



# **Examining the Impact of Psychological Distress and Substance Abuse on Violent Crimes Among Youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the influence of psychological distress and substance abuse on violent crimes among youths in Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the influence of psychological distress and substance abuse on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey research design was used to select a sample of 207 participants from a population of 429. The demographic characteristics of the participants were as follows: male (N = 109, 52.7%) and female (N = 98, 47.3%). In addition to providing demographic data, participants responded to three standardized self-report instruments, including socio-demographic questionnaires. Data were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics. Overall, three hypotheses were formulated and inferentially tested at the 0.05 level of significance using simple linear and multiple regression analyses. Findings revealed that psychological distress significantly predicted violent crimes among youths ( $\beta = 0.482, t = 7.42, p < .001$ ). In addition, the findings showed that substance abuse significantly predicted violent crimes among youths ( $\beta = 0.512, t = 8.01, p < .001$ ). Given these results, the findings confirmed all the hypotheses formulated for the study and highlighted the importance of addressing psychological and behavioral risk factors to reduce violent crimes among youths. The study concluded and recommended that drug prevention campaigns by government and non-governmental organizations should be intensified and targeted at adolescents. Therefore, comprehensive prevention and intervention programs targeting mental health and substance use are essential to curb youth involvement in violent crimes.

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*addition to providing demographic data, participants responded to three standardized self-report instruments, including socio-demographic questionnaires. Data were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics. Overall, three hypotheses were formulated and inferentially tested at the 0.05 level of significance using simple linear and multiple regression analyses. Findings revealed that psychological distress significantly predicted violent crimes among youths ( $\beta = 0.482$ ,  $t = 7.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, the findings showed that substance abuse significantly predicted violent crimes among youths ( $\beta = 0.512$ ,  $t = 8.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Given these results, the findings confirmed all the hypotheses formulated for the study and highlighted the importance of addressing psychological and behavioral risk factors to reduce violent crimes among youths. The study concluded and recommended that drug prevention campaigns by government and non-governmental organizations should be intensified and targeted at adolescents. Therefore, comprehensive prevention and intervention programs targeting mental health and substance use are essential to curb youth involvement in violent crimes.*

Keywords: psychological distress, substance abuse, violent crimes

**Keywords:**

## **Introduction**

Substance abuse among youths remains a significant public health concern globally, with varying trends observed across different regions. In the United States, recent data indicate a decline in adolescent substance use. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), in 2024, 41.7% of 12th graders reported alcohol use in the past year, a decrease from 45.7% in 2023. Similarly, cannabis use among 12th graders remained stable at 29.0% in 2023, with a slight decline in 2024 (NIDA, 2024). These trends suggest a positive shift in adolescent substance use patterns. However, the situation differs in other parts of the world. In Scotland, a 2023 World Health Organization (WHO) study found that 23% of 15-year-old boys had used cannabis, the highest rate globally. This statistic underscores the persistent challenges in addressing youth substance abuse in certain regions (The Times, 2023).

In Nigeria, substance abuse among youths is on the rise. A report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicated that 14.4% of Nigerians aged 15 to 64 abuse drugs, with marijuana being the most commonly used substance (UNODC, 2023). Additionally, a study in Osun State revealed that 12.3% of youths aged 15-24 had engaged in substance abuse, with alcohol, shisha, and tramadol being the most commonly abused substances (Idowu et al., 2023). Experts attribute these trends to various factors, including peer influence, lack of education on substance abuse, and socio-economic challenges. Dr. Oche Joseph Otorokpa, a public health specialist, highlighted that Nigeria's geographic location, economic disparities, political instability, and global demand for drugs contribute to rising drug abuse among youths (Otorokpa, 2023).

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around 20% of youths globally engage in harmful use of alcohol or illicit drugs, and this trend is exacerbated in certain regions (WHO, 2024). A survey



conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023) found that the global prevalence of youth drug use is increasing, with approximately 5.4% of adolescents aged 15-16 reporting having used illicit substances in the past month. This statistic is particularly concerning in low- and middle-income countries, where access to both illegal substances and prevention programs is limited.

In the United States, the 2023 National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) survey reported that 27% of high school seniors had used alcohol in the past month, and 16% had engaged in marijuana use within the same timeframe (NIDA, 2023). This statistic indicates that a significant proportion of adolescents in the United States are experimenting with substances, with marijuana use emerging as the most common form of illicit drug consumption. This trend is concerning because early substance use is associated with an increased risk of developing substance use disorders later in life, as well as a range of social, academic, and psychological challenges.

Several factors contribute to the high rates of substance abuse among youths. These factors are interrelated and can range from individual characteristics to environmental influences. Peer pressure is one of the most significant factors influencing youth substance use. A study by Macdonald and Williams (2023) found that 48% of adolescents who had experimented with alcohol or drugs reported that peer influence was the primary factor behind their decision to engage in substance use (Macdonald & Williams, 2023).

Violent crime among youths has become a rising global concern, with far-reaching implications for social stability, public health, and future development. Youths, defined by the United Nations as individuals aged 15 to 24, are both the primary perpetrators and victims of violent crimes in many societies. According to the World Health Organization (2024), homicide is one of the top five causes of death among young people aged 15-29, with males disproportionately affected, accounting for more than 80% of youth homicide victims globally. This alarming trend is not limited to fatal violence. A substantial number of young individuals are also affected by non-lethal violent acts such as assaults, bullying, sexual violence, and gang-related crimes, many of which go unreported (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024).

Recent data highlight regional differences and alarming increases in violent behavior. In the United States, youth-involved homicides tripled from 3.3 per 100,000 in 2016 to 9.9 per 100,000 in 2023 (Magee, 2024). Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, a 2023 Youth Endowment Fund report revealed that 16% of teenagers had been victims of violence within a year, and 47% had either witnessed or experienced violence. Alarmingly, 68% of the victims reported physical injuries. Furthermore, 62% of youths identified drug abuse and 50% pointed to gang involvement as major causes of youth-related violence (Youth Endowment Fund, 2023).

In Nigeria, the prevalence of youth violence is similarly distressing. A recent study conducted in Ekiti State showed that 55% of youths admitted involvement in gang-related activities, while 50.5% reported illicit drug use, both of which are major predictors of violent behavior (Akintoye, Okunola, & Olofintoye, 2023). Peer group pressure, social media influence, family breakdowns, and urban poverty were highlighted as common triggers. Public health expert Dr. Oche Joseph Otorokpa noted that "a combination of poor parental



supervision, unemployment, and exposure to aggressive role models" fuels aggression among Nigerian youths (Otokpa, 2023).

Scholars identify multiple risk factors contributing to violent behavior among young individuals. These include easy access to firearms, exposure to domestic violence, substance abuse, socio-economic disadvantage, and poor mental health (Coffey, 2023). According to the International Society for Research on Aggression (2023), youths who are socially excluded or who experience peer victimization are significantly more likely to express their frustration through violence. Additionally, studies have shown that chronic exposure to media violence desensitizes young viewers and may increase their likelihood of engaging in violent behavior (Anderson et al., 2023). Globally, the rate of violent crime among youths has fluctuated over the years, but it remains a significant concern. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), approximately 20% of violent crimes worldwide are committed by individuals aged 15 to 24, with a notable increase in violent incidents involving youth gangs and organized crime groups (UNODC, 2024). In many countries, there has been an increase in violent crimes among youths in the past decade, particularly in urban areas where economic disparities and social tensions are more pronounced.

Psychological distress among youths has become a significant global public health issue, with increasing evidence pointing to rising rates of mental health disorders within this demographic. The prevalence of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and emotional turmoil, among adolescents has reached alarming levels. This distress significantly affects various aspects of their lives, including academic performance, relationships, and overall well-being. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive understanding of its causes, consequences, and the best practices for intervention.

The World Health Organization (WHO) states that approximately 10%-20% of children and adolescents globally suffer from mental disorders, with the majority of these cases going unrecognized and untreated (WHO, 2024). This figure underscores the global nature of the problem, affecting youths in both high-income and low-income countries. Studies indicate that rates of anxiety and depression are particularly concerning among girls, who experience these disorders at higher rates than boys. A study by Gebremedhin and Gebremariam (2020) found that the prevalence of psychological distress among secondary school students in Ethiopia was around 25%, with girls reporting higher levels of distress than boys. This study suggests that social, environmental, and gender-related factors play a significant role in shaping the mental health of youths (Gebremedhin & Gebremariam, 2020).

A 2023 study by the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in the United States highlighted that nearly 40% of high school students reported experiencing persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Furthermore, 20% of adolescents seriously considered suicide in the past year, with 9% attempting it. These statistics reveal a troubling trend in adolescent mental health, with substantial implications for future policy and intervention strategies. The survey also found that female students, LGBTQ+ youth, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds were at higher risk for psychological distress (CDC, 2023).



Several factors contribute to the high rates of psychological distress among youths, including societal pressures, academic stress, family dynamics, and peer influence. Peer pressure and social comparison, especially in the context of social media, have become significant stressors for many young people. Constant exposure to idealized images and unrealistic expectations can lead to feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and anxiety (Levine & Murnen, 2024).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Substance abuse, violent crime, and psychological distress among youths present a significant challenge to both public health and public safety. According to the World Health Organization (2024), mental health disorders affect approximately 10%-20% of youths globally, with depression and anxiety being the most commonly diagnosed conditions.

In recent years, Makurdi, the capital of Benue State, Nigeria, has witnessed a concerning rise in substance abuse and violent crimes among its youth population. A study conducted in 2023 by Ugbem-Onah examined the socio-economic impact of substance abuse among youths in Makurdi Local Government Area. The research revealed a high prevalence of substance use, with peer influence, unemployment, and frustration identified as major contributing factors. The substances commonly abused included alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, which adversely affected the youths' income, physical health, and mental health status. In a related study focusing on Katsina-Ala Local Government Area, also in Benue State, Burbwa and Kimbi (2023) found that 84% of "Okada" riders, or commercial motorcycle operators, abused alcohol, 64% used marijuana, and 56% consumed tramadol. The primary reasons for drug use included stress relief, enhancement of strength, and peer influence. Violent crimes among youths in Makurdi have also seen an uptick. A 2022 study by Uya, Ibeenegh, and Achir highlighted that youths in the area were involved in various criminal activities, including kidnapping, armed robbery, and militia-related violence. Factors such as unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, and political instability were identified as key drivers of these crimes. Furthermore, police reports from late 2024 indicated that 273 individuals were arrested for capital offenses in Benue State, with 54 suspects apprehended for armed robbery and 63 for cultism. These figures underscore the escalating involvement of youths in serious criminal activities. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2023) reports that about 40% of youths with untreated psychological distress develop substance use disorders, exacerbating mental health issues and increasing the likelihood of engaging in violent acts.

Substance abuse remains one of the most pervasive issues among adolescents worldwide. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023), approximately 16% of adolescents aged 15-16 years have used illicit drugs in the past year. The most commonly abused substances include marijuana, alcohol, and prescription drugs, but the use of opioids and synthetic drugs has also risen dramatically in recent years.



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## **Research Questions**

Given the research objective, the following questions were raised for the study:

What is the influence of psychological distress on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria?

What is the influence of substance abuse on violent criminal behavior among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria?

## **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were raised for the study:

There will be a significant influence of psychological distress on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria.

There will be a significant influence of substance abuse on violent criminal behavior among youths in Makurdi.

## **Significance of the Study**

The study on examining the influence of psychological distress and substance abuse on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria, holds significant relevance both theoretically and practically within the context of local public health and broader criminological research.

First, the study will contribute to the growing body of literature in forensic and correctional psychology by deepening the understanding of how psychological distress and substance abuse influence violent criminal behavior among youths.

Second, for policymakers and criminal justice agencies, the research will provide evidence-based insights that can inform targeted intervention strategies and youth crime prevention programs in Makurdi and similar urban settings in Nigeria.

Moreover, the study is important for improving the existing framework of mental health care and youth support in Nigeria. Currently, there is a significant gap in mental health services for young people, particularly in rural or semi-urban areas like Makurdi.

## **Scope of the Study**

The study examined the effects of psychological distress and substance abuse on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. This research was a survey study in which a questionnaire was used for data collection, and the study was restricted to youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria.

## **Conceptual Clarification/Literature Review**



This section presents the conceptual definitions of key variables in the study and critically reviews related empirical literature to provide a theoretical and research-based foundation for understanding the relationship between psychological distress, substance abuse, and violent crimes.

## **Psychological Distress and Violent Crimes**

The relationship between psychological distress and violent crime is a complex and frequently debated topic within psychological and criminological literature. Many studies emphasize that individuals experiencing mental health issues are disproportionately victims of violence. For instance, a 2020 article from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority reported that only 3% to 5% of violent acts can be attributed to persons with serious mental illness, and adults with serious mental illness were over 10 times more likely to become victims of violent crime than the general population. This sentiment is echoed in a 2025 StatPearls article, which states that "a significant body of research indicates that individuals with mental illnesses are more likely to be victims, rather than perpetrators, of violent crimes" (StatPearls, 2025). This calls for a critical re-evaluation of societal perceptions and media portrayals that often stigmatize those with mental conditions as inherently dangerous. Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD) is frequently cited as having a strong association with violent behavior. Individuals with ASPD often exhibit traits such as a lack of guilt, impulsivity, and disregard for social norms (Hare, 1993, as cited in ScienceIJASAR, 2024). Recent research continues to explore the connection between ASPD and criminal behavior, emphasizing how high levels of psychopathy, closely related to ASPD, can increase the risk of extreme criminal acts (Salekin et al., 2021, as cited in ScienceIJASAR, 2024).

While the overall link is small, individuals with schizophrenia, particularly those experiencing severe forms of the disorder with symptoms such as paranoid delusions and hallucinations, may have a higher risk of violent behavior compared to the general population. However, this risk is significantly mitigated with adequate treatment and support (Lin et al., 2022; Swanson et al., 2018, as cited in ScienceIJASAR, 2024). A substantial body of evidence indicates that co-occurring substance use disorders significantly amplify the risk of engaging in violent or criminal behavior among individuals with major psychiatric conditions. Some researchers even suggest that the perceived increase in violent crimes associated with mental illness might be predominantly attributed to a history of alcohol or drug use (StatPearls, 2025). A 2025 study on mental health and violent behavior among university students also found that individuals with serious depressive disorders and other mental health issues had an increased probability of engaging in crime (IJMSSPCS, 2025).

## **Substance Abuse and Violent Crime**

The relationship between substance abuse and violent crimes is a well-established, albeit complex, area of empirical research. Research broadly categorizes the substance abuse-violence nexus into three primary models: psychopharmacological, economic-compulsive, and systemic (Goldstein, 1985). Each offers a



distinct lens through which to understand the intricate interplay.

Substances such as alcohol, cocaine, amphetamines, and phencyclidine (PCP) are frequently implicated. Alcohol, for instance, is a central nervous system depressant that can lower inhibitions, impair judgment, and distort perceptions, making individuals more prone to aggression (American Addiction Centers, 2025). Studies indicate that alcohol abuse precedes nearly half of all violent crimes, including homicides and sexual assaults (American Addiction Centers, 2025; SEAH Publications, 2025). Cocaine and amphetamines, as stimulants, can induce paranoia, irritability, and anxiety, potentially escalating to violent outbursts (SEAH Publications, 2025). Chronic intoxication, withdrawal symptoms, and sleep deprivation associated with prolonged substance use can also contribute to heightened aggression and impaired impulse control (AMJ, n.d.).

While the psychopharmacological link is widely accepted, scholars emphasize that intoxication alone does not cause violence. Instead, it interacts with pre-existing individual vulnerabilities, such as a history of aggression or mental health issues, and situational factors, such as social context or availability of weapons, to increase the likelihood of violent acts (American Addiction Centers, 2025; ResearchGate, 2024). Some researchers also note that certain substances, such as heroin and cannabis, are generally associated with a reduced desire for violence, though disturbed behavior can occur during withdrawal (SEAH Publications, 2025).

The high cost of maintaining a drug addiction can drive individuals to engage in income-generating crimes such as robbery, burglary, or theft (IISTE.org, 2013). When these crimes are resisted or involve confrontations, they can escalate into violence. For instance, approximately 17%-18% of inmates report committing crimes to obtain money for drugs (PMC, n.d.). The desperation associated with withdrawal and the need for immediate funds can lead to impulsive and aggressive actions.

While this model is strongly supported, some scholars argue for a reciprocal relationship in which criminal behavior might also provide funds for drug use, creating a self-reinforcing cycle (ResearchGate, 2024; AMJ, n.d.). There is also recognition that involvement in illicit drug sales itself can lead to violence due to the inherent risks and lack of legal recourse in the black market (IISTE.org, 2013).

A critical viewpoint within this model is that drug prohibition is a primary driver of violence, forcing the drug trade underground and making violence a necessary tool for market regulation (ASU Law, n.d.; GOV.UK, 2025). This suggests that policies aimed at reducing drug use or trafficking might inadvertently increase violence if they do not address the systemic factors of the illicit market. Recent reviews even suggest that some drug-related law enforcement activities are of limited effectiveness in reducing violence and may even be associated with increased violence (GOV.UK, 2025).

## **Methodology**

This section outlines the procedures and methods employed in conducting the study. It explains the research design, population of the study, sample size and sampling technique, instruments used for data



collection, methods of data collection, validity and reliability of the instruments, as well as the statistical techniques used for data analysis. These methodological steps were carefully followed to ensure the credibility, reliability, and validity of the findings on the influence of psychological distress and substance abuse on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria.

## **Population, Sample, and Sampling Techniques**

The total population of this study was four hundred and twenty-nine (429) youths in the Makurdi, Benue State Federal Medical Centre. To realize the sample for this study, the researcher used the Raosoft sample size calculator to determine the study's sample. The sample size calculator produced a sample size of 207 participants for the study. This means 207 measurements/surveys were needed to have a confidence level of 95% that the real value is within  $\pm 5\%$  of the measured/surveyed value using the formula:

Where:

$z$  is  $z$  score = 429

$p?$  is the population proportion = 0.05

$n$  and  $n'$  are sample size = .5

$N$  is the population size = 207

Therefore, 207 participants were randomly selected to participate in the study. This figure constituted the research study sample.

## **Research Instrument**

Three instruments were used in this study. These were:

**Section A: The Kessler Psychological Distress (K10).** Developed by Kessler et al. (2003), this is a simple measure of psychological distress. The K10 scale is measured with a 5-point Likert format involving 10 questions about emotional states, each with a five-level response scale. According to the scoring instructions, each item is scored from one, "none of the time," to five, "all of the time." Scores of the 10 items are then summed, yielding a minimum score of 10 and a maximum score of 50. Low scores indicate low levels of psychological distress, and high scores indicate high levels of psychological distress. For interpretation of scores, the 2001 Victorian Population Health Survey adopted a set of cut-off scores that may be used as a guide for screening for psychological distress. These are outlined below: K10 Score: Likelihood of having a mental disorder (psychological distress): 10-19, likely to be well; 20-24, likely to have a mild disorder; 25-29, likely to have a moderate disorder; and 30-50, likely to have a severe disorder.

### **Section A: The Kessler Psychological Distress (K10).**

**Section B: Violent Crimes (VC).** The BVRI-SV is a 12-item self-report screening tool designed to provide a rapid assessment of attitudes, behaviors, and historical factors associated with an elevated risk for violent



conduct. It is intended for use in forensic, clinical, or correctional settings by trained professionals as part of a broader risk assessment protocol, not as a standalone diagnostic tool. Psychometric properties are required for an instrument to be considered scientifically valid. These include strong psychometric properties after rigorous testing. Internal consistency assesses whether the items on the scale measure the same underlying construct. It is typically measured using Cronbach's alpha (alpha).

### **Section B: Violent Crimes (VC).**

Expected value: Total Scale: alpha = 0.89. Subscales: alpha ranging from 0.82 to 0.87. An alpha above 0.80 is considered good. Test-retest reliability assesses the stability of the scores over time. The instrument would be administered to the same group of individuals on two separate occasions, for example, 2 weeks apart.

Section C: Substance Abuse Screening Test. Developed by Skinner (2001), the instrument is a 20-item questionnaire measured with a response format of Yes or No. Questions concern information about one's potential involvement with drugs, not including alcoholic beverages, during the past 12 months. The substance abuse screening test has a reliability and validity coefficient of .74. In the statements, "substance abuse" refers to (1) the use of prescribed or over-the-counter drugs in excess of the directions and (2) any non-medical use of drugs. The various classes of drugs may include cannabis (e.g., marijuana, hash), solvents, tranquilizers (e.g., Valium), barbiturates, cocaine, stimulants (e.g., speed), hallucinogens (e.g., LSD), or narcotics (e.g., heroin).

### **Section C: Substance Abuse Screening Test.**

## **Techniques for Data Analysis**

The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while linear and multiple regressions, as inferential statistics, were used to test the effects of psychological distress and substance abuse on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. The entire statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 23).

Hypothesis One: This hypothesis stated that there will be a significant influence of psychological distress on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. Linear regression analysis was used. The result is presented in Table 4.2.

### **Hypothesis One:**

Table 4.2: Summary results of linear regression table showing the influence of psychological distress on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria

**Table 4.2: Summary results of linear regression table showing the influence of psychological distress on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
1		beta	Std. Error	?	
Violent Crimes	Constant	6.25	2.21		2.84 0.005
	psychological Distress	0.487	0.069	0.482	7.42

Dependent Variable: Violent Crimes; Sig .000;  $p < .01$

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*Dependent Variable:*

*; Sig .000;  $p < .01$*

The results presented in Table 4.2 show that psychological distress significantly predicted violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria (beta = 0.482,  $t = 7.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis One was supported.

Hypothesis Two: This hypothesis stated that there will be a significant influence of substance abuse on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. Linear regression analysis was used. The result is presented in Table 4.3.

**Hypothesis Two:**

Table 4.3: Summary results of linear regression table showing the influence of Substance abuse on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria

**Table 4.3: Summary results of linear regression table showing the influence of Substance abuse on violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
1		beta	Std. Error	?	
Violent Crimes	Constant	4.85	2.10		2.31 0.005
	Substance Abuse	0.533	0.069	0.512	8.01

Dependent Variable: Violent Crimes; Sig .000;  $p < .01$

**Dependent Variable: Violent Crimes; Sig .000;  $p < .01$**

*Dependent Variable:*

*; Sig .000;  $p < .01$*



The results presented in Table 4.2 show that substance abuse significantly predicted violent crimes among youths in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria (beta = 0.512,  $t = 8.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis Two was supported.

## **Discussion of Findings**

Hypothesis One stated that there will be a significant relationship between psychological distress and violent crimes among youths in Makurdi. The results indicated that psychological distress significantly predicted violent crimes, explaining 23.2% of the variance in violent criminal behavior. This finding implies that youths who experience higher levels of psychological distress are more likely to engage in violent criminal acts. This outcome aligns with previous research by Chen et al. (2023), who demonstrated that heightened emotional distress often triggers aggressive and risk-taking tendencies among adolescents. Furthermore, the result supports the stress-aggression theory, which posits that psychological strain leads to frustration, subsequently manifesting as aggressive or criminal behaviors. The positive association found in this study is consistent with the findings of Adewumi and Ibrahim (2024), who argued that unaddressed psychological distress arising from environmental stressors, peer pressure, and unstable home environments substantially increases the likelihood of delinquent behaviors. The implication is that mental health interventions among youths are crucial in reducing their engagement in violent crimes. Thus, the finding strongly supports Hypothesis One and corroborates the body of evidence emphasizing the role of psychological well-being in preventing criminal behaviors.

Hypothesis Two stated that there will be a significant influence of substance abuse on violent criminal behavior among youths in Makurdi. The study revealed that substance abuse significantly predicted violent criminal behavior, accounting for 26.2% of the variance. This suggests that substance abuse is a strong risk factor for involvement in violent crimes. This finding is in agreement with the study by Olawale and Eze (2023), who reported that the consumption of psychoactive substances such as alcohol, marijuana, and opioids directly correlates with aggressive and unlawful actions among young individuals. According to the disinhibition hypothesis, the use of drugs reduces self-control and heightens impulsive tendencies, which explains the increased likelihood of violent acts. Moreover, the current finding corroborates findings by Hassan and Umeh (2022), who noted that substance abuse contributes not only to the frequency but also to the severity of violent crimes among adolescents. From a psychosocial perspective, substance use serves as a maladaptive coping mechanism that exacerbates behavioral problems. Consequently, this result underscores the need for substance abuse prevention programs targeted at youths, as controlling drug use can directly reduce violent crime rates. Therefore, Hypothesis Two was confirmed.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that psychological distress and substance abuse are key predictors of violent criminal behavior among youths in Makurdi. Therefore, comprehensive prevention and intervention programs



targeting mental health and substance use are essential to curb youth involvement in violent crimes.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

**Mental Health Interventions:** Counseling and mental health programs should be introduced in schools and communities to help youths manage psychological distress effectively.

### **Mental Health Interventions:**

**Drug Prevention Campaigns:** Government and non-governmental organizations should intensify drug prevention campaigns targeted at adolescents.

### **Drug Prevention Campaigns:**

**Specific Strategies:** Special interventions should be designed for male youths, who are more susceptible to violent behavior under these risk factors.

### **Specific Strategies:**

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