

Exploring the Impact of Drug Use History and Abuse on Crime Propensity and Behavior among Inmates in Nigerian Correctional Facilities

Olaseni Abayomi O¹

Abstract

This study examined the influence of drug use histories on crime propensity among 450 convicted inmates ($M = 36.7$, $SD = 0.7$) using an ex post facto design and purposive sampling. Data were collected through the drug use history and the Crime and Criminal Behavior Checklist. Results showed that drug use history significantly influences crime propensity and behavior among convicted inmates in Kwara State [$F(2,375) = 11.44$, $p < 0.01$]. The eta squared (η^2) coefficient revealed that 76% ($\eta^2=0.76$) of the variance in crime propensity and behavior among participants. The Scheffé post-hoc analysis results indicate that respondents with a history of drug addiction exhibited the highest crime propensity and behavior ($= 24.39$; $SD = 02.39$), compared to those with a history of drug use ($= 21.45$; $SD = 08.51$) and those with no history of drug use ($=18.94$; $SD = 03.12$). . The study highlights the need for trained psychologists in correctional facilities to provide targeted interventions. Given its focus on convicted inmates, further research is recommended to explore broader populations on drug use, and additional psychological factors influencing criminal behavior.

Keywords: *Crime, Criminal behavior, Drug Use and Abuse, Inmates, Nigeria.*

Introduction

The increasing prevalence of crime and criminal behavior among inmates and/or re-incarcerated individuals is a pressing concern both globally and in Nigeria, particularly in developing nations (Daniel et al., 2024; Egwu et al., 2024). The surge in crime rates in Nigeria is on the increase recently, with offenses like mass killings by suicide bombers, kidnappings, and ritual killings among others (Egwu et al., 2024). Substance use and abuse among other factors may have been a catalyst for the increasing criminal behaviour observed in Kwara, Nigeria, yet, there is paucity of literature that explore the potent role of drug use in the observed criminal activities in the state. Criminal behavior encompasses any externalized action or conduct that violates the legal framework of a society (Bjelajac, 2024). More broadly, crime represents an unlawful act that contravenes a society's value system and is subject to legal sanction by the state or other governing authorities.

Criminal activities have far-reaching effects on society, causing widespread distress, discomfort, and a heightened sense of insecurity among the population, ultimately diminishing overall quality of life (D'Acci, 2024). Crime and criminal behavior remain major public concerns in Nigeria and across the world. Criminal acts manifest in various forms, including physical assault, communal killings, interpersonal conflicts, ethnic violence, sexual and domestic violence, robbery, threats, violations of individual rights, and homicide. These offenses contribute significantly to physical injuries, psychological trauma, and fatalities (Krug, 2012; Sethi, 2010; Miller, 2016). Furthermore, Hunduh et al. (2024) established a significant relationship between drug abuse and crime among residents in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, highlighting the role of substance use in fueling criminal activities..

In the United States, marijuana use among adults has been rapidly increasing due to the legalization of recreational marijuana in several states. These laws permit the sale and use of marijuana in small quantities for recreational purposes and have been adopted in at least 24 out of the 50 states. Recent studies examining the effects of these laws on drug use and crime have found that while increased marijuana use among adults has led to a reduction in marijuana-related arrests, it has also been associated with a significant rise in violent crimes among users (Sabia et al., 2024). Similarly, Jakupi (2024) highlighted the strong influence of drug use

¹ Senior Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Psychology, University of South Africa (UNISA), Orcid: 0000-0002-0209-1407; olaseao@unisa.ac.za 0719176172 (Corresponding author)

and abuse on criminal behavior, providing a broader understanding of how substance use contributes to the occurrence of criminal activities among individuals struggling with addiction.

Several research studies have explored the specific drugs associated with criminal behavior. For example, Daldegan-Bueno et al. (2024) identified crime and violence as major adverse consequences scientifically linked to cocaine use. Their findings, based on a systematic analysis of peer-reviewed articles, examined the relationship between cocaine use and the perpetration or initiation of physical violence in Brazil between 2000 and 2024. The study highlighted high rates of victimization and perpetration of violent crimes, including robbery, assault, homicide, and sexual abuse, among cocaine users. Additionally, toxicology reports frequently detected cocaine in victims of violent injuries or fatalities.

Similarly, Claro et al. (2015), in a cross-sectional study, posited that drug use and abuse contribute to a chain of events leading to mental health issues, which, in turn, exacerbate criminal and violent behaviors. Furthermore, Dietze et al. (2013) investigated the impact of alcohol and intravenous drug use, establishing a significant link between substance abuse and both criminal activity and the overall well-being of users.

The theoretical framework for this study integrates multiple psychological theories to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between drug use, abuse, and criminal behavior. This study adopts a biopsychosocial approach to explain the phenomenon of interest, emphasizing the interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. From a biological perspective, the study draws on Psychopharmacological Theory (Goldstein, 1985), which suggests that certain substances directly contribute to criminal behavior by altering physiological processes. Specifically, drug use can lead to increased aggression, impaired impulse control, and heightened risk-taking, all of which are linked to violent and impulsive criminal acts.

The psychological perspective is grounded in the General Aggression Model (Anderson & Bushman, 2002), which posits that drug use and abuse influence cognitive, emotional, and behavioral states, thereby increasing aggression. Substances such as alcohol, cocaine, marijuana, and stimulants lower inhibitions, impair decision-making, and heighten impulsivity, making individuals more prone to engaging in violent or reckless criminal activities. From a social perspective, the study adopts Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992), which argues that individuals experiencing significant economic or social strain are more likely to resort to drug use as a coping mechanism. In this context, substance abuse can contribute to criminal behavior, either as a means of obtaining financial resources to sustain drug dependency or as a response to frustration, marginalization, and social distress. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study provides a multidimensional understanding of how drug use and abuse contribute to criminal behavior, highlighting the need for interventions that address biological vulnerabilities, psychological triggers, and socio-economic challenges.

The core variables of interest in this study i.e. drug abuse and criminal behavior remain critical concerns in Nigeria and the Global South, particularly in the context of prevailing economic hardships, rising unemployment, and political instability. It is widely assumed that many Nigerian drug users and abusers turn to substance use as an escape from their harsh realities. Drug use has been linked to an increase in criminal behavior and activities, particularly in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. However, despite the high crime rates reported in Kwara State, there is no documented study that has specifically examined the correlation between drug use, drug abuse, and criminal behavior among convicted offenders in the region. This gap in knowledge may have contributed to a lack of awareness among drug users and abusers, potentially exacerbating criminal activities. The absence of empirical insights into this relationship may serve as a precipitating or perpetuating factor in criminal behavior. Without a clear understanding of the relationship between drug use histories and criminal behavior among convicted inmates, policymakers and correctional institutions may struggle to implement evidence-based rehabilitation programs. To address this gap, a retrospective study is essential to explore how different histories of drug use influence criminal tendencies.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to examine the influence of drug use histories on criminal propensity and behavior among inmates in Nigerian correctional institutions. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Investigate the extent to which a history of drug use and abuse influences criminal behavior among convicted inmates.
- Examine whether inmates with drug addiction problems exhibit higher criminal propensity and engagement in criminal behavior compared to their counterparts who are occasional users or have no history of drug use.

Research Method

This section outlines the research methodology employed in the study. It covers the research design, study setting, population, sampling techniques, instruments, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study adopts an ex post facto design, which is appropriate for examining how the independent variable influences the dependent variable without any form of manipulation. This design allows the researcher to examine the history of drug use among convicted criminals, providing insights into their potential role in criminal behavior.

Study Setting

The research was conducted among convicted inmates in the Nigerian Correctional Institution in Ilorin, Kwara State. The facility, originally built in 1914 to accommodate approximately 150 inmates, currently houses around 350 inmates (Oladeinde, 2017). The rate of crime, including armed robbery, human and drug trafficking, terrorism, kidnapping, and rape, has been on the rise in Ilorin and Nigeria at large (Sabo et al., 2020). Ilorin, the capital city of Kwara State, is strategically located approximately 306 km from Lagos, Nigeria's commercial hub, and 500 km from Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. Kwara State is one of the 36 states that make up Nigeria.

Population/Participants

The study's populations are inmates that have been convicted for the crime committed by competent courts of jurisdiction. A total of 450 prison inmates were purposive selected to participate in the study. Age ranged from 18 - 25 years (n=20; 04.4%), 22 - 25 years (n=73, 16.2%), 26 - 29years (n=03, 0.7%), 30 - 33 years (n=165, 36.7%), 34 - 37 years (n=53, 11.8%), and 38 and above years (n=136, 30.2%). For the gender, 423 (94.0%) self-identified as males, while 27 (06.0%) identified as females. 244 (54.3%) of the participants were Christians, 197 (43.8%) were Muslims, while 03 (01.3%) identified with other religions. 327 (72.7%) of the respondents were Yorubas, 41 (09.1%) were Igbos, 59 (13.1%) were Hausa/Fulani, while 21 (04.7%) were from other ethnic groups. 126 (28.0%) of the respondents had secondary school education, 132 (29,3%) had Ordinary National Diploma, 87 (19.3%) had Higher National Diploma, 90 (20.0%) had first degrees, while 15 (3.3%) were second degree holders. As regard the marital Status, 224 (49.8%) were single, 168 (37.3%) were married, while 58 (12.9%) were divorced.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- Ability to read, and understand in English Language
- Must be 18years and above
- Must have been found guilty of the committed crime and convicted

Instruments

Data for the study were collected using a well structured instruments that were standardized and validated. The data was collected in four phases/scales, namely; demographic data, drug abuse screening test (DAST), Million Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI-III), and Brief Criminal Attitude Scale.

Section A: Demographic Data: This section consists of the socio-demographic information of the participants such as age, gender, religion, marital status, educational qualification, working experiences, and ethnic affiliation.

Section B: Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST): The DAST is a validated and screening test designed to provide a brief clinical drug use screening and treatment. DAST is a 28-item self-report scale in which a the combination in a total DAST score to yield a quantitative indicator of problem related to drug use and abuse. The reliability estimate was substantial at .81. Participants are expected to respond either 'yes' or 'no' to the listed questions. For the scoring patterns, a score of "1" is given for each 'Yes' response, except for items 4, 5, and 7, for which, a 'No' response is scored "1". Interpretative, the higher the scores of the respondents the higher the problematic with drug use and abuse. DAST presents the cronbach's Alpha reliability of 0.805.

Section C: Brief Criminal Attitude Scale: The scale was developed by A.W. Taylor to measure criminal tendency and attitude, in other words, the scale assess the degree of criminality of any offender, but also of reflecting changes of a attitude as a result of treatment or recommendation. This is a two-point scale by which participants respond to by indicating their agreement as either True or False. It consists of 15 statements with no right or wrong answer which represent opinions that some people hold. The scale presents the Cronbach alpha of .076

Procedure

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethical Committees of the University of Ilorin through the Department of Psychology's ethical review process, ensuring compliance with research integrity and ethical standards. To gain access to the correctional facility, an official introduction letter and a request for permission were submitted to the Controller of Corrections, Kwara State Command, and formal approval was granted. Informed consent was a crucial component of the study, with participants receiving detailed information about its purpose, objectives, potential risks, and benefits. Individuals who met the inclusion criteria were thoroughly briefed and provided with consent forms for voluntary endorsement. The procedure for obtaining informed consent was also outlined in the proposal submitted to the ethical review committee to ensure transparency. Upon obtaining consent, participants were guided through the completion of the structured questionnaire, ensuring clarity and adherence to ethical research practices.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Ethical Review and Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology (ERC/2021/s7733/0531), ensuring compliance with established ethical guidelines. All ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the data collection process and beyond. Informed consent was obtained from all study participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and understanding of the study's objectives, potential risks, and benefits.

Data Analysis

The data for this study was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, were used to analyze demographic variables. Inferential statistics were applied to test the significance of research hypotheses, utilizing one-way analysis of variance to determine the influence of drug use histories on criminal behavior.

Results

This section examines the influence of history of drug use and abuse on criminal behavior among the study participants. The study's objectives was established using one-way analysis of variance as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Showing the Influence of drug use history on criminal behavior among Convicted Inmate

| Factor | SS | df | MS | F | P | np2 |
|----------------|---------|-----|--------|-------|------|------|
| Between Groups | 363.61 | 02 | 181.81 | 11.44 | 0.01 | 0.76 |
| Within Groups | 5960.43 | 375 | 15.89 | | | |
| Total | 6324.0 | 377 | | | | |

Dependent Variables: Criminal Propensity and Behaviour

The results presented in the table above indicate that drug use history significantly influences crime propensity and behavior among convicted inmates in Kwara State [$F(2,375) = 11.44, p < 0.01$]. These findings align with the study's objective, which sought to examine the extent to which a history of drug use and abuse influences criminal behavior among convicted inmates. The eta squared (η^2) coefficient revealed that 76% ($\eta^2=0.76$) of the variance in crime propensity and behavior among participants can be attributed to their history of drug use and abuse. Given the significant F-value, a post-hoc analysis (see Table 2) is necessary to further explore differences in the levels of the independent variable (history of drug use) on the dependent variable (crime propensity and behavior).

Table 2: Scheffé Post-Hoc Analysis Showing the Influence of Drug Use History on Criminal Behavior Among Convicted Inmates

| Drug Use History | N | \bar{X} | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|----------------------|-----|-----------|-------|---------|--------|---|
| No Hx of Drug Use | 136 | 18.94 | 03.12 | 1 | | |
| Hx of Drug Use | 054 | 21.45 | 08.51 | 02.51* | 1 | |
| Hx of Drug Addiction | 186 | 24.39 | 02.07 | 05.45** | 02.94* | 1 |

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.05$

The Scheffé post-hoc analysis results indicate that respondents with a history of drug addiction exhibited the highest crime propensity and behavior ($\bar{X} = 24.39$; $SD = 02.39$), compared to those with a history of drug use ($\bar{X} = 21.45$; $SD = 08.51$) and those with no history of drug use ($\bar{X} = 18.94$; $SD = 03.12$). These findings support Objective 2 of the study, which aimed to examine whether inmates with drug addiction problems exhibit higher criminal propensity and behavior compared to their counterparts who are occasional users or have no history of drug use.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that drug use history significantly influences crime propensity and behavior among convicted inmates in Kwara State. Specifically, individuals with a history of drug addiction demonstrated the highest levels of criminal propensity and engagement in criminal activities compared to those with a history of drug use and those with no history of drug use. This outcome aligns with prior research by Hunduh et al. (2024), Krug (2006, 2012), Miller (2016), and Sethi (2010), all of whom established that drug use and abuse significantly contribute to a wide range of criminal behaviors. These crimes include physical assault, communal killings, interpersonal conflicts, ethnic violence, sexual and domestic violence, robbery, threats, violations of individual rights, and homicide.

The study's findings also contribute to the growing body of evidence linking substance use to criminal behavior. The observed pattern suggests that chronic drug abuse may impair judgment, lower impulse control, and increase aggression, thereby heightening the likelihood of engaging in criminal acts.

Additionally, drug dependence often leads to financial desperation, which can drive individuals to commit offenses such as theft and violent crimes to sustain their drug habits. Moreover, this study supports previous research on the broader societal impact of drug policies. The increasing use of marijuana among adults, particularly in regions where recreational marijuana laws have been enacted, has been a subject of debate. While these laws have led to a reduction in marijuana-related arrests, they have also been linked to a significant rise in violent crime among users (Sabia et al., 2024). This suggests that while legalization may alleviate the burden on the criminal justice system, it may also have unintended consequences in terms of public safety.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce the conclusions of Jakupi (2024), who established the strong influence of drug use and abuse on criminal behavior. Substance abuse appears to serve as both a catalyst and a sustaining factor for criminal activities, further underscoring the need for intervention strategies that address addiction as a means of reducing crime rates. By providing a broader understanding of how drug use contributes to criminal behavior, this study highlights the importance of integrating rehabilitation programs into correctional institutions. Addressing substance abuse among inmates could play a crucial role in reducing recidivism and promoting long-term behavioral change.

Overall, these findings emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive drug intervention policies that target not only prevention and law enforcement but also rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for individuals struggling with substance use disorders. Future research should explore the psychological and socio-economic factors mediating the relationship between drug use and criminal behavior, as well as the effectiveness of intervention programs in reducing crime among drug-dependent individuals.

Conclusion

The study concludes that drug use history significantly influences crime propensity and behavior among convicted inmates in Kwara State. Further outcomes revealed that majority of the variance in crime propensity and behavior among participants was attributed by history of drug use and abuse. In addition, it was concluded that respondents with a history of drug addiction exhibited the highest crime propensity and behavior than those who are occasional users and those with no history of drug use.

Limitations and Recommendations

Limitations

Despite offering valuable insights into the predictive influence of drug use histories on criminal propensity and behavior, this study acknowledges several limitations. A key limitation is the adoption of cross-sectional design, which presents a methodological constraint, restricting the ability to establish causality between drug use and criminal behavior. A longitudinal approach would enhance the confidence in determining causative effects and provide greater precision in interpreting the findings. Furthermore, the use of purposive sampling introduces the possibility of selection bias, as randomization was not feasible. This limitation may reduce the heterogeneity of the sample and affect the generalizability of the results, necessitating cautious interpretation of the findings.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Psychological Practice: Based on the outcomes of the study which established the predictions of crime and criminal behaviour by past history of drug use and abuse, clinical or forensic psychologists, and/or mental health experts should leverage on this findings to develop early screening and intervention programs targeting persons/individuals with the implicated drug use as risk factors. In addition, forensic or clinical psychologists saddled with the responsibilities working in correctional services should consider the need to incorporate the identified drug use history into assessments and outcomes will better enhance informed intervention or rehabilitation programs for inmates in correctional facility. As for the intervention,

insight and cognitive-behavioral therapies may be useful in ensuring insight handling addiction problems among inmates.

Recommendations for Policy Makers: Policy makers within the Nigeria criminal justice system are encouraged based on the findings of the current study to integrate psychological assessment of drug use and addiction into rehabilitation programs and sentencing consideration and rehabilitation programs, in other words, ensuring scientific considerations and beneficial to offenders receive appropriate mental health interventions based on their history of drug use and addiction.

Recommendations for Future Research: Further studies may consider approaching similar purpose using longitudinal design, as the method would provide much stronger scientific evidence of causal relationships between the two variables in the study, i.e. drug use and addiction and criminal behavior. In addition, other psychological, or the situational constructs that may also determine crime and criminal behaviour. There may also be a need to consider replicating the study in other states with diverse cultural contexts, as culture may also play a major role determining the outcome of the study

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