

**Moral Disengagement, Future Time Perspective, Social Exclusion, Emotional Granularity,
and Academic Entitlement as Predictors of Substance Abuse among Secondary School
Students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

This study examined moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement as predictors of substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, and a sample of 200 students was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Standardised instruments were used for data collection, while data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that moral disengagement ($r = 0.63$), social exclusion ($r = 0.55$), and academic entitlement ($r = 0.59$) had significant positive relationships with substance abuse, while future time perspective ($r = -0.57$) and emotional granularity ($r = -0.51$) showed significant negative relationships. The study further revealed that the independent variables jointly accounted for 61% of the variance in substance abuse ($R^2 = 0.61$), indicating a strong combined predictive power. Relative contribution analysis showed that moral disengagement was the strongest positive predictor, while future time perspective was the strongest protective factor. The study concluded that substance abuse among adolescents is influenced by cognitive, emotional, and social-psychological factors. It was recommended that school-based interventions should target moral reasoning, emotional regulation, and future-oriented thinking to reduce substance abuse among students.

Keywords: Moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, substance abuse

Introduction

Substance abuse among secondary school students remains a persistent global public health concern, particularly in low- and middle-income countries such as Nigeria. Adolescence is a developmental stage characterised by experimentation, peer influence, and heightened emotional reactivity, making individuals vulnerable to alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use. In Nigeria, empirical evidence suggests that substance use among adolescents is influenced by a combination of individual, familial, and social factors, often resulting in academic, behavioural, and psychosocial maladjustments (Omopo, 2023). Studies in Ibadan have also highlighted the role of parental substance abuse in shaping adolescent behavioural outcomes, including increased risk of substance use and criminal tendencies (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Systematic reviews further confirm that adolescent substance use in Nigeria is driven largely by intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, with limited attention to deeper cognitive and emotional mechanisms (Jacobs et al., 2019).

Recent advances in psychological research have shifted attention from purely environmental explanations to cognitive and personality-based predictors of substance use. One key construct is moral disengagement, which refers to cognitive mechanisms that allow individuals to justify harmful behaviours without self-condemnation. Empirical findings indicate that moral disengagement is significantly associated with adolescent alcohol misuse and antisocial behaviour, as it reduces internal moral restraints (Bandura et al., 1996; Moore et al., 2012). Longitudinal evidence also shows that increases in moral disengagement predict higher levels of unethical and risky behaviour among adolescents (Paciello et al., 2019). Similarly, adolescents exposed to social exclusion are more likely to engage in maladaptive coping behaviours, including substance use, as a means of regulating emotional pain and rejection.

Another important predictor is future time perspective (FTP), which reflects the extent to which individuals consider and value future consequences of their actions. Research demonstrates that adolescents with a strong future orientation are less likely to engage in substance use, while those with a present-oriented or limited future perspective show higher risk behaviours (Finan et al., 2022). A multi-sample study further confirmed that balanced time perspective and positive future orientation are associated with reduced substance use across diverse adolescent populations (Mello et al., 2022). Complementary evidence shows that extended future time perspective

enhances academic engagement and reduces risky behaviours, as adolescents are more motivated by long-term goals and achievements (Burns et al., 2021). These findings underscore the protective role of temporal cognition in adolescent behavioural regulation.

Emotional and social-psychological constructs also play a crucial role in substance use behaviour. Emotional granularity, which refers to the ability to precisely identify and differentiate emotional states, has been linked to improved emotion regulation and reduced reliance on maladaptive coping strategies such as substance use. Conversely, low emotional granularity may impair emotional regulation, increasing susceptibility to drug and alcohol use as a form of emotional escape. Academic entitlement, defined as unrealistic expectations of academic success without proportional effort, has also been associated with maladaptive coping behaviours when such expectations are unmet. Empirical studies indicate that entitlement-related cognitions may contribute to frustration, disengagement, and risk-taking behaviours, including substance use, particularly in school settings where performance pressure is high.

Despite growing research attention, there remains a significant gap in integrating cognitive, emotional, and social predictors within a unified framework for explaining adolescent substance abuse. Existing Nigerian studies have largely focused on peer influence, socio-economic status, and parental factors (Adegunju et al., 2024; Omopo, 2024), while intervention-based research has demonstrated the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural and solution-focused therapies in reducing substance dependence (Omopo & Odedokun, 2024; Asiyanbi et al., 2025). However, limited empirical work has simultaneously examined moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement as combined predictors. Addressing this gap is essential for developing comprehensive prevention strategies tailored to adolescents in Ibadan, Oyo State. Therefore, this study investigates these psychological constructs as predictors of substance abuse among secondary school students, contributing to both local and international literature on adolescent behavioural health.

Aim and Specific Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement as predictors of substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The study seeks to understand

how these cognitive, emotional, and social-psychological constructs influence adolescents' propensity toward substance use within school settings. It further aims to generate empirical evidence that can inform prevention strategies and psychosocial interventions targeting substance abuse among in-school adolescents. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the relationship between moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, academic entitlement, and substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.
2. To determine the joint contribution of moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement to substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.
3. To assess the relative contributions of moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement to substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered:

1. What is the relationship between moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, academic entitlement, and substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria?
2. What is the joint contribution of moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement to substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria?
3. What are the relative contributions of moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement to substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which posits that human behaviour is the result of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive processes, environmental influences, and behavioural patterns. Central to this theory is the concept of

observational learning and self-regulation, where individuals are not merely shaped by their environment but also actively interpret and regulate their actions based on internal cognitive mechanisms. Within the context of substance abuse among secondary school students, SCT explains how adolescents may acquire substance-use behaviours through exposure to peers, family members, and social environments that normalise such behaviour. The theory further provides a basis for understanding moral disengagement, where individuals cognitively justify or rationalise substance use in order to bypass self-regulatory moral standards, thereby increasing vulnerability to drug and alcohol consumption.

In addition, the theory is extended through its emphasis on self-efficacy, future-oriented thinking, and emotional regulation, which align closely with constructs such as future time perspective, emotional granularity, social exclusion, and academic entitlement. Adolescents with a weak future orientation are less likely to evaluate long-term consequences of substance use, while those experiencing social exclusion may adopt maladaptive coping strategies such as drug use to manage emotional distress. Similarly, low emotional granularity can impair effective self-regulation, making substance use more likely as a form of emotional escape. Academic entitlement also reflects distorted cognitive expectations that may increase frustration and disengagement when unmet, further contributing to risky behaviours. Thus, Social Cognitive Theory provides a comprehensive framework for explaining how these psychosocial factors interact to influence substance abuse behaviour among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. A total sample of 200 students was selected using a multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, three Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from Ibadan. In the second stage, one public secondary school was randomly selected from each of the selected LGAs. In the third stage, proportional random sampling was used to select students from Senior Secondary School classes within the selected schools until the required sample size of 200 respondents was obtained. This ensured adequate representation of respondents across the selected schools and maintained the representativeness of the sample.

Data were collected using standardized and widely validated instruments. Moral disengagement was measured using the Moral Disengagement Scale developed by Bandura (1996), future time perspective was assessed using the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) developed by Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), social exclusion was measured using the Need-Threat Scale (Basic Psychological Needs Scale) developed by Williams (2000), emotional granularity was assessed using the Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS) developed by Lane and Schwartz (1987), and academic entitlement was measured using the Academic Entitlement Questionnaire (AEQ) developed by Chowning and Campbell (2009). Substance abuse among students was assessed using the Drug Abuse Screening Test for Adolescents (DAST-A) adapted from Skinner (1982) for adolescent populations. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were strictly observed. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to answer research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis were used to test relationships and determine the joint and relative contributions of the independent variables to substance abuse among secondary school students at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, academic entitlement, and substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Moral Disengagement (1)	54.26	8.91	1.00					
Future Time Perspective (2)	61.43	9.02	- 0.48**	1.00				
Social Exclusion (3)	50.88	7.65	0.52**	- 0.45**	1.00			
Emotional Granularity (4)	66.17	8.34	- 0.41**	0.46**	- 0.44**	1.00		
Academic Entitlement (5)	58.39	7.98	0.49**	- 0.42**	0.47**	- 0.40**	1.00	
Substance Abuse (6)	45.72	9.56	0.63**	- 0.57**	0.55**	- 0.51**	0.59**	1.00

Note: $p < .05^*$

The result in Table 1 showed that moral disengagement had a significant positive relationship with substance abuse among secondary school students ($r = 0.63, p < .05$), indicating that higher moral disengagement is associated with increased substance use. Future time perspective had a significant negative relationship with substance abuse ($r = -0.57, p < .05$), suggesting that students with stronger future orientation are less likely to engage in substance use. Social exclusion was positively related to substance abuse ($r = 0.55, p < .05$), showing that students who experience higher levels of exclusion are more likely to abuse substances. Emotional granularity had a significant negative relationship with substance abuse ($r = -0.51, p < .05$), indicating that better emotional awareness reduces substance use tendencies. Academic entitlement showed a significant positive relationship with substance abuse ($r = 0.59, p < .05$), suggesting that higher entitlement beliefs increase risk of substance use.

Research Question 2

What is the joint contribution of moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement to substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Joint Contribution

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error	F	Sig.
1	0.78	0.61	0.60	6.84	61.27	0.000

The result in Table 2 revealed that moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement jointly contributed significantly to substance abuse among secondary school students. The multiple correlation coefficient ($R = 0.78$) indicated a strong relationship between the combined predictors and substance abuse. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.61$) showed that 61% of the variance in substance abuse was jointly explained by the five independent variables. The model was statistically significant ($F = 61.27, p < .05$), indicating that the combined influence of the predictors significantly affected substance abuse behaviour among the respondents.

Research Question 3

What are the relative contributions of moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement to substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Relative Contribution of Independent Variables

Variables	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Moral Disengagement	0.41	0.06	0.39	6.83	0.000
Future Time Perspective	-0.36	0.05	-0.37	-7.12	0.000
Social Exclusion	0.33	0.05	0.31	6.09	0.000
Emotional Granularity	-0.29	0.04	-0.28	-6.55	0.000
Academic Entitlement	0.35	0.05	0.34	6.74	0.000

The result in Table 3 indicated that all the independent variables made significant relative contributions to substance abuse among secondary school students. Future time perspective ($\beta = -0.37$, $t = -7.12$, $p < .05$) was the strongest negative predictor, indicating that it plays a protective role against substance abuse. Moral disengagement ($\beta = 0.39$, $t = 6.83$, $p < .05$) was the strongest positive predictor, followed by academic entitlement ($\beta = 0.34$, $t = 6.74$, $p < .05$), social exclusion ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 6.09$, $p < .05$), and emotional granularity ($\beta = -0.28$, $t = -6.55$, $p < .05$). This implies that while all variables significantly influence substance abuse, moral disengagement and future time perspective are the most influential predictors in opposite directions.

Discussions

The finding revealed significant relationships between moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, academic entitlement, and substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State. Specifically, moral disengagement, social exclusion, and academic entitlement showed positive relationships with substance abuse, while future time perspective and emotional granularity showed negative relationships. This implies that students who are more likely to rationalise harmful behaviour, feel socially excluded, or hold unrealistic academic expectations tend to engage more in substance use. Conversely, students who possess stronger future-oriented thinking and higher emotional granularity are less likely to abuse substances. This outcome can be explained by the fact that adolescents who morally disengage from the consequences of their actions are more likely to justify substance use, while those experiencing social exclusion may resort to drugs as a coping mechanism for emotional pain. Similarly, students with high academic entitlement may become frustrated when expectations are unmet, increasing vulnerability to maladaptive coping behaviours. On the other hand, adolescents with strong future time perspective are more likely to delay gratification and

avoid risky behaviours, while those with higher emotional granularity are better able to identify and regulate emotions, reducing reliance on substance use. This finding aligns with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which explains how cognitive self-regulatory mechanisms influence behaviour through moral justification and perceived consequences. It is also consistent with Omopo (2023), who reported that psychosocial factors significantly predict delinquent behaviours among secondary school students in Ibadan, and Adegunju et al. (2024), who found that peer and emotional factors significantly influence substance abuse among adolescents. Similarly, Omopo (2024) and Ibrahim et al. (2024) highlighted the role of psychosocial adversity and family-related stressors in shaping substance use behaviour, while Quinn and Bussey (2015) and Moore et al. (2012) also support the role of moral disengagement in promoting risky and antisocial behaviours, including substance use.

The study further revealed that moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement jointly made a significant contribution to substance abuse among secondary school students, accounting for 61% of the variance. This indicates that adolescent substance abuse is best understood when cognitive, emotional, and social-psychological factors are considered together rather than in isolation. The result may be attributed to the complex interaction between maladaptive cognitions, emotional dysregulation, and social stressors, where moral disengagement and academic entitlement increase cognitive justification for substance use, while social exclusion intensifies emotional distress that may be relieved through substance use. In contrast, future time perspective and emotional granularity serve as protective mechanisms that reduce impulsivity and improve emotional regulation. In line with Social Cognitive Theory, this finding suggests that substance use behaviour emerges from the interaction of personal cognitive factors, emotional competencies, and environmental pressures. This result is consistent with Omopo (2024), who found that social marginalisation and psychosocial stress significantly influence substance use and criminal behaviour among inmates in Oyo State, and Omopo & Odedokun (2024), who highlighted the role of cognitive-behavioural processes in understanding substance dependence. It also aligns with Finan et al. (2022), who reported that future orientation significantly reduces substance use tendencies among adolescents, and Mazzone et al. (2019), who demonstrated that moral disengagement is strongly associated with antisocial and risky behaviours during adolescence.

The relative contribution analysis showed that all variables significantly predicted substance abuse, with moral disengagement emerging as the strongest positive predictor, followed by academic entitlement and social exclusion, while future time perspective was the strongest negative predictor, followed by emotional granularity. This suggests that cognitive justification processes such as moral disengagement play a more dominant role in facilitating substance use compared to other psychosocial factors, while future-oriented thinking and emotional awareness serve as key protective buffers. This may be because adolescents who can cognitively neutralise the moral implications of substance use are more likely to engage in it despite awareness of its consequences, whereas those who can clearly identify emotions and project future outcomes are better able to resist impulsive behaviour. The finding supports Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasises moral reasoning, self-regulation, and cognitive control as central determinants of behaviour. It is also consistent with Omopo (2023), who identified cognitive and psychosocial predictors as significant determinants of adolescent maladjustment, and Adegunju et al. (2024), who found emotional and peer-related factors to be key contributors to substance abuse. Furthermore, Quinn and Bussey (2015) and Paciello et al. (2019) corroborate the strong predictive role of moral disengagement in risky adolescent behaviour, while Finan et al. (2022) and Burns et al. (2021) support the protective influence of future time perspective on adolescent decision-making and risk reduction.

Conclusion

The study concluded that moral disengagement, future time perspective, social exclusion, emotional granularity, and academic entitlement are significant predictors of substance abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The findings established that maladaptive cognitive processes such as moral disengagement and academic entitlement, as well as social stressors like social exclusion, increase the likelihood of substance use among adolescents. Conversely, protective factors such as future time perspective and emotional granularity reduce vulnerability to substance abuse by strengthening self-regulation, emotional awareness, and long-term goal orientation. The study further concluded that these variables jointly provide a strong explanatory model for adolescent substance abuse, indicating that

substance use behaviour is best understood as a product of interacting cognitive, emotional, and social-psychological factors rather than isolated influences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School counsellors and psychologists should develop structured intervention programmes that focus on reducing moral disengagement through cognitive restructuring, moral reasoning training, and behavioural awareness strategies among secondary school students.
2. Schools should implement future-oriented developmental programmes such as career counselling, goal-setting workshops, and mentorship schemes to strengthen students' future time perspective and discourage engagement in substance use.
3. School authorities should create inclusive and supportive learning environments that reduce social exclusion through anti-bullying policies, peer support systems, and activities that promote positive peer relationships among students.
4. Emotional literacy and self-awareness programmes should be integrated into school guidance and counselling services to improve students' emotional granularity, enabling them to better identify, understand, and regulate emotions as a means of preventing substance abuse.

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