SURVEY OF DRUG USE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN IFE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to identify various drugs used by adolescents, the prevalence of such practices and the factors that influence in-school adolescents to use drugs. The study was conducted in the four local government areas of Ile-Ife, South-Western Nigeria, with a total of 800 senior secondary school students. Permission for the survey and consent were obtained from appropriate school authorities. Relevant data were obtained using a modified version of a questionnaire designed by the United Nations for conducting school surveys on drug abuse. The toolkit had been previously validated in Nigeria. The questionnaire items solicited information on students' drug use practices including the types of drugs, sources, frequency of administration and reasons for drug use. Students most widely used caffeine (19.8%), alcohol (5.6%), cigarette (6.3%) and occasionally marijuana (0.4%) as psychoactive substances. The substances were obtained from open drug market (23.5%), peers (5.2%) and village drug hawkers (0.6%). Reasons for drug use included; to keep awake (22.2%) to experience high feelings (21.8%), for body building (14.1%) and to moderate appetite (11.9%). The drugs were used mostly anytime and mainly by oral route of administration. There was a high frequency of psychotropic drug use among the students with caffeine being the most widely used. Drug use by the youths could be attributed to psychosocial perceptions of self need and peer influence.

Key Words: Drug use, psychoactive substance abuse, secondary schools, adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown a high prevalence of substance use among young people and much of this practice takes place in schools (Eneh & Stanley, 2004). Drug and alcohol use during adolescence is usually a social experience and a learned behaviour (Swaid, 1988). One of the important psychological phenomena observed among this demographic group is experimentation (Graham *et al*., 1999) and this behaviour has been found to lead to trying out of new experiences in drug use and sexual relations, sometimes with dire consequences for the adolescents. One widely accepted definition of drugs states that drugs are compounds that change the functioning of biological systems by virtue of their chemical composition

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(Levithal,1999). Such systems include the respiratory, growth, excretory, locomotive and reproductive organs. The effects may be beneficial as in the treatment of diseases, however drugs have been found to be capable of producing effects that may be both beneficial and harmful (Oloyede,1996). The term drug abuse, applies only to instances in which people take drugs purely to change their moods, and in which they experience impaired behaviour or social functioning as a result of doing so (Wallace & Fischer, 1987). It is pertinent to note that when people consume consciousness-altering or psychoactive drugs on a regular basis, they often develop dependence as they come to need the drug on a regular basis.

Studies on psychoactive drug use among adolescents in Nigeria have indicated an emerging problem, particularly with the socially acceptable drugs like alcohol and cigarettes. (Odejide *et al.*, 1987; Abiodun, *et al.*, 1994; Obot, *et al.*, 2001). Having realized that majority of drug abuse start in adolescence, especially for the 'gateway' drugs, alcohol and cigarettes, it becomes imperative to check the practice of psychoactive drug use in the society. Alcohol and cigarettes are described 'as gateway' drugs because they are usually, the first substances used before other drugs are tried out (Indiana Preventive Centre, 2003). Drug abuse by students can lead to a sharp decline in their academic performance, increase reports of truancy, deviant behaviours and ultimately, expulsion from schools. It can also lead to addiction (increased desire for drugs without which normal life processes is disturbed), increased appetite and libido. Other vices such as stealing, fighting and gambling may also be caused by drug abuse as a result of alteration in the brain chemistry of the abusers. Continued use of a drug of abuse over a prolong period of time often leads to drug tolerance and in some cases, tolerance for one drug increases tolerance for another, this is known as cross-tolerance (Baron & Kashler, 2008).

Patterns of drug use may vary greatly around the world over time. The result of one large survey in the United States, indicated that teenagers' use of many drugs –including, alcohol, cocaine, marijuana, and nicotine (in cigarettes) - dropped during the 1980's, but increased again during the 1990s (Baron & Kashler, 2008). Some studies have indicated considerable prevalence in the use of alcohol among secondary school students in both rural and urban communities in Nigeria (Fatoye & Morakinyo, 1997; Eke, 1997; Obot *et al.*, 2001) and the average age of self – initiated drinking among the students was 13.2years (SD=2.7). A similar trend was observed among undergraduates in Nigerian universities (Adelekan, 2000). Furthermore, a study conducted by Eneh and Stanley (2004) on the pattern of substance use among a large population of students in four secondary school in Rivers State, Nigeria revealed that eighty seven per cent (87%) of the respondents had used at least one substance at the time of the survey. The psychoactive substances commonly used included alcohol (65%), kola nut (63.1%), cigarettes (61%) and cannabis (26%) while the medications obtained for various reasons included paracetamol (41.5%), tetracycline (25.7%), ampicillin (24.3%) and Diazepam[R] (24%). Mention was also made of other substances but those that were least used included Ativan[R], heroin, cocaine, latex and petrol as inhaler. Findings from the various studies showed that substance abuse among youths in Nigeria is assuming a dangerous dimension and hence a need for immediate intervention. Drug abuse is a global health and social problem with conditions and problems that vary locally. The use of psychoactive substances among adolescents and young adults has become a subject of public concern globally in view of the potentials to contribute to unintentional injury. Drug abuse and addiction has a universal phenomenon that extends across socioeconomic, cultural, religious and ethnic boundaries.

Despite the efforts of various tiers of Government in Nigeria and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency [NDLEA] to stem the tide of drug abuse in the country there seems to be a consistent increase and a link with cases of cultism and violent disorders among Nigerian youths, hence the need for this study. The

objectives of this study were to identify the various drugs used by adolescents in the study area, the incidence of such practices, mode of administration and sources of the drugs. Furthermore the study aimed to identify the factors that influence in-school adolescents to use drugs and possible strategies to curb substance abuse among this demographic population.

METHOD

The study was conducted in the four local government areas of Ile-Ife, Osun state in south-western Nigeria, with a total of 800 senior secondary students drawn from eight schools in the study area. A cross-sectional descriptive study design was employed. Permission and assent for the survey was obtained from appropriate school authorities. The questionnaire administered was a modified version of the United Nations questionnaire for conducting school surveys on drug abuse after a pilot study (United Nations,2003). The survey instrument was pre-tested to ensure comprehension at the grade level of respondents and validated further by expert judgement of test developers. The final survey instrument consisted of items which solicited information on students' drug use practices including the types of drugs, sources, frequency of administration and reasons for drug use.

A multistage sampling method was used to select the schools and respondents in each class. A total of 782 questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 98%. The self-administered questionnaire was filled out in the classrooms by consenting students and the average time spent to respond to the questionnaire was 12 minutes. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, with section A addressing socio-demographic data of respondents on such issues as age, gender, and current grade level in school. Section B included issues relevant to drug use practices such as the types and sources of drugs, frequency of use, route of administration and perceived consequences of drug use. Other relevant items sought to identify the motives for consuming the drugs

and it also solicited for student's views on possible strategies to curb drug use in the schools.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 16.0. In the analysis, positive responses to items in Section B of the questionnaire were scored 'Strongly agree' (4), 'Agree'(3), 'Disagree' (2), 'Strongly disagree' (1), and 'Can't say' (0). The weighted average of the responses was computed to assess the students' perceptions on drug use.

RESULTS

The demographic data of respondents are presented in Table 1. The study sample consisted of 379 (48.5%) males and 403 (51.6%) females with most (95%) of them below 20 years of age and most of the respondents had used at least one substance as at the time of the survey.

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of selected variables relevant to drug use by the students. The factors included types of drugs commonly used, the source and routes of administration, frequency of use and suggestions on ways to curb substance use among the students. From the results the psychoactive substances frequently used as indicated by the students included caffeine 155 (55.5%), cigarettes 49 (17.6%) and alcohol 44(15.7%).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Frequency (%)
Age (years)	
12-15	407 (52.1)
16-19	349 (44.6)
20 and above	26 (3.3)
Sex	
Male	379 (48.5)
Female	403 (51.5)
Current grade level	
Senior secondary 2	394 (50.4)
Senior secondary 3	388 (49.6)

Table 2: Frequency distribution of selected variables relevant to drug use by the students

Variables	Frequency (%)
Selected drugs used by the students	
Alcohol	44 (15.7%)
Cigarette	49 (17.6%)
Caffeine (Nescafe[R])	155 (55.5%)
Diazepam	12 (4.3%)
Cocaine	16 (5.7%)
Marijuana	3 (1.1%)
Sources of drugs used by the students	
Open drug market	183 (79.9%)
Peers	41 (17.9%)
Village drug hawkers	5 (2.2%)
Routes of drug administration employed	
Oral	191 (90.1%)
Inhalation	11 (5.2%)
Injection	10 (4.7%)
Frequency of drug use	
Once daily	31 (15.6%)
Once a week	38 (19.1%)
Anytime	130 (65.3%)
Suggestions on ways to curb psychoactive drug use among students	
Health education on school visit and counselling sessions	349 (95.6%)
Religious intervention	14 (3.8%)
Health clubs in schools	2 (0.6%)

Some other drugs less commonly used were cocaine 16(5.7%), valium[R] (diazepam) 12(4.3%) and marijuana 3 (1.1%). Most of the students who used cigarette were in the age range of 15 to 19 years. The earliest age at first exploration was 13years. Most respondents obtained their drug supply from the open drug market (23.5%) while others consulted with friends and itinerant hawkers. The oral route of administration (90.1%) was predominant among respondents with less common incidents of injection drug users (4.7%). Some of the students used the substances anytime (65.3%) while others used them once a day (15.6%). The responses obtained on suggested means to curb drug use among the students included school visits (95.6%), religious intervention (3.8%), and establishment of health clubs in schools (0.6%).

Table 3 presents the possible reasons for the use of drugs by students and these were as a stimulant to stay awake for studies (31.7%%), for altered sense of well being (31.1%), to stimulate appetite to aid in muscle building (20.1%) and as a replacement for meals for being overweight (17%) with the specific drugs that were used for such purposes.

Table 4 presents the perceived consequence of drug abuse among the students; the level of agreement was determined by calculating the weighted average for each of the identified factors. With regards to the students' perception of the various consequences of drug abuse as reflected in their choice of the "strongly agree" or "agree" alternatives, the following are the frequencies reported as presented in Table 4; truancy 437 (62.4%), risky sexual behaviour 439 (68%), hooliganism/gangster 439(67.9%), suicidal attempt 369 (59.2%), stealing/robbery 434 (67.2%), cultism 432 (66.6%), mental disorder 465 (70%), murder 414 (64.3%), rape 436 (55.8%) and others 16 (2.1%). With a weighted mean score of 2.5 there seemed to be a general agreement on such consequences as mental disorder (2.84), risky sexual behaviour (2.75), hooliganism (2.76) and cultism (2.67) However, suicidal attempt with a weighted average of 2.43 has the least rating, thus indicating a low level of occurrence of this consequence among students in the area of study.

DISCUSSION

Drug abuse is a major problem among adolescents and it may have serious consequences on their well being and those in their environment. These negative effects are not limited to short-term effects but may also present as

Table 3: Frequency distribution of responses on reasons for drug use among students

Reasons for drug use		Alcohol	Cigarette	Pawpaw leaves	Glue	Diazepam	Caffeine	Cocaine
To stimulate appetite/ increase body size - 20.1%	f	19	23	7	8	16	18	2
	(%)	4.1	5.0	1.5	1.7	3.5	3.9	0.4
As a replacement for meals - 17%	f	13	17	16	9	9	11	6
	(%)	2.7	3.6	3.4	1.9	1.9	2.3	1.3
For high or altered feelings - 31.1%	f	37	41	17	11	9	16	11
	(%)	8.1	9.0	3.7	2.4	2.0	3.5	2.4
To stay awake - 31.7%	f	25	26	10	9	76	11	5
	(%)	4.9	5.1	2.0	1.8	14.9	2.2	1.0

health complications in adult life. For instance, the adolescent brain is still in development and this process may be affected by drug use. Substance abuse is an international problem of significant epidemiologic proportions that has particularly devastating effects on youths because early initiation of gateway drugs such as alcohol, tobacco or other psychoactive substances has been linked with deviant behaviours.

The finding in this study that most of the respondents were below 20 years of age and each one of them had used at least one substance as at the time of the survey is an indication of extent of substance use among youths and this finding agrees with the report of a similar study by Eneh and Stanley (2004) on the incidence of substance use among high school students in Rivers State, Nigeria. The frequency of cocaine use by the students may be explained by their close proximity to a large university with its diversity and sophistication. The finding that most of the students who used cigarette were in the age range of 15 to 19 years agrees with earlier findings of similar studies on the pattern of substance use among students in various parts of Nigeria (Eneh and Stanley, 2004; Shehu et al., 2008), thus suggesting risky behaviour among this demographic group. A significant number of the respondents who used the psychoactive substances reported engaging in risky sexual behaviours and this corresponds with

an earlier study (The Henry Kaiser family foundation, 2002). The earliest age of 13years at first exploration found in this study was in line with previous findings where the most frequent age at first exploration fell between 13 and 16years. Graham et al., (1999) observed that one of the most important phenomena observed during the period of adolescence is experimentation and this behaviour has been found to lead to trying out of new experiences such as drug and sex, sometimes with dire consequences for the adolescents, with a possibility of increased trend in the pattern of drug use as observed by Baron and Kashler (2008).

As found out in this study that most respondents obtained their drug supply from the open drug market, friends or itinerant hawkers agree with the fact that use of psychoactive substances in adolescence is usually a social experience and a learned behaviour and a common problem among adolescents (Abiodun et al., 1994). The oral route of administration, which seemed to be predominant among the respondents with less common incidents of injection, is of importance in view of additional risks of infections associated with injectables such as hepatitis and HIV infections. The results obtained for frequency of drug use among the students should be of concern as regards the poor knowledge of youths on the harmful effects of indiscriminate use of these substances.

The responses obtained on suggested means to curb drug use among the students show

Table 4: Students' perceptions of the consequences of substance abuse

Perceived consequences		Level of agreement					
		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Can't say	Weighted average (WA) WA=Σfx/Σf
	x	4	3	2	1	0	
Truancy	f	223	179	102	64	76	
	%	34.6	27.8	15.8	10	11.8	2.64
	fx	892	537	204	64	0	
Risky sexual behaviour	f	232	207	83	56	67	
	%	35.9	32.1	12.9	8.7	10.4	2.75
	fx	928	621	166	56	0	
Stealing or robbery	f	242	192	83	68	61	
	%	37.5	29.7	12.9	10.5	9.4	2.75
	fx	968	576	166	68	0	
Hooliganism/gangsterism	f	238	201	85	61	61	
	%	36.8	31.1	13.2	9.4	9.4	2.76
	fx	952	603	170	61	0	
Cultism	f	217	215	74	72	72	
	%	33.5	33.1	11.4	11	11	2.67
	fx	868	645	148	72	0	
Mental disorder	f	271	194	78	64	57	
	%	40.8	29.2	11.8	9.6	8.6	2.84
	fx	1084	582	156	64	0	
Murder	f	227	187	81	73	76	
	%	35.3	29	12.6	11.3	11.8	2.65
	fx	227	374	972	243	0	
Rape	f	206	230	83	65	64	
	%	26.4	29.4	10.6	8.3	8.2	2.69
	fx	824	690	166	65	0	
Suicidal attempts	f	172	197	84	69	102	
	%	27.6	31.6	13.4	11.1	16.3	2.43
	fx	688	591	168	69	0	

that youths desire adequate preventive measures to curb the menace of substance use. It is highly desirable that appropriate school health programmes be institutionalised in order to curtail this menace of substance use and its consequences among our youths. The students can be educated through establishment of preventive programmes in various schools which can help to strengthen peer-driven interventions. With regards to reasons given for the

use of drugs, adolescents could be obsessed about being overweight, while others may use drugs such as steroids to aid in muscle building. Some other motives which are particularly relevant to adolescents are the altered sense of well being and enhanced ability to experiment with sex, hooliganism and other deviant behaviours. All these factors explain the term 'drug abuse', which applies only to instances in which people take drugs purely to change their moods and in which they experience impaired behaviour or social functioning as a result of doing so (Wallace and Fischer,1987). This is in agreement with the widely accepted definition of a drug as compounds that change the functioning of biological systems because of their chemical structure (Levithal, 1999). A significant number of the respondents who used the psychoactive substances reported engaging in risky sexual behaviours as consequences of substance abuse and this corresponds with the result of an earlier study (The Henry Kaiser family foundation, 2002) while the perceived consequences of drug abuse among the students agree with findings from a previous study reported by Baron and Kashler (2008).

CONCLUSION

This study showed a considerable level of drug use among secondary school students in the four local Government Areas of Ile - Ife in line with similar studies among this demographic group in Nigeria. It is also evident from the responses that youths desire adequate preventive measures to curb the menace of substance abuse. Furthermore, in spite of the high incidence of substance use among the youths, there is a recorded significant level of perceived consequences of drug abuse. It becomes imperative to reiterate the dangers of drug abuse in general and early drug use in young people in particular. Therefore, it is concluded that psychoactive drug use among in-school adolescents is assuming a dangerous proportion and hence the need for immediate intervention to curb the menace.

Policy recommendations

Adolescents need support, guidance and orientation to facilitate their development of capacity to coping with, resisting and recovering from risky situations. In order to cub the use of hard drugs, it may be necessary to develop specific strategies to prevent transition to drug use, reach out to hard drug users and provide services by encouraging drug dependence treatment to help drug users and likewise establish a hierarchy of risk reduction strategies to prevent and reduce drug abuse among youths. Other preventive strategies could be based within the family structure, the schools, out-of-school or media interventions. Evidence – based studies indicate that risk and protective factors are context dependent and operate on people taking drugs for disparate reasons. With these caveats, improving the general social environment of children coupled with supporting parents will probably be the most effective strategies for primary prevention of drug use. Studies indicate that risk and resilience can be successfully altered with interventions of parental monitoring and enhancement of social attachments and skills. Appropriate training of children in the homes as well as parents teaching positive family interactions have been shown to be effective strategies. However, family intervention is only effective when the focus is on multiple risk and protective factors and the cultural background of the families is taken into consideration. Similarly, educational and media campaigns may be matched to youths as target audience. Studies have shown that children are attentive to alcohol advertisements and a fair proportion sees them as a source of information on real life (Wyllie *et al*., 1998).

Regulatory approaches to drug markets have shown considerable success in limiting and shaping drug use among youths particularly when there is a legal market in the drug sale. In this circumstance, regulatory authorities may efficiently enforce limits on youth access as a condition of licences to sell. However, the success of such regulatory approaches is dependent on a popular consensus. Maintaining this consensus may require efforts at public

persuasion (Saltz *et al.*, 1995). Moreover, policies work directly and indirectly by reflecting social norms and reflecting what is acceptable. The positive impact of policies on consumption as well as subsequent harm could be supported by consistent scientific evidence, especially in the case of alcohol. Health care personnel may also contribute to curbing substance use among youths through their participation in campaigns against indiscriminate use of psychoactive substances and also by providing the necessary information on rational use of drugs.

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