

Socioeconomic Effects of Drug Abuse Among Nigerian Youths

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Abstract

This work looks at drug abuse and its socioeconomic effects on youths in Nigeria. Drug abuse is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric s of our societies, whose effects are cataclysmic as it cuts across every creed, race and social status. No acceptable method has been developed to curb the menace since it has become a subculture that annihilates every human productive endeavours. Changing man is the focal point here as it breeds a change in the family, community, society, and the entire body polity. This is done via a collaborative efforts of the government, non-governmental organizations, community based associations as well as educational institutions, all this against the backdrop that a work on this Issue has overtime suffered negligence.

Key words: Socio-economic effects; Drug abuse; Unskilled workers

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INTRODUCTION

Overtime, many writers have given various opinions about drug, its uses, abuses, and consequences. Similarly researchers from various academic backgrounds such as medicine, pharmacy, and other related social sciences have contributed to issues related to drug uses, effects, and consequences. However, in their attempt to check

and proffer solutions, their efforts have really defied any cure. The story is the same over the whole world, and not different form the Nigerian experience.

Drug abuse has been of major concern to the government, the academia, and the society at large. This has actually constituted a great effect on the socio-economic development of individuals, family, the community and the state.

A society predominantly made up of young persons who indulge in drug abuse cannot be regarded as a healthy and a developed one, since the *abusers* lose their potentialities to this activity. The consequences of drug abuse are many, and range from large numbers of untimely deaths such as suicides, and road accidents, violent crimes, laziness, and subsequent impoverishment. To this end, homes are broken, dreams are shattered, and potential manpower is wasted as drug abusers struggle to sustain their habits. They therefore become burdens to themselves, families, the society, and the state at large. Unfortunately, young persons who are supposed to shoulder Nigeria's future development in terms of socio-economic aspect are constant promoters of this subculture, and anti-social activity of drug abuse.

It is important that development, no matter in what form is hard to come by, if the youth chooses to sacrifice their lives to the detriment of their future because of drug abuse. Socio-economic development therefore, is the improvement in the capacity of the people with emphasis on the youth, and their society to control, and manipulate their physical environment, as well as themselves for their own positive benefits and that of mankind entirely. This assertion is opined to establish self-positive-usefulness by the youth in developing the society.

The use of drugs has evolved through various stages in human historical development, since humans have been consuming varieties of drugs from the crude stage to their sophisticated stage for different reasons which can either be positive as; maintenance of good health,

disease management, alleviation of suffering and pains. Or negative such as; other purpose other than medically and socially accepted one. It can also be the persistent or occasional excessive use of drugs not in conformation with accepted practices. Drug abuse can therefore be acts like self-medication, excessive use of drugs, over or under dosage which leads to tolerance, physical and physiological dependence.

Drug abuse is increasingly growing higher day after day with an accelerated decrease in socio-economic development. Thus at various levels, government has promulgated decrees and edicts (as in military regimes) and laws during the civilian administration to check and curb this problem. Buhari and Idiagbong in 1984 enacted a decree called the Anti-Cocaine decree which spelt death sentence for drug pushers as well as the abusers. This decree however, claimed many lives and was later abrogated and repealed by the Babangida's administration which established the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in January 1990. Government's effort in subsequent regimes poised to check this menace also led to the establishment of another sister agency called; National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). In essence, NAFDAC is poised to check the excesses of drug production, circulation, quality, contents, distribution, and consumption.

It is disturbing to see the ways by which youth access drugs through illicit and legal supplies despite government's regulation. Similar to this are the types of names given to the different drugs by the users, such as; "Haukata Yaro"¹, "Aljan"² and "Temple"³ etc.. To some extent, even substances of economic importance such as Kerosene, aerosol, and correction fluids etc are consumed as drugs.

It is evidenced that the streets, Rehabilitation Centers or Correctional Institutions, and Psychiatric Hospitals, are all full of these ill-behaved youths who are either being rehabilitated, or are becoming more dangerous as they meet new chains of gangs in such centers.

Against this backdrop, several societal and environmental factors go a long way in contributing to this tremendous increase of drug abuse, and they are:

- (a) Proliferation of patent medicine stores whether licensed or not,
- (b) Parental negligence,
- (c) Economic backgrounds,
- (d) Peer pressure,

¹ Commonly used among substance abusers in Nigeria, it is coined from the Hausa words "Hauka"; meaning madness, while "Yaro" means boy. The combination gives us what we can say in English as "make the boy go mad".

² Commonly used among substance abusers, it is an Arabic word that forms the Hausa vocabulary, and it means "heaven".

³ Derived from the English word for a place of worship, here it brands a hard drug that makes its user to hallucinate.

- (e) Societal failure in reporting drug related cases to the appropriate authorities.

My concern for this development has orchestrated this work which will give an insight to the problem and how individuals, the society, and government can solve it, while in the same vein saving the image of the country from international embarrassment.

1. AN OVERVIEW OF DRUG ABUSE IN NIGERIA

The history of drug abuse in Nigeria predates the early trends of civilization which took place as man settled down from being a gatherer to a farmer. Some of the early crops he cultivated include intoxicants such as wine (alcoholic) and strong tobacco, as well as opium, and other harder substances. The introduction of Islam in the north and Christianity in the south reduced this trend.

Contemporary Nigeria witnessed drug abuse since the return of the World War II Veterans who fought in Malaysia and Burma (Myanmar). On return, after the war, they brought with them concealed contents of Cannabis (Indian hemp) as souvenirs.

Subsequently, there was a sporadic and illegal cultivation of cannabis as a widespread farm product. History has it that between the period 1960's and 1970's drug trafficking rate was low, as it was only dominated by derivatives and cannabis. By and large, the 1980's brought with it the emergence of wide varieties of substance into Nigeria that included Cocaine, Heroin, and Hallucinogens etc. This trend is still prevalent in Nigeria today because a considerable number of her youths have improvised other useful drugs to like caffeine, and antipyretics by abusing them. This happens in spite of the growing religious activities in the country.

This tremendous increase made the government to respond by establishing the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency, and National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control.

2. ASSESSING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF DRUG ABUSE

From this work, it can be drawn that the effects of drug abuse can really be divided into two which are; social and economic. The economic effect looks at the loss of potential manpower, low productivity, and creation of an unfavourable environment for investors which of course will affects the Gross National Income (GNI) of Nigeria.

The Social effect looks at issues dealing with increasing criminal activities associated with drug abuse like robbery, burglary, rape, vandalisation of public properties, increasing rate of HIV/AIDS, the congestion

of penitentiaries where the government spends more in the maintenance of prisoners, and of course the growing numbers of destitute which our social welfare administration system cannot carter for thereby depleting government's budget.

3. GOVERNMENT'S ATTEMPTS TO REDUCE DRUG ABUSE

Several attempts were made to curtail the circulation and nay the consumption of drugs particularly among the young and productive age of Nigerians, which it was held that it was and is still a good source of nducement to work among the young and productive age in Nigeria.

Between January 21st and 24th, 1992, a joint session of academics, media practitioners, health and social workers and other related fields as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) converged at the National Institute of Policies and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Jos Plateau State, for a national conference on the scourge of drugs abuse and trafficking. This gathering made several revelations which were worth noting:

Firstly, it was opined that the menace of hard drugs itself is a product of the antisocial behaviors which are prevalent in the society, particularly corruption and the craze for ostentatious life styles which have driven people to this life styles in search for money at all cost.

Secondly, Nigeria has outgrown her unenviable stature of a mere conduit but has quickly grown to a drug consuming nation.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. G. G. Ganaka, the Catholic Bishop of Jos in his work; *The Role of Religious Organizations in the War against Drug Abuse* averred that " Everything God created is good including hard drugs, but the problem is that they are wrongly used". Hard drugs to him do not only destroy the body but also the soul of men.

In trying to establish the history of the use and abuses of drugs, Huxley (1957) wrote thus:

All naturally occurring sedatives, narcotics, *euphorants*, and hallucinogens, and excitants were discovered thousands of years before civilization; probably by the late stone age man who systematically started poisoning himself. The presence of poppy heads in the *kitchen middens* of Swiss Lake dwellers shows how in his early history, man discovered the techniques of self-transcendence through drugs. There were drugs addicts even before the early farmers.

On the reasons why people abuse drugs Ethel (1985) said "People, particularly the young ones use drugs out of experimental curiosity". The indication here is that the young people get initiated by testing the drugs which their peers or mates use or abuse. And out of this curiosity, the fail to know the repercussion. Ethel further reasoned that "a few people use drugs as a means of displaying their masculinity or feminism or showing how they can control themselves". Furthermore, Prim

(1991) was of the opinion that the use of illicit drugs serve as a recipe for youths who on daily basis cannot deal with their immediate environment which is replete of poverty, and hopelessness. Therefore to him "those who do not have access to good mental healthcare as a result stumble upon theses bad substance and start abusing it". Davis (1984) postulated that alcohol in form of fermented or distilled liquor from varieties of plants is the most consumed drug, but it constitutes a threat to public health". A high proportion of hospital beds are occupied annually by the mentally and physically damaged victims of alcohol dependence". He continued. Banging on the dangers of Drugs Abuse Adeku (1991) opined that the dangers or effects posed by narcotic drugs to our youths in Nigeria and the world over in a concerted effort to create an appreciable level of awareness about the dangers of narcotic drugs, their production, demands, supply and consumption. According to him, "Jingles in the radio, television, symposiums and posters are obviously inadequate to achieve the stated goals. To achieve our goals, the controlled distribution and trafficking should attain a primary concern". Ajibola (1991) stated that: "More statements on the control, supply, demand or eradication and substitution of illicit production and processing of narcotic drugs substances would purely be cosmetics unless the right follow up of mechanisms were put in place to ensure control". While demands remain high, any success in reducing production will only result in greater reward for the United Nations' (UNs') selected traffickers. He thus opined that "we must pursue a comprehensive campaign against drug abuse in an aspect concerning traffickers not only eradicating of supply and suppression of illicit traffickers, but also on the prevention and reduction of demand".

With the above in mind, Abacha (1994) suggested that:

We should pursue strategies that are comprehensive and multidimensional in scope and that comprises measures to eliminate illicit demand for narcotic and psychotropic substances. It was against this backdrop that the Federal Government launched the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA).

He further affirmed that; "I have no doubt in my mind that the plan of action initiated in National Drugs control strategy will succeed, making Nigeria a drug free nation". Gannon (1987) views on attempting to prevent drug abuse shows:

That all attempts are particularly unsuccessful; this is because the numbers of new users and addicts grow daily. Maybe the time has come for reprisal, thus no matter how agonizing we are on this, the way we have gone about dealing with drugs so far seems futile.

Lafiagi (2001) stated:

For proper reduction of drug abuse, the NDLEA built community rehabilitation centers to provide appropriate services

to the addicts. This war cannot be lost, and if the war is lost, the generations of Nigerians unborn would have been condemned to eternal damnation.

The attempt to making Nigeria a drug Free State was born when Babangida (1991) in a paper titled; *for a drug Free Nigeria* said “It is a problem that poses threats to the health and survival of youths and it requires attention and cooperation of all nations of the world to make it”. This makes it indispensable that the claim cannot be derived, since no arrest of the abusers and traffickers have increased over the years. This goes far to buttress the fact that the more government makes policies to this effect, it also flaunts the policy documents.

It was against this backdrop that government policy measures are very significant as noted, due to the rate of the increase, since 1984 the military regime of Buhari decreed death sentence and imprisonment of 14 years to traffickers and abusers. Babangida in 1985 repealed the decree and establish the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency. It was also against this backdrop that Osinbanjo (1990) and Gumin (1992) stated that

It was as a result of the growth in drug related offences like rape, theft, and other criminal insurgencies that the need to establish institutions that will coordinate and monitor the efforts of other institution and agencies for drug use, trafficking and related crimes necessitated the enactment of the decree which brought NDLEA as an institution under the Decree 48 of Babangida’s regime.

CONCLUSION

Drug abuse is still a menace and has grown to become global subculture whose effects is cataclysmic and cuts across every society, creed, or race. However, no individual is born an abuser, but the multifarious human activities have through learning, interaction, and curiosity made man to develop this habit. It is empirical that drug abuse is more common amongst the youth especially in Nigeria. The habit develops as an attempt for instance to justify a curiosity in the daily interactions as man is a gregarious animal. To the individual, its effects can be physiological and psychological, which gradually penetrates the society and affects all productive endeavors both socially and economically.

As a menace, drug abuse has habitually become a means to an end which calls for individuals, families, groups, communities, societies and the Nigerian government to collaboratively join hands in curbing the menace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In an attempt to proffer some meaningful solutions to curb the menace of drug abuse, the following recommendations are presented to both government and the society at large.

(a) Government policies targeted at developing the society are more often than not mere paper work. Thus the government should ensure that through its policies, jobs are created, social services are rendered, and above all, its policies should be feasible and capable of implementation.

(b) Hospitals and clinics should be well stocked with genuine drugs and trained physicians put in place to ensure proper prescription of drugs while monitoring how the patients take such drugs to avoid over or under dosage tendencies which will lead to drug abuse.

(c) There should be a proper scrutiny and licensing of patent medicine stores, and such should be operated by well-trained Pharmacists. Alongside this, street drug hawking should be discouraged since this can promote accessibility to drug abusers.

(d) Individuals, families, communities, and the entire society should ensure that moral values are inculcated in the youths, by joining the government’s fight against the menace.

Domestic fuel such as Aerosol should not be made accessible to the young ones, as some even sniff the substance to get themselves high, while parents should advise their wards to desist from relating with peers who will exert such negative influence on them.

(e) The movie industry should ensure the proper censoring of all domestic and foreign films so as to avoid crime related scenes. Meanwhile, rehabilitation centers such as therapeutic and penal institutions should be equipped, employ trained staff as well as involve in proper guidance and counseling.

(f) Institutions like the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) should be empowered to squarely deal with “Drug Barons” as well their traffickers, peddlers, and conduits. This is because at times, their performances are undermined by the threats they get as well as the purported connections such barons and the traffickers have with people in higher authority.

(g) Government should encourage even development at all levels by providing the required skills, social services and recreational facilities to reduce Rural-Urban migration, as it was also found that so many youths migrate from rural areas to urban areas to search for the greener pastures and facilities lacking in the rural areas.

(h) There should also be a proper monitoring of Trans border activities to curb the rate of illegal or even legal immigrants that are likely to possess such hard substances.

The mass media should facilitate government’s campaign against drug abuse, and avoid such thrilling advertisements and jingles like those of tobacco and alcohol (Liquor) etc.. Meanwhile sensitization programs should be channeled through this medium.

(i) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) should encourage the sensitization campaigns against drug abuse as well as engage in rehabilitation programs.

(j) Educational Institutions at all levels whether public or private should organize workshops, lectures/symposiums to enlighten the people on the dangers of drugs and substance abuse.

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