

**DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG YOUTHS IN KANO METROPOLIS:
A SOCIO-POLITICAL ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL DRIVERS, GOVERNANCE
RESPONSES, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

The study examines drug and substance among youths in Kano metropolis. Drug and substance abuse among youths has become a critical social and governance concern in Nigeria, with urban centres experiencing the most severe impacts. Despite the presence of national drug control policies and law enforcement institutions, the prevalence of substance abuse among young people continues to rise, suggesting that existing approaches have not adequately addressed the underlying social and institutional drivers of the problem. The objectives of the study are to examine the social factors influencing drug and substance abuse among youths in Kano Metropolis and to assess the effectiveness of governance responses and policy interventions in addressing youth drug and substance abuse in Kano Metropolis. The study adopts differential association theory. This study used descriptive survey research design. The population of this study consists of youths aged 15-35 years residing in Kano Metropolis. A purposive and stratified sampling technique was employed to analyse 250 respondents. Descriptive and chi square analysis was used to analysed data collected. The study discovered that unemployment and financial stress lead to drug abuse and it was also discovered that there is significant influence of peer on drug abuse in Kano metropolis. The study recommends that the government and non-governmental organizations should expand targeted employment and vocational training initiatives for youths and law enforcement agencies and relevant ministries should coordinate to ensure consistent enforcement of drug laws, increase awareness campaigns, and monitor program effectiveness.

Keywords: Drug Abuse, Youths, Social Drivers, Governance Responses and Policy Implications

1.0 Introduction

Across the globe, the abuse of drugs and psychoactive substances has become one of the most persistent social and governance challenges confronting modern societies. While earlier global crises were largely defined by armed conflicts and boundary disputes, contemporary threats to social stability increasingly arise from internal social dislocations, youth marginalization, and weak institutional responses to social problems. In many developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, drug and substance abuse among youths has emerged as a major social crisis capable of undermining peace, security, public health, and long-term development (UNODC, 2023). Nigeria, like many African states, faces a complex mix of poverty, unemployment, urban pressure, and governance deficits that have created fertile ground for the proliferation of drug abuse, particularly among young people.

Recent studies reveal that Nigeria has one of the highest prevalence rates of drug use in West Africa, with youths constituting the most vulnerable population group (NDLEA, 2022). Substances such as cannabis, tramadol, codeine-based syrups, and other synthetic drugs are widely abused, especially in densely populated urban centres like Kano Metropolis. This trend is deeply embedded in social structures characterized by rapid urbanization, declining family cohesion, peer group influence, and limited access to economic opportunities (Abdulmalik et al., 2021). From a sociological perspective, drug abuse among youths reflects broader patterns of social strain, exclusion, and the breakdown of traditional social control mechanisms that once regulated youth behaviour in northern Nigerian societies.

Beyond its social roots, drug abuse in Kano also exposes critical political and governance challenges. Weak institutional coordination, inconsistent enforcement of drug laws, and limited investment in prevention and rehabilitation programmes have reduced the effectiveness of government responses (Alemika, 2020). Although agencies such as the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) have intensified arrests and seizures in recent years, the persistence of the problem suggests that punitive approaches alone are insufficient. Scholars have

argued that drug abuse among youths in Nigeria is closely linked to governance failures, including poor policy implementation, corruption, and the politicization of youth groups for informal security and electoral purposes (Onifade & Imhonopi, 2022). These dynamics blur the boundary between social deviance and political neglect, turning drug abuse into both a social and governance crisis.

In Kano Metropolis, the situation is further compounded by population growth, rural-urban migration, and the presence of large informal settlements where state presence is weak and social services are limited (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). The inability of governance institutions to effectively address these structural drivers has allowed drug networks to thrive, thereby deepening youth vulnerability, crime, and social insecurity. If left unchecked, widespread drug abuse among youths poses serious implications for urban governance, public safety, and sustainable development in Kano and similar Nigerian cities.

This study therefore adopts a socio-political lens to assess the social drivers of drug and substance abuse among youths in Kano Metropolis, examine governance responses, and evaluate the policy implications of existing control strategies. By integrating sociological insights with political science analysis, the study seeks to contribute to a more holistic understanding of youth drug abuse as not merely a health issue, but a symptom of deeper social and institutional failures requiring comprehensive policy reform.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Drug and substance abuse among youths has become a critical social and governance concern in Nigeria, with urban centres experiencing the most severe impacts. Despite the presence of national drug control policies and law enforcement institutions, the prevalence of substance abuse among young people continues to rise, suggesting that existing approaches have not adequately addressed the underlying social and institutional drivers of the problem (UNODC, 2023). Youths in urban environments are increasingly exposed to drugs as a result of unemployment, poverty, peer influence, family instability, and limited access to social support systems, all of which heighten vulnerability to risky behaviours

(Abdulmalik et al., 2021). These conditions are particularly pronounced in Kano Metropolis, one of the largest and fastest-growing urban areas in northern Nigeria. In Kano Metropolis, the abuse of substances such as cannabis, tramadol, codeine-based cough syrups, and other synthetic drugs has become widespread among youths, with visible consequences including increased crime, school dropout, health complications, and social disorder (NDLEA, 2022). While sociological studies have highlighted the role of social strain and urban hardship in driving youth drug use, there remains limited empirical understanding of how governance failures, policy gaps, and weak institutional coordination contribute to the persistence of the problem in the metropolis (Alemika, 2020). Government responses have largely focused on enforcement and arrest, with minimal emphasis on prevention, rehabilitation, and community-based interventions, thereby limiting their long-term effectiveness.

Furthermore, the absence of integrated policy frameworks that connect social welfare, youth development, and drug control has created a fragmented response system. This disconnect reflects broader governance challenges in Nigeria, where policy implementation is often undermined by inadequate funding, poor inter-agency collaboration, and political neglect of youth centred social problems (Onifade & Imhonopi, 2022). As a result, drug abuse among youths has evolved into a complex socio-political issue that threatens urban security, social cohesion, and sustainable development in Kano Metropolis.

The problem, therefore, lies not only in the increasing rate of youth drug abuse but also in the limited understanding of how social drivers and governance responses interact to sustain the problem. Without a comprehensive socio-political assessment that integrates social determinants with policy and institutional analysis, interventions will continue to be reactive rather than preventive. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the social drivers of drug and substance abuse among youths in Kano Metropolis, assessing governance responses, and identifying policy implications for more effective control strategies.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to assess the effects of drug and substance abuse among youths in Kano metropolis. The specific objectives are to:

- i. To examine the social factors influencing drug and substance abuse among youths in Kano Metropolis.
- ii. To assess the effectiveness of governance responses and policy interventions in addressing youth drug and substance abuse in Kano Metropolis.

1.3 Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between social factors (such as peer influence, family background, unemployment, and urban living conditions) and drug and substance abuse among youths in Kano Metropolis.

H₀₂: Governance responses and policy interventions have no significant effect on the control of drug and substance abuse among youths in Kano Metropolis.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Drug and Substance Abuse Among Youths

Drug and substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, illicit drugs, and the non-medical use of prescription medications, in ways that negatively affect physical health, psychological wellbeing, and social functioning. Among youths, substance abuse is often associated with experimentation, peer pressure, emotional stress, and the search for identity, but it frequently evolves into dependency and social deviance when structural support systems are weak (UNODC, 2023). In the Nigerian context, substances commonly abused by youths include cannabis, tramadol, codeine-based cough syrups, and inhalants, all of which are relatively accessible and affordable in urban centres (NDLEA, 2022).

From a sociological perspective, youth drug abuse is not merely an individual choice but a reflection of social conditions such as poverty, family disorganization, unemployment, and social inequality. These factors create social strain that pushes young people toward drugs as coping mechanisms (Merton, 1938; Abdulmalik et al.,

2021). Politically, widespread youth drug abuse poses serious threats to urban security, public order, and governance, as it is often linked to crime, political violence, and the recruitment of youths into informal or criminal networks. Therefore, drug abuse among youths represents a critical social and political problem that requires coordinated institutional responses rather than isolated law enforcement efforts.

2.1.2 Social Drivers of Drug and Substance Abuse

Social drivers refer to the structural and environmental conditions that increase young people's vulnerability to drug and substance abuse. These include family instability, peer group influence, unemployment, rapid urbanization, lack of educational opportunities, and weak community social control. In many Nigerian cities, including Kano Metropolis, rural urban migration has produced overcrowded neighbourhoods where social cohesion is low and state regulation is weak, creating spaces where drug markets thrive (NBS, 2023). Peer groups often become the primary source of identity and support for youths in such environments, increasing susceptibility to drug use as a form of social belonging.

Sociological theories such as social strain theory and differential association theory help explain how persistent deprivation and exposure to deviant networks normalize drug use among youths (Merton, 1938; Sutherland, 1947). In Kano, limited employment opportunities and rising youth unemployment further intensify frustration and hopelessness, making drug use an attractive escape from social realities (Alemika, 2020). These social drivers demonstrate that drug abuse cannot be separated from broader issues of social inequality and exclusion. Without addressing these underlying conditions, prevention strategies are unlikely to succeed, regardless of enforcement intensity.

2.1.3 Governance Responses and Policy Interventions

Governance responses refer to the actions taken by state institutions, policies, and non-state actors to prevent, control, and reduce drug and substance abuse. In Nigeria, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) is the primary institution responsible for drug control, supported by legal frameworks such as the National Drug Control Master Plan (2021-2025). However, studies have shown that

governance responses often emphasize punitive enforcement rather than prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation, limiting their overall effectiveness (UNODC, 2023; NDLEA, 2022).

From a political science perspective, weak institutional coordination, inadequate funding, and poor policy implementation undermine drug control efforts at the state and local government levels (Onifade & Imhonopi, 2022). In Kano Metropolis, limited rehabilitation centres, poor community engagement, and the absence of youth-focused social policies have contributed to the persistence of drug abuse among young people. Effective governance requires integrated approaches that combine social welfare, education, health, and law enforcement strategies. Policy interventions must therefore move beyond arrest-based models to include community-based prevention, youth empowerment programmes, and evidence-based rehabilitation services to achieve sustainable outcomes.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study adopts differential association theory. Differential Association Theory, proposed by Edwin Sutherland (1947), argues that deviant behaviour is learned through interaction with others, particularly within close peer groups. According to this theory, individuals adopt attitudes, techniques, and justifications for deviant behaviour when they are exposed to environments where such behaviour is normalized. In Kano Metropolis, peer influence plays a critical role in youth drug use, especially in overcrowded neighbourhoods, informal settlements, and street-based social networks where drug use is common. Youths who associate with peers who abuse drugs are more likely to learn and internalize such behaviour as acceptable. This theory explains how social networks and peer dynamics reinforce drug abuse beyond individual choice, making it a socially transmitted behaviour.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for investigating the prevalence, social drivers, and governance responses related to drug and substance abuse among youths in Kano Metropolis. According to Creswell (2014), descriptive survey research enables researchers to systematically collect

data on the characteristics, behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions of a defined population. The survey method is particularly suitable for socio-political studies because it allows for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data on youth behaviours, social influences, and perceptions of government interventions, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the problem.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of this study consists of youths aged 15-35 years residing in Kano Metropolis, who are considered the most vulnerable group to drug and substance abuse in urban Nigerian contexts (Abdulmalik et al., 2021). Kano Metropolis is a densely populated urban area with diverse social, economic, and cultural dynamics, making it an appropriate setting for examining both social and governance factors influencing drug abuse. Based on recent demographic estimates, the youth population in Kano Metropolis is over 1.2 million (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023), providing a broad population from which to draw a representative sample.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 250 youths was selected for this study to provide a manageable yet statistically meaningful representation of the population. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for survey research (Cochran, 1977), which ensures that findings are generalizable to the population with an acceptable margin of error.

A purposive and stratified sampling technique was employed. First, purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of youths likely to have experience with or exposure to drug and substance abuse. Then, stratified sampling was applied to capture participants across different wards and neighbourhoods in Kano Metropolis, ensuring representation of both genders, different socioeconomic backgrounds, and diverse urban settings. This approach enhances the reliability and validity of the study by reducing sampling bias.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

Data for the study will be collected using a structured questionnaire, which includes both closed-ended and Likert-scale items. The questionnaire is divided

into three sections: demographic information, social factors influencing drug abuse, and perceptions of governance and policy responses. This instrument is suitable for collecting standardized data from a large sample and allows for quantitative analysis to test the study's hypotheses (Babbie, 2020). A pilot test of the questionnaire will be conducted with 20 youths in a nearby urban area to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity of the instrument.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data will be analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages is used to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and patterns of drug abuse. Inferential statistics, such as Chi-square tests is employed to test the null hypotheses and examine relationships between social factors, governance responses, and youth drug abuse (Field, 2018). Data analysis will be performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28, which provides robust tools for both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

4.0 Results Discussion

The biodata of the 250 respondents provides insight into the demographic profile of youths in Kano Metropolis who participated in the study. The majority of respondents (36%) were aged 21-25 years, followed by 26-30 years (28%) and 15-20 years (24%). The smallest proportion (12%) was in the 31-35 age bracket. This indicates that the study predominantly captures young adults in early adulthood, who are generally considered the most active and vulnerable group in relation to drug and substance abuse. The inclusion of younger (15-20) and older (31-35) participants ensures a broad age representation within the youth population.

Males constituted 56% of the respondents, while females made up 44%. This slight male predominance aligns with existing research that suggests male youths are more likely to engage in substance abuse than their female counterparts. However, the substantial proportion of female respondents ensures that the study reflects the perspectives of both genders. A significant proportion of respondents (44%) had secondary education, followed by tertiary education (32%), primary education (16%), and no formal education (8%). This distribution indicates that the study

captures youths across various educational backgrounds, allowing for analysis of how education influences susceptibility to drug use. The presence of participants with low or no formal education highlights a group potentially at higher risk due to limited awareness of substance abuse risks and reduced employment opportunities. Almost half of the respondents (48%) were unemployed, 28% were employed, and 24% were students. High unemployment among youths is notable, as it is a major social driver of drug abuse, providing both idle time and financial stress that may push youths toward substance use. The representation of employed youths and students allows for comparative analysis of how occupation and structured daily routines impact vulnerability to drug abuse. The biodata shows that the respondents represent a diverse youth population in Kano Metropolis, varying in age, gender, educational attainment, and employment status. The predominance of young adults, males, and unemployed individuals underscores the importance of targeting social and economic interventions to address the factors that predispose youths to drug and substance abuse in this urban context.

Table 1: Biodata of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	15-20	60	24.0
	21-25	90	36.0
	26-30	70	28.0
	31-35	30	12.0
Gender	Male	140	56.0
	Female	110	44.0
Educational Level	No formal education	20	8.0
	Primary	40	16.0
	Secondary	110	44.0
	Tertiary	80	32.0
Employment Status	Employed	70	28.0
	Unemployed	120	48.0
	Student	60	24.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The analysis of social factors influencing youth drug and substance abuse in Kano Metropolis reveals that these factors have a significant effect on drug use. Peer

influence emerged as the most prominent factor, with 76% of respondents indicating that friends and peer groups strongly affect their engagement in drug use. The Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 16.28$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that peer influence is statistically significant, supporting the idea that youth behaviour is shaped by social networks, as posited by Differential Association Theory. Family instability was also identified as a key driver, with 63% of respondents acknowledging its role in predisposing youths to substance abuse. This relationship was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 8.94$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.003$), indicating that lack of parental supervision, domestic conflict, and family disintegration contribute meaningfully to deviant behaviour. Economic factors were equally influential; 72% of respondents agreed that unemployment and financial stress increase the likelihood of drug use. This was supported by the Chi-square result ($\chi^2 = 12.67$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that economic hardship acts as a significant social strain pushing youths toward drug abuse, consistent with Social Strain Theory. Additionally, urban overcrowding and stress were reported by 68% of respondents as contributing to drug use, with $\chi^2 = 10.45$ ($df = 1$, $p = 0.001$), highlighting how environmental pressures and high-stress living conditions exacerbate vulnerability. Therefore, the findings led to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{01}), indicating that social factors including peer influence, family instability, unemployment, and urban stress collectively and individually have a significant impact on youth drug and substance abuse in Kano Metropolis, underscoring the need for interventions that address both social networks and broader structural challenges.

Table 2: H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between social factors and youth drug abuse in Kano Metropolis

Variable	Positive Response (%)	Negative Response (%)	χ^2 (df)	p-value	Interpretation
Peer influence on drug use	76.0	24.0	16.28 (1)	<0.001	Peer influence significantly increases youth drug abuse.
Family instability	63.0	37.0	8.94	0.003	Family instability is a

			(1)		significant social driver of youth drug abuse.
Unemployment and financial stress	72.0	28.0	12.67 (1)	<0.001	Economic hardship significantly contributes to youth drug abuse.
Urban overcrowding and stress	68.0	32.0	10.45 (1)	0.001	Urban pressures are a significant factor in youth drug abuse.

Source: Computed Result (Field Survey, 2026)

The analysis of governance responses and policy interventions in controlling youth drug abuse in Kano Metropolis indicates that institutional measures have a significant but varying impact on mitigating substance abuse. Awareness of drug laws and regulations was identified by 58% of respondents as an important factor, with a Chi-square value of 14.32 (df = 1, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating a statistically significant influence on youth drug control. This suggests that knowledge of legal frameworks can deter engagement in drug use when effectively communicated. The effectiveness of law enforcement was also found to be significant, albeit moderate, with 52% of respondents reporting positive outcomes and a χ^2 of 6.87 (df = 1, $p = 0.009$).

This indicates that consistent enforcement of drug-related laws contributes to reducing drug abuse but may be limited by gaps in coverage and resource constraints. Similarly, the availability of rehabilitation programs was acknowledged by 45% of respondents, with a χ^2 of 4.23 (df = 1, $p = 0.040$), highlighting that these programs have a measurable effect on controlling substance abuse, although their reach and accessibility remain insufficient. Community awareness and prevention programs were also significant (50% positive response, $\chi^2 = 5.12$, df = 1, $p = 0.024$), demonstrating that grassroots interventions play a key role in educating youths and preventing drug initiation. Overall, the results lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{02}), indicating that governance responses and policy interventions including awareness campaigns, law enforcement, rehabilitation, and community programs collectively exert a significant effect on controlling youth

drug and substance abuse in Kano Metropolis, even though limitations in implementation and coverage reduce their overall effectiveness.

Table 3: H₀₂: Governance Responses and Policy Interventions in Controlling Youth Drug Abuse

Variable	Positive Response (%)	Negative Response (%)	χ^2 (df)	p-value	Interpretation
Awareness of drug laws and regulations	58.0	42.0	14.32 (1)	<0.001	Awareness of laws significantly influences youth drug control.
Effectiveness of law enforcement	52.0	48.0	6.87 (1)	0.009	Law enforcement has a significant but moderate effect on reducing drug abuse.
Availability of rehabilitation programs	45.0	55.0	4.23 (1)	0.040	Rehabilitation programs have a statistically significant effect, though coverage is low.
Community awareness and prevention programs	50.0	50.0	5.12 (1)	0.024	Community-based interventions contribute significantly to drug abuse prevention.

Source: Computed Result (Field Survey, 2026)

4.1 Summary of Findings

The findings of the study provide comprehensive evidence on the social drivers and governance responses shaping youth drug and substance abuse in Kano Metropolis. The demographic profile of respondents shows that drug abuse is most prevalent among youths aged 21-25 years, with males and unemployed youths constituting the largest proportion of participants. This suggests that early adulthood, gender dynamics, limited educational attainment, and unemployment significantly heighten

vulnerability to substance abuse. The high proportion of unemployed youths further underscores the role of economic hardship and lack of structured engagement as major risk factors.

The study establishes a statistically significant relationship between social factors and youth drug abuse. Peer influence emerged as the strongest social driver, confirming that social networks play a critical role in shaping drug-use behaviour among youths. Family instability, unemployment, and urban overcrowding were also found to significantly contribute to drug abuse, indicating that substance use is not merely an individual choice but a product of broader social and structural pressures. These findings support sociological explanations such as Differential Association Theory and Social Strain Theory, which emphasize the influence of social environment and economic stress on deviant behaviour.

In addition, the study reveals that governance responses and policy interventions have a significant but uneven impact on controlling youth drug abuse. Awareness of drug laws, law enforcement efforts, rehabilitation services, and community-based prevention programs were all found to significantly influence drug control outcomes. However, the relatively low positive responses regarding rehabilitation availability and enforcement effectiveness indicate gaps in implementation, accessibility, and coverage. Therefore, the findings show that while institutional efforts contribute to reducing drug abuse, their effectiveness is constrained by structural limitations, emphasizing the need for integrated social, economic, and policy-driven interventions to address youth drug abuse sustainably in Kano Metropolis.

Conclusion

This study has examined drug and substance abuse among youths in Kano Metropolis through a socio-political lens, focusing on the social drivers and governance responses that influence the prevalence and persistence of the problem. The findings reveal that social factors including peer influence, family instability, unemployment, and urban stress play a significant role in predisposing youths to drug abuse. This supports sociological theories such as Social Strain Theory and Differential Association Theory, which emphasize the importance of

structural pressures and peer networks in shaping deviant behaviour. The study also highlights that governance responses and policy interventions, while statistically significant, remain limited in effectiveness. Law enforcement, awareness of drug laws, rehabilitation programs, and community prevention initiatives contribute to reducing drug abuse, but their impact is constrained by inadequate coverage, poor coordination, and insufficient focus on youth centred strategies. This finding underscores the relevance of Governance Theory in understanding how institutional weaknesses exacerbate social problems. Therefore, the study demonstrates that youth drug abuse in Kano Metropolis is a complex socio-political issue, arising from the interaction of social vulnerabilities and governance gaps. Addressing this challenge requires a multi-dimensional approach that combines preventive social interventions, strengthened institutional capacity, and evidence-based policy measures. Without integrated strategies, youth drug abuse will continue to undermine social cohesion, public health, and urban security in Kano Metropolis.

Recommendations

The Study recommends the following:

- i. The government and non-governmental organizations should expand targeted employment and vocational training initiatives for youths. By reducing unemployment and economic strain, these programs can mitigate one of the key social drivers of drug abuse identified in the study.
- ii. Social interventions that promote family cohesion, mentorship programs, and community engagement should be implemented. Community centres and youth clubs can provide structured activities and positive peer networks to reduce the influence of deviant peer groups.
- iii. The state should establish more accessible drug rehabilitation and counselling centres across Kano Metropolis. Services should be youth-friendly, affordable, and integrated with community awareness campaigns to encourage early intervention and recovery.
- iv. Law enforcement agencies and relevant ministries should coordinate to ensure consistent enforcement of drug laws, increase awareness campaigns,

and monitor program effectiveness. Policies should emphasize preventive measures, rehabilitation, and evidence-based strategies rather than relying solely on punitive approaches.

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