

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE AS A THREAT TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN
NIGERIA: THE MORAL PANACEA**

Nzeh Atracta A., PhD

*Department of Religion and Cultural Studies,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri
atraco_2006@yahoo.com*

Okoro Ugonna, O., PhD

Research Fellow

Kokey Grace, C., PhD

*Department of Religion and Cultural Studies,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri*

Emmanuel C. Agoha, PhD

*Department of Religion and Cultural Studies,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri*

&

Ohaka Adaku Regina, PhD

*Department of Home Economics,
Hospitality and Tourism, AIFCE, Owerri*

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.21236.83849

Abstract

The growth of a nation is dependent on the moral development of its teeming youths. Reports have proved that Nigeria has the highest number of drug users in the world. Youths who abuse drugs engage in the act for various reasons which could be peer group influence, parental influence, suppression of frustration and just to get high or intimidate others. The economic situation of the country and lack of job opportunities have left some youths in the hands of drug peddlers. These peddlers as opportunists get profits from the sale to make a living. The paper introduced four theories of substance abuse as brainchildren of the writers. These are Pressurist Theory which states that one becomes addicted to drugs by peers. Association with peers at times can result to noxious behaviours rather than pleasant ones. Peers expose one to different activities that can be beneficial or harmful to one in future, the Genitor – Related Theory which states that

addiction to drug is imitable as a child can resort to taking hard drugs through watching parent or parents, the Theory of Discontentment states that out of frustration the youths can embrace hard drugs to ease their predicament, and the Theory of Dependency which views the in-take of hard substance as a result of addiction, that is once an individual starts taking a hard drug, there is a high impossibility to withdraw from it unless adequate measures are taken to repress the act. It is recommended that counselling centres should be set up by Christian organisations to educate the youths to refrain from taking hard drugs and also men of God should take it as a paramount issue to be tackled while preaching on the pulpit on service days. Christian Youth Organisations are to move forward in disseminating information to youths on the dangers of hard drugs through holding seminars or workshops.

Keywords: Substance Abuse, Drug, Threat, Drug Addiction, Moral.

Introduction

The abuse of drugs by youths of the country is a challenging issue that needs to be addressed to save the future leaders. A country that has been plagued by drug addicts has a long way to go because the vibrant human resources are affected as reports prove that there is widespread drug abuse in the country. In order to boost the economic sector all hands must be on deck to fight this catastrophe. Ugly situations can metamorphose into unpleasant attitudes in some individuals. Many youths indulge in taking hard drugs to calm their nerves when faced with distressful conditions, while some cling to drugs as a result of peer or parental influence and so on as reasons depend on individual. Some youths who indulge in taking hard drugs like cocaine, heroin, tramadol, alcohol, etc feel that taking these drugs is escape route to frustration which in turn injures their health and renders them useless. The employment situation has driven some youths to take to drugs to avoid being befogged by anxiety. Morality should be instilled in these youngsters by men of God through preaching and counseling.

Conceptual Explanations

Drug: As described by the writers, drug is any substance that alters the body's system to respond to physiological, physical or mental change. It can be categorized into legal, which are those authorized to be taken and illegal which are those prohibited.

Collins Dictionary defines drug as "a chemical which is given to people in order to treat or prevent an illness or disease". Also drugs are chemical substances that can change how your body and mind work. They include prescription medicines, over-the-counter

medicines, alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs (National Library of Medicine, 2019, para 1.)

Substance/Drug Abuse

As succinctly defined by the writers, substance or drug abuse is the inappropriate and indiscriminate use of drugs that are harmful to the body system. These drugs at times change the state of mind of the abusers thereby exposing them to exhibiting violence. Drug abuse is also the excessive, maladaptive, or addictive use of drugs for nonmedical purposes despite social, psychological, and physical problems that may arise from such use (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d, para. 1).

Substance/Drug Addiction

Addiction is defined as a chronic, yet treatable medical disease that's characterized by the repeated, uncontrollable use of substances (Walker et al, 2022 para. 1). In another vein drug addiction is a chronic brain disease. It causes a person to take drugs repeatedly, despite the harm they cause (National Library of Medicine, 2019, para .5).

Moral

Moral as an adjective of morality according to Lexicon (2022) is “concerned with or derived from the code of behaviour that is considered right or acceptable in a particular society”.

Commonly Abused Substance/Drugs in Nigeria

Youths in Nigeria have invented new names for illegal drugs, inspite of the existence of the known names as they use these names to confound their parents and other adults as well as the police and officers of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency. The following are the commonly abused drugs and their names as formulated by drug abusers.

- a. *Alcohol*: The drug is common to Africans. Both old and young do take it and it could be said that this drink is part of African man's life as it is used for libation, for example palm wine or its distilled local gin is used for this purpose and also drunken by Africans, more especially Igbo extraction. Some people do not perceive it as a drug, but it is a drug that intoxicates. Mamman, et al (2014) agrees to the fact that some cultures accept the intake of alcohol and marijuana, while others do not accept, like the Igbo, Edo, Ijaw, Ibibio, Urhobo, Yoruba, and Itsekiri do use it during cultural events.
- b. *Cocaine*: This drug appears in white powdery form and it is obtained from the leaves of coca plant which is especially seen in South America. It is sniffed and sometimes injected into the body system or eaten (Balamurugan, 2018).

- c. *Cannabis*: This drug is the number one commonly used hard drug in the world and it is easily got and its street names include kush, pot, marijuana, blaze, Eja, Mary Jane, ganja and so forth. It is composed of tetrahydrocannabinol (Freedom Foundation, (2022).
- d. *Tramadol*: This is a pain relieving drug which is in the opioid family. It is for the treatment of moderate serious pain. This is known to be abused all over Nigeria. Many Nigerians do take the drug on daily basis. It influences both physically and psychologically and highly addictive in nature (Tayo, 2017).
- e. *Synthetic Marijuana*: This drug is somehow new and very harmful. It is known as black mamba. It is not the real marijuana, but a conglomeration of chemicals sprinkled on dried herbs or the like and folded in shiny coloured packs and sold as marijuana (Tayo, 2017).
- f. *Methamphetamine* (Mkpuru mmiri as nicknamed by Igbo youths) is a clear narcotic hallucinogen that is very addictive and appears like broken glasses and has the same chemical substance with the drug amphetamine which is a drug for the treatment of ADHD – Attention – Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and narcolepsy which is a sleep problem. It affects the central nervous system. The drug can be smoked, swallowed, sniffed and even injected into the body when dissolved in water or alcohol. The drug has great effects on the brain as it elevates the amount of dopamine a natural chemical in the brain (Ujumadu, 2021).
- g. *Heroin*: This drug is derived from morphine which is in the family of opium poppy. It can be injected or smoked. The drug is mostly dangerous when taken in excess dose and injected (Balamurugan, 2018).
- h. *Tobacco*: Tobacco is a drug that is commonly abused in the world and it is very addictive. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention puts it that tobacco leads to six million deaths per year which means that it is the number one cause of death. Nicotine is the main ingredient in tobacco and it is also addictive. It increases dopamine. When tobacco is used for a long time it can lead to one being physically and psychologically addicted to the drug. This also applies to other forms of tobacco that do not emit smoke such as snuff and chewing tobacco (Tyler, 2018).

Causes of Substance Abuse

At times substance abusers start at an early age, let's say at adolescent age as they are under the influence of their peers or a way to run away from frustration individuals can resort to taking drugs. The following are the causes of substance abuse:

a. *Depression and Mental Illness*

Depression is characterized by despair. It is a feeling of loneliness and can lead to committing suicide and substance abuse in order to escape from suffering. It is prevalent in adolescents both boys and girls, unemployed young men and women and individuals dissatisfied with their life. Depression encompasses both the rich and the poor and even more conspicuous among the rich. Mental illness means being mentally unfit. Many a time those who are suffering from mental illness are given drugs to ease their situations. It then becomes harmful when the patients increase the doses of the drugs to regain health (Edeh, 2021).

b. *Family Influence*

Balamurugan (2018) is of the view that conflicts in the family is an indicative factor that can lead some individuals in resorting to taking drug as a means of running away from stress.

c. *Genetic Factor*

As confirmed by Balamurugan (2018), biology can lead to drug abuse as the individual is exposed to it during the early stage of development, that is when the individual first tastes drug in their early stage which leads to addiction.

d. *Unemployment*

As youths have no means of livelihood, some have resolved in taking drugs. The government has not made effort to create jobs for the teeming Nigerian youths who after graduation are still catered for by their parents, and invariably some of these parents are not paid salaries as when due. It is said that the idle mind is the devil's workshop. This adage is really working in many Nigerian youths.

e. *Poverty*

The economic situation of the country has rendered some families below middle class, thereby increasing the rate of delinquencies among youths. This is more heightened with the increasing rate of unemployment as youths in their state of hopelessness embrace hard drugs as the only escape route from frustration.

f. *Peer Influence*

As youths mingle with peers there is the tendency for them to be dependent on the decisions of their peer groups. They are accepted into the group so far as they stick to the rules of the groups. Their peers control their decisions and their

behaviour as they are highly dependent on them than their parents. Adolescent stage is a state of storm and stress as they exhibit aggressive attitude at any slightest provocation from their parents other than their peer groups because peer group acts as tranquilizing agent in times of distress as sometimes they are given drugs to calm them down. Also some of these youths “get high” (the slang they use) when they are in the midst of their peers, that is they take drugs to show that they belong to the group which depicts conformity to the rules of the group and maturity.

g. Parental Indifference

Many parents are indifferent about the welfare of their children, more especially the career ones who move out for work early morning and come back late. Such parents have left the care of their children in the perilous hands of peers and even depraved domestics. Kawugana and Faruna (2018, p. 33) state that: Many parents have no time to supervise their sons and daughters. Some parents have little or no interaction with family members, while others put pressure on their children to pass exams or perform better in their studies. This phenomena initialize and increases drug abuse.

h. Curiosity

Curiosity they say kills the cat. Relating this to youths’ in-take of hard drugs, youths are prone to experiment, they are curious to know the taste of these drugs and their effects on them. As they watch older adults take drugs, they are bent towards imitating them to find out what is in it without considering the danger that looms around.

i. Traumatic Incidence

According to Martens et al (2006) as cited by Tulu and Keskis (2015), children who have undergone traumatic life events such as sexual, emotional or physical abuse, including neglect are at the increased risk of taking drugs and getting involved in criminal acts, even acts that can destroy their life and lead them to committing suicide.

j. Advertisement

Kawugana and Faruna (2018) affirmed that alcohol and cigarette smoking advertisements move youths to experiment what happens in the advertisements as they are prone to imitation.

k. Frustration

Frustration of not achieving one's life purpose can lead one to hold on drugs to relieve distress. Youths in their distressful state can only extinguish frustration through taking hard drugs to forget their sorrows.

Effects of Substance Abuse

Substance abuse ranges from physical, mental, emotional, social and financial effects. These effects could be short term or long term as the case may be. The following are the effects:

a. *Financial Effect*

Both drugs and alcohol are very costly, especially when the demand is high and being used constantly. It affects productivity and progress at one's work place and school. The time one uses to look for these drugs and recovering from their effects should be better focused on achieving new skills to further one's vocation in life (American Addiction Centers Editorial Staff, 2022).

b. *Physical Effects*

Eske (2022, para.5) highlighted the physical effects of substance abuse as changes in coordination, blood pressure and heart rate changes, feelings of being awake or sleepy, improved sociability, pain relief and changes in the appearance of a person's body.

c. *Psychological Effect*

Ali (2011) is of the view that drug users are dependent on drugs to get along with life and manage stress and as a result their body systems demand for more drugs in order to get that same high experience they got at the inception of taking the drugs.

d. *Academic Effect*

Students who resort to taking drugs have problem in their academic pursuit as they absent themselves from classes and other academic activities. As supported by Ali (2011), drug addiction affects student's performance level in the aspect of missing class, not doing assignments etc.

e. *Crime*

Many crimes committed by youths have been associated with drug abuse. Youths who take hard drugs are exposed to delinquent behaviours such as armed robbery, assault, rape, petty theft (shoplifting) pickpocketing, cultism and even murder, etc. As stated by Sahu and Sahu (2012, p. 57):

There is an undeniable link between substance abuse and delinquency Possession and use of alcohol and other drugs are illegal for all youth. Beyond that, however, there is strong evidence of an association between alcohol and other drug use and delinquent behaviour of juveniles.

As the youths involve themselves in these crimes as a result of drug abuse, they are not only affected, but their families too as their conducts drain the finances of their families in trying to get them out of the legal consequences.

f. Mental Problem

Some of these youths that indulge in taking drugs suffer from mental problem. Many mentally insane youths who roam about the streets are drug abusers before they encountered their predicaments, even in their perilous state, they still take the drugs. The continuous in-take of these drugs is tantamount to prolonged delay in recuperation; if at all their conditions would be reversed.

g. Social Consequences

Some of these youths cause nuisance in the society. They engage in all sorts of delinquencies that are injurious to the society such as arson, provocative fights – as they ignite quarrels with people that result to combat -, rape, petty theft, and involving in destruction of properties.

h. Alienation

People tend to alienate themselves from those who take hard drugs. Parents warn their children to distance themselves from drug abusers in order not to be polluted by their amoral behaviour. Even some of their peers do not want to mingle with them to avoid being tagged “a substance abuser or addict”, because it is said “show me your friend and I will tell you who you are”.

i. Fatality

Drug users are liable to die young because some of them can die as a result of accident while driving or even take others to their early graves. While on the wheel, they lose consciousness which normally results from hallucination. It can lead them to contracting illnesses such as HIV which comes from injecting needles as they share needles without minding the outcome, and other infectious diseases that can be contracted through blood.

Theories of Substance Abuse

These theories are the coinage of the writers and they are as follows:

a. *Pressurist Theory*

This theory states that one becomes addicted to drugs by peers. Some youths might be good, but once they start associating with notorious peers they become influenced negatively by joining them in whatever vices they are known for. This happens in the case of substance abuse where morally behaved youths are lured into taking hard drugs or alcohol by peers.

b. *Genitor – Related Theory*

This theory states that addiction to drug is imitable as a child can resort to taking hard drugs through watching a parent or parents. Some of these youths who take drugs emulate their parents, for example a parent who takes intoxicants does not know that they are exposing their children to alcohol in-take. This is a learnt behaviour from parents as the children watch them take alcohol and even cigarettes. Tomorrow the child will think that alcohol or smoking is a way of life. The worst part of it is that it could be generational as the behaviour passes from one generation to another; thereby becoming hereditary attribute of a family.

c. *Theory of Discontentment*

This theory states that out of frustration the youths can embrace hard drugs to ease their predicament. Economic situations and lack of job opportunities are trigger factors to substance abuse.

d. *Theory of Dependency*

This views the in-take of hard substance as a result of addiction, that is once an individual starts taking a hard drug, there is a high impossibility to withdraw from taking the drug, unless adequate measures are taken to repress the act. The individual depends on the drug as if without it, their life is no more, that is, it is what they rely on to sustain life.

Moral Panacea for Substance Abuse

The Church has a great influence on turning the life of substance abusers to a positive lifestyle.

The following are expected of the Church for this to come to reality:

- a. The Church should invite resource persons to educate the youths on the effects of substance abuse.
- b. There should be rules made by the Church for youths to abstain from substance abuse, rules that attract punishment for offenders and their families. These would

act as deterrents to substance abuse as parents would carry out their roles towards the moral upbringing of their children.

- c. The Church should establish rehabilitation centres where substance addicts are treated and given moral instructions to turn a new leaf.
- d. Role models who were previously substance addicts should be invited to give talks to youths on the dangers of substance abuse as they had been in it.
- e. Skill acquisition programmes should be organized by the various churches to help the youths to learn some skills which would help them to be self-employed and reduce the high rate of unemployment in the country.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will help to reduce the incidence of substance abuse among the youths.

- a. Government should try as much as possible to create jobs for the youths who after graduation still roam about the streets and rely heavily on their parents. This situation is frustrating and can lead youths to have recourse to illegal drugs.
- b. The planting and sale of illegal drugs should be highly prohibited by the government.
- c. The various communities should put hands on deck to stop substance abuse as the substance abusers live among us. They should report them to law enforcement agents. They are known in the communities that is why it is necessary for communities to expose them to the law agents.
- d. Government should organize seminars to educate the youths on the ugly effects of substance abuse.
- e. It is imperative that communities set up monitoring groups to catch owners of medicine stores that sell prohibited drugs and help the law enforcement agents to capture drug addicts seen in the communities.
- f. Counselling centres should be set up by Christian Organisations to educate the youths to refrain from taking hard drugs.
- g. Men of God should take it as a paramount issue to be tackled while preaching on the pulpit on service days.
- i. Christian Youth Organizations are to move forward in disseminating information to youths on the dangers of hard drugs through holding seminars or workshops.
- j. The mass media should give information on the bad effects of drug abuse through phone-in programmes, news talks and advertisements.

Conclusion

The incidence of substance abuse among youths is increasing day by day. The economic condition of the country has made many youths to indulge in taking illegal drugs to escape from frustration. Peer groups have led some youths in taking hard drugs as they rely on their peers for making decisions for them. This is an appalling situation as it has devastating effects on the individuals and the public at large. Parents should play their roles in eradicating this unpleasant situation that has engulfed some youths of our time. This is because child development begins at home and parents are the first teachers a child encounters. Youths should not allow their peers to control their life.

References

- Ali, M.K. (2011) *Causes and effects of drug abuse on academic performance in Kaptma Zone North Pemba Gando village Wete district (Zanzibar)* [Doctoral thesis, Kampala International University].
- American Addiction Centers Editorial Staff (2022, August 2). *The harmful effects of drugs and alcohol*. drugabuse.com
- Balamurugan, J. (2018). Drug abuse: Factors, types and prevention measures. *Journal of Advanced Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 5 (4), 18. www.researchgate.net
- Collins Dictionary (2022). *Definition of drug*. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com>
- Edeh, S. C. (2021, December 8). *Drug abuse causes, effects and solutions*. <https://bscholarly.com/cause-effects-and-solutions-to-drug-abuse/>
- Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica.(n.d.). *Drug abuse*.www.britannica.com
- Eske, J. (2022, June 19). *What are the effects of drug abuse?* www.medicalnewstoday.com
- Freedom Foundation (2022). *Drug abuse among Nigerian students; the impact of drugs in our tertiary institutions*. www.freedomfoundation.org
- Kawugana, A., & Faruna, F. S. (2018). Effects of drug abuse on the Nigerian economy. *International Journal of Innovative Psychology and Social Development*, 6 (4), 33. www-seahipai.org
- Lexicon.(2022). *Moral*.www.lexicon.com
- Mamman, H., Othman, A. T., & Lian, L. H. (2014). Adolescents and drugs abuse in Nigeria. *Journal of Biology, Agriculture and Healthcare*, 4, (1), 6 www.iiste.org
- National Library of Medicine. (2019, November 15). *Drug use and addiction*. MedlinePlus.<https://medlineplus.gov/druguseandaddiction>.
- Sahu, K. K., & Sahu, S. (2012). Substance abuse causes and consequences. *Bangabasi Academic Journal*, 9, 57. scholar.google.com
- Tayo, A. O. (2017, October 19). 5 other drugs used by Nigerian drug users. <https://www.pulse.ng/list/pop-culture/pulse-light-5-other-drugs-used-bynigrian-drug-user/npzt33y>
- Tulu, S. K., & Keskis, W. (2015). Assessment of causes, prevalence and consequences of alcohol and drug abuse among Mekelle university, CSSL 2nd year students. *American Journal of Applied Psychology*, 3 (3), 49. <http://pubs.sciepub.com/ajap/3/3/1>
- Tyler M. (2018, September 4) *Tobacco and nicotine addiction*. www.healthline.com
- Ujumadu, V. (2021, November 20). Mkpuru mmiri: The drug destroying Igbo youths. *Vanguard*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/11/mkpuru-mmiri-the-drug-destroying-igbo-youths/>
- Walker, L. K., Doran, K., & Kelly R. (2020). *What is drug addiction?* drugabuse.com