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**Emerging Paradox of Drug Abuse among Youths: A Case for Sustainable Development in Communities in Rivers State**

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**Abstract**

This paper examined the effects of drug abuse on youths and community development. The import of this paper was on proffering solution to a social problem: drug abuse which inevitably affects the development of a community. Drug abuse is indiscriminate or inappropriate use of any substance which is not approved medically, culturally or socially. Its effect on youths' ability to contribute to community development is enormous and fluid. Ideas and opinions were obtained from secondary sources and analysed qualitatively. As a way forward, the paper recommended that planned quality education and emotional literacy should be developed as strategies to address the causes of drug abuse.

*Keywords:* abuse, community, development, drug, youths

**Introduction**

Each community faces one social problem or the other from time to time and the ability to surmount or sometimes, nip in the bud such problems results in grading of communities in terms of development in the areas of infrastructure, employability of youths, capacity building, tourism, education, peace and security. By implication, the destiny of every community – where they wish to be in terms of development and competitiveness – is in their hands. The good news is that it is never too late for a community to wake up and address its challenges. Youths are an integral part of a community. The word, youth is regarded in Sociology as an ascribed status, or a social construct to categorize a group of people in society rather the biological attributes of being young (Scott & Marshall, 2005). This means that you are a youth if you regard yourself as one no matter your age. However, in the context of this paper, youthful age is between 18 and 59 years. This is the age bracket that drives development in a community. Community, etymologically, is derived from Latin words, “com” (meaning with) and “unit” (meaning one) and therefore literally means “becoming one with”. Therefore, a community is a component of society defined by collective will and interest. It refers to a group of people living together in a place or who generally have a particular attribute (Obisike, 2018). It would be suicidal to leisurely underestimate the effects of drug abuse in society especially in rural areas where health promotions are “stories for the gods”. This paper makes effort to establish the impact of drug abuse on youths and community development in Rivers State through the questions stated below.

1. What is drug abuse?
2. What are the causes of drug abuse?
3. Is drug abuse a social problem in communities in Rivers State?

4. What are the indices showing that drug abuse has affected the youths and community development in Rivers State?
5. What is the way forward?
6. The emerging paradox

### **What is Drug Abuse?**

First, a drug is, in the sense of pharmacology, any chemical substance used in the treatment, cure, prevention, or diagnosis of disease or used to otherwise enhance physical or mental well-being of humans or other animals. This is the medically desirable main effect of drugs (Bernstein et al., 2006). It is in this positive sense that we see a substance and call it a medicine. On the other hand, the undesirable side effect may include the potential for abuse. The American Psychiatric Association (2000) defines drug or substance abuse as a pattern of use that causes severe social, legal, or interpersonal problems for the user. Therefore, if a drug is not used for the purposes of wellness, it is called a poison or illicit or habit-forming medicinal substance, such as narcotics. Simply put, narcotics are those drugs that come under the restrictions of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and they consist of mainly opiates (opium, morphine, heroin and codeine). Biologically, poisons are substances that can cause death, injury or harm to the body. This means that the abuse or misuse of drugs is what makes a drug poisonous.

Mustapha (2008) outlined the following definitions of drug abuse:

- a. It is the self medication or self administration of a drug in persistently excessive quantities which results in psychic or physical dependence, functional impairment and departure from approved social norms.
- b. It occurs when an individual indulges in a nonspecific or indiscriminate use of drugs, including alcohol, caffeine and nicotine.
- c. Drug abuse is indiscriminate or inappropriate use of any substance which is not approved medically, culturally or socially.

The first definition gives us a picture of ignorance on the part of the abuser or absence of the services of medical personnel or non availability of a functional health facility or the financial capacity to access proper medication. Here, “excessive quantity” reminds us of the fact that drugs have prescribed dose for administration depending on the age of patient, degree of the sickness, medical history and weight of the patient. Consequently, under dose is also part of drug abuse because it has medical consequences. Further explanation here may take us away from our focus, the main concern of this lecture. In sum, this definition primarily presents to us a picture of sickness and drug administration, a picture of patients and illness behaviour, a reflection of ignorance of drugs by individuals. The overall consequence here is that its impact on the health and wealth of a community is implicit.

The second and third definitions present an outright intentional act; use of drugs as a filler of a social-construct gap in the life of an individual. Here, we are presented with a picture of individuals who deliberately consume drugs, exploring their unintended functions. This category of abusers captures the main thrust of this paper. In this social context, we define drug abuse as any form of non-medical use of any substance for the purposes of stimulating the nervous system to increase strength, liveliness, boldness or social relaxation in a manner that it affects the individual and community; becomes a social problem. The argument here is that using drugs beyond medical purposes does not in itself constitute “drug abuse”; it does when it affects the productivity of the individual, when it increases criminality in a neighbourhood. Otherwise, what is the abuse when a farmer uses a drug to energize or consumes “kaikai” (local gin) for relaxation after a day's labour? Musicians, we understand, smoke and drink for energy and boldness on the stage. Certainly, we cannot classify this as a form of drug abuse culturally or socially. However, it is not our intention here to encourage farmers and musicians to use drugs as enhancers. The attempt here is to situate and explain drug abuse in the context of social and cultural situations.

So far, we have neither condemned any person who takes alcohol or cannabis or codeine or crack or cocaine nor set them free because of the advantages and disadvantages of drugs, depending on the circumstances. Contributing to this argument, Scott and Marshall (2005) state

The concept of addiction is unhelpful: it suggests a dependency with grave consequences for the individual and society. Not all

drug-users develop dependency nor do such consequences inevitably follow; the term “problem drug-user” is therefore increasingly favoured. Regarding crime, the dominant thesis is that regular drug use, coupled with the legality of supply, forces users to commit crime to pay for drugs; however, whether drug use leads to involvement in crime, or involvement in delinquent life-style introduces a person to drug use, is debated (p. 169).

While we make further attempts to establish the effects of drug abuse on the youth and community, we use the words of our Lord Jesus (in the book of John 8:11) to advise drug abusers when he commanded an adulterous woman to “go and sin no more.” It is possible to desist from drug abuse. All you need to do is to “walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). The conclusion here is that we should resist the temptation of substance abuse because it may lead to psychological dependence (a condition in which a person continues to use the drug despite its adverse effects, depends on it for a sense of well-being, and becomes preoccupied with obtaining the drug) or physical dependence (a physiological condition in which continued drug use becomes necessary in order to prevent an unpleasant withdrawal syndrome). One can still function without the drug at the level of psychological dependence but cannot at the level of physical dependence which leads to tolerance (a condition in which increasingly larger doses are needed to produce the same effect. At the stage of tolerance, many addicts need the drug just to prevent the negative effects of not taking it. Your guess of the financial implication here on the part of the addict, family and community is as good as ours. The truth is that many of our youths have entered the stage of drug tolerance and that is where the problem is situated. Most importantly, we should not underestimate the ease with which drug dependence develops in anyone because of its tendency to stimulate the brain's “pleasure centres”.

### **Causes of Drug Abuse**

They include:

- a. Accessibility and availability of drugs
- b. Bad friends and families
- c. Social media influence
- d. Unemployment
- e. Desire for riches
- f. Lack of parental care and guidance
- g. Poor performance in school
- h. Lack of knowledge of the adverse effects of drugs
- i. Lack of stringent measures against abusers on the part of community and government
- j. Low self-esteem
- k. Ignoring early warning signs
- l. Depression

Is drug abuse a social problem in Communities in Rivers State?

The distinction made in defining drug abusers is useful; we can comfortably apply the term “problem drug-user” to mean any drug user whose action constitutes a social problem. A social problem is any shared condition or attitude that damages or disorganizes society such as crime, unemployment, illiteracy, among others. According to Scott and Marshall (2005), social problems refer to series of conditions and abnormal behaviours which are seen as manifestations of social disorganization. One significant characteristic of a social problem is that a community must feel its impact; as long as the community is not aware or does not feel its impact, even though it exists, it is not a social problem (Obisike, 2018). Problem, in this sense, is not an absolute term; it is only a relative term because what is a problem for one community may not be a problem for the other. Similarly, problems are not permanent; what may appear a problem today may not remain so tomorrow. If a community feels the impact of drug-users in the neighbourhood, it means that drug abuse is a social problem in that community. Drug abuse is indeed a social problem in communities in Rivers State because many communities have been devastated by youth restiveness, cultism and other criminal activities.

Nwaoku (2022) reported that 30 suspects linked to different crimes across Rivers State were arrested in the month of June, 2022. Also in September, 2022, gunmen killed a bus driver and abducted eight of his passengers along the Abonema/Degema/Emuoha road (Naku, 2022). Data from the Rivers State Response Team on Violence against Women and Children show that there were 182 sexual violence cases in 2019, 109 in 2020 and 106 in 2021 (Ezenwafor, 2021). These criminal activities could not have been perpetrated without the influence of drugs.

**What are the indices showing that drug abuse has affected the youths and community development?**

a. Level of aggression

One of the indications of the effects of drug abuse on youths is the degree or increased dimension of hostility and violent behaviours expressed by the youths at the slightest provocation which may be mere admonition for wrong doing. If many of the youths react violently whenever their rights are perceived to be denied, it is an indication of the adverse effects of drug abuse. Systemic research by social psychologists has established the link between drug abuse and violence (Bernstein et al., 2006). If you compare the level of aggression in our communities yester years when youths were afraid of smoking, drinking alcohol, brandishing guns and recent years, the latter period is more gruesome.

b. Increase in Criminality

With the turn of endemic rate of drug abuse, many communities have become flashpoints for rape, kidnap, robbery, thuggery, murder, arson and wanton destruction of property. This development is an expression, in verifiable terms, the link between drug abuse and crime. It is obvious that many drug abusers indulge in criminality to pay for their drugs and this hampers development of society. More destructive is the fact that many criminals operate under the influence of drugs while committing violent crimes (Pierce et al., 2017; Rafeaie et al., 2013).

c. Reduction in the number of skilled manpower among the youths

Drug abuse can cause lethargy and procrastination among users; they are good planners but poor “executioners” of strategic plans. You will know them by their tall ambitions, high hopes and by-all-means belief syndrome.

d. Lack of respect for elders and constituted authorities

Another sign of effects of drug abuse is usurpation of sacred responsibilities of elders and constituted authorities by youths. They decide when, where and how land portions are shared in communities. In some extreme cases, they take over the responsibilities of paramount rulers and CDCs. In fact, frequent agitations by youths are an early warning sign of drug abuse.

Other indicators include:

e. Indecent dressing

f. Low turnout of graduates and skill trainees

g. Low participation in sociopolitical activities

h. Low participation in sports and cultural activities

i. Low enrollment in security agencies

j. Brazen smoking of cigarettes and consumption of alcohol in public

Youths are the drivers of development in every community and the case of Rivers State cannot be different. Logically, drug-devastated youths cannot make meaningful contributions towards the development of a community. The term, development, according to Friedman (in Jhingan, 2011, p.5), is “an innovative process leading to the structural transformation of social system”. In clear terms, development means progress, change or advancement made in different areas of life for organized society. Let us take a break and ask ourselves as a community: where have we made appreciable progress in the last five years? Considering the number of graduates and postgraduates, the number of skill trainees, the number of political appointees, the number of persons who recently got paid jobs,

the state of infrastructures, the security of lives and property, the educational, tourism and religious facilities; you will be unwilling to accept that our communities are on the thresholds of development.

### **What is the way forward?**

This paper established the link between drug abuse by youths and community development. First, an attempt was made to enumerate the causes of drug abuse and how behavioural patterns of abusers affect community development. Therefore, it is implicit that the way forward here is to address the causes of drug abuse. These causes can be tackled through different strategies; many require multifaceted approaches which may be mutually inclusive. Planned quality education, for example, is a veritable tool for community development; it has the potential to attract employment, wealth and healthy lifestyle. Beyond quality education, emotional literacy is one essential instrument which every community needs to drive development by reducing abuse of drugs among youths. Faupel (2006, p.167) describes emotional literacy as “skills and competences that are underpinned by a set of ethical and moral values”. Emotional literacy is the centre of human wholeness and it seems communities have lost it in thinking that wealth and positions are the hallmark of a “model individual.” Faupel agrees that emotional literacy is the feeling or affective aspects of human existence, and to “neglect it, to ignore it, to demean it ... may be turning us into a herd of Gadarene swine heading for disaster” (p.168).

The importance of emotional literacy is in its potency to address the needs of the poor, those people who feel they do not belong and behave badly. This is because emotional literacy makes us to understand that poor behaviour is an attempt by the individual or groups to try to meet legitimate needs. Faupel draws an analogy from the loss of Titanic to Southampton to explain the importance of emotional literacy in the life of a community. Titanic was a British luxury passenger liner that sank after it had struck the iceberg during its maiden voyage from Southampton (its home port) to New York City on the evening of Sunday, 15th April, 1912 with 2,208 passengers and crew on board. The accident took the lives of 1,500 persons, only 711, less than a third, survived. This is one famous tragedy that history will not forget; it has provoked many lessons and stories. Faupel makes the following lessons and implications for emotional literacy from it:

- a. The social redesign of the ship was probably the most important cause of how many survived and who survived.
- b. Human systems are inevitably designed by people who have power and resources, people who belong. Emotional literacy is not primarily for the poor but for the rich. The analogy here in relation to reduction of drug abuse is to appeal to bystanders (families and individuals) to change their apathy that has the greatest impact on abusers because it is in the best long-term interests of bystanders (non-abusers) to prevent the bad behaviour of abusers who do not feel as though they belong by genuinely sharing in the context of the whole community.
- c. The third lesson is that when we establish and maintain community, everybody tends to benefit. Not only would the social class distribution of survivors have been far fairer had the Titanic been designed differently, but there would probably have been far more survivors in the final analysis.

The above lessons indicate that emotional literacy is fundamentally about our feeling towards humanity, our vision and dreams for our community, what we can do to reduce criminality in our families and by extension, our communities.

### **The Emerging Paradox**

From the foregoing discourse, it seems paradoxical to state that drug abusers (especially the youths) in a community are blame-free and practically have no role to play in deflating occasions and predisposing factors that attract abuse of drugs under this context. The blame goes to the bystanders (families, elders and community elite) and perhaps, the government. The hard truth is that the drug abusers cannot rescue themselves or initiate plans to forestall or reduce abuse of drugs; it is our responsibility which begins with the development of emotional literacy as encapsulated in the lessons of the Titanic. Expression of emotional literacy is anchored on love, patriotism, selflessness and generosity; none of these is far-fetched, they are within us if we dispose ourselves to them.



Generosity, for example, is not defined by the amount of cash or material gifts we give to people; it is defined by one's empathic nature. Empathy drives generosity in terms of giving employment to your people, providing educational materials and facilities, counseling and settling of disputes, among others.

### **Conclusion**

The import of this paper is on proffering solution to a social problem: drug abuse which inevitably affects development of a community. We may not have exhausted all the possible solutions, but, at least, we have provoked your sensibilities towards the need to contribute to the development of your community. Your community is your mirror, a reflection of what you are, your vision, mission and dream. Your community is the basis of your identity, dignity and value which are dependent primarily on how you maintain, preserve and enhance the dignity and worth of other people. Remember, your life makes no meaning to God if you fail to live for others.

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