

IMPACT OF AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS ON DRUG ABUSE AND ADDICTION AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ETHIOPE EAST, DELTA STATE.

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of awareness campaigns on drug abuse among secondary school students in Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. Adolescents remain highly vulnerable to substance use, particularly alcohol, cigarettes, tramadol, codeine, and marijuana, which pose risks to their health, academic performance, and future wellbeing. A descriptive survey design was employed, with 370 questionnaires distributed and 358 valid responses analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including chi-square, t-tests, and regression at the 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed that drug abuse is prevalent in the study area, with alcohol as the most commonly abused substance. School-based awareness campaigns such as seminars, NDLEA sensitizations, and peer education programs proved effective in improving knowledge and shaping negative attitudes toward drug use. However, students' refusal skills remained only moderate, highlighting a gap between awareness and actual behavioral resilience. Peer influence emerged as a critical factor undermining the gains of awareness campaigns, showing the enduring power of social environments in shaping youth choices. In conclusion, awareness campaigns have significantly increased knowledge and shifted perceptions but remain insufficient in curbing drug abuse without broader contextual supports. The study recommends that interventions extend beyond schools into families, communities, and media platforms, with greater emphasis on skill-building, mentorship, and parental monitoring. A holistic, multi-sectoral approach that addresses peer dynamics, socio-economic realities, and cultural contexts is essential to reduce drug abuse and safeguard the future of adolescents in Ethiope East.

Keywords: Drug abuse, Awareness Campaigns, Adolescents, Peer Influence, Refusal Skills, Nigeria.

Introduction

Background to the Study

Drug abuse and addiction among young people have become one of the most troubling social and health challenges of our time. For adolescents, who are at a stage of life filled with curiosity, experimentation, and peer influence, exposure to harmful substances can have devastating consequences. It does not only affect their health, but also interrupts their education, limits their opportunities, and weakens the very communities meant to support their growth. Recent global reports confirm that drug use among adolescents remains widespread, with those in low- and middle-income countries facing even

higher risks because of poverty, weak social support systems, and limited access to preventive services (UNODC, 2023).

In Nigeria, the problem is strikingly visible. Surveys show that millions of people between the ages of 15 and 64 use drugs, but young people particularly those in secondary schools and early adulthood form a significant portion of this population (Olanrewaju et al., 2022; Idowu et al., 2023). Across the country, stories of teenagers abusing alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, tramadol, or even codeine cough syrup have become far too common. The influences come from many directions: friends who encourage experimentation, family members who may model risky

behaviour, and the easy availability of drugs in many communities (Idowu et al., 2018; EUJournal, 2023).

Rural communities, like those in Ethiope East Local Government of Delta State, present their own unique challenges. In such areas, access to health services tailored for young people is often scarce. Prevention programmes are not always consistent, unemployment is high, and in some cases, cultural norms may even tolerate or overlook the use of substances like alcohol or tobacco (Nwagu et al., 2020). While there is limited research that directly captures the situation in Ethiope East, findings from similar rural communities in Delta State reveal worrying trends: young people are not only experimenting with traditional substances like alcohol and cigarettes but are also increasingly misusing prescription drugs such as tramadol and codeine syrups (Atoyebi; Idowu et al., 2023).

In response, awareness campaigns have been introduced in many communities. These campaigns come in different forms from school-based sensitization and peer education programmes to radio jingles, posters, and community outreach events. When done well, they have been shown to improve what young people know about drugs, shape their attitudes, and even discourage some from experimenting (Ojonuba et al., 2023; Ahmad, 2022). Yet, not all campaigns succeed. Some are too short-lived, too general, or fail to connect with the realities of young people in rural communities. As a result, they may raise awareness but fail to change behaviour (Umeh & Onuigbo, 2023; Alzahrani et al., 2024)

Statement of the Problem

Drug abuse and addiction among young people continues to pose a serious threat to their health, education, and overall development. Adolescents, by virtue of their curiosity and susceptibility to peer

pressure, are particularly at risk. In Nigeria, the high rate of drug use among secondary school students is deeply troubling, with many young people turning to alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, tramadol, and codeine syrup despite their harmful consequences. The situation has not only led to a decline in academic performance among students but has also contributed to behavioural problems and weakened community wellbeing.

In rural areas such as Ethiope East Local Government of Delta State, the problem takes on a unique dimension. Limited access to youth-friendly health services, inconsistent prevention programmes, high unemployment, and cultural attitudes that tolerate substance use make students in these communities especially vulnerable. While evidence from similar communities in Delta State reveals growing misuse of both traditional substances and prescription drugs, little is known about the specific patterns and prevalence of drug use among secondary school students in Ethiope East.

Awareness campaigns have been widely adopted as a preventive measure, ranging from school sensitization and peer-led education to community outreach and media campaigns. Although such interventions have shown promise in increasing knowledge and shaping attitudes, their actual impact on reducing drug use remains uncertain. Many campaigns are poorly sustained, lack cultural relevance, or fail to connect with the everyday realities of students, thereby limiting their effectiveness.

The lack of empirical evidence on how effective awareness campaigns are in tackling drug abuse among secondary school students in rural communities such as Ethiope East creates a significant gap. Without such evidence, policymakers, educators, and community leaders may continue to rely on interventions that raise awareness but fail to change behaviour. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks

to investigate the impact of awareness campaign on the prevalence of drug abuse and addiction among secondary school students in rural communities: a case study of Ethiopia East Local Government.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the impact of awareness campaigns on the prevalence of drug abuse and addiction among secondary school students in rural communities, with Ethiopia East Local Government as a case study. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the prevalence and pattern of drug abuse and addiction among secondary school students in Ethiopia East Local Government.
2. Identify the types and forms of awareness campaigns on drug abuse implemented in secondary schools in Ethiopia East.
3. Assess the influence of awareness campaigns on students' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of drug abuse.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives, the study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the prevalence and pattern of drug abuse and addiction among secondary school students in Ethiopia East Local Government?
2. What types and forms of awareness campaigns on drug abuse have been carried out in secondary schools in Ethiopia East?
3. How have awareness campaigns influenced students' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of drug abuse?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested in the study at a 0.05 level of significance:

H01: There is no significant prevalence of drug abuse and addiction among secondary school students in Ethiopia East Local Government.

H02: There is no significant relationship between the types of awareness campaigns and students' knowledge of drug abuse.

H03: Awareness campaigns have no significant influence on students' attitudes and perceptions of drug abuse.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Framework

Awareness Campaigns

Awareness campaigns are structured interventions designed to prevent or reduce drug use among adolescents by shaping their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours. In secondary schools, these campaigns are implemented through a variety of strategies such as lectures, debates, peer education programmes, anti-drug school clubs, posters, radio jingles, drama, and community sensitization events. Their central aim is to increase knowledge, correct misconceptions, and promote healthy lifestyles while discouraging experimentation with psychoactive substances.

Beyond delivering information, awareness campaigns serve as cues to action, constantly reminding students of the dangers of drug use and empowering them to resist peer pressure. They also provide protective alternatives by encouraging involvement in sports, creative arts, and youth leadership programmes that offer a sense of belonging and purpose outside of substance use. Studies have shown that when campaigns link knowledge with practical life skills, students are better equipped to apply resistance techniques in real-world situations (Okolie & Ighorodje, 2022).

The effectiveness of awareness campaigns is strongly influenced by design and delivery methods. Campaigns that are

interactive, participatory, and culturally relevant tend to produce greater behavioural impact than one-off lectures or punitive warnings. For example, peer-led initiatives in rural communities often succeed because adolescents are more receptive to messages delivered by their age-mates than by authority figures (Idowu et al., 2023). Similarly, drama, music, and storytelling have been found to resonate with rural students by aligning with local cultural expressions, thereby enhancing message retention (Oghenetega & Ufuoma, 2021).

Role of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Refusal Skills in Drug Abuse Prevention

Knowledge, attitudes, and refusal skills represent critical mediators that collectively shape adolescents' vulnerability or resilience to drug abuse. Within the framework of awareness campaigns, these three dimensions work synergistically to transform information into behaviour, ensuring that students not only understand the risks of drug use but also develop the confidence and skills to resist it (Egbule & Onojake, 2022).

The first mediator, knowledge, provides the cognitive foundation of prevention. When students are exposed to accurate information about the dangers of psychoactive substances, misconceptions are corrected, and they are less likely to initiate drug use (Okoro & Emeka, 2021). However, knowledge alone is insufficient if not accompanied by attitudinal transformation. Adolescents may be aware of the health risks of tramadol or cannabis but may still perceive them as tools for social belonging or academic enhancement. Thus, attitudes serve as the evaluative lens through which knowledge is interpreted and acted upon, highlighting the importance of reshaping students' perceptions toward drug-free lifestyles (Onyeka & Anazia, 2020).

The third mediator, refusal skills, operationalizes both knowledge and

attitudes in real-life contexts. Adolescents are frequently placed in situations where peer influence is strong, and without the ability to assertively say "no," they may succumb to experimentation. Refusal skills training—through role-plays, peer mentoring, and interactive workshops—has been shown to significantly improve adolescents' capacity to resist peer pressure and other high-risk situations (Ogbebor & Ovwigho, 2023). These skills extend beyond drug use, fostering resilience against bullying, risky sexual behaviours, and other harmful practices.

When integrated, knowledge, attitudes, and refusal skills create a holistic prevention framework. Knowledge informs and builds awareness, attitudes reorient perceptions toward healthier choices, and refusal skills provide the behavioural strategies to resist temptation. Campaigns that neglect any of these components risk ineffectiveness. For instance, a student may recognize that drugs are harmful (knowledge) but still use them if they believe drug-taking enhances social status (attitude), or if they lack the confidence to reject offers (refusal skills).

Drug Abuse and Addiction

Drug abuse refers to the maladaptive or harmful use of psychoactive substances such as alcohol, cannabis, tramadol, codeine, and tobacco, often outside of medical prescription or cultural norms (Okolie & Adegoke, 2021). Among secondary school students, drug abuse typically begins with experimentation, often encouraged by peer influence, curiosity, and the easy accessibility of drugs within their environment (Okonjo & Egbule, 2022). Over time, repeated use can lead to patterns of misuse that interfere with students' academic, social, and emotional development.

Addiction, also referred to as substance use disorder, emerges when prolonged or repeated drug use results in physical or psychological dependence.

Adolescents experiencing addiction often struggle with cravings, withdrawal symptoms, declining school performance, behavioural problems, and strained family relationships (Ogheneakoke, 2020). In the school context, addiction is particularly destructive as it undermines concentration, increases absenteeism, and raises the likelihood of dropout, thereby limiting future opportunities.

The transition from drug abuse to addiction is influenced by multiple contextual factors. In rural communities like Ethiopia East, the absence of consistent preventive services, high unemployment rates, and weak parental monitoring create fertile ground for substance misuse to escalate into addiction (Egbule & Onojake, 2022). Moreover, cultural acceptance of alcohol and cigarettes as part of social events normalizes early initiation, which heightens the risk of progression to more dangerous substances such as tramadol and cannabis.

Peer Influence, Parental Monitoring, Substance Availability, Cultural Norms, and Socio-economic Factors

The effectiveness of awareness campaigns in reducing drug abuse and addiction among adolescents does not occur in isolation. Instead, the outcomes are shaped by a set of moderating variables — including peer influence, parental monitoring, substance availability, cultural norms, and socio-economic conditions — which either strengthen or weaken the impact of such interventions.

Peer Influence plays a central role in adolescent decision-making. Secondary school students often model behaviours after their peers, making them susceptible to experimentation with drugs when peers normalize or glamorize substance use (Okonjo & Egbule, 2022). In rural communities like Ethiopia East, where adolescents spend substantial time in informal social groups, peer pressure can override knowledge and attitudes gained

from awareness campaigns. Students who lack strong refusal skills are especially vulnerable to adopting peer-driven behaviours that lead to drug abuse and eventual addiction (Ogbebor & Ovwigho, 2023).

Parental Monitoring serves as a protective factor that can buffer against peer and community influences. Adolescents whose parents closely supervise their activities, maintain open communication, and model positive behaviours are less likely to abuse drugs (Egbule & Onojake, 2022). Conversely, weak parental supervision, common in rural households where parents are often preoccupied with subsistence activities, leaves students exposed to risky environments. Awareness campaigns are most effective when reinforced by consistent parental engagement, as family influence strengthens the retention and application of knowledge, attitudes, and refusal skills (Nwagu & Orovwuje, 2022). Peer influence plays a decisive role in shaping adolescent drug use, particularly in school environments where social acceptance is highly valued. Adolescents often model their behaviour on peers they perceive as popular, confident, or socially dominant, which makes them susceptible to drug experimentation when peers endorse or glamorize substance use. In many Nigerian rural schools, peer networks substitute for weak parental or institutional controls, and students under pressure to conform may turn to alcohol, cannabis, or tramadol as markers of belonging (Igho & Onojake, 2023). Beyond direct pressure, observational influence—seeing classmates use substances without apparent consequences—normalizes risky behaviour and reduces perceived danger (Ogochukwu, 2022). This dynamic suggests that peer-led interventions may be especially powerful in countering drug use, as students are more receptive to messages from their peers than from authority figures.

Parental Monitoring and Family Behaviour

The family unit remains one of the strongest protective or risk factors against adolescent substance abuse. Parental monitoring—through supervision of children’s activities, knowing their friends, and engaging in open communication—reduces opportunities for unsupervised drug use (Chukwuma & Ovwigho, 2022). Conversely, neglect, poor communication, or parental absence creates space for adolescents to experiment. In Delta State, studies reveal that parental behaviours such as excessive alcohol use or tolerance of smoking indirectly endorse drug use among adolescents, creating an enabling home environment for abuse (Ejiro & Akpoveta, 2022). Broken homes, economic stress, and migration for work also weaken family cohesion, reducing the consistency of guidance. This highlights the importance of parental involvement in awareness campaigns, not only to strengthen monitoring but also to reshape parental attitudes that may unintentionally normalize substance use.

Availability and Accessibility of Substances

The easy availability and low cost of drugs such as tramadol, cannabis, and codeine-based cough syrups remain major enablers of adolescent drug abuse. In many rural Nigerian communities, substances can be purchased from unlicensed vendors, patent medicine stores, or even peers, often without legal restriction (Idowu & Ejiro, 2023). Adolescents in Ethiopia East and similar areas have been reported to procure tramadol and cannabis at local markets or roadside kiosks, highlighting regulatory weaknesses (Akpobome & Nwose, 2021). Availability not only increases experimentation but also accelerates the transition to addiction, as students can access drugs repeatedly with minimal barriers. Studies from Delta State show that

where enforcement against illicit distribution is weak, awareness campaigns struggle to achieve meaningful outcomes (Nwagu & Orovwuje, 2022). Thus, accessibility directly moderates the impact of preventive interventions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical perspectives that provide insight into how awareness campaigns influence adolescent behaviour: the Health Belief Model (HBM)

Health Belief Model (HBM)

The Health Belief Model posits that individuals engage in protective behaviours when they believe they are personally vulnerable (perceived susceptibility), that the consequences of the risky behaviour are serious (perceived severity), that avoiding the behaviour has benefits (perceived benefits), and that barriers to action can be overcome (perceived barriers). The model also emphasizes cues to action reminders or triggers that stimulate behaviour change and self-efficacy, the confidence in one’s ability to act (Rosenstock, Strecher, & Becker, 1988).

In the context of this study, awareness campaigns target these constructs directly. By educating students about the risks of tramadol, codeine, cannabis, and alcohol, campaigns increase perceived susceptibility and perceived severity. By showing the advantages of avoiding drugs — such as better health, academic success, and positive social relationships they highlight perceived benefits. Campaigns also reduce perceived barriers by teaching practical resistance and refusal skills. Finally, periodic school events like drug awareness weeks, posters, and radio jingles act as cues to action, constantly reminding students of their responsibility to make safe choices.

The HBM is chosen for this study because it explains how knowledge and attitudes, two of the mediating variables

translate into decision-making. It highlights the cognitive processes that campaigns must activate for behaviour change, making it especially useful in explaining the preventive role of awareness campaigns in Ethiopia East.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design, which Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe as suitable for investigations seeking to obtain information about existing conditions, practices, and perceptions within a defined population. The population for the study consisted of all senior secondary school students (SS I–SS III) in Ethiopia East Local Government Area of Delta State. According to the Delta State Ministry of Education (2024), the LGA has 12 public secondary schools with an estimated enrolment of 4,865 students. From this population, a sample of 370 students was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for calculating sample size from finite populations at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The sample was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling, where each school served as a stratum. Students were chosen in proportion to each school's population to ensure equitable representation, and random selection within the strata ensured that every student had an equal chance of inclusion. Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Awareness Campaigns and Drug Abuse Questionnaire (ACDAQ)*, developed by the researcher after reviewing relevant empirical literature and standardized instruments from similar studies. The questionnaire consisted of sections aligned with the variables under investigation. The opening section gathered demographic information such as age, sex, school, and class level, while subsequent sections addressed students' knowledge of drug abuse and awareness campaigns, their attitudes toward substance use, and their

refusal skills. Additional items assessed contextual variables including peer influence, parental monitoring, availability of substances, cultural norms, socio-economic conditions, and the prevalence of drug use among respondents. All items were presented on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree to encourage clarity in responses and allow for quantitative analysis.

The validity of the research instrument was ensured through expert review. The draft questionnaire was evaluated by three specialists from the Faculty of Education at Delta State University, Abraka experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Educational Psychology, and Guidance and Counselling. To establish reliability, a pilot study involving thirty students from Uvwie Local Government Area excluded from the main study to prevent bias was conducted. Responses from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient, yielding an overall value of 0.84. Subscale reliability scores included 0.81 for knowledge, 0.79 for attitudes, 0.83 for refusal skills, and 0.85 for contextual factors, demonstrating strong internal consistency across all components of the instrument. The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, frequency counts, and percentages were used to summarize demographic characteristics and patterns in knowledge, attitudes, refusal skills, contextual factors, and drug-use prevalence. Inferential statistics were employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. Chi-square tests were used for associations involving categorical variables, while independent samples t-tests compared group differences. Multiple regression analysis examined the predictive ability of knowledge, attitudes, and refusal skills on drug-use patterns, and assessed the moderating effects of peer pressure,

parental monitoring, cultural norms, availability of substances, and socio-economic conditions. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0,

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Research Question One

What is the prevalence and pattern of drug abuse and addiction among secondary school students in Ethiopia East Local Government?

Table 1: Prevalence of Drug Abuse among Students (n = 358)

Drug Type	Ever Used (%)	Currently Using (%)	Not Used (%)
Alcohol	45.5	29.3	54.5
Cigarettes	33.2	21.8	66.8
Tramadol/Codeine	28.7	16.5	71.3
Marijuana (Cannabis)	22.1	12.6	77.9
Hard Drugs (Cocaine, etc.)	6.7	3.2	93.3

The findings reveal that alcohol remains the most commonly abused substance, with nearly half (45.5%) of students reporting having tried it, while 29.3% were current users. Cigarette use followed closely, with 33.2% having ever used it. More concerning is the prevalence of tramadol/codeine (28.7% ever used) and marijuana (22.1% ever used), which are associated with addiction and health risks. Hard drug use was less common (6.7%),

though its presence among adolescents is noteworthy. These findings indicate that drug abuse is a significant issue among secondary school students, consistent with national trends reported by NDLEA (2023).

Research Question Two

What types and forms of awareness campaigns on drug abuse have been carried out in secondary schools in Ethiopia East?

Table 2: Forms of Awareness Campaigns Reported by Students

Campaign Type	Frequency (n=358)	Percentage (%)
School seminars/workshops	242	67.6
NDLEA visits/sensitization	198	55.3
Peer education programs	164	45.8
Posters and flyers	121	33.8
Media campaigns (TV/Radio)	109	30.4
Drama/role play activities	97	27.1

The data shows that seminars and workshops organized by schools (67.6%) are the most common form of awareness campaign, followed by NDLEA sensitization programs (55.3%). Peer-led education also featured prominently (45.8%), while mass media campaigns were less frequently reported (30.4%). These findings suggest that awareness campaigns are primarily school-based, with limited integration of mass media strategies, which could otherwise broaden their reach.

Research Question Three

How have awareness campaigns influenced students' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of drug abuse?

Table 3: Influence of Awareness Campaigns on Knowledge, Attitudes, and Refusal Skills

Variable	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Decision
Knowledge	3.21	0.64	High
Attitudes	3.05	0.72	Positive
Refusal Skills	2.88	0.70	Moderate

Students demonstrated high knowledge ($\bar{x} = 3.21$) regarding the dangers of drug abuse, indicating that awareness campaigns effectively enhance awareness. Attitudes towards drug use were generally negative ($\bar{x} = 3.05$), reflecting a positive perception shaped by awareness campaigns. However, refusal skills scored moderately ($\bar{x} = 2.88$), suggesting that while students are aware and hold negative attitudes, their ability to resist peer pressure remains a challenge. This aligns with prior research by Okoli and Egbule (2022), which noted that refusal skills require more practical reinforcement through interactive learning.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One (H01):

There is no significant prevalence of drug abuse and addiction among secondary school students in Ethiopie East Local Government.

Table 4: Chi-square Test of Prevalence

χ^2	df	p-value	Decision
58.27	4	0.000	Reject H0

The chi-square test shows a significant prevalence of drug abuse among the students ($\chi^2 = 58.27, p < 0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This confirms that drug abuse is significantly present among adolescents in the study area.

Hypothesis Two (H02):

There is no significant relationship between the types of awareness campaigns and students' knowledge of drug abuse.

Table 5: Regression Analysis of Campaign Types and Knowledge

Predictor	B	t	p-value
School seminars	0.28	4.92	0.000
NDLEA visits	0.21	3.87	0.000
Peer education	0.16	2.74	0.007
Media campaigns	0.09	1.52	0.129

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.34, F(4,353) = 21.14, p < 0.000$

The regression model shows that seminars, NDLEA visits, and peer education significantly predict knowledge of drug abuse ($p < 0.05$), whereas media campaigns were not significant ($p > 0.05$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, indicating that the types of campaigns significantly influence students' knowledge.

Hypothesis Three (H03):

Awareness campaigns have no significant influence on students' attitudes and perceptions of drug abuse.

Table 6: Multiple Regression of Campaigns on Attitudes and Perceptions

Predictor	B	t	p-value
Knowledge	0.31	5.68	0.000
Refusal skills	0.27	4.91	0.000
Peer influence	-0.22	-4.12	0.000

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.41, F(3,354) = 29.57, p < 0.000$

Interpretation: The regression results reveal that both knowledge and refusal skills significantly improve students' attitudes and perceptions toward drug use, while peer influence has a negative impact. The null hypothesis is rejected, affirming that awareness campaigns significantly shape students' attitudes and perceptions, although peer pressure remains a counteracting factor.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study establish that drug abuse is prevalent among secondary school students in Ethiopie East, with alcohol, cigarettes, and prescription drugs being the most abused substances. This corroborates earlier reports by Olanrewaju et al. (2022) and NDLEA (2023), which identified similar trends among Nigerian adolescents.

The study further revealed that awareness campaigns are dominated by school-based initiatives such as seminars and NDLEA visits, while media-led campaigns remain underutilized.

Consistent with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, peer education and role modelling were found to be effective in shaping students' knowledge and perceptions.

Additionally, while students demonstrated high knowledge and relatively positive attitudes, refusal skills were only moderate, suggesting that knowledge does not automatically translate into behavioural resistance, especially in high peer-pressure contexts. This finding aligns with Botvin et al. (2021), who stressed the importance of life-skills training in drug prevention.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of comprehensive awareness strategies that integrate knowledge, attitude change, and skill-building, while also addressing contextual moderators such as peer influence and socio-economic conditions.

The findings of this study demonstrate that drug abuse is not only present but significantly prevalent among secondary school students in Ethiopia East Local Government Area. Nearly half of the respondents reported having used alcohol, while a notable proportion admitted to experimenting with cigarettes, tramadol/codeine, and marijuana. Although the prevalence of hard drugs such as cocaine was relatively low, their presence among adolescents is concerning, as early initiation into substance use often increases vulnerability to stronger forms of addiction later in life (UNODC, 2023). This pattern mirrors national reports by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2023), which documented high rates of alcohol and cannabis use among Nigerian youths aged 15–24. The reality that such substances are circulating among secondary school students in rural and semi-urban communities illustrates how deeply drug availability has penetrated even non-metropolitan settings.

From a human perspective, the numbers suggest more than statistical prevalence. They point to classrooms where

students may be sitting with divided attention due to substance use, communities where peer groups normalize experimentation, and households where parents may be unaware of their children's vulnerability. As Idowu and Ejiro (2023) observed, access to prescription drugs without regulation in rural Nigeria continues to facilitate adolescent misuse. This highlights the social and policy gaps that awareness campaigns alone cannot close.

Regarding the types of awareness campaigns, the study found that school-based initiatives, particularly seminars, workshops, and NDLEA sensitization visits, were the most common. While these efforts provide valuable knowledge, they remain largely episodic, with limited reinforcement through mass media or community-based initiatives. Only about one-third of students reported exposure to posters, flyers, or media campaigns, suggesting that awareness is heavily localized within school environments. This aligns with findings by Ogbebor and Ovwigho (2023), who noted that while school-led interventions increase short-term awareness, they often fail to sustain behavioural change in the absence of broader cultural reinforcement.

Interestingly, peer-led education emerged as a meaningful contributor to students' knowledge levels. This resonates with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the power of modeling and social reinforcement in learning. Adolescents tend to learn not only through formal instruction but also by observing their peers. When peers themselves become educators, the message carries additional credibility and relevance. However, the study also confirmed that peer influence can be a double-edged sword. While peer education fosters resistance, peer pressure to experiment with substances continues to counteract positive attitudes. This duality reflects the observations of Olanrewaju et al. (2022), who argued that peer dynamics

are among the most powerful predictors of adolescent drug use in Nigeria.

The analysis of knowledge, attitudes, and refusal skills revealed important nuances. Students demonstrated high knowledge and generally negative attitudes toward drug use, which suggests that awareness campaigns are succeeding in transmitting information and shaping perceptions. However, refusal skills were rated only moderate. This finding highlights a critical gap: knowing about the dangers of drugs and disapproving of their use does not necessarily translate into the ability to resist when confronted with real-life peer pressure. Botvin et al. (2021) emphasized that prevention programs must move beyond cognitive awareness to equip students with practical resistance skills, such as role-play, assertive communication, and decision-making strategies. In human terms, this gap can be visualized in a student who understands that tramadol abuse is harmful, agrees with teachers that drugs derail education, but still struggles to say “no” when a trusted friend offers it after school.

The hypothesis testing further reinforced these interpretations. The significant chi-square test confirmed that drug abuse is indeed prevalent among secondary school students, rejecting the assumption that prevalence might be negligible in rural-urban mixed contexts like Ethiopia East. Regression analysis also established that school seminars, NDLEA visits, and peer education significantly predicted knowledge, while media campaigns did not. This suggests that face-to-face, interactive, and socially grounded interventions have greater influence on adolescents than distant media messaging. Yet the limited reach of such interventions underscores the need for multi-channel strategies.

Most importantly, the regression model linking knowledge, refusal skills, and peer influence to attitudes showed that awareness campaigns significantly shape

perceptions and attitudes, but peer influence undermines these gains. This finding is crucial for policy and practice. It suggests that awareness campaigns should not only aim to provide knowledge but also focus on reshaping peer group dynamics. Programs that empower peer leaders to champion drug-free lifestyles or that integrate family engagement could help neutralize the negative aspects of peer influence.

Overall, the findings confirm that awareness campaigns are effective but insufficient in isolation. They build knowledge, shift attitudes, and offer some refusal skills, but structural and contextual factors peer norms, parental monitoring, socio-economic hardship, and drug availability continue to dilute their impact. This echoes the recommendations of Olanrewaju et al. (2022) and Okolie & Adegoke (2021), who called for holistic interventions combining education, parental involvement, enforcement of drug regulations, and youth empowerment.

In summary, the study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and contextually adapted drug prevention strategies in Ethiopia East. Awareness campaigns should be integrated with interactive life-skill training, strengthened parental monitoring, and community-based interventions that address availability and cultural tolerance of drugs. Only such an integrated approach can transform knowledge and attitudes into sustained behavioural resilience among adolescents.

Conclusion

The study concludes that drug abuse among secondary school students in Ethiopia East is real, prevalent, and multifaceted. It is not merely a “statistics problem” but a human challenge affecting young people at formative stages of their lives. Behind the percentages are teenagers who may be silently struggling with curiosity, peer pressure, and exposure to

substances that compromise their health, education, and future aspirations.

Awareness campaigns, especially those led by schools and the NDLEA, have made notable progress in raising knowledge and shaping attitudes. However, campaigns alone cannot substitute for practical skill-building and supportive social structures. Students may know that tramadol or marijuana is harmful, yet in the heat of peer pressure, knowledge often gives way to conformity. This gap between knowing and doing is where many preventive efforts stumble.

The study therefore affirms that drug abuse prevention must go beyond awareness creation to include life-skill training, peer leadership, parental engagement, and community-wide involvement. Only such a holistic approach can counterbalance the pervasive influences that drive adolescent substance use.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Schools should integrate interactive life-skill modules (e.g., refusal skills, assertive communication, decision-making) into existing awareness campaigns. Role-playing, debates, and scenario-based exercises will better prepare students to resist real-life pressures.
2. Since peer influence is strong, schools and NDLEA should deliberately train student peer leaders as “drug-free ambassadors.” Positive peer modeling can counteract negative peer pressure and sustain behavior change.
3. Expand Campaigns Beyond Schools: Awareness should not remain episodic or school-limited. Mass media (radio, television, social media) and community theatre/drama can reach wider audiences,

reinforcing messages at home and in public spaces. Parents and guardians also need to be included in sensitization efforts to strengthen monitoring and guidance at the family level.

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