

# Causes and Implications of Drug Abuse Among Youths in Nigeria

By

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## Abstract

*Drug abuse refers to indiscriminate use of drugs without the permission of medical personnel. In Nigeria, despite the effort made by health personnel in enlightening peoples about danger of drug abuse and effort by National Drug Law Enforcement Agency to control the drug abuses, the burden of drug abuse is on the rise and becoming a public health concern. Nigeria, which is the most populous country in Africa, has developed a reputation as a center for drug trafficking and usage mostly among the youth population. This paper reviewed the Causes and implication of drug abuse among youth in Nigeria. The finding of this paper revealed that unemployment, influences of peers, curiosity, and poor parental recognition and availability of drugs are the causes of drug abuse among youths. It was also found that drug abuse is associated with many health and social problems including risk of accidents and injuries, increase in disease transmission, poor academic performance and many family and societal problems. Based on this findings, it was recommended that drug education should be made a compulsory course in educational institutions in Nigeria in order to educate youths about implications of drug abuse.*

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**Key words:** Drug abuse, Causes, Implication, Youths.

## Introduction

Drug abuse is both a global health and social problem with distinct conditions and problems that vary from place to place (WHO, 1987). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (5th ed.), drug or substance use disorder is a pattern of symptoms resulting from the use of drugs, despite the clear problems associated with using them. The continuous use of psychoactive substances among adolescents and youths has become a

public concern worldwide because it potentially causes deliberate or in deliberate harm or injury (Whichstrom, 2021).

In Nigeria, the burden of drug abuse is on the rise and becoming a public health concern. Nigeria, which is the most populous country in Africa, has developed a reputation as a center for drug trafficking and usage mostly among the youth population (Abiodun, 2021). According to the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018), reported that in Nigeria, one in seven persons (aged 15–64 years) had used a drug in the past year. Also, one in five individuals who had used drug in the past years is suffering from drug-related disorders. Drug abuse has been a cause of many criminal offences such as theft, burglary, sex work, and shoplifting (UNODC, 2018).

Nigeria is an enormously diverse country with over 400 ethnicities and many religious groups. Drug abuse is therefore viewed within a broader context in Nigeria, due to its multicultural nature. For instance, most societies do not consider the use of some drugs which do not produce overt behavioral changes as drug abuse. However, despite this multicultural nature of the Nigerian population, there is a consistent outcry from both the public, police, preachers, health professionals, teachers, regulatory agencies and parents on the growing burden of drug abuse (abuse of drugs which affect behavior) in the country. The recent call was that of the President of the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria (Ohuabunwa, 2019).

Efforts to prevent the growing burden of drug abuse in Nigeria involve the identification of evidence-based information on the extent of the problem, from epidemiological studies. To date, most of the information on drug abuse in Nigeria is reported by the media (print, electronic and online).

Drug abuse, including drug addiction and trafficking, has a universal ramification that transverses socio-economic, religious, cultural and ethnic boundaries (Oyakhilome, 2017). The Nigerian Government and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), through policies, have tried to stem its tide in the country but despite these efforts, there has been a consistent rise in the number of cases especially among adolescents (10-25 years of age) (NDLEA, 2018). During adolescence, experimentation with drugs is quite common in Nigeria because at this age, these young people desire to explore due to curiosity, pressure from peers and to —relieve stress. The use of gateway drugs such as alcohol and tobacco from an early age increases the risk of using other hard drugs later. Some adolescents may experiment with drugs

and stop (or continue to use them occasionally) without having negative complications while others develop an addiction that makes them susceptible to other dangerous drugs and cause significant harm to themselves and possibly family/community members (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2013).

### **Prevalence of Drug use in Nigeria by Geopolitical Zones and States**

The UNODC reported that in 2016, over 246 million people used drugs illicitly, with 27 million people having drug use disorders and about 400,000 deaths resulting from drug use. Furthermore, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number and non-medical use of synthetic psychoactive substances between 2015 and 2020 (UNODC, 2021). The problem of drug abuse poses a significant threat to the social status of the families, society and the entire nations (Giade, 2012). Almost every country in the world is affected by one or more drugs being abused by citizens (UNODC, 2007). Drug abuse globally has resulted in increased violence and crimes, higher prevalence in Hepatitis B and C virus, HIV/AIDS, and collapse in the social structure (Oshodi, 2010). A report in 2010 established a link between cultism/violent behavior and drug abuse in secondary schools and tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Schmallegger, 2016).

Examples of drugs include: tobacco, Indian hemp, cocaine, morphine, heroin, alcohol, ephedrine, caffeine, barbiturates, and amphetamines. A study on perception of drug Abuse amongst Nigerian undergraduates, identified drug dependence and addiction as some of the major consequences of drug abuse, characterized by compulsive drug craving seeking behaviours that persist even in the face of negative consequences (Aina & Onajole, 2016). These changes are maladaptive and inappropriate to the social or environmental setting, therefore may place the individual at risk of harm.

### **Implications/Consequences of Youth Substance Abuse**

Young people who persistently abuse substances often experience an array of problems, including academic difficulties, health-related problems (including mental health), poor peer relationships, and involvement with the juvenile justice system. Additionally, there are consequences for family members, the community, and the entire society.

#### **1. Poor Academic performance**

Declining grades, absenteeism from school, and other activities, and increased potential for dropping out of school are problems associated with adolescent substance abuse. Hawkins,

Catalano, and Miller (1992) reported that a low level of commitment to education and higher truancy rates appear to be related to substance use among adolescents

## **2. Increase risk of Accident and injuries**

Injuries due to accidents (such as car accidents), physical disabilities and diseases, and the effects of possible overdoses are among the health-related consequences of teenage substance abuse.

Disproportionate numbers of youth involved with alcohol and other drugs face an increased risk of death through suicide, homicide, accident, and illness.

## **1. Increase the rate of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)**

Transmission of STDs including HIV/AIDS primarily occurs through exposure to body fluids of an infected person during sexual contact or through sharing of unsterile drug-injection equipment. Another primary means of transmission is from mothers to infants during pregnancy or the birth process. Many substance-abusing youth engage in behavior that places them at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases (Oshikoya, 2022)

## **2. Mental health problems**

Mental health problems such as depression, developmental lags, apathy, withdrawal, and other psycho-social dysfunctions frequently are linked to substance abuse among adolescents. Substanceabusing youth are at higher risk than nonusers for mental health problems, including depression, conduct problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and suicide. Marijuana use, which is prevalent among youth, has been shown to interfere with shortterm memory, learning, and psychomotor skills. Motivation and psychosexual/emotional development also may be influenced (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016).

## **3. Families problems**

In addition to personal adversities, the abuse of alcohol and other drugs by youth may result in family crises and jeopardize many aspects of family life, sometimes resulting in family dysfunction. Both siblings and parents are profoundly affected by alcohol- and drug-involved (Nasiru and Mustapha, 2021)

## **Reasons for Drug Abuse in Nigeria**

Studies have revealed that most drug addicts started smoking in their youth. As they grow older they seek new thrills and gradually go into hard drug abuse (Aina & Onajole, 2016). A nationwide survey of high school students in 2008, reported that 65% used drugs to have a —good time

with their friends, 54% wanted to experiment to see what it is like, and 20-40% used it to alter their moods, to feel good, to relax, to relieve tension and to overcome boredom (Abudu, 2018).

Some other reasons include:

### **1. Curiosity**

Curiosity to experiment the unknown facts about drugs thus motivates youth into drug use. The first experience in drug abuse produces a state of arousal such as happiness and pleasure which in turn motivates them to continue (Oshikoya, 2022).

**2. Influence of Peer Group:** Peer pressure plays a major role in influencing many youths into drug use and abuse.

**3. Environmental Conditions:** Many young people live in communities or slums which suffer from multiple deprivations, with high unemployment, low quality housing, lack of water sanitation and hygiene, increased violence and crime rate, and where the surrounding infrastructure of local services is splintered and poorly resourced. In such communities drug supply and use often thrive as an alternative source of quick money often controlled by powerful criminal groups (Nasiru and Mustapha, 2021)

**4. Promotion and Availability:** Alcohol and pain relief drugs are regularly advertised on television especially at peak hours. The advertising of tobacco products is now banned, but research from Strathclyde University (published by the Cancer Research institute) concluded that advertising did encourage young people to start smoking and reinforced the habit among existing smokers (Okafor, 2019). Despite legislation, children and adolescents have no problems obtaining alcohol and tobacco from any number of retail outlets. A variety of products are openly hawked in kiosks, at parks and on the roadside. It is not uncommon to see people openly advertising sexual enhancing drugs to pedestrians all over major cities in the country.

### **5. Unemployment:**

Unemployment is one of the leading causes of drug abuse in the society. Many youths nowadays involved into drug abuse to deal with worries possess by unemployment. That is why majority of drug abusers are found jobless (Okafor, 2019).

#### **1. Lack of Parental Supervision:**

Failure of parents to look after the movement and affairs of their children throughout the day may predisposed the children to antisocial behavior including drug abuse.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that drug abuse poses significant health and social problems to youths in Nigeria as it leads to accidents and injuries, increase the rate of sexually Transmitted Diseases Transmission, mental health disorder, family problems and many antisocial behaviour. However, poor parental recognition, unemployment, curiosity and availability of drug are the significant causes of drug abuse among youth in Nigeria.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the finding of this paper, the following recommendations were made;

1. NDLAGA should double their effort in arresting and persecuting drug abuser in order to discourage the behaviour among youths in Nigeria
2. Public awareness programme should be carried out regularly through mass media in order to educate youths about danger of drug abuses
3. Government should be committed to banning the importation of illegal drugs in the country
4. Clerics in the society should help in educating youths about implication of drug abuse
5. Parents should educate their children about implication of drug abuse and monitor them to ensure that they are not associating with group of drug abuser

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