

# **YOUNG PEOPLE AND DRUGS ABUSE**

**By**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper reveals the prevalence of drug abuse among young people, the inherent problems associated with addiction and some reasons why teenagers are more vulnerable to addiction. Despite the known risks associated with addiction, people continue to abuse drugs. Drug abuse causes a lot of hazards among the people and the society.

It results to gang formation, cultism, armed robbery, mental illness etc. Studies revealed that most of the drug addicts started smoking from their adolescence. As they grow older they seek new thrills and gradually go into hard drugs. There was an indication that 65% high school students used drugs to have good time, 54% wanted to experiment to see what it is like, 20 – 40% used it to alter their moods. It concludes by prescribing some ways of curbing the menace arising from drug addiction.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Unpleasant youthful activities are widespread in Nigeria and all over Africa, to the extent that they have been giving a lot of concern to the government and general public. In primary schools, peers engage in organized crimes and disrupt normal academic programmes. In secondary schools and most Nigerian universities, the activities of secret cults are known to have been source of threat to lives and property. Outside the campuses, a lot of ritual killings are taking place. (Aluede 2000).

The impact of drug abuse among Nigerian youths has been a hallmark of a morally bankrupt, decadent and wasted generation and loss of our societal values and ideals. The situation now appears to be such that no one can claim ignorance of what is happening. We cannot sit on the fence and criminally pretend on the menace of drug abuse among our young people.

Little wonder, then that the immediate past UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan once said "Drugs are tearing apart our societies, spawning crime, spreading diseases such as aids, and killing our youths and our future".

## **YOUNG PEOPLE**

Young people could be referred to as people not mature or experienced as one would expect. Such may include teenagers, adolescents and generally youths.

Experts differ in their opinion regarding the period of life in terms of years that demarcate this set of people. However, this study shall refer to young people as those within the ages of 10 and 40 years.

## **DRUG ABUSE**

Drug abuse may be defined as the “arbitrary” over dependence or misuse of one particular drug with or without a prior medical diagnosis from qualified health practitioners.

According to world book Medical encyclopedia, Drug Abuse is the harmful use of mind altering drugs. It added that the term usually refers to problem with illegal drugs, which also include harmful use of legal prescription drugs, Such as in self medication.

Drug abuse is a global health and social problem (world journal of medical sciences 1(2): 133 – 138, 2006).

Majority of the Nigerian youths ignorantly depend on one form of drug or the other for their various daily activities – social, educational, political, moral etc etc. Such drugs include: Tobacco, Indian hemp, cocaine, morphine, Heroine, Alcohol, ephedrine, Madras, Caffeine, Glue, Barbiturates, Amphetamines, etc.

Oshikoya and Alli (2006) in their studies on perception of Drug Abuse amongst Nigerian undergraduates identified dependence and addiction as one of the major consequence of drug abuse, characterized by compulsive drug craving seeking behaviours are use that persist even in the face of negative consequences. These changes are maladaptive and inappropriate to the social or environmental setting, therefore may place the individual at risk of harm.

Drug use among young people should be a matter of concern to all Nigerians especially the government, school heads, the leaders of religious groups and other NGOs.

Experiment with drugs during adolescence (11 – 25 years) is common. At this age, they try so many new things. They use drugs for many reasons, including curiosity, because it feels good, to reduce stress, or to feel grown up. Using alcohol and tobacco at a young age increase the risk of using other

drugs later. In one of the WHO's and the World Heart Foundation's data, posit that in Nigeria, 22.1% of school youth age between 12 to 17 years use tobacco, in South Africa, it is 19.4%, 15.1% in Ghana and 16.2% in Kenya. The Government of Nigeria seems to lose sight of its responsibilities, though it claims that tobacco should be regulated in a market oriented frame work, which strikes an optimal balance and the need to ensure healthy work force. The fear is that youths are lured into early death from Cardio Vascular diseases (CVD), lung cancer and other tobacco related diseases. With this danger in mind, the Secretary-General of African heart Network, Dr. Kingsley Akinroye urged Nigerians not to be partnership with industries that are injurious to them even if they cannot prevent their establishment. This was a reaction to the multi-billion naira investment deal between the last administration and British American Tobacco (BAT) to build a tobacco plantation in Ibadan for production of tobacco related products at the detriment of Nigerians. Already, Nigerian youths are being offered cigarettes through promotions and musical concerts.

Some teens will experiment and stop, or continue to use occasionally without significant problems. Others will develop addiction, moving on to more dangerous drugs and causing significant harm to themselves and the society at large.

Despite the effort of many concerned bodies to curb this menace, many firms and individuals still present these drugs as though they are harmless. They give them slogans such as "" – "for greatness" – "for brighter life", \_\_\_\_ "for taste" etc. which often lure irrational youths into drugs and alcoholism.

Reports from all over the world about this menace for instance are grim. The British officer for National Statistics reports that 12% of pupils aged (11 – 15) had used drugs. Amphetamines are used among student (Oshodin 1973) Barbiturates are used by youths with suicidal tendencies rather than for addictive purpose (Anumonye 1975). Madras abuse once reached epidemic proportions among students (Anumonye 1973). However, cannabis (marijuana) appears to be the most commonly abused drug by our youths.

Marijuana is in everywhere in our cities, motor parks, Street corners, joints on campuses, uncompleted buildings, under flyovers etc.

From a survey of Ring Road outlets in Benin City, Ajegule in Lagos, Mabushi in Abuja, under flyover in Onitsha etc will amaze you of the number of youths involved in the intake of cannabis (Abudu 2005).

Cannabis is popularly known as “'igbo’, ‘ganja’, ‘weed’, morocco, Indian hemp’ ‘herb’ ‘pot; ‘hash’ marijuana”. It comes from the Cannabis hemp plant, which is grown around the world. It grows profusely in this tropical climate with little or no care. Farms of the plant scattered over parts of Nigeria.

In July 2005, Daily Sun reported of a man who fingered members of his community as dealers in this illicit drug.

The man who was being held by narcotic agent said every member of his community in Delta State is involved in the cultivation and sales of weeds, identified by NDLEA as cannabis sativa.

Speaking further, the man said “we are all involved, is our God given resource control, everybody in our village owns an Indian hemp farm so it is not a crime”.

From the ongoing revelation, there is indication that African farmers (Nigerians in particular) are shifting from traditional food crop production to cannabis at the detriment of the consumers (mostly youths).

This will definitely promote lawlessness and leads to food shortage through out the nation.

According to Mr. Shaepe – the Secretary of the UN drug agency, the popularity of cannabis as cash crop grew in Africa, as consumption of the drug increased in North America and Europe; farmers, he said, have learned that they can earn much more money growing cannabis than traditional food crops.

## **HOW IS IT TAKEN?**

Cannabis is usually smoked either with tobacco or by itself. The resin and herbal forms will be mixed with tobacco and smoked in a handmade cigarette (joint); they can also be smoked in a pipe or bong. The oil is coated on

cigarette papers and made into a joint with tobacco. Some people eat it raw, cooked as pepper soup or mixed with alcohol.

In 2005, the NDLEA raised alarm over a new discovery in the use of marijuana, the Agency (NDLEA), in Bayelsa state command pointed out that there is a new drug called MONKEY TAIL. According to the Commander of the Agency, Monkey Tail is a combination of Indian hemp (Marijuana) and illicit gin – ogogoro. And that this combination is common on the streets, and among youths and sold for N20 a short which made it very popular and can easily be purchased by students. The adverse effects on our youths can be best imagined.

### **CAUSES OF YOUNG PEOPLE VULNERABILITY TO DRUG ADDICTION**

Studies have revealed that most of the drug addicts started smoking from their youths. As they grow older they seek new thrills and gradually go into hard drug abuse. A nation wide survey of high school students reported that 65% used drugs to have good time with their friends 54% wanted to experiment to see what it is like, 20% to 40% used it to alter their moods, to feel good, to relax, to relive tension and to overcome boredom and problems.

Anumonye (1980) said no single factor could be defined as solely responsible for the abuse of drugs but listed the following factors as frequently found among both Nigerians and other nationalities.

1. Defective personality, including chronic inadequacy, poor frustration tolerance, insensitivity and egocentricity.
2. Widespread belief in the magic of medicines
3. Enjoyment of induced euphoria and excitement
4. Dissatisfaction and disillusionment of young persons
5. Search for sharpened perception, especially by music lovers
6. Self – medication of primary psychological disorders.
7. Lack of alternatives for various cultural changes.

Apart from these findings by anumonye, other studies have also shown the followings as responsible factors:

1. Parental neglects of their children

2. The prevalence of drugs in the community
3. Pathological family background – broken homes, illegitimate relationships, alcoholic parents or parent's involvement in antisocial and illegal activities.
4. Peer influence
5. Imitation of film stars and teenage idols
6. Media adverts – Radio, TV, Billboard inter
7. Ambition
8. Urbanization and unemployment
9. Ignorance of the dangers of illegal drug use
10. Alienation – they feel isolated and want to belong etc (Abudu 2006).

## **CONSEQUENCES**

Apart from the various effects already highlighted in the cause of this presentation. I wish to add that the various consequences of drug addiction or drug abuse are so devastating and very shameful to the extent that both the nation and international organizations all over the world are also worried about the spread of this scourge among the youths.

They are as follows: Mental disorder, social violence, gang formation, cultism, armed robbery 419 syndrome, internet frauds, social miscreants (area boys and girls) lawlessness among youths, lack of respect for elders, rape, loss of senses, instant death and wasting of precious and innocent lives and many more.

## **HOW TO CURB THE MENACE**

I believe this should be the concern of us all.

We are aware that government on its own has tried in Nigeria to curtail, eradicate or discourage the use, sale, trafficking and recycling of illegal drugs by promulgating various decrees against such drug use. There is the popular Anti-narcotic Decree under which the NDLEA was set up. We also have the Dangerous Drug Act and the Decree banning smoking in public places. We

cannot forget NAFDAC, which the Federal Government set up to tackle evil importation, sale of expired drugs and the rest.

These organizations have been doing very well. But for these agencies, the situation in Nigeria concerning dangerous drugs would have been unbearable. On the part of the NDLEA, a lot of hard drugs such as heroin, cannabis etc. has been seized both at border points, airports, and sources of production and among street gangs.

Despite the lost of some operatives of the Agency by cannabis growers while trying to destroy their farms, they agency has won notable victories against them, but it is far from defeating them.

Apart from the government efforts, what else can we do?

The table below shows some suggestions from expertise of interventions in the field of substance abuse.

| <b>Setting</b>           | <b>Effectiveness of Intervention</b>                                                                                                                     | <b>Conditions require for Effectiveness</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FAMILY                   | Integral family intervention:<br>Family training including children as well as parents to teach positive family interactions have shown to be effective. | Family intervention is only effective when the focus is on multiple risk and protective factors and the cultural background of the families is taken into consideration                                                                                                                                           |
| SCHOOL                   | Certain school programmes have shown a level of effectiveness                                                                                            | - Effectiveness is shown if school based programmes are interactive, (actively involving the students) and if the focus is not only on drug abuse but on the training of life skill in general. This should be repeated within the same target group.                                                             |
| OUT OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES | Monitoring programmes in which adults are persons of 'TRUST' (persons of reference) for children and teenagers at risk have shown some effectiveness     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| MEDIA                    | Media campaigns are only effective in combination with additional intervention in other settings (such as schools, communities etc).                     | Effectiveness campaigns are characterized by the following aspects:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They use strong emotional pictures</li> <li>- They only express one clear message</li> <li>- The carriers of the message are young people themselves</li> <li>- They don't use humour.</li> </ul> |



|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                          |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| POLICY    | Increase of taxes, restriction of physical availability of alcohol and other drugs, restriction of advertisement and marketing, and drink driving counter measurers have the highest level of effectiveness | The policies have shown to be effective when implementation is controlled and sanctioned.                |
| COMMUNITY | Interventions in community setting have shown effectiveness (however there are only few studies available).                                                                                                 | The intervention is different community setting such as schools; media etc. have to be well coordinated. |

Source: [www.bzga.de/2006](http://www.bzga.de/2006)

### CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, I hope we have accepted in principle that abuse of drugs and alcohol is an undesirable feature of our culture. It is also important to emphasize the fact that many of our young people come from different backgrounds and that drug use and addiction is not restricted to any one social class. Therefore, I wish to add here that,

1. Parents should sincerely re-orientate their children on the adverse effects of drug abuse on their health, society and human dignity, since charity, they say begins at home.
2. The Ministry of Education (Federal and State) must as a matter of urgency add to their curricular – DRUG EDUCATION for both the primary and post primary schools, along with lectures, rallies, seminars and film shows for the Nigerian youths on the adverse effects of drug abuse.
3. National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) must also intensify their anti drug campaigns in order to have a drug –free society with a special focus on the youths.
4. All tiers of government in Nigeria, the NGOS and concerned individuals must made concerted effect in curbing the spread of the scourge of drug abuse among our youths through awareness programmes. Finally, I believe the above suggested solutions and other views from our eminent scholars at this conference will go a long way in critically correcting this avoidable scourge on our national consciousness.

Aren't our children precious in our sight? Permit me to allude to one of the Holy Books – the Bible; in Lamentations Chapter 4:2-4 it says “2. See how precious children of Jerusalem worth, their weight in gold are now treated like pots of clay.

3. Even the jackals feed their young, but not my people Israel. They ignore their children's cries like the Ostriches of the desert.

4. The parched tongues of their little ones stick with thirst to the root of their mouths. The children cry for bread but no one has any to give them (NLS).

LET US RETURN TO OUR RESPONSIBILITIES.

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