

## **An Evaluation of the Impacts of Drug Use and Abuse among Youth in Borno State, Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT :** *Many people do not understand why or how people become addicted to drugs. It is often mistakenly assumed that drug abusers lack moral principles or willpower and that they could stop using drugs simply by choosing to change their behavior. In reality, drug addiction is a complex disease, and quitting takes more than good intentions or a strong will. Youth particularly male youth, are prone to criminal behaviour due to the facts of their youthfulness and exposures to peer group which may in turn be involved in drugs taking in some cases. Addiction is a chronic, often relapsing brain disease that causes compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences to the addicted individual and to those around him or her. Although the initial decision to take drugs is voluntary for most people, the brain changes that occur over time challenge an addicted person's self control and hamper his or her ability to resist intense impulses to take drugs. This paper therefore intends to explore the negative consequences of drug use and abuse among the youth and proper possible solution to the menace among the Nigerian youths.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Drugs, Abuse, Youth Child*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Never before in Nigerian body polity did the child come into focus than now because the crises within the Nigerian economy has made working parents to spend more time outside their domestic household, working towards sustaining and improving their living conditions. Many people do not understand why or how people become addicted to drugs. It is often mistakenly assumed that drug abusers lack moral principles or willpower and that they could stop using drugs simply by choosing to change their behavior. In reality, drug addiction is a complex disease, and quitting takes more than good intentions or a strong will. In fact, because drugs change the brain in ways that foster compulsive drug abuse, quitting is difficult, even for those who are ready to do so. Through scientific advances, we know more about how drugs work in the brain than ever, and we also know that drug addiction can be successfully treated to help people stop abusing drugs and lead productive lives (Rehm et al. 2009).

Drug abuse and addiction have negative consequences for individuals and for society. Estimates of the total overall costs of substance abuse in the United States, including productivity and health- and crime-related costs exceed \$600 billion annually. This includes approximately \$193 billion for illicit drugs \$193 billion for tobacco, and \$235 billion for alcohol. As staggering as these numbers are, they do not fully describe the breadth of destructive public health and safety implications of drug abuse and addiction, such as family disintegration, loss of employment, failure in school, domestic violence, and child abuse (Carai et al. 2000). While parents are busy interacting with the harsh condition of the Nigerian economy, the child, who is indeed the posterity of the future, is left alone without guide and care. His future is uncertain. His ambition bloated and finds himself in the street either engaging chuwa-chuwa, stealing or indulging in drug consumption or drug abuse.

Government on its part is vigorously pursuing multiple programmes towards enhancing the Nigerian child welfare. The child too has a strong desire to move up to the social ladder, a tendency to be idealistic as a result of the values passed unto him by the role models in the society. As a fervent to live up to these models frequent frustrations and anxieties confronts the child in the cold realism of daily existence; as a result the child resorts to drug use. This topic therefore explores drug use and abuse by the child. Drug abuse is a universal phenomenon. The so called advanced countries of 21 Century battle the War of drugs every second of their life. Some use it; some abuse it while others market it. Drug abuse among our children in Nigeria today is alarming. From schools to streets, from market to Motor Park, from park field to political gathering, drug is being abused and

raped.

Our youth who are seen as the hope for tomorrow account for over 55% of cases of drug is being abused in one form or the other. Some abuse it intentionally; some abuse it out of fun, some out of frustration while others abuse it for lack of proper guide and knowledge about it. Should the condition be allowed, what happens to our future? What happens to our children? What happens to Nigeria? The anticipation is disastrous. This paper looks at the involvement of the child, who will be referred to as child-youth in drug use and abuse. The abuse of drug among the children population is fast spreading from the cities to the rural areas.

## **II. CONCEPTUALIZATION**

The controversy surrounding the concept of child-youth has been a phenomenon that attracts a lot of conceptualization among leaders and scholars across the globe. Nigeria economy greatly depends on its child-youth for productivity and development. Currently, the government is subjected to the nightmare of both man-made and natural disaster. Ethnic rivalry, religious miscalculations, vandalization, power, conflict, poverty and host of seen and unseen social problems is associated with drug related influence (OHCHR,2008).The child-youth of the nation are at the centre of it all, championing and propagating it to its peak, yet the country looks up to them for its survival, productivity and development. It looks up to the child-youth for its healthy integration and social coordination across its regions. The child-youth of all nations and society are the bedrock of all meaningful progress and innovations. The child-youth of this country account for about 60% of the total population and about 90% of its work force in both rural and urban areas. But, their impact and utilization lies with respective government and the society if properly socialized and given responsibility, the society will prosper. If neglected and abandoned, drugs will take over and they will be our own time bomb. The child – youth is a bridge between the young and the old it looks at child-youth as resourceful and energetic being who attempts to establish a new social order in the spirit of visions of unity, peace and progress. It looked at him as someone who is actively involved in re-constructing the ills of past regime, multi-national cooperation's the Western Societies and re – defining the fortunes of the society, utilizing both his energy and intellect either in the farm land., classrooms or in any capacity he/she finds himself in.

Chinua Achebe in his book *Things Fall Apart* said that if a child washed his hand he can equally eat with the king. Thus attributes and skills provide the central framework of defining a child-youth, i.e. Social attributes. A child-youth is an ideal personality in both the eyes of the kid children and the old. He is a person who is objective in his deeds and intentions, a person who is honest and truthful in all his acts and utterance, a person who is not biased and pragmatic to all issues that requires his services, a person who can sacrifice his personal interest for the sake of society, a person who has communal feelings, someone who is ready to learn and take corrections, someone who is not jealous of others achievements, someone who strives hard to success, someone who loves and respects parents and traditional values etc. The socialization of children is never so perfect which explains why deviation from the norms occurs. At the youth or adult stage for example, deviation occurs often as a result of the individual's breach of the set standards of behaviour. This breach occurs either out of ignorance of what is expected of him, or out of his inability to conform to these expectations or simply out of lack of motivation to conform. According to Nwa-Chil and Egbue (1993) next to the family and the school in the socialization of the individual is the peer group. They defined it as group of equals, often of primary nature, or one's own intimate friends, playmate, cliques or work-gangs: the peer group differs from the school and the family in several ways; firstly, though it has some of the characteristics of a social institution namely structure and functions, customs, norms, interest and value (Miller 1961) in a way its not an established social institution.

Similarly unlike the family and school, member's roles within the peer group may change from time to time and some times may not be clearly defined. Furthermore, most peer groups are transient or ephemeral as members changes peers and group's not only within each stages but as they pass through different stages, growth and development. Also, an individual may belong to several groups simultaneously. For example, the scout troupe, the boy's brigade, the debating society and the school class etc, can all be a peer's group at once. The youth of any society are one of the most important aspects of the society who, if vibrant, can help transform the society into a better one; but where the youth are involved in criminal behaviour or deviant attitudes, there may be normlessness and chaos. the youth serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. The extent of youth vitality, responsible conduct, and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country. National youth policy and strategic plan on action (2001) asserts that the youth have for long been making important contributions to the development of their individual societies in the areas of agriculture, defense, and transmission of cultural values and so on. This is in addition to the role they played during the colonial period and the struggle for self rule. In the present day Nigeria, youth are contributing in protecting the nation from lawlessness within and after defense against

external aggression; they provide manpower and engage in sports.

The new Collin Concise Dictionary of English Language defines “Youth” as “the quality or condition of being young, immature or inexperienced; the period between childhood and maturity: a young person, especially a young man or boy” more specifically, youth refers to children and young persons between 14 and 25 years of age (UNICEF, 1965). Abdullahi (2003) defined youth as any person in the period between early childhood and old age. This permits further differentiation of youth stratum on the basis of seniority for example, youth of 18 to 23 years, 24 to 29, 30 to 35 years. Other definitions might extend the age limit to 40 years. This segment of the population is generally, said to be active, restive, adventurous, mobile, and open to new ideas and innovations. In short, it is generally assumed that youth are more favorably disposed to change than the older generations who often resist change and innovation on account of their vast experiences as well as their age-old customs and traditions (Okolacha, et al 1999:224-225). Youth particularly male youth, are prone to criminal behaviour due to the facts of their youthfulness and exposures to peer group which may in turn be involved in drugs taking in some cases. National Youth Policy and Strategies Plan of Action (2001) states that inadequate parental care, non availability of suitable sports and recreational facilities, more decadence in the society, lack of appropriate role models, religious fanaticism, cultism, political manipulation of youth organizations, unemployment, poor educational background, poor family influence are the problems confronting the Nigerian youth.

**What Is Drug Addiction?** : Addiction is a chronic, often relapsing brain disease that causes compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences to the addicted individual and to those around him or her. Although the initial decision to take drugs is voluntary for most people, the brain changes that occur over time challenge an addicted person’s self control and hamper his or her ability to resist intense impulses to take drugs. Fortunately, treatments are available to help people counter addiction’s powerful disruptive effects. Research shows that combining addiction treatment medications with behavioral therapy is the best way to ensure success for most patients. Treatment approaches that are tailored to each patient’s drug abuse patterns and any co-occurring medical, psychiatric, and social problems can lead to sustained recovery and a life without drug abuse (Ferri et al. 2006). Similar to other chronic, relapsing diseases, such as diabetes, asthma, or heart disease, drug addiction can be managed successfully. And as with other chronic diseases, it is not uncommon for a person to relapse and begin abusing drugs again. Relapse, however, does not signal treatment failure—rather, it indicates that treatment should be reinstated or adjusted or that an alternative treatment is needed to help the individual regain control and recover.

#### **What Happens to Your Brain When You Take Drugs?**

Drugs contain chemicals that tap into the brain’s communication system and disrupt the way nerve cells normally send, receive, and process information. There are at least two ways that drugs cause this disruption: (1) by imitating the brain’s natural chemical messengers and (2) by over stimulating the “reward circuit” of the brain.

Some drugs (e.g., marijuana and heroin) have a similar structure to chemical messengers called neurotransmitters, which are naturally produced by the brain. This similarity allows the drugs to “fool” the brain’s receptors and activate nerve cells to send abnormal messages. Other drugs, such as cocaine or methamphetamine, can cause the nerve cells to release abnormally large amounts of natural neurotransmitters (mainly dopamine) or to prevent the normal recycling of these brain chemicals, which is needed to shut off the signaling between neurons. The result is a brain awash in dopamine, a neurotransmitter present in brain regions that control movement, emotion, motivation, and feelings of pleasure. The overstimulation of this reward system, which normally responds to natural behaviors linked to survival (eating, spending time with loved ones, etc.), produces euphoric effects in response to psychoactive drugs. This reaction sets in motion a reinforcing pattern that “teaches” people to repeat the rewarding behavior of abusing drugs (Garland, 2010).

As a person continues to abuse drugs, the brain adapts to the overwhelming surges in dopamine by producing less dopamine or by reducing the number of dopamine receptors in the reward circuit. The result is a lessening of dopamine’s impact on the reward circuit, which reduces the abuser’s ability to enjoy not only the drugs but also other events in life that previously brought pleasure. This decrease compels the addicted person to keep abusing drugs in an attempt to bring the dopamine function back to normal, but now larger amounts of the drug are required to achieve the same dopamine high—an effect known as tolerance (McDougall, 2006). Long-term abuse causes changes in other brain chemical systems and circuits as well. Glutamate is a neurotransmitter that influences the reward circuit and the ability to learn. When the optimal concentration of glutamate is altered by drug abuse, the brain attempts to compensate, which can impair cognitive function. Brain imaging studies of

drug-addicted individuals show changes in areas of the brain that are critical to judgment, decision making, learning and memory, and behavior control. Together, these changes can drive an abuser to seek out and take drugs compulsively despite adverse, even devastating consequences—that is the nature of addiction (Betz, 2009).

**Social Traits of Child-Youth :** A strong desire to move up the social ladder, a tendency to be idealistic as a result of the values passed unto them at earlier ages by role models in society, an eagerness to live up to these models; frequent frustrations and anxieties as these idealism confronts the cold realism of daily existence. Child-youths are thus people still worrying about wanting to keep what they have. They are concerned about how to change society as a whole a trait which in some child-youths attains revolutionary proportions. Youths, especially when not in the mature category, are also people who are materially dependent and to some extent need adult supervision. They also want quick results and desire that everything be accomplished in a day and they are also risk bearers because of their limited level of responsibilities (Glover, 2007).

#### **Why Do Some People Become Addicted While Others Do Not?**

No single factor can predict whether a person will become addicted to drugs. Risk for addiction is influenced by a combination of factors that include individual biology, social environment, and age or stage of development. The more risk factors an individual has, the greater the chance that taking drugs can lead to addiction. For example:

- **Biology.** The genes that people are born with—in combination with environmental influences—account for about half of their addiction vulnerability. Additionally, gender, ethnicity, and the presence of other mental disorders may influence risk for drug abuse and addiction.
- **Environment.** A person’s environment includes many different influences, from family and friends to socioeconomic status and quality of life in general. Factors such as peer pressure, physical and sexual abuse, stress, and quality of parenting can greatly influence the occurrence of drug abuse and the escalation to addiction in a person’s life.
- **Development.** Genetic and environmental factors interact with critical developmental stages in a person’s life to affect addiction vulnerability. Although taking drugs at any age can lead to addiction, the earlier that drug use begins, the more likely it will progress to more serious abuse, which poses a special challenge to adolescents. Because areas in their brains that govern decision making, judgment, and self-control are still developing, adolescents may be especially prone to risk-taking behaviors, including trying drugs of abuse.

**Socialization:** Socialization process for youths usually begins at home just at that level. There is the need for a father figure or mother figure, at the national level, youths usually feel at a loss without a hero that they can identify with and after whom they can pattern their lives. This tends to structure their dreams and aspiration and influences their response to the socialization process. Such models provide the youths with tangible image of societal leaders they can strive to emulate. Parents and guardians owe it to their children and wards to provide them with role models by leading exemplary life styles. To effectively do this they must ensure a high degree of stability in their family life. Family stability can be better aided at home if certain aspect of the Nigerian culture is not de – emphasized. Outside the family, it was expressed for the need to work towards the establishment of a national socialization process. This means that the government must provide ample funds for creating institution, organization and activity programmes outside of the formal school system. All these must be directed at achieving intensified and more structured inter personal interactions among all categories of Nigerian youths with a view to enhancing national integration and fostering the evolution of a national culture.

**Social Implications :** The social implications of drug abuse among the youth can best be understood when seen from the abusers relationship with his immediate community in the following areas.

- [1] Moral decay
- [2] School drop out
- [3] High rate of crime
- [4] Family disintegration
- [5] Prostitution
- [6] Increase in number of psychopaths

**Moral Decay :** Most of our children today find it difficult to think or work without energy enhancing drug. Most parents in the family front find it difficult to control their children who are under the influence of drug as a

result of this; most children no longer have respect to their parents. This moral decay affects not only family but also tradition and other constituted authority. Child-youth under influence of drug molest their parents and commit all sort of social and economic crime. Some even take their parents to police stations and courts. They hold authority to ransom and the country at large. Youth no longer respect their motherland or its constitution. They kill under the influence drug, they rape and steal from their blood relations and feel normal.

**School Drop Out :** As the moral decay is fast spreading across families across the country, most youth, who have lost contact with their families have no regard to all forms of authority, schooling is seen as burden to them. They attend classes at will and spend greater time with peer group abusing drugs that were easily acquired from patent medicine dealers. For these who managed to stay for the period of their study come out with F9 in all course. They can neither get admission to further their education, nor a job to keep body and soul alive. Thus, they take refuge in drug and wait for an alternative means of survival.

**High Rate of Crime :** Most of our children who drop out of school find refuge in crime. They engage in all types of crime, from kwanta-kwanta burglary. They can kill under drug influence. They can vandalize government property like the recent ones we are witnessing in the Delta area. They become the Red Wing of the OPC's and other forms of area boys. They are the political thugs ( e.g.Ecomog) to politicians and commit all sorts of deadly crimes etc. Thus the implication of drug abuse is devastating and deadly. In every 100 crime committed 95% of the crime is carried out under drug influence. As the number of accessibility to drug abuse increases, the crime ware also increases.

**Family Disintegration :** One of the major functions of the family is to integrate the child to the main streams of the larger society. But when such children were being integrated to the society by drug wave, the family loses its function. Parents will be accusing each other for neglect. This may bring out children running away from such homes, women were divorced and in most cases, parents find it difficult to control the remaining members of the family, particularly if it is a polygamous family.

**Prostitution :** Prostitution is a product of family crises. But most importantly prostitution is being encouraged by the use and abuse of drug related cases. Prostitutes account for greater percentage of patronage of patent medicine stores. They misuse and abuse drug in order to control their emotion, to stay away from pregnancy, to enhance their sexual behavior, to terminate pregnancy, to any STDs etc in each of this stage in their life, drug becomes inevitable. Excessive use advances the consumer to a chronic consumption stage, at it becomes a social problem to the person and to the environment.

**Increase in Psychotic Cases :** The drug awareness guide has indicated that almost of cases of drug abuse may result into psychotic condition. No one is born psychopath. He or she finds himself or herself in such a condition by interaction with drug. One can account for many factors that makes one to become drug addict and consequently to a psychopath. It can start with simple panadole tablet for headache; to valium for quite sleep or rest and gradually it goes on. Most people take such tablets to run away from frustrations of either lost of love one, lack of job, disappointment, poverty etc., a number of factors come in. This small and systematic abuse of drug, advances someone to psychopathic stage,

**Prevention Is the Key :** Drug addiction is a preventable disease. Results from NIDA-funded research have shown that prevention programs involving families, schools, communities, and the media are effective in reducing drug abuse. Although many events and cultural factors affect drug abuse trends, when youths perceive drug abuse as harmful, they reduce their drug taking. Thus, education and outreach are key in helping youth and the general public understands the risks of drug abuse. Teachers, parents, medical and public health professionals must keep sending the message that drug addiction can be prevented if one never abuses drugs.

### **III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The children in Borno State like most other children in other states were cut off from both their parents and respective government agents. They roam the streets day and night like sheep without Sheppard. They neither understand what is in front of them or what lies ahead of them. They are alienated from all structures of the society. Poverty is taking its toll greatly on them. Yet they are indispensable, so also is drug to their lives. Government through its agent and institutions should mobilize parents and school teachers and educate them on their roles and responsibilities. Perhaps a workshop should be organized for primary and secondary school headmasters and principals respectively. They will be taught on how to keep our children's off the streets and drugs during school hours. Parents will equally be educated through the media. Women affairs and community development ministry should devise a way of encouraging parents to report delinquent's children to

the ministry so that professionals will be sent to guide and counsel such parents and their siblings. Social welfare office should be encouraged to live to expectations. They should live to their responsibility of integrating deviating children and parents into the mainstream of the society. Patient medicine stores should be directed by government not to sell any form of drug to children under the age of 16. Those between 16 – 20 years of age should be sold to them but with doctor's prescription only. Parents must be informed of the directive. NDLEA, should expand their areas of supervision to all unit that children assemble: and to primary school and secondary school areas.

Ministry of women affairs should find a way of stopping young girls from selling or following laborers. The use of children to beg or be used as a guide in begging should be stopped because most parents give them energy enhancing drugs to enable them go round the town to beg. Guidance and counseling unit in all primary and secondary school should include the dangers of drug to the child-youth in their curriculum.

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