

THE CAUSES AND EXTENT OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG YOUTHS IN GBOKO TOWN OF BENUE STATE

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***Abstract:** Drug abuse is a social problem that has become prolific in Benue State and Gboko town in particular. This study thus investigated the causes and extent to which youths abuse drugs in Gboko town. This problem was examined through the theoretical lenses of anomie theory. Questionnaire was adopted as the instrument for primary data collection for the study and 227 respondents participated in the study. The study found out that, among other factors, unemployment/underemployment and frustration are influential factors precipitating the involvement of youths in drug abuse in Gboko town. The study also revealed that, as part of attempts at resolving their predicaments, many youths in Gboko town are increasingly joining associations that anchor their activities on drug abuse. This paper, therefore, calls for creation of employment opportunities for the youths in Gboko town, promulgation of laws that will prohibit formation and/or existence of drug abuse associations and the establishment of drug abuse treatment and rehabilitation centers in Gboko town as strategies that will help to curb the problem of drug abuse among youths in Gboko town.*

Keywords: Drug abuse, Causes, Extent, Gboko town.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Agba, Solomon Arumun and Kyernum, Nguveren (2015), The Causes and Extent of Drug Abuse among Youths in Gboko Town of Benue State. *J. of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, Vol. 7, Number 1, Pp. 86 – 94.

INTRODUCTION

In every known human society, mankind has always resort to the use of stimulant or depressant drugs or substances in attempt to either increase pleasure or escape individual and/or societal challenges.¹¹ It is in this light that Adler, Mueller and Laufer observe that the use of drugs to achieve relaxation and pleasurable state of mind is as ancient as the use of drugs to treat illness.¹² But when can it be said that a drug is abused? Oshodin has maintained that "a drug is abused when it is used in a manner that deviates from medically approved or socially acceptable patterns within a given society or culture".¹³ To Ahire "a drug is abused if there is a self-administration of drugs which will have primary action on the brain or the central nervous system in a manner that deviates from approved medical or social patterns."¹⁴ Drug abuse is therefore, the act of taking drugs, especially for non-medical purpose(s), in frequencies or manner that is considered socially disapproving within a given society.

In Nigeria, this phenomenon has persisted, despite concerted efforts by federal government to curb the problem of drug abuse, as reflected in the activities of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) against the drug scourge. Dambazau observed in this regard that:

*Today, Nigeria is a significant producer of cannabis in the West African sub-region. It is grown widely in most parts of the country, especially the southern and middle belt states of Anambra, Edo, Delta, Kogi, Ogun and Ondo (and of course Benue and Gboko).*¹⁵¹

Weekly Trust report further indicates in a similar vein that:

*Despite efforts being made by Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) operative towards fighting the menace of illicit drugs production, circulation, marketing and consumption, more people are being recruited daily by drug barons to serve as couriers, just as many more, especially youths are increasingly becoming addicted to assorted drugs. In Abuja, the nation's capital, many youths are increasingly joining the 'big boys club' that abuse drugs such as: heroin and cocaine.*¹⁶¹

It is quit worrisome to observe that the youths feature prominently in the act and phenomenon of drug abuse in Nigeria. This situation is disturbing because the youths in any known human society occupy a very crucial position within the population structure by constituting a dominant proportion of the economic labor force. This disturbing situation undoubtedly provokes contemplation on the causes of drug abuse among the youths. Studies by Abuđu¹⁷¹ Kobiowu¹⁸¹ and Okoza¹⁹¹ has all revealed that peer-influence, curiosity, boldness, sexual prowess and to enhance performance in sports are some of the factors that influence youths involvement in drug abuse. But what are the causes of drug abuse among youths in Gboko town of Benue State? And to what extent do youths in Gboko town involve in the act and phenomenon of drug abuse? This paper thus, seeks to address these questions.

The Problem

Studies on factors precipitating youths' involvement in drug abuse by Okoza¹⁰¹, Abuđu¹¹¹, Kobiowu¹²¹, Ođuaran¹³¹ and Johnson¹⁴¹, have all identified factors such as: sexual prowess, to enhance performance in sports, peer-influence, curiosity and boldness as reasons for youths involvement in drug abuse. Gboko town is an area which is characterized by high level of urban territorial activities. It is a commercial town with many business enterprises including brothels. This suggests that there may be a high level of sexual activities in Gboko town, to which youths may have been involved. Therefore, is it possible that the youths could have been using drugs for their sexual activities? Furthermore, Gboko town has a township stadium which is a sports facility that many youths within the town utilize. Apart from the township stadium, there are other sports clubs with facilities across the town that youths utilize for their sports activities. Therefore,

is it possible that the youths in Gboko town have been using drugs to enhance their performance in sports?

Many youths in Gboko town can be seen abusing drugs, especially alcohol, at hours that raises questions about their employment status. This is because many of the youths usually cluster around 'hot-drink' joints for alcohol consumption at early hours of the day, whereas they are supposed to be at their place of work, if they had been gainfully employed. Does this imply that unemployment may have been precipitating drug abuse among youths in Gboko town? Furthermore, many youths can be seen trooping into areas that are usually called 'bunks', which are dedicate for taking hard drugs. Many of such youths might have been introduced into the act by their peers who counsel them to take advantage of the solace provided by the pleasurable feelings induced by the drugs and the solidarity among their peers or cohort and thus, use it as an avenue to escape from the social and economic challenges confronting them. From the foregoing, it is suggestive that reasons such as: unemployment, frustration and peer-influence might have been responsible for the drug abusing behavior of the youths in Gboko town and this problem is worth investigating.

Considering the extent of youths' involvement in drug abuse in Gboko town, it seems the operations of Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) at checking drug abuse has made many drug abusers in Gboko town to advance from the abuse of hard drugs such as: cocaine and heroin to prescription drugs such as: cough syrups and codeine, which they take in large volume to produce intoxicating effect. Furthermore, the frequent clustering of drug abusing youths around alcohol and hard drugs abusing joints, coupled with speculations about the 'big boys' club for drug abusers suggests that the youths may have formed associations which are anchored on their drug abusing activities. Given this situation, this paper seeks to examine the extent to which youths in Gboko town are involved in the act and phenomenon of drug abuse. By way of assumption, this paper proposes that: unemployment and frustration are influential factors precipitating youths' involvement in drug abuse in Gboko town.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Anomie Theory

This paper examines the phenomenon of drug abuse among youths in Gboko town through the theoretical lenses of the anomie theory. The proponent of the anomie theory is Robert Merton.^[15] This theory basically proposes that anomie is a situation of the social structure which is characterized by absence of clear norms, loss of confidence in the mechanisms of social control and unequal distribution of opportunities for members of the society to realize their individual and societal goals. That deviance is a response to the social strains or unpleasant conditions that people experience within the social structure which makes them frustrated as they attempt to actualize their goals or aspirations. Given this situation, some people will, nevertheless, strive to conform to the socially approved means for actualizing their aspirations. However, other people will

deviate at various levels such as: innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion.¹⁶¹ The theory finally submits that deviance and crime occurs when such frustrated persons resort to deviant means in attempt to resolve their frustration.

Given this theoretical premise, it becomes clear that drug abuse seem to be a deviant adaptive strategy employed by youths to resolve their predicaments. Several unpleasant situations in the Nigerian social structure such as: unemployment/underemployment, unhappy family life, etc. may have predisposed many youths to resort to drug abuse as a way of resolving the frustration and depression they may have been experiencing as they strive for self-development. Some youths have no privilege to pursue formal education. While others who may have painstakingly acquired formal education remain unemployed, as they continue to experience social strains and frustration in the course of seeking for gainful employment. Such social strains are occasioned by factors such as: unfair reward structure which are inherently rooted in the Nigerian social structure, etc. Others have become self-employed mostly in the informal economic sector with underemployment conditions which rather make such youths to experience boredom at work and frustration.

Given these situations, youths who are married find themselves experiencing family problems, as they find it difficult to handle financial responsibilities in the family and this condition invariably leads to the experience of unhappy family life. With this experience, such youths likely resort to drug-life, by which, their daily activities revolve around alcohol drinking and indianhemp smoking joints as they retreat from the frustrating reality in their family and the social structure or society into a 'world of solace' that the drugs temporarily provide. To this extent, it becomes clear that the act of drug abuse among youths in Gboko town seem to be a deviant adaptive behavior as can be observed through anomie theoretical perspective.

METHOD

Participants

227 youths comprising of 141 males and 86 females who were between the ages of 15-35 years were drawn from 4 council wards which constitute Gboko town, with the aid of cluster sampling technique.

Instrument

In congruence with survey research design which was adopted for this study, questionnaires were adopted as the instrument for primary data collection. Questionnaire for the study was unstructured with open-ended questions which were organized in sections. Section A contained questions about the demographic variables of respondents which include: sex, age, educational qualification, marital status, occupation, religion and council ward of residence. Section B of the questionnaire contained questions about the causes of drug abuse among youths in Gboko town and the extent to which youths

involve in drug abuse in Gboko town. Frequency tables and simple percentage calculation was employed as the instrument for data analysis in this study.

RESULTS

TABLE 1: SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON THE CAUSES OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG YOUTHS IN GBOKO TOWN.

Responses (%)	Frequency (f)	Percentage
Peer influence	24	10.6
Unemployment	57	25.1
For sexual experiments	22	9.7
Ignorance	23	10.1
Availability of the drugs	21	9.2
Frustration	42	18.5
To enhance performance in sports	20	8.8
Curiosity	18	8
Total	227	100

Table 1 above shows that, there are numerous factors that make youths in Gboko town to indulge in drug abuse. The table indicates that unemployment has the highest frequency of 57 (25.1%), followed by frustration which has a frequency of 42 (18.5%). This implies that unemployment and frustration are the most influential factors precipitating youths' involvement in drug abuse in Gboko town.

TABLE 2: SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON THE KIND OF DRUGS THAT YOUTHS ABUSE IN GBOKO TOWN.

Responses	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Indian hemp	28	12.3
Tobacco	3	4.15
Cocaine	26	11.5
Codeine	43	18.9
Volatile substances	60	26.4
Alcohol	36	15.9
Total	227	100

Table 2 above indicates that consumption of hard drugs such as: indian hemp (12.3%) and cocaine (11.5%) by youths in Gboko town is low, compared with licit or socially acceptable drugs such as: tobacco (15%) and alcohol (15.9%) and prescription drugs like codeine (18.9%). However, there is a clear indication that youths in Gboko town mostly abuse volatile substances (26.4%).

TABLE 3: SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON YOUTHS WHO ABUSE DRUGS AND THEIR MEMBERSHIP TO ASSOCIATIONS.

Responses	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
They belong to associations	212	93.4
Not sure	5	2.2
They do not belong	10	4.4
Total	227	100

By 93.4% respondents’ affirmative response on table 3 above, it is clear that 93.4% of youths who abuse drugs in Gboko town belong to one association or the other.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study pertaining to the causes of drug abuse among youths in Gboko town, as observed on table1 above shows that, among factors such as: peer influence, sexual experiments, ignorance, availability of drugs, curiosity and to enhance performance in sports, unemployment and frustration are the most influential factors precipitating youths’ involvement in drug abuse in Gboko town. Given this finding, the assumption of this study which states that, unemployment and frustration are the most influential factors precipitating youths’ involvement in drug abuse in Gboko town is confirmed and accepted. This finding is in congruence with the findings of Nicholson that youths abuse drugs in attempt to escape unpleasant reality which make them frustrated. That such frustration mostly result from their experience of unemployment condition, unhappy family life, etc^[17].

Similarly, Eckersley (in Spooner) found out that high level of youth unemployment and the unpleasant conditions that accompany it imposes a growing psychological stress on the youths, which make them feel that they can never realize their aspirations for personal development.^[18] Accordingly, the report by Ogidi and Saharaon the 2014 Nigerian Immigration Service recruitment exercise also supports the finding above. The report indicated that 17,800 applicants took part in the 2014 Nigerian Immigration Service recruitment exercise in Benue State.^[19] This clearly shows the high level of unemployment among the youths in Benue State and Gboko town, which undoubtedly precipitates youths’ involvement in drug abuse.

This finding also reaffirms the relevance of the anomie theory as a suitable theoretical lenses through which the phenomenon of drug abuse and its causes among youths in Gboko town has been considered. This is because the anomie theory basically proposes that unpleasant conditions that people experience within the social structure make them frustrated, as they strive to realize their aspirations. They therefore, resort to deviant means as an adaptive strategy so as to resolve their frustration. Going by the finding of this study pertaining to the causes of drug abuse among youths, it has become clear that drug abuse is a deviant adaptive strategy employed by the youths in Gboko town to resolve their predicaments and frustration. On the extent of drug abuse among youths in

Gboko town, findings show that, due to the activities of law enforcement agents against the possession and consumption of hard drugs such as: cocaine and indian hemp, youths in Gboko town have resort to abuse prescription drugs like codeine, cough syrup and volatile substances such as: nail polish, lizard excrement, petrol, etc. This finding is consistent with the finding of Ebiti (in Weekly Trust) that:

Due to the heightened activities of Drug Law Enforcement agents, the youths have resort to the abuse of prescription drugs like codeine and volatile substances such as: nail polish, lizard excrement, petrol, robin blue powder, etc. There have been some incidences where youths even attack and kill owners of pharmacy shops or chemists because of their refusal to sell codeine to them.^[20]

This study has also found out that about 93.4% of youths who abuse drugs in Gboko town belong to associations such as: Ganja association, we-we Brothers, Agedam Youths association, Agwanta Brothers, which its activities mainly revolve around abuse of drugs. This finding confirms the report of Weekly Trust that "many youths are increasingly joining the 'big boys club' that abuse drugs".^[21]

CONCLUSION

There is a high level of youths' involvement in drug abuse in Gboko town and this could be a representation of other towns in Benue State and Nigeria at large. Many youths in Gboko town resort to drug abuse in attempt to resolve the frustration they are experiencing, which is predominantly occasioned by their unemployment/underemployment status. Again, as part of attempts at resolving their frustration, most of the youths who abuse drugs join associations which anchor their activities on drug abuse. This paper conclusively submits that the act of drug abuse by the youths in Gboko town is a deviant adaptive strategy for resolving their predicaments and/or frustration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Employment opportunities should be created for the unemployed youths in Gboko town. This may also include establishment of skill acquisition centers which will empower the youths to become self-employed. This will inspire a sense of optimism and responsibility in the youths, which will undoubtedly, keep the youths from becoming frustrated and vulnerable to be lured into drug abuse.
- The government should promulgate a law that will prohibit the formation and/or existence of drug abuse associations. By such law(s), law enforcement agents should be legally empowered to disperse any gathering of youths which its cause cannot be properly explained or defended as genuine and void of drug abuse.

- Drug abuse treatment and rehabilitation centers should be established in Gboko town so that youths who are addicted to drugs can receive medical attention from professionals which will help to address their addiction problem.

It is hoped that with the implementation of these suggestions, the socio-economic life of the youths will improve as frustration will be done away with and the need to abuse drugs will be minimized and/or eradicated in Gboko town and by extension, other towns in Benue State.

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