

**MENTAL HEALTH STATUS AND DRUG USE PATTERN AMONG  
UNDERGRADUATES IN A NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study examined the mental health status of the undergraduates in relation to their pattern of drug use. 240 students including 138 males and 102 females drawn from Ekiti State University participated in the study. General Health Questionnaire and Drug use Scale were employed to collect data. One Way ANOVA and independent t-test were used to test the three hypotheses stated. Result shows that alcohol consumption has a significant effect on somatic symptoms, anxiety and depression, but not on social dysfunction. Results also show how undergraduates vary in their mental health status relating to somatic symptoms, anxiety, depression and social dysfunction. Findings from hypothesis three showed a significant sex difference in drug and alcohol use but not in their mental health.

**Keywords** - Drug use, Mental health, Anxiety, Somatic symptoms, Social dysfunction, Depression.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Man has long used substances that alter consciousness for the production of pleasure and euphoria, or for the reduction of pain, anxiety, and distress. Altering of consciousness is evident both psychologically and physiologically. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely absence of disease or infirmity. Mental health has to do with how we think, feel and behave and any problem with it can affect anyone regardless of age, race, gender and social background. If left without care, mental health problem can have a serious effect on the individual and those around them. It can develop from difficult life event, such as moving from a house to another, losing one's job or death of someone special. Drinking too much alcohol over a period of time and using illegal drugs can all contribute to mental health problems, particularly those who are already vulnerable.

The wide exposure of present day students, in Nigerian educational institutions, to drug use through television, internet browsing, newspapers, magazines and personal experience, in some instances, makes it imperative that they learn the basic facts about drugs and discuss freely the effects of drug use on the individual and on society.

Careful observation in the society today shows that, Nigerians have a drug for every purpose and many with no genuine purpose at all, (Ahianté, 2003; UNDCP Nigeria projects, 2003). Most deplorable however, is the rate of increase in the use and abuse of tobacco, alcohol and other dangerous drugs that can only distort, damage and destroy their users. While people of all ages tend to be involved in drug use, the increase of this phenomenon among young people, between ages 10 and 29 (Sulaiman, 2003) in contemporary Nigeria is regrettably serious and alarming. These are the years of personal growth and development. This is the time when young people are expected to plan their future and prepare for a good general academic and occupational career that will enable them meet the challenges of the ever

rapidly changing technological society. What future can there be in a world of unreality distorted by drug use and effects caused by constant drug use which could lead to abuse of drug and invariably could affect the mental health or functioning of such individual.

Mental health, like physical health, may be viewed as existing on a continuum from healthy living to chronic illness. In 2001, the US Surgeon General defined mental health as “the successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity” (US Department of Health and Human services, 2001).

A mentally healthy person is individual with a wholesome, consistent and balanced personality, without any emotional or nervous tension. Mental health combines both physical and psychological well-being, and involves the equilibrium between an individual and the environment, which made it to be an everyday issue. Mental health problems occurs when an individual cannot make appropriate use of interpersonal assets and skills that are available unto him to perform the daily life activities, resulting in a struggle to cope with the challenges that accompanies one’s responsibilities. There has been evidence that students employ the use of drugs in order to reduce anxiety

## **2. METHODS**

This is a survey research. The participants, 240 undergraduates comprising of 138 males and 102 females were selected through cluster sampling technique in their hostels in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti Nigeria, in order to cut across all the Faculties and levels. The age range between 16 and 28 years

### **2.1 Instruments**

The instrument used for this study include General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) 28 developed by Goldberg (1978) to collect data for mental health while frequency of drug use and alcohol scales were employed to collect data for drug and alcohol use. The GHQ is a screening instrument aimed at detecting non-psychotic psychiatric disorders, regardless of diagnosis in the community. In clinical studies, the GHQ28 has four sub-scales; somatic symptoms, anxiety, social dysfunction, depression, each consisting of seven items. The items of the drug use scale include a list of frequently used drugs, frequency of usage, with the frequency of the options including: never, occasionally, two times a month, weekly, 2-4 times weekly, and daily. Alcohol consumption scale contains items like how often do you take drinks containing alcohol etc.

### 3. RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive table showing the mean, frequency and percentage of mental health status of undergraduates

Variables	Somatic Symptoms	Anxiety	Social Dysfunction	Depression
Mean	9.72	10.06	11.11	9.08
Percentage Low	25%	30%	10%	45%
Percentage middle	68%	57%	81%	49%
Percentage high	7%	13%	9%	6%

Table 1 shows that in somatic symptoms; 25% score low, 68% are of middle score, while 7% are high. Anxiety; 30% score low, 57% are of middle score, while 13% are high. Social Dysfunction; 10% are low, 81% are of middle scores, while 9% are high. Depression; 45% score low, 49% are of middle scores, while 6% score high.

Low in this case means the individual scored between zero and seven (0-7) in the particular subscale, that is, responding to items like 'feel ill' with not at all (0 score) or not more than usual (1 score). Middle means the symptoms are present in the individual, the responses are between eight and fourteen (8-14), meaning that the symptoms are rather more than usual. While High indicates symptoms much more than usual and the scores for the individuals are between fifteen and twenty one (15-21). There are seven items in each of the subscales in GHQ which measures four dimensions of mental health

Table 2: One way ANOVA summary table showing the effect of alcohol consumption on mental health of undergraduates

Variable		No alcohol consumption	Low alcohol consumption	High alcohol consumption	Total	F
N		100	76	64	240	
Somatic symptoms	Mean	9.26	9.49	10.14	9.57	3.06*
	S.D	2.90	2.51	2.76	2.76	
Anxiety	Mean	9.30	9.88	11.02	9.74	5.69**
	S.D	2.89	3.05	3.72	3.24	
Social dysfunction	Mean	11.15	11.07	11.13	11.12	.019
	S.D	2.77	2.87	2.87	12.87	
depression	Mean	8.72	8.68	9.92	9.03	3.94*
	S.D	2.68	2.53	3.78	3.01	

F (2, 237) \*\*significant at .01, \* significant at .05

Alcohol consumption has a significant effect on somatic symptoms, anxiety and depression but not on social dysfunction.

Table 3: One way ANOVA table showing the effect of drug use on mental health of undergraduates.

Variable		No Consumption	Low Consumption	High Consumption	Total	F
N		152	60	28	240	
Somatic symptoms	Mean	9.08	9.97	11.32	9.57	9.21**
	S.D	2.59	2.40	3.49	2.76	
Anxiety	Mean	9.26	10.48	12.46	9.94	14.00**
	S.D	2.97	2.88	3.96	3.24	
Social dysfunction	Mean	10.83	11.67	11.57	11.17	.101
	S.D	3.01	2.47	2.68	2.87	
Depression	Mean	8.64	9.27	10.64	9.03	5.72**
	S.D	2.55	2.89	4.65	3.01	

\*\* Significant at .01

There is a significant effect of drug use on somatic symptoms  $F(2,237) = 9.21$   $p < .01$ ; on anxiety  $F(2,237) = 14.00$ ; on depression  $F(2,237) = 5.72$   $p < .01$ ; but There is no significant effect of drug use on social dysfunction  $F(2,237) = 101$   $p > .05$ .

Table 4: Independent t-test table showing the gender difference on drug use, mental health and alcohol use among undergraduates.

variables	Sex	N	Mean	S. D	S.E	t
Drug use frequency	Male	138	1.65	3.50110	.298	3.23**
	Female	102	.51	.84132	.083	
Somatic symptoms	Male	138	9.59	2.70	.23	-.18
	Female	102	9.53	2.84	.28	
Anxiety	Male	138	10.43	3.16	.27	-.56
	Female	102	9.80	3.39	.33	
Social dysfunction	Male	138	11.17	2.80	.24	.31
	Female	102	11.05	2.97	.29	
Depression	Male	138	9.18	3.13	.29	.91
	Female	102	8.82	2.84	.28	
Alcohol consumption	Male	138	3.46	4.43	.38	3.05**
	Female	102	1.89	3.18	.32	

\*\* Significant at .01

There is a significant difference between male and female undergraduates on drug use  $t(238) = 3.23$   $p < .01$  and alcohol consumption  $t(238) = 3.05$   $p < .01$ , but male and female do not differ in any of the dimensions of mental health.

### 3.1 Discussion

The first hypothesis that alcohol consumption will significantly affect the mental health of undergraduates was partially confirmed. Result revealed that alcohol has significant effect on the dimensions mental health which includes somatic symptoms, anxiety and depression except social dysfunction. Alcohol is a depressant. It has been found to contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety and make stress harder to deal with. This is because regular, heavy drinking interferes with neurotransmitters in our brains that are needed for good mental health. Regular drinking lowers the level of serotonin in the brain – a chemical that helps to regulate individual's mood.

The second hypothesis says that there would be a significant effect of drug use on mental health of male and female undergraduates. The result of this analysis reveals that there is a significant effect of drug use on somatic symptoms, anxiety symptoms and depression but there is no significant effect of drug on social dysfunction. Moronkola (2003), also pointed out that some substances alter the mood, changed the user's feeling, perception and behaviour when they are used because they exert action on the brain. Global studies on drug use and abuse revealed that early initiation of drug use is one of the best predictors of future drug problems later in life than those who started using drugs at the age of 21 and above. The mental problems that most commonly co-occur with substance use are depression, anxiety etc. Drug use reflects feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, loss of interest in daily activity, concentration problems, anger, physical pain, and reckless behaviour (especially in men), hyperactivity, excessive tension and worry, feeling restless or jumpy, insomnia etc.

Social dysfunction which is an umbrella term used to describe a variety of emotional problems largely experienced in social situations such as shyness, social phobias, unstable relationships is not necessarily caused by drug use or alcohol consumption but could be as a result of economic deprivation, poor parenting, an anti-social family and hyperactivity-impulsivity-attention deficit as well as social isolation. Alcohol consumption is seen in the society as being used as a medium for socialization, and among the youths, as a means to boost self-confidence in the face of social anxiety and shyness. This was found to be more common among male than female as reported in the result of this research work, which confirmed the third hypothesis which states that sex will have significant effect on drug use, mental health and alcohol consumption of undergraduates. It was discovered that there is a significant difference in the drug use and alcohol consumption of male and female respondents but no significant difference in the mental health of male and female undergraduates.

Ellickson, Tucker and Klein, (2003) in their surveys of adolescents in the general population have found out that early onset of drinking among adolescents is associated with academic problems, drug use and dependence, nicotine dependence, delinquent behaviour and psychopathologies such as conduct disorder and antisocial personality disorder. The findings of this work make it necessary to carry out further studies on the undergraduates to find out the impact of mental health status on their academic performance.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study assessed the mental health status and drug use pattern among undergraduates. Deducing from the result of this study, the findings will be of immense benefit to the Management Nigerian educational institutions who are concerned with deteriorating mental health status of undergraduates to strengthen opportunities for students to do things that will

promote their own mental health status and well-being and that of others. Furthermore, school psychologists and counselors should be employed in institutions and given the necessary facilities to work in order to sensitize students through participatory mental health programme about the concept of developing adequate self-esteem and self-confidence without necessarily depending on drugs or alcohol to achieve success in life especially as undergraduates. More so, since the family is the bedrock of the human society, parents should be adequately sensitized and make it a point of duty to provide parental care and guidance through been sensitive to their children's needs physically, psychologically and emotionally.

Also, the findings of this study is a wake-up call for Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to spread their tentacles not only within and outside the society but also within and outside the school environment for possible smuggling and consumption of drugs and alcohol which impair students' cognitive as well as mental abilities. Students should also stake their stand in schools and environs by been extra sensitive against the circulation of drugs and alcohol within the schools and hostels because these variables cause hyperactivity, increased tension, restlessness, anti-social behaviour which are responsible for disrupting schools' activities and calendar making learning more tasking.

Additionally, effort should be made to encourage healthy eating, increased physical activity and reduce alcohol consumption as well as drug use which can make a significant contribution to improving emotional well-being and cognitive functioning relating to adequate mental health. This should be done because careful observation of Nigerian undergraduates reveals that they don't eat healthy meals, no adequate relaxation and mostly are fond of attending parties or ceremonies as well as going to bars or joint without the purpose of eating but consuming alcohol and drugs on empty stomach in the name of fun, enjoyment or forming associations.

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