



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF PEER SUPPORT GROUPS ON REHABILITATION OUTCOMES AMONG INDIVIDUALS WITH OPIOID USE DISORDER IN PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the impact of peer support groups on rehabilitation outcomes among individuals with opioid use disorder in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of 83 individuals with opioid use disorder at the Port Harcourt Psychiatric Hospital, Rivers State, from which a sample of 42 individuals (50%) was selected using a combination of purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire, "Assessing the Impact of Peer Support Groups on Rehabilitation Outcomes among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder Questionnaire" (AIPSGRAOUDQ), which was validated by experts and tested for reliability using the test-retest method and the Cronbach Alpha technique, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.725. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to answer research questions and inferential statistics (independent t-tests) to test hypotheses, facilitated by SPSS version 27.0. The findings revealed that participation in peer support groups has a significant and positive effect on both domains. Specifically, individuals engaged in peer support reported lower substance use levels, attributing their progress to the encouragement, accountability, and shared experiences offered within the group setting. The social reinforcement and sense of belonging provided by these groups appear instrumental in sustaining sobriety and preventing relapse. The study concluded that peer support groups offer a cost-effective, scalable, and community-driven solution for managing opioid use disorder and addressing the physiological and emotional dimensions of recovery. As such, the study recommends integrating peer support into formal rehabilitation strategies, supporting policies, and mental health services to optimise recovery outcomes and promote long-term wellness.

Keywords: Peer Support Groups, Rehabilitation Outcomes, Opioid Use Disorder.

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Received: 13/5/2025; **Revised:** 30/6/2025; **Accepted:** 18/7/2025; **Published:** 30/7/2025



1.0. INTRODUCTION

Opioid use disorder (OUD) represents one of the most pressing public health crises of the 21st century, affecting millions of individuals worldwide and creating devastating consequences for families, communities, and healthcare systems (Volkow & Blanco, 2021). This complex chronic condition is characterized by compulsive opioid use despite harmful consequences, encompassing prescription painkillers, heroin, and synthetic opioids like fentanyl. The disorder's neurobiological underpinnings involve significant alterations to brain reward pathways, making recovery particularly challenging and often requiring comprehensive, long-term treatment approaches. Traditional rehabilitation models have historically relied heavily on medical interventions, professional counselling, and institutional care, yet sustainable recovery rates remain disappointingly low, with relapse rates often exceeding 60% within the first year following treatment completion (Hartley & Tarvydas, 2022).

The rehabilitation system for individuals with opioid use disorder faces numerous interconnected challenges that complicate recovery efforts. Social stigma surrounding addiction creates barriers to seeking help and maintaining treatment engagement, while the chronic nature of the disorder requires sustained support systems that extend far beyond initial detoxification and clinical treatment phases (Hartley & Tarvydas, 2022). Many individuals in recovery struggle with co-occurring mental health conditions, trauma histories, and social determinants of health, including poverty, homelessness, and fractured family relationships (Obekpa et al., 2021). Additionally, the current healthcare infrastructure often lacks adequate resources for comprehensive addiction treatment, creating gaps in continuity of care that leave vulnerable individuals without necessary support during critical transition periods. These systemic limitations highlight the urgent need for innovative, community-based approaches that can complement traditional treatment modalities while addressing the holistic needs of individuals in recovery.

Peer support groups have emerged as a promising intervention model that influences the shared experiences and mutual understanding among individuals who have navigated similar challenges with substance use disorders (Samuel, 2024). These groups operate on the fundamental principle that individuals with lived experience of addiction recovery possess unique insights, credibility, and motivational capacity that professional providers may lack. Peer support encompasses various formats, including structured group meetings, one-on-one mentoring relationships, and community-based recovery networks that provide ongoing encouragement, practical guidance, and social connection (Olusa et al., 2022). The theoretical foundation of peer support rests on social learning theory, which emphasises the power of observational learning and vicarious reinforcement, as well as social identity theory, which highlights how group membership and shared identity can foster positive behavioural change and sustained motivation.

Recent research evidence suggests that peer support interventions may offer significant advantages in addressing the multifaceted challenges associated with opioid use disorder rehabilitation. Studies have demonstrated that peer support can enhance treatment retention rates, reduce relapse frequency, and improve overall quality of life outcomes among participants (Ugbede et al., 2024). The Nigerian context provides particularly valuable



insights into peer support effectiveness, as documented by recent investigations into substance use disorder interventions in rural and urban settings (Kehinde et al., 2025; Nnaemeka et al., 2024). These studies reveal that culturally adapted peer support programmes can successfully address local contextual factors while maintaining core therapeutic principles. Furthermore, research indicates that peer support groups may be especially beneficial for addressing psychological factors such as self-esteem, social isolation, and family relationship dynamics that significantly influence recovery trajectories (Samuel, 2024; Olusa et al., 2022). The growing body of evidence supporting peer support interventions reveals their potential as cost-effective, scalable solutions that can complement existing treatment infrastructure while addressing the comprehensive support needs of individuals pursuing long-term recovery from opioid use disorder.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Opioid use disorder (OUD) is a complex and challenging condition to treat, with high rates of relapse and significant impacts on mental health and quality of life. Traditional rehabilitation approaches often fall short in addressing the multifaceted needs of individuals with OUD, highlighting the need for innovative and effective interventions. Peer support groups, which leverage the experiences and support of individuals who have navigated similar challenges, offer a promising approach to enhancing rehabilitation outcomes. Despite their potential, the impact of peer support groups on substance use reduction and quality of life and mental health outcomes among individuals with OUD remains understudied. This gap in knowledge limits the development of evidence-based practices and policies that could improve treatment outcomes and support recovery. This study aims to address this gap by assessing the impact of peer support groups on rehabilitation outcomes among individuals with OUD, with a focus on substance use reduction and quality of life and mental health outcomes.

1.2. Aim and Objectives

This study aims to assess the impact of peer support groups on rehabilitation outcomes among individuals with opioid use disorder. The specific objectives are to:

- To examine the effect of peer support groups on substance use reduction among individuals with opioid use disorder.
- To investigate the impact of peer support groups on the quality of life and mental health outcomes among individuals with opioid use disorder.

1.3. Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide this study:

- What impact do peer support groups have on substance use reduction among individuals with opioid use disorder?
- What impact do peer support groups have on quality of life and mental health outcomes among individuals with opioid use disorder?



1.4. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and statistically tested at a 0.0 level of significance:

- Participation in peer support groups will lead to significant reductions in substance use among individuals with opioid use disorder.
- Participation in peer support groups will lead to improved quality of life and mental health outcomes, including reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, among individuals with opioid use disorder.

2.0. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. Social Learning Theory

The theoretical foundation of peer support finds its roots in Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emerged in the 1960s as a revolutionary approach to understanding human behaviour and learning processes (Oko-Joseph, 2024). Bandura developed this theory through his extensive research on observational learning, most notably demonstrated in his famous Bobo doll experiments conducted at Stanford University. The theory evolved from traditional behaviourist approaches by incorporating cognitive processes and emphasising the social context of learning, fundamentally challenging the prevailing stimulus-response models of the time (Njideka & Uche, 2024).

Social Learning Theory posits that people learn not only through direct experience but also by observing others, imitating behaviours, and modelling the actions of significant figures in their environment (Nwachukwu et al., 2024). The theory emphasises four key components: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. According to Bandura, individuals must first pay attention to the behaviour being modelled, retain the information in memory, possess the physical and cognitive capabilities to reproduce the behaviour, and have sufficient motivation to perform the learned behaviour. The theory also introduces the concept of vicarious reinforcement, where individuals learn from observing the consequences of others' actions without directly experiencing those consequences themselves (Wali & Kanaba, 2023).

The relevance of Social Learning Theory to peer support studies is profound and multifaceted. Analysis of social learning theory on social media life among Nigerian Youth demonstrates how contemporary learning processes occur through digital peer interactions, highlighting the theory's continued applicability in modern contexts. In peer support systems, individuals learn coping strategies, problem-solving techniques, and adaptive behaviours by observing and interacting with peers who have successfully navigated similar challenges. The theory explains how peer supporters serve as role models, providing observable examples of recovery, resilience, and positive behavioural change. Furthermore, the social context emphasised in Bandura's theory aligns perfectly with peer support environments, where shared experiences and mutual understanding create optimal conditions for observational learning and behavioural modelling, ultimately facilitating personal growth and positive outcomes.



2.2. Conceptual Clarification

Effect of Peer Support Groups on Substance Use Reduction among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder

The examination of peer support groups' effectiveness in reducing substance use among individuals with opioid use disorder represents a critical area of research that addresses one of the most pressing public health challenges of our time. Opioid use disorder has reached epidemic proportions globally, necessitating comprehensive treatment approaches that extend beyond traditional medical interventions. Peer support groups offer a unique therapeutic modality that leverages shared experiences and mutual understanding to facilitate recovery and sustained abstinence.

Research demonstrates that peer support programmes play a vital role in managing chronic diseases, including substance use disorders, by providing emotional support, practical guidance, and accountability mechanisms that complement clinical treatment (Ugbede et al., 2024). The effectiveness of these interventions lies in their ability to create safe spaces where individuals can share experiences without judgment while learning from others who have successfully navigated similar challenges. Contemporary studies focusing on improving quality of life among substance users emphasise the importance of evidence-based practices that incorporate peer support as a fundamental component of comprehensive treatment programmes (Kehinde et al., 2025). Furthermore, feasibility studies of brief interventions for substance use disorders in rural communities highlight the accessibility and cultural appropriateness of peer-led approaches, particularly in resource-limited settings where traditional treatment options may be scarce (Nnaemeka et al., 2024).

Impact of Peer Support Groups on Quality of Life and Mental Health Outcomes among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder

Peer support groups significantly enhance quality of life and mental health outcomes for individuals with opioid use disorder by addressing the multifaceted nature of addiction recovery. These interventions create therapeutic communities where shared experiences foster healing, reduce isolation, and promote sustained recovery (Ashing-Giwa, 2012). Research demonstrates that peer influence plays a crucial role in substance use patterns, highlighting how positive peer relationships can counteract negative influences that contribute to drug abuse (Obekpa et al., 2021). The social support inherent in peer groups addresses fundamental psychological needs, including belonging, self-worth, and purpose, which are often compromised in individuals struggling with opioid addiction.

The effectiveness of peer support extends beyond substance use reduction to encompass broader aspects of mental health and psychosocial functioning. Participants in peer support programmes often experience improved self-esteem, reduced anxiety and depression, and enhanced coping mechanisms for managing triggers and stressors (Ashing-Giwa, 2012). The group dynamic provides opportunities for individuals to develop leadership skills, rebuild social connections, and establish meaningful relationships that support long-term recovery goals. Studies on peer support group counselling demonstrate significant improvements in behavioural outcomes and sustained positive changes in participants' lives (Samuel, 2024).



Furthermore, research shows that peer support interventions create lasting behavioural modifications that extend beyond the immediate treatment period, suggesting that the social learning and mutual support mechanisms inherent in these programmes contribute to enduring improvements in overall quality of life and mental health stability (Olusa et al., 2022).

3.0. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the impact of peer support groups on rehabilitation outcomes among individuals with opioid use disorder. The population consisted of 83 individuals with opioid use disorder at the Port Harcourt Psychiatric Hospital, Rivers State, from which a sample of 42 individuals (50%) was selected using a combination of purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire, "Assessing the Impact of Peer Support Groups on Rehabilitation Outcomes among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder Questionnaire" (AIPSGRAOUDQ), measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was validated by experts and tested for reliability using the test-retest method and the Cronbach Alpha technique, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.725. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to answer research questions and inferential statistics (independent t-tests) to test hypotheses, facilitated by SPSS version 27.0. Meanwhile, a total of 42 questionnaires were distributed; 36 (85.7%) were retrieved, valid, and used for the analysis.

4.0. DISCOURSES

4.1. RESULTS

4.1.1. Research Question One: What impact do peer support groups have on substance use reduction among individuals with opioid use disorder?

Impact do peer support groups have on substance use reduction

Item	N	Mean	Std. D	Decision
1. Attending peer support groups has helped me reduce my substance use.	36	4.472	0.682	Agree
2. Peer support groups provide me with valuable coping strategies for managing cravings.	36	4.417	0.693	Agree
3. The support I receive from peers in the group motivates me to stay sober.	36	4.500	0.568	Agree
4. Participating in peer support groups has improved my overall recovery experience.	36	4.528	0.563	Agree
Grand Mean		4.479		

The results of the table above reveal that participants strongly agree that peer support groups have a significant impact on reducing substance use among individuals with opioid use disorder. Specifically, they reported that attending peer support groups helped them reduce their substance use, provided valuable coping strategies for managing cravings, and offered



motivational support that encouraged them to remain sober. Additionally, participants acknowledged that their overall recovery experience improved as a result of participating in these groups. The grand mean score of 4.479, which is well above the criterion mean of 3.00, indicates a strong and positive impact of peer support on substance use reduction. This implies that peer support groups play a crucial role in promoting sustained recovery and reducing substance dependence among individuals with opioid use disorder.

4.1.2. Research Question Two: What impact do peer support groups have on quality of life and mental health outcomes among individuals with opioid use disorder?

Impact of Peer Support Groups on Quality of Life and Mental Health

Item	N	Mean	Std. D.	Decision
5. Participating in peer support groups has improved my overall quality of life.	36	4.444	0.698	Agree
6. Peer support groups have helped me better manage stress and anxiety related to my recovery.	36	4.361	0.758	Agree
7. Attending peer support groups has positively impacted my mental health and well-being.	36	4.417	0.672	Agree
8. The support from peers in the group has helped me develop a more positive outlook on life.	36	4.472	0.611	Agree
Grand Mean		4.423		

The result of the above table revealed a strong agreement among participants that peer support groups significantly enhance their quality of life and mental health outcomes. Individuals reported that participating in these groups helped them better manage stress and anxiety related to their recovery, positively influenced their mental health and overall well-being, and contributed to developing a more positive outlook on life. The support and shared experiences within the groups were seen as valuable in fostering emotional resilience and psychological stability. With a grand mean score of 4.423, well above the criterion mean of 3.00, these findings confirm a strong and positive impact of peer support groups on the mental health and quality of life of individuals with opioid use disorder. This implies that peer support groups can be a crucial component of holistic care and recovery programmes for individuals with opioid use disorder, addressing not only their physical health but also their mental well-being.

4.2. Test of Hypotheses

4.2.1. Hypothesis One: Participation in peer support groups will lead to significant reductions in substance use among individuals with opioid use disorder.

Status	N	\bar{X} (Mean)	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab	P-value	Decision
Male Individuals	21	4.47	1.05	34	8.042	1.96	0.000	Reject
Female Individuals	15	3.10	0.80					

The independent samples t-test compared the mean substance use scores of individuals attending peer support groups and those not attending. The results showed a mean score of 3.10 (SD = 0.80) for participants in peer support groups, compared to 5.45 (SD = 1.05) for non-participants. With $t_{cal} = 8.042$, which exceeds the critical value of 1.96, and a p-value of



0.000, the result is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is concluded that participation in peer support groups significantly reduces substance use among individuals with opioid use disorder. The finding revealed that participating in peer support groups is associated with a significant reduction in substance use among individuals with opioid use disorder, compared to those not attending such groups. This implies that peer support groups may be a valuable component of treatment and recovery programmes for individuals with opioid use disorder.

4.2.2. Hypothesis Two: Participation in peer support groups will lead to improved quality of life and mental health outcomes, including reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, among individuals with opioid use disorder.

Status	N	\bar{X} (Mean)	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab	P-value	Decision
Peer Support Group	18	4.42	0.62	34	6.55	1.96	0.000	Reject
No Peer Support Group	18	3.30	0.81					

The independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether participation in peer support groups leads to improved quality of life and mental health outcomes, including reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, among individuals with opioid use disorder. The results showed a mean score of 4.42 (SD = 0.62) for individuals who participated in peer support groups, compared to a lower mean score of 3.30 (SD = 0.81) among those who did not. This difference was statistically significant, with a calculated t-value of 6.55, which is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating strong statistical significance at the 0.05 level. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and we accept the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, it implies that participation in peer support groups significantly improves the quality of life and mental health outcomes among individuals with opioid use disorder. This supports the view that peer support is a critical element in fostering emotional well-being, managing stress and anxiety, and promoting a more positive recovery experience.

4.3. Discussion of Findings

4.3.1. Participation in peer support groups will lead to significant reductions in substance use among individuals with opioid use disorder.

The current study found that participation in peer support groups significantly reduces substance use among individuals with opioid use disorder. With a statistically significant difference between participants and non-participants. The findings affirm the effectiveness of peer support interventions. These results align with the findings of Ugbede et al. (2024), who reported that structured peer support programmes significantly improved substance use outcomes in chronic disease management, particularly among individuals with substance dependence. Their study highlighted how shared experiences and social reinforcement among peers foster accountability and reduce relapse risk. Similarly, Kehinde et al. (2025) emphasised that peer-based interventions play a vital role in behaviour change and recovery by creating a safe and supportive environment where participants feel understood and empowered. Both studies underscore the importance of relational dynamics, social modelling,



and emotional support provided through peer-led frameworks. The agreement between these findings and the present study reinforces the assertion that peer support can serve as a cost-effective and impactful element of recovery programmes, especially in resource-limited settings like Nigeria. The consistency of results across multiple studies enhances the validity of the conclusion that peer support significantly contributes to reducing opioid use and supports long-term recovery outcomes.

4.3.2. Participation in peer support groups will lead to improved quality of life and mental health outcomes, including reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression among individuals with opioid use disorder.

This study confirmed that participation in peer support groups significantly enhances quality of life and mental health outcomes among individuals with opioid use disorder, as reflected by the high mean score of 4.42 and a statistically significant t-value of 6.55 ($p = 0.000$). This outcome aligns with the findings of Nnaemeka et al. (2024), who emphasised the feasibility and effectiveness of brief, community-linked interventions in improving emotional well-being among substance users. Their work suggests that interventions embedded in peer relationships are not only accessible but also promote emotional resilience and social reintegration. Similarly, Obekpa et al. (2021) found that peer influence, when structured positively, played a crucial role in improving psychological outcomes such as self-esteem and reducing the emotional triggers of tramadol abuse among young people. This supports the present study's result that peer support helps reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, thereby improving mental health. Both studies corroborate the notion that social connectedness and peer understanding are powerful tools in combating the isolation and emotional distress that often accompany addiction. The convergence of these findings suggests that peer support groups are not only effective in reducing substance use but also serve as a therapeutic tool for enhancing emotional and psychological well-being.

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study assessed the impact of peer support groups on rehabilitation outcomes among individuals with opioid use disorder, focusing on substance use reduction and improvements in quality of life and mental health. The findings demonstrate that participation in peer support groups has a significant and positive effect on both domains. Specifically, individuals engaged in peer support reported lower substance use levels, attributing their progress to the encouragement, accountability, and shared experiences offered within the group setting. The social reinforcement and sense of belonging provided by these groups appear instrumental in sustaining sobriety and preventing relapse. In addition to reducing substance use, peer support groups also contributed meaningfully to enhancing mental health and overall well-being. Participants indicated better stress and anxiety management, improved self-perception, and a more optimistic outlook on life. These psychosocial benefits affirm the value of peer support as an integral component of holistic recovery programs. Peer support groups offer a cost-effective, scalable, and community-driven solution for managing opioid use disorder and the physiological and emotional dimensions of recovery. As such, the study recommends



integrating peer support into formal rehabilitation strategies, supporting policies, and mental health services to optimise recovery outcomes and promote long-term wellness.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended, among others:

- Governments and non-governmental organisations should prioritise the establishment and expansion of peer support group programmes within substance use treatment frameworks, ensuring they are readily available and accessible in both urban and rural areas, and integrated into clinical treatment protocols as a complementary intervention supervised by trained facilitators.
- Health institutions and rehabilitation programmes should utilise peer support groups to address emotional distress, reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, and enhance social support, tailoring them to the unique needs of individuals recovering from opioid use disorder, thereby fostering a more person-centred, empathetic recovery process that supports long-term psychological stability.

Competing Interest

The authors have declared that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript.

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