

Assessing the Nature and Trends of Commonly Abuse Substance and Crime Among Youths in Nigeria

¹Abdullahi Kassim Adams, ²Aminu Ibrahim (PhD) & ²Kigbu D. Hafsat

¹Department of Sociology, Nasarawa state University, Keffi

²Department of Political Science, Nasarawa state University, Keffi.

Email: abdullahikassima@nsuk.edu.ng, aminuibrahim@nsuk.edu.ng

Abstract

There has been a growing concern on the increase in the rate of substance abuse among young people in Nigeria and this has led to a changing behaviour among addicts which often leads to increase in crime rate. Hence, this study assesses the nature and trend of substance abuse and crime among youth in Nigeria. The study is a theoretical discourse hence it adopts a qualitative research approach and relies on secondary data sources obtained from journal articles, Government publications, books, as well as web-based studies on substance abuse and crime in Nigeria. It is guided by Paul Goldstein psychopharmacological model which best highlight the nexus of substance abuse and crime. The findings revealed that the abuse of substance is common according to overwhelming percent of the respondents among which are cocaine, alcohol, Indian hemp, codeine syrup, and shisha. Findings also revealed a new trend in substance abuse which include; mixture of cough syrups and soft drinks or juice, others engage in inhalation of petrol, gasoline, aerosol, nail polish removal, some engage in smoking lizard dung, others in inhalation of bio gas, pit toilet/soak away and gutter fumes, some are chewing, and/or cooking food with cannabis as vegetable or tea, mixture of weed, granulated tramadol/tramol with shisha flavours, smoking natural leaves: pawpaw, bamboo growth, mushroom and injection of substance. Also, findings revealed that substance abuse leads to violent crimes such as violent assault, armed robbery, murder, rape and domestic violence. This study therefore, recommends the need to encourage family education on drugs and substance as a core for social organization so as to reduce the rate of substance abuse among youths. Considering the nexus between substance abuse and crime, it is imperative for the government and other relevant authorities to establish a criminal justice drug programme which will be vested with the responsibility of detoxification, education and vocational training of offenders. It will also provide pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy to addicts who are also criminal.

Keywords: Substance, Substance Abuse, Crime, Nigeria Youths.

Introduction

Historically, the use of psychoactive substance can be said to be a universal phenomenon found among such diverse people as the Fangs of North Western Equatorial Africa, the Aryans of Northern India, the Jivaro of the Amazonian rain forest, the Aborigines of Australia, the Reindeer Herders of Siberia (Hollister, 1972). Drug abuse has been a common problem in Europe, United State, Columbia, Mexico, India, China, Peru, Paraguay, Hong Kong, Afghanistan etc. According to Hollister (1972), there is historical evidence that human beings had used drugs practically since their emergence. Throughout history in almost all societies, individuals and group of youths have swallowed, snuffed, smoked, or taken into their bodies intoxicating substances (Indian hemp,

cocaine, heroin etc.) for the purpose of altering their mood, level of consciousness or behaviour (Hollister, 1972; Zhang *et al*, 2008).

Today, substance abuse is a global health and social problem with conditions and problems ‘that vary locally among various countries (WHO, 1987). The use of psychoactive substances among adolescents and young adults has become a subject of public concern worldwide, partly because of its potential to contribute’ to unintentional and intentional injuries (Whichstrom & Hegna, 2003; Daane, 2003). The use of harmful habit-forming substance is a growing problem in the world today. Although, alcohol and tobacco are legal in most countries, both are habit forming or addictive drugs. The World Health Organization (2013) defined “substance abuse as the harmful and hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs”. According to a 2013 report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), while the use of traditional drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, seems to be declining in some parts of the world, the abuse of prescription drug and new psychoactive substance is growing. Africa is emerging as a target for the production and trafficking of illicit substances, making the continent more vulnerable to drugs, crime, as well as health and development related challenges. Cannabis remains the most widely used illicit substance in the continent.

While its use has clearly declined among young people in Europe over the past decade, there has been a minor increase in the prevalence of cannabis users in Africa (180 million or 3.9 percent of the population age 15-64) as compared with previous estimates in 2009 (UNODC, 2018). Another report of the UNODC revealed that little change has been seen about the overall global situation in the production, use, and health consequences of illicit drugs (UNODC, 2011). In the African continent, there is a high level of abuse of liquor, marijuana, tobacco (cigarette and snuff), among other local beverages and/or illicit gin. Accordingly, about 13% to 25% of young people aged 16 to 30 years abuse Indian hemp, tobacco, and liquor, especially in the West African sub-region (Manbe, 2018).

In the case of Nigeria, based on a UNODC (2018) report, in 2017 alone, 14.3 million people (14.3%) of Nigerians between 15 and 64 years were estimated to be engaged in drug or substance abuse. Similarly, Ubom and Okorodudu (2004) in their research also indicated that, the problem of substance abuse has been common placed among the youths (boys and girls alike) in Nigeria, who are recruited into the trend on daily basis. For them, about 34 percent of young people in the South-West, 38% in South-South and 36% in North-Central geographical zones in Nigeria, including Karu, Nasarawa State consume high quantities of liquor mixed with Indian hemp, roots, herbs, and other beverages. These substances may be swallowed, inhaled, applied to the skin, or injected into the body.

The emerging trends in drug or substance abuse among the youth, which have not been fully reported include overdose usage of cough syrups, notably codeine, inhaling of sewage tanks, inhaling of automobile motor spirit, inhaling of sewage tanks, superglue, monkey tail, among others. Another trend in substance abuse in Nigeria is the increasing involvement of girls in drug abuse. Going by UNODC (2018) distribution of substance abuse, it was revealed that, more males (94.2%) than female (5.8%) use and abuse substance.

The use of drugs and alcohol has impacts that extend across socioeconomic, cultural, religious, and ethnic boundaries; and despite the efforts of the various Nigerian tiers of Government and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to stem its tide in Nigeria, there has been a

consistent rapid rise in the number of cases recorded in the country, especially among young adolescents between ten and twenty-four years (Oyakhilome, 1990). United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) in 2011 listed Nigeria as a high-risk, country among seven of the eight West African countries assessed as major crime areas. The risks identified range from drug control issues, where Nigeria serves as transit point for cocaine from Latin America, heroin from Asia and a major provider of cannabis which is locally cultivated to small arms, human trafficking, to ammunition and illicit goods such as counterfeit medication.

Theoretical framework

The study adopts the psychopharmacological model developed by Paul Goldstein in 1985. The model proposes that the effects of illegal substance-use cause criminal behavior. These effects can range from neurochemical changes within one's body to altering one's judgment. According to the psychopharmacological model, the acute or chronic use of psychoactive substances may result in aggression and violence. The effects of such drugs include excitability, irritability, fear/paranoia, disinhibition, drastic mood swings, cognitive distortions, and impaired judgment, any of which may lead to criminal behaviour. It is also important to include in this category crimes induced by the victim's own substance use. Such crimes are less visible because many go unreported. Thus, psychopharmacological crimes should also include crimes such as sexual assault committed while the victim is under the influence of alcohol or other psychoactive substances, but also robbery or mugging that is made possible because of the victim's incapacitation and fights instigated under the influence of drugs. Much of the existing research supports the view that there is a strong association between alcohol intoxication and psychopharmacologically induced crime, especially violence. Following a long way behind alcohol in this regard are the stimulants - cocaine/crack and amphetamines.

The use of opiates and cannabis is usually considered to be unlikely to lead to psychopharmacologically induced crime and may even contribute to reducing it in some individuals, as these drugs (and tranquillizers) tend to reduce violent impulses and aggression. However, irritability associated with the withdrawal syndrome, as well as related mental health problems, may be linked to increased violence. While the pharmacology of most illicit drugs is well known, the specific mechanisms through which they promote violent behaviours are not fully understood although some substances, usually stimulants, are known to produce psychotic episodes of behaviour and may well exacerbate existing behavioural problems. That said, no psychoactive substance can be said to have universal criminogenic properties and both individual and environmental factors can influence how the use of psychoactive substances impacts on behaviour.

Empirical Review

The concepts of substance, substance abuse and drug addiction, are used closely and are devoid of a universally accepted definition. For instance, Odedounmi (2010) defined substance as any chemical substance which when taken into a body organism modify one or more functions. In line with this definition, alcoholic, herein and caffeine found in beverages are substance because these substances bring about modification in behaviour by influencing co-ordination of the central nervous system. For World Health Organization (2013), drug is any substance or product that is used or intended to be used to modify or explore physiological system or explore states for the benefit of the recipient.

It is also appropriate to define a substance as a drug that could bring a change in the biological function through its chemical action (Okoye, 2001). It is also considered as a substance that modifies perception, cognition, mood, behaviour, and general body function (Balogun, 2006). Fawa (2003) sees it as any substance, which is used for treatment or prevention of disease in men' and animals. Drugs alters the body functions either positively or negatively depending on the body composition of the user, the type of drug used, the- amount used and whether used singling or with other drugs at the same time. Similarly, Haladu (2010) defined drug as any substance, which is used for treatment or prevention of a disease in man and animals. Drug alters the body functions either positively or otherwise depending on the body composition of the user, the type of substance used, the amount used and whether used singly or with other drugs at the same time.

The above definitions of substance boil down the fact that, when drugs are used under the normal condition, the purpose is positively achieved. For example, curing ailments and relief from pains, on the other hand, when drugs are used illegally; they can cause untold hardships to the abuser more than the anticipated gains. This mostly, takes the form of ill-health, mental disorders, physical disability depression, low academic performance, and the likes. However, substance are abused when they are taken without a doctor's permission. This may constitute a major public health problem all over the world (UNODC, 2018).

The use and abuse of substance by adolescents have become one of the most distributing health related phenomena in Nigerian and other parts of the world (NDLEA, 2015). Drug abuse has caused a good number of adolescents to experience mental problem (insanity), maladjustment to school demands and eventually drop out of school, and breakdown of family relationship. However, for Haladu (2003), substance or drug abuse is defined as excessive and persistent self-administration of a drug without regard to the medically or culturally accepted patterns. It could also be viewed as the use of a drug to the extent that it interferes with the health and social function of an individual. Drugs mainly abused are, Stimulants like Amphetamine, Sedative and Tranquilizers like Barbiturates, Valium, Mandrase, Hauvelnogens and Heroin. These drugs do not only have capacity, but they may often be physically harmful. For this study, substance abuse is seen as the misuse of drugs without any prior medical prescription but basically for the purpose of social satisfaction.

Crime has been defined in various ways by different scholars. In ordinary language, the term crime denotes an unlawful act punishable by a state. According to The Law Dictionary, crime is an act committed or omitted, in violation of a public law, either forbidding or commanding it; a breach or violation of some public right or duty due to a whole community, considered as a community in its social aggregate capacity, as distinguished from a civil 'injury. In other words, Allen (2005) sees crime or offence (or criminal offence) is an act harmful not only to some individual or individuals but also to a community, society, or the state ("a public wrong"), and such acts are forbidden and punishable by law.

Also, Okechukwu (2012) defined crime as an act or omission which renders the person doing the act or making the omission liable to punishment under any order in council, ordinance, law, or statute. Chia (2017) sees crime as those activities that break the law of the land and are subject to official punishment. To Caputo (2015) crime is any human conduct that violates criminal laws and is subject to punishment.

Methodology

This study is a theoretical discourse hence it adopts a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach as adopted and recommended by Tracy (2013), is useful for understanding a range of social issues. Also, Yin (2014), described qualitative research as the process of collecting the research data while embracing a blend of orientations and methodological considerations through the possible multiplicity of interpretation of human events; and the methodological variations available. The study is descriptive hence it relies mainly on secondary data sources obtained from relevant articles, publications, and web-based studies on substance abuse.

Result of the Findings

Nature and Trends of Commonly Abused Substances in Nigeria

Practically, any substance whose ingestion can result in a euphoric (“high”) feeling can be abused. While many are aware of the abuse of legal substances like alcohol or illegal substance like marijuana (in most states) and cocaine, less well known is the fact that inhalants like household cleaners are some of the most abused substances. Other form of drugs like Indian hemp, which is commonly produced in Nigeria and others like metliamphetamine, syrups, and tablets with codeine capable of intoxicating are mostly found in military barracks, schools, and motor parks and even with local traders that sell provisions in kiosks. According to Onoja (2010) that an average annual retail cost on psychotropic substances is more than 15,000 USD, while alcohol beverages aside from spirit generates more than 30,000 USD from sales to a consumer population of about 30 to 35 million people (Onoja, 2010).

Following the above argument, in 2017, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency arrested 10,009 drug suspects nationwide. The numbers of male suspects were 9,387 which accounted for 93.78% of the total arrest while female suspects were 622 representing 6.22% of the total arrested (NDLEA, 2018). In contemporary Nigeria, there is the tendency to talk of drug substance most abused in Nigeria, abuse in general, not the abuse of a particular type of drug.

Causes of Substance Abuse

Several reasons or factors account for the use and abuse of substances among youths and the old alike. Odedounmi (2010) points out that different people abuse substances of whatever class or kind for different reasons. Atwan (2011) reiterates that the causes of drugs and substances abuse are diverse and peculiar to individual abusers. In his words, Atwan (2011) asserts that “if you interview ten different substances abusers, each might give a different reason for starting to use drugs”.

According to Chia (2010), abuse of substance in the country is a catalogue of changes brought about by such factors as the civil war, unexpected oil boom that followed with its sudden increase in Gross National Product (GNP) and rapid socio-economic changes as well as urbanization which also led to disintegration of the family social network and increase in drug availability. The author further explains that the problem of abuse of drugs/substances was practically unknown in Nigeria until the 1960s when it was discovered that youths were engaged in smoking cannabis (Indian hemp). Since then, the abuse of psychoactive substance has been on the increase with the youths constituting the highest group.

Generally, the causes of substance use and abuse could include peer pressure, family background, euphoria/pleasure seeking, failure of the people to achieve their goals/loose, normative values, occupational career/environmental factors, and economic condition, among others. Ikoh et al., (2019) who found that there are three possible explanations for increasing drug use among the youths includes poor parental control, availability of drugs in the neighbourhoods, and easy access to drugs among other factors. And each of these factors tends to reinforce the other

Implication of Substance Abuse

The nexus between substance use and crime is complex. Most crimes result from a variety of factors (personal, situational, cultural, and economic); hence when substance is a cause, it is more likely to be only one factor among many. In short, no evidence suggests that drug use alone inexorably leads to criminal activity. However, at most intense levels of drug use, substance and crime are directly and highly correlated. Among crime-prone individuals, illegal drug use intensifies criminal activity. As illegal drug use increases in frequency and amount, so does criminal behaviour. Persons who are criminally inclined tend to commit both a greater number and more serious crimes after they become dependent on drugs. As their drug use decreases, so does the number of crimes they commit. In addition, illicit substance use and criminal activity often occur simultaneously and are mutually reinforcing aspects of a deviant behaviour.

The propensity for crime-prone, substance using persons to commit violent crimes might be expressed only after they cross the threshold from use to abuse or dependence. Hence, the high number of armed robbery suspects (violent offenders) in a maximum-security prison in north central Nigeria with alcohol/drug dependence and intoxicated at the time of their offense (Abiona *et al*, 2006).

The manufacturing, distribution, and possession of drugs such as marijuana, heroin and methamphetamine, or the misuse of prescription drugs are illegal and have the potential for abuse. Driving under the influence of alcohol and or drugs is also illegal. However, as mentioned earlier, the relationship between substance use and crime is much more complicated. Crime and substance use both usually involve individuals with low self-control. Those willing to try drug are more impulsive and may turn to Street crime because of addiction (Idaho State Police, 2010).

Substance use does not create a criminal offender; however, it may intensify such actions. In addition, individuals who use drugs or substance are less likely to have a legitimate occupation or the education necessary to find a good job (BRFSS, 2009 cited in Idaho State Police). Lifestyle choices, environmental factors as well as genetics are determinant factors for those who will abuse drugs as well as, those who will commit crime (Idaho State Police, 2010).

Substance abuse is one of the principal causes of violence, especially when abusers are intoxicated or withdrawing from drugs. The presence of drug abuse in the West African region and the violence associated with the issue is a cause for concern. Drug related violence have consequences ranging from fighting between rival drug dealing gangs to drug traffickers to the pharmacological effects of such drugs.

Substance use, abuse and dependence are more common in the criminal justice population than the general population. A study conducted at a maximum- security prison in North Central Nigeria among inmates already convicted or awaiting trial, reported that 60% of the inmates had used

alcohol and illegal drugs before their current offense; 37.3% of them were charged with armed robbery; while 28% were diagnosed with substance use disorder (Buddy, 2017). This is among various studies that have been conducted on drug abuse and crime. While numerous studies have been conducted on substance abuse, its prevalence, its effects, and consequences in Nigeria but there is a lop on the nexus between substance abuse and crime. Thus, these studies unearth the nexus between substance abuse and crime.

Conclusion

This study has assessed the nexus between the nature and trends of commonly abused substance and crimes among youths in Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Evidently, the incidences of substance abuse have become a common phenomenon in our today society. All over the world, substance abuse is a problem that is causing serious concern to both individuals and government. The problem of substance abuse is not limited to only the youths but also adolescents, and aged. It also spans across all races, religions, gender, and socio-economic statuses. This incidence poses as a problem to not just the individual addicts but to the society at large. Substance abuse is a disorder that is characterized by a self-destructive pattern of using a substance that leads to significant problems and distress.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

- i. It is important to encourage family education on substance and drugs because, the family is the core of the social organization. Parents should give their children/wards appropriate awareness on substance use. They should be encouraged by health authorities to offer family education on substance abuse to their children. They should inform them on the dangers of drug and substance abuse to their health, society, and the nation at large.
- ii. Also, counseling centres for drug control should be established in every community, rural or urban by the government or private individuals. Skilled health counsellor should be employed in helping drug addicts or dependents on drugs by giving them needed help and advice that will facilitate their withdrawal.
- iii. Equally, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) should intensify their campaigns on antidrug to have a drug free society. The campaign against use of certain substance and misuse of drugs should be more strengthened at the lower levels of education especially the secondary school level because it is the peak of adolescence. Also, government and other relevant authorities should lunch out campaigns against drug abuse as well as dependence.
- iv. Considering the nexus between substance abuse and crime, it is imperative for the government and other relevant authorities to establish a criminal justice drug programme which will be vested with the responsibility of detoxification, education, and vocational training of offenders. It will also provide pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy to addicts who are also criminal.

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