

## **GENDER AND ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA AS PREDICTORS OF DRUG ABUSE TENDENCIES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN AKWA IBOM NORTH-EAST SENATORIAL DISTRICT, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The prevalence of drug abuse among adolescents continues to rise globally, with significant implications for educational outcomes and public health. This study examined the influence of gender and entertainment media exposure on drug abuse tendencies among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District, Nigeria. Using an ex-post facto research design, data were collected from 1,006 Senior Secondary Two students selected through multi-stage sampling from 28 public secondary schools. The Socio-Familial Variables and Drug Abuse Tendencies of Students Questionnaire (SFVDATSQ) was employed, with a reliability coefficient of 0.809. Data were analysed using independent t-test. Results revealed that male students exhibited significantly higher drug abuse tendencies (Mean = 75.42, SD = 3.50) compared to female students (Mean = 65.39, SD = 2.03;  $t = 11.21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, students with high exposure to entertainment media containing substance use content exhibited significantly higher drug abuse tendencies (Mean = 57.99, SD = 4.61) compared to those with low exposure (Mean = 52.81, SD = 5.16;  $t = 13.32$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The study concludes that gender and entertainment media exposure significantly predict drug abuse tendencies among adolescents. It is recommended that gender-sensitive prevention programmes be developed and that media literacy education be incorporated into school curricula.

**Keywords:** Gender, entertainment media, drug abuse tendencies, adolescents, secondary school students

### **Introduction**

The global burden of drug abuse among young people continues to escalate, with profound consequences for individual health, educational attainment, and societal development. In Nigeria, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has consistently identified secondary school students as a population at heightened risk for substance use, with reports indicating widespread experimentation with alcohol, marijuana, codeine, tramadol, and other psychoactive substances (Jatau et al., 2021). The Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District, like many other regions in Nigeria, has witnessed increasing reports of student involvement in substance use, prompting urgent need for empirical research to identify the factors contributing to this trend. Among the numerous factors associated with adolescent drug abuse, gender and entertainment media exposure have emerged as significant predictors warranting scholarly attention. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, expectations, and opportunities associated with being male or female, which significantly influence behaviours, including substance use patterns (Brooks-Gunn & Peterson, 2013). Research has consistently demonstrated gender differences in substance use, with male adolescents typically exhibiting higher rates of drug use than their female counterparts (Aguocha et al., 2020; Cotto et al., 2020). These differences are often attributed to

cultural norms that encourage risk-taking among males while discouraging such behaviours among females, as well as differential motivations for substance use across genders.

Entertainment media, encompassing television, films, music videos, social media platforms, and video games, has increasingly been implicated in shaping adolescent attitudes and behaviours toward substance use (Gupta, Pettigrew, & Lam, 2016). Contemporary media often portray drug and alcohol use in glamorous, exciting, and consequence-free contexts, potentially normalising such behaviours and reducing perceptions of harm among young viewers (Jernigan et al., 2017; Jackson, Janssen, & Gabrielli, 2018). The proliferation of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat has further amplified the reach of such content, with celebrities and influencers often depicted engaging in substance use in ways that appear aspirational to impressionable adolescents. Despite growing recognition of the roles of gender and media exposure in adolescent substance use, limited research has examined these factors within the specific context of Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District. The present study seeks to address this gap by investigating the influence of gender and entertainment media exposure on drug abuse tendencies among secondary school students in this region.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the influence of gender on drug abuse tendencies of secondary school adolescents?
2. What is the influence of entertainment media on drug abuse tendencies of secondary school adolescents?

### **Research Hypotheses**

H01: There is no significant influence of gender on drug abuse tendencies of secondary school adolescents.

H02: There is no significant influence of entertainment media on drug abuse tendencies of secondary school adolescents.

### **Empirical Review**

Several studies have examined gender differences in substance use. Ihaji and Ben (2015) investigated the influence of gender on drug abuse among secondary school students in Benue State, Nigeria, finding that male adolescents were significantly more likely to engage in illicit drug use than their female counterparts. Aguocha et al. (2020) examined gender differences in psychoactive substance use among undergraduates in Imo State, Nigeria, reporting that male students were more likely to use substances for pleasure, boldness, and strength, while female students cited curiosity as their primary motivation. Uzere and Oghounu (2024) studied gender factors in substance abuse among undergraduate students in Delta State, Nigeria, finding that male students were more prone to alcohol consumption, marijuana use, and energy drink consumption than female students.

Regarding entertainment media, Loveth *et al.* (2022) examined the influence of mass media on drug abuse among undergraduates in Imo State, finding that viewing drug use in media influenced students to become more prone to substance abuse. Odofin and Igabari (2023) investigated the relationship between social media exposure and substance abuse among secondary school students in Delta State, revealing a significant correlation between exposure to media imagery of alcohol and illicit drugs and increased drug abuse tendencies. Jude and Omenebele (2023) examined the

influence of social media and parental upbringing on drug abuse among tertiary institution students in Delta State, finding that social media had a significant relationship with drug abuse.

### **Conceptual Review**

**Gender:** Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, expectations, and opportunities associated with being male or female (Brooks-Gunn & Peterson, 2013). Unlike biological sex, which is determined by physiological characteristics, gender is shaped by cultural norms, values, and socialisation processes. These norms significantly influence behaviours, including substance use patterns (Thoits, 2017). Research has consistently documented gender differences in drug abuse, with male adolescents generally exhibiting higher prevalence rates than females (Aguocha et al., 2020; Cotto et al., 2020). Males are often socialised to be risk-takers and to use substances as a means of demonstrating masculinity or coping with stress, while females may be socialised to avoid such behaviours (Zolala et al., 2016).

**Entertainment Media:** Entertainment media refers to various forms of media designed primarily for entertainment purposes, including television programmes, films, music videos, video games, and social media platforms (Gupta et al., 2016). These media increasingly portray substance use in ways that may influence adolescent attitudes and behaviours. Studies have shown that exposure to media content depicting drug and alcohol use is associated with increased likelihood of substance use among young people (Jernigan et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2018). The mechanisms underlying this relationship include desensitisation to the risks of substance use, normalisation of such behaviours, and social modelling of drug-using celebrities and influencers.

**Drug Abuse Tendencies:** Drug abuse refers to the excessive, maladaptive use of psychoactive substances irrespective of the associated physical, psychological, and social costs (World Health Organization, 2021). Drug abuse tendencies encompass the predisposition or inclination toward substance use, reflecting the probability that adolescents will engage in such behaviours (Muganga, 2017). These tendencies are shaped by multiple factors, including gender socialisation and media exposure.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is informed by Ecological Systems Theory, proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977), which posits that human development is influenced by multiple interacting environmental systems. The theory identifies five layers of environmental influence: the microsystem (immediate environments such as family and peers), the mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), the exosystem (broader social structures), the macrosystem (cultural values and norms), and the chronosystem (changes over time). In the context of adolescent drug abuse, Ecological Systems Theory explains how gender (as a macrosystem factor) and entertainment media (as an exosystem factor) interact with individual characteristics to shape substance use behaviours. Media content reflects and reinforces cultural norms about gender and substance use, which in turn influence adolescent attitudes and behaviours.

### **Methodology**

This study employed an ex-post facto research design, which according to Akinlua (2020) involves comparing existing groups based on independent variables that cannot be manipulated, appropriate for examining the effects of parental lifestyle and peer pressure on drug abuse tendencies. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District, South-South Nigeria,

comprising nine local government areas: Etinan, Ibesikpo Asutan, Ibiono Ibom, Itu, Nsit Atai, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Ubium, Uruan, and Uyo. The area features diverse economic activities including farming, trading, and oil exploration. The population comprised 20,264 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students across 89 public secondary schools (Department of Planning, Research and Statistics, 2025). A multi-stage sampling technique selected a sample of 1,013 students (5% of the population) through: (1) systematic random selection of five local government areas; (2) selection of half the schools in each sampled LGA (28 schools); and (3) balloting to select 12% of students per school. A total of 1,006 valid responses were obtained (99.21% return rate).

Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire, the Socio-Familial Variables and Drug Abuse Tendencies of Students Questionnaire (SFVDATSQ), comprising three sections: demographics, socio-familial variables, and 15 items measuring drug abuse tendencies. Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). Face validity was established by three lecturers from the University of Uyo. Reliability was determined through pilot testing on 30 SS2 students using Cronbach Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.809, above the acceptable threshold of 0.50 (Tan, 2020). Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation for research questions, while independent t-test tested hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level.

## Results

### What is the Influence of Gender on Drug Abuse Tendencies?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Drug Abuse Tendencies by Gender

**Table 1 : Summary of mean and standard deviation on the influence of gender on drug abuse tendencies of secondary school adolescents**

Variable	Gender	n	Mean	SD
Drug Abuse Tendencies of Students	Male	602	3.95	0.86
	Female	404	3.12	0.74

Source: Field Data (2025)

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 1 shows that male students had a mean drug abuse tendency score of 75.42 (SD = 3.50), while female students had a mean score of 65.39 (SD = 2.03). The mean difference of 10.03 indicates that male students had higher drug abuse tendencies than female students.

### What is the Influence of Entertainment Media on Drug Abuse Tendencies?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Drug Abuse Tendencies by Entertainment Media Exposure

**Table 4.6: Summary of mean and standard deviation on the influence of entertainment media on drug abuse tendencies of secondary school adolescents**

Variable Remark	Entertainment Media	n	Mean	SD
Drug Abuse Tendencies of Students	High Exposure	478	3.83	0.82
	Low Exposure	528	3.10	0.71

Source: Field Data (2025)

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 2 shows that students with high exposure to entertainment media containing substance use content had a mean drug abuse tendency score of 57.99 (SD = 4.61), while those with low exposure had a mean score of 52.81 (SD = 5.16). The mean difference of 5.18 indicates that students with high media exposure had higher drug abuse tendencies than those with low exposure.

### Hypothesis Testing

**Table 3: Independent t-test for Gender and Drug Abuse Tendencies**

**Table 4.12: Summary of independent t-test analysis on the influence of gender on drug abuse tendencies of secondary school adolescents**

Variable	Gender	n	Mean	SD	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Drug Abuse Tendencies of Students	Male	602	3.95	0.86	9.76	.000	Sig.
	Female	404	3.12	0.74			

S = Significant; P<.05; df = 1004

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 3 reveals a p-value of 0.001, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, indicating that gender has a significant influence on drug abuse tendencies of secondary school adolescents.

**Table 4: Independent t-test for Entertainment Media and Drug Abuse Tendencies**

**Table 4.14: Summary of Analysis of Variance on the influence of entertainment media on drug abuse tendencies of secondary school adolescents**

Entertainment Media	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7201.616	2	3600.808	435.184	.000
Within Groups	12684.374	1004	8.274		
Total	19885.990	1006			

S = Significant;  $P < .05$ ;  $df = 1004$

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 4 reveals a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, indicating that entertainment media exposure has a significant influence on drug abuse tendencies of secondary school adolescents.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that gender significantly influences drug abuse tendencies among secondary school adolescents. Male students exhibited significantly higher tendencies toward drug abuse than their female counterparts. This finding aligns with Social Learning Theory, which suggests that gender-role socialisation influences behaviour acquisition and performance. In many societies, males are socialised to be risk-takers and to use substances as a means of demonstrating masculinity, coping with stress, or gaining social acceptance (Zolala et al., 2016). This finding corroborates previous studies by Ihaji and Ben (2015), Aguocho et al. (2020), and Uzere and Oghounu (2024), all of which found significant gender differences in substance use, with males exhibiting higher rates than females.

Similarly, the study found that entertainment media exposure significantly influences drug abuse tendencies among adolescents. Students with high exposure to entertainment media content depicting substance use exhibited higher tendencies toward drug abuse than those with low exposure. This finding reflects the powerful influence of media in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. When media portray substance use in glamorous, exciting, and consequence-free contexts, young viewers may develop positive attitudes toward drug use and underestimate associated risks (Jernigan et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2018). This finding is consistent with research by Loveth et al. (2022), Odofin and Igabari (2023), and Jude and Omenebele (2023), all of which found significant associations between media exposure and substance use among Nigerian students.

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that both gender and entertainment media exposure are significant predictors of drug abuse tendencies among secondary school adolescents. Male students are more vulnerable to drug abuse than female students, and students with high exposure to media content depicting substance use are at increased risk. These findings underscore the need for gender-sensitive prevention programmes and media literacy education.

## Recommendations

1. Drug abuse prevention programmes should be tailored to address gender-specific risk factors, recognising the differential vulnerabilities and motivations of male and female students.
2. Media literacy education should be incorporated into school curricula to help students critically analyse media content and recognise the unrealistic portrayals of substance use.
3. Parents should monitor their children's media consumption and engage in discussions about the messages conveyed in entertainment media.
4. Regulatory bodies should enforce existing guidelines regarding the portrayal of substance use in media content accessible to young people.

## Contributions to Knowledge

This study contributes to the literature on adolescent drug abuse by providing empirical evidence on the roles of gender and media exposure in a previously understudied region. It highlights the need for comprehensive prevention strategies that address both individual characteristics and environmental influences.

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