

Emerging Problems of Drug Abuse in Nigeria: Implications for Family Living

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Abstract

A rising societal concern in Nigeria is the issue of drug abuse, of particular concern is the number of women in drug related use and abuse. About 14.3 million Nigerians aged between 15 - 64 years of age use drugs which translates to 14.4 per cent of the population. The menace has assumed an epidemic state and is a public health concern that is threatening the well-being of families and societies. Experiencing a situation of drug abuse is often one the family is unprepared for and all of its members are affected. This study examined the emerging problems of drug abuse, the likely risk factors, and common signs of adolescents who use drugs. The paper concludes that drug abuse is a social problem that cuts across age and gender, with its devastating effects on health, family relationships, education of young people; job and family stability. Curbing the drug menace depends heavily on families taking preventive measures. Based on the conclusion, it was recommended that, families should be strengthened to form a close circuit with children, government intervention in establishing rehabilitation centers for chronic cases of drug abuse, professional help should be sought and Home Economists should sensitize the general public through seminars and workshops on the menace of drug abuse.

Key word: Drug, Drug abuse, Addiction, Illicit Drug, Drug Dependency

Introduction

A rising societal concern in Nigeria is the issue of drug abuse. The menace has assumed an epidemic state and is a public health concern. Recent reports by United Nations Office on Drug Control and Crime (UNODC, 2018) showed a steady rise in drug abuse among Nigerian populace aged between 15-64 years, with higher prevalence rates amongst ages 15 - 29 years old. Similarly, various media outfits have in recent times drawn public attention to the increased abuse of drugs among youths. About 3 million bottles of codeine preparations are consumed daily in Kano and its immediate environs and about 6 million bottles are consumed in the North-West region of Nigeria (Olu, 2018). These are pointers that drugs are being abused and the estimated quantities of codeine use alone without reference to other substances of abuse is frightening.

Generally, the word 'drug' to a layman, means any substance used to treat or heal a disease. By this definition, drugs should only be used when there are health challenges that need to be addressed. Scientifically, a drug is any substance other than food which when consumed, affects bodily functions and structures (Hales, 2007; Adenuga and Okeshola, 2018). According to Mooney, Knox & Schacht (2002) a drug is any chemical substance that has direct effect on the user's physical, psychological and/or intellectual functioning, has the potential to be abused, and has an adverse consequences for the individual and/or society. In essence, in whatever form a drug is consumed, it will create changes in bodily functions. The changes created may be healthy or unhealthy depending on the type of drug, the pattern of use, the quality, quantity and frequency of use.

Hence, Cattarello, Clayton & Leukefeld (1995) and WHO, (2019), have viewed drug use from three perspectives. These are drug use, drug abuse and drug addictions or dependency. Drug Use, refers to the legal or illegal way in which people use drugs, it may be prescribed or not prescribed. Drug Abuse is the violation of social standards of acceptable drug use, resulting in adverse physiological, psychological and/or social consequences and finally drug Addiction/dependence is a progressive, chronic, primary relapsing disorder that involves features such as compulsion to use a chemical, loss of control over the use of substances and continued use of a drug in spite of adverse consequences caused by its use (WHO, 2019).

Cattarello, Clayton & Leukefeld (1995) added that people differ in their illicit drug use. Some people never experiment; some experiment and never use again; others use drugs irregularly or become regular users; whereas others develop pathological and addictive patterns of use (Doweiko, 2006). Based on these differentials on drug use, Doweiko (2006) described drug use in four patterns:

Level (No use or Total abstinence): refers to those who completely abstain from all alcohol/drug use and are therefore not at risk of any problems associated with drug use.

Level 1 (Non- problem users or rare or social use): in this category are experimental users, who use alcohol or drug for recreational purpose. Thus, their consumption level is low and are of low risk for substance abuse disorders.

Level 2 (Heavy Social use/early problem drug use): This level refers to people whose use of alcohol or drugs is above the norm for society and/or those who already experience a combination of problems associated with drug abuse such as social, financial, occupational and

personal problems.

Level 3 (Heavy problem use/early addiction): this stage is made up of people whose alcohol or substance use has actually become problematic. People in this category may actually be addicted to substance use but are likely to deny it. They may actually experience medical complications and may also exhibit classical withdrawal symptoms when unable to use alcohol or drugs.

Level 4 (clearly addicted to drugs/ Dependency): at this level, use is more frequent and excessive. The individual is completely and clearly addicted or dependent on alcohol or drugs and demonstrates all the symptoms of classic addiction syndrome alongside multiple problems associated with drug abuse (Doweiko, 2006; Core Addiction Practice, 2008, Hittle, 2011 and Treatment Solutions, 2014).

Drug abuse is highly harmful to the physical and psychological well-being of people. Drug abuse can lead to many health problems and risks involving major organs of the body, increased risk of infections such as HIV/ Aids, anxiety, depression and other mental health disorders. The result is families and communities will be faced with increased health problems and more importantly, there will be increased number of people with mental health disorder (Adenugba and Okeshola, 2018 and Miller, 2019).

Based on the discussion, the menace of drug abuse is discussed under the following sub- headings: The problem of drug abuse, predisposing factors to drug use and abuse, signs of drug use by adolescents, conclusion and recommendations.

The Problem of Drug Abuse

Recent reports by UNODC (2018) have shown that a large number of Nigerians (14.3 million people) use drugs, which

translates to 14.4 per cent of the population. Researchers claim that this figure is comparatively higher than the 2016 global annual prevalence of any drug use of 5.6 per cent among adult population (Proshareng, 2019 and UNODC, 2018). This concurs with findings of Quadri et al (2013) & Adekeye et al (2015), in various studies, which revealed that a large number of their respondents used drugs. Chia (2016) identified the most commonly abused substances to be cannabis, alcohol, tranquillizers, opiates, and tobacco among others.

Reports also reveal that the menace is widely spread across all geopolitical zones of the country, with the highest past year prevalence of drug use found in south-west region (22.4%) and the lowest rate recorded by the North-central (10%). The UNODC reports (2018) revealed that one out of every 4 drug users is a woman. It is worrisome that the females are highly involved in drug abuse. Women are the custodian of future generations and responsible for the moral upbringing and continuation of humanity. As the common saying goes, educate a woman and you educate a nation, so also is the effect of female drug abuse on the nation. One female drug abuser will bring up several children who are likely to abuse drugs. Mooney et al (2002) admits that children raised in such homes have a higher probability of neglect, behavioral disorders and absenteeism from school as well as lower self-concepts and increased risk of drug abuse.

Drug use and abuse is a social problem that affects not only the quality of life of the user but also everyone around the user and society in general, casting shadows of fear over everyone around the user and the entire community. Horta (2016) viewed that experiencing a situation of drug abuse is often one the family is unprepared for and all of its members are

affected. Therefore, it is a phenomenon bound to the family's development, occurring in any social class.

The menace has become a threat to healthy family living and sustainable futures. It endangers the peace, happiness, and survival of families and nations. Baker (2017) admits that drug abuse impacts the lives of both users and their families. He further claims that the potential damage the abusive behavior has on the family unit and the entire family dynamics is hardly given the attention it deserves. Drug abuse places significant threat to the social, health and economic fabrics of families, society and the entire nation (Mamman, Othman and Lian, 2014 and Miller, 2019).

Drug abuse is associated with family instability. It puts a strain on family relationships; there is an increased rate of domestic violence, sometimes even death. Baker (2017) viewed that drug abuse impacts the lives of both users and their families by straining the relationship. Family members develop different ways of speaking to each other and the entire family dynamics may have to shift to accommodate the challenges that come with drug abuse. Typically, the drug abuser rarely follow rules, values are misplaced, most times leading to the drug abuser developing negative habits such as stealing to meet up with the desire for drug use. Adenugba and Okeshola (2018) concurred that people who persistently abuse substances often experience an array of problems including academic difficulties, health problems (including mental health), poor peer relationships and involvement in social vices such as stealing, bullying, secret cult activities, all which have negative consequences for the family members, community and the entire society. Chia (2016) viewed that at the home front, substance abuse creates interpersonal problems such as

interference with family peace and happiness due to arguments, suspicious and distrustful feelings. Miller (2019) viewed that abusing substance creates both changes in behavior and especially in the way the brain works in the areas governing judgement and vital decisions making.

This situation has become a source of constant worry for parents and guardians, particularly, bearing in mind the effect of drug addiction. Obviously, the long term effects of drug abuse to the user is clearly understood by most people, however, its long-term effect on family, community living and indeed national development are rarely given attention.

Drugs may either be ingested, inhaled or absorbed. Typical examples of these substances of abuse are medicines over-the-counter drugs, illegal drugs, beverages, cigarette, food additives, industrial chemicals (Adenuga and Okeshola, 2018). Kazeem (2019), identified other crude concoctions used by youth as alternatives to drugs to include smoking lizard parts and dung, human faeces, sniffing glue, petrol, sewage and urine as inhalants.

Predisposing Factors to Drug Abuse

Many studies have identified a number of factors that may predict the use and abuse of drugs. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH, 2018) revealed that no one single factor can predict if a person will become addicted to drugs or not, but rather a combination of factors influences the risk for addiction. By implication, the higher the number of risk factors a person has, the greater the possibility that taking drugs can result into drug use and abuse. Such factors include:

A family history of substance abuse; children with a family history of drug abuse are more at risk of drug abuse. Family Dysfunction and family crisis can

lead to the abuse of drugs. The likelihood of drug abuse is higher in families characterized by family instability, parental rejection and divorce. In the family environment, the presence of violence, physical or emotional abuse can lead to drug abuse. This can also affect parental roles and responsibilities. Poor parental roles and responsibilities affect parental guidance; lack of proper parental guidance may make children to turn to others (Peers and negative role models) for socio-emotional support. This puts them at higher risk to turn on to drugs and other negative social vices. Drug abuse is also associated with family domestic violence.

Mooney et al (2002) reports that about 25 and 50 percent of men involved in domestic violence have substance abuse problem and drug abuse contributes to 7 out of 10 cases of child maltreatment. A history of domestic violence such as physical abuse, sexual abuse or emotional abuse, can cause one to turn to drugs and/or alcohol to deal with the painful memories. People who have suffered any form of abuse are usually faced with feelings of low self-esteem, self-blame and feeling stigmatized, angry and confused. People who are depressed have higher chances of using drugs to elevate their mood to relief them from painful feelings. Lifestyle imbalance, such as unemployment, relationship breakdowns and homelessness are likely to increase the risk of and exposure to substance use as a coping mechanism.

Early use of alcohol and cigarettes by children are more likely to graduate to drug abuse. Peer influence such as being around friends and in the company of people who use drugs or alcohol regularly increases one risk of drug abuse. Adolescents' conformity is one of the developmental milestones during this period of growth, upon which choices

and preferences are dictated by the peer group and acceptability is measured by how readily one conforms to the group's norms and behavior. According to Kembe (2016), group conformity is observed in the dress sense, hair styles, mode of dressing and salutation, behavior and in some cases even the gait and walk styles are characteristics of a group. A peer group that promotes early sex initiation, smoking, alcoholism and drug use, will have all its' members doing same. Furthermore, the search for independence, especially where parents are domineering, puts the child at risk of turning on to drugs.

Easy access to the drugs or substance of abuse may be one reason for the high rates of drug abuse. Mamman, Othman & Lian (2014) claimed that drugs can be found everywhere in Nigerian cities such as motor parks, street corners, joints on campuses, uncompleted buildings and under flyovers. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2014), asserts that availability of drugs within neighborhood, community and school makes it easy to use, especially for people who are already vulnerable to drug use. Coombs (2002) asserts that it has become a challenge to raise healthy, content and chemically free youngsters in a turbulent world where drugs are readily available and widely glamorized.

Kazeem (2019) adds that corruption at local pharmaceutical companies is boosting the illicit supply of codeine-based cough syrups to drug users in Nigeria. It has become a challenge to raise healthy, content and chemically free youngsters in a turbulent world where drugs are readily available and widely glamorized (Coombs, 2002).

People who suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes, arthritis, Cancer, High blood pressure, Asthma, Cystic fibrosis, Stroke, Obesity and all of such

diseases that can lead to hospitalization and long term disability, result to the use of drugs and become addicted to such pain relieving drugs as a coping mechanism, (Littleton, 1997; Hales, 2007; Davis et al, 2015 and UNODC, 2018).

Signs of Drug Abuse

Baker (2017), reports that drug abuse exerts emotional and financial strain on family members and impact on family health. Thus, to help avoid these negative consequences of drug abuse, parents must recognize early enough the signs, to be able to help the person. Parents often suspect their wards of drug abuse but rarely clearly understand the signs to look out for. These signs may not necessarily be conclusive evidence that a person is abusing drugs but suggest strong evidence of possibility of drug abuse. Littleton, (1997) & Baker, (2017) provided some of the possible signs of drug abuse common with adolescents.

1. Physical changes such as weight loss is particularly common with the use of cocaine and/or amphetamines. Bloodshot eyes are common with the use of marijuana and a runny nose from snorting cocaine.
2. Psychological changes such as becoming more withdrawn, often becoming angry, irritable and seeming to get less enjoyment in life.
3. Social changes such as deteriorating relationships with family members and acquiring new group of friends, usually older and spending less time on activities previously enjoyed.
4. Finding substance abuse paraphernalia such as rolled papers, tubes of glue, pipes, marijuana plants, or tablets, bottles of alcohol in a child's room,

(Nowak, 2019).

5. Carelessness with personal appearance and good grooming, changes in eating or sleeping habits skipping school and decline in academic performance is common (NIDA, 2014)

In such situations, parents are advised to discuss it with the person involved and if there is need for further action, turn to other avenues of support (Littleton, 1997 and NIDA, 2014). The importance of the family in the prevention and treatment of drug abuse cannot be overemphasized. It is therefore important for families to deliberately put in place structures that will safeguard against children turning onto drug abuse.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is increased abuse of drugs among Nigerians aged 15-64 years across the six geopolitical zones of the country. More worrisome however, is the increase in the number of female drug addicts. The menace has become epidemic with long-term generational consequences on families and the nation if not urgently addressed.

1. Build Family Closeness: It is important to build friendship among family members and the drug abuser. A warm relationship between parents and children powerfully decreases the odd that a child will turn into others and/or drugs to strengthen family bonds think positively about the child's potentials, do not demean the child. Every human being has some positive side, express appreciation of such and encourages the adolescent to keep it up.
2. Home Economics professionals should sensitize families and the

general public on the trends and long-term implications of the trends in drug abuse among Nigerians.

3. Government can provide rehabilitation centers that are professionally managed and equipped to cater for the needs of these group of persons. This is not readily available in Nigeria and it is difficult to address mental health problems if there are no institutions saddled with this responsibility.
4. Get professional help from institutions in the hospitals and professional clinical psychologists. Using professional help is an opportunity to get advice and guidance on the way forward. This helps to overcome powerful barriers that might otherwise hinder one from taking the right step

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