

## Drug abuse and rising incidence of youth violence in Nigeria: a review

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### Abstract

**Background:** Particularly of great concern to all is the rising incidence of drug abuse among the adolescents and youth. Coupled with this growth is larger menace of drug abuse that destroys the individual, significant others, society and the global community. Hence the condemnation of the use and abuse of psychoactive substances by all and sundry. This article hereby brought to the fore violence as a special kind of associated menace. Thus the current review of the rising incidence of violence as a function of increasing use of psychoactive substances.

**Method/Result:** This paper x-rayed for the fact that drug abuse might be related to the rising incidence of youth violence in Nigeria. It identified perpetrators of violence as mostly anointed god-sons of politicians, particularly during the political rallies and campaigns. It also identified the role drugs of abuse played in the dare-devil activities of these perpetrators of violence.

**Conclusion:** This review concluded that the use of drugs of abuse did not only intoxicate and lead to abnormal behavior among the users but has also been related to the rising incidence of violence in the society. Hence, politicians who exploit this mechanism are called upon to desist from such acts. Lastly, all must make effort to roll back the increasing use of drug abuse which will reduce the rising incidence of violence and other menace of addiction in the society.

**Key Words:** Drug abuse; Rising incidence; Menace of drug abuse; Youth Violence

### Introduction

The use of drugs of abuse is a well-known phenomenon being advocated against by all and sundry. This is because drugs of abuse by definition are psychoactive substances that modify perceptions, cognitions, moods, behaviours and general body functions.<sup>[1]</sup> The most vulnerable group who abuse psychoactive substances are the adolescents. Study has shown that chronic use of psychoactive substances among the adolescents can cause serious, sometimes irreversible damage to their physical, social and psychological development.<sup>[2]</sup> Psychoactive substance use among Nigerian adolescents and youths has

been related to more drug abuse, rape, robbery, cultism, violence and vandalism that are dangerous to the home, community, school and the nation.<sup>[3,4]</sup> Of particular concern is the relatedness of drug abuse with social violence,<sup>[5,6]</sup> defined as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.<sup>[6]</sup>

### Drug Abuse and Violence

It is often said that there is no violence devoid of drug abuse. True to this, study had identified categories of relatedness of violence to drug

abuse as follows: high rate of illicit drug use among perpetrators and victims of violence; violence associated with illicit drug trafficking and sales; pharmacological effects of drugs of abuse leading to loss of self-control; and others like individual personality, poor parenting style, lack of social control mechanism like effective policing ect.<sup>[5]</sup>

All the above categories are present in Nigeria and perhaps the most widespread is that of politically-related violence that seems to be energized by influential Nigerian through the mechanism of drug abuse. Here, politicians have been accused of being the god-fathers of violence perpetrators in Nigeria.<sup>[8]</sup> Another angle where politicians had been accused of contributing to violence even when not related to politics is the impoverization of Nigeria and Nigerians. Such politically induced poverty are often coped with by the youths through maladaptive use of drugs of abuse. Other observations of violence in Nigeria related to drugs of abuse are the ongoing militarism in eastern Nigeria, ethnic clashes in southern Nigeria and religious violence in northern Nigeria. A wide spread drug-related violence is the so called kidnapping and terrorism of Boko Haram and/or herdsmen attacks that ravages several regions of Nigeria.

From the above, the impacts of drug-related interpersonal violence is definitely substantial,

damaging individuals' health and destroying the fabrics of community cohesion and development. Furthermore, the other costs of drug-related violence include the shifting of scarce resources from other priorities, particularly from education and health to the criminal justice services.

### **Mitigating the impact of drug related violence in Nigeria**

To mitigate the impact of drug-related violence in Nigeria is to roll back the incidence of both phenomena. Tackling both together and from a public health perspective should bring about better result. Hence the following approaches are presented thus:

#### Universal prevention of drug of abuse

Since, the rising violence is related to drug abuse, it also goes to say that efforts that limit the use of drugs of abuse should go a long way to prevent violence. Here, drug demand reduction programs championed by United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Green Crescent Health Development Initiative (GHI) and Islamic Medical Association of Nigeria (IMAN) to mention but few must be supported and promoted by all and sundry.

#### Good parenting initiative

It appeared that the biting improvisation of Nigerian's parents has robbed them of capability to carry onward the important duty of

parenting where the proper philosophy of life is first taught and ingrained in the children. Training of existing and would-be parents is essential to help refocused parents to their duty of raising God-fearing and patriotic Nigerians. This I believe is a challenge to Islamic Medical Association of Nigeria (IMAN) and other agencies whose responsibility is it to foster good parenting skills in the parents.

#### Drug access prevention

Nigeria is blessed with the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) whose statutory role to enforce reduction of drug supply and prevent further access to users. Hence, we look forward to NDLEA intensification of their effort to include the drug abuse markets and industries that serve as agents of sales and production respectively.

#### Keeping a well-balanced life

People take up drugs when something in their life is not working, or when they are unhappy about their lives or where their lives are going. Teaching skills that will help individuals see life's big picture, set the right priorities of life in order and live them effectively will contribute to the efforts that will mitigate against drug-related violence.

#### Others

Other efforts geared toward mitigation of drug-related violence are: to ensure provision of evidence-based services for victims and perpetrators; to advocate to our policy makers/leaders at all level to support the efforts rolling back drug-related violence; to demilitarize perpetrators of drug-related violence who are god-sons of politicians; to push for responsible politicking as a status symbol and not the current hooliganism politicians are noted for in Nigeria; and lastly policies that are actionable and that will stand the test of time must be formulated.

#### **Conclusion**

This review has shown that drug abuse is related to social violence. It identifies the general categories of the relatedness of the two phenomena. Furthermore, it pointed out the roles of politicians as a well-known exploiters of drug-related violence. Even though the two phenomena seem to be on the rise, it discussed some interventions that will help mitigate their negative consequences. Finally, it looked forward to a public health approach and some agencies that will help in the actualization of rolling back the incidence drug-related violence.

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