

**THE CONTEMPORARY TREND OF DRUG ABUSE
AND ITS EFFECTS AMONG YOUTH IN AWKA
SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF
ANAMBRA STATE**

By

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Abstract

Drug abuse has become a societal problem, with its prevalence being found among youths. The study investigated the contemporary trend of drug abuse and its effects among youth in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Identifying the factors influencing the prevalence of the contemporary trend of drug abuse among youths, and the effects were among the objectives of the study. Differential association theory was employed as the theoretical framework. A total of 208 respondents were used. Multistage and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. The collected data were analyzed using simple

frequency distribution tables and simple percentages. Findings from the study showed that drug abuse is a prevalent issue among the youth in Awka South Local Government Area, and that it has significant effects on their physical and mental health, financial, social well-being and academic performance. It also showed that morphine is the leading contemporary trend in drugs being abused by youths, followed by cannabis, tramadol and rophypnol amongst others. It was also found that there are various factors influencing the prevalence of the contemporary trend of drug abuse among youth, such as frustration, peer influence, sensation, and a lack of parental control. However, the study found that psychological disorders, social isolation, poor academic performance, and low self-esteem are the effects of drug abuse among youths. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the government, through its agencies such as the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), should partner with academic institutions, community stakeholders, and religious leaders to create awareness about the dangers of drug abuse, especially among youths, provide treatment for the affected individuals and implement better policies and regulations to reduce the prevalence of drug abuse among youth in Awka South Local Government Area. Achieving this, would go a long way towards reducing the alarming rate of illicit drugs being abused by youth.

Keywords: Contemporary trend, drugs, drug abuse, prevalence, youths

Introduction

Drugs are commonly used by everybody whether young or old. Drug is an effective substance in the life of any living thing to cure sickness and to make life healthy. In itself, the use of drugs does not constitute an evil rather when properly

administered. However, over the past few decades, drug abuse which is the abuse of psychoactive materials that exert their major effects on the brain resulting in sedation, stimulation or change in mood of an individual has spread at an alarming rate and has reached every part of the world and prevalent among the youths. (Gunjan, Tomar & Singh, 2020). According to the UN office on Drugs and Crime (2022), around 270 million people (or about 5.5% of global population aged 15-64) abused drugs in 2021 and about 35 million people were estimated to have been affected by drug use disorders (harmful pattern of drug use or drug dependence).

Sub-Saharan Africa has a long history of substance abuse, but it was mostly limited to alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and khat (Kamninga et al 2021). A recent systematic review in Sub-Saharan Africa estimated the prevalence of substance use among adolescents to be 41.6%, with alcohol being the most prevalent (40.8%) compared to other substances (Kamninga et al 2021).

In Nigeria, the burden of drug abuse is on the rise and fast becoming a public health concern. Nigeria, which is the most populous country in Africa, has developed a reputation for drug trafficking and usage mostly among the youth population (Jatau et al, 2021). According to the 2018 UNODC report, "Drug use in Nigeria", one in five individuals who had used drug in the past year are suffering from drug-related disorders (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018). According to the reports of The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), statistics have revealed that 40% of Nigerian Youth between 18 and 35 years are deeply involved in the abuse of drugs (Premium Times, 2021). To Yunusa (2022), the current health situation of Nigerian youths is disheartening and worrisome considering their engagement

into hard drug abuses. Over 11 per cent of youth's populations in Nigeria take illicit drugs like syrup, tramadol, diazepam, cocaine, shisha mix among others (Yunusa, 2022).

It is true that drugs are used for beneficent therapeutic purposes, effective substance for good health but regrettably, they are being abused by Nigerian Youths. They use it illegally and unlawfully, thus it becomes harmful to the body (Adepeju & Osunwoye, 2022). According to Oliha (2014), many of Nigerian youths ignorantly or knowingly depend on one drug or the other for their daily activities including social, educational, political, moral etc. In many psychiatric hospitals in Nigeria, many youths are undergoing drug treatment while a significant number of them are also homeless, wanderers, and derelicts, unemployed, rapist, thugs and armed robbers as a result of drug abuse (Adepeju et al, 2022).

Regrettably, despite the numerous studies, efforts of many concerned individuals and groups, such as scholars, law enforcement agencies including NDLEA to stem the tide of illegal drug abuse among youths in Nigeria (Awka South LGA inclusive); the menace is still on the increase with new trends emerging on daily basis. In concert with the above background, this study is designed to investigate the contemporary trend of drug abuse and its effects among youth in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Specifically, the study will focus on the dominant contemporary trend of drugs being abused among youths, factors influencing the prevalence of contemporary trend of drug abuse and effects of drug abuse among the youths.

Literature Review

Issues arising or related to the study are discussed below.

Dominant Contemporary Trend of Drug abuse among youths

According to Awoyemi (2009), it is interesting to note that even though, drug abuse has become prevalent among adolescents, the trend of drug use keeps changing. In the past, addicts used fermented liquor such as ogogoro, burukutu and palm wine. Awoyemi (2009) indicated that smoking diverse stimulating plants and the chewing of some local products such as kola had been used for centuries. The trend of substance use changed drastically in Nigeria between 1970 and 1980 when cannabis seed was imported from India by war veterans after the Second World War. Substances such as heroin, cocaine, opioids, amphetamines and Khat leaves, and morphine became common among the youths (Vanguard, 2016).

According to Adepeju et al (2022) the common drugs that are being abused by the youths are;

- Alcohol: Alcohol is the most commonly abuse substance. It is most often viewed as depressant, although it can be a stimulant and for some it is a hallucinogen. Alcohol includes the following; ethyl, methyl, propyl, butyl and amyl.
- Cannabis (Marijuana): According to Danjuma et al (2015), "Marijuana" is the common name for the plant cannabis sativa. The plant has been used for centuries, primarily for its euphoric (mood altering) effects and is one of the leading drugs of abuse particularly among the youths.
- Cocaine: This is a stimulant. It is a white powder that is typically sniffed. In its original form, it is chewed as a leaf from the cocoa plant. The mixture is done by mixing the raw cocaine powder with sodium

bicarbonate (Na_2CO_3) in a particular proportion. The mixture is poured into a conical flask with distilled water and heated over an unseen burner and the rock it will form is what the addicts use.

- Morphine: Morphine is a powerful drug made from opium that is used to reduce pain. It is being prescribed by doctors for its effectiveness in reducing pains in patients who are suffering from chronic illness like cancer. It is abused when it is being used habitually and recreationally without the prescription of the doctor.

Other drugs being abused by the youths includes; Percocet, Amphetamines, tramadol, vicodin, pemline, sedatives, hallucinogen amongst others.

Concluding, Danjuma et al (2015) averred that in a strong quest to "get high", Nigerian youths make use pit toilet/soak away fumes (biometric gas), gun powder, lizard dung especially the whitish part, goskolo (a concoction of unimaginable harm), gadagi (a substance resembling tea leaves), robin blue powder cocktails, and pharmaceutical products such as Rohypnol, Codeine, Tramadol, Tranquilizers, and cough syrup mixed with soft drinks. These products are steadily increasing and becoming more popular among the youth as compared to using alcohol (Vanguard, 2016).

Factors influencing the prevalence of contemporary trend of Drug abuse among the Youths.

Drug abuse among the youths is now a common phenomenon and regrettably, it has contributed in the set back of the society. According to Adepeju et al (2022), there are lots of factors influencing the prevalence of drug abuse among the youths, they are:

- **Frustration:** This is another fast and commonest factor that leads to drug abuse. In Nigeria today, many youths are frustrated due to unfulfilled dreams, lack of employment, death of loved one, conspiracy, dismissal from jobs etc. All these contribute to drug addiction and abuse.
- **Imitation:** Children easily imitate things whether good or bad especially from someone they see as a model. For fathers that are cigarette smokers or drug addicts, children can easily imitate them unless they have not seen them in the act.
- **Brain Charge/Sensation:** Some youths are drug addicts today, abusing drugs because they are seeking for sensation. This is habitually done by criminals for carrying out their criminal acts like robbery, raping, thuggery etc.

To Adeniyi (2022), there are some contributory factors to the influence of drug abuse among the Nigerian youth and they are: lack of parental supervision, experimental curiosity, peer group influence, social pathologies, emotional and psychological stress.

Effects of Contemporary Trend of Drug Abuse among the Youths

Generally, the youth seem to be target of this drug menace and its abuse. Young people who persistently abuse substances often experience an array of problems, including academic difficulties, health related problems (including mental health), and poor peer relationships. According to Okafor (2020), drug abuse is a major threat not only to the youths but also to national development, and family stability. To Okafor (2020), the consequences of drug abuse includes

low self-esteem, destabilized future ambition, psychological disorder and social isolation.

According to Adeniyi (2022), young people who tirelessly abuse drugs often experience problems like academic difficulties, health related problems (including mental health), poor peer relationships, and involvement with the juvenile system. In addition, there are consequences for family members, the community, and the entire society.

Concluding, Haruna et al (2022) averred that drug abuse has enormous effects on individuals, groups or society. As individuals or group, drug abuse results to low working capacity, increase in diseases, mental disability or disorder and accident which lead to injuries or death, thus hampering the overall development of the society.

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories that can be used to explain the contemporary trend of drug use and abuse in Nigerian society, as it has no single cause. However, the differential Association theory was adopted for the study, as it best explains the global phenomenon. The theory developed by Edwin Sutherland in the year 1939 proposed that through interaction with others, individuals learn values, attitudes, techniques and motives for criminal behavior. The theory predicts that an individual will choose the criminal or deviant paths when the balance of definitions for law-breaking exceeds those for law abiding. According to Sutherland, the amount of time that a person is exposed to a particular definition and at what point the interaction began, are both crucial for explaining criminal activity.

Following the postulation of this theory, it is established that many youths are exposed to drugs as a result of influence of those they associate with. Often times, they tend to copy the act from their parents, peers and numerous impersonal agencies of communication such as movies, televisions, cinemas amongst others. Therefore, for drug abuse among the youths to be a story of the past, the parents, care givers and other key agents of socialization, should promote activities that would enhance the positive development of the children and youths and at the same time, expose the youths to societal approved behaviours.

Research Methodology

The study design for this work was cross sectional survey design. The area of the study was Awka South Local Government Area located in Anambra state with its headquarters at Awka. Awka South has a land mark of 164.2 km² and Nine (9) towns namely Awka, Nibo, Nise, Isiagu, Mbaukwu, Okpuno, Ezinato, Umuawulu and Amawbia. According to the National Population Commission (NPC), the projected population for Awka South L.GA in 2022 is 270,300. A Sample size of 200 respondents aged 18-35 years was adopted for the quantitative component of this study while 8 Youths (two community youth leaders, two religious leaders and four Students) were purposely selected for the qualitative component of this study.

The multi-stage sampling procedure comprising of simple random sampling technique and systematic sampling technique were adopted for this study. Using the balloting method of simple random sampling technique, two towns namely Awka and Okpuno were selected as they were used as representative case studies for Awka South L.G.A.

The questionnaire and In-depth Interview (IDI) guide were the instruments used for data collection. Section A of the questionnaire comprised the socio demographic characteristics of respondents: such as age, gender, religious affiliation, educational attainment. The In-depth interview guide was designed to gather relevant qualitative data from respondents and also elucidate and support the quantitative data. The In-depth interview guide was divided into the consent section and the section that deals with the substantive issues of the research as drawn from the study objectives.

Concluding, the quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The researchers made use of frequency distribution tables and percentages to present the data for easy understanding and clarity. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. The qualitative data was used to complement the quantitative data.

Table 1: Respondents' views on dominant contemporary trend of drug being abuse among youths

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Morphine	80	40
Cannabis	40	20
Tramadol	45	22.5
Rophynol	32	16
Others	3	1.5
Total	200	100

Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 shows the result of the respondents' views on contemporary trend drugs being abused among youths in

Awka South L.G.A, Anambra State. Majority 80 (40%) of the respondents identified morphine, 40(20%) identified cannabis, 45(22.5%) said it was tramadol, 32(16%) said it was rophypnol and 3 (1.5%) posited others as the dominant contemporary trend drugs abuse among youths. One of the interviewee stated thus *"Morphine is now the other of the day among our teeming youths. Just the way they abused tramadol in recent past, they have started abusing morphine"* (Awka Youth Leader, 35years). Another interviewee stated thus; *"I heard a new "sheriff" is in town and it is reigning among the youth. The name is Morphine" (300 level, 25 years NAU Awka).*

Table 2: Respondents’ view on the leading Factor influencing the prevalence of Contemporary trend of Drug abuse among the Youths

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Frustration	74	37
Peer influence	65	32.5
Sensation	22	11
Lack of parental care	39	19.5
Total	200	100

Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 presents respondents’ views on the factors influencing the prevalence of contemporary trend of drug abuse among the youths. The results indicate that 74 (37%) of the respondents identified frustration, 65 (32.5%) said it was peer influence, 22 (11%) agreed that it was sensation while 39

(19.5%) identified lack of parental care as the leading factor influencing the prevalence of contemporary trend of drug abuse among the youths in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. One of the interviewees said;

To me, I think frustration is the leading factor influencing the abuse of drugs among our youths. In Nigeria today, the youths are frustrated as a result of the numerous challenges affecting their self-development. Unfortunately, those who do not have the fear of God in them tend to resort to drugs in an effort to be happy (Pastor, 33 years, Okpuno).

Another interviewee also posited that; *"I have couple of times abused tramadol but in all sincerity, I learnt taking it from my friends back then in school"* (24 years, Ward Youth Leader, Okpuno).

Table 3: Respondents' views on what they think is the major effect of drug abuse among youths

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Psychological disorder	57	28.5
Low self-esteem	55	27.5
Poor performance in Academics	37	18.5
Social Isolation	51	25.5
Total	200	100

Field Survey, 2023

Table 3 shows the results of the major effect of drug abuse among youths in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. According to the results, Majority of the respondents were of the view that psychological disorder 57 (28%) is the major effect of drug abuse among youths, while others adopted Low self-esteem 55 (27.5%), Poor Performance in academics 37 (18.5%) and Social Isolation 51 (25.5%) as the respective major effects of drug abuse among youths.

Discussion of findings

Drug abuse is a social canker-worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society, with our teeming youths being the most affected. Observations from the study revealed that the youths of Awka South Local Government Area are aware of the threats and dangers associated with drug abuse. Findings also showed that morphine is the leading contemporary trend of drugs being abused by the youths, followed by cannabis, tramadol, rophynol amongst others. Also, the qualitative data through the in depth interview equally highlighted morphine as the leading contemporary trend of drug that is being abused by the youths. However, this observation was in corroboration with the view of Adepeju et al (2022) who described morphine as the "new bride" among the litany of drugs being abused by the youths.

Furthermore, it was observed that there are various factors influencing the prevalence of contemporary trend drug use and abuse among the youths which are frustration, peer influence, sensation and lack of parental control. Also, the qualitative data through the in-depth interview captured that all the above listed factors as well as broken homes and decay in moral decadence are the factors influencing the prevalence of recent drug use and abuse among the youths. This

observation is in agreement with Adepeju et al (2022) and Adeniyi (2022) who respectively noted that there are various factors influencing the abuse of drugs among youths and they include; frustration, sensation, peer influence and imitation.

Observations from the study revealed that there are various effects of drug abuse among youths. The effects are psychological disorder, low self-esteem, poor performance in academics, and social isolation. These findings are in concord with the opinion of Okafor (2020) who highlighted low self-esteem, destabilized future ambition, psychological disorder and social isolation as the effects of drug abuse among youths.

Conclusion

Youths are the brain box and future of any nation. The way they appear, reflects the future and development of our society. Therefore, the fight against the menace of drug abuse should be taken serious and all hands must be on deck to sufficiently address this canker-worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of the study;

1. Government through its agencies, such as the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), should partner with academic institutions, community stakeholders and religious leaders to create awareness on the further dangers of drug abuse, especially among youths. Achieving this, would go a long way to reduce the alarming rate of hard drugs being abused by the youths

2. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) should intensify efforts towards providing treatment for the affected individuals and consistently advocate for the implementation of better policies and regulations to reduce the prevalence of drug abuse among youths.
3. Parents and teachers should effectively help the children and youths to deal with peer pressure. Part of the biggest reasons why many youths start using illicit drugs is due to peer pressure. Therefore, parents should monitor the kind of friends their children interact with and guide them properly.
4. Stiffer penalties should be spelt out for anyone found dealing in illicit drugs in order to serve as deterrent to others.
5. There is need to integrate good values and customs in the current curricular at primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels. This will help the children, adolescents and youths to learn the right societal values and norms that will guide their activity all through in life.
6. Government should intensify efforts towards tackling the issue of unemployment among the youths. Lack of jobs from numerous findings has birthed numerous social vices (drug abuse inclusive) among the youths and addressing the issue would help make our society better, prosperous and habitable.

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