



PEER INFLUENCE AND MORAL BEHAVIOUR AS CORRELATES OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BAUCHI SOUTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT, BAUCHI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined peer influence and moral behaviour as correlates of drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State, Nigeria. A descriptive correlational research design was adopted. The population comprised 10,280 SS II students, from which a sample of 384 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using the researcher-developed Peer Influence, Moral Behaviour and Drug Abuse Questionnaire (PIMBDAQ) with an overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.85. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between peer influence and drug abuse ($r = .58, p < .05$), a significant negative relationship between moral behaviour and drug abuse ($r = -.56, p < .05$), and a significant negative relationship between peer influence and moral behaviour ($r = -.49, p < .05$). The study concluded that peer influence increases adolescents' susceptibility to drug abuse, whereas moral behaviour serves as a protective factor. It was recommended that schools strengthen peer education, counselling services, moral education, and life-skills programmes to reduce drug abuse among students.

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INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse among adolescents has emerged as a persistent public health, educational, and social challenge with far-reaching consequences for individual development and national productivity. Across the world, increasing access to psychoactive substances, changing social norms, and rapid urbanization have contributed to a steady rise in substance use among young people. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable because this developmental stage is characterized by experimentation, identity formation, emotional instability, and heightened sensitivity to environmental influences. Although the problem is global, its impact is more profound in low- and middle-income countries where preventive services, mental health support, and substance abuse control programmes remain relatively inadequate (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2024; World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Drug



abuse during adolescence extends beyond individual health concerns to affect educational attainment, behavioural adjustment, family relationships, and community safety. Within school settings, substance use has increasingly become a source of concern due to its association with poor academic performance, truancy, disciplinary problems, school dropout, and involvement in antisocial behaviours. Early exposure to psychoactive substances also increases the likelihood of long-term dependence, psychological disorders, and diminished social functioning in adulthood (UNODC, 2023). Consequently, understanding the factors that predispose adolescents to substance use remains an important priority for researchers, educators, counsellors, and policymakers.

In Nigeria, adolescent drug abuse has assumed an increasingly troubling dimension. Recent reports indicate that secondary school students are becoming more exposed to substances such as cannabis, opioids, inhalants, and the non-medical use of prescription medications, including tramadol and codeine-based products (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency [NDLEA], 2022). The widespread availability of these substances, coupled with weak enforcement mechanisms and changing social attitudes, has contributed to growing concerns about substance use within school communities. Beyond its immediate health implications, drug abuse among students has been linked to declining academic achievement, behavioural misconduct, violence, and other adverse developmental outcomes (Abubakar et al., 2021).

Among the factors consistently associated with adolescent drug use, peer influence occupies a central position. During adolescence, relationships with peers become increasingly important in shaping attitudes, values, and behavioural choices. Acceptance within peer groups often encourages conformity to group norms, even when such norms promote behaviours that are socially or morally unacceptable. Adolescents whose friends engage in substance use are therefore more likely to perceive drug use as acceptable and to experiment with similar behaviours. This pattern is reinforced through observation, imitation, and social reinforcement within peer networks, making peer influence a powerful determinant of adolescent behaviour (Bandura, 1977; UNODC, 2023). While external social influences are important, adolescents' responses to these influences are also shaped by their moral behaviour. Moral behaviour encompasses the values, principles, and ethical standards that guide individuals in distinguishing right from wrong and regulating their conduct accordingly. It provides an internal mechanism for evaluating behavioural alternatives and resisting actions that may be harmful to oneself or others. Adolescents with well-developed moral values are generally better equipped to withstand peer pressure and make responsible decisions, whereas those with weaker moral orientation may be more susceptible to engaging in risky behaviours, including substance use (UNESCO, 2021).

The relationship between peer influence and moral behaviour is particularly relevant within secondary school environments, where students encounter diverse social expectations and behavioural models. In many situations, adolescents must negotiate competing pressures arising from peer acceptance on one hand and personal or societal values on the other. The choices they make often depend on the extent to which internal moral standards are able to counterbalance external social pressures. Consequently,



understanding drug abuse requires consideration of both the social contexts in which adolescents operate and the personal values that guide their behavioural decisions. Several empirical studies have examined the determinants of adolescent drug abuse in different contexts. Recent evidence demonstrates that peer influence remains one of the strongest predictors of adolescent drug abuse. For example, the systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by Stevens et al. (2024) reported that adolescents whose close friends engaged in substance use were significantly more likely to initiate and sustain substance use themselves, highlighting peer influence as a major determinant of adolescent drug use. Within Nigeria, Ajetunmobi and Ilori (2024) examined the influence of peer pressure, parental socioeconomic status, and emotional intelligence on substance abuse susceptibility among 300 secondary school adolescents in Ibadan, Oyo State. Using a correlational research design, the study found that peer pressure significantly predicted adolescents' susceptibility to substance abuse, while higher emotional intelligence reduced the likelihood of engaging in substance use. The authors recommended strengthening school counselling services and peer education programmes to reduce adolescent drug abuse.

Similarly, Ogbonna et al. (2024), in a comprehensive narrative review of drug abuse among secondary school students in Nigeria, reported that peer pressure consistently emerged as one of the strongest predictors of adolescent substance use across different regions of the country. The review further highlighted the protective roles of parental monitoring, school counselling, and emotional competence in reducing adolescents' involvement in drug abuse. In another Nigerian study, Ebuenyi et al. (2023) investigated psychoactive substance use among in-school adolescents in Nigeria and reported that peer influence, curiosity, and ease of access to substances significantly increased adolescents' likelihood of engaging in drug use. The study recommended strengthening school-based prevention programmes and peer-led interventions to reduce adolescent substance abuse. Evidence from Bauchi State also confirms the growing magnitude of adolescent drug abuse. Okon et al. (2023) reported a substantial prevalence of substance use among secondary school adolescents in Bauchi State and found that drug abuse negatively affected students' academic performance, mental health, and social functioning. The study further identified peer association, curiosity, and accessibility of psychoactive substances as major contributors to adolescent substance use, emphasizing the need for stronger preventive interventions within schools.

Although these studies have significantly advanced understanding of adolescent drug abuse, most have focused primarily on peer influence, emotional intelligence, parental characteristics, or the prevalence of substance use. Comparatively few studies have simultaneously examined peer influence and moral behaviour as determinants of drug abuse among senior secondary school students, particularly within Bauchi South Local Government Area of Bauchi State. Consequently, empirical evidence explaining how adolescents' internal moral values interact with peer influence to shape drug abuse behaviour remains limited. Within Bauchi South Local Government Area of Bauchi State, concerns about drug abuse among secondary school students have become increasingly evident. Reports from schools, community leaders, and relevant stakeholders suggest growing exposure of adolescents to substance-related behaviours, driven by peer association, easy access to psychoactive substances, and weakening



parental and institutional supervision. Despite ongoing efforts by government agencies, schools, and community organizations to curb substance abuse, the persistence of the problem suggests that existing interventions have not adequately addressed the behavioural and psychosocial factors that sustain drug use among adolescents. This study therefore addresses this gap by investigating the combined influence of peer influence and moral behaviour on drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State, Nigeria.

The study is anchored on Social Learning Theory developed by Albert Bandura (1977) and Problem Behavior Theory developed by Richard Jessor (1991). Social Learning Theory posits that behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within one's social environment. The theory explains that adolescents are likely to adopt behaviours exhibited by significant others, particularly peers, when such behaviours are rewarded or socially accepted. It therefore provides a useful framework for understanding how peer influence contributes to drug abuse among senior secondary school students. Problem Behavior Theory complements this perspective by explaining that adolescents' engagement in risky behaviours, including drug abuse, results from the interaction of personal characteristics, perceived environmental influences, and behavioural systems. The theory recognizes moral values as important protective factors that can reduce adolescents' involvement in problem behaviours despite exposure to negative peer influences. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive explanation of how peer influence and moral behaviour jointly determine drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area of Bauchi State, Nigeria.

Against this background, the present study examines peer influence and moral behaviour as determinants of drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State, Nigeria. By investigating the combined contribution of these psychosocial factors, the study seeks to generate empirical evidence capable of informing school-based counselling programmes, preventive education initiatives, and policy interventions aimed at reducing adolescent drug abuse and promoting healthy behavioural development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Drug abuse among senior secondary school students remains a major educational, social, and public health concern in Nigeria because of its adverse effects on students' academic performance, psychological well-being, and social adjustment. Despite the implementation of school regulations, counselling services, and drug awareness programmes, the prevalence of substance abuse among adolescents continues to increase, suggesting that existing preventive interventions have not sufficiently addressed the behavioural and psychosocial factors associated with drug use. Among these factors, peer influence and moral behaviour have been identified as important determinants of adolescents' behavioural choices. Students who associate with peers who engage in substance use are more likely to

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experiment with drugs, while weak moral behaviour may reduce their ability to resist negative peer pressure and make responsible behavioural decisions.

Although previous studies have examined peer influence and moral behaviour as predictors of adolescent drug abuse, these variables have largely been investigated independently, with relatively few studies exploring their combined influence on drug abuse among senior secondary school students, particularly in Bauchi South Local Government Area of Bauchi State. This lack of context-specific empirical evidence limits a comprehensive understanding of the behavioural determinants of drug abuse and constrains the development of effective school-based counselling programmes and preventive interventions. Therefore, this study examines peer influence and moral behaviour as determinants of drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State, Nigeria, with a view to providing empirical evidence for strengthening counselling services, school-based drug prevention programmes, and educational policies aimed at reducing substance abuse among adolescents.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to investigate peer influence and moral behaviour as determinants of drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the relationship between peer influence and drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State.
2. Determine the relationship between moral behaviour and drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State.
3. Investigate the relationship between peer influence and moral behaviour among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

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1. What is the relationship between peer influence and drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State?
2. What is the relationship between moral behaviour and drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State?
3. What is the relationship between peer influence and moral behaviour among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between peer influence and drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State.
2. There is no significant relationship between moral behaviour and drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State.
3. There is no significant relationship between peer influence and moral behaviour among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationships among peer influence, moral behaviour, and drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State, Nigeria. The design was appropriate because it enabled the investigation of naturally occurring relationships among the study variables without manipulating the research.

The study was conducted in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State, Nigeria. The target population comprised all Senior Secondary School II (SS II) students enrolled in public and private secondary schools within the study area, with an estimated population of 10,280 SS II students obtained from the Bauchi State Ministry of Education. SS II students were selected because they are at a developmental stage characterized by increased peer interaction, continued moral development, and heightened vulnerability to risk-taking behaviours, including substance use. The sample size of 384 students was determined using Cochran's (1977) sample size determination formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A multistage sampling procedure was employed to select the respondents. Schools were first stratified by ownership (public and private) to ensure adequate

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representation. Selected schools were then chosen through simple random sampling, after which intact SS II classes were identified. Respondents were subsequently selected from the class registers using simple random sampling, ensuring that each eligible student had an equal opportunity to participate.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed structured questionnaire titled the Peer Influence, Moral Behaviour and Drug Abuse Questionnaire (PIMBDAQ), developed from the study objectives and relevant literature. The instrument comprised four sections. Section A elicited respondents' demographic information. Section B measured peer influence, Section C assessed moral behaviour, and Section D measured drug abuse. Sections B, C, and D contained 10 items each, making a total of 30 substantive items, rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), with higher scores indicating greater levels of the measured constructs.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by three experts in Guidance and Counselling, Educational Psychology, and Measurement and Evaluation, whose observations and recommendations were used to improve the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the questionnaire items. A pilot study was conducted among 40 SS II students outside the study area, and the data obtained were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability coefficients obtained were 0.82 for Peer Influence, 0.85 for Moral Behaviour, 0.87 for Drug Abuse, while the overall reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.85, indicating that the questionnaire was sufficiently reliable for the study.

Following approval from the relevant educational authorities and school administrators, the questionnaire was administered to the selected respondents with the assistance of trained research assistants. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and completed questionnaires were screened for completeness before data entry.

Data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise respondents' characteristics and the study variables. The hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to determine the strength and direction of the relationships among peer influence, moral behaviour, and drug abuse. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between peer influence and drug abuse among senior

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secondary school students.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation between Peer Influence and Drug A

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	P-value	Decision
Peer Influence	384	3.71	0.68	0.58	0.000	Significant
Drug Abuse	384	2.84	0.81			

Table 1 shows that there was a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between peer influence and drug abuse among senior secondary school students ($r = .58$, $p < .05$). This indicates that students who experienced higher levels of peer influence were more likely to engage in drug abuse. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that peer influence is a significant determinant of drug abuse among the respondents.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between moral behaviour and drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Moral Behaviour and Drug Abuse

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	P-value	Decision
Moral Behaviour	384	3.86	0.64	-0.56	0.000	Significant
Drug Abuse	384	2.84	0.81			

Table 2 shows that there was a moderate negative and statistically significant relationship between moral behaviour and drug abuse among senior secondary school students ($r = -.56$, $p < .05$). This indicates that students with high moral behaviour were less likely to engage in drug abuse. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that moral behaviour is a significant determinant of drug abuse among the respondents.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant relationship between peer influence and moral behaviour among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State.

**Table 3: Pearson Correlation between Peer Influence and Moral Behaviour**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	P-value	Decision
Moral Behaviour	384	3.86	0.64	-0.49	0.000	Significant
Peer Influence	384	3.71	0.68			

Table 3 shows a statistically significant moderate negative relationship between peer influence and moral behaviour among senior secondary school students ($r = -0.49$, $p = 0.000$). The finding indicates that as negative peer influence increases, the level of moral behaviour among students tends to decrease.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined the relationships among peer influence, moral behaviour, and drug abuse among senior secondary school students in Bauchi South Local Government Area, Bauchi State. The findings show that peer influence is positively associated with drug abuse, while moral behaviour is negatively related to drug use. In addition, peer influence is inversely related to moral behaviour. Overall, the results indicate that adolescent substance use is shaped by the interaction between external social pressures and internal moral regulation.

The first finding revealed a significant positive relationship between peer influence and drug abuse, suggesting that students exposed to stronger peer pressure are more likely to engage in substance use. During adolescence, peer groups become central to identity formation and behavioural validation, making individuals more susceptible to conformity. Where drug use is normalized within peer networks, adolescents may perceive it as acceptable and gradually adopt similar behaviours. This finding is consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which explains behaviour acquisition through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. It also agrees with the reports of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023), Abubakar et al. (2021), Ogbonna et al. (2024), and Ebuonyi et al. (2023), which identified peer association as one of the strongest predictors of adolescent substance use. The finding highlights the need to strengthen positive peer group structures and peer-led preventive interventions in school settings.

The second finding established a significant negative relationship between moral behaviour and drug abuse, indicating that students with stronger moral values are less likely to engage in substance use. Moral behaviour functions as an internal regulatory system that guides judgement, strengthens self-control, and discourages engagement in behaviours considered harmful or unacceptable. Adolescents



with well-developed moral standards are better able to resist peer pressure and make responsible behavioural choices. This finding supports Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory, which emphasizes the role of internalized moral reasoning in guiding behaviour. It is also consistent with the position of UNESCO (2021) and the work of Lapsley and Narvaez (2004), who argued that moral identity and character development are important protective factors against risky behaviours. The finding further aligns with World Health Organization (2022), which emphasizes life-skills education, moral development, and psychosocial competence as protective factors against adolescent substance use. The implication is that drug prevention efforts should integrate moral education, value reorientation, and counselling-based interventions alongside conventional awareness programmes.

The third finding revealed a significant negative relationship between peer influence and moral behaviour, indicating that increased susceptibility to peer pressure is associated with weaker moral behaviour. This suggests that excessive reliance on peer approval may weaken independent judgement and increase conformity to group norms, even when such norms conflict with personal or societal values. Conversely, adolescents with strong moral behaviour are more capable of resisting negative peer influence and maintaining independent decision-making. This finding is supported by both Social Learning Theory and Moral Development Theory, which together explain the interaction between social reinforcement and internal moral regulation in shaping behaviour. It also corroborates the findings of Lansford et al. (2022) and Lapsley and Narvaez (2004), which emphasize that strong moral identity and positive developmental relationships enhance adolescents' resistance to peer pressure and reduce engagement in risky behaviours, including substance use.

Thus, the findings demonstrate that adolescent drug abuse is determined by both environmental and personal factors. While peer influence increases vulnerability to substance use, moral behaviour serves as a protective factor that reduces exposure to risky behavioural outcomes. The results therefore underscore the importance of integrated school-based interventions that combine peer education, moral development programmes, counselling services, and family involvement in order to promote healthier behavioural adjustment and reduce drug abuse among secondary school students.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that peer influence and moral behaviour are significant determinants of drug abuse among senior secondary school students. While negative peer influence increases the likelihood of drug abuse, strong moral behaviour reduces students' susceptibility to substance use. Therefore, strengthening moral values and promoting positive peer relationships are essential for reducing drug abuse among



adolescents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made in line with the specific objectives:

1. Secondary schools should strengthen peer education, mentoring, and counselling programmes to promote positive peer relationships, discourage substance use, and equip students with skills to resist negative peer pressure.
2. Schools, parents, counsellors, and religious organizations should collaborate to strengthen character education, moral values, self-discipline, and ethical decision-making among students.
3. Schools should implement integrated counselling and life-skills programmes that reinforce moral behaviour, encourage positive peer associations, and help students resist unhealthy social influences through the support of parents and the community.

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