**INFLUENCE OF GENDER, SELF- ESTEEM AND SOCIAL SUPPORT ON DRUG ABUSE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN NIGERIA**

**Abstract**

*The current study examined the interaction between social support, gender, self-esteem and drug abuse in a sample of Nigerian university students. More specifically, the goals were to explore relationship between social support and drug abuse, the role of gender in such associations, and the moderating effects of self-esteem. The study employed a descriptive survey research design with a population of 550 Psychology students from Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko (Source; Departmental Admission List, 2025). A total of 384 student 200-400 level students between 17-26 years of age were respectively and purposively sampled. The data were collected by using a structured and pre-validated questionnaire based on 4 points Likert scale. The collected data were subjected to descriptive statistics as well as multiple regression analysis at the .05 level of significance. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the regression model was significant F = 49.756, p = 0.000 and accounted for a large percentage of the variance in drug abuse. But, contrary to expectations, self-esteem (B = 0.799, p = 0.000) and social support (B = 0.638, p = 0.02) were significant predictors of drug abuse with positive coefficients. There was no evidence of a significant effect of gender in the gender by condition interaction term, B = .017, p= .891. The findings highlighted the role of psychological and social support variables in drug abuse among university students, the study concluded that self-esteem and social support are not intrinsic protective factors and may in fact indicate complex cultural and social dynamics. Among the recommendations that emerged from study were the need for the integration of community structures into national mental health policies and investment in community driven programs and research into the efficacy of community-based mental health strategies to understand local meanings of self-esteem and support.*

**Keywords:** Gender, self- esteem, social support, drug abuse and university students

**Introduction**

The problem of drug abuse among college students had emerged as a serious public health and social issue worldwide. Young adults in universities with relatively pressure for achieving academically, freedom from your own parents, peer pressure, and identity crises are more likely to be involved in drug experimentation and ultimately, abusing the substances (Majee et al., 2025). Young person substance use, particularly in tertiary institution has increased according to the World Health Organization (WHO (2023), where marijuana, alcohol and prescription drugs are popular substances of abuse (Chukwuemeka et al., 2025). The ease of accessibility of such drugs and poor copings skills as well as poor access to strong support systems exposes such individuals to the risk of dependence. Similar research done in America, UK and some parts of Asia and South America show that the higher the level of family, peer, and institutional support received, the less likely the students are to use drugs. On the other hand, inadequate social support enhances vulnerability even to risky behaviours ranging from drug addiction. Abuse of drugs among university students in Nigeria (Kehinde et al., 2025). Actually, university students' involvement in drug use and abuse is nose diving with all manner of drug use increasing among them every day in Nigeria to be against the law (NDLEA, 2022). Tramadol, codeine, cannabis and Rohypnol are the most frequently abused substances among male and female students. Although there continuous public enlightenment programmes and policy in most institutions, the practice still goes on among girls with weakened social support system and peer pressure being the major determinants (Kehinde et al., 2025; Majee et al., 2025; Nyameh, 2023). Social economy, urbanization, family destruction, and inefficacious campus psychological guidance have all worsened the situation. In addition, gender differences and self-esteem also establishing itself as other psychological factors affecting students' seeking and using social support which in return affects their susceptibility for drug use because gender has a substantial influence on both the access and the utilization of social support by students. Among others, one study found that female students are more prone to emotional and family support, whereas male students are more dependent on peer support and networks that may foster drug experimentation (Onyemaechi et al., 2025). In addition, self-esteem is important; low self-esteem students avoid help- seeking and are more likely to be influenced by peers and use drugs (Akanni et al., 2024). This is but not the case in Nigeria, where drug abuse in universities continues to be on the high side, even with some increased awareness and attempts to mitigate drug abuse on campuses. Fadipe et al. (2025) would argue that “the problem precisely is lack of social support systems, familial, institutional, peer in drug abuse prevention among students, coupled with gender differentials and self-esteem issues. The fallout of this problem is, among others, low performance and achievements in school, mental health issues, higher rates of dropping out, and social deviancy in students. Sensitization campaigns and policies by the NDLEA, university authorities and NGOs have been put in place, but, the issue remains, largely because there are not enough studies on the interplay between social support, gender, and self-esteem (Akanni et al., 2024). The general research aim is the exploration of the impact that social support has on drug abuse among university students in Nigeria, specifically looking at the roles of gender and self-esteem. This study in particular; explore the relationship of social support to drug abuse among university students; analyze the impact of gender on the relationship between social support and drug abuse; and examine the moderating effect of self-esteem on the impact of social support on drug abuse on university students in Nigeria.

**Research Questions**

1. To what extent does social support influence drug abuse among university students?
2. How does gender affect the relationship between social support and drug abuse among university students?
3. What role does self-esteem play in moderating the effect of social support on drug abuse among university students?

**Research Hypotheses**

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between social support and drug abuse among university students.

H02: Gender does not significantly influence the relationship between social support and drug abuse among university students.

H₀3: Self-esteem has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between social support and drug abuse among university students.

The findings of the study would provide a deeper understanding of how social support influences drug abuse among university students, highlighting the moderating roles of gender and self-esteem. The findings would inform the development of targeted intervention programs, assist university authorities and mental health professionals in designing effective support systems, and guide policymakers in formulating evidence-based strategies to reduce substance abuse in tertiary institutions. Furthermore, the study would contribute to academic literature by bridging existing gaps in the psychosocial dynamics of drug abuse among young adults in Nigeria. The study focuses on undergraduate students in selected public and private universities in Nigeria. The study narrowed its scope to covered issues relates to drug abuse, forms of social support (familial, peer, and institutional), and the moderating roles of gender and self-esteem. The study excludes postgraduates, secondary school students, and non-student populations.

**Literature Review**

**Conceptual Review**

**Gender**

Gender is defined as the social roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities a society sees fit for men, women, and people of diverse genders. According to Enwere and Iloakasia, 2024, Gender affects personal experience, expectation, and interaction within the academy and society at large. Gender, in contrast to biological sex which is anatomical, is a flexible and cultural construct related to self- identity and social identity or the way that one is perceived by society (Lawrence & Adebowale, 2023). Gender roles govern involvement in scholarly work, university governance, and friendships within the university context. According to Majee et al. 2025, “gender based discrimination and stereotypes influence one’s self-esteem, access to support, and vulnerability to risky behaviors like drug use”.

**Self-Esteem**

Fadipe et al. (2025) postulate that self-esteem is an individual’s subjective evaluation of their own worth, encompassing beliefs about oneself and emotional states such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame. Self-esteem is a core psychological factor that shapes how students cope with academic and social pressures (Lawrence et al., 2023). University students with high self-esteem are generally more confident, resilient, and better equipped to handle challenges. Conversely, low self-esteem is often linked with anxiety, depression, and vulnerability to peer pressure, which can lead to maladaptive behaviors, including substance abuse (Enwere & Iloakasia, 2024). Promoting healthy self-esteem contribute to better academic performance and well-being for the living (Chukwuemeka et al, 2025).

**Social Supports**

Social support refers to the emotional, informational, and practical assistance received from family, friends, peers, and institutions and adequate social support serves as a protective factor against stress and harmful behaviors among university students (Chukwuemeka et al., 2025). Social support systems play a crucial role in student mental health and decision-making because students who feel supported are more likely to seek help, manage academic stress effectively, and resist peer pressure to engage in drug use (Akanni et al., 2024). Nyameh (2023) articulated that lack of social support leads to isolation and increased risk of negative coping mechanisms, including substance abuse.

**Drug Abuse**

Drug abuse, defined as “the habitual excessive use of a drug or drugs, particularly psychoactive ones-alcohol, prescription medicines, or illicit ones, in ways detrimental to health and functioning” (Ezeaka & Ochuba, 2024). Substance abuse is a common important problem that has a devastating impact on the student’s study, health, and social relations (Nyameh, 2023). Peer pressure, anxiety, curiosity and psychological problems are some of the reasons students use drugs while the effects include poor grades in school, addiction, health problems and expulsion from school (Ezeaka & Ochuba, 2024). Awareness, counseling by peers, and a solid support system can go a long way in preventing drug abuse within tertiary institutions (NDLEA, 2022).

**University Students**

University students are those who are registered in a tertiary institution for undergraduate or postgraduate education (Ikpeama et al., 2025). Students in universities encounter various types of stressors that impact their academic achievement, mental health, and social conduct. The university student population is at a critical liminal phase between teenaged years and adulthood, and thus susceptible to various influences (Muhammad et al, 2025) that contend, among other things, with academic anxiety, the establishment of a social identity, and autonomy; all of which can impact risk and mental health. It is important to understand their experiences to ensure positive interventions and outcomes related to self-esteem, gender equity, social support, and drug abuse prevention among other factors (Lawrence & Adebowale, 2023).

**Theoretical Review**

The theories considered in the present study include Social Learning Theory and Self-Esteem Theory, two of which are reviewed below. Nevertheless, it is based on Social Learning Theory as the study done based on regards Social Learning Theory provides reason as to why the gender, self- esteem and social support factors influence drug abuse in among university students.

**Social Learning Theory**

Social Learning Theory, by Albert Bandura (1977), posits that behavior, including drug use, is learned through observation and modeling others, especially peers, parents, or other influential role models, rather than through reinforcement or any direct experience. The theory proposes that people are active agents who can learn from observing the consequences of others’ behaviour and apply those lessons to their own (Bubou & Job, 2022). Social Learning Theory, a key factor in learning is consideration of intervening processes such as attention, memory, and motivation (Kim et al., 2019). In the specific case of drug abuse this theory is quite relevant, since in the construction of certain types of behavior is defined according to gender stereotypes which are influenced by the cognitive and the esteem that the person has of himself (herself), which makes it harder to learn from peers´ behavior and social support may operate as a direct, protective and cutting back against. Peer selection, self- esteem and social support in  entpatient drug addicts depressive behavior incentive for people to behave in line with gender roles, which are learned and based on reinforcement (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). Critics of the theory argue that it pays too little attention to biological predispositions and that it does not explain spontaneous behavior where no model is present. But, in addition to the use of empirical support, empirical evidence, the ability to be applied to different contexts, and acknowledgments of both environmental factors as well cognitive factors behind behaviors make this a strong approach (Muritala, 2025). Social Learning Theory continues to serve as a theoretical basis for understanding youth and adolescent drug abuse in the context of peer influence and absence of adult supervision.

**2. The Self-Esteem Theory**

Self-Esteem Theory, which was developed extensively by Morris Rosenberg (1965), argues that low self-esteem individuals are more likely to cope via risk-taking, maladaptive, or compensatory behaviors such as drug abuse in order to deal with or mitigate negative self-assessment or to achieve social acceptance (Enwere & Iloakasia, 2024). According to this theory, self-esteem is viewed as integral to personality and people are motivated to maintain or regain a positive view of the self when the self is threatened by failure, rejection, or identity conflict (Nyameh, 2023). Specifically with regards to drug abuse, Self-Esteem Theory is particularly applicable as substance use may provide an escape or source of worth from peers for those students with low self-esteem (Tiamiyu et al., 2024). The same behavior is more likely in situations of low social support or when an individual feels that they are failing to meet gendered expectations (Onyemaechi et al, 2025). Critiques of the theory include its over-simplification of complex behaviors by relying heavily on self-esteem as the primary explanatory factor as well as problems of measurement of self-esteem in different cultural contexts and situations (e. g. Ojeleye et al., 2023). The theory’s “weaknesses” was its emphasis on internal psychological processes that explain external behavior, and it has continued to be a foundation supporting interventions based on the development of emotions and self-concept and is currently widely utilized in counseling, mental health, and substance abuse prevention programs.

**Empirical Review**

Onyemaechi et al. (2025) explored the dynamics of traditional support systems, including family networks, age grades, religious institutions, and communal ties, and their contributions to mental health resilience amidst economic challenges. Drawing on Resilience and Ecological Systems Theories, their study illuminates the mechanisms through which community support mitigates the psychological impacts. In rural Nigeria, the communitarian lifestyle deeply ingrained in the culture, spiritual beliefs and spiritual leaders often serve as the first line of support for mental health issues.

Kehinde et al. (2025) explored the context of substance use in Nigeria, emphasizing its impact on the overall quality of life of Nigerians. Nigeria faces a growing challenge of substance use, with alcohol, cannabis, and pharmaceutical opioids among the commonly abused substances. Used a systematic literature review was conducted using different search engines to identify articles focused on the relationship between substance use and quality of life (QoL), as well as the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in Nigeria. Their findings revealed variations in QoL measures and the impact of rehabilitation interventions, studies show a negative correlation between substance use disorder (SUD) severity and quality of life (QoL).

Majee et al. (2025) examines three case studies to provide a detailed understanding of substance use among African youth, its impact, and intervention strategies. Their findings inform future research and guide the development of interventions, programs, and policies to improve the well-being of at-risk youth in Africa and around the world.

Enwere and Iloakasia (2024) established self-esteem as the predictor of psychological well-being of senior secondary school adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria, with reference to gender distinctions. The type of research used was correlational research design. Their findings revealed that self-esteem was mutually having a moderately positive though significant correlation with Masculinity for males: (R = 0.517) which represented 26% of variance in Masculinity for males. 7% of the variance. Females’ association was modest (R = 0.484) accounting for 23 percent. The potential influence of anxiety in males should be additionally investigated. 4% of the variance.

Amadu et al. (2024) endeavours to gauge the prevalence of adolescent drug abuse. Used a cross-sectional study design was used. Their research employed a meticulously crafted questionnaire featuring both open and closed-ended questions. Their findings indicate a disturbing trend of drug abuse among teenagers in schools or students in Tamale Metropolis and Sagnarigu Municipal of the northern region of Ghana, particularly involving substances like shisha and tramadol. Negative peer group influence emerged as a prominent factor leading adolescents into the realm of drug abuse. Inadequate parental supervision, coupled with parental substance use, was identified as significant contributors to adolescents adopting similar habits. Encouragingly, a noteworthy percentage of teenagers in schools or students demonstrated awareness of available resource and help centres for seeking assistance and counselling services against drug abuse.

Akanni et al. (2024) aimed to compare the quality of life (QoL) in two communities with different exposures to conflict and investigate the inter-relationship between posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), social support, and QoL. This is a cross-sectional with 413 participants. Study instruments included the PTSD module of the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI), the World Health Organization Quality of Life BREF (WHOQoL-BREF), and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The family domain of social support was protective of both PTSD and QoL. Except for the relationship between community’s location and the physical subscale of the QoL, a hierarchical regression analysis showed that all the independent variables were significantly associated with the QoL domains.

Nyameh (2023) Prevalence, predictors of drug and substance use, their psychosocial and academic effects on secondary school students in North-Eastern Nigeria. The menace has been linked to many negative consequences, including physical, psychological, and academic problems. While some studies have shown that the menace is low, others have shown that it is high and associated with various psycho-social and academic impacts. All the studies, however, agree on the prevalence and the associated educational effects, his study findings have shown that various factors influence or sustain drug or substance habits. Predisposing factors related to a person’s background, such as family history, upbringing, personal history, curiosity, peer pressure, and some life events like grief, divorce, re-marriage, loss of job, and change of home or school.

Lawrence and Adebowale (2023) investigated the predictive roles of family structure, mental health, and self-esteem in dropout risk among school-going adolescents in the Ibadan Municipality of Oyo State, Nigeria. A quantitative research design approach was adopted. A total of 287 school-going adolescents with consistent record of absenteeism were randomly selected from 14 schools in the Ibadan Municipality. A single adapted questionnaire divided into sections was used to collect data. The hypotheses raised were tested using the Pearson's product moment correlation and multiple regression analysis. The study established that the relationship between dropout risk, lack of family structure (r = 0.491, n = 287, p < 0.05), mental health (r = 0.373, n = 287, p < 0.05), and self-esteem (r = 0.428, n = 287, p < 0.05) of the participants was significant. Furthermore, the joint influence of the predictive variables (family structure, mental health, and self-esteem) was also significant on dropout risk (R = 0.489, adjusted R2 of 0.398).

**Method and Data**

A quantitative survey research design was adopted in the study which was appropriate for gathering standardised information from numerous people. There were 550 students in the Department of Psychology at Adekunle Ajasin University in Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria (Source: Departmental Admission List, 2025). The study involved 384 students who were picked randomly using a Purposive Sampling Technique. They were between their second and fourth years (200 to 400 Level) and aged 17 to 26 years. They had more established social identities that included gender norms, patterns of self-esteem, and peer pressure experiences with drug use.

A semi-structured questionnaire was administered and a 4-point Likert scale was used to quantify the response: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Content validity of the questionnaires was assessed by public health and psychology professionals. A pilot study involving 30 students, independent of the main sample, was conducted to try reliability using Cronbach's Alpha (α ≥ 0.70) with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analyzing data that was procured. Inferential statistics using multiple regression analysis and descriptive statistics were employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level.

**Data Analysis**

**Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics for the study variables; drug abuse, social support, gender, and self-esteem, were calculated based on data from 269 respondents. Participants’ scores were slightly above the average of 3.13 for drug abuse. The kurtosis of.263 reveals a slightly platykurtic distribution, while the skewness of.253 suggests a slight positive skew, meaning that most of the responses were a little bit lower than the mean. Participants felt a moderate level of social support, as shown by the mean score of 3.13. Given that the skewness and kurtosis data indicate “almost normal distribution” with a “slight skew to the right,” the values for gender, quite possibly coded as a measure of perception or identity, also had a mean of 3.08, but had a higher positive skew (.522) and a slightly negative kurtosis (-0.133), suggesting a longer or fatter right tail and a flatter than normal peak in the sample data set versus a normal distribution. The variable self-esteem also had the highest mean, 3.14, indicating that overall, participants had a relatively positive view of themselves. It is also worth noting that the distribution is not very skewed (.043) and has a moderate kurtosis (.380), both showing that the data are relatively normally distributed, with some spread of responses. Means for all variables are between 2.14 and 4.00, supporting the presence of more or less invariant response patterns, as the distributions are generally symmetric with minimal deviations and no marked skewness and kurtosis, thus justifying the use of these variables in subsequent inferential statistics.

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| **Table 1: Descriptive Statistics** | | | | | | | | | |
|  | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Skewness | | Kurtosis | |
| Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error | Statistic | Std. Error |
| Drug\_Abuse | 269 | 2.44 | 4.00 | 3.1283 | .41541 | .253 | .456 | .263 | .887 |
| Social\_Support | 269 | 2.43 | 4.00 | 3.1319 | .40188 | .248 | .456 | .241 | .887 |
| Gender | 269 | 2.43 | 4.00 | 3.0824 | .42795 | .522 | .456 | -.133 | .887 |
| Self\_Esteem | 269 | 2.14 | 4.00 | 3.1429 | .44630 | .043 | .456 | .380 | .887 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 269 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Source: Author Computation (2025)**

**Model Summary**

A summary of the model shows that the independent variables, Social Support, Self- Esteem, and Gender are all significantly correlated with their dependent variable, Drug Abuse. So, the R square which is .812 suggests that 81.2 percent of the variability in drug use among respondents is explained by the combined effects of social support, self-esteem, and gender. The Adjusted R Square of.796 supports the goodness off of the model, in that it adjusts for the number of predictors. The Standard Error of the Estimate shows a figure of 0.18154 which suggests low residual variation and therefore reliable predictive power for the model.

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| **Table 2: Model Summary** | | | | |
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| 1 | .901a | .812 | .796 | .18154 |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Social\_Support, Self\_Esteem, Gender | | | | |

**Source: Author Computation (2025)**

**ANOVA**

The findings validate that the regression model is a significant predictor of Drug Abuse with the independent variables (Social Support, Self-Esteem, and Gender). The F-statistic value of 49.756 and a p-value of 0.000 indicate that the overall model is statistically significant at p < 0.01, and hence the possibility of obtaining such a relationship by chance is very low. The regression sum of squares (3.280) versus the residual sum of squares (0.758) indicates that the predictors account for the majority of total variation in drug abuse. The test, with 6 for the model and 263 for the residuals, indicates that the model fits much better than a model with no predictors. The result implies that gender, self-esteem, and social support as a whole have a statistically significant impact on drug abuse among university students.

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| **Table 3: ANOVA** | | | | | | |
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | P-Value |
| 1 | Regression | 3.280 | 6 | 1.640 | 49.756 | .000 |
| Residual | .758 | 263 | .033 |  |  |
| Total | 4.038 | 269 |  |  |  |
| a. Dependent Variable: Drug\_Abuse | | | | | | |
| b. Predictors: (Constant), Social\_Support, Self\_Esteem, Gender | | | | | | |

**Coefficient**

The coefficients table describes the individual contribution of Social Support, Gender, and Self-Esteem to predicting Drug Abuse. The intercept (constant) is 0.567, with a marginal p-value of 0.055, so it is not significant at the 5% level but is very close. Social support has a significant and positive effect on drug abuse, evidenced by a coefficient (B = 0.638) and a p-value of 0.02. This implies that perceived increase in social support generates a negligible increase a surprising trend for which more work is needed. Gender has no impact, statistically nonsignificant, on drug abuse (B = 0.017, p = 0.891), which suggests that gender does not significantly predict drug misuse in this model. Self-esteem plays the largest and most powerful role, with a value of 0.799 and p = 0.000. This indicates that higher self-esteem is strongly related to higher levels of drug abuse in this environment, which is counterintuitive and may need a recoding or reapplication of measures of self-esteem. Self-esteem and social support are both significant contributors to drug use, while gender is not. The uniformly positive slope of all the coefficients could suggest some potential problems in variable scaling or cultural/contextual interpretation of the constructs that are measured.

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| **Table 4: Coefficients** | | | | | | |
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | P-Value |
| B | Std. Error | Beta |
|  | (Constant) | .567 | .280 |  | 2.026 | .055 |
| Social\_Support | .638 | .138 | .653 | .142 | 0.02 |
| Gender | .017 | .126 | .019 | .138 | .891 |
| Self\_Esteem | .799 | .121 | .887 | 6.613 | .000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Drug\_Abuse | | | | | | |

**Discussion of Findings**

The results indicate that social support, self-esteem, andgender are significant predictors of drug abuse on a regression modelamong university students. As it can be seen from the ANOVA results, the F-statistic is 49.756 while the p-value is 0.000 indicating that the model is good by showing that the set of variables accounted for significant variance in drug abuse. The strongest and most significant of the drug misuse predictors was again self-esteem B=0.799, p=.000; and support from others B=0.638, p=0.02. The effect of gender was small and non-significant, B=.017, p=.891. Thepositive correlation between self-esteem and drug abuse is counterintuitiveand might imply that self-esteem functions differently within a contextthat is more oriented toward collectivistic values amongst students, oralternatively that there are problems with measurement. Likewise, the relationship between higher social support and increased drug misuse indicates that not all types of social support are protective, nor does all peer influence have a preventative effect, as some peer influence promotes substance use. The present findings are in agreement with Enwere and Iloakasia (2024) who, while considering the issue of gender, identified self-esteem as the best predictor of psychological well-being among adolescents in senior secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria, and also found that self-esteem has moderate significant positive correlation with Masculinity among males. The outcome of the finding in this study but is in contrast with the study of Kehinde et al. (2025) examined the context of substance use in Nigeria and across the overall quality of life of Nigerians, While their finding identified differences in QoL measures and the influence of rehabilitation interventions shows that substance use disorder (SUD) severity has a negative correlation with quality of life (QoL). This contradiction might actually relate to the context of the study such that, in line with peer norms condoning risk-taking behaviour, a misapplied sense of self-esteem might actually promote risky behaviour in university environments, and the need for further exploration on the qualitative aspects of self-esteem and social support in these settings is warranted.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Self-esteem and social support, but not gender, are important determinants of drug abuse, the complexity of the psychological and social determinants of behavior. For society, these results imply that perhaps we should rethink our prevention strategies that assume self-esteem and social support are protective by nature. But the influence in the opposite direction suggests that this needs to be better understood in a particular context. It was recommended that, in addition to refining national policies on mental health by recognizing the importance of community structures, increasing funding for community-based initiatives and conducting research on their efficacy, that universities could benefit from integrating more nuanced understandings of psychosocial experience into their educational programs, being critical of social support and peer influence in the place of support, and reconsidering existing measurement scales of self-esteem and social support to also ensure cultural validity.

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