

**Pattern of Substance Abuse among Youths Seen at Psychiatric Hospital Rumuigbo
Hospital in Rivers State, Nigeria in 2020-2024**

Onwudebe, Peace Uchechi

School of Public Health, University of Port Harcourt

Email: peaciology@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: Youth substance misuse is becoming a more significant socioeconomic and public health issue in Rivers State, Nigeria. **Objective:** The prevalence and trends of substance abuse are reviewed in this article, along with important abuser's demographics and some detrimental consequences of substance misuse. **Methods:** This a descriptive cross-sectional study which utilized secondary data collected from Psychiatric hospital between 2020 and 2024 (461 case files). Data was analyzed using Advanced Microsoft Excel and summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequency, simple percentage, mean and standard deviation.

Results: The report highlights the most often abused substances: alcohol (11, 2%), cannabis (120, 26%), and dual/poly-substance users (402, 68%) based on data from Psychiatric Hospital Port Harcourt. There are also growing worries about tramadol and other psychoactive medications. Young men (93.06%), are a particularly vulnerable group, especially those over the age of 26years. The main negative consequences include, substance use disorders (201, 44%), Psychosis (145, 31%), schizophrenia (4, 1%), mental behavioral disorders (106, 23%) seizures etc. **Conclusion:** To lessen the negative consequences of substance misuse on young people, the results highlight the urgent need for comprehensive intervention methods, such as improved public health education, fortified regulatory frameworks, and easily available counseling services to be able to lessen the negative impacts of substance abuse on Rivers State's youth population.

Keywords: prevalence, pattern, substance abuse, youths, Rivers State.

INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse is referred to as the dangerous or damaging use of psychoactive substances. This covers the abuse of legal substances like alcohol, prescription pharmaceuticals, and even over-the-counter treatments, in addition to the usage of illegal narcotics. The fact remains that its use is harmful to the individual in all ramifications, his family and the society as a whole (WHO, 2025).

Substance abuse is a widespread problem that has terrible effects on people, families, and communities. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) 2024 World Drug Report estimates that 292 million individuals used drugs in 2022, a 20% increase over the previous decade (UNODC, 2024). In 2022, approximately 5.6% of people aged 15-64 used drugs, a number that has been rising due in part to the world's population growth. The number of people with substance use disorders has also increased significantly, reaching an estimated 64 million people worldwide in 2022, a 3% increase from 2018. Despite the high number of people with SUDs, access to treatment is still a major challenge, with only about one in 11 people with a drug use disorder receiving the necessary treatment globally, a gap that is especially severe for women (UNODC, 2024).

The issue has grown into a serious public health emergency in Nigeria, with a startlingly prevalence among young people. The most thorough data on the problem comes from a historic national survey carried out in 2018 by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the United

Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). According to estimates, 14.4% of Nigerians between the ages of 15 and 64 consume drugs. This corresponds to over 14.3 million individuals, which is a substantial amount more than the global average of 5.6% for 2016 (UNODC, 2018; Olanrewaju et al., 2022). The South-South geopolitical zone, which includes Rivers State, is not an exception to this pattern. Urbanization, educational institutions, and other social dynamics all contribute to the state's distinct socioeconomic landscape, which generates a complex environment that affects the substance use patterns of its youth (Ojule & Te-Erebe, 2022; Dataproject, 2025).

Youth, who are generally classified as those in adolescence and the early stages of adulthood, are more susceptible to substance misuse because of developmental characteristics like identity formation, heightened curiosity, and vulnerability to peer pressure. Substance misuse has wide-ranging effects on this population, including a negative influence on social connections, physical and mental health, academic performance, and an increase in criminal activity (Amadi, 2024). For the purpose of creating focused and successful prevention, intervention, and treatment programs, it is essential to comprehend the unique patterns of substance addiction in Rivers State (Ojule & Te-Erebe, 2022; Dataproject, 2025). Several factors have been implicated as determinants of substance abuse. Factors such as peer influence, curiosity and experimentation, stress and coping mechanisms, accessibility and availability, socio-cultural factors and family influence have all contributed to the high prevalence of substance abuse seen among Rivers' youths (Ojule & Te-Erebe, 2022; Pepple, et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

The main focus of this article is a review of secondary data collected from the Psychiatric Hospital Rumuigbo between 2020 and 2024, which demonstrates the pattern of substance abuse among young people in Rivers State, Nigeria who attended the hospital. The data was compiled and examined to provide pertinent information about the youth's substance abuse patterns. A total of 461 case files were sourced out and data extracted from them. The data obtained involved the following:

- Social demographic data (The age and gender of abusers)
- The types of substances commonly abused.
- The prevalence rates of substance use among different youth
- Duration of substance abuse
- The effect of substance abuse on the abuser

RESULTS

Social Demographic Data

TABLE 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics

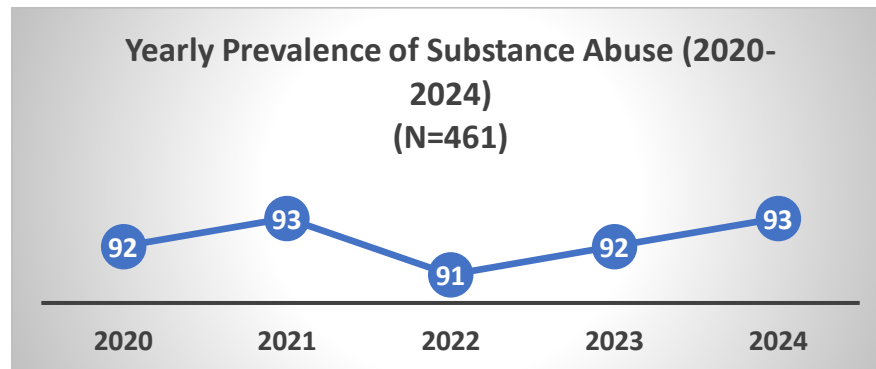
Variables	Mean (N=461)	StDev. (N=461)
Mean Age	26.42	7.65
Sex	N = 461	%
Female	32	6.94%
Male	429	93.06%

The mean age of substance abusers was 26.42 ± 7.65 years and a large majority were male (93.06%), while females accounted for only 6.94%. Table 1 below presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 461 patients studied.

The prevalence of drug consumption in the studied cities

TABLE 2: Yearly Trend of Substance Abuse

Year	N=461	%
2020	92	20%
2021	93	20%
2022	91	20%
2023	92	20%
2024	93	20%



The data show a consistent distribution across the five-year period, with each year accounting for approximately 20% of the total cases (N=461). Specifically, 92 cases (20%) were recorded in 2020, 93 cases (20%) in 2021, 91 cases (20%) in 2022, 92 cases (20%) in 2023, and 93 cases (20%) in 2024. This uniform pattern suggests a stable annual prevalence of substance abuse within the study setting, indicating no significant fluctuations in occurrence across the years under review. Table 2 and Chart 1 below present the yearly trend of substance abuse among patients in the psychiatric hospital, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Pattern of substance abuse

TABLE 3: Patterns of Substance Abuse

Substance Abused	N=461	%
Dual Substance Abuse	282	61%
Cannabis	120	26%
Poly-Substance Abuse	33	7%
Alcohol	11	2%
Cocaine	4	1%
Tramadol	3	1%
Methamphetamine	3	1%
Cannabinoids	2	0%
Heroin	1	0%
Amphetamine	1	0%
Codeine	1	0%

Out of the 461 patients surveyed, the most prevalent form of substance abuse was dual substance abuse reported by 282 patients (61%), followed by cannabis use with 120 patients (26%). Poly-substance abuse accounted for 33 patients (7%), while alcohol use was reported by 11 patients (2%). Less common substances included cocaine (4 patients; 1%), tramadol (3 patients; 1%), methamphetamine (3 patients; 1%), cannabinoids (2 patients; 0%), heroin (1 patient; 0%), amphetamine (1 patient; 0%), and codeine (1 patient; 0%). These findings indicate that combined use of multiple substances, particularly dual substance abuse, is the most common pattern among psychiatric patients in the hospital, with single-drug use being relatively less common. This is shown in Table 3;

Duration of Substance abuse

TABLE 4: Duration of Substance Abuse

Abuse Duration	N=461	%
<1 month	224	49%
1 - 11 months	52	11%
1 - 5 years	79	17%
6 - 10 years	73	16%
11 - 15 years	18	4%
16 - 20 years	7	2%
21 years & above	8	2%

Nearly half of the respondents (49%) had abused substances for less than one month. A smaller proportion (11%) reported substance abuse for 1–11 months, while 17% had a duration between 1–5 years. Furthermore, 16% reported 6–10 years of substance abuse, and 4% had abused substances for 11–15 years. Only 2% each reported abuse for 16–20 years and 21 years or more. This indicates that while a significant number of patients were recent users, there is also a considerable proportion with long-term substance abuse histories. This is based on Table 4;

Effect of substance abuse

TABLE 5: Effects of Substance Abuse

Effects	N = 461	%
Substance use disorder	201	44%
Substance Induced Psychosis	145	31%
Mental Behavioral Disorder	106	23%
Substance induced schizophrenia	4	1%
Poly substance induced Schizophrenia	1	0%
Poly-substance use disease	1	0%
Substance induced schizophreniform disorder	1	0%
Substance and Seizure disease	1	0%
Substance Ass schizophrenia	1	0%

The most frequently reported effect of substance abuse among patients (youths) in the psychiatric hospital was substance use disorder (201; 44%), followed by substance-induced psychosis (145; 31%) and mental behavioral disorder (106; 23%). Less common effects included substance-induced schizophrenia (4; 1%), while poly-substance induced schizophrenia, poly-substance use disease, substance-induced schizophreniform disorder, substance and seizure disease, and substance-associated schizophrenia were each reported by only one patient (0%). This pattern shows that the majority of patients experienced direct psychiatric complications of substance abuse, with psychosis and behavioral disorders being more prevalent than chronic schizophrenia-related conditions. Table 5 shows this result;

DISCUSSION

The results highlight how widespread drug usage is among young people in Rivers State. In Nigeria, where alcohol and cannabis are frequently easily accessible and culturally, albeit occasionally informally, incorporated into social contexts, the high frequency of dual/polysubstance addiction is consistent with national patterns (Tebu et al., 2025; Grant & Enyindah, 2024).

Eneji et al. (2024) showed that young males are constantly identified as the most vulnerable category by the demographic patterns. Social norms, risk-taking and daring tendencies more frequently associated with men, and possibly increased exposure to peer pressure in male-dominated social environments could all be contributing factors to this gender gap (Eneji et al., 2024; Dataproject, 2025). Furthermore, according to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2018), men were more likely than women to have used psychoactive substances in the previous 12 months, with the exception of alcohol. Those between the ages of 25 and 39 were most likely to take drugs. The most often utilized drugs were cannabis and opioids, namely the non-medical usage of cough syrup and prescription opiates. (NBS, 2018) This underscores the need for target, context-sensitive intervention on the male specifically. Concerted Public Health Education which involves a strong, appropriately designed drug awareness campaigns in communities and schools (primary, secondary, and tertiary), emphasizing the physical and psychological effects of commonly abused substances. Again, Psychotherapy and Rehabilitation Services should be made available and accessible and should be appealing to young people. Counseling, rehabilitation, and support services should be more available and accessible throughout the State. These services

should target substance abuse as well as underlying mental illnesses. They should not be a ploy to apprehend abusers and indict them.

Pattern of substance abuse also revealed that dual substance abuse was the most common type of substance misuse, as reported by the study 282 patients (61%) seconded by Poly-substance abuse -33 patients (7%). This simply means abusing or mixing more than one substance and taking it at the same time. This can lead to serious health complications and may even lead to death. Crabbe (2025) and Adam (2025) state that this could lead to Mental health disorders, brain damage and chronic health problems. Other abused substances according to our study were cannabis use with 120 patients (26%). while alcohol use was reported by 11 patients (2%). Less common substances included cocaine (4 patients; 1%), tramadol (3 patients; 1%), methamphetamine (3 patients; 1%), cannabinoids (2 patients; 0%), heroin (1 patient; 0%), amphetamine (1 patient; 0%), and codeine (1 patient; 0%). Similarly, a review of secondary data collated from University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital' mental health department done by Nkporbu et al. (2021) showed that 42.3% (43 males, 1 female) used cannabis, alcohol was 13.5% (14 males, no female), tobacco 11.5% (12 males, no female), opioids 9.62% (8 males, 2 females), tramadol 7.69% (6 males, 2 females), cocaine 4.81% (5 males, no female), codeine 3.85% (4 males, no female), pentazocine 2.88% (2 males, 1 female), cracked cocaine 1.98% (2 males, no female), while 0.96% (2 males, no female) used sedative hypnotics and hallucinogens. Majority of the subjects were males 98 (94.2%), singles 93 (89.4%), and had tertiary education 73 (75.0%).

According to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency's annual report on drug misuse in Nigeria for 2019, poly-drug use has increased in Rivers State, where almost 25% of young people who use drugs, report combining multiple substances. According to the same report on drug use, there was a gender gap in 2017 with approximately 70% of reported drug users being men and higher rates among urban teenagers. (Grant, & Enyindah, 2024).

In line with this, Azi and Maduka's (2021) study showed that alcohol was the most often used substance, accounting for 65%, followed by kolanut (63.1%), cigarettes (61%), paracetamol (41.5%), butazolidine (39.3%), pemoline (28%), and cannabis (26%). Among them are valium (24%), ampicillin (24.3%), and tetracycline (25.7%). Heroin, cocaine, latex, gasoline, pethidine, and ativan were the least utilized (Azi & Maduka, 2021). This underscores why a Stronger Regulatory Frameworks should be instituted. This would mean to Increase the effectiveness of legislation governing the distribution and sale drug tobacco, alcohol, and prescription medications like tramadol, especially to children. The supply channels for illegal drugs should also be cracked down. Addressing this complicated issue involves an integrated approach and collaboration involving government agencies, educational institutions, healthcare professionals, community leaders, families, and non-governmental groups.

Our study also showed a consistent distribution across the five-year period, with each year accounting for approximately 20% of the total cases (N=461). Specifically, 92 cases (20%) were recorded in 2020, 93 cases (20%) in 2021, 91 cases (20%) in 2022, 92 cases (20%) in 2023, and 93 cases (20%) in 2024. This uniform pattern suggests a stable annual prevalence of substance abuse within the study setting, indicating no significant fluctuations in occurrence across the years under review. According to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency's Annual Report on Drug Abuse in Nigeria for 2015, the prevalence of drug use in Rivers State was 12.5% of young people in the state who reported using drugs, with cannabis being the most regularly abused substance. Again, 15% of secondary school students in Port Harcourt had tried with drugs, primarily cannabis, according to a 2016 report on substance use among students conducted by Rivers State (Grant & Enyindah, 2024). Approximately 70% of drug users in 2017 were men, and drug use was higher

among urban teenagers, according to reports on gender difference. According to Rivers State's Ministry of Health's annual report on substance abuse, prescription drug usage increased in 2018. (Grant, & Enyindah, 2024). Approximately 20% of teenagers between the ages of 15 and 24 reported abusing prescription drugs like codeine and tramadol. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency's 2020 Annual Report on Drug addiction in Nigeria detailed the effect of COVID-19 on drug addiction in Rivers State. The prevalence of young people who take drugs rose from 12.5% in 2015 to 23% in 2020. (Grant & Enyindah, 2024). Corroborating this is a study by Azi and Maduka (2021) where at the time of the study, 87% of respondents were using at least one substance, and 3% had used it in the previous 12 months (Azi & Maduka, 2021).

The negative impacts of substance abuse are also a matter of consideration. Effects such as substance use disorder, substance-induced psychosis and mental behavioral disorder are not to be treated with kids' gloves. These findings also agree with Ernest and Asor (2022) whose study revealed that abusers of substance are at risk of mental health complications such as depression, schizophrenia, daytime sleepiness, and anxiety disorder, etc. (Ernest & Asor, 2022). The duration of abuse is another concern as our study showed (49%) had abused substances for less than one month. A smaller proportion (11%) reported substance abuse for 1–11 months, while 17% had a duration between 1–5 years. Furthermore, 16% reported 6–10 years of substance abuse, and 4% had abused substances for 11–15 years. Only 2% each reported abuse for 16–20 years and 21 years or more. This indicates that while a significant number of patients were recent users, there is also a considerable proportion with long-term substance abuse histories. Other effects include social effects and physical health effect which are common factors among substance abusers (Adam, 2025). This calls for Parental and Family Engagement which is aimed at Promoting parental participation in drug prevention by offering seminars and awareness programs that provide parents the tools they need to keep an eye on their children and wards, communicate openly, and spot substance use symptoms early.

CONCLUSION

The prevalence of alcohol and cannabis usage, as well as dual/poly drug abusers, are characteristics of the substance abuse pattern among young people in Rivers State, Nigeria. Young men are disproportionately impacted, especially those under the age of 26. A number of factors combine to make the issue worse, such as easy access to drugs, stress-coping strategies, natural adolescent curiosity, and strong peer pressure. The detrimental impacts on social behavior and health emphasize how urgently coordinated measures are needed.

References

- Adam, S. (2025). *Polysubstance abuse: Common patterns, causes, effects, diagnosis, treatment and challenges*. <https://olympicbehavioralhealth.com/rehab-blog/polysubstance-abuse/>
- Amadi, J. C. (2024). *Drug abuse among secondary school students in Rivers State*. <https://www.seahipublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IJIER-S-1-2024.pdf>
- Azi, E. I., & Maduka, O. (2021). Substance use and associated factors among junior students in a public secondary school in an urban local government area in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Medicine*, 30(5), 532-537.
- Crabbe, R., (2025). *Polysubstance abuse*. <https://freebythesea.com/polysubstance-abuse/>
- Data Project (2025). *An investigation of the influence of peer pressure on youth drug abuse in Ahoada East Local Government Area, Rivers State*. <https://datapointng.com/project/33590/An%20investigation%20of%20the%20influence%20of%20peer%20pressure%20on%20youth%20drug%20abuse%20in%20Ahoada>

- Eneh, A. U., & Stanley, P. C. (2004). Pattern of substance use among secondary school students in Rivers State. *Nigerian Journal of Medicine: Journal of the National Association of Resident Doctors of Nigeria*, 13(1), 36-39.
- Eneji, R. I., Odey, S. A., Asuquo, E. M., & Ekene, O. G. (2024). Socio-demographic parameters of drug addiction in the southern cross river, Nigeria. *Humanities and Social Sciences Letters*, 12(1), 24-32.
- Ernest, I. S. & Asor, A.C. 2022. Abuse of psychotropic drugs and mental health challenges among the youth of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. *International Journal on Integrated Education*. 5 (5), 165–174. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.31149/ijie.v5i5.3055>.
- Grant, N. C., & Enyindah, I. (2024). Drug abuse among youths in Rivers State, 2015-2020. *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 8(10), 174–189.
- Morral, A. R., McCaffrey, D. F., & Paddock, S. M. (2002). The gateway hypothesis: Theoretical models and statistical models. In D. B. Kandel (Ed.). *Stages and pathways of drug involvement: Examining the gateway hypothesis* (pp. 64-96). Cambridge University Press.
- National Bureau of Statistics (2018). *Drug use in Nigeria (2018)*. <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary/read/881#:~:text=The%20past%20year%20prevalence%20of,cent%20among%20the%20adult%20population>.
- Nkporbu, A. K. I., Oti, I. K., & Ugbomah, L., (2021). *Prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of substance use among patients attending the drug unit of the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital*. [https://biomedres.us/fulltexts/BJSTR.MS.ID.006241.php#:~:text=Results%20revealed%20that%2042.3%25%20\(43,2.88%25%20\(2%20males%2C%201](https://biomedres.us/fulltexts/BJSTR.MS.ID.006241.php#:~:text=Results%20revealed%20that%2042.3%25%20(43,2.88%25%20(2%20males%2C%201)
- Ojule, I. N., & Te-Erebe, H. B. (2022). Prevalence and predictors of substance use disorder among urban and rural secondary school students of Khana, Rivers State, Nigeria. *European Journal of Public Health Studies*, 5(2).
- Olanrewaju, J. A., Hamzat, E. O., Enya, J. I., Udekwu, M. O., Osuoya, Q., Bamidele, R., Feyisike Johnson, O., Johnson, B. S., Olanrewaju, I., & Owolabi, J. O. (2022). An assessment of drug and substance abuse prevalence: a cross-sectional study among undergraduates in selected southwestern universities in Nigeria. *The Journal of International Medical Research*, 50(10), 3000605221130039. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03000605221130039>
- Oluwasanmi, L. (2022). *Effects and consequences of drug abuse*. <https://eksu.edu.ng/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Students-Orientation.pdf>
- Pepple, B. G., Iruo, L. A., Lilly-West, B. R., Dappa, G. L., Olunwa, R. O., & Nkomadu, O. S. (2024). Level of substance use disorders among youths of Rumuekpe community in Emouha Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria. *Journal of Community and Social Health Nursing*, 6(1), 32-42.
- Tebu, O., Ojule, I., & Chinda, H. (2025). Prevalence and determinants of substance use among students attending tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Journal of the Medical Women's Association of Nigeria*, 10(1).
- UNODC (2024). *UNODC world drug report 2024: Harms of world drug problem continue to mount amid expansions in drug use and markets*. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/press/releases/2024/June/unodc-world-drug-report-2024-harms-of-world-drug-problem-continue-to-mount-amid-expansions-in-drug-use-and-markets.html#:~:text=We%20need%2>
- WHO (2025). *Substance abuse*. <https://www.afro.who.int/health-topics/substance-abuse#:~:text=Financial%20reports-,The%20Transformation%20Agenda%20%2C%20BB,consequences%20experienced%20by%20it>