

## MASS MEDIA AND THE DISCOURSE ON ILLICIT DRUG USE BY NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS



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### **Abstract**

*This Paper delved into the discourse surrounding illicit drug use among Nigerian university students, focusing on the role of mass media in shaping perceptions, behaviours, and attitudes towards drug abuse. This study sought to identify university students' sources of illicit drug exposure, determine the drugs they abuse most, and investigates the extent to which the mass media have fulfilled their expected role in combating illicit drug use. The population consisted of Mass Communication (Journalism) students and lecturers from three universities in Edo State, Nigeria: University of Benin, Benin City; Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma; and Igbenedion University, Okada. A questionnaire was used to collect data for the quantitative survey. Study used Uses and Gratifications theory. The data show that university students are exposed to illegal drugs through social media, friends, and their environment. This survey also found that university students mostly abuse cannabis (marijuana) and methamphetamine, and that, though the media are trying their best in fighting against the use of illicit drugs, but they can do more than they are doing at present to combat drug abuse. Therefore, a holistic and multi-faceted approach was advised to combat university students' drug usage. The media, educational institutions, policymakers, community organisations, and students should collaborate to create a supportive, drug-free atmosphere that fosters well-being and academic performance.*

**Keywords:** *Addicts, Discourse, Drugs, Mass media, Students, University*

### **Introduction**

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Public health officials in Nigeria are very concerned about the prevalence of drug abuse; this is due to the rising tendency of substance and drug abuse. The abuse is common among young people, who occasionally combine illegal substances with Zobo drink and pepper soup, or even sniff them as shisha. In some cities and villages, there are a lot of joints where individuals go to buy narcotics and use them freely. Some drug users engage in illicit drug usage for “status enhancement” since they now view themselves as having “arrived” while others do it for the confidence to face the crowd, especially artists and performers. Some people believe that drugs enable them to “forget the sorrows” brought upon them by events in their environment. Additionally, most illicit drug merchants attempt to make others dependent on them in order to sell their goods and turn a profit.

According to the 2019 National Drug Use Survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics-NBS (2019) in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the estimated amount that the Nigerian population spends on alcohol and psychotropic substances is **US\$1.5 billion** annually, the significant increase in the number of young people incarcerated in recent years has been caused by the abuse of drugs and other substances and the resulting crime. The World Drug Report 2022, released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime- UNODC (2022), an estimated 14.4 million Nigerians between the ages of 15 and 64 used illicit drugs in 2020. This represents 10.6% of the Nigerian population in this age group. The use of illegal drugs by University students is a serious problem that affects both their personal well-being and academic progress. Understanding the patterns of drug use among university students is essential for creating successful prevention and intervention programmes in Nigeria, where drug usage has become more pervasive in recent years. The mass media are crucial factors impacting drug-related behaviours and attitudes since they shapes public perceptions, disseminates information, and affects social norms (Achebe, 2018; Okeke & Ogwezzy, 2020).

The objectives of this study were to explore the discourse surrounding illicit drug use by Nigerian university students, and examine the extent to which mass media contribute to the formation of drug-related attitudes and behaviours within this demographic. Specifically, this research sought to identify the sources of exposure to illicit drugs among university students, ascertain the types of drugs that are predominantly abused, and investigate whether the media have been fulfilling their expected role in combating drug abuse. For the purpose of creating focused treatments and preventive measures, it is imperative to understand the origins of exposure to illegal drugs. According to other studies (Oshodi, Aina, & Onajole, 2019), drug exposure can happen through a variety of pathways, including social networks, peer influence, family contexts, and media portrayals. Policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders can create interventions to

reduce exposure and possible harm by pinpointing these sources in order to obtain insight into the situations in which kids encounter drugs.

Further, pinpointing the illicit drugs that university students use most frequently is essential for targeting preventative efforts and efficiently allocating resources. According to Nwagu, Ogbonna, & Ogwumike (2017), drug addiction frequency and patterns might vary by geographic region and demographic category. Therefore, thorough understanding of the specific drugs of concern among Nigerian university students is essential for creating evidence-based treatments that cater for their particular needs.

As significant socialising agents, the media have the power to influence people's attitudes, beliefs, and drug use habits (Kilani & Krugman, 2018). However, it is important to examine and assess their part in the fight against illicit drug usage. While the media can act as platforms for disseminating accurate information, increasing public awareness of the risks associated with drug abuse, and promoting prevention techniques, it is important to evaluate whether they have been doing so (Onyechi & Ogunjimi, 2019). Analysing the media's performance critically might guide future plans to maximise their impact in the fight against drug abuse among college students.

By investigating the discourse surrounding illicit drug use among Nigerian university students and examining the impact of mass media in influencing attitudes and behaviours, this study was set to add to the body of literature. This research attempted to inform evidence-based interventions, policies, and educational programmes aimed at reducing drug usage and establishing a healthy campus environment by identifying sources of exposure, identifying prevalent drug kinds, and assessing the media's performance in curbing drug use.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The use of illicit drugs by university students in Nigeria has become a major problem with far-reaching effects on societal advancement, academic achievement, and personal well-being. However, there has not been much research done on the conversation surrounding this problem or how the media affects attitudes and habits connected to drugs. As a result, the following primary issues are the focus of this research: Limited Knowledge of Sources of Exposure: There is a lack of comprehensive knowledge regarding the sources of exposure to illicit drugs among Nigerian university students. While peer pressure and family dynamics have been mentioned as potential influences (Balogun, 2016), further research is needed to determine the precise function that media play in

influencing attitudes and behaviours linked to drugs. Knowledge Gap on Common Drug forms: Little research has been done on the common forms of drugs taken by Nigerian university students. For focused preventive and intervention efforts, it is essential to understand the particular substances that students frequently abuse (Nwagu *et al.*, 2017). However, existing research on this aspect is limited, necessitating further examination. Evaluation of Media's Role in Combating Drug Abuse: Despite being acknowledged as powerful forces in influencing public opinion and conduct, the media's contribution to the fight against drug abuse among Nigerian university students has gotten little attention. Effective intervention techniques depend on the media's performance in communicating correct information, generating awareness, and supporting preventive measures (Onyechi & Ogunjimi, 2019). For evidence-based interventions and policies to successfully address the problem of illicit drug use among Nigerian university students, these knowledge gaps must be filled. This study aimed to contribute to a thorough understanding of the dynamics of drug addiction in this demographic and influence future preventive and support measures by examining the sources of exposure, identifying the most common drug types, and assessing the media's role.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study aimed to:

1. Identify the sources of exposure to illicit drugs by university students.
2. Ascertain the types of drugs mostly abused by university students.
3. Investigate if the media have been playing their expected roles of fighting against the use of illicit drugs.

### **Literature review**

#### **Theoretical Leaning**

This study leaned on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. This theory is centred on how people actively seek out and use media to satisfy particular needs and desires (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). It contends that people deliberately choose what media they consume depending on their own needs, wants, and reasons. The Uses and Gratifications Theory is a useful communication theory for comprehending the function of mass media in the debate about illegal drug use by Nigerian university students.

The theory can assist to explain how and why students interact with drug-related media messages in the context of illicit drug use among university students. For a variety of demands and gratifications, such as amusement, social contact, information, or identification with drug-related subcultures, Nigerian university students may seek out media content on illicit drug use (Balogun, 2016; Okeke & Ogwezy, 2020). By exploring these motives, the theory provides insights into the

role of media in shaping drug-related attitudes and behaviours among this demographic.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory can be applied to this study to examine how Nigerian university students interact with the media to learn about illegal drug usage and the pleasures they obtain from doing so. Interventions and preventive measures can be specifically designed to address these underlying the specific needs and motives driving their media consumption.

### **An Overview of Drug Abuse in Nigeria**

Drug abuse has serious social, economic, and health repercussions, and is a major public health concern in Nigeria. The most populous nation in Africa, Nigeria, deals with a number of issues relating to drug abuse, such as the accessibility of efficient prevention and treatment programmes, the emergence of new drug trends, and the widespread availability of illicit narcotics. Nigeria's strategic location between drug-producing regions and consumer markets makes it a transit and destination country for drug trafficking (Onyeka, Ubbor, & Anyebe, 2018). Trafficking in illegal substances like marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine has an impact on the nation. The prevalence of drug abuse in the population is influenced by the availability and use of these substances.

Poverty and socio-economic disparity are two of the main causes of drug abuse in Nigeria. Drug abuse is more prevalent in areas with high unemployment rates, little educational possibilities, and weak social support networks (Aliyu, Shehu, & Mohammed-Durosinlorun, 2019). Many people take drugs as an escape from their socio-economic problems or as a coping tool. In Nigeria, cannabis, also referred to as "igbo" or "weed," is frequently used, and is still the most abused substance (Oshodi, Aina, Onajole, & Ogunwale, 2018). Additionally, there is growing worry about the abuse of prescription drugs, notably opioids and benzodiazepines, especially among young people (Ukpong & Abubakar, 2020). In recent years, the use of synthetic drugs such as tramadol and cough syrups with codeine has also increased, aggravating the problem of drug abuse (Abdulmalik et al., 2018).

The effects of drug abuse on people's and communities' health are profound in Nigeria. Through the sharing of needles among injectable drug users, it leads to the spread of infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C (Aliyu *et al.*, 2019). Drug abuse is linked to mental health conditions such as psychosis, depression, and anxiety, which puts further strain on the healthcare system (Oshodi *et al.*, 2018). There are many obstacles in the way of Nigerian efforts to combat drug abuse. Ineffective law enforcement, a lack of funding for prevention and treatment, the stigma attached to substance addiction, and a lack of public knowledge and education regarding the dangers and effects of drug abuse are a few of these (Onyeka *et al.*, 2018). However, the Nigerian government has adopted a number of steps to fight drug usage, including drug demand reduction

programmes, rehabilitation facilities, and information campaigns (Ukpong & Abubakar, 2020).

### **Drug Abuse among Students in Nigeria**

Drug abuse among students in Nigeria is an issue that has to be addressed since it has a negative impact on their academic success, health, and general well-being. The prevalence of drug abuse among students in Nigeria is alarming. A significant frequency of substance use among students in various educational contexts has been found by several research. For instance, a study by Dada *et al.* (2018) discovered that 17.9% of Lagos State secondary school students acknowledged using drugs at some point in their lives. According to a subsequent study by Ibrahim, Sulaiman, and Ibrahim (2019), 15.3% of university students in Kano State admitted to using drugs or alcohol currently. These figures demonstrate the serious issue of drug addiction among Nigerian students.

Numerous risk variables play a role in student drug abuse. Students' susceptibility to drug usage is influenced by socio-economic factors such as poverty and unemployment (Aliyu *et al.*, 2019). According to Dada *et al.* (2018), peer pressure and influence are important factors in both the beginning and continuation of drug usage behaviours among students. Other risk factors include having easy access to drugs, being stressed out at school, not having close parental supervision, and not knowing enough about the dangers of substance use (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2019; Nwagu *et al.*, 2020).

Drug abuse among Nigerian students has a variety of negative effects. Drug abuse has a poor effect on students' academic performance overall, as well as their cognitive skills, attention span, and memory (Aliyu *et al.*, 2019; Nwagu *et al.*, 2020). The learning environment is disrupted by behavioural issues caused by substance use, such as hostility, violence, and delinquency (Dada *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, drug consumption is linked to mental health conditions including depression and anxiety, which can further harm students' general wellbeing (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2019).

In Nigeria, combating student drug addiction necessitates a thorough strategy. Increased student resistance skills, the promotion of good peer influence, and improving awareness of the dangers and repercussions of drug usage should be the main goals of prevention programmes (Nwagu *et al.*, 2020). Peer support groups and counselling services are just two school-based treatments that can help identify and help at-risk adolescents (Aliyu *et al.*, 2019). Implementing successful preventative and treatment initiatives requires cooperation between educational institutions, parents, and relevant stakeholders.

### **Some Dangers of Drug Abuse among Students**

Numerous risks and dangers to students' general development, academic performance, and physical and mental health are associated with drug abuse.

Drug addiction can have serious negative impacts on a student's physical health. According to Aliyu *et al.* (2019), substance use increases the chance of mishaps, injuries, and overdoses. According to Volkow *et al.* (2019), it can cause immune system dysfunction, liver damage, cardiovascular problems, pulmonary problems, and respiratory disorders. The danger of acquiring blood-borne illnesses like HIV and Hepatitis C rises when drugs are injected (Aliyu *et al.*, 2019).

1. **Drug abuse and Mental Health Disorders:** There is a direct link between drug abuse and mental health disorders among students. According to Dada *et al.* (2018) and Volkow *et al.* (2019), substance use can influence the onset or progression of mental health issues like anxiety, depression, psychosis, and mood disorders. According to Aliyu *et al.* (2019), students may struggle with cognitive deficits, memory issues, and issues focusing and making decisions.
2. **Drug addiction has a severe negative impact on students' academic achievement and performance.** According to Dada *et al.* (2018) and Volkow *et al.* (2019), substance use affects cognitive processes, attention, and memory, which results in subpar academic performance, worse grades, and higher dropout rates. According to Aliyu *et al.* (2019), students may have trouble attending classes regularly, finishing their assignments, and studying successfully.
3. **Relationship Issues:** Students who abuse drugs may experience difficulties in their friendships, family, and peer relationships. According to Dada *et al.* (2018), substance use frequently causes interpersonal disputes, retreat from social interactions, and social isolation. According to Aliyu *et al.* (2019), students may struggle to build good friendships, experience a decline in social support, and have strained relationships with their parents.
4. **Legal Concerns:** Students who take drugs may face legal repercussions. Illegal drug possession, sale, or distribution can result in arrests, criminal charges, and other legal issues (Volkow *et al.*, 2019). Students' lives, education, and future chances are further disrupted by legal concerns.

It is necessary to take a holistic approach that incorporates support services, early intervention, and prevention in order to address the dangers of drug abuse among students. Adopting drug-free campus regulations, fostering healthy coping techniques, offering counselling and mental health assistance, and educating students about the dangers and repercussions of substance abuse are all examples of effective strategies (Dada *et al.*, 2018; Volkow *et al.*, 2019).

### **Effects of Drug Abuse on Students' Learning Abilities**

Student learning capacities are significantly impacted by drug abuse, which leads to academic challenges and poor educational achievements. Drug usage can affect

a student's ability to study in a variety of ways, including memory loss, cognitive decline, diminished motivation, poor focus, and poor academic achievement.

1. Drug abuse can cause cognitive deficits, which have a direct impact on students' capacity to study. According to Meier *et al.* (2018), substance use, particularly heavy and chronic use, can lead to deficiencies in attention, concentration, information processing speed, and problem-solving abilities. (Crego *et al.*, 2010) Cognitive impairments can limit students' capacity to understand and retain information, making it difficult to understand complicated concepts and exercise critical thinking.
2. Drug addiction can have a major negative impact on a student's memory. Students may find it challenging to recollect information, facts, and concepts gained in the classroom as a result of substance use affecting both short-term and long-term memory (Crean *et al.*, 2011). Memory issues can have an impact on learning, test performance, and overall academic success.
3. Drug usage can result in a loss in motivation and interest in academic endeavours. Drugs become the main drive rather than academic performance when substance use disrupts the brain's reward system (Baler & Volkow, 2006). Students could develop apathy, lose interest in their academics, and see a drop in their motivation to perform well in school.
4. Drug addiction can make it difficult for students to concentrate and stay focused on their academic work. According to Meier *et al.* (2018), substance use can interfere with the neurotransmitter systems that control attention and focus, making it difficult to maintain concentration when listening to lectures, studying, and finishing assignments. Lack of focus can lead to faulty or incomplete work, which reduces productivity in general.
5. Reduced Academic achievement: Drug abuse has a negative impact on learning capacities, which ultimately results in lower academic achievement. Drug-abusing students are more likely to repeat classes, have lower grades, and have higher absenteeism and dropout rates (Crean *et al.*, 2011; Meier *et al.*, 2018). Academic underachievement can have an adverse impact on a student's future educational and professional opportunities.

Drug abuse has a negative impact on students' ability to learn, and this must be addressed through programmes for prevention, intervention, and support. A supportive and drug-free learning environment should be established, early intervention services should be offered to students who are at risk, and counselling and support services should be made available (Wagner & Anthony, 2002). The detrimental consequences of drug abuse on students' learning

capacities can be lessened, and timely treatments can assist pupils achieve academic achievement.

### **Impact of Drug Abuse on Students Academics**

Drug abuse significantly affects pupils' academic performance, and has a variety of detrimental effects. Substance abuse can hinder a student's capacity to excel academically by impacting their performance in class, engagement in it, and overall attendance. An outline of how drug usage affects students' academic performance is provided below:

1. **Reduced Attendance and Engagement:** Drug abuse can have an impact on students' reduced participation in class and poor attendance. According to National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2014), students who use drugs are more likely to skip assignments, be late for class, or skip examinations. Reduced involvement and attendance can lead to missed learning opportunities, knowledge gaps, and challenges making up on homework.
2. **Academic Underachievement and Lower marks:** Drug addiction is closely linked to academic underachievement and lower marks. According to Arria *et al.* (2013), substance use can affect cognitive abilities such as memory, concentration, and cognitive functioning, which can affect academic achievement. Drug-using students are more likely to struggle with their homework and tests, get poorer grades, and face other academic setbacks.
3. **Increased Dropout Rates:** Students who take drugs are much more likely to abandon their studies. According to Mason *et al.* (2014), substance use might cause students to become disengaged from school, lose their drive, and lessen their dedication to academic goals. Drug-using students are more likely to leave school early, which limits their possibilities and employment prospects in the future.
4. **Drug abuse among students can interfere with learning,** which can be disruptive for both the affected students and their peers. According to Mason *et al.* (2014), substance use can result in behavioural issues such as hostility, violence, and disruptions in the classroom. All students' learning is hampered by the hard and distracting environment these disturbances produce.
5. **Drug abuse's effects on students' academic performance may have long-term educational repercussions.** Dropout rates and poor academic performance can restrict students' access to further education and career possibilities (NIDA, 2014). Drug abusers who have difficulty in school may find it difficult to pursue their ideal careers and reach their full potential.

Drug abuse's negative effects on students' academic performance must be addressed through programmes for prevention, intervention, and support. According to NIDA (2014), schools should conduct comprehensive drug abuse prevention programmes, offer counselling and mental health services, and encourage a drug-free learning environment. Early detection and intervention for at-risk kids can promote their academic success while reducing the detrimental effects of drug addiction on their academic performance.

### **How the Mass Media can be used to Address Drug Abuse**

The media play a crucial role in curbing drug abuse among students by adopting a variety of tactics and venues to increase awareness, disseminate knowledge, and support preventative initiatives. The following are some strategies for using the media to address drug abuse among students:

1. **Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and Educational Campaigns:** To educate students about the dangers and repercussions of drug usage, the media can create and broadcast PSAs and educational campaigns. These campaigns spread messages that increase awareness, dispel myths, and encourage healthy behaviours through a variety of media, including print, radio, television, and social media (Durkin *et al.*, 2017). These programmes can help in preventing students from abusing substances by disseminating accurate information and emphasising the detrimental effects of drug abuse.
2. **Media literacy programmes:** Students' analytical and critical thinking abilities are emphasised in media literacy programmes so they can better comprehend and assess media messages on drug usage. According to Primack *et al.* (2014), these programmes instruct students on how to evaluate media content, recognise manipulative tactics, and discriminate between reliable and false information. By giving students media literacy skills, they can make educated judgements and become less susceptible to media messages that support drug use.
3. **Education through entertainment:** The media can incorporate anti-drug usage messages into entertaining content like movies, TV series, and documentaries. According to Noar *et al.* (2009), this method, also known as entertainment education, enables students to interact with gripping narratives that address the effects and consequences of drug usage. Entertainment education can affect students' attitudes, beliefs, and actions by presenting plausible scenarios and illustrating the possible risks of substance use.
4. **Social media engagement** is a powerful tool for the media to interact with students and disseminate personalised preventive messages. The media can engage students in interactive dialogues about drug abuse prevention

by utilising platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube (D'Amico *et al.*, 2015). Social media campaigns can promote inter-group communication, share success stories, and offer resources to pupils in need of advice or guidance.

5. Collaboration with Role Models and Influencers: The media can work with role models, celebrities, and influencers who are well-liked by students. These people can utilise their platforms to advocate for drug-free lifestyles, spread encouraging messages, and reveal their own struggles with substance addiction (Stautz *et al.*, 2016). Collaboration with notable individuals can broaden the audience for the impact of student drug abuse prevention initiatives.

The media can play a significant influence in reducing drug abuse among adolescents by implementing these tactics. In order to meet the changing media landscape and student preferences, it is crucial to develop evidence-based techniques, monitor the success of media interventions, and change strategies.

### **Specific Media Interventions**

Specific media can be used in various ways to address the issue of drug abuse among students, to wit:

- i. Television: Students can learn about the risks of drug usage from watching television. For instance, "D.A.R.E." (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) on television teaches students about the perils of drugs and how to withstand peer pressure.
- ii. Movies: Students can also be taught about the risks of drug abuse through watching movies. For instance, the film "Requiem for a Dream" depicts the terrible effects of drug abuse.
- iii. Music: Music can help spread encouraging messages about leading healthy lives and discouraging drug use. For instance, Whitney Houston's song "Just Say No" became a well-known anti-drug anthem in the 1980s.
- iv. Books: Students can learn about the risks of drug abuse from books, and they can also develop coping mechanisms to deal with peer pressure and stress. As an illustration, S.E. Hinton's book "The Outsiders" The issues of drug abuse and gang violence are explored in the classic coming-of-age tale Hinton.
- v. Social media: Social media can be used to connect students with options for support and to spread awareness about the risks of drug usage. One organisation that shares knowledge on drug usage and prevention on social media is the National Institute on Drug usage.

Additionally, the following are some instances of media intervention programmes that have been successful in lowering drug addiction among students in different contexts:

- i. The Drug abuse Resistance Education (DARE) initiative educates students on the risks associated with drug abuse through a school-based setting. It has been demonstrated that DARE is successful in lowering drug use among students.
- ii. The Life Skills Training (LST) programmes offers pupils a range of life skills, such as coping mechanisms, problem-solving techniques, and decision-making techniques. The effectiveness of LST in lowering drug usage and other dangerous behaviours among students has been demonstrated.
- iii. The Positive Action programme encourages positive attitudes towards healthy living and is rooted in schools. It has been demonstrated that Positive Action is beneficial in lowering drug usage and other dangerous behaviours among students.

### **Research Method**

This study adopted the quantitative research approach. A questionnaire was designed and administered to a representative sample of Nigerian university students and lecturers to collect data. The population of this study was made up of the students, and Mass Communication (Journalism) lecturers of three universities in Edo State, Nigeria, made of a Federal university (University of Benin, Benin City), a State university (Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma), and a Private university (Igbenedion University, Okada). The justification of the inclusion of mass communication lecturers was to get the media perspective in the fight against drug abuse by the media, and to provide rich insights into the complex dynamics between students, drugs, and media.

The sample size was made up of 450 students, which included 100 male and 50 female students from each of the three selected universities, and three lecturers from each school. This gave a total sample size of 459. Copies of the designed questionnaire were administered to the respondents, but only 440 (97.78%) copies were returned. Tables and simple percentages were used for data presentation and analysis.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Table 1: Sources of exposure to illicit drugs by university students**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Social media	132	30
Conventional media	27	6.1
Friends	60	13.6
Relations/Family members	22	5

Peer groups	69	15.7
Drug joints	97	22.0
Family environment	33	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

The information on Table 1 support the fact that sources of exposure to illicit drugs by Nigerian university students are diverse.

**Table 2: Types of drugs mostly abused by university students**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Royfenol	31	7.0
Tramadol	54	12.3
Cannabis	115	26.1
Colos	46	10.5
Hallucinogens	29	6.6
Cocaine	32	7.3
Methamphetamine	111	25.2
Others	22	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 shows that university students abuse different types of drugs, but the mostly abused drugs amongst them are cannabis, also known as marijuana (26.13%) and methamphetamine (25.23%).

**Table 3: Media have been playing their expected roles in fighting against the use of illicit drugs**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly Agree	136	30.9
Agree	81	18.0
Can't Tell	6	1.4
Disagree	83	18.9
Strongly Disagree	134	30.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2022

Likert - type five points rating scale and dichotomous was used: 5= Strongly Agree (SA), 4=Agree (A), 3= Can't Tell (CT), 2= Strongly Disagree (SD), and 1= Disagree (D) responses as well as open-ended questions.

Table 3 indicates that the reaction to the role of mass media in fighting against illicit drug use is mixed.

## Discussion of Findings

According to this study, Nigerian university students are exposed to illegal substances through social media, traditional media, their friends and family, their peer groups, drug joints, and their schoolmates. This result is in line with a Botswana study that revealed peer pressure, parental neglect, and a family history of substance abuse are all factors that influence alcohol and drug use among secondary school adolescents (BMC Public Health, 2018). The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre in Australia's report, which emphasizes the significance of social determinants, such as exposure to drug-using social situations, in high school students' drug use, supports this conclusion as well (National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, 2004).

Additionally, this study discovered that tramadol, cannabis (also known as Igbo or marijuana), colos, barbiturate, hallucinogens, cocaine, and methamphetamine are the most often abused drugs by university students, with methamphetamine (25.23%) and cannabis (26.13%) topping the list. Prior research by Adelekan, Abiodun, and Ogunremi (1992) at a university in Nigeria revealed that participants frequently used cigarettes, alcohol, codeine, and tramadol. The most widely used drugs, according to Oshodi *et al.*'s (2018) study of young adults from two Nigerian universities, were cannabis (marijuana).

Hitherto, Guanah (2021) identified some of the drugs youth abuse as codeine cough syrups, and tramadol. Gadazi, Zakami, lizard pooh, comorado, codeine, cocaine, heroin, speed, AZT, ecstasy, royfenol, fentanyl, meth, oxy, marijuana, toothpaste, and dry lemon grass. Guanah and Edike (2022) also list other commonly abused substances to be tobacco, tramadol, sedatives, marijuana, "alomo", gum, mkpuru mmiri, opiates, barbiturates, hallucinogens, cocaine, heroin, benzodiazepines (Valium), and bromazepam (Lexotan), as well as other unidentified tablets and capsules.

Similar to this, other studies conducted at various times and locations demonstrate that university students in Nigeria consume a variety of substances. Ekpenyong (2012) discovered that alcohol (60%) and mild tranquillizers (48%), tobacco (35%), and narcotics (29%), mainly codeine, were the most frequently abused substances among Nigerian university students. Only 11% of users abuse cannabis. According to research by Ogunleye *et al.* (2015), alcohol, cannabis, and codeine are the three narcotics that Nigerian university students abuse most frequently. Ikpeze, Adegoke, and Olaleye (2016) discovered that alcohol (75%) cannabis (50%) and codeine (40%) were the most frequently abused substances among university students in Nigeria. Afolabi *et al.* (2017) discovered that alcohol (80%), cannabis (46%), and ecstasy (5.3%) were the most frequently abused substances among university students in Nigeria. Adebayo *et al.* (2018)

found that the most commonly abused drugs among university students in Nigeria were alcohol (70%), cannabis (50%), and tramadol (30%).

Thirdly, this study showed that while the media is making an effort to combat the use of illegal drugs, but more needs to be done. For instance, Ojebuyi and Salawu (2015) contend that Nigeria's mass media can combat drug use and trafficking more aggressively. They advocate for the media to use its platforms to promote positive role models, dispel myths about drug users, and spread knowledge of the risks associated with drug usage.

When performing their duty in regards to drug-related reporting, the media must use caution. This is crucial because, as Oluwaseun and Oluwaseun (2021) found in their research, Nigerians are increasingly using social media platforms to advertise and sell illegal substances. As a result, they promote the idea that the media should monitor and report on the use of social media for drug-related activities more actively.

Preston (2022) also notes that drug addiction is frequently portrayed negatively and sensationally in the media. People may grow to have negative attitudes about drug users as a result, which may make it more challenging for them to get help. According to Odhiambo (2014), asserts that exposure to mass media content that displays drug use can increase the likelihood of young people using drugs. He believes that drug usage should be more accurately reported in the media since it may have a detrimental effect on the health of young people.

Overall, the media's contribution to the fight against illegal drug usage is uneven. According to certain research, the media can effectively spread knowledge about drug usage and encourage favourable attitudes towards drug treatment. However, some studies have discovered that the media, by portraying drug usage in a negative and sensationalised way, can also contribute to the issue of drug abuse. It is crucial to remember that the target audience, the campaign's message, and the manner in which it is presented will all have an impact on how effective mass media campaigns are at combating illicit drug usage. As a result, it is challenging to say with any degree of certainty whether or not the media is making an effort to combat the use of illegal drugs.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the discourse on illicit drug use among Nigerian university students and the role of mass media in shaping attitudes and behaviours related to drug abuse. The study shed important light on the sources of exposure to illegal drugs, the most often used drug classes, and the function of the media in discouraging drug use within this group through the use of quantitative research method.

The results of this study have demonstrated how important it is to comprehend how university students in Nigeria are exposed to illegal drugs. Exposure can

happen through a variety of avenues, including social networks, peer pressure, familial situations, and media portrayals, as has been established. Policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders can create targeted interventions and preventive actions to reduce exposure and potential harm by identifying these sources.

Moreover, this study shed light on the types of drugs that are predominantly abused by Nigerian university students. It is essential for creating evidence-based interventions and efficiently allocating resources to comprehend the specific substances that are frequently abused within this cohort. There is a need for specialised measures to address the particular needs of Nigerian university students because the frequency and patterns of drug usage may change across different demographic groups and geographical places.

This study has also critically evaluated how the media can help university students avoid using illegal drugs. While the media can provide a forum for spreading accurate information, increasing public awareness of the risks associated with drug usage, and advocating preventative techniques, it is crucial to evaluate whether they have been doing so. It has proven possible to design future tactics to maximise the media's impact in preventing drug abuse among college students by evaluating how well they performed.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of the study's findings, the following suggestions are made:

1. A holistic and multi-faceted approach should be adopted to prevent students from getting exposed to illicit drugs and their use. This should involve the media, educational institutions, policymakers, community organisations, and students themselves, working together towards creating a supportive and drug-free environment that promotes overall well-being and academic success. Universities should integrate thorough drug education courses into their curricula to ensure that students are given accurate and factual information on the risks of drug usage, its effects, and the services that are available to provide support. The development of resilience, decision-making abilities, and efficient coping methods may also be a focus of these activities.
2. Addicts should receive social therapy and follow-up services without stigmatisation or punishment, and they should be required to sign up for drug treatment programmes along with students who use drugs for functional purposes. This supports **the point made by Professor Monday Igwe, the Medical Director of Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Enugu, Nigeria.** Professor Monday Igwe, who argues that drug abuse patients and sufferers should be treated with empathy and care rather than being viewed as criminals or moral failures (Flowerbudnews, 2023).

3. Regulatory organisations should review and improve the current standards for media coverage of illegal drugs. This entails presenting information about drugs truthfully, refraining from normalising or glamorising drug use, and offering balanced coverage that places an emphasis on prevention, treatment, and support choices.

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