

## THE MENACE OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG UNIVERSITY OF BENIN UNDERGRADUATES

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### Abstract

*This study examined drug abuse and its health implications among university of Benin undergraduates, Edo State. Three research questions were analyzed. The study population consisted of all full time undergraduate of the various faculties in the University of Benin, with a total population of forty four thousand, one hundred and forty (44140) students, with a sample size of 150 students selected through 'purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. Results indicated that alcohol and tramadol (opioids) were the most commonly abused substances among undergraduates in university of Benin. There was significant awareness of drug abuse among the undergraduates, and it was associated with physical, social, psychological, and long-term health consequences. Recommendations included the provision of qualified personnel like counsellors and rehabilitation facilities to address undergraduates drug abuse effectively. University of Benin should empower these personnel to identify undergraduates at risk, provide counselling, and make necessary referrals for interventions or treatment. Governments should enhance efforts beyond advocacy and illegal drug trade should be cracked down and make it harder for young people to get access to drugs.*

**Keywords:** Menace, Drug Abuse, undergraduates.

### Introduction

The impact of drug abuse among young people in Nigeria has been a stigma of a morally bankrupt, decadent and wasted generation that must be revitalized and collectively salvaged together in order to prevent the total degeneration and loss of our societal values and ideals. Drug abuse is one of the driving forces behind the decay in the society. Instead of actively addressing the deeply-rooted problems of drug abuse that has permeated our society, everyone remains passive and deceitfully pretends it does not exist.

The extent and pattern from country to country varies but are increasingly prevalent with multidimensional health consequences. Drug abuse may be defined as the arbitrary over dependence or misuse of one particular drug with or without prior medical diagnosis from qualified health practitioners. Drug abuse, according to the National Institute on Drug abuse (NIDA,2020), is the use of illegal drugs or misuse of prescription or over-the -counter drugs for purposes other than those for which they are indicated or in a manner or in quantities other than directed. Drug abuse is the consumption or administration of any physical matter (solid, liquid or gaseous) ranging from alcohol, tobacco and caffeine to illicit drugs (WHO, 2019). As a behaviour, a large number of adolescents are found to be

engaged in the use of these illegal drugs or the use of prescription or over-the-counter drugs for purposes other than those for which they are meant to be used, or in excessive amounts which adversely affect their overall physical, psychological, social and economic well-being. Internal and external factors such as motivation, peer pressure and availability of the drugs are major contributors to this behavior. (Britannica, 2023), drug abuse as the excessive, maladaptive, or addictive use of drugs for nonmedical purposes despite the social, psychological, and physical problems that may arise from such use.

The use of drugs dates back to the prehistory of mankind. 'These drugs were used to relieve pain, cure, and control disease (Curew & Dibal, 2019). During those times, various drug compounds were derived from plants, minerals, and even animals, primarily used for therapeutic purposes with different beliefs within local communities. Historical records also indicate the existence of traditional healing practices in various cultures worldwide, often involving the use of herbal concoctions and rituals to treat illnesses. The continuous evolution of medical knowledge and pharmacology over millennia has contributed to the modern pharmaceutical industry we are familiar with today, firmly establishing the enduring connection between humans and the use of drugs for health-related purposes.

In the words of Nahvizadeh Akhavan, Arti, Qaraat, Geramian, Farajzadegan, & Heidari (2014), the onset of drug use is often rooted among the youths, and studies indicate a strong association between substance abuse and the consumption of cigarettes and alcohol during this life stage. According to the United Nations Youth are those persons between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four (15-24), marking the transition from childhood to adulthood. The elevated prevalence of drug abuse among undergraduates can be attributed to various factors. One of which is "adolescent sensation-seeking behaviour". Quinn and Harden (2013) found that increases in sensation seeking were associated with escalating substance use from mid-adolescence to early adulthood. This suggests that adolescents with a higher level of sensation-seeking behavior may be more susceptible to trying drugs out of curiosity, or a desire for excitement, which can be harmful to their health and well-being.

Psychosocial factors also influence drug initiation. It includes peer pressure, family dynamics, and societal influences. According to Trucco (2020), adolescence is characterized by increased time spent with peers, heightened sensitivity to social reward, and engagement in novel experiences with greater emotional detachment from parents. Consequently, peer pressure tends to have a significant impact on undergraduate substance use behaviour during this period. Additionally, a dysfunctional family environment, marked by issues such as parental substance abuse, neglect, or inconsistent discipline, can increase the risk of drug abuse among undergraduates. Various other factors, such as biological and psychological factors, are also major determinants of drug use among undergraduates.

Drug abuse has a profound impact, not only on academic performance but also on physical health, mental well-being, social relationships, and the future prospects of young individuals. Obarisiagbon and Ajayi (2019) discovered that drug or substance abuse played a significant role in driving risky sexual behaviour among youths in Benin City, Nigeria. Researchers in Lagos, Nigeria also demonstrated that Nigerian youths have limited

awareness of the adverse effects of substance abuse and frequently misuse substances such as tobacco, alcohol, opiates, cannabis, amphetamines, and benzodiazepines (Odukoya et al., 2018). Regrettably, many of these young people eventually escalate to abusing even more addictive substances (Oshodi et al., 2019).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Drug abuse has emerged as a pervasive issue affecting the holistic well-being of secondary school students, encompassing aspects of their mental, social, emotional, psychological, intellectual, and academic spheres. In present times, not only has the abuse of drugs heightened among undergraduates, these youths now abuse a wide range of substances: from prescription drugs, cough syrup, codeine, opioid, caffeine, tramadol, sedatives, Indian hemp, and stimulants. These young abusers tend to continually adopt new methods of abusing substances. The existing body of literature on this subject is notably limited, creating a knowledge gap that perpetuates misconceptions among young individuals. Findings from available literatures show that more youths are not only experimenting with psychoactive drugs but its addiction is on steady increase (Nahid et al., 2012). Many undergraduates erroneously believe that the consumption of psychoactive substances poses no significant harm as long as their bodies tolerate them, unaware of the severe and multifaceted consequences. It is imperative to bridge this gap with an extensive and in-depth analysis of these trends among youths, shedding light on the intricate relationship between drug abuse and its intricate web of health-related repercussions. These alarming comprehensive examination of the specific health implications associated with drug abuse in the context of undergraduates of university of Benin.

### **Research questions**

**The following research questions were raised to guide the study:**

1. What are the drugs commonly abused by undergraduates of University of Benin?
2. What is the level of awareness of drug abuse among undergraduates of University of Benin?
3. What are the health implications of drug abuse among undergraduates of university of Benin?

### **Methodology**

The study design was descriptive survey. The study population consisted of all full time undergraduates of the various faculties during 2022/2023 academic session with a total population of forty four thousand, one hundred and forty (44,140) students according to Academic Planning Unit, Student Affairs Division, University of Benin, 2022/2023 Academic Session. A sample size of one hundred and fifty (150) undergraduates were purposively selected from three (4) faculties to represent the target population, this was done to ensure that participants in the study were true representatives of undergraduates of University of Benin and from four different spheres of studies; Law, Medicine, Dentistry and environmental Science. The instrument used for this study was a questionnaire. The

instrument was developed by the researcher. It employed a likert scale with four options strongly Agree(SA), Agree(A), Disagree(D) and Strongly Disagree (SD), graded one to four respectively. A yes/No Selection was also employed. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency count and all percentages.

## Results

The study population consists of all full time Undergraduate students of the various faculties during 2022/2023 academic session with a total population of forty four thousand, one hundred and forty (44140) students (Academic Planning Unit, Student Affairs Division, University of Benin, 2022/2023 Academic Session). The breakdown of the population and sample is given below. The sample for this research consist of one hundred and fifty undergraduates (150) purposively selected from four trends of the University of Benin.

**Table 1: Population data of the Study**

S/N	Faculty	Population
1	Agriculture	1685
2	Arts	6262
3	Basic Medical Science	3437
4	Dentistry	111
5	Education	7416
6	Engineering	5481
7	Environmental Science	1015
8	Law	1078
9	Life Science	5132
10	Management Science	3506
11	Medicine	685
12	Pharmacy	1107
13	Physical Science	3283
14	Social Science	3411
15	Veterinary Medicine	70
	Other Services	461
	<b>Total</b>	<b>44140</b>

**Source:** Academic Planning Unit, Student Affairs Division, University of Benin, Ugbowo campus (2022/2023 Academic Session)

**Table 2: Respondents distribution according to faculty**

Names of Faculty	Number of Undergraduates	Number of sampled Undergraduates
Law	1078	54
Medicine	685	35
Dentistry	111	8
Environmental Science	1015	53
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2918</b>	<b>150</b>

Source: Field Survey 2023

Respondents were sampled and the researchers ensured that participants in the study were true representatives of undergraduates in the University of Benin and from different spheres of studies such as Law, Medicine, Dentistry and environmental Science.

### Analysis of Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** What are the drugs commonly abused by undergraduates of university of Benin?

**Table 3:** What are the drugs commonly abused by university of Benin undergraduates?

S/N	Drugs	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Alcohol	119	79.3
2.	Amphetamine	20	13.3%
3.	Analgesics	27	18%
4.	Antibiotics	41	27.3%
5.	Antimalarial	35	23.3%
6.	Caffeine's	39	26%
7.	Cannabis	55	36.67%
8.	Codeine	37	24.67%
9.	Coffee	54	36%
10	Energy drinks	75	50%
11	Glue	10	6.67
12	Heroin	65	43.3%
13	Miraa	9	6%
14	Opioids	16	10.67%
15	Sedatives	28	18.67%
16	Tramadol	92	61.3%
17	Tranquilizers	27	18%
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: *Field Survey 2023*

In table three (3), responses reveal that alcohol with 79.3% (119), and tramadol with 61.3% (92) were the two major abused drugs by undergraduates, then energy drinks with 50% (75), and heroin 43.3% (65) follows next. The next group is cannabis with 36.67% (55), and coffee with 36% (54). Then follows antibiotics 27.3% (41), antimalarial drugs 23.3% (35), caffeine's 26% (39), and codeine 24.67% (37). Least respondents acknowledged sedatives 18.67% (28), tranquilizers 18% (27), analgesics 18% (27), and amphetamine 13.3% (20), while glues 6.67% (10), Miraa 6% (9) and opioids 10.67% (16) had the lowest respondents.

## Research Question 2

**Table 3:** What is the level of awareness of drug abuse among University of Benin undergraduates?

S/N	Statements	Yes(%)	No(%)	Total
1.	Are you aware if it's okay to experiment with drugs as a teenager	10(6.7%)	140(93.3%)	100%
2.	I know that Marijuana is not harmful, and it is a natural plant	35(23.3%)	115(76.7%)	100%
3.	I am aware that paracetamol, cough syrup and malarial drugs can be abused	119(79.3%)	31(20.7%)	100%
4.	I am aware that students who use drugs are more likely to engage in criminal activities	125(83.3%)	25(16.7%)	100%
5.	I am aware that students who abuse drugs face legal consequences	136(90.7)	14(9.3%)	100%

Source: *Field survey, 2023*

Table 4 presents results on the level of awareness of drug abuse among university of Benin undergraduates. Among the respondents, a total of 140(93.3%) of the respondents are aware that 'It is not okay to experiment with drugs as a teenager' while 10(6.7%) believe otherwise. Also the table shows that 35(23.3%) of the respondents know that 'marijuana is not harmful; it's a natural plant' while the other 115(76.7%) were aware of the negative impacts of marijuana. Also, 119(79.3%) of the respondents were aware that 'paracetamol, cough syrup, and malaria drugs can be abused' while 31(20.7%) did not think so. Also, 125(83.3%) of the respondents were aware that 'students who use drugs are more likely to engage in criminal activities' while 25(16.7%) of the respondents were not. It also shows that 136(90.7% of the respondents were aware that 'Students who abuse drugs face legal consequences' while 14(9.3%) of the respondents are not.

### Research Question 3

**Table 5:** What are the health implications and possible control measures of drug abuse among undergraduates in the University of Benin?

S/N	Statements	SA(%)	A(%)	D(%)	SD(%)	Total
1.	Drug abuse can lead to death	100(66.67%)	39(26%)	4(2.67%)	7(4.66%)	100%
2.	Students who use drugs are harming their future prospects	87(58%)	56(37.3%)	5(3.3%)	2(1.4%)	100%
3	Drug abuse can cause mental illness	98(65.3%)	48(32%)	3(2%)	1(0.7%)	100%
4.	Students who use drugs are more likely to have physical health problems	92(61.3%)	50(33.3%)	4(2.7%)	4(2.7%)	100%
5.	People who use drugs perform poorly in academics	74(49.3%)	61(40.67%)	10(6.7%)	5(3.33%)	100%
6	People who use drugs involve in antisocial behaviours like cultism	95(63.3%)	47(31.4%)	2(1.3%)	6(4%)	100%
7	The government should invest more in drug abuse prevention programs	91(60.67%)	46(30.67%)	6(4%)	7(4.66%)	100%
8.	Drug education should be included in the school curriculum from an early age	88(58.67%)	49(32.67%)	9(6%)	4(2.66%)	100%
9.	Schools should have dedicated counsellors to address drug abuse issues	84(56%)	55(37.33%)	10(6.66%)	1(0.67%)	100%

**Source:** *Field survey, 2023*

Table 4 shows the responses of the respondents concerning the health implications and possible control measures of drug abuse among University of Benin undergraduates. Response to statement 1 here shows that 100(66.67%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 39(26%) agreed, 4(2.67%) disagreed and 7(4.66%) strongly disagreed that drug abuse can lead to death. Response to statement 2 revealed that 87(58%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 56(37.3%) agreed, 5(3.3%) disagreed and 2(1.4%) strongly disagreed that 'students who use drugs are harming their future prospects'. Response to statement 3 here further revealed that 98(65.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 48(32%) agreed, 3(2%) disagreed and 1(0.7%) strongly disagreed that 'drug abuse can cause mental illness'. Response to statement 4 shows that 92(61.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 50(33.3%) agreed, 4(2.7%) disagreed and 4(2.7%) strongly disagreed that 'students who use drugs are more likely to have physical health problems'. Response to statement 5 indicates that 60(40%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 44(29.3%) agreed, 35(23.3%) disagreed and 11(7.34%) strongly disagreed that students who use drugs perform poorly in

academics than non-drug abusers. Response to statement 6 also indicated that 95(63.3% of the respondents strongly agreed, 47(31.4%) agreed, 2(1.3%) disagreed and 6(4%) strongly disagreed that students who abuse drugs more likely involve in antisocial behaviours like cultism. Response to statement 7 shows that 91(60.67% of the respondents strongly agreed, 46(30.67%) agreed, 6(4%) disagreed and 7(4.66%) strongly disagreed that government should invest more in drug abuse prevention programs as a way to curb this problem. Response to statement 8 also shows that 88(58.67%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 49(32.67%) agreed, 9(6%) disagreed and 4(2.66%) strongly disagreed that inclusion of drug education into the school to statement 9 indicates that 84(56%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 55(35.67%) agreed, 10(6.66%) disagreed and 1(0.67%) strongly disagreed that all schools should have dedicated counsellors who could address drug concerns among school adolescents.

### **Discussion of findings**

This study was conducted to assess the problem of drug abuse and its health implications among undergraduates of the University of Benin, Edo state. The study found that alcohol and tramadol are two most commonly used drugs by undergraduates in University of Benin as at this period. This is probably due to the ease of their availability and their slightly harmless external looks. Alcohol which is a depressant came top hence, it would be expected to observe physical symptoms like mental illness and physical health problems among these students. While common health implications to expect from tramadol which is an opioid pain killer would include; high rate of respiratory depression among these abusers, exacerbated mental health issues, cardiac (heart) issues, cases of coma or seizures from intake of high dosage, and specifically high prevalence of liver and gastrointestinal tract problems among these young abusers in the nearest future. Abuse of cannabis (marijuana), coffee and antibiotics (prescription drugs) is also included in the top five most abused drugs in this locality.

The findings also showed a good level of general drug awareness University of Benin undergraduates. The majority were of the opinion that legal punishment should be enforced on adolescents drug abusers, and that prescription drugs like paracetamol can also be abused. Conveniently, it could be said that the problem of drug abuse among undergraduates is more of behavioural than ignorance since a majority of these students are positively aware of drug abuse. Lastly, findings from data collected and analyzed suggests a good knowledge of possible health risks among undergraduates of university of Benin. Drug abusers cannot escape the severity and health consequences of substance use behaviour. There are evident physical, psychological, social and severe long term consequences of drug abuse.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that drug abuse among university of Benin undergraduates poses a substantial health risk. There is a strong correlation between drug abuse and adverse health outcomes. Also, efforts to address drug abuse among adolescents should extend beyond creating awareness and include the provision of more

qualified personnel, such as counsellors and rehabilitation facilities in the university communities, to permanently curb this prevalence. Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Awareness campaigns should be strengthened on campuses and the wider community to educate students, parents, and teachers about the dangers of drug abuse.
- ii. Peer support programmes where undergraduates can help and encourage each other to avoid drug abuse should be encouraged.
- iii. University of Benin management should prioritize the presence of qualified counsellors who can identify at-risk students, provide counselling, and refer them to appropriate interventions or treatment when necessary.
- iv. Enforcement of drug regulations that limit access to drugs, especially among minors, and persecution of drug abusers.

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