

**DRUG-RECIDIVISM NEXUS IN NIGERIA:
A SOCIOLOGICAL CRIMINOLOGY PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

The vast majority of studies that examine the drug-recidivism nexus are generally found in the Western literature, while the scholarship has received comparatively far less attention in Nigeria, despite its pervasiveness. This gap in knowledge calls for first, a theoretical discourse, and later, data-based studies on the interplay between substance use and recidivism. Guided by sociological criminology perspective, we applied multidisciplinary approach (i.e. an integration of economic, psychosocial, sociological, medical/physiological and criminological thoughts, concepts, variables, constructs, models, and theories) to examine the problem. From the review, it was found that illicit substance use inhibits the pathways to criminal desistance (aging out of crime) and heightens the trajectories to criminal persistence (recidivism). That is, it amplifies the tendency for individuals to take a long career in crime and at the same time causes them to persist in crime to get money to sustain their drug culture. This shows that the outcome of drug-recidivism interactions is mixed or perhaps unclear in terms of a particular variable that significantly influence the occurrence of the other. It is therefore, suggested that further studies in Nigeria be focused on developing a more robust methodologies and survey instruments for generating quantitative or qualitative data, or a combination of both methods. The aim is bidirectional: firstly, is to establish a more scientific basis for a clearer understanding of the two variables for accurate predictions and generalisation. Secondly, it stands to direct the paths to formulating treatment-based (against the widespread punishment-oriented) policy and practice on drugs and

recidivism, with primary focus on legal, social, economic, medical/physiological and psychological harm reduction as well as prison decongestion.

Keywords: Drugs, Nexus, Recidivism, Nigeria, Sociological Criminology Perspective

INTRODUCTION

Derived from the Latin word 'recidere' which means 'to fall back', recidivism simply means re-arrest, resistance to reformation and rehabilitation, repeat offending, re-conviction, reoffending, re-admission, re-incarceration, repetitious criminal tendency, or chronic offending. It is act of relapsing into criminal behaviour by an individual who had once or more times been processed (corrected or punished) through the criminal justice system (police, courts, or prisons). The problem is of global concern, as different societies—whether developed or developing—are experiencing increasing incidence of reoffending behaviour. It is one of the most fundamental challenges not only facing correctional institutions, prison system but also other subsystems in the criminal justice system and society at large. Although the rate of the problem varies from country to country, statistics lending credence to its prevalence on the global scale is seemingly overwhelming. For instance, Tica (2014) argued that recidivism is present in different percentages in all countries. In Romania, the incidence of repeat offending among prisoners is 45.78%. This percentage indicates that, for more than half of the inmates incarcerated in prisons, social and penal policies are ineffective and do not lead to the desired prosocial correction.

In Europe, the following percentages are presented concerning recidivism rate:

Austria (38%), Germany (35.7%), Netherlands (40.4%), Sweden (36%), Norway (43.4%), Scotland (53%), and England and Wales (48%) (Wartna, 2009; Tica, 2014). The problem appears to be more pronounced in the United States of America (USA), or perhaps is because it has rich sources of statistics on recidivism compared to most countries. Virtually all the States in USA are currently witnessing rapid increase in prison population, with recidivism inmates on the lead. A longitudinal study undertaken by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in 2005 followed up 404,638 prisoners released in 30 States in US for five years after their release, that is, between 2005 and 2010. The result of this study revealed that 76.6% of them released in 2005 were rearrested at end of the five-year follow-up study period (i.e. 2005 through to 2010) (Durose, Cooper & Snyder, 2014; Fazel & Wolf, 2015; James, 2015). Again, the result of a study undertaken from 2003 to 2010 in 15 USA States shows that, on the average, approximately 52% of freed prisoners returned to prison for any reason within three years of release (Michael & Crews, 2012). Another evidential data shows that 61% of adult offenders in USA relapsed into crime and were arrested and incarcerated within one year of their release from prisons in 2009 (Iorizzo, 2012).

The rate of recidivism is also high in most African countries, even though reliable statistics on the act are grossly lacking and thereby somewhat undermining

the degree, frequency and seriousness of the problem. For instance, “recidivism in South Africa is generally accepted to be very high, with some observers citing figures as high as 95%, but official figures are not known” (Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012, p. 73). This is an indication that there is a serious problem in all the operative ways of criminal justice system in several societies in the African continent (Stephen, 2004). In 2009, prisons in Mauritius recorded 85% rate of recidivism; most of the inmates have been to prison for 2-5 times or even more (Mauritius Prison Services, 2011 cited in Fhooblall, Chittoo & Bholoa, 2011).

As tenable in South Africa and other African countries, official statistics on crime generally, and its correlation with substance use particularly, is sparse in Nigeria. Nonetheless, few data highlighting the increasing rate of reoffending still exist in the country. Abrifor, Atere and Muoghalu (2012) explained that the rate at which inmates in Nigeria return to the prison few months after they have been released has been a major source of worry to experts and professionals from diverse disciplines who now doubt the ideal function of the prison institution. Statistics shows that the prevalence of recidivism in 2005 was 37.3%, it reached 52.4% in 2010 (Abrifor *et al.*, 2012 citing Soyombo, 2009 & Abrifor, 2010), and 60% in 2012 (Chukwumerije, 2012 in Senatorchukwumerije.net). Nigeria has about 227 prisons spread across the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, with the population of about 47, 800 inmates (Nigerian Prison Service Annual Report, 2010 cited in Alabi & Alabi, 2011; Africa News Service, 2012). The total number of inmates in Nigerian prisons as at 2010 was put at over 85,000 with the

highest number of them on awaiting trial, followed by recidivism offenders (Alabi & Alabi, 2011).

However, only recently have policy and research interests in understanding recidivism in Nigeria are beginning to appear in the scientific community. Even at that, only few scholarship attention has been given to the general area of drug-crime linkages in the country, while, in specific terms, there is no scientific study till date that has exclusively and specifically investigates the interplay between substance use and recidivism. Rather, postulations and debates on the phenomenon dominate Western, foreign literature. This neglected but important area of public interest has serious implications for drug-crime policy and practice. The lack of knowledge about the relationship between drug use and recidivism has, for long, negates every effort to combat the two social problems. Calling for further scientific studies and debates on the subject matter, this paper sets out to fill a void in the existing knowledge and make contribution to new knowledge. In fact, its central goal is to advance pragmatic measures that could lead to significant reduction in recidivism and illicit drug use.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Sociological Criminology Perspective: A Multidisciplinary Approach

The foundation of sociological criminology can be traced to the work of pioneering sociologists, Adolphe Quetelet (1796-1874) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) (Nisbet, 1974 cited in Siegel, 2008). It is “an approach in criminology, based on the work of Quetelet and Durkheim, which focuses on the relationship

between social factors and crime” (Siegel, 2008, p. 4). Sociological criminology perspective is a practical and broader approach (which applies social psychological, economic, socio-medical, sociological and criminological ideas) to the study of social problems by investigating their complex network using individual, group/familial and societal push-pull factors. The central goal for adopting this perspective is to promote interdisciplinary scholarship that would fill the gap in knowledge and literature on the drug-recidivism connection in Nigeria. In so doing, the paper is in the right direction to explain, in practical and holistic terms, the complex economic, psychological, sociological, physiological and criminological dynamics of the phenomenon under study for broad-based understanding by wide audience and thus provides a lead to dealing with the problem effectively.

Drug-Recidivism Nexus: Theoretical Underpinnings

When a social problem is of multiple causations, a systematic consideration of different relevant perspectives, theories, models, paradigms, propositions, constructs, concepts, and variables that give insight into the problem becomes necessary. Downe and Rock (1988) contended that only rarely does a single theory exhaust all interesting possibilities of a problem. Van Impe (2000) explained that some conventional theories and methods suggest that strategies to conduct research on a complex social phenomenon require multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, hence the rationale for adopting sociological criminology perspective. S. E. Otu (2004, 2012a, 2012b) maintained that, since criminals possess criminogenic elements which cut across

a good number of social science theories, an integrated or alliance approach remains the best and most favoured (see also Korhauser, 1978; Elliot, Ageton & Canter, 1979; Elliot, 1985; Downe & Rock, 1988; Lanier & Henry, 2004, 2010; Nnam, 2014; Agboti & Nnam, 2015; Ordu & Nnam, 2017; S. E. Otu & Nnam, 2018).

The theoretical underpinning is ingrained in the sociological criminology standpoint, which finds support from allied disciplines. As earlier established, the perspective is conceptually holistic, objective, critical, analytical and pragmatic in explaining social pathologies like the drug-recidivism relationship. What is more, the study does not only include certain elements of sociology and criminology in its analysis, but also variables in psychology, economics and medicine/physiology in its scientific enquiries into the nature and extent of drug-recidivism associations. This it does by unifying or—in their individual form—the basic tenets of several different theories as a framework for explaining the causal relationship between the two phenomena. In developing subcultural theory (sociology and criminology) to account for drug-crime causalities, for instance, Cloward and Ohlin (1961) postulated that some lower class youths form retreatist subculture, organised mainly around illegal drug use, because they have failed to succeed in both the legitimate and the illegitimate structures of the society. As failed gang members, they retreat, tails between their legs, into ‘retreatist cultures’ (Harambos, Holborn & Heald, 2008), which also predispose them to persist in law-breaking.

A theoretical orientation stemming from social control theories, particularly social bond and self-control strands

(criminological, sociological and psychological theories) reveals that one risk factor for criminal behaviour, including recidivism, is an absence of strong social bonds with people who engage in pro-social behaviour (Carr & Vandiver, 2001; Kosterman, Hawkins, Abbot, Hill Herrenkhol & Catalano, 2005; Goldner, Peters, Richards & Pearce, 2010; Nnam, 2017b). Importantly, theoretical explanations of the relationship between drugs and crime tend to fall into one of four categories: (1) drug use precedes criminal behaviour, (2) criminal behaviour precedes drug use, (3) drug use and deviant or criminal behaviour are mutually reinforcing or accelerating, and (4) drugs and crime are both the product of a common external cause (Link & Hamilton, 2017). Although centred on drugs and violent behaviour (not recidivism precisely), one of the earliest, famous and highly cited works that has established drug-crime linkages is Goldstein's (1985) tripartite postulation. For him, people commit violent crimes for three reasons: (1) psychopharmacologically under the influence of drugs (medical/physiological, psychosocial learning and cognitive theories); (2) economically compelled to offend to fund drug use (rational choice and economic theories); and (3) systemically brought to crime by being involved in the violent environment of drug use and drug markets (general theory of crime [self-control], social bond and life-course development theories).

The strength of Goldstein's framework is significant and its contribution seminal in explaining the correlation between substance use and recidivism. However, the three variables in his construct lack empirical testing and verification (MacCoun, Reuter & Kilmer, 2003) and, as a result, have come under intense criticisms.

At its core, the model is narrow in scope, and the categories are too rigidly categorical and not mutually exclusive (Parker & Auerhahn, 1998). Comparatively, for instance, certain psychoactive substances like alcohol and, to some extent cocaine, have been linked to increased violence (Bennett, Holloway & Farrington, 2008), but many individuals who use these substances do not go on to commit crimes (recidivate) while under the influence (Belenko & Spohn, 2015). As Belenko and Spohn (2015) rightly observed, individual drugs-crime relationships vary over the life-course (life-course developmental theories in physiology, psychology, sociology and criminology), which may also suggest that Goldstein's perspective is again too limited (see also Link & Hamilton, 2017).

The economic motivation model proposes that substance abusers commit income-generating crimes such as robbery, burglary, and drug sales in order to support their drug habits. The systemic model assumes that the system of substance distribution and use is intrinsically linked with violent crime through activities such as 'turf' skirmishes, assaults to collect debts, and robberies of dealers or buyers (Goldstein, 1985; Gottfredson, Kearley & Bushway, 2008). Although the current paper takes a cue from Goldstein (1985) and others, as illustrated above, it narrows down its scope to criminal recidivism instead of crimes generally. The advocacy is on making a paradigm shift from studying the general crime problem and its correlation with drug culture to an examination of recidivism as an aspect of criminal behaviour and its association with substance use. This is in consideration of the fact that conducting empirical research exclusively, specifically on the

latter area stands to hold great promise for articulating a more practical course of action that could guard against repeat offending and its attendant problems in both the Nigerian prison system and the free society.

The Interplay Between Substance Use and Recidivism

The relationship between substance use and recidivism is contested in the academia. Gottfredson, *et al.* (2008) opined that the link between drugs and crime has been a topic of sustained interest to scholars and policymakers, as evidently seen in a large volume of literature on the subject matter. Others explained that there is a great debate on the dynamics of drugs-crime correlations and three broad explanations for the relationship have emerged. Firstly, drug use leads to crime. Secondly, crime leads to drug use. Thirdly, the drug-crime relationship is explained by a set of common causes (Goldstein, 1985; Gottfredson *et al.*, 2008; Dennison, 2013; Huebner, 2014; Link & Hamilton, 2017). Although the drug-crime connection is powerful, it does not tell the whole story as many users have had a history of criminal activity before the onset of their substance abuse (Speakart & Anglin, 1986).

In the United States, for instance, research shows that chronic criminal offenders, recidivists begin to use drugs and alcohol after they had been introduced to crime. The problem could be either way: that crime causes drug use, or substance users turn to a life of crime to support their habits—that is, drug use causes crime (Siegel, 2008). To some scholars, drug use and crime co-occur in individuals; in other words, both crime and drug use are caused by some other common

factors (Wei, Loeber & White, 2004). The 2012 statistics of the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) show that the total correctional population is estimated to be 6, 937, 600, with 4, 794, 000 inmates on probation or under parole supervision, and drug law violations accounting for the most common type of criminal offences (Glaze & Herberman, 2013). In a survey of State and Federal prisoners in the US, BJS estimated that about half of the prisoners met Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM) criteria for drug use or dependence, and yet fewer than 20% who needed treatment received it (Karger & Mumola, 2006; Chandler, Fletcher & Volkow, 2009).

In more specific terms, substance users suffer a number of problems, such as excessive and uncontrollable drinking habit and mental illness (Martin, Maxwell, White & Zhang, 2004), which are related to recurring offending. The report of the State of Illinois Prison Management Committee reveals that 50% of crimes are drug-related; about 20% of the offenders admitted having committed the crimes in order to obtain money for drugs, while about 36% of them reported using alcohol at the time of their offence (McKean & Ransford, 2004). Research also shows that drugs play a major role in the cause of recidivism; for instance, the use of illicit drugs and a prior criminal history increases the risk of arrest and rearrest (Uggen, & Kruttschnitt, 1998; Benda, 2005).

The increasing incidence of drug abuse among prisoners prompted McKean and Ransford (2004) to argue that drug or substance use is an underlying factor responsible for recidivism. Drug culture and alcoholism are, without a doubt, foremost predisposing factors to both the

offence (recidivism) and offender (recidivist). Dawkins (1997) pointed out that a clear and significant relationship exists between substance use and crime; (the life-course) begins in adolescence and continuing into adulthood. Young persons, for instance, who are drug users, are more likely than non-abusers to frequently commit crime (Dawkins, 1997; Siegel, 2008); hence, the act of recidivism.

Surveys conducted on prison inmates in the United States reveal that many (about 80%) are lifelong substance abusers; more than one third of them claimed to have been under the influence of drugs when they committed their last offence (Beck *et al.*, 1993 cited in Siegel, 2008). Acknowledging the existence of drugs-recidivism correlations, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2006 introduced social reintegration or social support as an intervention/programme designed to assist inmates with the moral, vocational and educational development by making, educational, cultural, and recreational activities available in prisons. Examples are addressing the special needs of imprisoned persons, with programmes covering a range of problems, such as substance addiction, mental or psychological conditions, anger and aggression, among others, which may have led to persistent offending (UNODC, 2006).

In Nigeria, research linking criminal recidivism to substance use is sparse (see for example M. S. Otu, 2017). Instead, available studies are on the 'drug-crime problem' (Iwarimie-Jaja, 2003; Igbo, 2007; Ajala, 2009; Okogwu, 2014; Nnam, 2017), but not on 'drug-recidivism problem'. Iwarimie-Jaja (2003), for instance, unravelled in his study that armed robbers particularly use marijuana before and after carrying out their criminal activities.

Therefore, it is important to move the scholarship of African economics, physiology, psychology, sociology and criminology of substance use/abuse forward by expanding the scope to include recidivism. Here, lies the strong point, driving force, newness and contribution of the current research. This it does by strike a balance through scientific investigation into the two different but related phenomena, crime and recidivism, in relation to drugs.

In addition, the aim is to build theoretical but evidence-driven harm reduction policies and interventions for the attainment of near drug/recidivism-free society, since a complete drug/recidivism-free society is practically impossible. This gap in knowledge is what the current study identified in the avalanche of existing literature and, for this reason, suggests that more empirical (data-based) studies be conducted specifically on the drug-recidivism nexus in Nigeria. With data-based studies, in-depth understanding of this public and social health issue is gained. And from which a strong lead to achieving effective prevention and control of the growing population of recidivists and drug users in Nigerian prisons, hospitals and other reformatory and rehabilitative facilities, centres is followed to logical conclusion.

CONCLUSION

The problem of this research was framed in line with its findings, and was critically and analytically dissected, to orient the conclusion. The nuances of the association between substance use and recidivism are mixed or perhaps unclear. The outcome of their influence on each other is symbiotic; it could be either way:

illicit psychoactive drug users take a long career in crime (chronic offending, recidivism) to support an already established drug habit and, at the same time, they often take to drugs to sustain or keep fit in their criminal career. This discovery has moved the scholarship of African studies on drugs and crime/recidivism forward using multidisciplinary approach, incorporating medicine/physiological, psychological, sociological and economic ideas and variables into criminological currents.

Furthermore, weak social relations and societal or familial affinity are corollary of the absence of capable guardianship, which consequently make many individuals suitable targets to motivated offenders who initiate them into drug culture and repeat offending. Sometimes, offenders are forced to pursue a long career in crime so as to get money to support an already established drug habit. Societal pariahs and other social failures are more likely to easily indulge in repetitious criminal behaviour and/or unlawful drug use both as a way of redeeming their battered image and also as coping mechanism than social conformists and social achievers. Unlike the latter category (achievers), the former's (failures) level of aging out of drugs and reoffending is exceedingly low while their persistence in law violations increases on geometrical progression.

The problem becomes complicated and aggravated when people also belong to criminal subcultures or gangs, particularly campus/street secret cult groups. Such individuals usually spend much of their time visiting taverns, 'Bunks' (a universal name given to marijuana smoking spots in Nigeria) and local drug shooting galleries with peers of the same or similar psychosocial identity and needs (see also Etuk & Nnam (2). Under the influence of drugs, coupled

with economic, psychological, social and environmental strains, this category of people stands the high risk of flouting the law and even persisting in their antisocial behaviour to keep afloat.

Policy Implications and Suggestions for Further Studies

The aetiological controversies in the intersecting area of drugs-recidivism linkages, to a large extent, have been clearly delineated and elucidated. In the light of the foregoing reviews, it is clear that the drug-recidivism nexus exists in Nigeria, yet very little attention has been paid to the problem in the scientific community, academia. Rather, most literature on the subject matter is derived from Western scholarship. What exists in Nigeria are studies that only made references to drug use as a probable cause of crime generally, but not on drugs-recidivism connections. While we acknowledged the relevance of these studies, as progressively reviewed herein, additional efforts were made to theoretically establish the true nature and extent of this relationship.

Consequently, as strongly supported by the results of previous studies so far reviewed, the veracity of the identified sociological criminology constructs linking persistent, repetitious offending to substance misuse was determined and validated. The strength and novelty of this paper lie in its efforts to identify and close the gap in knowledge, especially in Nigeria, where far less attention has been given to this increasing social problem. It has contributed to the general body of knowledge that will pave way for developing cutting edge policies and practice that could particularly move the scholarship of African studies on drugs and crime/recidivism forward.

However, theoretical consideration alone is not strong and scientific enough to solve a research problem (i.e. establish a particular variable drugs or recidivism) that significantly influence the occurrence of the other). Accordingly, it amounts to effort in futility to continue to examine the problem theoretically without conducting data-based studies on the subject of discussion. For this reason, it is suggested that further studies should focus on developing a more robust methodologies and survey instruments for generating quantitative or qualitative data, or a combination of both methods. The aim is to achieve a more empirical, clearer understanding of the two overlapping variables for accurate and specific generalisation that will pave way for evidence-based policy formulation, intervention and action. No wonder Nnam and Otu S. E. (2015, p. 74), argued “that future studies (on social problems such as drug-recidivism linkage) should focus on developing more sophisticated tools to generate data which are both hypothetical and testable” for more specific, valid and reliable theoretical and practical results to be achieved.

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