

Drug Abuse and Crime among Youths: The Bane of South Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

Drug abuse and crime among youths are prevalent in South East Nigeria. Drug-related crimes committed in the region include burglary, cultism, murder, armed robbery, arson, rape, kidnapping, vandalism and ritual killing. Social analysts have identified, among others, the general decline in the promotion and observance of high moral and social values, peer pressure, youth unemployment, over-exposure to social media enticements, and sheer idleness, as some of the major reasons why drug abuse and crime among youths are the bane of South Eastern Nigeria. The paper is anchored on the attribution theory developed by Firtz Heider in 1958 and adopted library research as secondary data. The researcher also investigated the factors influencing drug abuse and crime among the youths in the South East. To control the spread of drug abuse among youths in the region, and crimes associated with it, the paper recommends the following: introduction of a massive anti-drug abuse and anti-crime awareness programmes in schools and the media; intensification or introduction of drug education programme in the school system, especially in tertiary institutions, in order to enlighten youths on the adverse effects of drug abuse.

Keywords: drug abuse, crime, youth, South East Nigeria

Introduction

Adolescence and the transition to adulthood are sometimes characterized by the urge to be independent from parents and older adults and the desire to seek close ties with peers and friends. This age range is also typified by the tendency to experiment with new ideas and life styles, and to make choices that may not be conventional or ultimately right. These experimentations, in many cases, lead to uncertain outcomes that lure some youths into the use of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol as means of escaping those situations. The excessive usage of such drugs and addictive substances results into drug abuse.

One of the major problems affecting the whole world today especially the

youths in school and out of school is the issue of drug abuse. It is a problem that affects all races both in the developing and developed nations. It has a number of negative effects on the abusers, and these include disruption of their academic, social, psychological and physiological development, all of which hinder them economically and make them, even as adults, financially dependent on others.

Drug abuse, also called substance abuse, refers to the use of certain chemicals for the purpose of creating pleasurable effects on the brain (Ananya, 2021). Drug abuse can also be seen as an illness characterized by a destructive pattern of using a substance that leads to significant problems or distress, including tolerance to or withdrawal from the substance, as well as other problems that use of the substance can cause for the sufferer, either socially or in terms of their work or school performance. The type of drugs abused could be legal drugs, such as alcohol and tobacco, or illegal and more dangerous drugs, such as cannabis, cocaine, crystal meth or methamphetamine, otherwise known as *Mkpurummiri* in the Igbo parlance.

According to Muanya (2021), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) launched the War against Drug Abuse (WADA) in order to encourage Nigerians to actively participate in the war against drug abuse, that was taking a frightening dimension in the country. Experts have, at various fora, warned that drug abuse had risen to emergency levels in the country. The abuse of illicit drugs among youths in the country, in particular, has been identified as having diverse and devastating effects on the society. Aside from reports of chronic health conditions of the abusers, experts have also established a nexus between the menace and rising incidences of violent crimes.

Drugs can be found all around us and no country can claim that drugs do not affect their societies (Rogers and McCee, 2003; Mason and Henningfield, 2001). According to Njuki (2004), there are so many issues confronting Africa as a continent that drug abuse is not given the attention it deserves. He further reiterated that both illicit drug trafficking and drug abuse are increasing in the continent. For instance, cannabis, methaqualone, heroin and alcohol are included among drugs used across the African continent which has become the transit zone in international drug trafficking. Kaven (2003) described drug abuse as a global problem. He was of the opinion that drug abuse encourages socio-economic and political instability, undermines sustainable development and hampers efforts to reduce crime and poverty.

Drug abuse reports in Nigeria initially dwelt only on the use of cannabis, popularly called Indian hemp (Oli, 2015). Contrary to popular perception, the concept of drug abuse is not narrowed down to persons injecting themselves

with substances or sniffing cocaine. An individual could be abusing drugs or substances without knowing it. Many people today engage in self prescription, which is, going to the chemist shop to buy drugs without the doctor's prescription. Drug abuse is a common phenomenon in Nigeria. A drug, generally speaking, is any substance of vegetable, animal or mineral origin or any preparation or admixture thereof, which is used for internal and external application to the human body in the treatment of diseases. Drugs are substances used for medicinal purposes either alone or in a mixture (Akindele, 1995). When drugs are used according to their prescriptions, the desired therapeutic response will be elicited. But when the drugs were not prescribed or used according to the prescriptions, they usually have adverse effect on the individual and may even worsen the health condition.

The problem of drug abuse poses a significant threat to the social, health, and economic fabrics of families, societies and nations (Giade, 2012; Oshodi, Aina & Onajole, 2010). Almost every country in the world is affected, with one or more drugs being abused by its citizens (UNODC, 2007). The prevalence of drug abuse globally has brought problems such as increase in violence and crimes, increase in Hepatitis B and C virus, increase in HIV/AIDS diseases, collapse of the abusers' veins and collapse of the social structure (UNODC, 2007; Oshodi, Aina, & Onajole, 2010).

Horrible youthful activities are widespread in Nigeria to the extent that they have been giving a lot of concern to the society, government and other stakeholders in the country. In primary schools, peers engage in organized crimes and disrupt normal academic programmes. In secondary schools and most Nigerian universities, the activities of secret cults are known to be constant sources of threat to lives and property. Outside the campuses, a lot of ritual killings are taking place (Abudu, 2008; Oshodi, Aina, & Onajole, 2010). Drug abuse among Nigerian youths is said to be the result of the moral bankruptcy and corruption of the present "wasted generation" noted for its unprecedented loss of societal values and ideals. The situation now appears to be such that no one can claim to be ignorant of the dangerous trend drug abuse in the country is taking (Abudu, 2008).

Cannabis, which is usually known as marijuana or Indian hemp, is the most abused psychotropic drug in Nigeria and it also has a criminal stigma. The drug problem escalated with the use of other drugs like amphetamines and barbiturates (Akindele, 1994). Research has shown that students take these drugs during examination period; long-distance drivers and labourers began to abuse the use of amphetamines which they usually obtain without medical prescription. Drug abuse problem includes the use of tranquilizers to control emotional problems. Substance use disorders, unfortunately, occur quite commonly in people who also have a severe mental illness. Individuals with

dual diagnoses are also at higher risk of being non-compliant with treatment. Drug abuse has continued to be a strategy adopted by youths to cope with various socio-economic and psychological problems. Considering the fact that youths are a vulnerable population, it is crucial for the international community to address this matter.

Methodology

This study obtained relevant information and resources from secondary data, mainly library research. Articles and studies relevant to this paper were obtained and evaluated.

Literature Review

Prevalence of Drug Abuse and Crime

The age brackets of 18-35 are those mostly involved in drug abuse (Kumar, 2022). This set of young people abuse drugs most, due to impulsive acts associated with this group of individuals. Alcohol (61.5%) and cigarettes (54.5%) are the most commonly overused drugs or substances. This is probably because, despite limitations on usage for children and before driving, these substances are permitted in Nigeria (Olanrewaju et al., 2022). There are some underlying reasons why young people engage in drug abuse. Lack of education and awareness of the effects has led to greater number of adolescents and young adults taking to drug abuse. Most abuss arise out of recreational use of drugs and addictive substances. The majority of young people who use drugs do so due to peer pressure, incompetent monitoring by parents and teachers, and poor family upbringing (Lumun & Joshua, 2022). Due to its impact on the youth and the country as a whole, drug abuse has gained international attention. Although young people are meant to be the driving force behind development and change, drug usage has left some of them irreparably damaged (Okafor, 2019). Adolescents need to be properly educated about risks associated with drug abuse (Ofiaeli, Udigwe, Ndukwu & Emelumadu 2022). The problem is most prevalent among young individuals, who frequently lack knowledge of the inherent dangers of the abused substance. Many of them engaged in drug usage due to disappointment, poverty, lack of parental supervision, peer pressure, and other factors (So, 2020).

Drug Abuse and Crime

The relationship between drug abuse and violent crimes, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and cult activities, has exacerbated the already fragile

security situation in South East Nigeria. Drug abuse and drug-related crimes have detrimental consequences on the public's health, safety, and economic stability. Numerous health hazards, such as overdose, infectious diseases, and mental health issues, are issues faced by people who are addicted. Families experience psychological distress, financial strain, and social censure. Communities struggle with rising crime rate, overburdened healthcare infrastructure, and a decline in production. Drugs are abused on the streets and in university campuses. Students of secondary schools and those of tertiary institutions in Nigeria use drugs; it is not just limited to street youths (Chikere & Mayowa, 2011). Drug addicts frequently steal, commit robberies, and participate in other criminal activities as a means of funding their addiction, thereby endangering the safety of the general public and the community. Drug abuse is the root of most criminal activities, including armed robberies, kidnappings, banditry, terrorist attacks, and even public looting (Anyanwu, Eneushike, & Owa-Onibiyo, 2022). Drug abuse and crimes have taken root and spread throughout South East Nigeria, posing a serious danger to the social cohesion, economic stability, and general well-being of the area.

Drug abuse and crime are intertwined, and this leads to negative effects, causing instability and loss of civic values. This menace has a significant impact on not only individuals but also families and the society at large. Drug addiction is a significant issue in terms of social, personal, and public health, and its international nature has made it a major problem across the world.

Theoretical Framework

This paper applies Attribution theory as a framework. Attribution theory was propounded by psychologist Fritz Heider in 1958. Later, Jones et al (1972) and Weiner (1974) focused his attribution theory on achievement. The theory examines the cognitive and social processes underlying the attributional process and its impact on the individual's perception, judgments and subsequent behaviours. This theoretical framework aims to elucidate the factors that influence attributional processes and the consequences of these attributions. Attribution theory reflects how individuals decode events and happenings around them and how it affects their behaviour and thinking. Attribution theory tries to give reasons why people do certain things or actions. It assumes a motivation force for an individual action. It is about attributing reason or causes to an action.

Heider's ideas emphasized two main types of attributions: dispositional (internal causes) and situational (external causes) attributions.

1. **Dispositional Attribution:** This type of attribution assigns the cause of behavior to some internal characteristic or trait of a person. When explaining the behavior of others, we tend to attribute it to enduring internal factors, such as personality traits. This tendency is known as the fundamental attribution error.

2. **Situational Attribution:** Situational attribution involves assigning the cause of behavior to external factors or circumstances beyond a person's control. When explaining our own behaviour, we often make external attributions, considering situational or environmental factors. Situational attributions take into account the influence of the context or situation on behaviour.

Jones and Davis developed the Correspondent Inference Theory, which helps explain the process of making internal attributions. According to this theory, we are more likely to make internal attributions when we see a correspondence between someone's behavior and their motives.

Going by attribution theory, there is need to acknowledge the causes of drug abuse and related crimes. Attribution theory gives reasons why individuals indulge in a particular behaviour and actions; it enquires into the causes of these in our society. Attribution theory suggests that drug abuse can be attributed to multiple factors, including individual characteristics, social influence such as peer pressure and environmental factors. Individual characteristics such as low socio-economic status in cases of unemployment or low income earners, low educational background, and poor coping skills are associated with an increased risk of drug abuse. These factors can contribute to a sense of hopelessness and limited opportunities, leading individuals to turn to drugs as a means of escape or pleasure.

Conclusion

Epidemiological studies have revealed that drug abuse is a significant public health concern in Nigeria. The prevalence of drug abuse among students and youths is alarming, with various substances being commonly abused. The availability of drugs from different sources contributes to the widespread problem. Poor socio-economic factors and low educational background are identified as risk factors. Despite the presence of drug laws, policies, and strategies, the burden of drug abuse persists. To address this issue, it is crucial to involve the community, government, and religious bodies in preventive measures that target high-risk populations and sources of drugs. Continued research and comprehensive interventions are necessary to combat drug abuse and related crimes in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The recommendations here are as follows:

- Addressing this challenge requires collaborative efforts from the community, government, religious bodies, and other stakeholders.
- Prevention measures should specifically target youths, students, identified sources of drugs, reasons for drug abuse, and associated risk factors. Implementing effective preventive interventions and increasing public awareness about the consequences of drug abuse are crucial steps toward reducing the burden.
- Control of the spread of drug abuse among youths through awareness programmes in the media should be intensified.
- Drug education should be introduced in the school system, especially the tertiary institutions, in order to enlighten youths on the adverse effects of drug abuse.

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