

YOUTH, POLITICS AND DRUG ABUSE IN NIGERIA

¹AZOWUE O. EMMANUEL, ²EZUGWU, KELECHI, ³ONUOHA, EMMANUEL CHIMA,

⁴EZEA, STELLA CHINEDU, ⁵NWEZE, CHIGOZIE VIVIAN,

⁶UGWU, EBERE GODSFAVOUR & ⁷ONU, CHISOLUM JANE-FRANCES

^{1,2,3,4,5,6&7}School of General Studies, Social Science Unit, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Corresponding Author: Onu, Chisolum Jane-Frances

Abstract

The issue of drug abuse has become a major disturbing issue that has become prevalent in the Nigerian state; and this has been predominately perpetuated by the youths in the country. But one disturbing fact this study will be examining is the nexus between politics and drug abuse in the country. The use of banned drug substance by the political class may have been the major attraction driving today's youths in Nigeria into engaging in this unfortunate and dangerous practice of getting involved in drug abuse. While some studies have averred that some politicians initiate willing youths into drug abuse in order to make them available instruments of thuggery for elections and other related illegal purposes. Some other scholars are of the view that politics appears to have become part and parcel behind the scene political activities that acts as melting point among politicians, their foot soldier and their illicit and dangerous activities in the country. The study therefore recommends that laws against drug abuse must not be made to deter the youths, but also the elites and political class who have become motivators and chief influencers of youths that engage in this dangerous and unfortunate practice

Keywords: Youth, Politics, Drug Abuse, Causes, Consequences, Solutions, Nigeria.

Introduction

The issue of drug abuse has become one of the most prevalent and unfortunate phenomenon that has been linked to the youths and some prominent political actors in Nigeria. Though, it has become common for the media to amplify the issues of drug abuse among Nigerian youths while playing down the involvement of some major political actors and prominent individuals in the society who may have influenced the youths into drug abuse today. The media has been severally accused of playing double standard on issue relating to drug abuse in the society as it gives prominent coverage to the poor and less attention is being paid to the high class in the society, and with such bias coverage and reportage, combating drug abuse cannot be said to be holistic, and ending the menace may never be achieved in this part of the world.

Several scholars are of the view that the youths are the most valuable assets of every society who are needed for the proper engineering of societal growth and development. The youths are considered as the pillars and engines that propel the development of the human society (Akindele, 1974; Bayer, 1981; and Dankani, 2012). Dasgupta (2019) argued that the youths are those individuals that fall within the age bracket of 10-16 years. Nelsson (2018) sees the youths as those who are between the age brackets of 6-30 years. To this end, Abdullahi (2003) posits that these classification of the youths if not properly attended to as to combat the rising cases

of drug abuse that have enveloped them may be dangerous to the society at the end of the day.

According to the report on Vision 2010, it described a youth as a person who is aged between 20-30 years. Also, Cicchetti and Handley (2019) defined a youth as an individual who is between early childhood to old age. These different classifications and definitions of who a youth is shows the importance the survival and progress of these sets of persons in the society can be when properly attended to; this is because the youths have been acknowledged for their great importance towards the contribution of the social, economic and political development and defense of any society.

Understanding the great importance of the youths towards achieving any major issue or agenda in the society, some prominent Nigerian political actors have ceased the opportunity to influence gullible youths, directly or indirectly towards engaging in drug abuse, possibly to influence their actions and deeds, such as engaging in political thuggery, election manipulation, ballot box snatching and other unconstitutional and illegal activities during electioneering period, and in most cases, such youths have been discovered to be acting under the influence of hard drugs which beclouds them from thinking twice before taking obnoxious and dangerous actions on behalf of their political patrons and sponsors, as the action of these desperate political class is to be in the comfortable result of the political process through achieving electoral victory using the back door.

Statement of the Research Problem

The issue of drug abuse appears to have taken a centre stage among the major challenges presently facing the Nigerian youths which has some connectivity with peer group influence, wrong adoption of the lifestyle of their role models in the society, the desire to become popular and famous like some Nigerian political actors who are known drug addicts. And this was why Alexander (2016) revealed that in a study they conducted, it was revealed that 77% of the respondents interviewed who were mainly youths were discovered to have history of drug abuse and the use of banned substances. The study further revealed that youths who are involved in drug abuse are deceived into believing that their involvement in this unfortunate action is a gateway for them to be connected to the high and mighty in the society, and that they will become very rich and materially successful, without hard work as long as they maintain their habit of drug abuse since some prominent and rich individuals in the society are also involved in the crime.

According to a report by the NDLEA, cited in Borodo (2005), it was revealed that the drug agency (NDLEA) arrested more than 55,008 youths between the age brackets of 15-33 who are directly involved in hard drugs and other banned substances in the country in 2008 alone, and that 64.9% of those arrested were male. The agency further revealed that some of these youths who were arrested for drug related offences weren't tried in court as was expected due to the interferences and premature release from detention of these culprits through the influence of highly placed political actors and elites in the society.

Research Questions

1. Has the involvement of youths in drug abuse any connection to political relevance in the society?

2. Is the media deliberately shielding the elites involved in drug abuse as to achieve any political purpose?
3. Does the law against drug abuse made for the gullible poor youths alone and exempts the prominent political class in the society?

Conceptual Clarifications

Drug

According to Blackstone, Fuhr and Pociask (2014) sees drugs as a substance produced with some chemical components aimed at curing or preventing the occurrence of certain ailments and diseases in the human body. He was also of the view that drugs are chemical substances which alters the functions of a living organism. Aubel (2021) defined drugs within the social sense as a substance that carries negative connotation from the public for its powers to influence the actions of the body different from its usual ways of functioning. Argyropoulos and Nutt (2013) argues that drugs are mainly consumed to sedate the body organ into performing certain functions in the organs of an organism. Freeman et al. (2018) refers to drugs as a substance that affects the functions of the body physically or mentally. To this end, we can rightly say that drugs are being taken or consumed primarily to cure certain ailments in the human body but when taken out of proportion or against the prescription of a physician, become an abuse of such drugs, and will therefore act negatively in the body system.

Drug Abuse

Folawiyo (1998) noted that drug abuse is the consistent intake or usage of psychoactive substances at a certain degree that goes against medical and social practices and recommendations. Garba (2005) further argued that when the use of some chemical substances expected to have been manufactured for the improvement and wellbeing of human health becomes dangerous for human consumption, due to the abusive usage of such drugs, it meets the disapproval of the society. Even though the society has vehemently vented its disapproval for the abuse intake of drugs, research has shown that there is a growing number of young people engaged in drug abuse and abusive intake of hard drugs to achieve their delusionary purposes (Ibrahim, et al. 2017).

In a recent survey conducted in the UK as was cited in Moahmmed, et al. (2020), it was discovered that over 10million people engage in the intake of cannabis; 5million make use of amphetamines; 3.5million make use of LSD, and over 2million indulge in ecstasies. In another survey conducted among some students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka by Ugwu cited in Osonwa and Arikpo (2018), it was discovered that out of 2000 students interviewed on drug abuse related issue, it was revealed that 63.9% have a history of drug abuse and intake of other banned substances. The study further revealed that 43.2% of the respondents who admitted to have a history of drug abuse were female. This poses a great danger to these future mothers of the Nigerian society if something is not done drastically to curb the menace.

Causes of Drug Abuse

Oraegbune, Adole and Adeyomo (2017), listed some of the causes of substance or drug abuse might differ from person to person, and there may be several factors at play; and they are:

Social aspects

1. Peer pressure is a major contributing factor
2. Impersonation and role-modeling
3. Conflicts (typically intra-familial)
4. Easy availability
5. Cultural or religious grounds
6. Social or family support system that is lack
7. A celebratory attitude
8. Rapid urbanization

Psychological factors

1. Curiosity or as a novelty
2. Social rebelliousness (disobedience)
3. Early initiation
4. Poor control
5. Sensation seeking (Feeling high)
6. Low self-esteem (Anomie)
7. Poor stress management
8. Childhood loss or trauma
9. As a way to escape reality
10. To relieve fatigue or boredom
11. Lack of interest in conventional goals
12. Emotional discomfort

Biological Factors

1. Family history, genetic susceptibility
2. Pre-existing psychiatric or personality disorder, or a medical condition
3. Drug-Reinforcing Effects
4. Withdrawal Effects
5. Craving, o Biochemical Factors
6. Pre-Existing Psychiatric or Personality Disorder, or a Medical

Consequences of Drug Abuse

In spite of the severity of the issue in India, rigorous study to properly document the combined social, economic, health, and psychological effects of substance addiction has not been conducted. However, even the scant information that is currently available shows that problems related to substance addiction are linked to many different aspects of life (Radda, 2005).

Each year, harmful alcohol usage causes 2.5 million fatalities worldwide. Alcohol-related causes account for 320,000 young individuals under the age of 29, or 9% of all deaths in that age range. 15.3 million people at least suffer from drug use problems. There are 148 nations where injecting drug use is reported, and 120 of those indicate HIV infection among this population. Alcohol, tobacco, and other substance misuse are linked to a number of medical, psychological, social, and employment issues. It is a serious issue that affects people from all social classes and has medical and societal repercussions. All facets of society are impacted, not only the user and their relatives (Onwubiko, Ivy and Kalu, 2015).

Youth who abuse substances repeatedly frequently struggle in a variety of ways, including in school, with their physical and mental health, with their peer connections, and with involvement in the juvenile prison system. In addition, there are repercussions for the community, society as a whole, and family members. Substance abuse/addiction's effects can be broadly classified under the following headings:

Academics

Problems related to teenage substance misuse include declining grades, absenteeism from school/college and other activities, and an increased likelihood of dropping out. According to research cited by Okpaku (2014), juvenile substance use may be associated with lower levels of dedication to education and higher rates of truancy. Youth who use alcohol and drugs may have cognitive and behavioral issues that hinder their academic achievement as well as their classmates' ability to learn.

Health and Safety

Psychoactive substances modify a person's feelings, ideas, and behavior via affecting the central nervous system. They work by directly influencing the brain or central nervous system (CNS), which can result in a variety of complications, health issues, and behavioral issues. The negative effects of potential overdosing, physical disabilities and diseases, and accidents-related injuries (such as car accidents) are a few of the health-related implications of juvenile substance usage. Youth who use alcohol and other drugs in disproportionately high numbers run a higher risk of dying by suicide, homicide, accident, and disease. Substance misuse is linked to trauma, aggression, organ system damage, different diseases, risky sexual behavior, early death, and low nutritional status in households with fathers who drink heavily (Odejide and Sanda, 1976).

HIV/AIDS is primarily spread through sexual contact with an infected person's bodily fluids or by sharing contaminated drug-injection supplies. Mothers to babies are another main source of transmission during pregnancy or childbirth. Young people who abuse drugs frequently behave in ways that put them at risk of getting HIV/AIDS or other STDs. This could involve engaging in real usage of psychoactive chemicals (especially those that are injected) or acting out due to lack of self-control and bad judgment when under the influence of mood-altering substances. Compared to most other age groups, teenagers now have comparatively low rates of AIDS diagnoses. However, many young adults with AIDS were likely HIV-positive as teenagers because the disease has a long latency period before symptoms manifest (Onwubiko, Ivy and Kalu, 2015).

These few examples highlight the devastating effects of teen substance usage on their health. Additional healthcare expenses and lost future production create burdens on the community in addition to causing personal and family misery.

Mental Health

Mental health problems such as depression, developmental lags, apathy, withdrawal, and other psychosocial dysfunctions frequently are linked to substance abuse among adolescents. Substance-abusing youth are at higher risk than nonusers for mental health problems, including depression; conduct problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students (Okpaku, 2014). Marijuana use, which is prevalent among youth, has been shown to interfere

with short-term memory, learning, and psychomotor skills. Motivation and psychosexual/emotional development also may be influenced.

Peers

Young people who abuse substances frequently feel isolated from and stigmatized by their peers. Teenagers abusing alcohol and other drugs also frequently skip out on school and community events, robbing their peers and communities of the beneficial contributions they may have made otherwise (Njagi, 2015).

Families

In addition to personal hardships, juvenile substance addiction can put many elements of family life in danger and cause family crises, sometimes leading to disintegration. Siblings and parents are both severely impacted by a child's involvement with alcohol and drugs. The emotional and financial resources of a family can be depleted by substance misuse (Odiase, 1980).

Social and Economic Consequences

In addition to personal hardships, juvenile substance addiction can put many elements of family life in danger and cause family crises, sometimes leading to disintegration. Siblings and parents are both severely impacted by a child's involvement with alcohol and drugs. The emotional and financial resources of a family can be depleted by substance misuse. Since the available resources were used on substances rather than essential necessities, many families with a substance user also struggled to manage day-to-day household tasks. Other family members are greatly affected psychologically by this. Family members' emotional and psychological well-being is consequently affected, which in turn impacts their level of happiness and psychological stability (Richter, et al. 2019).

The social and financial repercussions of juvenile drug addiction are significant. They emerge from increasing support costs for adolescents and young adults who are unable to sustain themselves, increased requests for medical and other treatment services for these individuals, and the financial losses and emotional suffering endured by victims of alcohol and drug-related crimes (Richter, et al. 2019).

Delinquency

The connection between substance misuse and delinquency is apparent. For many young people who use alcohol and other drugs, the juvenile justice system's eventual responses include arrest, rulings, and interventions. It cannot be said that using drugs and alcohol leads to delinquent behavior or that being a troublemaker leads to drug and alcohol use. However, the two actions frequently result in issues with school and family life, membership in unfavorable peer groups, a lack of social controls in the neighborhood, and physical or sexual abuse (Stillerman, 2015). All youth are prohibited from having alcohol in their possession or using other drugs. Beyond that, however, there is compelling evidence linking teen delinquent behavior to alcohol and other drug use. The usage of drugs by young people is linked to both violent and profit-making crimes. Residents of the community become more fearful as a result, which raises demand for youth and criminal justice services and places more strain on available resources. The social and criminal justice issues that are frequently connected to adolescent substance addiction include gangs, drug trafficking, prostitution, and an increase in the number of youth homicides (Mullerova, 2021).

Work Place

Many substance users have missed work, regularly borrowed money from coworkers and friends, demonstrated low productivity, and experienced a lack of respect from both employers and coworkers. Many of them received warnings from their employers about their risky drinking habits, which also caused them to fight frequently with their bosses and coworkers, humiliating them in the process (Oraegbune, Adole and Adeyomo, 2017).

Some Drugs and their Effects

Drugs	Street Names(s)	Mode of Administration	Harmful Effect(s)
Cocaine	Coke, Snow, Rock, Coco, Crack, Speed, Pee, Columbian goad	Sniffing, Snorting, Inhaling	Hallucination, Diarrhea, Nausea, Insomnia, Influenza
Opium	Brown, Sugar, Stuff, Smark, Shit, etc.	Injecting, Ingesting, Swallowed	Strong and quick cure of illness different from normality
Heroin	Thai, White	Smoking, Injecting, Fumes, Absorption	Euphoria (false feeling), Physical and Psychological imbalance
Cannabis	Marijuana, Pot, Gra, Hashish, Charas, Ganja, Ganye, Wiwi, Chaku, and Dope	Wrapped and smoked (alone or in tobacco's mixture). Also chewed or tea made	A psychogenic substance producing a psychotic state when taken in a high dose, false sensory perceptions, Delusions, Drowsiness or Coma

Sources: (Siro cited in Dawson, et al. 2015)

Theoretical Framework

Rational Choice Model

The rational choice model approach posits that when an individual decides to break an extant law in the society, such an individual usually considers two things; personal factor consideration and situational factor consideration. Hence, before an individual decides to commit a crime, such an individual usually evaluates the risk involved, the severity of the expected punishment for such offence, the potential benefits of the criminal enterprise he/she will achieve if it becomes successful, and the immediate needs on why he or she should engage in such crime (Lauer, 1992).

On the other divide, the decision of an individual who is posed with the intent of committing a criminal activity will be premised on the consideration if the economic benefit that will be derived from such criminal activity is worth the risk, in the eventuality where he or she is being apprehended. To this end, drug abuse in this instance may be engaged in by some gullible youths due to the mouthwatering promises that may have been made to them by some desperate political actors with the intention of achieving their inordinate political ambitions. And these gullible youths, in view of what they believe they will gain where they are successful in the criminal activity they are being sponsored to undertake, will be

influenced into to take hard drugs as to be able to be in the right frame of mind for the crime they are about to undertake for their political patrons and paymasters.

It is therefore right to posit that youths are posed with the choice to get involved in drug related offences and abuse when they are being presented with the opportunity. The eventual choice they make is premised on the level of gain they believe they will achieve at the end of the day, if they become successful in their crime venture. More often than not, these benefits never come to the youths, and this makes them to become desperate and possibly influenced these youths into getting deep in the use of hard drugs to calm their frayed nerves.

Methodology

Library method of data collection was adopted as the research methodology where the study had to identify and locate the sources of factual information needed by the study (Joseph, 1980), in this instance, reviewed literatures adopted using qualitative method of data analysis to examine youths, politics and drug abuse in Nigeria, their relativeness and connection.

Empirical Review

Political Relevance and Drug Abuse among Youths

The erroneous belief by some youths in Nigeria that being addicted to the habit of drug abuse and banned substances will bring them to social limelight and political prominence has become one most deceptive and illusionary perception that has failed to see the light of the day (Ekuri and Sanusi, 2016). In as much as we believe that some prominent Nigerians and influential politicians in the country are actively involved in drug abuse related issues, that does not change the fact that gullible youths who are deceived into indulging in drug abusive habit as a medium to associate and connect with their high class and super-rich counterparts in the society, that doesn't change the fact that their social status will remain unchanged, and their aspiration to become materially rich through such association may never be achieved (Theonye, 2004).

The idea sold to some gullible youths who engage in drug abuse that their association with politicians who are in the same trade with them will help to ensure that they achieve political and social relevance in the society is one of the greatest deceptive gambit projected to them to enable them avail themselves as willing tools and instruments to be used for the actualization of the inordinate political ambition and objective of these desperate political class in the society (Steffensmeier and Allan, 1994)

The Media and Drug Abuse

Major media outlets in Nigeria have been accused of being hoodwinked and influenced into giving more attention to the drug abuse activities of gullible youths which downplaying or under reporting that of the rich and influential individuals in the society, more especially the political class who have been severally accused of being major patrons and benefactors of peddlers of abusive drugs and banned substances in the country (Benjamin, 2020). The fight against the use of hard drugs and abusive substances appears to be one sided and against a certain social strata in the society (Watt, 1997), and if this is the case, as has been alleged against the mainstream media in the country, then the issue of combating the rising cases of drug abuse in the country, especially within the circle of the youths and students may never be achieved anytime soon (Nelson, 2018). The pathway towards achieving a good result in the fight against drug abuse in the Nigerian society can only be attained when the Nigerian press

decides to be objective and detests being sectional and selective in their reportage of those involved in the crime, and the security and drug agency should be more proactive in resisting any form of interference in drug abuse related cases brought to them.

Drug Abuse and Political Violence

Research has shown that most of those who are engaged in the act of political violence are usually under the influence of hard drugs, and this drugs or banned substance makes them to act out of their natural tendency as their actions are being influenced by the hard drugs they have taken which tend to affect their actions negatively (Doherty and Gaughran, 2014). It has been reported by some scholars that most perpetrators of political violence are usually under the influence of hard drugs and banned substances, as this is one of the enabling morale booster that leads them into engaging in violence situations they won't ordinarily get involved in their right frame of mind (Abdullahi, 2003). This therefore implies that many youths who are involved in political violence in the country are mainly influenced into getting into such societal defiant behaviour due to their involvement and intake of hard drugs and banned substances, hence, political violence will among the youths will be reduced to the barest minimum if the government and the drug agency saddled with the responsibility of tackling the issue of drug abuse are proactive and responsive to their duties (Sullivan and Thompson, 1994).

For Ekuri and Sanusi (2016), he noted that by drastically curbing the involvement of the youths in their involvement in drug abuse and those who are caught in the act are severally punished and rehabilitated as to serve as deterrent to others who may want to follow the same path, and where this is achieved, the issue of political violence being instigated by youths as has been widely reported in some lead newspapers will be reduced to the barest minimum in the country, and the incessant issues of political violence, ballot snatching, political thuggery, election rigging, election manipulation among others that have been related to the youths will be checkmated.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study came to the conclusion that most of the youths who are engaged in drug abuse and the intake of other banned substances are more often than not influenced into getting involved in such illicit actions, and studies reviewed showed that the elite class, political actors and prominent Nigerians have been severally accused of wrongly influencing gullible Nigerian youths into use of hard drugs as to make them do their defiant biddings, such as political violence which has been mainly attributed to able bodied Nigerian youths as perpetrators of such crimes. The study also pointed out that the coverage of the press on drug related issues appears to be one-sided which must be discontinued if the fight against drug abuse can be made any meaningful headway. To this end, the study made the following recommendations:

1. The Nigerian press must give the needed objective and wide reportage of issues related to drug abuse as to deter more youths from getting involved in the act
2. The government and agency saddled with the responsibility to tackle drug abuse related cases should be more proactive and responsive in its fight against the use of hard drugs and other related banned substances by the Nigerian youths.
3. Nigerian political class deceive gullible youths into engaging in hard drugs as to enable them be used as willing instruments for political violence should be arrested and prosecuted in accordance of the laws of the land

4. The Nigerian Orientation Agency should be up and doing in sensitizing the youths and students on the dangers of drug abuse, and re-orienting them that most of the illusionary promises being made to them by their patrons who belong to the high class in the society are mirages and deceptive.
5. Nigerian youths must be taught within their homes and social settings that getting involved in drug abuse and other related banned substances won't bring them to social limelight and political prominence as they are being deceived into believing.

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