

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF DRUG ABUSE ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NSUKKA EDUCATION ZONE, ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceived impact of drug abuse on the mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population consisted of 4,220 SSII students, from which a sample of 422 students representing 10% of the population was selected through a simple random sampling technique from selected schools in the area. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled *Drug Abuse and Mental Health of Students' Questionnaire (DAMHSQ)*. The questionnaire consisted of 16 items divided into two clusters and structured on a four-point rating scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Section I of the instrument gathered demographic data, while Section II focused on the main research variables. The instrument was validated by three experts, two from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Studies and one from the Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Department of Science Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability index of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and yielded a coefficient of 0.81. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while t-test was employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the commonly abused substances among students included tramadol, marijuana (cannabis), cocaine, valium, and heroin. The perceived impacts of drug abuse on students' mental health included memory loss, risk-taking behavior in school, poor academic performance, insanity, and other forms of mental disorders. Based on the findings, the study recommended, among other things, the regular organization of workshops and sensitization programs to educate students on the harmful consequences of drug abuse on mental health. This study contributes to knowledge by highlighting the specific psychological and academic risks of drug abuse among adolescents in a Nigerian school context.

Keywords: Drug abuse, mental health, secondary school students, counseling intervention

Introduction

The impact of drug abuse on mental health among secondary school students remains a pressing concern in educational and public health discourse, particularly within Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. Drugs, when used responsibly and under the guidance of medical professionals, serve essential therapeutic functions. When prescribed appropriately, they contribute significantly to disease management and the restoration of health. However, the misuse of such substances especially when consumed without medical supervision constitutes drug abuse, which poses a threat to individual well-being and societal stability. Drug abuse occurs when substances are taken in ways that deviate from medical or legal guidelines, either through excessive intake or non-prescribed usage. While certain drugs such as alcohol and kola nuts are socially tolerated, their excessive use still

qualifies as abuse. According to Barau (2013), the inappropriate use of drugs presents a serious medical risk, particularly among adolescents who may lack the maturity to make informed decisions regarding substance use. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2015) defines a drug as any chemical substance that alters the structure or function of the body and mind, whether positively or negatively. Likewise, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2010) emphasizes that drugs can have therapeutic value but become harmful when misused.

Interestingly, recent trends indicate a growing prevalence of drug abuse among adolescents, despite efforts by individuals, schools, and government agencies to curb the problem. Garba (2013) observed that drug abuse negatively affects mental health, cognitive capacity, and productive potential. In 2018, NDLEA reported the arrest of over 1,528 individuals, including secondary school students, for drug-related offenses across various regions of Nigeria, highlighting the widespread nature of the issue. International statistics also reflect this concern. The British Office for National Statistics (2011) reported that over 12 percent of students aged 16 to 20 admitted to drug use. In academic settings, students frequently turn to amphetamines for stimulation or barbiturates for sedation, with some using these substances in dangerous combinations, such as mixing barbiturates with alcohol, which can result in fatal consequences. Similarly, some students resort to marijuana use under the misconception that it enhances memory and cognitive performance, disregarding the associated health and behavioral risks. Hence, this growing trend necessitates empirical investigation into the perceived impact of drug abuse on students' mental health, with the goal of providing evidence-based recommendations for counseling and preventive interventions.

The challenges posed by substance abuse as a public health concern, particularly among secondary school students, are significant on a global scale (Akanbi, Augustina, Theophilus, Muritala, & Ajiboye, 2015). Nearly every country continues to witness rising incidents of substance use among adolescents, resulting in increased violence, criminal behavior, the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the breakdown of social structures—alongside an alarming rise in mental health problems among students. Schindler and Bröning (2015) emphasize that substance abuse results in numerous complications, including health disorders, social dysfunctions, physical dependence, and psychological addiction. In Nigeria, many secondary school students have increasingly engaged in the use of harmful substances such as Indian hemp, cocaine, morphine, heroin, alcohol, ephedrine, madras, caffeine, glue, barbiturates, and amphetamines for daily academic, social, and other activities (Adeyemo, Beatrice, Okpala, & Oghale, 2016). Drug abuse in Nigeria has escalated into a matter of urgent concern due to its harmful effects. Those involved often experience depression, confusion, and an unhealthy dependency on drugs as a coping mechanism for social, academic, or health-related challenges (Akanbi, Augustina, Theophilus, Muritala, & Ajiboye, 2015). According to these authors, the prevalence of drug abuse demands immediate national and international attention.

Studies have consistently revealed that the illicit use of drugs is widespread among Nigerian secondary school students, including those in Nsukka Education Zone. This issue has become a critical concern among educational stakeholders, medical professionals, religious organizations, sociologists, parents, and counselors. In particular, Obarisiagbon and Ajayi (2019) noted that drug abuse has led to numerous cases of mental illness and has destroyed the academic and psychological well-being of many students. The upward trend in the use of these harmful substances continues. The World Drug Report (2018) suggests

that this may be linked to the belief that drug use reduces tension and enhances memory, focus, and academic performance. However, alcohol and other drugs are frequently associated with detrimental outcomes such as psychosis, violence, cognitive disruption, and various mental health disorders. Studied conducted by Ekpenyong (2012) on drug abuse perceptions among undergraduates in Nigeria identified addiction and dependency as major outcomes. Such dependency is marked by compulsive drug-seeking behaviors, which persist despite adverse consequences. These behavioural patterns, according to Etta and Ojedokun (2017) are maladaptive and socially inappropriate, placing individuals at risk. The increasing prevalence of drug use among secondary school students calls for broad societal concern. The government, school authorities, religious organizations, and non-governmental bodies have made concerted efforts to address this menace. Nevertheless, the problem persists as these drugs are often promoted as benign or even beneficial, sometimes with slogans claiming they lead to “greatness” or a “brighter life” (Adeyemo et al., 2016). Many students engage in drug use without fully understanding the long-term consequences, which often include academic failure, mental health disorders, criminal behavior, cultism, sexual misconduct, deviant behavior, and school dropout (Obiechina & Isiguzo, 2016).

Hence, despite multiple awareness campaigns, drug abuse continues to affect mental health adversely in the region. In Nsukka Education Zone, reports indicate that secondary school students not only consume illicit substances but also suffer from the resultant psychological conditions. Obiechina and Isiguzo (2016) observed that some students within Enugu State exhibit serious mental health problems, requiring psychiatric intervention. Empirical research further supports these observations. Anzaku (2019) and Bakare (2019) identified drug dependency and addiction as outcomes of persistent abuse, particularly among school-age adolescents. These behaviors often resist correction, even when accompanied by severe consequences. Ado (2016) listed substances such as marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and alcohol among the commonly abused drugs and highlighted their consequences, including memory loss, poor academic performance, and mental instability. Additionally, a study by Adekeye, Adeusi, Chenube, Ahmadu, and Sholarin (2015) confirmed that secondary school students and undergraduates in South-West Nigeria abuse substances such as tramadol, sedatives, cocaine, and cannabis. The National Institute on Drug Abuse classified the effects of drug abuse into physical and psychological categories. Physical effects include impaired vision and coordination, reduced judgment, appetite loss, cardiovascular issues, and memory disruption. Psychological effects encompass hallucinations, confusion, paranoia, erratic behavior, anxiety, and depression.

Gotsang, Mashalla, and Seloilwe (2017), in a study on the awareness and knowledge of drug abuse consequences, reported that substance use could lead to liver and lung diseases, stroke, cancer, and other mental health conditions. Xang and Xia (2019) also noted that adolescents are increasingly aware that drug use adversely affects academic performance, either in the short or long term, depending on the duration of abuse. Against this backdrop, the present study investigated the perceived impact of drug abuse on the mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State,

Statement of the Problem

The increasing prevalence of drug abuse among adolescents has become a significant global public health concern, with severe implications for students' mental well-being and academic progress. Ideally, secondary school students are expected to engage actively in learning, develop healthy peer relationships, and cultivate responsible behaviors that support their mental, emotional, and cognitive development. In a conducive educational

environment, students should receive adequate guidance and protection against influences that could compromise their mental health and overall development. However, the real situation presents a stark contrast. There is a growing trend of substance abuse among secondary school students across Nigeria, particularly within the Nsukka Education Zone. Students are increasingly exposed to various illicit drugs such as cannabis, cocaine, heroin, tramadol, and other psychotropic substances. This misuse has been linked to numerous mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, paranoia, and psychotic episodes. Reports also indicate a rise in maladaptive behaviors, poor academic performance, school dropout, and criminal activities resulting from drug dependency. Although various governmental and non-governmental bodies have launched interventions aimed at curbing drug abuse and promoting mental health awareness in schools, the issue remains persistent. Many adolescents continue to indulge in substance use, often unaware of its long-term psychological consequences. Misconceptions among youths that certain drugs enhance concentration and relieve stress further exacerbate the problem. This trend is not only widespread but also under-addressed within the educational sector. Therefore, the core problem this study seeks to address is the rising incidence of drug abuse among secondary school students in the Nsukka Education Zone and its perceived impact on their mental health. Despite increasing awareness campaigns, many students continue to experience psychological distress linked to substance use, underscoring a critical gap in prevention and intervention efforts. Without evidence-strategies tailored to the local context, the mental health and future potential of these adolescents remain at risk.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived impact of drug abuse on the mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. identify the types of drugs commonly abused by secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone.
2. examine the perceived effects of drug abuse on the mental health of these students within the Education Zone.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of drugs are commonly abused by secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone?
2. What are the perceived impacts of drug abuse on the mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference between male and female secondary school students on the types of drugs commonly abused by secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female SSII students on the perceived impact of drug abuse on mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the perceived impact of drug abuse on the mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State. Two specific objectives, along with corresponding research questions and hypotheses, guided the study. The population consisted of 4,220 Senior Secondary II (SSII) students from 62 secondary schools within the zone. A sample size of 422 SSII students (300 males and 122 females), representing 10% of the population, was selected through simple random sampling from 10 randomly chosen secondary schools in the area. Data were collected using a researcher-designed instrument titled *Perceived Impact of Drug Abuse on Mental Health Questionnaire* (PIDMQ). The validity of the instrument was established by three experts—two from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Studies and one from the Department of Science Education, all from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The instrument demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions, while an independent samples t-test was employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that the types of drugs commonly abused by secondary school students include tramadol, tobacco, cocaine, heroin, sedatives, and marijuana, among others. The perceived impacts of drug abuse on mental health included poor academic performance, insomnia, memory loss, risk-taking behavior, and mental disorders. Additionally, hypothesis testing showed no significant difference between male and female students' perceptions regarding the impact of drug abuse on mental health.

Results

Table 1: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation on Types of Drugs Commonly Abused by Secondary School Students in Nsukka Education Zone

S/N	Item Statements	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Secondary school students commonly abuse Tramadol (Tramal).	3.23	0.71	A
2	Marijuana (Cannabis) is commonly abused by secondary school students.	3.42	0.63	A
3	Cocaine is frequently abused by secondary school students.	3.14	0.86	A
4	Heroin abuse is prevalent among secondary school students.	3.24	0.84	A
5	Valium and related benzodiazepines are abused by secondary school students.	2.85	0.87	A
6	Sedatives are commonly used abusively by secondary school students.	3.05	0.89	A
7	Codeine is among the drugs abused by secondary school students.	3.28	0.80	A
8	Alcohol consumption is common among secondary school students.	3.17	0.73	A
Grand Mean and SD		3.26	0.83	A

Data in Table 1 shows that secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone perceive several types of drugs as commonly abused within their schools. All eight items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating agreement (A) that these substances are frequently abused by students in the area. Marijuana (Cannabis) recorded the highest mean

score of 3.42, suggesting it is the most commonly perceived abused drug, while Valium and related benzodiazepines have the lowest mean of 2.85. The aggregate mean score of 3.26 further confirms the consensus among respondents that drug abuse involving these substances is a significant issue in the zone.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between SSII males and females secondary school students on the types of drugs commonly abused by secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone.

Table 2: t-test analysis of the responses of SSII male and female secondary school students on the types of drugs commonly abused by secondary school students in the area

S/N	Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-cal	Level of sign	Dec
1	Male	300	3.20	0.71	618	.000	0.05	Accept
2	Female	122	3.26	0.66				(NS)

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of .000 is less than 0.05 level at 420 degree of freedom. Since the p-value of 0.05 is greater than the calculated t-value of .000, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between SSII male and female secondary school students on the types of drugs abused by secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone is accepted. This implies that both male and female secondary students did not differ in their opinions on the types of drugs abused by the secondary schools in area.

Table 3: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation on the Perceived Impact of Drug Abuse on the Mental Health of Secondary School Students in Nsukka Education Zone

S/N	Item Statements	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
9	Drug abuse leads to lack of sleep among secondary school students.	3.40	0.72	A
10	Drug abuse causes hyperactivity in secondary school students.	3.14	0.82	A
11	Drug abuse causes somatic diseases in students.	3.33	0.73	A
12	Drug abuse results in loss of memory among secondary school students.	3.10	0.86	A
13	Drug abuse leads to risk-taking behavior in school.	3.35	0.69	A
14	Drug abuse causes poor academic performance in students.	3.03	0.88	A
15	Drug abuse may lead to insanity among secondary school students.	3.80	0.97	A
16	Drug abuse contributes to mental disorders in students.	2.98	0.61	A
Grand Mean and SD		3.25	0.74	A

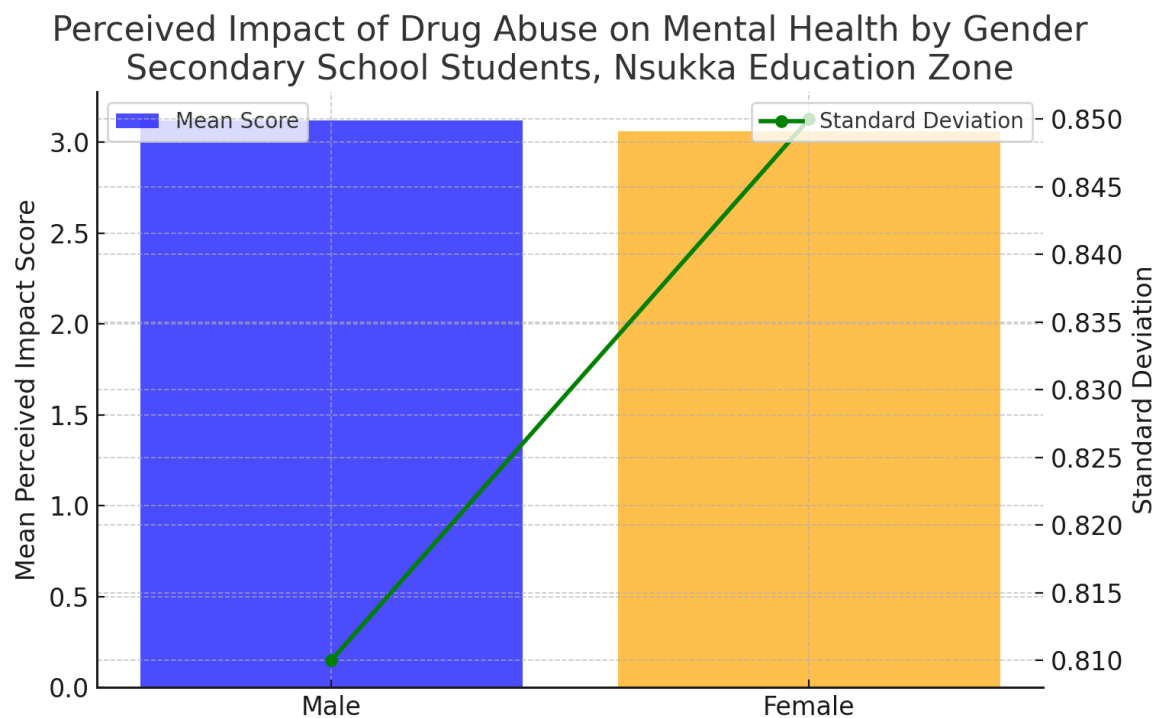
Data in Table 3 shows that secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone perceive several significant mental health impacts resulting from drug abuse. All items scored mean values above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating agreement (A) that these effects are commonly experienced or observed among students. Insanity (mean = 3.80) and lack of sleep (mean = 3.40) are perceived as the most prominent impacts, while mental disorders (mean = 2.98) recorded the lowest but still agreed upon. The grand mean of 3.25 confirms the overall consensus that drug abuse negatively affects the mental health of secondary school students in the zone.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between male and female SSII students on the perceived impact of drug abuse on mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone.

Table 4: t-test analysis of the responses of male and female SSII students on the perceived impact of drug abuse on mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone

S/N	Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-cal value	Level of sign	Dec
1	Male	300	3.12	0.81	420	0.012	0.05	Accept
2	Female	122	3.06	0.85				(NS)

Table 4 shows that the calculated t-value of .012 is less than 0.05 level at 420 degree of freedom. Since the p value of 0.05 is greater than the calculated t-value of 0.012, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between male and female SSII students on the perceived impact of drug abuse on the mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone is accepted. This implies that male and female SSII students did not differ in their views on the perceived impact of drug abuse on mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone.



The chart shows that both male and female students have similar mean perceptions of the impact of drug abuse on mental health, with males scoring slightly higher (3.12) than females (3.06). The standard deviations are also close (0.81 for males and 0.85 for females), indicating similar variability in responses within each group. This supports the statistical

result that there is no significant difference between male and female students' views on this issue.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the types of drugs commonly abused by secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone include tramadol (tramol), marijuana (cannabis), cocaine, heroin, valium or related drugs, sedatives, codeine, and alcohol. These substances recorded mean responses above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating general agreement among respondents that these are the prevalent drugs being abused. This finding aligns with the study by Ado (2016), who reported that tramol, marijuana, and cocaine were the most commonly abused drugs among students in North-West Nigeria. Similarly, Adekeye et al. (2015) found that students in Nigeria frequently abuse cannabis, heroin, cocaine, and alcohol. Supporting these findings, Onyeka and Ibe (2018) noted that both prescription and illicit drugs are commonly misused by secondary school students due to peer pressure and accessibility. In a global context, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) confirmed an increasing trend of youth involvement in the abuse of substances such as cannabis, tramadol, and sedatives. The findings of the study also revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female SSII students in their views on the types of drugs commonly abused by secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone. Data in Table 2 showed that the calculated t-value of .000 was less than the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance with 420 degrees of freedom. Since the p-value (0.05) was greater than the calculated t-value (.000), the null hypothesis was accepted. This implies that both male and female students shared similar views on the types of drugs commonly abused. This is in agreement with Eneh and Stanley (2004), who found no gender-based difference in the types of drugs abused by adolescents, and with Akubue and Emeka (2017), who observed that male and female students equally participate in drug abuse patterns, particularly involving substances such as marijuana, codeine, and tramadol.

The findings of the study revealed that the perceived impacts of drug abuse on the mental health of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone include lack of sleep, hyperactivity, somatic diseases, memory loss, risk-taking behavior in school, poor academic performance, insanity, and mental disorder. All listed items recorded mean scores above the cut-off point of 2.50, suggesting strong agreement among respondents on the negative implications of drug abuse on mental health. These findings are in consonance with the study by Obiechina and Isiguzo (2016), who identified risk-taking behavior, mental disorders, poor academic performance, and psychotic symptoms as some of the consequences of drug use among students. Ekpenyong (2012) similarly reported that drug abuse among adolescents' results in hyperactivity, memory loss, and emotional instability. WHO (2019) further asserted that early drug use contributes to various mental health issues, including depression, insomnia, and behavioral disorders, while Brown and Tapert (2018) observed that adolescent drug users are at risk of developing cognitive impairments and psychiatric conditions. The findings of the study also revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female SSII students in their opinions regarding the perceived impacts of drug abuse on mental health. Table 4 indicated a calculated t-value of .012, which was less than the critical value at the 0.05 level with 420 degrees of freedom. Since the p-value (0.05) was greater than the calculated t-value (.012), the null hypothesis was accepted. This result implies that gender did not significantly influence students' perceptions of the mental health impacts of drug abuse. This is supported by the findings of

Isangedighi et al. (2015), who reported that both male and female adolescents are equally susceptible to the mental and psychological effects of substance abuse. In addition, Aloba and Adewuya (2020) emphasized that mental health disorders resulting from drug abuse such as anxiety, insomnia, and poor concentration are common among students regardless of gender.

Educational Implications of the Study

The findings of the study have important implications for parents, school principals, counsellors, and students. Parents need to monitor and guide their children's activities both at home and in school, considering the harmful effects of drug abuse on mental health. Principals should take proactive steps by organizing regular sensitization campaigns to discourage drug abuse and enforce school policies against it. Counsellors are expected to organize workshops and awareness programmes to educate students on the dangers of drug use, especially its effects on academic performance and mental stability. Students themselves must understand that drugs are harmful to their health and should avoid using them as sedatives or for experimentation. In general, the findings suggest that a joint effort by all stakeholders is necessary to reduce drug abuse and promote healthy behavior among secondary school students.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the types of drugs commonly abused by secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone, including specific substances such as tramadol, marijuana, cocaine, and codeine. The findings deepen understanding of the scope of drug abuse at the secondary school level in southeastern Nigeria. Additionally, the study highlights the perceived impact of drug abuse on students' mental health, such as poor academic performance, memory loss, risk-taking behavior, and mental disorders. These insights extend the literature by linking specific drugs to particular mental health challenges within this demographic. Furthermore, the study reveals that male and female students did not significantly differ in their perceptions regarding types of drugs abused or the impacts on mental health. This contributes to gender-related discussions in drug education and mental health interventions among adolescents.

Conclusion

Drug abuse remains a global public health concern, particularly among adolescents in secondary schools across developing countries, including Nigeria. The findings of this study revealed a high prevalence of drug abuse among secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone. Substances such as tramadol, marijuana, cocaine, and alcohol were identified as commonly abused. The study also established that drug abuse is perceived to have significant negative effects on the mental health of students, including poor academic performance, memory loss, risk-taking behavior, and mental disorders. Based on these findings, it is concluded that drug abuse poses a serious threat to the mental well-being and educational outcomes of secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State.

Recommendations

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

1. School authorities should regularly organize sensitization workshops to educate students on the dangers of drug abuse to their mental and general health.

2. Counsellors should intensify awareness campaigns and drug education programs, particularly highlighting the negative effects of drug abuse on students' mental well-being.
3. Parents should closely monitor their children's behavior, peer groups, and activities, and engage them in open discussions on the harmful effects of drug abuse.
4. Government and relevant agencies should enforce strict regulations on the sale and distribution of harmful substances and support anti-drug abuse initiatives in secondary schools.

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