

## **PEER PRESSURE AND DRUG ABUSE AS CORRELATES OF DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR AMONG STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN RIVERS STATE**

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**ABSTRACT:** The study investigated the relationship between peer pressure, drug abuse and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The study adopted a correlational research design. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised all the 23429 students in 200 and 300 level from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) and Rivers State University (RSU). The sample for the study consisted of 400 students. Taro Yamane formula was used to get the sample size. The researcher developed three instruments, namely; Peer Pressure Scale (PPS), Drug Abuse Scale (DAS) and Deviant Behaviour Scale (DBS). In order to ascertain the face and content validities of the instruments for the study, it was submitted presented to experts in Measurement and Evaluation who went through the content and structure of the instrument. To determine the reliability of the instruments, test-retest technique was used. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result revealed that direct peer pressure, indirect peer pressure and drug abuse significantly related to deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in

Rivers State. Based on the results, the researcher recommend among others that tertiary institutions should implement peer mentoring and counselling programmes that target students' social interactions.

**Keywords:** *peer pressure, drug abuse, deviant behaviors*

## **Introduction**

Deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions has become a growing concern in contemporary society, both globally and within Nigeria. Across the world, educational institutions that were once regarded as centres of discipline and moral refinement are now witnessing increasing incidents of indiscipline, social misconduct, and moral decline. Reports from international studies indicate that cases of student unrest, substance abuse, academic dishonesty, and violence have become common occurrences in universities and colleges, raising serious concerns about the behavioural orientation of the younger generation (Johnson & Miller, 2022). In many societies, including Nigeria, the challenge of deviant behaviour is not only undermining the core objectives of higher education but also threatening social stability and public safety. Nigerian tertiary institutions, in particular, have recorded rising cases of cultism, examination malpractice, truancy, vandalism, sexual immorality, and substance abuse. This ugly trend portrays the erosion of moral and ethical values among students (Okon & Ekong, 2023). The increasing prevalence of these acts suggests a deeper psychosocial and environmental problem that demands urgent attention from educators, parents, and policymakers.

The period of tertiary education coincides with a critical developmental stage known as late adolescence and early adulthood. This period is characterised by intense psychological, social, and emotional transitions. During this stage, individuals are in the process of developing a sense of personal identity, independence, and self-definition. They begin to make important life decisions concerning their careers, social relationships, and personal values. Erikson's psychosocial theory of development proposed that this period corresponds to the stage of identity versus role confusion, in which young adults struggle to establish who they are and how they fit into society (Erikson, 1968 in Moshman, 2021). The psychological need for

autonomy and self-expression drives students to challenge authority, experiment with new ideas, and seek acceptance within peer groups. At the same time, the emotional instability and cognitive immaturity that may accompany this developmental stage make them vulnerable to external influences that can either shape or distort their behaviour. Consequently, tertiary students find themselves in a complex process of balancing personal aspirations with societal expectations, which may lead to either socially acceptable or deviant conduct.

At this stage of development, students in tertiary institutions are typically exposed to new environments, social circles, and lifestyles that can either foster positive development or encourage maladaptive behaviours. For many students, gaining admission into a university or polytechnic marks their first experience of living independently away from parental supervision. The freedom associated with campus life offers opportunities for self-discovery, innovation, and responsible decision-making; however, it also presents the risk of exposure to negative peer influence, drug experimentation, and antisocial behaviours (Eze & Nnamani, 2021). Students interact with individuals from diverse cultural, socio-economic, and moral backgrounds, leading to an exchange of ideas and lifestyles that can sometimes conflict with their upbringing. The pressure to conform to group norms and maintain social acceptance within peer networks may push some students towards behaviours that contravene institutional rules and societal values. Chikwe and Nwankwo (2023) observed that the campus environment, though intellectually stimulating, can also become a breeding ground for deviance if not properly regulated through effective moral guidance, counselling, and mentorship.

Deviant behaviour refers to actions or conducts that violate societal norms, institutional rules, and moral standards. It cut across a wide range of acts such as dishonesty, aggression, substance abuse, theft, sexual immorality, and other forms of misconduct that are considered socially unacceptable. Scholars describe deviant behaviour as any action that departs from the expectations or accepted codes of conduct within a given social system (Clinard & Meier, 2016). In the academic setting, it includes behaviours that disrupt learning, compromise academic integrity, or endanger the welfare of others within the institution. Deviance may stem from

psychological factors such as poor self-control, social influences like peer pressure, or structural factors including weak institutional discipline and societal moral decay. In Nigeria, the manifestation of deviant behaviour among tertiary students has been linked to factors such as peer pressure, anxiety, poor parental supervision, exposure to social media, and the declining influence of traditional moral values (Adebayo & Olasupo, 2022).

Peer pressure has been identified as one of the leading social influences that shape students' attitudes and behavioural patterns in tertiary institutions. Peers play a powerful role in the process of socialisation, particularly during adolescence and young adulthood, when individuals seek acceptance, identity, and belonging. Positive peer influence can promote academic excellence and responsible conduct, but negative peer influence often leads to deviant tendencies such as drug abuse, violence, and disregard for authority. Eze and Nnamani (2021) explained that many students engage in deviant acts not out of personal inclination but due to the desire to conform to peer expectations and avoid rejection. In tertiary institutions in Rivers State, where social dynamics are diverse and competitive, peer conformity manifests in risky behaviours that compromise students' academic performance, health, and moral integrity.

Direct peer pressure among students in tertiary institutions exerts a powerful influence on their behaviour, which manifests through overt and explicit demands from peers to engage in certain acts, whether positive or negative. It is a type of pressure in which an individual is openly persuaded, encouraged, or coerced to conform to specific group behaviours, sometimes against their personal values or judgement. In tertiary institutions, direct peer pressure has been observed to promote various forms of deviant behaviour such as cultism, examination malpractice, substance abuse, truancy, and vandalism. For instance, Abubakar and Adamu (2023) revealed that peer pressure significantly predicted students' involvement in deviant acts, demonstrating that the desire for peer acceptance overrides moral restraint. The pressure often comes in the form of statements such as "everyone is doing it" or "you have to join us to belong," which directly compel the student to act against institutional norms. This direct form of influence becomes particularly potent

because tertiary students are at an age where social belonging and group identity are deeply valued. Consequently, many students yield to peer expectations in order to avoid isolation, ridicule, or rejection, even when the actions encouraged are clearly deviant or self-destructive (Aliyu & Umar, 2022).

Indirect peer pressure, on the other hand, operates more subtly but is equally capable of influencing students towards deviant conduct. It arises not through open persuasion or coercion, but through the silent influence of group norms, unspoken expectations, and the general behaviour patterns of peers. Students often observe their friends engaging in acts such as drug use, exam malpractice, or cult-related activities without being directly invited to participate; yet the mere observation of such conduct normalises it within the group context. Over time, this silent exposure creates an implicit message that such behaviour is acceptable or even necessary for social acceptance. Bala and Mohammed (2023) observed that perceived group norms and peer modelling were among the strongest predictors of deviant behaviour. This suggests that indirect peer pressure influences behaviour through social learning and imitation, where students internalise the values and practices of their peers. The need to avoid being labelled as “different” or “too rigid” often drives conformity, even without explicit coercion.

Drug abuse, on the other hand, remains one of the most serious social problems confronting tertiary institutions. The easy accessibility of psychoactive substances such as cannabis, tramadol, cocaine, and alcohol has made substance abuse a growing menace among students. The abuse of these substances not only impairs students’ cognitive functioning and academic achievement but also predisposes them to antisocial and deviant behaviours such as cultism, sexual misconduct, and violent acts. Studies have shown that substance misuse alters reasoning, emotional control, and moral judgement, thereby increasing the likelihood of engaging in socially unacceptable conduct (Ojedokun & Idemudia, 2022). In Rivers State, where tertiary institutions are situated in highly urbanised and socially complex environments, the interaction between drug abuse and deviant behaviour has been observed as a major factor disrupting the educational climate and safety of campuses.

Drug abuse refers to the excessive, improper, or non-medical use of psychoactive substances in ways that are harmful to an individual's physical, psychological, or social well-being. It involves the intentional consumption of drugs such as cannabis, cocaine, tramadol, codeine, methamphetamine, and alcohol for purposes other than prescribed medical use. The World Health Organization (2022) explained that drug abuse is characterised by the continuous or periodic intake of substances that alter the functioning of the mind and body, leading to dependence, health complications, and impaired social functioning. In tertiary education, drug abuse typically manifests as students using substances to boost academic performance, reduce anxiety, or enhance social experiences, often without recognising the long-term consequences. Scholars have described drug abuse as a maladaptive coping strategy that provides temporary relief from stress or peer pressure but ultimately leads to behavioural disorganisation, addiction, and moral decline (Sulaiman & Gidado, 2022). This behaviour is very common among young adults in tertiary institutions who are in a developmental stage marked by experimentation, curiosity, and a strong desire for independence.

Drug abuse among students in tertiary institutions has become a major social and psychological problem that undermines both academic and moral development. In Nigeria, the phenomenon is increasingly common across universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, especially in the Northern region. Studies indicate that many students begin using drugs out of curiosity or as a response to peer influence and academic pressure. Yusuf and Bello (2023) reported that over half of undergraduates surveyed in Kano metropolis had experimented with psychoactive substances, with cannabis, tramadol, and codeine being the most frequently abused. The accessibility of these substances around campuses, coupled with weak institutional monitoring and limited parental supervision, has worsened the situation. Drug abuse impairs students' cognitive abilities, reduces motivation, and increases the likelihood of aggression, truancy, and other forms of deviant behaviour. Abdullahi and Zubairu (2023) found a strong correlation between drug use and deviant acts such as cultism, examination malpractice, and sexual misconduct among university students in Northern Nigeria. The psychological disinhibition caused by substance use lowers moral restraint and increases the tendency to violate social norms. Consequently, drug abuse among students is not merely a health issue but a

multifaceted social problem that disrupts learning environments, promotes deviant subcultures, and threatens the integrity of tertiary institutions.

Peer influence serves as a gateway to substance use, while the consumption of drugs further reinforces deviant tendencies through impaired self-regulation and moral disengagement. This cyclical relationship creates a challenging situation for educational authorities, counsellors, and parents, who struggle to curtail the rising wave of misconduct among youths in higher education. Chikwe and Nwankwo (2023) noted that addressing deviant behaviour in tertiary institutions requires a holistic understanding of its social and psychological roots, especially those linked to peer relationships and drug use.

In Rivers State, the situation has drawn the attention of educational stakeholders and policymakers due to its implications for students' academic achievement, campus security, and societal stability. Institutions such as the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education have all reported cases of student indiscipline and criminal activities linked to substance use and peer-group influence. Hence, this study sought to investigate how peer pressure and drug abuse relate to deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the incidence of deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions across Rivers State. Acts such as cultism, examination malpractice, substance abuse, truancy, sexual immorality, and violence have become common occurrences within campuses that were once regarded as centres of moral and intellectual refinement. This worrying trend has raised public concern among parents, educators, and policymakers, as it threatens not only students' academic achievement but also the overall moral tone of higher education. The researcher observed that many of these deviant acts are not committed in isolation but are often linked to strong social influences and maladaptive habits, particularly peer pressure and drug abuse. Students entering tertiary institutions are usually at a sensitive stage of development, striving for

independence, acceptance, and identity. In their quest to belong, many fall under the sway of peers who encourage risky or unlawful behaviours that conflict with institutional rules and societal values.

Equally disturbing is the growing prevalence of drug abuse among tertiary students in Rivers State. The researcher observed that many students now have easy access to psychoactive substances such as tramadol, cannabis, codeine, and alcohol, which they often use to relieve stress, boost confidence, or enhance social experiences. Unfortunately, this practice has led to a decline in moral consciousness, impaired judgement, and increased involvement in deviant activities. Some students under the influence of drugs become aggressive, disrespect authority, or engage in violent acts and cult-related crimes. Moreover, the weakening of traditional moral supervision, exposure to negative peer groups, and inadequate counselling services within institutions appear to have worsened the problem. Despite the efforts of school authorities and government agencies, the issue of deviant behaviour persists, suggesting that existing interventions have not adequately addressed the underlying social and psychological factors.

The researcher further observed that there is a gap in empirical understanding of how peer pressure and drug abuse jointly influence deviant behaviour among tertiary students in Rivers State. While some studies have examined each factor independently, few have explored their combined effect within the same educational context. This lack of comprehensive understanding limits the ability of counsellors, educators, and policymakers to design targeted preventive strategies. The continued rise in deviant behaviour among students, despite disciplinary measures, underscores the need to investigate the psychosocial roots of the problem. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine peer pressure and drug abuse as correlates of deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised all the 23429 200 and 300 level students from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) and Rivers State University (RSU). This includes 5271 and



4218 students from 200 and 300 level in the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Management Sciences respectively from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) as well as 6399 and 7541 students in the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Management Sciences respectively from Rivers State University (RSU). The sample for the study consisted of 400 students from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) and Rivers State University (RSU). Taro Yamane formula was used to get the sample size. The researcher developed three instruments, namely; Peer Pressure Scale (PPS), Drug Abuse Scale (DAS) and Deviant Behaviour Scale (DBS). In order to ascertain the face and content validities of the instruments for the study, it was submitted presented to experts in Measurement and Evaluation who went through the content and structure of the instrument. To determine the reliability of the instruments, test-retest technique was used. The researcher visited and administered the same instruments to a sample of 30 level 400 students from University of Port Harcourt which is outside the sample levels after two weeks interval. A reliability coefficient  $r = 0.89$ ,  $r = 0.83$  and  $r = 0.79$  respectively were established for the instruments using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The instrument was therefore, judged as reliable for the study. The researcher visited the sampled schools and administered the instrument personally with the help of two research assistants. The researcher retrieved the copies of the instruments after the students have responded to the items. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## **Presentation of Results**

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**Research Question One:** What is the relationship between direct peer pressure and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant relationship between direct peer pressure and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

**Table 1:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Direct Peer Pressure and Deviant Behaviour among Students in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

		<b>Direct Peer Pressure</b>	<b>Deviant Behaviour</b>
<b>Direct Peer Pressure</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.582**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	400	400
<b>Deviant Behaviour</b>	Pearson Correlation	.582**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	400	400

\*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 1 presents the results of a Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between direct peer pressure and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .582, which indicates a moderate positive relationship between direct peer pressure and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. This means that as students experience higher levels of direct peer pressure, their likelihood of engaging in deviant behaviours. This result is statistically significant as the p-value of .000 is less than 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis one is hereby rejected. This result suggests that direct peer pressure significantly related to deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

**Research Question Two:** What is the relationship between indirect peer pressure and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant relationship between indirect peer pressure and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

**Table 2:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Indirect Peer Pressure and Deviant Behaviour among Students in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

		<b>Indirect Peer Pressure and</b>	<b>Deviant Behaviour</b>
<b>Indirect Peer Pressure</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.317**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	400	400
<b>Deviant Behaviour</b>	Pearson Correlation	.317**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	400	400

\*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 presents the results of a Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between indirect peer pressure and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .317, which indicates a weak positive relationship between indirect peer pressure and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. This suggests that even subtle forms of peer influence such as observing peers' attitudes, conforming to unspoken group norms, or striving to fit into social circles are associated with a slight increase in students' engagement in deviant behaviours, including acts like truancy, rule-breaking, and minor misconduct. This result is statistically significant as the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis two is rejected. This implies that indirect peer pressure significantly related to deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

**Research Question Two:** What is the relationship between drug abuse and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant relationship between drug abuse and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Drug Abuse and Deviant Behaviour among Students in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

		<b>Drug Abuse and</b>	<b>Deviant Behaviour</b>
<b>Drug Abuse and</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.858**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	400	400
	Pearson Correlation	.858**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	400	400

\*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 presents the results of a Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between drug abuse and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .858, which indicates a very strong positive relationship between drug abuse and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. This finding implies that students who engage in drug abuse are highly

likely to also exhibit deviant behaviours such as truancy, vandalism, academic dishonesty, or other forms of rule-breaking. This result is statistically significant as the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis three is rejected. This result indicates that drug abuse significantly related to deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

## **Discussion of Findings**

Table 1 presents the results of a Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between direct peer pressure and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.582, indicating a moderate positive relationship between direct peer pressure and deviant behaviour. The relationship is statistically significant ( $p = .000$ ), suggesting that the observed association is unlikely to have occurred by chance and that peer influence plays an important role in shaping behavioural tendencies among students in these institutions. This finding is consistent with Jiang et al. (2023) who reported that adolescents who are directly pressured by peers are more likely to engage in delinquent and antisocial behaviours. Similarly, Adeyemo and Williams (2021) found that undergraduates exposed to strong peer pressure exhibited higher levels of moral transgressions and risk-taking behaviours.

Table 2 presents the results of a Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis examining the relationship between indirect peer pressure and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of 0.317, indicating a weak positive relationship between indirect peer pressure and deviant behaviour. This finding is in line with Laursen (2021), who observed that adolescents often internalise peer behaviours and attitudes even without explicit pressure, which can subtly guide them toward deviant tendencies. Similarly, Adeyemo and Williams (2021) found that undergraduates exposed to indirect peer expectations showed a tendency to engage in minor antisocial behaviours, though the effect was less pronounced than with direct peer pressure.

Table 3 presents the results of a Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between drug abuse and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.858, indicating a very strong positive relationship between drug abuse and deviant behaviour. The result is statistically significant ( $p = .000$ ), confirming that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance and highlighting the powerful influence of substance use on behavioural outcomes in tertiary institutions. This finding is supported by Okon and Ekong (2021) who observed that undergraduates who use drugs frequently display increased antisocial tendencies, risk-taking, and non-conformity to institutional rules. Similarly, Oloruntoba and Eze (2022) reported that drug abuse among university students is closely associated with higher incidences of misconduct and behavioural problems.

## **Conclusion**

This study investigated the relationship between peer pressure, drug abuse and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The study specifically investigated direct peer pressure, indirect peer pressure and drug abuse with regards to their relationship with deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. From the result of the study, it disclosed that direct peer pressure, indirect peer pressure and drug abuse significantly related to deviant behaviour among students. Based on the results of the study, the researcher concluded that there is a significant relationship between peer pressure, drug abuse and deviant behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

## **Recommendation**

Based on the results above, it is recommended that:

1. Tertiary institutions should implement peer mentoring and counselling programmes that target students' social interactions. By promoting positive peer influence and teaching students how to resist negative peer pressure, institutions can reduce the likelihood of deviant behaviour.

2. Educators and counsellors should create awareness campaigns that highlight the subtle ways peers can influence behaviour. Encouraging students to critically assess group norms and reinforcing pro-social values through orientation programmes or student clubs can help mitigate the effects of indirect peer pressure on deviant behaviour.
3. Tertiary institutions must prioritise drug abuse prevention and intervention programmes. This could include regular drug education workshops, accessible counselling services for students struggling with substance use, and strict enforcement of anti-drug policies. Early identification of students at risk and support through rehabilitation or mentorship programmes can significantly reduce both drug abuse and associated deviant behaviours.

### **Implications for Counselling**

The study has the following counselling implications:

- Counsellors should focus on equipping students with assertiveness and decision-making skills to resist negative peer pressure. Through individual and group counselling sessions, students can learn strategies to maintain personal values and make responsible choices, reducing the risk of engaging in deviant behaviour.
- Counsellors should help students develop critical thinking and self-awareness to recognise and manage the subtle influences of indirect peer pressure. Incorporating workshops or discussions on social influence and peer dynamics can enable students to evaluate peer expectations and adopt pro-social behaviours.
- Counsellors should prioritise early identification and intervention for students involved in drug use. Providing therapeutic support, addiction counselling, and referral to rehabilitation services can help students overcome substance abuse and prevent the escalation of deviant behaviours, thereby promoting healthier coping strategies and personal development.

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