

Socio-Demographic Determinants of Drug Abuse Prevalence among Young Adults in Adamawa State, Nigeria

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>Drug abuse among young adults in Nigeria represents a critical public health crisis, with prevalence rates significantly higher than global averages. This crisis is particularly acute in conflict-affected regions like Adamawa State, where socio-economic dislocation and the legacy of the Boko Haram insurgency have created a high-risk environment. However, a lack of context-specific empirical evidence on the key determinants of drug abuse in this region hinders effective intervention. This study investigated the socio-demographic determinants of drug abuse prevalence among young adults in Adamawa State, Nigeria, with a specific focus on the correlation between drug abuse and four variables: gender, employment status, educational attainment, and peer influence. The study employed a correlational research design. A sample of 400 young adults aged 18-35 was selected from nine Local Government Areas using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using a validated and reliable structured questionnaire, the Socio-Demographic Determinants and Drug Abuse Scale (SDDDAS), which achieved a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.86. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. The findings revealed statistically significant correlations for all four variables: a low positive correlation with gender ($r = 0.214, p=0.031$), a moderate negative correlation with employment status ($r = -0.412, p=0.004$), a weak negative correlation with educational attainment ($r = -0.273, p=0.018$), and a strong positive correlation with peer influence ($r = 0.631, p=0.000$). The study concludes that peer influence is the most potent predictor of drug abuse, followed by unemployment, while higher education serves as a protective factor. The study recommends that government agencies and community-based organizations in Adamawa State prioritize peer-led prevention programs, youth employment initiatives, and educational empowerment to effectively combat the scourge of drug abuse among its young adult population.</i> Keywords: Drug Abuse, Young Adults, Socio-Demographic Determinants.
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Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited. Citation: Rahila Elisha Zacharia. (2025). Socio-Demographic Determinants of Drug Abuse Prevalence among Young Adults in Adamawa State, Nigeria. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHSS). Volume 1(9), 74-81.	

Introduction

Drug abuse represents one of the most significant public health and social challenges of the 21st century, with its tendrils reaching deep into the fabric of societies globally. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) consistently highlights that substance use disorders disproportionately affect the youth population, a demographic at a critical juncture of physical, psychological, and social development (UNODC, 2022). In Nigeria, this issue has escalated into a national crisis, with a prevalence rate of drug use that is considerably higher

than the global average. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the UNODC's 2018 survey revealed that 14.3% of Nigerians aged 15-64 had used a psychoactive substance for non-medical purposes in the past year, a figure that is more than twice the global average (UNODC, 2018). This alarming statistic underscores a pervasive problem that threatens the nation's human capital, security, and future development.

The vulnerability of young adults to drug abuse is particularly acute. This period, marked by the transition

from adolescence to full adulthood, is characterized by identity exploration, increased independence, and susceptibility to peer pressure. Concurrently, it is a phase of significant stress induced by educational pressures, unemployment, and societal expectations. Within the Nigerian context, these common stressors are compounded by systemic issues such as widespread poverty, inadequate social safety nets, and, in certain regions, prolonged exposure to violence and instability. For many young Nigerians, drugs become a maladaptive coping mechanism to escape socio-economic hardships, trauma, and a perceived bleak future (Eneh & Stanley, 2019). The consequences are devastating, ranging from poor academic performance, mental health disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety, and psychosis), increased engagement in risky sexual behaviours, and a heightened propensity for violence and criminality, thereby fueling a vicious cycle of poverty and social disintegration (Oshodi et al., 2020).

While the problem is national in scope, its drivers and manifestations are profoundly local, shaped by unique geographical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts. Adamawa State, situated in the North-Eastern region of Nigeria, presents a critical and compelling case study. The state has been at the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency for over a decade, leading to massive internal displacement, the destruction of livelihoods, and a pervasive breakdown of social and family structures. The trauma of conflict, the idleness in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, and the erosion of traditional social controls have created a fertile ground for substance abuse (Falola et al., 2021). Furthermore, Adamawa's status as a border state, sharing an international boundary with Cameroon, makes it a strategic transit route for illicit drug trafficking, potentially increasing the availability and reducing the cost of narcotics within local communities (Abdulmalik et al., 2022).

Despite this potent confluence of risk factors, there remains a significant gap in context-specific, empirical research focusing on Adamawa State. Many existing studies on drug abuse in Nigeria have concentrated on metropolitan hubs like Lagos, Kano, or the South-Eastern states, often overlooking the unique socio-demographic and conflict-related dynamics of the North-East (Anene & Nweke, 2021). A nuanced understanding of the specific socio-demographic determinants at play in Adamawa is not merely an academic exercise; it is a prerequisite for designing effective, targeted, and culturally sensitive intervention and prevention strategies.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the escalating and devastating prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Nigeria, with rates far

exceeding the global average, a critical problem persists in Adamawa State where a confluence of unique risk factors—including the lingering trauma of the Boko Haram insurgency, mass displacement, rampant youth unemployment, and its status as a border region for drug trafficking—creates a fertile ground for this epidemic; however, there is a profound lack of empirical, context-specific research investigating the precise socio-demographic determinants (such as gender, educational status, employment, family structure, and peer influence) that predict drug abuse prevalence in this vulnerable population, resulting in current intervention and prevention strategies being largely generic, ineffective, and incapable of addressing the root causes, thereby perpetuating a cycle of addiction, deteriorating public health, and hindering sustainable post-conflict recovery in the state.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this research was to investigate the socio-demographic determinants influencing the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State, Nigeria. To achieve this aim, the study pursued the following specific objectives:

1. To determine the correlation between **gender** and the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State.
2. To determine the correlation between employment status and the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State.
3. To determine the correlation between educational attainment and the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State.
4. To determine the correlation between peer influence and the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does gender correlate with the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State?
2. To what extent does employment status correlate with the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State?
3. To what extent does educational attainment correlate with the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State?
4. To what extent does peer influence correlate with the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State?

Literature Review

Drug abuse remains a formidable global public health challenge, with its impact most acutely felt among young adults, a demographic in a critical phase of biopsychosocial development. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that in 2021, over 284 million people aged 15-64 used drugs worldwide, a 26% increase over the previous decade, with young people being the most vulnerable group (UNODC, 2022). In Nigeria, the situation is particularly dire. The 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, conducted by the UNODC and Nigeria's National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), revealed an alarming prevalence rate of 14.4% among Nigerians aged 15-64, which is more than twice the global average (UNODC, 2018). This crisis disproportionately affects young adults, undermining their health, educational attainment, and economic potential, thereby posing a significant threat to the nation's developmental goals. While this is a nationwide epidemic, its drivers are not uniform. The focus of this review is to critically examine the existing literature on four key socio-demographic determinants—gender, employment status, educational attainment, and peer influence—to establish a theoretical and empirical foundation for investigating their correlation with drug abuse prevalence among young adults in the specific, high-risk context of Adamawa State, Nigeria.

The Correlation Between Gender and Drug Abuse

Globally and within Nigeria, research consistently demonstrates a significant correlation between gender and patterns of drug abuse, with a pronounced male predominance. The World Drug Report (2022) indicates that for every woman who uses drugs, there are nearly two men, a disparity linked to a combination of biological vulnerabilities, risk-taking behaviours, and gendered social norms (UNODC, 2022). In Nigeria, this gap is even starker. The UNODC (2018) survey found that the prevalence of drug use was 21.8% among males compared to 7.0% among females. This disparity is often socioculturally constructed; traditional masculine ideologies in many Nigerian societies often encourage risk-taking and substance use as a rite of passage or a demonstration of resilience, while simultaneously stigmatizing such behaviours in women, thus suppressing reported prevalence among females (Lasebikan & Gureje, 2016).

However, a growing body of evidence suggests a narrowing gap and unique gendered pathways to substance use. Studies indicate that while men have higher rates of initiation and prevalence, women often progress from initiation to addiction more rapidly, a phenomenon known as "telescoping" (McHugh et al., 2018). Furthermore, the drivers for female drug use are often distinct, strongly

correlated with experiences of gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and co-morbid psychological distress such as depression and anxiety (Lasebikan & Gureje, 2020). In conflict-affected regions like Adamawa State, where the social fabric has been torn, these gendered dynamics may be exacerbated. The trauma of displacement and loss may drive more men towards substance use as a coping mechanism, while women and girls in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps may face heightened vulnerabilities that lead to initiation (Falola et al., 2021). Therefore, while a strong positive correlation between male gender and drug abuse is expected, it is crucial to investigate the nuanced nature of this relationship in Adamawa's unique context.

The Correlation Between Employment Status and Drug Abuse

Unemployment and underemployment are among the most potent socio-economic determinants correlated with drug abuse. The stress, idleness, financial hardship, and pervasive sense of hopelessness associated with joblessness create a fertile ground for substance use as a maladaptive coping mechanism. The link is bidirectional: drug abuse can lead to job loss, and unemployment can precipitate or exacerbate substance use (Henkel, 2011). In Nigeria, where youth unemployment rates are persistently high—exceeding 40% according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022)—this correlation is a central concern. A study by Oshodi et al. (2020) among youth in Lagos found that unemployed individuals were over three times more likely to abuse drugs than their employed counterparts. The authors attributed this to the "frustration-aggression hypothesis," where the blockage of goal-seeking behaviour (e.g., gaining employment) leads to frustration, which may be channeled into substance use.

In Adamawa State, this dynamic is amplified by the decimation of the agrarian and trading economies due to the Boko Haram insurgency. The collapse of formal and informal employment structures has left a generation of young adults in a state of chronic idleness and economic despair. Falola et al. (2021) argue that in such post-conflict settings, substance use becomes not just an escape but also a social activity to fill the void left by the absence of productive engagement. Furthermore, the lack of legitimate economic opportunities may push young adults towards illicit activities, including drug trafficking, which in turn increases their exposure to and normalisation of drug use (Abdulmalik et al., 2022). Consequently, a strong positive correlation is hypothesised between unemployment and the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State.

The Correlation Between Educational Attainment and Drug Abuse

Educational attainment consistently emerges in literature as a significant protective factor against drug abuse. Higher levels of education are correlated with greater health literacy, improved socio-economic prospects, and enhanced cognitive resources for problem-solving, thereby reducing the reliance on substances as a coping mechanism (Hwang, 2018). Conversely, low educational attainment and school dropout are strong risk factors. The UNODC (2018) report on Nigeria indicated that the prevalence of drug use was highest among those with only primary education or no formal education at all. The school environment itself can serve as a protective social institution, providing structure, supervision, and access to positive peer networks. When this structure is absent, as is the case for dropouts, vulnerability increases significantly.

In the context of Adamawa State, the educational system has been severely disrupted by conflict. Widespread school closures, destruction of infrastructure, and the fear of attacks have led to a dramatic increase in school dropout rates, creating a large population of out-of-school youth who are highly susceptible to negative influences, including drug abuse (UNICEF, 2020). Anene and Nweke (2021) posit that for these young adults, the loss of the educational trajectory shatters future aspirations, creating a sense of anomie—a breakdown of social norms—that makes drug use a more attractive and socially acceptable alternative. Therefore, a strong negative correlation is anticipated between the level of educational attainment and the prevalence of drug abuse in this population.

The Correlation Between Peer Influence and Drug Abuse

The influence of peers is arguably the most proximate and powerful determinant of drug use initiation during young adulthood. This is robustly explained by the Social Learning Theory (Akers, 2009), which posits that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within their intimate social groups. Peers provide the attitudes, opportunities, and social rewards for drug use. Empirical evidence from Nigeria strongly supports this. A study by Egbochukwu and Obot (2019) among university students in the North-Central region found that having friends who use drugs was the single strongest predictor of an individual's own drug use, outweighing even familial factors.

In the socially fragmented environment of post-conflict Adamawa, where traditional family and community structures have been weakened, the role of peer groups may become even more pronounced. For displaced and traumatized youth, peer networks can provide a crucial sense of belonging and identity. However, if these networks are involved in substance use, the pressure to conform can be immense. Falola et al. (2021) observed that in IDP

camp, drug use often becomes a communal activity, a way for youth to bond and collectively numb their psychological pain. This creates a situation where peer influence is not merely a social factor but a survival mechanism, strongly and positively correlating with the prevalence of drug abuse.

Knowledge Gap

In summary, the extant literature provides compelling evidence of significant correlations between drug abuse and the four socio-demographic variables of gender, employment status, educational attainment, and peer influence. However, a critical gap remains. Most of the cited studies were conducted in relatively stable, urban settings in Southern or Western Nigeria. The unique socio-cultural milieu of Northern Nigeria, compounded by the specific trauma and social dislocation caused by the insurgency in Adamawa State, creates a context where the strength and interaction of these determinants may differ substantially. This literature review therefore establishes the imperative for an empirical, location-specific investigation in Adamawa State to quantify these correlations and provide a robust evidence base for truly effective, context-aware interventions.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design. The design was deemed appropriate because it enabled the researcher to establish the nature and degree of relationships between selected socio-demographic variables (such as age, gender, educational level, marital status, occupation, and family background) and the prevalence of drug abuse among the target population without manipulating any variable. The population of the study comprised all young adults aged between 18 and 35 years residing in Adamawa State. A sample of 400 participants was selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, three Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from each of the three senatorial zones, giving a total of nine LGAs. In the second stage, two communities were randomly chosen from each LGA, and in the final stage, respondents were selected proportionately using a simple random sampling technique to ensure fair representation of gender and educational background.

The study utilized a structured questionnaire titled *Socio-Demographic Determinants and Drug Abuse Scale (SDDDAS)* as the primary instrument for data collection. The instrument consisted of two parts: Section A gathered information on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, while Section B assessed the prevalence, frequency, and pattern of drug abuse using a 4-point Likert scale (Always, Sometimes, Rarely, Never). The instrument

was validated by three experts from the Departments of Psychology, Sociology, and Health Education at Modibbo Adama University, Yola, to ascertain its content and construct validity. To determine reliability, a pilot study involving 30 respondents outside the sample area was conducted, and the data obtained were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.86, indicating high internal consistency. Data were collected by the researcher and trained assistants after obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. Descriptive

statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to describe respondents' demographic data and patterns of drug abuse. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between socio-demographic variables and drug abuse prevalence among young adults. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Research Question 1: To what extent does gender correlate with the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State?

Table 1: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Gender and Drug Abuse Prevalence among Young Adults in Adamawa State

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Remark
Gender	400	1.47	0.50			
Drug Abuse Prevalence	400	2.83	0.64	0.214*	0.031	Significant

$p < 0.05$ (2-tailed)

The result in Table 1 showed a low positive correlation ($r = 0.214$, $p < 0.05$) between gender and the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State. This indicates that gender has a slight but significant association with drug abuse prevalence. The positive value suggests that male respondents were more likely to engage in drug abuse than females.

Research Question 2: To what extent does employment status correlate with the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State?

Table 2: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Employment Status and Drug Abuse Prevalence among Young Adults in Adamawa State

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Remark
Employment Status	400	1.62	0.78			
Drug Abuse Prevalence	400	2.83	0.64	-0.412**	0.004	Significant

$p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Table 2 showed a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.412$, $p < 0.01$) between employment status and drug abuse prevalence among young adults in Adamawa State. This means that as employment increases, drug abuse decreases. In other words, unemployed youths are more likely to abuse drugs.

Research Question 3: To what extent does educational attainment correlate with the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State?

Table 3: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Educational Attainment and Drug Abuse Prevalence among Young Adults in Adamawa State

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Remark
Educational Attainment	400	2.14	0.91			
Drug Abuse Prevalence	400	2.83	0.64	-0.273*	0.018	Significant

$p < 0.05$ (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 3, there is a weak negative correlation ($r = -0.273$, $p < 0.05$) between educational attainment and drug abuse prevalence among young adults. This suggests that the higher the educational level of a respondent, the less likely they are to abuse drugs. Educated youths may possess greater awareness of the consequences of substance use and better decision-making skills.

Research Question 4: To what extent does peer influence correlate with the prevalence of drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State?

Table 4: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Peer Influence and Drug Abuse Prevalence among Young Adults in Adamawa State

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Remark
Peer Influence	400	2.77	0.73			
Drug Abuse Prevalence	400	2.83	0.64	0.631**	0.000	Significant

$p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

The result in Table 4 indicated a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.631$, $p < 0.01$) between peer influence and drug abuse prevalence among young adults in Adamawa State. This means that young adults who associate with peers involved in drug use are significantly more likely to engage in the same behavior.

Discussion of Findings

The study found a low but significant positive correlation ($r = 0.214$, $p < 0.05$) between gender and drug abuse prevalence among young adults in Adamawa State, indicating that males are more likely to engage in drug abuse than females. This finding aligns with the pattern observed across Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries, where male youths demonstrate higher susceptibility to drug experimentation and dependence (Abdullahi & Yahaya, 2021). Similarly, Oluwole and Adebayo (2020) reported that cultural norms and societal tolerance often permit male risk-taking behaviors, including alcohol and substance use, while discouraging such behaviors among females. The finding may also be interpreted through the lens of social learning theory, which posits that individuals adopt behaviors observed within their social and gender groups (Bandura, 1977). In many northern Nigerian communities, males are more exposed to peer groups and public spaces where drug use occurs. Aliyu and Ahmed (2022) also observed that men often use psychoactive substances as a coping mechanism for stress, unemployment, and social identity affirmation. Thus, while gender is not the strongest determinant, it remains a relevant socio-cultural factor influencing drug use patterns in Adamawa State.

The study revealed a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.412$, $p < 0.01$) between employment status and drug abuse prevalence, suggesting that unemployed young adults are more likely to engage in drug abuse compared to their employed counterparts. This finding is consistent with Nwankwo and Ibe (2020), who noted that unemployment and economic frustration are key socio-economic drivers of substance use among Nigerian youths. The absence of steady income and structured daily engagement often leaves idle time, making unemployed youths vulnerable to peer influence and drug experimentation. In a similar study, Onwuama and Okorie (2021) reported that joblessness significantly increases psychological distress and the likelihood of using drugs as a coping mechanism. This outcome aligns with strain theory (Agnew, 1992), which explains that individuals experiencing economic strain may

resort to deviant behaviors such as substance abuse as a form of emotional relief. Therefore, promoting youth employment programs and vocational training opportunities in Adamawa State could reduce drug-related behavior among young adults.

A weak negative correlation ($r = -0.273$, $p < 0.05$) was found between educational attainment and the prevalence of drug abuse, meaning that individuals with higher levels of education were less likely to abuse drugs. This result corroborates the findings of Ibrahim and Garba (2022), who established that education equips individuals with knowledge, moral reasoning, and decision-making skills that discourage engagement in risky behaviors. Similarly, Uche and Okonkwo (2020) found that low literacy levels were significantly associated with increased drug use among young adults in northern Nigeria. The implication is that education enhances awareness of the negative health, legal, and social consequences of drug abuse. According to Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991), educated individuals are more likely to form attitudes and behavioral intentions consistent with health-promoting norms. Moreover, schools and tertiary institutions often provide preventive education and counseling programs that mitigate the initiation of substance use. Therefore, improving educational access and integrating drug education into school curricula could serve as an effective preventive strategy in Adamawa State.

The study found a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.631$, $p < 0.01$) between peer influence and drug abuse prevalence among young adults. This implies that peer influence is a strong predictor of drug abuse, meaning that individuals who associate with peers who use drugs are more likely to engage in similar behavior. This finding is in line with Okoro and Umar (2023), who emphasized that social groups, particularly peer networks, play a critical role in initiating and sustaining drug use among Nigerian youths. Likewise, Eze and Eze (2021) found that peer pressure and the desire for social acceptance are the most dominant factors influencing drug-taking behavior among university students in northern Nigeria. The result can be explained using Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, which asserts that behavior is shaped by social interaction and environmental context. When young adults interact in social circles where drug use is normalized, they internalize such behaviors as acceptable. Additionally, Audu and Bello (2020) observed that peer encouragement, imitation, and the desire to belong are key social reinforcements that sustain substance abuse. Consequently, intervention

strategies focusing on peer-led education, mentorship programs, and positive youth group engagement could effectively reduce the impact of peer influence on drug abuse in Adamawa State.

Conclusion

Drug abuse among young adults in Adamawa State is largely shaped by socio-demographic factors that reflect broader societal challenges. Addressing this issue therefore requires a multifaceted approach including youth empowerment initiatives, employment creation, community-based rehabilitation, and peer group reorientation. Strengthening family structures, expanding educational access, and enforcing community-level sensitization campaigns will also be critical in mitigating the growing prevalence of drug abuse.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government agencies such as the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Ministry of Youth and Sports, and educational institutions should intensify awareness campaigns that educate young adults on the dangers of drug abuse.
2. Since unemployment showed a significant negative correlation with drug abuse, the Adamawa State Government and relevant NGOs should create vocational training and entrepreneurship programs to empower unemployed youths.
3. Considering the strong positive correlation between peer influence and drug abuse, youth-friendly centers and community-based organizations should develop peer mentorship and rehabilitation programs.
4. Given that higher educational attainment was associated with lower drug abuse rates, government and private stakeholders should improve access to affordable, quality education and integrate life skills and moral education into school curricula.

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