

WORK PRESSURE AND DRUG ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Drug use in the workplace is a behaviour displayed by employees to cope with work-related pressures. Based on the review of existing literature, this paper concluded that work pressure is caused by some Organisational factors, and employees resort to drug abuse to cope with work-related pressures. The availability of substances in the workplace, the work environment's culture, management control, job dissatisfaction, work group influence, and inadequate regulations are some of the workplace factors identified as contributing to drug use among employees. It was also noted through the lens of social control theory that turning to drug use in response to workplace pressure could result in absenteeism, low productivity, losing one's job, showing deficient performance, and psychological problems. The paper suggested that every Organisation's human resource management department can lessen pressures at work enacting strict laws to deal with the phenomenon of drug use in the workplace.

Keywords: Drug Abuse, Human Resource Management, Work pressure, Workplace

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that managing employees and optimizing their performance is the most important and fundamental function of any Organisation's human resource management wing. Despite this important function, among many others, human resource management is still dealing with serious managerial and employee-related issues, particularly in today's world. These issues among many others include work pressures, discriminations, issue of safety, reward system, work regulation, work overtime and so on. Work pressure has recently been identified as a common factor that induces drug use among employees (both skilled and unskilled) in an Organisation, because all jobs involve some degree of pressure (Askew & Williams, 2021).

Abuse of drugs and alcohol puts employees' health and safety at serious risk in the workplace (Mallow, 2019). According to Frone (2019), drinking alcohol results in absenteeism, feeling ill at work, being late or leaving early, accidents, having difficulty performing job-related tasks, and harm to coworkers and customers. The nature of the work itself can occasionally place extremely high demands on the employees, to the point where they may be tempted to turn to alcohol or other drugs to cope. The pressure to support certain productivity levels, work rules and deadlines, working night or long shifts, constant long-distance driving, job complexity, and role conflicts may all have an impact on how an individual employee behaves about drug use (Bourquin et al., 2021)

Based on the foregoing, workplaces are at risk of creating a problem with employee substance abuse. This is because many workplace factors may unintentionally enable, induce, or support employee substance abuse (Egazy, 2021). This is why hiring Organisations, employee service providers, and labour policymakers must be aware of these factors. According to Alkan and Güney (2021), these factors could include unpleasant work environments, a lack of safety, insufficient

physical or financial resources, poor supervision and problems with coworkers, low pay, inadequate training and job preparation, job insecurity, and a lack of opportunities for career advancement.

The dangers of substance abuse can affect various aspects of human life. For example, the abuser may suffer from physical and psychological dependence, disciplinary action and job loss, loss of income and shattered family relationships, the need to direct scarce resources to rehabilitation programs, and workplace productivity loss and work accidents (Babalola & Yelwa, 2020). It is within this context and with the aim of addressing the issue of drug abuse in the workplace that this paper examines work pressure as a key determinant of substance use, drawing exclusively from existing literature on the subject. For coherency and succinctness, concept like drug abuse and work pressure will be clarified followed by discussions on workplace factors and drug abuse among workers.

1.1.1 Concept of Drug Abuse

Drug abuse has historically been defined as the use of any illegal substance, regardless of whether it was harmful or not. For instance, even occasional use of marijuana can lead to abuse, unlike occasional use of alcohol because of alcohol's level of social acceptance as a legal substance. The United States National Commission on Drug Abuse stated in 1920 that the term "abuse" was ambiguous and that it "has no functional ability and has become no more than a code word for drug considered wrong and illegal" (Miech et al., 2017). More disturbing is the fact that drug abuse is a major public health problem all over the world (Degenhardt et al., 2018). The use and abuse of drugs have become one of the most troubling health related phenomena in Nigeria and other parts of the world (Chia, 2016).

Drug abuse is described as a condition where a person becomes psychologically or physically dependent on a drug, or both, after taking it on a regular or continuous basis (Kawugana, & Faruna, 2018). The terms "harmful use" and "hazardous use" are used by the World Health Organisation (1973) to define the word. A pattern of psychoactive drug use that is endangering one's physical or mental health is referred to as harmful use. Negative societal effects of harmful use are often seen, though not always. Hazardous use refers to a habit of drug use that raises the user's chance of adverse reactions. Drug abuse, according to Adewale (2022), is the inappropriate consumption of drugs for reasons other than medical treatment that has a negative effect on the user's social, mental, or physical health. Social effects may manifest as a person's greater tendency to argue with peers, teachers, and school officials. Drugs' mental side effects include memory loss and an individual's failure to concentrate on academic work (Adewale, 2022).

According to the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, as cited by Haladu (2003), drug abuse is defined as excessive and persistent self-administration of a drug without regard for medically or culturally accepted patterns. According to Ahmed et al. (2004), drug abuse is defined as the non-medical use of a drug that interferes with a healthy and productive life. Manbe (2008) defined drug abuse as the excessive, maladaptive, or addictive use of drugs for non-medical reasons. According to Abdulahi (2009), drug abuse is defined as the use of drugs to the point where it interferes with an individual's health and social function. Drug abuse may be defined as the arbitrary overdependence or misuse of one drug with or without a prior medical diagnosis from qualified health practitioners. It can also be regarded as an illegal overdose in the use of drugs (s). Odejide et al. (2017) cautioned that drug users who show symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, behavioural changes, fatigue, and loss or increase in appetite should be treated by medical experts and counsellors to avoid fatal diseases. Looking at the definitions given above,

a drug is a medical treatment for illness in and of itself. It only turns harmful and dangerous to the biological system when used improperly, with extreme dependence, to relieve stress or emotional distress, or to elicit psychological sensationalism.

This is why according to Sussman and Ames (2001), the most abused drugs are cannabis sativa (marijuana or Indian hemp), cocaine heroine, morphine, opium, tobacco, and alcohol. The sale and consumption of these drugs has caused numerous issues in Nigerian society and internationally (Abdullah, 2009). This is why most drugs are illegal under the law, and there are national and international agencies set up to monitor and control the illegal drug trade. To combat drug abuse and trafficking in the country, the Federal Government established the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in 1980. Since then, it has arrested numerous people involved in illegal drug activities and seized a variety of hard drugs. In 2013, the NDLEA reported that her agency had seized more than forty million tons of cannabis, cocaine, and heroin. It was also stated that a reasonable number of drug lords and traffickers were apprehended during the period, with some of them successfully prosecuted and imprisoned (NDLEA, 2013).

1.1.2 The Dynamics of Work Pressure

Work pressure has emerged as a growing issue in Organisations over the last few decades. Work related pressure is a tense state in which a person is confronted with an opportunity, demand, or resource that is related to what the individual desires and the outcome is perceived to be both ambiguous and critical (Krieg & Mohseni, 2015). A vast and multi-disciplinary literature identifies several key factors, such as work environment, management support, workload, and so on, in determining how pressured work can be and its impact on employee physical and mental health (Schmitt, et al., 2016). Workplace pressure has also been identified as a dysfunctional factor for Organisations and their members (Bronkhorst, 2015).

However, work-related pressure, in another instance, can be mostly immobilizing due to the potential threats to family functioning and individual performance. It can also cause a disparity between the demands placed on employees and their ability to provide material security for their family (Quratulain & Khan, 2015). While there is less research on work and family, there is a significant amount of research on perceived job insecurity (i.e., concerns or fears about job loss) and marriage and family life. Pressure condition occurs when one realizes that the requirements of a situation, is greater than their recognition can handle, especially if these requirements are large and continue for an extended period without any break, as a result, mental, physical or behavioural problems may occur.

It is undeniable that pressure exists in all workplaces whether large or small and those workplaces have become increasingly complex because of the dynamics that exist in their operation. Workplace pressure has a significant impact on employee job performance, and human resource departments around the world are grappling and attempting to cope with this scenario. According to Wang (2020), employees have an elevated level of time pressure, working longer hours, which reduce employees' desire to perform better. Management support either reduces or increases pressure in employees, and visible Organisational assistance, management support acts as a cushion, positively reducing work-related pressure in employees (Stamper & Johlke, 2003). Workplace pressure can arise for a variety of reasons, including family conflicts and work overload, but one of them is that "if the Organisation or management does not appreciate its employees for their hard work or contribution toward the Organisation, it can create work pressure and generally leads to the intention to leave," according to Stamper and Johlke (2003).

However, work pressure was defined by Adeoti et al. (2020) as a circumstance that will cause a person to deviate from normal functioning because of a change (i.e. disruption or enhancement) in

his/her psychological and/or physiological condition, such that the person is forced to deviate from normal functioning (Ho & Chan, 2022). We can infer from this definition that researchers have produced the assumption that it is crucial for a person to be aware of the pressures they are facing in their line of work. The behaviour of university academic staff for example may be influenced by certain demographic factors, and the management role of an Organisation is one of the factors that also affect employee work related pressure (Antoniou et. al., 2003).

Several studies have also dwelt specifically on the deleterious consequences of high workloads or work overload. According to Johari et al. (2019) work overloads and time constraints were significant contributors to work pressure among community nurses as observed in their study. Workload pressure can be defined as reluctance to come to work and a feeling of constant pressure accompanied by the general physiological, psychological, and behavioural stress symptoms (Delisle, 2020). Johari et al. (2019) also mentioned in their studies that one of the major factors for occupational demand is pressure originating from workload. The ultimate results of this work pressure have been found to be one of the crucial factors influencing job performance in the workplace (Duxbury & Halinski, 2018).

1.1.3 Workplace Factors and Drug Abuse among Workers

Employee substance abuse is a problem that can occur in any workplace. This is because many workplace factors may inadvertently enable, prompt, or open room for employee substance abuse. As a result, human resource managers and labour policymakers must be aware of these factors. The following are some of the factors identified in the literature.

- ***Work Environment and Occupational Demand***

It was stated that several adverse work environmental factors can make even some of the best jobs stressful, which may contribute to employee problems of substance abuse. These factors could

include uncomfortable work settings, lack of safety, inadequate physical or financial resources, poor supervision and problems with co-workers, low pay, poor training and job preparation, job insecurity and lack of opportunities for career advancement (Shaw et al., 2020; Adekanmbi & Ukpere, 2020; Agberotimi et al., 2020). Occupational demand many at times results from high work demand and a low amount of control over the situation. This contributes towards employee diminished performance, negativity and cynicism, a decline in commitment and creativity, decreased ability to concentrate, and less interaction with other employees (Otu et al., 2018). Over demanding occupation can also make an employee develop a range of symptoms including insomnia, headaches, fatigue, anxiety, irritability and depression which in the long run becomes unbearable, some of these employees may resort to substance abuse to cope with their situations (Yang & Hayes, 2020).

- ***Workplace culture***

Employers need to make their stance clear on substance abuse, to address the unofficial practices that may be taking place within their Organisations. Officially a blind eye may be turned to some employees' practices. At worst, some of these practices may have come to be accepted in some workplaces, for instance, drinking during work breaks (the so-called "liquid lunches") in the locker rooms, or for that matter during working hours (Pidd et al., 2019). At times, the nature of the work itself may place remarkably high demands on the workers, so that they may be tempted to use alcohol or other drugs to absorb the pressure. The demand, for example, to maintain the required levels of productivity and constant deadlines, working nightshifts, long shifts, constant long-distance driving, job complexities and role conflicts may all play an important part in particular employees' behaviours.

As observed in literature that some of the occupational groups at “risk” of abuse of substances include among others: artists, musicians, medical personnel, farm workers and transport industry workers, especially long-distance truck drivers (Olaniyi, 2018). The nature of the environment plays part in terms of work demands and pressures, while also part of the problem could be culture of such occupations. Employees may be aware that some amongst them are abusing drugs. A blind eye may have been turned, with no repercussions. For that matter, those identified in the past may have been leniently treated. This may have been despite the Organisation’s “noise” made around the subject (Olaniyi, 2018).

- ***Unbothered Attitudes of the Management***

For a variety of reasons Organisations may simply ignore the use or abuse of substances, if it is perceived as not affecting the “work.” The general attitude is that substance abuse is an individual employee’s problem. The view is that the publicity that may come because of the problem may not be “good for the business.” This may particularly be so for small Organisations, especially those that rely on small markets, which may react negatively to the publicity (e.g. loss of customers). Publicizing the presence of a problem, therefore, is perceived to threaten the image or the very survival of reporting Organisations (Backer & O’Hara, 1991). Some employers may not believe that there may be a problem worth investigating. The attitude is one of denial, where employers may say something like: *“Our employees do not do that, we know them. They know it is against company policy, and for that matter, they know the consequences: expulsion”* (Backer & O’Hara, 1991). This may be the position until, for example, an employee loses a limb or their life, because of their own or someone else’s substance abuse while at work.

- *Availability of the substances in the environment*

This factor has more to do with the Organisation's geographical location and the availability of addictive substances in and around the workplace. The location of the workplace and its area of operation are crucial factor to be considered in determining drug abuse among workers. Is the workplace, for example, located in or near a neighbourhood area with stores that sell alcoholic substances? An experience shared by Frone (2019) is that of a public relations officer who was constantly intoxicated, even at work. His job included receiving and entertaining many visitors to the institution (i.e. prospective donors, academics, and government officials), who came daily. On arrival or during various functions these visitors would be offered all sorts of beverages such as tea, soft drinks, and beer. The public relations officer would take the advantage of the work situation, drink all sorts of alcoholic beverages and in the process lose control over his drinking. His work performance was adversely affected. Chapman et al. (2021) also give examples of employees in the pharmaceutical environment, where medication drugs are widely available. This is where health professionals such as doctors, nurses and other general medical workers are found. There could be abuse problems if drug and medicine control procedures are not properly adhered to. The question here becomes: to what degree is the work environment to blame? The lethal combination is both the poor administrative controls, and the poor will power on the part of the individual professional.

- *Social control and peer pressure*

There is also an element of the work environment and atmosphere which fosters no freedom of independent individual behaviour. Another situation is the pressure of constant employee supervision. Employees with a "need to belong" and get accepted may succumb to pressures by doing what they think is right in terms of that particular social or work group's norms (Johnson,

2007). Unfortunately, the co-workers' activities may include drinking and the use of other substance during breaks, as well as before or after work. The attitude and thinking are that: *"If you do not do as we do here, you belong to the other side."* This is important in small groups where everyone who belongs is expected to comply with group norms (Johnson, 2007).

- ***Alienation and dissatisfaction***

Some work environments isolate workers from their social support networks when these are needed. This is experienced during times of stress and dissatisfaction related to problems such as: work overload and job complexities, unpleasant work atmosphere, poor pay, feelings of powerlessness and other personal issues in the workers' private lives (Mogorosi, 2009). Such employees may hang onto anything they can. This may include, unfortunately, being tempted to use alcohol and other substances. Pelders and Nelson (2017) aptly describe the dilemma facing the mineworkers (*the "men between two worlds"*) in the context of South Africa during the 1980s as a succinct example of employee alienation, which may ultimately tempt them to resort to substance abuse to cope with the pressures. Most of these mineworkers are African men from a traditional rural life, who come to enlist for jobs at the urban-based mines. Historically these work settings belittled and ridiculed these men and regarded the miners' lifestyles as primitive and uncivilized and treated them accordingly. This often leads to the mineworkers feeling alienated and becoming socially dysfunctional like a man who has lost self-confidence, self-respect, and initiative. In consequence many resorts to aggression and other related negative behaviour like drug abuse as methods in trying to negotiate the new and complex life (Pelders & Nelson 2017).

1.2 Theoretical framework

1.2.1 Social Control Theory

Social control theory proposes that exploiting the process of socialization and social learning builds self-control and reduces the inclination to indulge in behaviour recognized as antisocial. It derives from functionalist theories of crime and was developed by Ivan Nye (1958). Social control theory proposes that people's relationships, commitments, values, norms, and beliefs encourage them not to break the law. Thus, if moral codes are internalized and individuals are tied into and have a stake in their wider community, they will voluntarily limit their propensity to commit deviant acts (Costello & Laub, 2020).

The theory seeks to understand the ways in which it is possible to reduce the likelihood of criminality developing in individuals. It does not consider motivational issues, simply stating that human beings may choose to engage in a wide range of activities, unless the range is limited by the processes of socialization and social learning. The theory derives from a Hobbesian view of human nature as represented in *Leviathan*, i.e. that all choices are constrained by implicit social contracts, agreements, and arrangements among people. Thus, morality is created in the construction of social order, assigning costs and consequences to certain choices and defining some as evil, immoral, and/or illegal.

Proponent like Edward A. Ross in 1901, who defined social control as "the more that the smooth running of social machinery implies the frequent breaking off or turning aside of individual activities, the more perfect is the social order." Hence, the more perfect that the social order is, the more social control is achieved. His best-known work, 'Social Control' (1901), deals with the reasons for and the means of societal limitation of the individual. Regarding specific deterrence, the application of legal sanctions following a conviction for an offence such as using cocaine has

several purposes including punishment, reform, retribution and possibly incapacitation (Robert, 2020). However, a primary goal of the sanctioning process is to deter offenders from repeating the same crime in the future, and thus, the penalty should be perceived as certain, severe, and swift (Chiricos et al., 2020).

Going by this theoretical understanding, drug abuse is a social problem and a deviant behaviour because no employer will allow workers to engage in the use of drug while on work even the acceptable alcohol cannot be allowed in any work environment. Based on this assertion, every kind of substance either licit or illicit should not be allowed in the workplace because it is considered a deviant act. The main position of the social control theory assumes that the higher the control, the lower the crime rate and the lower the control, the higher the crime rate in any society. Work pressure as a determinant of drug abuse can be explained in the light of this assumption by considering drug abuse as a deviant behaviour. Since drug abuse is determined in the workplace by the level of work pressures experienced by the workers then the practicing of such deviant act should be arrested through the establishment of strict regulation. If the punishment for the use of any substance abuse in the work place is high, social control theory posits that the use of substance abuse will be low because the workers will be afraid of negative sanction but if the regulation guiding the use of substance abuse in the workplace is low, the use of substance abuse will be high among workers and the continuity of such deviant act could be disastrous on the overall output of the workers and could subsequently lead to absenteeism, low productivity, job loss, poor performance, and psychological issues as revealed in other literatures.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a meta-analysis approach, systematically reviewing existing literature to explore the relationship between work-related pressures and drug abuse among employees. Research articles were selected through a systematic search of academic databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect. Keywords like "work pressure and substance abuse," "workplace stress and drug use," and "Organisational factors influencing drug abuse" guided the search.

The inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed studies published within the last 20 years (2004–2024), addressing workplace-related factors contributing to drug abuse. Empirical studies, theoretical analyses, and policy reports were included, while non-academic sources and opinion pieces were excluded. A total of forty-two research articles and reports were analysed, covering various sectors such as corporate Organisations, healthcare, transportation, and industrial labour, with studies from Nigeria, other African nations, the United States, Europe, and Asia.

Modelling work pressure and drug abuse in the workplace

Category	Components	Connections
Organisational Factors	- High Job Demands	Leads to Work Pressure
	- Low Job Satisfaction	Leads to abusing drugs
	- Workplace Culture	
	- Substance Availability	
	- Management control	
	- Inadequate regulations	
Work Pressure	- Stress	Causes individual Strain.
	- Anxiety	Causes Behavioural Change (drug usage)
	- Fatigue	

Behavioural Change	- Substance use as a coping mechanism	Leads to Deviant Behaviour: Drug Abuse
Deviant Behaviour	- Drug Abuse	Results in Workplace Deterioration such as absenteeism, low productivity, psychological issues
Social Control Mechanisms	- Formal Controls (strict policies) - Informal Controls (peer influence) - Support Systems	Aims to mitigate Deviant Behaviour and reduce its impact
Outcomes	- Reduced Drug Abuse - Improved Well-being - Enhanced Productivity	Achieved through effective implementation of Social Control Mechanisms

(Author's conception)

The table shows the progression from Organisational factors such as high job demands, low job satisfaction, workplace culture, and substance availability to work pressure, which causes individual strain and behavioural changes like involvement in drug use. Drug abuse, which is considered deviant behaviour, leads to workplace deterioration, including absenteeism, reduced productivity, and psychological issues. To improve this, social control mechanisms such as formal policies, peer influence, and support systems need to be employed to mitigate this deviant behaviour and its consequences. Effective implementation of these mechanisms results in positive outcomes, including reduced drug abuse, improved employee well-being, and enhanced productivity.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the foregoing, a review of existing scholarly productions reveals that most scholars have based their studies of work pressure and drug use on corporate Organisation among white collar employees, ignoring the unskilled workers in the social system. Nonetheless, some studies have found the pressures faced by unskilled labour in the workplace, such as truck drivers, and how they engage in drug use as a result. However, most of the research on work pressure remains an Organisational and human resource management issue. This paper attempted to conceptualize drug abuse, the dynamics of work pressure, and then opened a discussion on workplace factors and drug abuse among workers.

It is possible to conclude from this paper that work pressure is caused by Organisational factors, and that employee's resort to drug abuse to cope with work-related pressures. Some workplace factors found in the literature as being responsible for drug use among workers include nature of work, work demands, workplace culture, poor management control over the use of drug, work dissatisfaction, work group influence, substance availability in the work environment, and poor regulations. It was also discovered through the application of social control theory that using drugs because of work-related pressure shows the low level of Organisational regulations which could result in absenteeism, low productivity, job loss, deficient performance, and psychological issues. As a result, this paper suggests that the human resource management wing of every Organisation can reduce work-related pressures by increasing remuneration and hiring more people, as well as putting strict laws in place to address and improve the phenomenon of drug use in the workplace.

FUTURE RESEARCH

For future research, scholars could explore the intersection of work pressure and drug abuse across different occupational settings, including blue-collar and informal work environments that may not have been extensively covered in this study. Longitudinal studies could also offer deeper insights into how work-related pressures evolve over time and their long-term effects on employee health and Organisational productivity. Furthermore, comparative studies across different countries and industries could offer a broader perspective on how cultural and regulatory differences influence workplace drug use.

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