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Drug Abuse Among Nigerian Youth and Its Consequences – A Review of Literature.Adepeju Akinlawon Adetiloye¹, Osunwoye Adedapo Abel*²Department of Medical Laboratory Science, University of Osun Teaching Hospital Osogbo, Nigeria, West Africa¹, Department of Medical Laboratory Science, University of Osun Teaching Hospital Osogbo, Nigeria, West Africa².Author for Correspondence*: +234-703-305-1489/dypuldon@gmail.com/
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/sokjmls.v7i2.12>**Summary**

The available evidences suggest that it is true that drugs are used for beneficial therapeutic purposes, effective substance for good health, but they are also being abused by people especially youths. They use it illegally and unlawfully, thus it becomes harmful to the body. Studies have described a growing impact of drug abuse among Nigerian youths to the extent of being considered a moral decadent. The Nigerian youths are deliberately using drugs illegally, unlawfully and intentionally. While many are ignorantly or knowingly depending on one drug or the other for their daily activities. The objective of this review is to highlight the dangers and consequences of drug abuse particularly among the Nigerian youths. The review, which consists of literature search of journals and chapters in books, provides an insight into common drugs and substances that are abused, causes of drug abuse, social effect, prevention or control measures and laboratory investigations. Hence, for its public health significance, there is an urgent call for increased vigilance and improved knowledge/research-driven approaches to the diagnosis and management of drugs and substance of abuse.

Keywords: *Drug Abuse, Nigerian Youth, Review.***Introduction**

Drugs are commonly used by everybody whether young or old. Drugs are not only useful for human beings; they are also useful for animals for good health. Human beings give drugs to their animals when they discovered that they are not healthy. Drug is an effective substance in the life of any living thing

to cure sickness and to make life healthy. It is true that drugs are used for beneficent therapeutic purposes, effective substance for good health, but they are being abused by people especially youths. They use it illegally and unlawfully, thus it becomes harmful to the body. The impact of drug abuse among Nigerian youths has been considered a moral decadent. Drug abuse have had a negative impact as well as brought shame to our society. The Nigerian youths are deliberately using drugs illegally, unlawfully and intentionally.

Many of our youths ignorantly or knowingly depend on one drug or the other for their daily activities. According to the statistics provided by World Health Organization (WHO), drug including alcohol and tobacco, have caused a lot of road accidents and have claimed more lives than other sicknesses suffered by mankind. As International Drug Trafficking is gaining strength, the international cooperation against drug trafficking is steadily losing strength and lacking organization.

The report from world narcotics agencies has shown that confiscation level has fallen below 10 percent of the global circulation level of drug internationally while the mortality figures from drug abuse have tripled since 1988. In the United States, medical emergencies coming from cocaine taken rose by 1000 percent between 1976-1993. The case of heroine taken has increased by 6 percent from 1988-1993 and by 155 percent in the case of cannabis. Cocaine addicts between the age of 12 and 17 increased by 166 percent from 1994-1995 in various countries. Drugs are being abused every day.

In Nigeria, this issue of drug abuse has been a serious concern for the society. Youths have taken to drug abuse. In recent times, the rate at which youths abuse drugs have been so alarming and worrisome that much effort has been made to eradicate it. As the youths are abusing drugs, the effort being made to eradicate it is losing strength. Drug abuse and addiction have a destructive or devastating consequence but our youths are still into drugs. "Not only that it destroys the affected individual but it has a pervasive effect on all those who know or work with the individual (Barber, 1985; Barber, 1967). Drug addiction is a tragedy in our Nigerian society.

Statement of Problem

Drug abuse among youths in Nigeria is now a common phenomenon. Females are not exempt in this evil act. A recent research shows that 15-20 percent of drug addicts are females while males constitute about 50-55 percent, all comprising of traders, students, unskilled workers and the unemployed as shown by a retrospective study carried out by NDLEA (Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 1997).

Drug abuse has contributed in the set back of the society. In spite of this, many youths do still indulge in it. In many psychiatric hospitals in Nigeria, many of our youths are there undergoing drug treatment. The number of the youths that are insane are more than old people that are insane and most insanity among youth are mostly caused by drug abuse. Some youths are school drop-outs because they could not continue due to the rate of drug, they have taken that resulted to their insanity. Many youths are homeless, wanderers, derelicts, unemployed, rapist, thugs, armed robbers and so on because they are drug addicts. A lot of lives and property have been wasted in accident and violence because of drug. Youths that are supposed to be the hope of their families and the society at large and useful to themselves have wasted their lives, all because of drugs and it has been a serious problem in Nigeria.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to make the Nigerian youths to be aware of the dangers of drug abuse, its effect as well as the consequences of drug abuse

Drugs Abused in Nigeria

Drug abuse has been a scourge in our country Nigeria especially among the youths. As seen in the definition, it is the intentional misuse of a drug without a written prescription from a doctor. It is necessary to know those drugs that are being abused. In this chapter, attempt will be made to write out the names with full explanation of most of the drugs, their uses, effects or consequences, causes of drug abuse etc.

Common Drugs that are Abused Substance

1. Alcohol: This is one of the most commonly abuse substance. It is the drug of choice in our society and most people are taking it. People do not regard it as a dangerous drug because in Africa, especially in Nigeria, it is part of their daily life and they drink it often.

According to Agha (2003:86);

Most Africans believe that wines, "ogogoro" local gin and spirits are believed to be a necessary passport to social acceptance. Beer is advertised daily as drink which makes a man truly masculine, lagers and light also are said to promote the feminine touch.

Alcohol is most often viewed as a depressant, although it can be a stimulant and for some it is a hallucinogen. Alcohol includes the following: ethyl, methyl, propyl, butyl and amyl. During the 1940's and 1950's, there was a view that alcoholism is a disease and that it can be cured as an illness. In 1957, the American Medical Association (AMA) came to a conclusion that alcoholism is a disease.

Alcohol abuse manifests as drinking becomes increasingly important and take priority over every other thing else. "Alcohol abuser or problem drinker or alcohol addict is a person who drinks too much on a regular basis". Sometimes they try to control themselves from drinking but it has penetrated inside them so much that it takes time and the special grace of God to stop alcoholism. Alcohol abusers are at risk for continuing in alcoholism. Alcoholism can increase or emerge as a result of the death of a loved one, trouble, unemployment, dismissal from work, betrayal, retirement, family problem etc.

Cannabis (Marijuana): Aka and Akunyili (2003), says that “marijuana is the common name for the plant *cannabis sativa*. The plant has been used for centuries, primarily for its euphoric (mood altering) effects and is one of the leading drugs of abuse particularly among the youths”. This drug first emerged in the United States of America (USA) in the 1920's. It is dangerous and addictive, by 1960's and 1970's it became popularly known by the youths till today day. It is an indigenous product, cheapest among drugs and most widely abused by the youths. (Abel, 1980). Cannabis was brought into Nigeria by slave traders and soldiers who returned from the world wars. This drug is widely used by millions of people because of its effectiveness in mood alteration. Through research, it has been revealed that it is being abused by all grades and strata of Nigerian society especially the youths and adolescents. This drug has been causing a lot of problem to the Nigerian youths till this day. (Aka and Akunyili, 2003).

Cocaine: This is a stimulant. It is a white powder that is typically sniffed. In its original form, it is chewed as a leaf from the cocoa plant. Cocaine is a byproduct of the resin of cocoa plant. The plant is mostly found in the South American countries like Peru, Chile, Columbia, Bolivia etc and was used initially to enhance physical endurance or by doctors as a local anesthetic before it's abuse by addicts (Barber, 1967). Cocaine is abused when used in a wrong way. It is done by mixing the raw cocaine powder with sodium bicarbonate (Na_2CO_3) in a particular proportion. The mixture is poured into a conical flask with distilled water and heated over an unseen burner and the rock it will form is what the addicts use. They take it by combining it with other drugs. The powdery substance is injected or snorted by the addicts (Hollister, 1995). “Snorting is the process of inhaling cocaine powder through the nose, where it is absorbed into the bloodstream, smoking involves inhaling cocaine vapour or smoke into the lungs where absorption into the bloodstream is as rapid as by injection while injection, is the use of a needle to release the drug directly into the bloodstream” (Lauer, 1978). These three methods of cocaine usage can lead to addiction and other severe health problems.

Heroin: This is a powerful illegal drug and it is made from morphine. There is a brown heroin that is obtained through the purification of opium and that brown substance is due to the dirt contained in the substance. At the end of the purification, the white heroin is gotten. The opium can be swallowed raw with water or licked. The brown powder can be mixed with cigarette. Heroin is one of the worst drugs as it damages severely more than other drugs both physically and mentally. Heroin gives an addict pleasure when abused and he develops tolerance to the heroin and endangers the life of the addict.

Opium: This is derived from juices of the opium poppy. It produces physical and psychological dependence. It is used in relieving of pains and inducing of sleep. It is licked, swallowed or put in a hot tea after cutting off the semi-molten opium resin into small bits. It is commonly prescribed to patients for the relieving of pains. People abuse this drug on the grounds that it is good for pain relief. Opium abuse begins when the patient starts taking medication on their own term, more frequently than what their doctor has recommended. It is not only used by the patients for their relief, opium abuse is even more prevalent in those who use it as a recreational drug.

Valium: This is a drug that is used to reduce anxiety. It is commonly recommended CNS (Central Nervous System) depressant used to produce beneficial drowsy or calming effect in individuals suffering from sleep disorders or anxiety. If valium is used as prescribed by a doctor it is not addictive but when used as not prescribed by the doctor, it becomes addictive and an abuse.

Methadone: It is a drug that is used to treat people that are trying to stop taking the illegal drug. Since its legalization in 1947, it has become a highly abused drug. It is used to break one's addiction to another substance. It is effective in withdrawal symptoms that is causing pains in the patient. When it is taken incorrectly or against the prescribed direction, it can easily move from an abuse situation into a full edged addiction. It is available in tablets, liquid and injection forms. It is safely and carefully given/administered by a highly trained staff but

the drug is rampant everywhere and it makes it one of the fastest addiction substances available.

Morphine: Morphine is a powerful drug made from opium that is used to reduce pain. It is being prescribed by doctors for its effectiveness in reducing pains in patients who are suffering from chronic illness like cancer. It can be used easily, even though it is used for health treatment. It is abused when it is being used habitually and recreationally without the prescription of the doctor. It can be administered in tablet form through injection. The longer one takes morphine, the more he needs to experience the same level of effect.

Percocet: This is a narcotic drug prescribed to patients by doctors for the management of mild to moderate post-operative pain. The medication which is a mixture of oxycodone and acetaminophen is part of the opioid family of drugs and as such it is highly addictive. Percocet is abused when the patients do not follow the prescription as directed by the physician. The patient may take more than the prescribed number of pills at a given time or take the medication more often than what is recommended. The drug can be chewed or crushed and the powder sniffed.

Amphetamines: These are Central Nervous System (CNS) stimulants. They are used in medicine to counteract narcolepsy, sometimes to overcome drowsiness. It increases energy, dissipation of fatigue and loss of appetite. They can be taken orally in the form of tablets or injection through the vein. The injection form is efficacious more than that of tablet form because tablet form takes time to dissolve.

Vicodin: This is a narcotic drug, prescribed by doctors to alleviate all types of pain. Vicodin addiction creates a variety of negative consequences for every addict. Its consequences can be costly, both physically and emotionally like many other drugs of its kind, it is caused by the desire to enhance one's mood. Vicodin is abused when it is taken without the prescription from a doctor. It is also abused when the problem for which it was initially taken is no longer in existence and it is still being used. Sometimes people abuse it unintentionally. They initially take it for pain alleviation as prescribed by a

doctor. When the sickness is gone, they start to have craving for the vicodin even when the sickness has been cured. This causes the addict to go to any length in order to get the drug without the prescription from the doctor. Some people do not observe the addiction until it is too late. Vicodin is very expensive and when you become an addict to it, having craving, it is likely that you will be spending much to satisfy your craving.

Pemoline: This is a newly made drug. Others were in existence before it. It is coated in white colour and it has the same size with panadol and paracetamol. It is not costly and because of its cheapness, it is being abused by many people.

Sedatives: These are drugs that are used to induce sleep or to cause relaxation. They are barbiturate, capable of producing psychological and physical dependence. It is being abused when taken more than what is prescribed or without the prescription from a doctor.

Hallucinogen: This drug affects people's minds and makes them see things that are not really there or what they are or what they thought they are. According to the findings of the researcher, the word hallucination gave rise or brought about the name of this drug "hallucinogen". "Hallucination is the fact of seeming to see or hear somebody or something that is not really there, especially because of illness or drugs" (Hornby, 2000). This drug makes one to hallucinate. Examples of the drug are mescaline, psilocybin, lysergic acid, diethylamide etc. (Agha, 2003).

Crystal Methamphetamine: This is one the abused drugs. This drug is extremely dangerous but it induces sleep and appetite for food.

Xanax: This is a commonly prescribed short-term drug used to treat severe anxiety and panic disorders. The possibility of being xanax addict is extremely high especially after two months of use as tolerance to the drug builds over this period of time. It is administered naturally with its pill or injecting into the vein.

Oxycotin: This drug is commonly used in the medical field to treat chronic and other ailments of patients. It is used in treating severe pain and cancer. Oxycotin addiction is becoming more

and more rampant as the use of the sustained release oxycodone is more readily available. It can be administered in tablet form but the common one is by crushing the tablet and inject them with needle or snort them to increase the effectiveness and to reduce the time taken to feel the hit of the drug. Often the oxycotin addict will ingest the large dose of oxycotin into his body. This can lead to a dangerous overdoes which can become fatal.

Inhalants: This includes glue and other similar toxic substance. They are poured or sprayed into a plastic bag, on a cloth etc and the fumes are inhaled. Intoxication starts after two or three deep breaths. With prolonged use, tolerance will increase and the addict will start to require more substance.

There are many other drugs but these ones are popularly or commonly abused drugs. They are useful as seen but the effects or consequences are far more than their usefulness. They have rendered and are still rendering people especially our youths useless. Thereby causing problem to their families and to the society in general. It is not only rendering them useless, but also killing them. It is good to be exposing these drugs and their effects so that ignorant abusers and others should know about them and their menace.

Causes of Drug Abuse

There are a lot of factors that cause drug abuse among the Nigerian youths.

a. Peer Group: This is one of the common causes of drug addiction and abuse. It is a form of societal influence on the affected youth. "Peer group is a group of people of the same age or social status" (Hornby, 2000). A lot of evil like drug abuse, armed robbery, rape, among our youths in Nigeria and beyond are caused by peer groups. Someone can be influenced to become a drug addict by his friends who are drug addicts. Some people are drug addicts today because they associate with drug addicts and they do not want to be called "Jew guys" by their friends. Some people are compelled by their friends to become drug addict. One would like to be identified with his friends or peer group and when one is addicted to a particular drug, he or she will have the craving for that drug thereby losing the sense of direction in his or her life.

b. Family: The parental background of a child can expose a child to all sorts of evil including drug abuse. This could be due to family problems like broken homes, polygamous family, poverty, cultural influence on children, having a father who is a drug addict etc. if a child has a father who is a drug addict, it is likely that the child will become a drug addict, "like father like son". As the child watches his father there is every tendency that the child will become a drug addict or smoker and from cigarette smoker he will graduate to other hard drugs (Eze, P.O. Personal Communication, 2009). "I was a drug addict before because my father was a drug addict and several times, I used to see him snorting drugs into his nostrils, drinking the tablet form and injecting the drug into his body. In an interview with the researcher a girl of 20 years, she said, "I am a drug addict because I cannot behold and bear the enmity between my parents, any time they start their quarrel, I take drug to forget about them" (Ikenwa, M.I. Personal Communication 28th April, 2009). Some parents who engage too much in the struggle for survival tend to neglect their responsibilities on their children.

A Nigeria drug abuse students' activist had this to say; *Most parents in Nigeria today in their bid to make end meet, searching for greener pasture always abandon and neglect the proper welfare of their wards and children and expose them to the "unofficial" assistance of the so called house-maids. This ugly incidence will psychologically depress such children thereby given rise to CHILD ABUSE which is an off-shoot of DRUG ABUSE. Such youths will end up in taking solace in some illicit hard drugs gradually and systematically ruined uncontrollably, thereby destroying the moral values of the Nigerian society via her youth. Wasted generation of course. (Drug abuse activist).* When parents fail to carry out their responsibilities on their children, they are exposing the children to evils like drug abuse and others. So many youths are drug addicts today because they were not brought up religiously or trained well by their parents.

- c. Emotional Stress:** Some youths are emotionally stressed but instead of looking for a proper medical attention and counselling, they will embark on self-medication, like taking drugs that are not prescribed by a doctor which leads to drug abuse. In this way they will be using hard drugs that are illegal and unwholesome for their body to stop the stress. Some youths desire coffee or other hard drugs in order to subdue sleep without knowing that nature cannot be cheated. When one is an addict to a particular drug, the craving for that drug will be high. The habitual use of this substance may lead to drug abuse.
- d. Frustration:** This is another fast and commonest factor that leads to drug abuse. Many youths are frustrated in our society today. Many of our youths' desire or dreams are unfulfilled. Some are in the higher institutions without graduating because of references and other hidden things that are setting them back. Frustration can set in based on a number of factors such as graduating from higher institution without getting any employment, being disappointed by their loved ones, death of a dear one or bread winner, incessant strike by university lecturers, dismissal from job, conspiracy and accusation etc. All these contribute to drug addiction and abuse. According to an informant who suffered the ugly effect of drug abuse, he said; "I had many references and my girlfriend I loved so much, whom I used to help financially in the school betrayed my love for her and I could not bear all these, I became a drug addict" (Okeh, E.E. Personal Communication 6th May, 2009). Another person said, "I was a drug addict for 3 months when I could not get a job 6 years after I had finished serving my father land, what a country!" (Eke, S.O. Personal Communication 20th May, 2009). Frustration has led the Nigerian youths into drug abuse.
- e. Imitation:** Children easily imitate things whether good or bad especially from someone they see as a model. For fathers that are cigarette smokers or drug addicts, children can easily imitate them unless they have not seen them in the act. In practicing or smoking with an ordinary paper gradually, they will become perfect in cigarette smoking or in drug addiction.
- f. Search for a Dreadful Identity:** This is commonly found on the streets, some secondary schools and in higher institutions. Some youths like to have bad look, they like to be identified as "bad guys" and to be feared (Ugwu, I.C. Personal Communication 1st June, 2009). "I did not fail any examination when I became a drug addict on campus even though I was not serious in academic, I do not even write all the exams, my countenance and appearance dreads students and lecturers. I was not a cultist but a drug addict". Some people are abusing drugs today because they want to have dreadful appearance so that people will be afraid of them.
- g. Brain Charge/Sensation:** Some people are drug addicts today, abusing drugs because they are seeking for sensation. They want to "charge" their brain. This is habitually done by criminals for carrying out their criminal acts like robbery, raping, thuggery etc. With the abusing of drugs, they can carry out their crime without having human sympathy, taking human beings as nothing because their brains have been charged and they can kill their fellow human beings easily. In an interview with a criminal at Nsukka Prison, he says "If I take a wrap, my brain go charge well for action, I no go be person again, and person no go be person for me again" (Enebe, O.M. Personal Communication 15th June, 2009).

Social Effects of Drug Abuse

Apart from the effects of drug abuse on a victim or an addict as already discussed, it also has social and economic effects.

Family Problem. Drug abuse is one of the causes of family problem. A lot of families are having problem because of drug abuse. A man who is a drug addict and who drinks to stupor can beat his wife and children to death especially when the children are still tender. Such man cannot take care of his family.

ii. Blood Transmitted Diseases: The society is at risk because of this menace called drug abuse. Many of the drug addicts are dying of blood transmitted diseases like AIDS because most of them indulge in the exchange of unsterilized injection equipment for injecting of drugs into their bodies. With

this the society is at risk because AIDS can spread in the society through them. They can contact AIDS through coitus because these drugs increase the urge for sex most times without a condom. There was an incident that happened at Jalingo between 1999-2000 where some of the prisoners were sharing injection needles in taking their drugs. When one of them was released due to illness, it was discovered through the medical test carried on him that he was affected with HIV VIRUS (AIDS). He died and all the inmates that used the same injection equipment died of AIDS (Dauda, 2006).

iii. Violence/War: Drug abuse causes violence in the society. When one is engaged in drug abuse, he can carry out any evil act. In the higher institutions, most crisis are caused by drug addicts. If they are only cultists, they can hold themselves and have human sympathy in time of crisis but because of the drug, they cannot restrain themselves. This can lead to violence and consequent maiming of lives, loss of lives and property.

iv. Insanity/Death: Drug abuse has disgraced and degraded our youths to the lowest ebb. It is quite obvious that most of the Nigerian youths that are insane today were drug addicts. In Nigeria, the number of youths that are insane are more than that of old people. Not only that they are mad because of drug abuse but they are dying of it. Many of our youths are school dropouts because they have gone mad due to the drugs they have taken. A society that is losing her youths has no future and is in trouble.

Some Prominent Victims of Drug Abuse Nigerian youth emulate:

- (a) Diego Maradona, a great Footballer from Argentina.
- (b) Bob Maley, the Reggae musician who died of heart failure.
- (c) Beat Johnson, a great runner from Canada.
- (d) Gerd Muller, the great German Football ballestro.
- (e) Samuel Okwaraji, a late Nigerian Footballer.
- (f) Bob Hayas, a 100 metres gold medalist.
- (g) Estaban De Jesus, the great boxer who became a drug addict and died of AIDS.

- (h) FelaAnikulakpoKuti, the great Afro beat regent.
- (i) Timi Hendrix, the great Rock 'N' Roll exponent.
- (j) Charles Sunny Liston, the Black looking legend who died of drug abuse at the age of 38 years at Las Vegas in 1970.
- (k) Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez, Division general, Cuban Revolutionary Armed forces.
- (l) Brenda Fassy, a great South African Musician, etc. (Nyame, 2007).

Drug abuse prevention or control measures

Most people do not understand the effects of drug abuse especially on the youths. It is very necessary that drug abuse should be prevented or controlled. Drug abuse is a growing problem and drug abuse prevention should also be a growing measure and stronger in order to over-power the cankerworm.

Family: The prevention of drug abuse should start first from the family.

Conclusion.

Drug is a substance that affects the function of a living cell, which is used to cure and prevent the occurrence of illness. A drug becomes a “medicine” when it is used to save life, it becomes “poison” when it causes death, it becomes “mis-use” when people indulge in self-medication to cure illness and it becomes “abuse” when it is used indiscriminately. Due to the habitual use of drugs, drug addicts especially youths cannot do without it and it has been a problem to our country Nigeria and the world in general.

The impact of drug abuse among the Nigerian youths has been a stigma to the society. The effects of drug abuse especially among our youths and society are so devastating. Many of the Nigerian youths depend on one form of drug or the other. The rate at which youths abuse drugs is so alarming and worrisome. Many youths have tried one drug or the other and many of them are 80 drug abusers today. The family, church, community, school, Nigerian government have role to play in controlling drug abuse in Nigeria (Bamaiyi,1997) had this to say: *Certification or no certification, Nigeria must continue the drug war. In this hide and seek game, our primary objective is to salvage the nation from the scourge of hard drug.*

In this regard, youths should reject drug abuse because it may seem good to them but it leads to doom. Finally, the researcher is advocating that all hands should be on deck to make sure that drug abuse is eradicated or curbed in our country Nigeria so that our youths should be useful to themselves, their individual families and our country Nigeria as a whole

Acknowledgements

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