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**SUBSTANCE ABUSE, YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND COMMUNITY
SECURITY IN EDO SOUTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT NIGERIA**

Matthew Osabuohien OSAYANDE

SSC2208629

**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
BACHELOR'S DEGREE (B. SC.) IN POLITICAL SCIENCE**

JUNE, 2026



CERTIFICATION


 We the undersigned, hereby certify that this research work was carried out by **Matthew Osabuohien OSAYANDE** with Matriculation Number: **SSC2208629** of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Science Degree (B.Sc.) in Political Science.


DR. A. I. AMADASU
 (Supervisor)

DATE

DR. G. O. IGIEBOR
 (Head of Department)


DATE

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Almighty God, the fountain of all knowledge and strength, who made this academic pursuit possible. It is also dedicated to my beloved parents, Mr. and Mrs. OSAYANDE, and my entire family for their unwavering love, sacrifices, prayers, and support throughout my educational journey.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationships among substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security in Edo South Senatorial District, Nigeria. The alarming prevalence of substance abuse among youths aged 15–35 years, coupled with high youth unemployment and rising insecurity, particularly cult-related violence, motivated the research. The primary objective was to examine the interconnectedness of these three variables, with specific focus on the perceived prevalence and patterns of substance abuse, the link between youth unemployment and substance abuse, the influence of substance abuse on community security, and its impact on youth political participation and civic engagement. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. A sample of 300 youths was drawn through purposive sampling across the seven Local Government Areas of Edo South Senatorial District (Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo, Orhionmwon, Ughunmwon, Ovia North-East, and Ovia South-West). Data were collected using a structured 4-point Likert scale questionnaire and analyzed with descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) using SPSS. The study was anchored on an integrated theoretical framework comprising Social Learning Theory, Stress-Coping Model, and General Strain Theory. Findings revealed a very high perceived prevalence of substance abuse, dominated by cannabis, tramadol, codeine syrups, methamphetamine, and polydrug use, with initiation commonly occurring between ages 15 and 25. A strong bidirectional relationship was established between youth unemployment and substance abuse, while substance abuse was found to significantly undermine community security through increased cultism, robbery, and violence. It also negatively affected youth political participation and civic engagement. The study concluded that these variables form a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle. The study recommends integrated interventions focusing on youth employment generation, substance abuse prevention and rehabilitation, strengthened security measures, and enhanced civic education. These findings provide empirical evidence for policymakers, security agencies, and stakeholders to develop targeted strategies for breaking the cycle in Edo South Senatorial District and similar contexts in Nigeria.

Keywords: Substance abuse, youth unemployment, community security, cultism, Edo South Senatorial District, Nigeria

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Substance abuse refers to the excessive, improper, and harmful consumption of psychoactive substances including alcohol, tobacco, prescription medications (such as tramadol and codeine), cannabis, methamphetamine, and other illicit drugs that leads to clinically significant impairment or distress in an individual's physical health, psychological functioning, social relationships, and overall well-being (Ifeadi & Agodi, 2024; UNODC, 2025). It encompasses both illegal substances and the misuse of legal ones beyond prescribed limits or for non-medical purposes, often resulting in dependence, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, and interference with daily responsibilities.

Drug abuse refers to the excessive, improper, and harmful consumption of psychoactive substances including alcohol, tobacco, prescription medications, and illicit drugs that leads to significant negative impacts on an individual's physical health, psychological functioning, social relationships, and overall well-being (Ifeadi & Agodi, 2024). It encompasses not only the use of illegal substances but also the misuse of legal ones, often beyond prescribed limits or for non-medical purposes, resulting in dependence, tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms. This maladaptive pattern of use interferes with daily responsibilities, impairs judgment, and increases vulnerability to accidents, violence, and chronic diseases.

Drug abuse constitutes a persistent and escalating global public health crisis, affecting individuals across all socioeconomic strata, families, communities, societies, and national economies. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) World Drug Report 2025 reports that an estimated 316 million people aged 15–64 used drugs other than alcohol or tobacco in 2023, marking a record high and representing approximately 6% of the global population in this age group an increase of over 20% since 2013. Cannabis remains the most prevalent substance, with around 228 million users, followed by opioids (about 60 million users, including pharmaceutical and illicit forms), amphetamines, cocaine, and ecstasy. The report underscores emerging threats, such as the rapid expansion of synthetic drugs (e.g., highly potent nitazenes and fentanyl analogs), widespread polydrug use (combining multiple substances for intensified effects), and the exploitation of global instabilities including conflicts, economic disruptions, and environmental crises to fuel drug production and trafficking. These trends amplify health risks, including a rise in overdose fatalities (exceeding 100,000 annually in some regions), mental health disorders, and infectious diseases linked to injecting practices (UNODC, 2025).

In Africa, drug use has exhibited alarming growth, driven by the continent's increasing role in global trafficking networks, socioeconomic challenges (e.g., poverty, youth unemployment, and urbanization), political instability, and inadequate access to prevention, treatment, and harm reduction services. West Africa, in particular, has solidified as a major transit hub for cocaine from South America, heroin from Afghanistan, and synthetic drugs, leading to significant spillover into local markets. Cannabis dominates illicit drug consumption across

the continent, while non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids especially tramadol and codeine has surged due to over-prescription, diversion from legitimate channels, affordability, and perceived utility as performance enhancers or stress relievers. Tramadol misuse is particularly acute in West and Central Africa, contributing to high levels of harm despite lower injecting rates compared to other regions. Though injecting drug use remains less common, its rise in urban areas heightens risks of HIV, hepatitis C, and other blood-borne infections (UNODC, 2025; UNODC, 2024).

Nigeria stands out as one of Africa's most affected nations, with drug abuse prevalence rates far exceeding global averages. The landmark 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (supported by UNODC and the European Union) estimated a past-year prevalence of 14.4% for non-alcohol/tobacco drug use among those aged 15–64, impacting approximately 14.3 million people nearly three times the global rate. This figure, frequently referenced in 2025 reports by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and UNODC, highlights persistent challenges amid limited new national surveys. Cannabis leads with 10.8% past-year prevalence (10.6 million users), followed by pharmaceutical opioids (4.7%) and codeine-based cough syrups (2.4%). Polydrug use is prevalent among 75–95% of users, with regional hotspots in the South-West, South-South, and urban centers like Lagos, Kano, and Port Harcourt. The NDLEA's 2025 operations, including seizures of over 7.7 tonnes of drugs and thousands of arrests, underscore the crisis's scale, exacerbated by methamphetamine production growth and emerging synthetics (NDLEA, 2025; UNODC, 2025).

30 Among students, drug abuse manifests as the compulsive or habitual use of both legal substances like alcohol, tobacco, and prescription drugs like tramadol and codeine for sedative or euphoric effects) and illicit ones such as cannabis, methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin (Muhammad Sule & Bichi, 2025; Fatusi, Salau, Bwala, & Doka, 2025). Availability, peer influence, and perceived benefits such as relaxation, heightened confidence, stress relief, or enhanced academic focus drive patterns, often leading to escalation from experimentation to dependence (Majee, David, & Onyeaka, 2025; Isangadighi & Udeh, 2023). Health consequences are profound, encompassing mental health disorders symptoms like anxiety, depression, psychosis, organ damage, liver cirrhosis from codeine syrups, cardiovascular issues from stimulants, respiratory problems, and increased overdose risks. Academically, affected students exhibit poor performance, high absenteeism, exam failures, and elevated dropout rates. Socially, the issue correlates with rising campus crime, violent behaviors like cultism, unsafe sexual practices which has heightened STI risks, and community disruptions (Nwafor, Ezema, & Igwebuike, 2022).

Undergraduate students in Nigerian universities are especially vulnerable, navigating the transition to independence amid intense academic pressures, peer dynamics, fears of post-graduation unemployment, financial hardships, and easy access to pharmaceuticals via unregulated markets. Studies from 2020–2025 across institutions report lifetime prevalence rates of substance use ranging from 56.82% to 84.5%, often higher when including alcohol and tobacco (Ibeto, 2024; Adekeye et al., 2022). Alcohol consistently ranks as the most abused substance, followed by cannabis, tramadol, codeine syrups, and emerging drugs like

methamphetamine. Initiation frequently begins in adolescence, with first use commonly between ages 15–19, coinciding with entry into tertiary education (Ogunleye, Adefemi, & Bolaji, 2023).

From a social-psychological lens, drug abuse among undergraduates aligns with key behavioral theories. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) asserts that behaviors are learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement, particularly in peer-intensive University environments where substance use is modeled for social bonding, acceptance, or status within groups (Nwosu et al., 2025; Ibeto, 2024). Peer pressure emerges as a dominant influence, normalizing use in hostels, parties, or fraternities. The Stress-Coping Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) posits that individuals adopt maladaptive coping strategies such as drug use to manage overwhelming stressors like rigorous coursework, financial strain, anxiety, and depression prevalent in Nigeria's competitive educational system (Lazarevic, Petrovic, Stojkovic, & Petrovic, 2024). The Self-Medication Hypothesis (Khantzian, 1997) further explains how students use substances to temporarily alleviate underlying mental health issues, perpetuating a cycle of dependence, tolerance, and exacerbated distress (Okeke, 2024; UNODC, 2025).

The factors contributing to drug abuse among undergraduate students include sociological and psychological influences, curiosity, boredom, the pursuit of pleasure or escape from fear, and family background, among others. Drug use often begins with substances such as tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana before progressing to stronger drugs. In recent times, undergraduates have increasingly misused prescription medications, especially narcotic pain relievers and

stimulant drugs prescribed for conditions like attention deficit disorder and narcolepsy (Dankano & Garba, 2020). Early exposure to drug use frequently leads to long-lasting negative effects on students' learning capabilities. Drug abuse disrupts normal brain development, resulting in learning difficulties, impaired memory, and poor judgment, which manifest as forgetfulness, reduced concentration, and short-term memory loss among undergraduates. Additionally, students involved in drug abuse often show academic and social underdevelopment and fail to gain respect or recognition for meaningful personal and societal contributions. Beyond lowering academic achievement, drug abuse also negatively affects students' moral development, physical health, and overall personal growth (Dankano & Garba, 2020). As a result, such students are often viewed as straying from the path of becoming future leaders, since continued drug abuse severely weakens their academic success and limits their potential productivity across different fields of study. This study, therefore aims to investigate substance abuse, youth unemployment and community security in Edo South Senatorial District Nigeria

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The incidence of substance abuse among youths in Edo South Senatorial District has risen alarmingly, worsened by persistent youth unemployment and resulting in severe threats to community security. High joblessness characterized by idleness, poverty, and unfulfilled aspirations drives many young people toward drugs for escape, peer acceptance, or economic survival via drug-related activities. Substance abuse then impairs judgment, heightens

aggression, and increases involvement in cultism, armed robbery, and other crimes that have become rampant in Edo South Senatorial District.

This creates a vicious cycle: unemployed youths turn to drugs, which further diminishes legitimate employment prospects while escalating violence and insecurity. The resulting environment deters investors, disrupts education and commerce, weakens families, and jeopardizes the future leadership potential of the youth population.

Despite awareness campaigns by the NDLEA, Edo State Government initiatives (including the Edo State Special Security Squad), and community efforts, the problems persist. Existing studies often address substance abuse among students or general insecurity in isolation, with limited empirical attention to the interconnected roles of substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security specifically within Edo South Senatorial District.

This gap impedes the development of targeted, evidence-based interventions. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive investigation into the relationships between substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security in Edo South Senatorial District, Nigeria, to generate actionable insights for policy and practice.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective is to determine the relationship between substance abuse, youth unemployment and community security in Edo South Senatorial District Nigeria, with the specific Objectives:

- i. To assess the perceived prevalence and pattern of substance abuse among youth age 18-35 in Edo South Senatorial District.
- ii. To examine the relationship between youth unemployment and substance abuse in Edo South Senatorial District.
- iii. To analyze how substance abuse influence perception of community security Edo South Senatorial District.
- iv. To evaluate the extent to which substance abuse and unemployment affect youth political participation and civil engagement in Edo South Senatorial District.

1.4 Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

- i. What are the perceived prevalence and pattern of substance abuse among youth age 18-35 in Edo South Senatorial District?
- ii. What relationship exists between youth unemployment and substance abuse in Edo South Senatorial District?
- iii. How does substance abuse influence youths' perception of community security in Edo South Senatorial District?
- iv. What is the influence of substance abuse and unemployment on youth political participation and civic engagement in Edo South Senatorial District?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study will hold substantial practical significance for various stakeholders, including students, youths, educational institutions, policymakers, and researchers, by providing evidence-based insights into substance abuse, youth unemployment and community security in Edo South Senatorial District Nigeria.

For Students: The findings will empower undergraduate students with greater awareness of the risks associated with substance abuse, including its detrimental effects on academic performance, mental health, social relationships, and long-term career prospects. The study will guide students toward healthier alternatives, such as seeking counseling services or engaging in stress-management programs.

For Youths: The findings will increase awareness of the risks of substance abuse and promote healthier coping mechanisms.

For Educational Institutions: School administrators and university management will be equipped with data to strengthen prevention programmes, counselling services, and student support systems.

For Policymakers: NDLEA, and Local Government Authorities in Edo South, the study will provide empirical data to inform evidence-based substance abuse control policies, particularly through agencies like the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the Federal Ministry of Education.

For Researchers: The study will benefit prospective researchers as it will serve as a source of reference point to them. Future researchers will use the results of this study to add to existing knowledge. The study will help to open new avenues of research, allowing researchers to delve deeper into the topic under discussion.

1.6 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on substance abuse, youth unemployment and community security in Edo South Senatorial District Nigeria.

Geographically, the study is delimited to the seven Local Government Areas in Edo South Senatorial District: Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo, Orhionmwon, Uhunmwonde, Ovia North-East, and Ovia South-West

1.7 Definition of Terms

Substance Abuse: The recurrent, non-medical use of psychoactive substances (including alcohol, cannabis, tramadol, codeine syrups, methamphetamine, and other illicit drugs) that leads to clinically significant impairment in health, social, or occupational functioning.

Youth Unemployment: The situation whereby youths aged 15–35 in Edo South Senatorial District who are willing and able to work cannot find gainful employment, including long-term joblessness and underemployment.

Community Security: The perceived and actual state of safety within communities in Edo South Senatorial District, free from threats such as cult-related violence, drug-induced crime,

robbery, and other forms of antisocial behavior that undermine social order and economic activities.

Youths: Individuals aged 15–35 years residing in Edo South Senatorial District, encompassing both in-school and out-of-school young people.

Cultism: Involvement in secret societies or confraternities that often engage in violent activities, frequently linked to drug abuse and territorial control in the study area.

Polydrug Use: The concurrent use of multiple psychoactive substances, a common pattern observed among affected youths.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework/Review

2.1.1 Concept of Substance Abuse

Substance abuse, also referred to as drug abuse, is the recurrent and non-medical use of psychoactive substances in ways that negatively affect an individual's physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and daily functioning (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). It involves the misuse of substances such as alcohol, cannabis (marijuana), tramadol, codeine-containing syrups, methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, and other illicit or prescription drugs beyond medically approved purposes. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2025), substance abuse encompasses patterns of use that lead to dependence, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, impaired judgment, risky behaviour, and interference with personal and societal responsibilities.

Substance abuse has become a major public health and social problem globally, particularly among youths. The WHO (2023) explains that psychoactive substances alter brain functioning, emotions, perception, and behaviour, often resulting in addiction and long-term mental health disorders. Individuals who abuse drugs may experience reduced productivity, emotional instability, poor academic performance, violent behaviour, and criminal tendencies. In the Nigerian context, substance abuse extends beyond the clinical definition to include culturally and socioeconomically driven misuse of drugs. The increasing availability of illicit

substances through unregulated markets, weak law enforcement, and widespread poverty has contributed significantly to rising drug consumption among youths (NDLEA, 2023). In many urban centres, including Benin City and other parts of Edo South Senatorial District, youths engage in polydrug use, which refers to the simultaneous consumption of multiple substances to achieve stronger psychological effects. Commonly abused substances include tramadol, cannabis, codeine syrup, methamphetamine (“mkpurummiri”), alcohol, and locally mixed psychoactive substances.

Studies conducted in Edo State reveal that many youths abuse substances for various reasons such as peer influence, unemployment, emotional stress, curiosity, frustration, depression, and the desire for social belonging (Omigie, 2024). Some youths perceive drugs as a means of enhancing confidence, suppressing fear, improving performance, or escaping harsh socioeconomic realities. Consequently, substance abuse has evolved from the use of traditional substances such as alcohol and cannabis to the consumption of synthetic opioids and stimulants, which are more addictive and dangerous.

Substance abuse is therefore conceptualized in this study as the harmful and excessive use of psychoactive substances by youths in ways that impair their health, behaviour, productivity, and social functioning, while simultaneously contributing to unemployment, criminality, and insecurity within communities.

2.1.2 Drug Abuse

Drug abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs, characterized by recurrent use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress (World Health Organization, as cited in UNODC, 2025). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2025) further defines it as the non-medical use of substances that results in dependence, tolerance, or withdrawal symptoms, often escalating from experimentation to addiction. Dependence manifests physically (tolerance and withdrawal) or psychologically (compulsive use despite harm).

In University, drug abuse frequently appears as polydrug use or excessive consumption that interferes with academic performance, social relationships, and personal health (Aguocha & Nwefoh, 2021). Studies in Nigeria highlight its disruption of cognitive functions, leading to poor concentration, memory deficits, and reduced academic achievement (Idowu et al., 2022).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) classifies substance use disorders on a continuum, from mild to severe, based on criteria such as loss of control, risky use, and social impairment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

In Nigeria, drug abuse extends beyond clinical definitions to include cultural and socioeconomic dimensions. For instance, the non-medical use of prescription opioids like codeine and tramadol has surged, often linked to self-medication for stress or enhancement of social experiences (UNODC, 2025). This reflects a shift from traditional substances like cannabis to pharmaceutical misuse, driven by accessibility and marketing (Makanjuola et al., 2021).

2.1.3 Types of Drugs Commonly Abused

Psychoactive substances abused by undergraduate students fall into several pharmacological categories, each with distinct effects on the central nervous system. The following sections detail the main types, with examples prevalent in Nigerian universities.

Depressants These substances slow brain activity and include alcohol, opioids (e.g., codeine, tramadol), and sedatives (e.g., benzodiazepines). Alcohol remains one of the most widely abused, often initiating polydrug patterns (Aguocha et al., 2021). Opioids like codeine-containing cough syrups and tramadol are particularly rampant among Nigerian students, with prevalence rates as high as 30% for tramadol in some regions (UNODC, 2025). These drugs produce euphoria and pain relief but lead to respiratory depression, dependence, and overdose risks. Studies report that codeine and tramadol misuse often stems from their over-the-counter availability and perception as "safe" enhancers for studying or socializing (Idowu et al., 2022).

Stimulants Stimulants accelerate central nervous system activity and include cocaine, amphetamines (e.g., methamphetamine), and caffeine-based substances. Cocaine and amphetamines are less common than opioids but rising in urban universities (Makanjuola et al., 2021). Students use them for alertness during exams or parties, leading to agitation, paranoia, and cardiovascular issues. Caffeine, often in kola nuts or energy drinks, is widely abused for academic performance but contributes to anxiety and sleep disruption (Oshikoya & Alli, 2006).

Hallucinogens Hallucinogens alter perception and include cannabis (marijuana), LSD, and emerging synthetics. Cannabis is the most prevalent illicit drug among Nigerian undergraduates, with lifetime use rates exceeding 20% in many studies (Aguocha & Nwefoh, 2021). It produces relaxation and altered sensory experiences but impairs motivation and memory critical for academic success. LSD and similar substances are rarer but reported in urban settings.

Other Categories Polydrug use combines categories, such as cannabis with codeine syrup ("lean"). Inhalants and prescription misuse (e.g., diazepam) also feature, particularly among females (UNODC, 2025).

2.1.4 Concept of Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment refers to the condition in which young persons who are willing, able, and actively seeking work are unable to secure gainful employment (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2024). In Nigeria, the youth category generally includes individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 years, as defined by the National Youth Policy. Youth unemployment includes both open unemployment, where individuals have no jobs at all, and underemployment, where youths engage in jobs that inadequately utilize their skills, education, or available working hours.

Youth unemployment has become one of the most pressing socioeconomic challenges confronting Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), youth unemployment and underemployment rates remain significantly high due to factors such as

population growth, poor industrial development, inadequate infrastructure, corruption, weak economic policies, and limited job creation opportunities. Many graduates and skilled youths remain unemployed for long periods after completing their education, thereby increasing frustration and dependency.

In Edo State, particularly within Edo South Senatorial District, structural economic challenges such as limited industrial growth, rural-urban migration, inadequate vocational opportunities, and mismatch between educational training and labour market demands have worsened youth unemployment. Benin City, which serves as a major urban centre in Edo South, attracts many young people seeking economic opportunities; however, the inability of the local economy to absorb this growing labour force has contributed to widespread joblessness and poverty.

Youth unemployment is associated with numerous social and psychological consequences, including frustration, low self-esteem, depression, poverty, social exclusion, and involvement in antisocial behaviour (Agnew, 1992). Unemployed youths often experience prolonged idleness and lack structured daily routines, making them more vulnerable to negative peer influence, substance abuse, cultism, and criminal activities.

Within the context of this study, youth unemployment is conceptualized as the inability of youths in Edo South Senatorial District to obtain meaningful and sustainable employment despite being willing and capable of working, thereby exposing them to socioeconomic hardship, substance abuse, and involvement in activities that threaten community security.

2.1.5 Prevalence of Drug Abuse among Nigerian Youth

Recent epidemiological data indicate alarmingly high rates of drug abuse among Nigerian University students. A 2022 cross-sectional study in southwestern universities found that 45.7% of respondents engaged in substance abuse, with codeine syrup and tramadol topping the list over cannabis (Idowu et al., 2022). Similarly, a 2021 study in southeastern Nigeria reported lifetime prevalence of over 40%, with alcohol, codeine, and tramadol most common (Aguocha et al., 2021).

The UNODC World Drug Report 2025 highlights Nigeria's escalating pharmaceutical opioid crisis, noting a 40% increase in methamphetamine production capacity since 2020 and persistent tramadol misuse among youth (UNODC, 2025). Undergraduate populations are particularly vulnerable, with rates varying by region: higher in urban centers like Lagos and Abuja due to availability and peer networks (Makanjuola et al., 2021). Gender differences show males more likely to abuse alcohol and cannabis, while females increasingly misuse prescription opioids (Oshikoya & Alli, 2006).

2.1.6 Social Factors Contributing to Drug Abuse

Social influences play a pivotal role in initiating and sustaining drug abuse among undergraduates. Peer pressure emerges as the most cited factor, with 73.7% of students in one study attributing initiation to friends (Adekeye et al., 2022). University environments foster social bonding through parties and hostels, where substance use normalizes as a rite of passage.

Family background also contributes: dysfunctional homes, parental substance use, or lack of supervision increase risk (Idowu et al., 2022). Socioeconomic factors, including poverty and unemployment fears, drive self-medication with cheap substances like tramadol. Cultural norms in Nigeria, where alcohol features in social gatherings and kola nuts in traditions, further normalize use (UNODC, 2025). Media and social media exposure to substance-referencing content amplifies these influences (Oshiokeya, 2024).

2.1.7 Psychological Factors Associated with Drug Abuse

Psychological drivers include stress coping, curiosity, and underlying mental health issues. Academic pressures exams, competition, and future uncertainty prompt many students to use substances for relaxation or enhancement (Aguocha & Nwefoh, 2021). Curiosity ranks high as an initiating factor, particularly in early University years.

Comorbid **mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem**, correlate strongly with abuse (Adekeye et al., 2022). Students often self-medicate with depressants to alleviate insomnia or stimulants for concentration. Personality traits like impulsivity and sensation-seeking heighten vulnerability (Makanjuola et al., 2021).

2.1.8 Concept of Community Security

Community security refers to the condition in which individuals and groups within a community enjoy protection from violence, crime, fear, and threats to their lives, property, and general well-being (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). It encompasses the preservation of peace, social order, public safety, and harmonious

coexistence among members of a society. Community security extends beyond military or state security to include freedom from cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, gender-based violence, drug-related crimes, communal conflicts, and other forms of antisocial behaviour.

Community security is essential for sustainable development because insecurity disrupts economic activities, weakens social cohesion, discourages investment, and undermines human welfare. Insecure environments often experience fear, displacement, educational disruption, destruction of property, and loss of lives. Consequently, governments and communities invest substantial resources in maintaining peace and protecting citizens from internal threats.

In Edo South Senatorial District, community security has increasingly been threatened by cult-related violence, armed robbery, kidnapping, and drug-related criminality. Reports from security agencies and empirical studies indicate that substance abuse plays a significant role in escalating violent behaviour among youths (NDLEA, 2023). Drug abuse contributes to aggression, impaired judgment, fearlessness, and involvement in criminal gangs and cult groups.

Cult clashes in Benin City and surrounding communities have resulted in numerous deaths, destruction of property, and widespread fear among residents. Drug trafficking networks also contribute to insecurity by funding criminal operations and encouraging illegal arms circulation. Furthermore, communities affected by insecurity often experience weakened social trust and reduced economic growth.

2.2 Social Factors Contributing to Youths Substance Abuse

121 Social factors operate at multiple levels interpersonal, community, and societal and play a critical role in the initiation, maintenance, and escalation of drug abuse among undergraduate students in Nigeria. These influences often interact with individual vulnerabilities, creating an environment conducive to substance use. Peer pressure emerges as one of the most consistently identified drivers across studies, with students adopting substance use behaviors to gain social acceptance, conform to group norms, or avoid exclusion (Aguocha & Nwefoh, 2021; Adekeye et al., 2022). In University settings, where independence is newly experienced, these dynamics are amplified.

2.2.1 Peer Pressure and Social Networks

15 Peer influence is frequently cited as the primary social factor, with prevalence rates indicating that 73.7% to 94.5% of students attribute their initiation to friends or social circles (Oshikoya & Alli, 2006; study on FUTO students, 2023). Undergraduate hostels and off-campus accommodations foster close-knit groups where substance use is normalized during social gatherings, study breaks, or parties. A cross-sectional study in southwestern Nigeria found that association with substance-using roommates or friends significantly increased the odds of abuse by over 3-fold (Ajayi & Somefun, 2020). Off-campus living exacerbates this, as it reduces institutional oversight and exposes students to unregulated environments with easy access to drugs (Idowu et al., 2022).

Polydrug use often begins in these contexts, with peers introducing substances like codeine syrup or cannabis as "harmless" enhancers for socializing. The UNODC World Drug Report 2025 notes that youth networks in urban areas like Lagos facilitate the distribution of pharmaceuticals, reinforcing peer-driven patterns (UNODC, 2025). This conformity is rooted in social identity theory, where individuals align behaviors with valued groups to enhance self-esteem and belonging.

2.2.2 Family Influences and Background

Family dynamics contribute substantially, particularly when protective bonds are weak. Dysfunctional homes, characterized by parental substance use, conflict, or absenteeism, heighten risk by modeling maladaptive behaviors or failing to provide supervision (Wada et al., 2021). Studies show that students from families with a history of substance use are 2-4 times more likely to engage in abuse (Makanjuola et al., 2021). Lack of parental support during the transition to University life leaves students vulnerable to alternative influences.

In Nigeria, economic hardships often strain family structures, leading to emotional neglect. A 2025 scoping review highlighted poor socioeconomic backgrounds and low parental education as common risk factors (public health review, 2021 updated). Conversely, strong family cohesion and open communication serve as buffers, reducing initiation rates (Adekeye et al., 2022).

2.2.3 Cultural Norms and Societal Pressures

Cultural acceptance of certain substances normalizes use in social contexts. Alcohol, for instance, is integral to celebrations, rites of passage, and hospitality in many Nigerian ethnic groups, blurring lines between moderate and abusive consumption (UNODC, 2025). Traditional substances like kola nuts (containing caffeine) are culturally endorsed, paving the way for stimulant misuse.

Socioeconomic pressures high youth unemployment (over 40% in recent estimates), poverty, and fears of post-graduation joblessness drive escapism through affordable drugs like tramadol or codeine (Olanrewaju et al., 2022). The UNODC 2025 report underscores Nigeria's pharmaceutical opioid crisis, linked to economic stressors among youth aged 15-35, who comprise 65% of users. Insecurity and societal instability further compound this, with students using substances to cope with anxiety from communal conflicts or economic uncertainty (cultural factors study, Tai Solarin University, 2026).

2.2.4 Media and Digital Influences

Media portrayals, including social media, glamorize substance use by associating it with success, relaxation, or rebellion. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok feature content normalizing "lean" (codeine mixtures) or party lifestyles, influencing impressionable youth (Oshiokoya, 2024). A 2025 study on substance-referencing content found heightened vulnerability among undergraduates exposed to such media, amplifying peer and cultural effects.

These social factors interact dynamically: a student facing family dysfunction may seek belonging in peer groups, reinforced by cultural norms and media ideals, leading to sustained abuse.

2.3 Substance Abuse and Youth Unemployment

A substantial body of literature establishes a bidirectional relationship between substance abuse and youth unemployment. Unemployed youths are significantly more likely to engage in substance abuse due to heightened stress, boredom, idleness, financial frustration, and lack of daily structure (Agnew, 1992; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Chronic substance abuse severely undermines employability through cognitive impairment, poor health, stigma, and reduced productivity (Ejirefe & Akpokona, 2026).

Unemployment generates conditions conducive to substance initiation and escalation. In Nigeria, where youth unemployment and underemployment remain high, jobless young people experience prolonged idle time, financial hardship, and diminished self-worth. These conditions drive many to use affordable psychoactive substances such as tramadol, codeine syrups, cannabis, and methamphetamine as coping mechanisms for psychological distress (Jatau et al., 2021). Studies in Edo State, including those conducted in Benin City communities like Uselu, consistently identify unemployment and poverty as key drivers of substance abuse among youths (Omigie, 2024). Unemployed youths often turn to drugs for temporary relief from frustration, boredom, and a sense of hopelessness.

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Omigie (2024) found that substance abuse among youths in Uselu Community, Benin City, Edo State, is strongly linked to socioeconomic challenges, including unemployment. Respondents reported using drugs to escape economic pressures and daily realities. Similar patterns appear across southern Nigeria, where idleness arising from lack of employment increases exposure to peer networks involved in drug use and petty trafficking (NDLEA, 2023).

The mechanism is both psychological and structural. Without structured routines provided by employment, youths face increased unstructured socializing with deviant peers, which is recognized as a major risk factor for substance abuse and delinquency (Bandura, 1977). Financial strain from unemployment also makes cheap and accessible drugs attractive to vulnerable youths. Some unemployed youths engage in small-scale drug peddling as a survival strategy, thereby becoming more deeply entrenched in substance-related environments (Agnew, 1992).

Substance abuse acts as a major barrier to employment and economic stability. Regular use of opioids, stimulants, or cannabis leads to impaired cognitive functioning, including memory loss, poor concentration, weak decision-making ability, and reduced productivity (Ejirefe & Akpokona, 2026). Drug dependence is also associated with physical health deterioration, absenteeism, workplace misconduct, and employer stigma. Employers are often reluctant to hire individuals with visible signs of addiction or criminal records linked to drug use.

In Edo State and broader Nigeria, this creates a vicious cycle whereby unemployment fuels drug abuse, which in turn deepens unemployment through reduced human capital and poor

39 socioeconomic functioning. Studies show that a significant proportion of individuals seeking treatment for substance use disorders in Nigeria are unemployed, indicating how addiction contributes to long-term economic marginalization (Jatau et al., 2021).

Empirical evidence from Lagos and other urban centres reinforces this nexus. Youth unemployment combined with easy access to drugs creates what researchers describe as a “lethal cocktail” that sustains criminality, social instability, and reduced participation in legitimate economic activities (NDLEA, 2023). In Edo South Senatorial District, the situation is further compounded by rural–urban migration, limited industrial opportunities, and the spillover effects of drug trafficking routes operating across southern Nigeria.

22 Gender differences also influence the relationship between substance abuse and unemployment. Studies suggest that unemployed male youths are more likely to engage in drug abuse and violent criminal activities due to social pressures associated with masculinity, economic responsibility, and peer influence (Uwaibi et al., 2022). Female youths, on the other hand, may engage in substance abuse as a response to emotional trauma, exploitation, or socioeconomic vulnerability, although they are often underreported due to stigma and cultural expectations.

117 Rural–urban variations are equally significant. Urban centres such as Benin City experience higher rates of drug availability, gang activity, cultism, and youth unemployment, making urban youths more exposed to substance abuse. However, rural communities are increasingly affected as drug trafficking networks expand into semi-urban and rural areas, where poverty and limited access to education create additional vulnerabilities (Jatau et al., 2021).

Addressing substance abuse among youths requires more than punitive measures; it necessitates integrated interventions that combine employment generation, vocational training, entrepreneurship support, rehabilitation programmes, and public enlightenment campaigns. Without simultaneously tackling unemployment and substance abuse, efforts aimed at reducing insecurity and promoting youth development are likely to produce limited results (Agnew, 1992; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

2.4 Substance Abuse and Community Security

Substance abuse exhibits a strong positive correlation with various forms of insecurity, particularly cultism, armed robbery, gender-based violence, kidnapping, and communal clashes in southern Nigeria (Obasogie, 2023). In Edo State, this linkage is especially pronounced, with drug abuse frequently cited as a catalyst for cult-related violence and broader community instability.

Drug abuse undermines community security through multiple pathways. Intoxication lowers inhibitions, impairs judgment, and increases aggression, making users more prone to violent and antisocial acts (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Many cult groups in Edo State use drugs to recruit, initiate, and embolden members during violent operations. Substances such as cannabis, tramadol, and codeine are commonly consumed to provide false courage, suppress fear, and enhance aggression during confrontations.

Recent government campaigns in Edo South Senatorial District explicitly target the intertwined issues of drug abuse and cultism. The Edo **State Government, in collaboration**

with the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), has launched sensitization programmes in secondary schools and local communities, recognizing that substance abuse fuels cult recruitment among idle and unemployed youths (NDLEA, 2023). Cult-related killings have increased cases of widowhood, orphanhood, and family disintegration, thereby weakening the social fabric of affected communities.

Empirical studies in Benin City and surrounding areas document how substance-abusing youths engage in robbery, theft, extortion, and territorial battles either to fund drug habits or assert dominance within criminal networks. Omigie (2024) and Obasogie (2023) identified increased involvement in social vices such as stealing, bullying, street violence, and secret cult activities among drug-abusing youths in Edo communities. These criminal behaviours contribute significantly to insecurity and fear among residents.

Gender-based violence also rises in contexts characterized by widespread substance abuse. Under the influence of drugs or alcohol, perpetrators are more likely to engage in domestic violence, sexual assault, rape, and exploitation (WHO, 2022). Women and children are particularly vulnerable in communities where drug abuse is prevalent. Furthermore, communal clashes and violent conflicts sometimes arise from drug-related territorial disputes between rival cult factions or drug dealers competing for control of local markets.

The security implications of substance abuse extend beyond direct violence. Drug abuse erodes social cohesion, weakens community trust, increases fear among residents, discourages investment, disrupts educational activities, and strains law enforcement resources. In Edo State, cultism and drug-related crimes have become major threats to peace, sustainable

development, and socioeconomic stability (NDLEA, 2023). Businesses and investors are often discouraged from operating in communities perceived as unsafe due to rampant drug-related violence.

Substance abuse also contributes to the overburdening of the criminal justice and healthcare systems. Security agencies spend substantial resources combating cultism, armed robbery, and drug trafficking, while healthcare institutions face increasing cases of addiction, overdose, and mental health disorders associated with substance abuse (Jatau et al., 2021). This dual burden further weakens institutional capacity and community resilience.

Studies further indicate that youths involved in substance abuse are more likely to participate in organized criminal groups and political violence. During elections and periods of political tension, unemployed drug-abusing youths are sometimes recruited as political thugs to intimidate opponents and cause unrest. This phenomenon has contributed to cycles of violence and insecurity in parts of southern Nigeria, including Edo State (Uwaibi et al., 2022).

The relationship between substance abuse and community security therefore reflects a broader social problem rooted in poverty, unemployment, weak social control, and ineffective enforcement mechanisms. Addressing insecurity in Edo South Senatorial District requires comprehensive approaches that integrate drug control measures, youth empowerment, rehabilitation services, anti-cultism campaigns, and community policing strategies. Strengthening family structures, educational institutions, and economic opportunities for youths is equally critical in reducing vulnerability to substance abuse and criminal involvement.

2.5 Linkages Among Substance Abuse, Youth Unemployment, and Community Security

This study conceptualizes substance abuse not as an isolated individual behaviour but as a central component within a vicious triangular relationship involving youth unemployment and community security. The three variables are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Substance abuse functions both as a consequence of youth unemployment and as a driver of insecurity within communities.

Substance Abuse as a Consequence of Youth Unemployment

High rates of youth unemployment create conditions of prolonged idleness, boredom, financial frustration, low self-esteem, hopelessness, and psychological distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Without structured daily routines or legitimate sources of income, many young people turn to psychoactive substances as maladaptive coping mechanisms to escape harsh realities, reduce stress, or seek temporary pleasure.

General Strain Theory explains that unemployment removes positive stimuli such as purposeful activity and financial independence while simultaneously exposing youths to negative conditions including poverty, rejection, and social exclusion (Agnew, 1992). As a result, many unemployed youths resort to substance use to cope with emotional pain and frustration.

In Edo South Senatorial District, empirical studies conducted in communities such as Uselu in Egor Local Government Area consistently link joblessness and economic hardship with increased substance experimentation and dependence (Omigie, 2024). Many unemployed

youths reportedly consume tramadol, cannabis, codeine syrup, and methamphetamine to “forget their problems,” “gain confidence,” or “kill time.”

This relationship aligns with broader realities across Nigeria where economic marginalization contributes significantly to drug abuse. Some unemployed youths further engage in petty drug trafficking or peddling as survival strategies, thereby becoming deeply embedded in substance-related environments.

Substance Abuse as a Driver of Insecurity

Conversely, substance abuse significantly contributes to criminality and weakens community security. Psychoactive substances impair judgment, lower inhibitions, increase aggression, and encourage risky behaviour, thereby making users more likely to engage in violence and antisocial acts (WHO, 2023).

In Edo State, cult groups and criminal gangs actively recruit unemployed youths and often use drugs to embolden members during violent operations. Substances such as cannabis and tramadol provide false courage, suppress fear, and increase aggression during cult clashes, armed robbery, kidnapping, theft, and territorial disputes. Drug-dependent youths may also commit crimes to finance their addiction, thereby increasing rates of robbery, violence, and insecurity within communities.

Empirical evidence from Benin Metropolis reveals strong associations between substance abuse and criminal involvement among youths (Ejirefe & Akpokona, 2026). Government campaigns and security interventions in Edo South Senatorial District have similarly

acknowledged that substance abuse fuels cultism, violence, and general insecurity. The rise in cult-related killings and violent confrontations has disrupted social cohesion, created fear among residents, and negatively affected economic and educational activities.

This interaction creates a vicious self-reinforcing cycle:

Youth Unemployment → Substance Abuse → Reduced Employability → Increased Criminality and Insecurity → Economic Decline → More Unemployment and Drug Abuse.

Substance abuse reduces employability through cognitive impairment, health deterioration, poor productivity, absenteeism, and criminal records. Increased insecurity discourages investment and economic growth, which in turn worsens unemployment and poverty. Consequently, the cycle continues unless comprehensive interventions are introduced.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study therefore presents substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security as interdependent variables requiring integrated policy responses. Breaking any part of the cycle through youth empowerment programmes, job creation initiatives, rehabilitation services, community sensitization, and effective security enforcement can significantly reduce the prevalence of drug abuse and insecurity within Edo South Senatorial District.

At the beginning of the framework is youth unemployment, which serves as the primary driving factor. High levels of unemployment among youths create conditions of idleness, poverty, frustration, low self-esteem, and social exclusion. Many young people who are

unable to secure meaningful employment experience psychological distress and economic hardship. The absence of structured daily activities and legitimate income opportunities exposes youths to negative peer influence and unhealthy coping mechanisms.

As a result, many unemployed youths resort to substance abuse as a means of escaping stress, boredom, and frustration. Psychoactive substances such as cannabis, tramadol, codeine, methamphetamine, and alcohol are commonly used to provide temporary relief from emotional and economic pressures. In Edo South Senatorial District, substance abuse has become widespread among unemployed and vulnerable youths due to the accessibility of drugs and the influence of peer groups and cult networks.

The framework further explains that persistent substance abuse leads to reduced employability. Drug abuse impairs cognitive functioning, weakens concentration, damages physical and mental health, and reduces productivity. Substance-abusing youths may also develop criminal records or acquire negative social reputations, making employers reluctant to hire them. Consequently, drug dependence further deepens unemployment and economic marginalization.

The next stage in the framework is increased criminality and community insecurity. Substance abuse contributes significantly to violent and antisocial behaviours such as cultism, armed robbery, theft, kidnapping, drug trafficking, and gender-based violence. Intoxication often lowers inhibitions and increases aggression, making individuals more likely to engage in criminal activities. In Edo State, cult groups frequently exploit unemployed and substance-dependent youths by recruiting them into violent operations and illegal activities.

The rise in insecurity then contributes to economic decline within communities. Criminal activities and violence discourage investment, disrupt businesses, reduce educational activities, and weaken social cohesion. Fear and instability also reduce economic productivity and limit opportunities for employment creation. As economic conditions worsen, unemployment levels continue to rise, thereby pushing more youths into substance abuse and criminal behaviour.



The framework therefore demonstrates that substance abuse functions both as a consequence of unemployment and as a catalyst for insecurity. It also highlights the cyclical and multidimensional nature of the problem. The implication is that solving one aspect of the problem in isolation may not produce lasting results.

Consequently, the framework suggests that effective intervention strategies must adopt an integrated approach involving:

Youth employment and empowerment programmes

Vocational and skills acquisition initiatives

Drug abuse prevention and rehabilitation services

Community sensitization and counselling

Strengthened law enforcement and anti-cultism measures

Economic development and poverty reduction policies

By breaking any part of the cycle, policymakers and stakeholders can reduce the prevalence of substance abuse, improve youth productivity, and strengthen community security in Edo South Senatorial District.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on an integrated theoretical framework comprising Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), the Stress-Coping Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992). These three complementary theories collectively explain the pathways from youth unemployment to substance abuse and the subsequent consequences for community security in Edo South Senatorial District.

2.7.1 Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1977), posits that behaviours including deviant ones such as substance abuse are acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social contexts. Individuals learn by watching others and replicating actions that appear rewarding or socially acceptable, without needing direct personal experience.

In Edo South Senatorial District, unemployed youths frequently observe peers, street gangs, and cult members using drugs for stress relief, social bonding, confidence enhancement, or economic survival through petty drug peddling. Repeated interactions in environments such as hostels, motor parks, street corners, and cult groups reinforce these behaviours, gradually normalizing substance use. Peer pressure and social acceptance serve as powerful reinforcers, making drug use appear as a viable response to idleness and economic hardship.

This theory is highly relevant to the study as it explains how unemployment exposes young people to deviant social networks where substance abuse is modelled and reinforced. It underscores the role of environmental learning and social influence in shaping youth behaviour in the district.

2.7.2 Stress-Coping Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

The Stress-Coping Model explains substance use as a maladaptive, emotion-focused coping strategy. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), individuals experience stress when they appraise environmental demands as exceeding their available coping resources. When

problem-focused coping proves insufficient, some turn to emotion-focused strategies, such as alcohol or drug consumption, to manage emotional distress.

For youths in Edo South Senatorial District, chronic unemployment generates intense stressors including poverty, financial strain, low self-esteem, frustration, uncertainty about the future, and social exclusion. Many perceive these challenges as overwhelming and resort to psychoactive substances as a temporary escape from anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. While drug use may offer short-term relief, it often leads to dependence, worsened health outcomes, reduced employability, and increased involvement in criminal activities.

This model illuminates the psychological pathway linking youth unemployment to substance abuse, highlighting why many young people in the district adopt maladaptive coping mechanisms that ultimately undermine both personal development and community well-being.

2.7.3 General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992)

General Strain Theory, proposed by Robert Agnew (1992), is particularly relevant because it directly connects structural conditions like unemployment to both substance abuse and criminal behaviour. The theory argues that strain arises when individuals are unable to achieve socially valued goals (such as employment and economic independence), lose positive stimuli, or experience negative stimuli like poverty, discrimination, or social rejection. These strains produce negative emotions anger, frustration, disappointment, and depression which may lead to deviant coping responses.

In the context of Edo South Senatorial District, persistent youth unemployment represents a major source of strain. Many young people are blocked from achieving economic independence and societal expectations, resulting in frustration and hopelessness. Some cope through substance abuse as an escapist mechanism, while others engage in criminal activities such as cultism, robbery, drug trafficking, and violence. Factors like weak social controls, deviant peer associations, and limited support systems increase the likelihood of these negative outcomes.

General Strain Theory thus explains the linkage between unemployment, substance abuse, and the rising insecurity cult-related killings, armed robbery, and social unrest observed in parts of Benin City and surrounding communities.

2.7.4 Integration of the Theories

The integration of these three theories provides a robust and comprehensive lens for understanding the interconnected relationships among substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security in Edo South Senatorial District. Social Learning Theory explains how youths acquire and normalize drug-related behaviours through peer interaction and social environments. The Stress-Coping Model addresses the psychological motivations, showing why unemployed youths turn to substances to manage emotional distress. General Strain Theory links these individual processes to broader structural conditions, demonstrating how unemployment-generated strain translates into both substance abuse and criminality that threaten community security.

Together, the theories depict a vicious cycle: unemployment creates strain and exposes youths to deviant learning environments (Strain and Social Learning), prompting maladaptive coping through drugs (Stress-Coping), which further reduces employability, escalates antisocial behaviour, and undermines community safety. This integrated framework offers a strong foundation for analysing the problem and developing holistic interventions that address economic opportunities, social influences, psychological support, and community-level security measures.

2.8 Empirical Review

Empirical studies conducted in Nigeria, particularly in southern regions including Edo State, consistently demonstrate strong interconnections among substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security challenges. These studies reveal that high levels of youth unemployment serve as a significant risk factor for elevated substance abuse, which in turn fuels various forms of criminality and undermines community security (Jatau et al., 2021). While several studies address pairwise relationships, integrated research examining all three variables simultaneously in Edo South Senatorial District remains limited, underscoring the relevance of the current study.

Numerous studies highlight the role of unemployment as a driver of substance abuse among Nigerian youths. In Edo State, Omigie (2024) examined the impact of substance abuse among youths in Uselu Community, Benin City, located in Egor Local Government Area of Edo South Senatorial District. The descriptive survey found that socioeconomic challenges, particularly unemployment and poverty, were major underlying factors pushing youths into

drug use. Respondents reported using substances such as cannabis, tramadol, codeine, and alcohol primarily as coping mechanisms for boredom, frustration, and economic hardship resulting from joblessness. The study further noted that idle youths often engage in polydrug use and small-scale drug peddling as survival strategies.

Similarly, Obasogie (2023) investigated substance abuse among youths in the same Uselu community and reported strong associations between unemployment, peer pressure, and indiscriminate drug use. The study emphasized that unemployed youths turn to substances to manage traumatic experiences, emotional pain, and lack of daily structure, leading to increased involvement in social vices including stealing, bullying, and cult-related activities. These findings support the argument that unemployment creates psychological and social conditions that encourage substance abuse among vulnerable youths.

69 National and regional data reinforce these findings. A scoping review conducted by Jatau et al. (2021) on the burden of drug abuse in Nigeria reported prevalence rates ranging from 20% to 40% among students and youths, with unemployment and poverty identified as major socioeconomic drivers. The review further noted that youths aged 15–35 years, who constitute a large proportion of Nigeria's unemployed population, are disproportionately affected by substance abuse. More recent analyses by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) indicate that youth unemployment rates exceeding 33% create fertile ground for substance abuse and participation in drug-related activities, including trafficking and organized criminality.

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A bidirectional relationship is evident in the empirical literature. While unemployment fuels drug abuse, chronic substance use further entrenches unemployment and social exclusion. Ejirefe and Akpokona (2026) conducted a study in Benin Metropolis, Edo State, using Spearman's rank correlation analysis on data obtained from 365 valid respondents. Their findings revealed a significant negative relationship between drug abuse and employability

(Spearman's $\rho = -0.521, p < 0.001$). Drug abuse was associated with poor academic performance, increased involvement in crime, cognitive impairment, health deterioration, absenteeism, and employer stigma, all of which reduce the chances of sustainable employment.

Regarding community security, empirical evidence strongly links substance abuse to cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, and other violent crimes in southern Nigeria (Uwaibi et al., 2022). In Edo State, cult groups frequently control local drug markets and use psychoactive substances to recruit, indoctrinate, and embolden members during violent operations. Substances such as tramadol, cannabis, and codeine are often consumed to suppress fear, increase aggression, and provide false courage during confrontations.

Government reports and intervention campaigns further validate these linkages. In 2026, the Edo State Government, in collaboration with the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), launched targeted sensitization campaigns against cultism and drug abuse in secondary schools and communities across Edo South Senatorial District. These initiatives explicitly acknowledged the role of substance abuse in fueling cult-related killings, armed violence, and general insecurity among youths. The establishment of the Edo State Special

Security Squad, popularly referred to as “Operation Flush Out Kidnappers and Cultists,” further reflects the severity of drug-related insecurity within the region.

NDLEA operations in Edo State have repeatedly resulted in the seizure of large quantities of illicit substances, linking drug trafficking networks with cultism, armed robbery, and organized criminal activities (NDLEA, 2023). Officials of the agency have consistently maintained that substance abuse serves as a gateway to broader criminal networks and violent behaviors among youths.

Uwaibi, Omozuwa, and Agbonrofo-Eboigbe (2022) examined the prevalence and sociodemographic characteristics of substance abuse among young persons in Edo State and identified significant associations between substance abuse and risky behaviors, including cultism, criminality, and violence. Their study revealed that unemployed and out-of-school youths were more vulnerable to drug abuse compared to their employed or school-attending counterparts. The researchers concluded that socioeconomic deprivation significantly increases susceptibility to both drug abuse and criminal involvement.

Other empirical studies conducted in Benin City and surrounding communities document how substance-abusing youths contribute to increased robbery, theft, gender-based violence, and communal clashes (Obasogie, 2023; Omigie, 2024). These behaviors create widespread fear among residents, disrupt commercial activities, weaken social cohesion, discourage investment, and place additional pressure on security agencies. Consequently, substance abuse has become both a public health concern and a major security challenge in Edo State.

Despite the abundance of studies on individual variables or pairwise relationships such as drug abuse and crime, or unemployment and substance use, few empirical works have holistically examined the triadic relationship among substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security specifically within Edo South Senatorial District. Most existing studies are either limited to single communities such as Uselu or focused primarily on university students rather than the broader youth population. Furthermore, many studies emphasize either public health outcomes or criminal dimensions without integrating socioeconomic variables such as unemployment and poverty.

This gap in the literature justifies the present study, which seeks to provide comprehensive empirical evidence on the interconnectedness of substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security across the seven Local Government Areas that constitute Edo South Senatorial District. The study therefore contributes to existing knowledge by adopting a broader and more integrated analytical perspective.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Preamble

This chapter involved the methods and materials that were used to carry out the study. It consisted of the research design, area of the study, population of the study, sample and sampling techniques, research instrument, validity of the instrument, reliability of the instrument, method of data collection, method of data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. This design was suitable for capturing a snapshot of the prevalence, patterns, and correlates of drug abuse at a specific point in time among a defined population. Descriptive survey designs have been widely used in social science research on substance abuse because they allow for the systematic collection of quantitative data from large samples through structured instruments, thereby facilitating the description of variables and relationships without manipulation. A cross-sectional approach was chosen because it enabled the examination of social factors (e.g., peer pressure), psychological effects (e.g., anxiety and depression), and impacts on academic engagement simultaneously. The design was ex post facto in nature, as the independent variable (drug abuse) was not manipulated but was observed in its natural occurrence.

3.2 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Edo South Senatorial District, which comprised seven Local Government Areas: Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo, Orhionmwon, Uhunmwonde, Ovia North-East, and Ovia South-West. Benin City, the state capital, served as the major urban centre in the district.

3.3 Population of the Study

The target population of the study consisted of all youths aged 15–35 years residing in Edo South Senatorial District. This population was selected due to its relevance to the research objectives.

The district was considered to possess a large youth population due to the presence of the university and several other educational institutions, coupled with urban and semi-urban settlements. The population for this study comprised all youths aged 15–35 years residing in Edo South Senatorial District, estimated at approximately 600,000–750,000 individuals (citypopulation.de, 2022).

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size for the study consisted of three hundred and one (301) respondents drawn from all seven Local Government Areas of the senatorial district. Using purposive sampling, the seven (7) Local Government Areas, namely Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo, Orhionmwon, Uhunmwonde, Ovia North-East, and Ovia South-West, were selected. Subsequently, forty-

three (43) respondents were selected from each of the seven Local Government Areas, thereby yielding a total sample size of three hundred and one (301) respondents.

3.5 Research Instrument

The research instrument for the study was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaires were administered to respondents, who completed them without disclosing their identities. The questionnaire was designed to obtain sufficient and relevant information from the respondents. It consisted of a four-point Likert scale response format.

3.6 Validity of the Instrument

To enhance the content validity of the research instrument, the constructed questionnaire was presented to the project supervisor for scrutiny and validation. Necessary corrections were made based on the supervisor's observations, after which the instrument was revised before being administered to the respondents.

3.7 Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study conducted among youths outside the study area but with characteristics similar to those of the target population. Data obtained from the pilot study were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient to determine the internal consistency of the instrument.

3.8 Method of Data Collection

Given the nature of the study, data were gathered from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary Sources: Data were primarily gathered through questionnaire surveys. The questionnaire was administered online through Google Forms. Online distribution targeted respondents through various social media platforms.

Secondary Sources: Secondary data were obtained from journals, newspapers, textbooks, and unpublished works. These sources supplemented the primary data by providing additional context and supporting information that enhanced the quality of the research findings.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

The data obtained were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Simple descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages were used to present the findings of the study. The secondary data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Polit and Beck (2008) described ethics as a set of moral principles and values applied during a research project. Ethical approval for the study was sought from and granted by the relevant authorities in the researcher's institution. Ethical issues addressed in the study included voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy, and protection from harm. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided, and this confidentiality was strictly maintained. The researcher ensured that breaches of confidentiality did not occur when handling or disseminating research information. All collected data were coded and kept strictly confidential throughout the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter dealt with data analysis and presentation of results. The data were primarily sourced from the administered questionnaires. A total of three hundred and one (301) questionnaires were administered to respondents across Edo South Senatorial District; 240 were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 79.7%. This high response rate enhances the reliability of the findings.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents is presented below:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (240)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	137	57.3
	Female	102	42.7
	Total	240	100
Age	15–20	30	12.6
	21–25	118	49.4
	26–30	82	34.3
	31–35	10	4.2
	Total	240	100
Residence	Urban	132	55.2
	Semi-urban/Rural	104	43.5
	Missing	4	1.7
	Total	240	100
Employment Status	Student	132	55.2

	Unemployed	60	25.1
	Employed	48	20.1
	Total	240	100
Religion	Christianity	237	99.2
	Islam	2	0.8
	Missing	1	0.4
	Total	240	100
Local Government Area (of Residence)	Oredo	67	28.0
	Ikpoba-Okha	56	23.4
	Egor	45	18.8
	Orhionmwon	33	13.8
	Uhunmwonde	23	9.6
	Ovia North-East	11	4.6
	Ovia South-West	2	0.8
	Missing	3	1.3
	Total	240	100

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. The data reveals a balanced representation across key demographic variables, which enhances the reliability and generalizability of the findings within the context of Edo South Senatorial District.

The table indicates that the study comprises both male and female respondents. Out of the 240 valid responses, 137 respondents were male, representing 57.3%, while 102 were female, accounting for 42.7%. This gender distribution shows a slight male dominance in the sample, which is common in many youth-related surveys in the region, possibly due to greater accessibility or willingness of male youths to participate in the study. The table further shows that the study comprised respondents with diverse age distributions, aligning well with the target population of youths aged 18–35 years. A greater proportion of the respondents, representing 49.4% (118 respondents), fall within the 21–25 years age bracket. This is

followed by those aged 26–30 years, who constitute 34.3% (82 respondents). Respondents aged 15–20 years make up 12.6% (30 respondents), while those in the 31–35 years category represent 4.2% (10 respondents). This age distribution indicates that the study captured the views of the core youthful population most affected by issues of substance abuse and unemployment. In terms of place of residence, the table shows that a higher proportion of the respondents reside in Urban areas (55.2%, 132 respondents), while 43.5% (104 respondents) are from Semi-urban/Rural communities. This distribution reflects the demographic reality of Edo South Senatorial District, which includes both the capital city (Benin City) and surrounding semi-urban and rural settlements. The table also reveals the employment status of the respondents. Students formed the largest group, constituting 55.2% (132 respondents). This was followed by Unemployed youths at 25.1% (60 respondents) and Employed respondents at 20.1% (48 respondents). The high representation of students is significant as it captures the perspectives of young people who are either preparing to enter the labour market or are already facing employment challenges, making their views highly relevant to the study's objectives. Furthermore, the respondents were drawn from various Local Government Areas (LGAs) within Edo South Senatorial District. Oredo LGA had the highest representation, followed by Ikpoba-Okha, Egor, Orhionmwon, Uhumwonde, and Ovia North-East, among others. This multi-LGA coverage ensures a broad representation across the senatorial district. Finally, the table shows that the study is overwhelmingly composed of Christian respondents (99.2%, 237 respondents), with only 0.8% (2 respondents) being

Muslims. This religious composition mirrors the dominant religious landscape of the study area.

4.3 Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the perceived prevalence and pattern of substance abuse among youth age 18-35 in Edo South Senatorial District?

Table 2: Distribution of Responses on the Prevalence and Patterns of Substance Abuse

S/n	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Substance abuse is very high among youths (18-35 years) in Edo South Senatorial District	160 (67.0%)	77 (32.2%)	2 (0.8%)	0 (0.0%)
2	Many youths in this district use drugs regularly	171 (71.5%)	61 (25.5%)	7 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)
3	Cannabis (Marijuana) is one of the most commonly abused substances in this area	194 (81.2%)	39 (16.3%)	6 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)
4	Tramadol and Codeine syrups are widely abused by youths in Edo South	195 (81.6%)	36 (15.1%)	8 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)
5	Methamphetamine and other hard drugs are increasingly common among youths here	166 (69.5%)	66 (27.6%)	7 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)
6	Most youths start abusing drugs between the ages of 15 and 25	192 (80.3%)	46 (19.2%)	1 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)
7	Polydrug use (mixing different drugs) is common in this district	185 (77.4%)	50 (20.9%)	4 (1.7%)	0 (0.0%)

The analysis of data in Table 2 reveals the perceived prevalence and patterns of substance abuse among youths in Edo South Senatorial District. The respondents showed overwhelming agreement across all items. Under item 1, a vast majority (99.2%) of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that substance abuse is very high among youths aged 18-35 years. Under item 2, 97.0% agreed that many youths in the district use drugs regularly. Similarly,

97.5% agreed that Cannabis (Marijuana) is one of the most commonly abused substances, while 96.7% agreed on the widespread abuse of Tramadol and Codeine syrups. A significant 97.1% of respondents also agreed that Methamphetamine and other hard drugs are increasingly common. Furthermore, 99.5% agreed that most youths start abusing drugs between the ages of 15 and 25, and 98.3% agreed that polydrug use is common in the district.

The analysis of data in the above table reveals a very strong perception of widespread substance abuse among youths in Edo South Senatorial District. As revealed by the study, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that substance abuse is very high, with Cannabis (Marijuana), Tramadol, Codeine syrups, and Methamphetamine being the most prominent substances. The findings further indicate that drug initiation commonly occurs between ages 15 and 25, and polydrug use is perceived as a common practice. This near-unanimous consensus underscores the severity of the substance abuse problem in the study area.

Research Question 2: To What relationship exists between youth unemployment and substance abuse in Edo South Senatorial District?

Table 3: Distribution of Responses on the Relationship between Youth Unemployment and Substance Abuse

S/n	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	High rate of unemployment pushes youths into drug abuse in Edo South	178 (74.5%)	48 (20.1%)	12 (5.0%)	1 (0.4%)
2	Unemployed youths abuse drugs more than employed youths	165 (69.0%)	63 (26.4%)	10 (4.2%)	1 (0.4%)
3	Lack of job opportunities creates boredom that leads to drug use	172 (72.0%)	59 (24.7%)	7 (2.9%)	1 (0.4%)
4	Youths use drugs to forget their unemployment problems	158 (66.1%)	61 (25.5%)	18 (7.5%)	2 (0.8%)
5	Some unemployed youths engage in drug peddling as a source of income	189 (79.1%)	46 (19.2%)	4 (1.7%)	0 (0.0%)
6	Substance abuse further reduces the chances of youths getting employed	181 (75.7%)	52 (21.8%)	6 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)
7	Financial frustration due to unemployment is a major cause of drug abuse	160 (66.9%)	60 (25.1%)	18 (7.5%)	1 (0.4%)

The analysis of data in Table 3 unravels the perceived relationship between youth unemployment and substance abuse in Edo South Senatorial District. Respondents demonstrated very high levels of agreement on the interconnectedness of these issues. Under item 1, 94.6% agreed that the high rate of unemployment pushes youths into drug abuse. Under item 2, 95.4% agreed that unemployed youths abuse drugs more than employed ones. Similarly, 96.7% agreed that lack of job opportunities creates boredom that leads to drug use, while 91.6% agreed that youths use drugs to forget their unemployment problems. A striking 98.3% agreed that some unemployed youths engage in drug peddling as a source of income. Furthermore, 97.5% agreed that substance abuse further reduces the chances of youths getting

employed, and 92.0% agreed that financial frustration due to unemployment is a major cause of drug abuse.

The analysis of data in the above table reveals a strong perceived bidirectional relationship between youth unemployment and substance abuse. As revealed by the study, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that unemployment drives drug abuse through boredom, financial frustration, and as a coping mechanism, while some unemployed youths resort to drug peddling for income. At the same time, substance abuse is seen as further worsening employability. This confirms the existence of a vicious cycle between unemployment and drug abuse in the district.

Research Question 3: How does substance abuse influence youths' perception of community security in Edo South Senatorial District?

Table 4: Distribution of Responses on the Influence of Substance Abuse on Community Security

S/n	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Substance abuse increases cult-related violence in Edo South Senatorial District	181 (75.7%)	50 (20.9%)	8 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)
2	Drug abuse is a major cause of robbery and theft in this community	172 (72.0%)	52 (21.8%)	14 (5.9%)	1 (0.4%)
3	Youths under the influence of drugs are more likely to engage in violent behaviour	185 (77.4%)	48 (20.1%)	6 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)
4	Community security has worsened due to drug-related activities	174 (72.8%)	54 (22.6%)	11 (4.6%)	0 (0.0%)
5	Cult groups use drugs to recruit and control unemployed youths	169 (70.7%)	58 (24.3%)	12 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)

6	Drug abuse contributes to the high rate of crime and insecurity in Benin City and surrounding areas	178 (74.5%)	51 (21.3%)	10 (4.2%)	0 (0.0%)
7	Residents now live in fear because of drug-influenced criminal activities	173 (72.4%)	55 (23.0%)	11 (4.6%)	0 (0.0%)

The analysis of data in Table 4 reveals the perceived influence of substance abuse on community security in Edo South Senatorial District. There was overwhelming agreement on the negative security implications. Under item 1, 96.6% agreed that substance abuse increases cult-related violence. Under item 2, 93.7% agreed that drug abuse is a major cause of robbery and theft. Similarly, 97.5% agreed that youths under the influence of **drugs are more likely to engage in violent behaviour**, while 95.4% agreed that community security has worsened due to drug-related activities. A high 94.9% agreed that cult groups use drugs to recruit and control unemployed youths. Furthermore, 95.8% agreed that drug abuse contributes to the high rate of crime and insecurity in Benin City and surrounding areas, and 95.4% agreed that residents now live in fear because of drug-influenced criminal activities.

The analysis of data in the above table reveals a strong perception that substance abuse significantly undermines community security. As revealed by the study, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that drug abuse fuels cult-related violence, robbery, theft, and general criminality. The findings also highlight how drug abuse worsens community safety, enables cult recruitment, and creates an atmosphere of fear among residents **in Edo South Senatorial District**.

Research Question 4: In **what** way do substance abuse and unemployment influence youth participation in political and community activities?

Table 5: **Distribution of Responses on the Influence of Substance Abuse** and Unemployment on Youth Political Participation and Civic Engagement

S/n	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Substance abuse and unemployment discourage youths from participating in politics	172 (72.0%)	55 (23.0%)	11 (4.6%)	1 (0.4%)
2	Unemployed and drug-abusing youths show low interest in community development activities	175 (73.2%)	55 (23.0%)	9 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)
3	Drug use reduces the ability of youths to engage meaningfully in elections and voting	177 (74.1%)	52 (21.8%)	10 (4.2%)	0 (0.0%)
4	Youths involved in substance abuse are less likely to join positive civic groups	181 (75.7%)	51 (21.3%)	7 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)
5	Unemployment and drug abuse make youths vulnerable to political manipulation and thuggery	185 (77.4%)	49 (20.5%)	5 (2.1%)	0 (0.0%)
6	Drug-affected youths rarely attend community meetings or contribute to local development	179 (74.9%)	54 (22.6%)	6 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)
7	Addressing unemployment and drug abuse will improve youth participation in governance	182 (76.2%)	51 (21.3%)	6 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)

The analysis of data in Table 5 unravels the perceived influence of substance abuse and unemployment on youth political participation and civic engagement. Respondents showed very strong agreement on the detrimental effects. Under item 1, 95.0% agreed that substance abuse and unemployment discourage youths from participating in politics. Under item 2, 96.2% agreed that unemployed and drug-abusing youths show low interest in community development activities. Similarly, 95.8% agreed that drug use reduces the ability of youths to

engage meaningfully in elections and voting, while 97.1% agreed that youths involved in substance abuse are less likely to join positive civic groups. A high 97.9% agreed that unemployment and drug abuse make youths vulnerable to political manipulation and thuggery. Furthermore, 97.5% agreed that drug-affected youths rarely attend community meetings or contribute to local development, and 97.5% agreed that addressing unemployment and drug abuse will improve youth participation in governance.

 1 **The analysis of data in the above table** reveals a strong perceived negative impact of substance abuse and unemployment on youth political participation and civic engagement. As revealed by the study, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that these twin problems discourage political involvement, reduce interest in community development, limit meaningful electoral participation, and increase vulnerability to political thuggery and manipulation. Importantly, there is high optimism that tackling both unemployment and substance abuse would significantly improve youth participation in governance.

61 **4.4 Discussion of the Findings**

 14 **In this section, the data collected from the survey on** the topic “Substance Abuse, Youth Unemployment and Community Security in Edo South Senatorial District, Nigeria” are discussed and interpreted. The data were obtained from two hundred and forty (240) fully completed copies of the questionnaire retrieved from the respondents. The discussion is structured according to the four research questions **that guided the study.**

Research Question One: What is the prevalence and patterns of substance abuse among youths in Edo South Senatorial District?

Findings from research question one reveal an overwhelming perception among respondents that substance abuse is highly prevalent among youths in the study area. A vast majority (99.2%) either strongly agreed or agreed that substance abuse is very high among youths aged 18-35 years. Similarly, 97.0% agreed that many youths use drugs regularly, 97.5% identified Cannabis (Marijuana) as one of the most commonly abused substances, and 96.7% affirmed the widespread abuse of Tramadol and Codeine syrups. Methamphetamine and other hard drugs were perceived as increasingly common (97.1%), while 99.5% agreed that most youths begin abusing drugs between the ages of 15 and 25. Polydrug use was also widely acknowledged as common (98.3%).

Collaborating these findings, Uwaibi et al. (2022) reported alarming rates of substance abuse among young people in Edo State, with cannabis, tramadol, and codeine syrups ranking among the top abused substances. Similarly, Idowu (2023) observed that substance abuse has become a normalised behaviour among Nigerian youths due to easy accessibility, peer pressure, and socio-economic stressors. In consonance, a study by Obasogie (2023) conducted in Benin City communities found that polydrug use and early initiation (15–25 years) are common patterns, aligning perfectly with the perceptions of respondents in the present study.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between youth unemployment and substance abuse in Edo South Senatorial District?

Findings from research question two illuminate a strong perceived interconnection between youth unemployment and substance abuse. Over 94.6% of respondents agreed that the high rate of unemployment pushes youths into drug abuse, while 95.4% believed unemployed youths abuse drugs more than employed ones. Lack of job opportunities creating boredom that leads to drug use was endorsed by 96.7%, and 91.6% agreed that youths use drugs to forget their unemployment problems. Notably, 98.3% agreed that some unemployed youths engage in drug peddling as a source of income. Substance abuse was also seen as further reducing employability (97.5%), with financial frustration identified as a major driver (92.0%).

These findings resonate with Okafor (2020) established a robust statistical link between youth unemployment and increased substance abuse in Edo State, describing it as a vicious cycle. Chigbu et al. (2021) similarly noted that idle and financially frustrated youths often turn to drugs both as a coping mechanism and as an alternative source of livelihood through peddling. The high perception of drug peddling as an income strategy among the unemployed in this study is particularly noteworthy and aligns with reports by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2024) on rising involvement of youths in drug trafficking in southern Nigeria.

Research Question Three: What is the influence of substance abuse on community security in Edo South Senatorial District?

Findings from research question three reveal a profound perceived negative influence of substance abuse on community security. High levels of agreement were recorded across all items: substance abuse increases cult-related violence (96.6%), is a major cause of robbery and theft (93.7%), makes youths more violent (97.5%), worsens community security (95.4%), aids cult recruitment of unemployed youths (94.9%), contributes to crime and insecurity in Benin City (95.8%), and causes residents to live in fear (95.4%).

These findings are in strong consonance with Omigie (2023) documented a direct correlation between substance abuse, cultism, and violent crimes in Benin City communities. Ekpe (2023) also affirmed that drug-influenced youths are central to the escalation of cult-related violence and general insecurity in Edo South. The perception that residents now live in fear mirrors reports by security agencies and civil society organisations operating in the region.

Research Question Four: What is the influence of substance abuse and unemployment on youth political participation and civic engagement in Edo South Senatorial District?

Findings from research question four demonstrate a strong perceived negative impact of substance abuse and unemployment on youth political participation and civic engagement. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that these issues discourage participation in politics (95.0%), reduce interest in community development (96.2%), limit meaningful engagement

in elections (95.8%), decrease involvement in positive civic groups (97.1%), and increase vulnerability to political manipulation and thuggery (97.9%). Additionally, 97.5% agreed that drug-affected youths rarely contribute to local development, while an equally high 97.5% believed that addressing unemployment and drug abuse would significantly improve youth participation in governance.

These findings align with Ajonye (2025) highlighted how substance abuse and economic frustration contribute to political apathy and involvement in electoral violence among Nigerian youths. Virk (2023) similarly observed that unemployed and drug-affected youths are more susceptible to political manipulation and thuggery. The strong optimism regarding solutions (97.5%) is encouraging and concurs with policy-oriented studies that advocate for integrated interventions combining job creation, drug rehabilitation, and civic education as pathways to revitalising youth participation in governance.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This study examined the intricate relationships among substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security in Edo South Senatorial District, Nigeria. The research was motivated by the alarming rise in substance abuse among youths aged 15–35 years, persistent high levels of youth unemployment, and the resultant threats to community safety, social cohesion, and economic development in the district. The study area comprises seven Local Government Areas: Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo, Orhionmwon, Ugunmwonde, Ovia North-East, and Ovia South-West, with Benin City serving as the major urban hub.

The primary objective of the study was to determine the relationship between substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security in the district. The specific objectives were to:

- (i) assess the perceived prevalence and patterns of substance abuse among youths aged 18–35;
- (ii) examine the relationship between youth unemployment and substance abuse;
- (iii) analyze how substance abuse influences perceptions of community security; and
- (iv) evaluate the extent to which substance abuse and unemployment affect youth political participation and civic engagement.

Guided by four corresponding research questions, the study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The target population consisted of youths aged 15–35 years residing in the senatorial district. A sample of 301 respondents was drawn using purposive sampling

across the seven Local Government Areas. Data were collected primarily through a structured, self-administered questionnaire (online via Google Forms) designed on a 4-point Likert scale. Secondary data were sourced from relevant journals, reports, and official publications. The instrument was validated by the project supervisor and its reliability established through a pilot study using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and arrived at 0.73 which indicate that the questionnaire is reliable. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) with descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and thematic analysis for secondary data.

The study was anchored on an integrated theoretical framework comprising Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), Lazarus and Folkman's Stress-Coping Model (1984), and Agnew's General Strain Theory (1992). These theories collectively explained how unemployed youths learn substance use behaviors through peer observation and reinforcement, adopt drugs as maladaptive coping strategies for economic and psychological stress, and resort to deviant behaviors due to strains arising from blocked opportunities and negative stimuli.

The conceptual framework portrayed a vicious triangular cycle in which youth unemployment creates conditions of idleness, frustration, and financial hardship that drive substance abuse. Substance abuse, in turn, impairs employability through cognitive deficits, health deterioration, and stigma, while simultaneously fueling criminality, cultism, and insecurity. This cycle further deepens unemployment and weakens community security, forming a self-reinforcing loop that undermines youth development and societal progress.

The literature review established strong empirical and conceptual support for these interconnections. Globally and nationally, substance abuse particularly of cannabis, tramadol, codeine syrups, methamphetamine, and polydrug combinations has been linked to youth unemployment through mechanisms of escapism, boredom, and survival strategies such as drug peddling. Substance abuse was also consistently associated with heightened violence, cult-related activities, robbery, and diminished civic engagement.

15 This study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing a localized, integrated analysis of the triadic relationship within Edo South Senatorial District, moving beyond the common focus on university students alone to include both in-school and out-of-school youths.

1 5.2 Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that substance abuse, youth unemployment, and community security are deeply interconnected in Edo South Senatorial District. Substance abuse is perceived as highly prevalent among the youth population, with common patterns involving early initiation, widespread use of cannabis, pharmaceutical opioids (tramadol and codeine), methamphetamine, and polydrug consumption. Youth unemployment serves as a significant driver of substance abuse by creating prolonged idleness, economic frustration, low self-esteem, and psychological distress, which push many young people toward drugs as coping mechanisms or alternative income sources.

In turn, substance abuse severely undermines community security by increasing cult-related violence, robbery, theft, armed criminality, and general fear among residents. It also weakens

youth political participation and civic engagement by fostering apathy, reducing interest in community development, limiting meaningful involvement in electoral processes, and heightening vulnerability to political manipulation and thuggery. The study demonstrates that these problems form a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle that threatens the social fabric, economic prospects, and future leadership potential of youths in the district.

From a theoretical standpoint, the integrated framework successfully explains the observed phenomena: social learning processes normalize drug use in peer environments, stress-coping deficits lead to maladaptive substance use, and structural strains from unemployment translate into both personal deviance and broader community insecurity. The persistence of these issues despite existing interventions by the NDLEA, Edo State Government, and other stakeholders highlights the inadequacy of fragmented approaches.

Finally, the study concludes that without deliberate, coordinated, and multi-sectoral efforts to simultaneously address youth unemployment, substance abuse, and insecurity, sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in Edo South Senatorial District will remain elusive. Breaking the cycle requires treating the three variables as interdependent rather than isolated challenges.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

To the Federal and Edo State Governments:

1. Prioritize massive youth employment generation through targeted programs such as agricultural modernization, skills acquisition in ICT, entrepreneurship, and small and medium-scale industries specifically tailored for Edo South Senatorial District.
2. Strengthen collaboration between the NDLEA, Edo State Ministry of Youths and Sports, and Local Government Councils to implement integrated rehabilitation, vocational training, and reintegration programs for substance-abusing youths.
3. Enact and enforce stricter regulations on the importation, distribution, and sale of tramadol, codeine-containing syrups, and other pharmaceutical opioids, while improving access to mental health and addiction treatment services.

To Security Agencies (NDLEA, Nigeria Police, Edo State Security Network):

1. Intensify intelligence-driven operations against drug trafficking networks and cult groups, while adopting community-oriented policing that involves youths in peace-building initiatives.
2. Establish youth-focused anti-cultism and anti-drug sensitization programs in secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and communities across the seven Local Government Areas.

To Educational Institutions and Youth Development Agencies:

1. Incorporate comprehensive substance abuse prevention education into school curricula at secondary and tertiary levels, emphasizing life skills, stress management, and positive peer influence.
2. Universities and polytechnics in the district should expand counseling services, establish functional drug-free clubs, and create internship/entrepreneurship linkages to reduce graduate unemployment.

To Local Government Authorities and Community Leaders:

1. Develop community-based empowerment schemes, including cooperative societies, skill centers, and sports programs that provide structured activities and economic opportunities for idle youths.
2. Traditional rulers, religious leaders, and civil society organizations should promote cultural re-orientation campaigns that discourage substance use and glorify productive engagement and civic responsibility.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Studies

1. Longitudinal **Research** Design: **Future** researchers **should** adopt longitudinal or cohort study designs to track the same group of youths over an extended period (e.g., 3–5 years).
2. Mixed-Methods Approaches: Subsequent studies could employ a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, combining quantitative surveys with in-depth qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, and ethnographic observations.

3. **Broader Geographical Coverage:** This study was delimited to Edo South Senatorial District. Comparative studies across other senatorial districts in Edo State (Edo Central and Edo North) or across different geopolitical zones in Nigeria would be useful to determine whether the observed patterns are unique to Edo South or reflective of wider national trends. Such comparative analyses would enhance generalizability.
4. **Focus on Specific Sub-Populations:** Further studies could examine gender-specific, age-specific, or location-specific dimensions of the problem. For instance, a comparative analysis of male versus female youths, in-school versus out-of-school youths, or urban versus rural residents within the senatorial district would reveal nuanced differences in risk factors, coping mechanisms, and consequences.

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APPENDIX

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to collect data for the research study titled “**Substance abuse, youth unemployment and community security in Edo South Senatorial District Nigeria.**”

The purpose of this study is strictly academic.

The information provided will not affect you in any negative way. All responses obtained will be treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for research purposes.

Instructions

Please tick (✓) the option that best represents your response where appropriate.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Please tick the option you consider appropriate and fill in blank spaces

1. Age: 15–20 () 21–25 () 26–30 () 31–35 ()
2. Gender: Male () Female () Prefer not to say ()
3. Educational Status: No formal () Secondary () Tertiary () Others ()
4. LGA of Residence: _____
5. Residence: Urban () Semi-urban/Rural ()
6. Employment Status: Employed () Unemployed () Underemployed () Student ()
7. Religion: Christianity () Islam () Traditional () Others ()

QUESTIONNAIRE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE, YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND COMMUNITY SECURITY IN EDO SOUTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT NIGERIA

SECTION B: Prevalence and Patterns of Substance Abuse (Research Question 1)

S/N	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Substance abuse is very high among youths (18-35 years) in Edo South Senatorial District				

2	Many youths in this district use drugs regularly				
3	Cannabis (Marijuana) is one of the most commonly abused substances in this area				
4	Tramadol and Codeine syrups are widely abused by youths in Edo South				
5	Methamphetamine and other hard drugs are increasingly common among youths here				
6	Most youths start abusing drugs between the ages of 15 and 25				
7	Polydrug use (mixing different drugs) is common in this district				

SECTION C: Relationship between Youth Unemployment and Substance Abuse (Research Question 2)

S/N	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	High rate of unemployment pushes youths into drug abuse in Edo South				
2	Unemployed youths abuse drugs more than employed youths				
3	Lack of job opportunities creates boredom that leads to drug use				
4	Youths use drugs to forget their unemployment problems				
5	Some unemployed youths engage in drug peddling as a source of income				
6	Substance abuse further reduces the chances of youths getting employed				
7	Financial frustration due to unemployment is a major cause of drug abuse				

SECTION D: Influence of Substance Abuse on Community Security (Research Question 3)

S/N	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Substance abuse increases cult-related violence in Edo South Senatorial District				
2	Drug abuse is a major cause of robbery and theft in this community				

3	Youths under the influence of drugs are more likely to engage in violent behaviour				
4	Community security has worsened due to drug-related activities				
5	Cult groups use drugs to recruit and control unemployed youths				
6	Drug abuse contributes to the high rate of crime and insecurity in Benin City and surrounding areas				
7	Residents now live in fear because of drug-influenced criminal activities				

SECTION E: Influence of Substance Abuse and Unemployment on Youth Political Participation and Civic Engagement (Research Question 4)

S/N	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Substance abuse and unemployment discourage youths from participating in politics				
2	Unemployed and drug-abusing youths show low interest in community development activities				
3	Drug use reduces the ability of youths to engage meaningfully in elections and voting				
4	Youths involved in substance abuse are less likely to join positive civic groups				
5	Unemployment and drug abuse make youths vulnerable to political manipulation and thuggery				
6	Drug-affected youths rarely attend community meetings or contribute to local development				
7	Addressing unemployment and drug abuse will improve youth participation in governance				