is evident in the frequency, diversity of substances, and the profound impact on academic, personal wellbeing and safety. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that combines preventive education, peer-led initiatives, gender-inclusive strategies, academic support, and strong institutional policies. Without decisive action, the volume and intensity of drug abuse will continue to escalate, undermining not only the academic success of students but also the safety of the students and the university community. This study therefore calls for urgent, evidence-based interventions to safeguard the future of undergraduate students and the nation at large.

This study investigated the prevalence, patterns, and predictors of drug abuse among undergraduate students at Federal University Gashua. The results revealed that 50% of students reported drug use, with alcohol and cannabis being the most commonly abused substances. Gender differences were evident, with males showing higher prevalence, though female daily use was also observed. Drug use increased across academic years, peaking in 300Level, and was strongly associated with peer influence. Awareness of anti-drug programs was linked to reduced likelihood of use, though effectiveness varied. Importantly, drug abuse was associated with moderate to severe negative impacts on academic performance.

Drug abuse among undergraduates at Federal University Gashua is a complex and multifaceted challenge with significant implications for health, academic success, and secured environment. Addressing it requires comprehensive, student-centered, and evidence-based interventions that combine prevention, peer engagement, gender inclusivity, and policy enforcement. This study is expected to serve as a foundation for evidence-based interventions at Federal University Gashua. By combining research findings with proactive recommendations, the university can foster a safer, healthier, and more academically productive environment for the holistic development of their students.

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