

**THE PERCEPTION OF YOUTH ON THE EFFECTS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN
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Article Received on 26/06/2019

Article Revised on 15/07/2019

Article Accepted on 06/08/2019

ABSTRACT

Substance abuse is a maladaptive use of a drug, resulting in impairment of functioning or distress, as manifested by a failure to perform adequately at home, school or work. In Nigeria, a large number of the population mostly the youth buy drugs without any physician's prescription. The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of the youth on the substances they abused in Gawon Nama area of Sokoto, Sokoto state, Nigeria. An exploratory descriptive qualitative design was used. Twelve youth between the ages 18 to 30 years who abuse different substances but were not in psychotic state were recruited using snowball and purposive sampling methods. Semi-structured interview guide was used to interview the respondents after obtaining an informed consent from the respondents. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim, the data was analyzed using content analysis. The findings of this study revealed that Physical, psychological and social effects were identified where impaired relationships and violence were common among the youth who indulge in substance abuse. Job provision, enlightenment and education were perceived measures in prevention, reduction or controlling substance abuse in Sokoto. Recommendations were made based on the findings of the study such as the government and non-governmental organizations should provide job opportunities for the youth.

INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse is a maladaptive use of a drug, resulting in impairment of functioning or distress, as manifested by a failure to perform adequately at home, school or work (Adewuyi, 2013). Substance abuse has to do with an individual who is using a drug when there is no legitimate medical need to do so or who is drinking in excess of accepted social standards is said to be abusing that chemical (Olley, 2007). Substance Abuse is a harmful pattern of use of any substance for mood altering purposes which lead to frequent and serious problems. These problems can affect performance at school, work or home. Many times, relationships (such as with friends and parent) begin to suffer due to substance abuse. Individuals that engaged in abusing substances often have trouble with the law.

Youth occupy a prominent place in any society. They are one of the greatest assets any nation can have. Apart from being the leaders of tomorrow, they out-number the middle-aged and the aged. The youth are a particular segment of the national population that is sensitive, energetic, active and the most productive phase of life as citizens. The youth are also most volatile and yet the most vulnerable segment of the population in terms of

social-economic, emotion and other aspects (Ajufo, 2013).

Generally, drugs are helpful when they are properly used and destructive when they are misused or abused, but most youth are guilty of substance abuse (Mohammad, 2014). The use of illicit substances is a major public health problem in high income countries like the US. However, this problem of illicit substance use has spread rapidly to include middle and low income countries where most of its youth and adolescents are actively engaged in this illegal practice (Aliyu, 2014; Mohammad, 2014).

The problem is worse in African countries, as the use of these substances is accompanied with a lot of risk behaviours such as crime, violence and suicide (Nsimba, 2010). For cocaine and heroin drug injectors, often have high chances of contracting infections such as HIV, Hepatitis B and C, abscesses and other ill-health problems, such as drug dependence, which manifests with complex set of behaviours related to mental illnesses. Substance abuse is a problem to users, when it begins to cause some damage to their physical health, mental health and social well-being. These damages come in the form of mental illness, crime, violence and

diseases e.g. HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis, which are related to the use of these substances (Nsimba, 2010).

The amount of harm associated with the use of these substances, is increasing in Nigeria and other middle and low income countries in Sub-Saharan Africa; as well as high income countries like the US (Aliyu, 2014). Although majority of the youth have a good understanding of the consequences of substance abuse, there is still a high prevalence of this phenomena occurring in Africa (Ekpenyong, 2012).

In Nigeria, a large number of the population mostly youth buy drugs without any physician's prescription (Mohammad, 2014). Substance abuse started becoming a serious problem in Nigeria in the 1960s. During the period, various professionals such as drivers, farmers, armed robbers, and hardened criminals used to abuse drugs such as Marijuana (Indian hemp), Alcohol etc. Studies have shown that, the use of drugs and other pharmacologically active substances was a problem for several centuries ago (Jibril, Olayinka, Omeiza, & Babantunde, 2008).

In the past, choice of such substances was limited to those easily available in the environment of the users, but in the present era, the use of various types of drugs has gone beyond those produced and available in the immediate environment (Mohammad, 2014). About 11% of the youth in Nigeria are reliant on one form of substances or the other and this causes a great threat to the sustainable youth development especially in the Northern Nigeria. Substance abuse has reached an alarming stage among adults, youth and children (Dankani, 2012).

Substance abuse has negative physical, psychological and social effects on individuals, families, friends and society (Mohammad, 2014). According to Ahmad (2012), the ill effects of substance abuse include; medical problems, academic problems, conflicts, crime, financial problems, psychological disorders and increase in occultism.

Substance abuse among the youth has great potential to cause academic difficulties and social as well as employment problems later in life (Usman & Usman, 2012). A study conducted in Minna, Niger State (Nigeria), showed that drug abuse and violence were correlated and this has made politicians to use the youth in causing violence for political interest. Consequently, this makes youth to indulge actively in substance abuse especially in the Northern part of Nigeria (Usman & Usman, 2012).

Also a study conducted to examine the menace of cough syrup abuse as a new trend of substance abuse in some selected states in north-western part of Nigeria including Sokoto, found that there is massive consumption of

cough syrup as a means of getting high (euphoria) among the youth age 21-30 years, (Dankani, 2012).

Substance abuse has several effects. There is general belief that problems of substance abuse can be categorized into medical, physical, psychological, social, educational, and economic implications and can be from experimenting substance to drug dependence (Ahmed, 2012). The physical, psychological, social and economic consequences of substance abuse among youth are becoming more obvious and disturbing (Yusuf, 2010, 2013). Young people who persistently abuse substances experience many problems. These include academic difficulties, health related problems including mental health disorders, poor peer and family relationships and involvement in social vices which include violence, stealing, bullying, secret cult activities which have negative consequences on the family, community and the society (Yusuf, 2010,2013; Ahmed, 2012).

Also, a study on drug abuse and its mental health and health consequences among addicts in Greater Accra region, shows that, the entire twenty six participants interviewed acknowledged that substance abuse problems are increasing in Ghana, especially among youth. A cross section of the respondents believed that substance abuse may result in mental illness, chest pains, tuberculosis, malnourishment, headaches, bodily pains, dizziness, and serious coughs, loss of weight, AIDS, and general weakness. In addition, they also mentioned homelessness and unemployment as consequences of substance abuse (Affinnih, 2012).

Substance abuse has effect on the physical body of youth who are involved in this behavior. Intoxication with a substance can cause physical effects, intoxication with heroin, sedative or hypnotic drugs can cause marked sleepiness and slowed breathing. Also, cocaine intoxication can cause rapid heart rate, or tremors, while, seizures can occur due to alcohol withdrawal syndrome (Edwards, 2014).

Youth who involve in substance abuse may not realize they have a problem until pronounced effects of these substances start to manifest physically (Edwards, 2014; Tracy, 2014). According to Tracy (2014), the effect of substance abuse on the body vary depending on the type used, all substances abuse have negative impacts on the health of abusers. Common effects of drug abuse on the body include sleep changes (Ahmed, 2012; Jibril et al., 2008). Violence is another physical effect of substance abuse witnessed in various communities and tertiary institutions leading to bloodletting, rape, stealing and cultism (Mohammad, 2014; Salaam, 2011; Siro, 2014). Other common physical problems include; abnormal vital signs like respiration, heart rate and blood pressure, chest or lung pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, skin can be cool and sweating or hot and dry. Diseases such as hepatitis B or C, or HIV from needle-

sharing, impotence and more frequent illnesses can occur due to indulgence in substance abuse (Affinnih, 2012).

Psychological effects of substance abuse tend to vary and depend on the type of substances involved (Edwards, 2014). The general effects of abuse or addiction of any drug can be devastating. Psychologically, intoxication with substances or withdrawal from a substance can cause euphoria as with alcohol or inhalant intoxication, paranoia which occur due to marijuana or steroid intoxication, while cocaine or amphetamine withdrawal will lead to severe depression or suicidal thoughts (Edwards, 2014). One of the primary effects of substance abuse can be found within the definition of substance abuse itself, that is an increasing, intense desire to use the drug (Gaidhane *et al.*, 2008).

Psychological effects of substance abuse then include preoccupation with where to get the substances, how to get money for the substances, and where and when the substances can be used. Psychological effects of substance abuse also include changes in mood, the individual may be anxious, thinking about when next to use the substances, or can be depressed due to side effect of substances. Other psychological side effects include, aggression, irritability, selfishness, hopelessness, lack of pleasure from previously enjoyed activities and pressuring others to involve into substance abuse (Tracy, 2014).

A study in Nigeria, to investigate the effects of peer modelling techniques in reducing substance abuse among undergraduate students found that, substance abuse may reduce undergraduate chances of graduating from school or of landing and holding a steady job, it may also be causing student unrest in the campus which will disturb academic calendar and this may also lead to poor academic performance (Yusuf, 2013). Study has also shown that there is a significant association between crimes committed by adolescents and their use of alcohol and other drugs (Ahmad, 2012). This shows that many youth can commit crime under the influence of drugs. Therefore, in order to reduce and prevent social vices, moral decadence and crime rate in Nigeria, there is need for more preventive measures to be put in place in order to reduce the rate or eliminate the acts of substance abuse among the undergraduates in Nigeria (Yusuf, 2010). Other social effect of substance abuse include dishonesty, bribery and corruption, forgery, gambling and prostitution (Mohammad, 2014).

Youth who abuse substances are involved in political violence which always destabilizes peace and harmony within the public (Aliyu, 2014). It can be inferred that abuse of drugs among youth triggers-off violence especially during elections which in turn engenders loss of lives and properties threatening the future of the society. The youth that engage in political violence do so with the backings of their political masters (Siro, 2014). In Nigeria, about 63% of the youth who abuse substances

were involved in violent activities in the last one year (Usman & Usman, 2012).

Youth tend to have problem with their girlfriend or boyfriend due to high demand for sexual intercourse. This is due to high sexual desire manifested by the youth who abuse substances such as alcohol and marijuana (Floyd & Latimer, 2009; Parkes, Wight, Henderson, & Hart, 2007). The use of Alcohol and marijuana is associated with increase in sexual intercourse due to increase in libido among youth aged between 15 to 24 years (Floyd & Latimer, 2009). Moreover, poor relationships with other people was found to be another effect of substance abuse among the youth and the impacts of substance abuse on student behaviour include laziness and lack of concentration, poor relationships with others, lack of interest in school and work, absenteeism from school, withdrawal, and indiscipline (Ekpenyong, 2012).

METHOD

An exploratory descriptive qualitative design was used for this study. This design is appropriate for areas where little has been reported and that is the reason that motivated the researcher to explore the perception of the youth on substance abuse.

Also, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to use a naturalistic method to gain in-depth understanding on perceptions of the youth on substance abuse. Accordingly, this study employed qualitative techniques in both the collection and analysis of the data (Field & Morse, 1985). The research was conducted in Sokoto, Sokoto state, Nigeria. A non-probability sampling methods (purposive and snowball sampling techniques) were used to select the participants from Sokoto.

Participants

The populations for this study were twelve (12) youth between 18-30 years who abuse substances but do not have obvious signs of psychosis in Sokoto, Sokoto state, Nigeria.

Data Collection

An in-depth interview was conducted with each participant, using open ended interview questions and following a topical semi- structured interview guide after obtaining an ethical approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board of Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research. Each interview lasted for about 30-45 minutes. The interviews were audio taped and later transcribed in English, verbatim. Interviews conducted in Hausa were also translated in English. The transcript was discussed with an expert in Hausa to ensure accuracy of the translation.

Analysis

Data was analyzed using a content analysis as described by Mayan, (2001). Also, content analysis of the individual participant's in-depth interview was used to

achieve all the objectives of the study. In this study, data was analyzed to identify the main themes and sub-themes within the narratives given by the participants. The analysis began once the first interview was conducted and continued throughout the data gathering process. Following the completion of each interview, the researcher would then transcribe the tape recordings. Each written transcript was read several times, while listening to the corresponding audio tape to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed tape. In addition, the transcripts were given to the supervisors to ensure integrity of the transcription. Important phrases, sentences or paragraphs were highlighted and assigned a label or code; this process was repeated until all the data was coded. The coded passages were then compared and codes that had common elements were grouped to form major themes and sub-themes. These themes and their supporting passages were continuously revised during the process of going through the transcripts. Every data was scrutinized to ascertain its suitability within the assigned theme. The themes were compared with each other and this helped to identify the relationships among the themes which were used to describe the perceived effects of substance abuse among the youth.

RESULT

Interviewees were between the ages of 18-30 years old. One (1) out of the twelve had a national certificate of education and three (3) had primary education and the remaining nine (9) had secondary school education. Only four (4) participants were not working and eight (8) were working, out of which two (2) were motor mechanics, one (1) was a businessman who sells cloth and the other one (1) was a watchman whilst the other two (2) were primary school teachers in a private and public primary school each. One (1) was working at an international airport in Sokoto. Half of the participants were single whilst the other half were married. Two (2) out of the married participants had children. All the participants were males and Muslim by religion. All the participants were interviewed in Hausa because they understood the language better and preferred to be interviewed in Hausa. All the participants were living in Sokoto, Sokoto state, Nigeria.

Perceived Effects of Abuse

The study also explored the perceived effects of substance abuse in Sokoto. There were three sub-themes that emerged which were; physical, social, and psychological effects.

Physical Effects

It was found that substance abuse causes cough and vomiting mostly at the beginning making one feel as if he is dying. Respondents one and two explained this as follows;

“I coughed seriously when I smoked it for the first time, as if I was dying. That day I was afraid. My friend then asked me to smoke again and I refused. He said it was

because I did not smoke it well that is why I was coughing, but once I smoke it again, I will not cough as I can see he is not coughing. I then smoked for the second time and I vomited throughout the day. But I did not stop”. **(Participant 1)**

“Yeah, substances had many effects on me, I was coughing and vomiting”. **(Participant 2)**

Again it was found that substance abuse caused headaches, body pains, dizziness, dry mouth, loss of weight, reddish and protruded eyes.

“Abusing substances also causes headaches, body pains, dizziness, serious coughs and loss of weight, despite the fact that, it will make you eat much”. **(Participant 11)**

Others reported that, substances made them to sleep for more than thirteen hours and also caused weakness.

“Some of the substances also caused weakness, so I felt very weak when I used some drugs and that made me feel lazy. It also had a sedative effect and when I take substances like codeine I will sleep continuously for 13 hours or more”. **(Participant 8)**

Respondent five also expressed that substance abuse caused tachycardia and coughing. He said:

“It affects my heart, if I take some substances like Tramadol my heart beat faster than the way it was. Substances also cause coughing so it affects my lungs as well. It also affects your mouth as it makes my mouth to become dark”. **(Participant 5)**

Also, it was found that after being addicted to the substances, a period of non-usage was associated with weakness, malaise, sickness, and drowsiness while its usage made one feel very strong and normal (withdrawal syndrome). A respondent explained that:

“So many things happen, If I don’t use the substances, I will feel weakness and malaise, I can’t do anything. But if I use them, I will become so strong that I can do anything. Also, if I did not use them, I will feel as if I was sick, I will become drowsy, but once I took it I will become normal, I feel normal”. **(Participant 4)**

Social Effects

The study revealed the social effects of substance abuse. It was found that involvement in illicit substances cause strained relationship among families and friends, lack of involvement in decision making among family members, difficulties in getting married, loss of libido, violence and stealing. Participant number one and eight narrated how substance abuse affects their relationships as follows:

“Before, I had a good cordial relationship with people, but now, because I am involved in substance abuse my

relationship is only with those that abuse substances. I only respect those that abuse substances. Also, before my family involved me in decision making, but now I am isolated. My parents don't pay my school fees anymore, because of this behaviour... All my family members don't respect me, including my younger ones". **(Participant 1)**

"It affected my relationship with my friends and family, because all those that use to advise me to stop using these substances are no more my friends. So substance abuse had affected my relationship with my friends and family members. Even though, they are telling me the truth". **(Participant 8)**

Beside these, it was found that substance abuse causes strain relationship between the opposite sex and made some youths find it difficult to get married. Respondent two and nine narrates:

"I am not married; abusing substances affected my relationship with some girls that I intended to marry. Any lady I propose to, people will go and say bad things about me, that I am abusing substances...hmm that has affected me seriously". **(Participant 2)**

"As you can see me, I want to marry, but where ever I go, people will say that I am a drunkard,... Even if I went to look for a girl to marry people will be saying that I am a substance abuser. I am getting to thirty years, but I am still single". **(Participant 9)**

It was also found that some substance made married youth to have decrease in libido and affected their relationship with their partners. Respondent four and seven who were married expressed that:

"It depends on the individual; if I smoke marijuana it makes me to lose interest in sex with my wife. I will just go to my house and sleep; even if my wife needs sex she will not get it at that time and that have affected my relationship with her". **(Participant 7)**

"Yes, it affects my sexual desire, whenever I smoke marijuana, it is not possible for me to have sex with my girlfriend that night, because marijuana makes me think too much and lose interest in sex and affects our relationships as well". **(Participant 4)**

Substance abuse also made the youth to involve themselves in violence and stealing from the neighbourhood and their families:

"...abusing substances has made me to be involved in bad behaviours such as violence and stealing, if I don't have money to buy, I steal my parent's money to buy the drugs. Hmmm, when I have the urge to use these drugs I can do anything to get them and this has affected not only me but to the whole society". **(Participant 1)**

"It makes most of us involve in stealing people's properties, especially those that use to take the solution (glue); it misleads us to steal. So some of these substances make you to assume that people don't see you and you go and steal someone's property with the belief that people cannot see you". **(Participant 4)**

Psychological Effects

The study found that engagement in substance abuse causes psychological effects from sedation, mood change, to mental illness. Respondents twelve and four narrated this as follows:

"It affects my mood, and everybody knows that marijuana will make you a madman, you will become a mad person, and then they will take you to "Kware", where they normally send mad people ...It also had a sedative effect on me. It makes me go out of my senses, and I involve in violence". **(Participant 12)**

"Yes, it affects our mood, when I take the substances I become drowsy, I will be talking slowly also. I have double vision. They alter my mood. And all these are not expected from a normal individual who did not use substances" **(Participant 4)**

Also, the study revealed that stopping substance abuse causes withdrawal syndrome and made users uncomfortable, sad and they felt as if they were sick or dying. Respondent three intimated that:

"Yes, I am used to it, now if I don't take substances I feel as if I am not happy, I will feel uncomfortable. I will even be sick whenever I try to quit. I don't even know how to describe what I feel whenever I try to stop using the drugs. This is what everybody will tell you, I will not feel happy. I feel weak, to the extent that I can't do anything, even to walk is a problem. Also, if I don't take it, I will feel like I am sick, I will be so upset, I will become so lazy". **(Participant 3)**

Again, it was found that some youth had illusion and hallucinations due to substances abuse. Respondent six and four shared their plight and they said:

"It changes my vision, it makes me see things differently, I will see a car, but it looks like a motorbike with me, I can also see an elderly man but will appear like a small boy to me. It is when the drug has stopped working in my body that I am back to my senses again. That is when I can realize what has happened". **(Participant 4)**

"Initially, when I started smoking substances, I used to hear some sounds, some noise that I can't explain their source, it seemed as if the sounds were coming from heaven, I will hear it above my head. Substances also made me laugh unnecessary. All these things have stopped with time, now I feel normal". **(Participant 6)**

DISCUSSION

This study assessed the perceptions of the youth on the effects that substance abuse has on them. When assessing the effects of substance abuse among the youth in Sokoto, it was found that there were physical, social and psychological dimensions of effects of substance abuse as mentioned by previous authors Yusuf (2013), Affinnih (2012), Jibril *et al.* (2008), Edward (2014), Adewuyi (2013), Mohammad (2014), Salaam (2011), Ahmed (2012), Gaidhane *et al.* (2008), Floyd and Latier (2009) and Siro (2014).

This study found that substance abuse had physical effects such as coughing, Tachycardia, vomiting, headache, body pains, dizziness, polyphagia, and loss of weight. These findings are congruent with that of Affinnih (2012) and Edwards (2014). Also, this study found that, after being addicted to a substance, a period of non-usage is associated with weakness, malaise, sickness, and drowsiness. This is similar to the findings of Edwards (2014), who reported that substance abuse causes withdrawal symptoms. Although, the researcher related this to only alcohol withdrawal, many respondents of this study experienced similar effect with other substances such as marijuana and tramadol.

Again, it was found in this study that, substance abuse causes psychological effects ranging from alteration of mood to mental illness depending on the type of substance used. In this study, substances such as Marijuana had psychological effects such as mood change, hallucination and illusion. These findings are similar to the findings of previous studies by Edwards (2014) and Tracy (2014) who reported that psychological effects of substance abuse were severe depression or suicidal thoughts, aggression, irritability, selfishness and hopelessness. This study also found that lack of pleasure from previously enjoyed substance which led to increase in dosage or amount of the substances and an increasing, intense desire to use the substance. This finding concurs with the findings of previous studies (Gaidhane *et al.*, 2008; Tracy, 2014). For instance, Gaidhane *et al.* (2008), stated in his definition of substance abuse, that is an increasing, intense desire to use the drug.

Moreover, this study found that substance abuse had social effects on the youth who abused substances, and social effect was found to be problematic. Reasons were that, the involvement in illicit substances caused strained relationship with families and friends, lack of involvement in decision making, difficulty in getting married, stealing and violence. The most common social effects of substance abuse found in this study was youth's strained relationships with their parent, family members and friends of both genders. This study found that the youth who were married tend to have problem with their partners due to lack of desire for sexual intercourse. This finding goes contrary to previous studies by (Floyd & Latimer, 2009; Parkes *et al.*, 2007) who found that the youth tend to have problem with their

girlfriends or boyfriends due to high demand for sexual intercourse and this is due to high sexual desire manifested by the youth who abuse substances such as alcohol and marijuana. Also, poor relationship with other people was found to be another effect of substance abuse among the youth. This finding is in line with the study by Ekpenyong (2012). However, this study did not explore the specific substances that caused the decrease in the libido. As such further study to explore the association of substance abuse and sexual desire. Violence was another social effect found in this study. The findings resonate with previous quantitative studies by Yusuf (2010) and Siro (2014) but contradict findings of Mohammad (2014). Another social effect of substance abuse found in this study was stealing. The study found that the youth who did not have money to buy the substances were compelled to steal which started from home to the community. This finding is supported by the findings of a previous study by Yusuf (2013).

CONCLUSION

The study explored the perceptions of the youth on the effects of substances they abused in Sokoto, Sokoto state, Nigeria. The objectives of the study was to explore the perceived effect of substance abuse among youth in Sokoto, The study adopted a qualitative exploratory design. Twelve youth between the ages 18 to 30 years were recruited using snowball and purposive sampling methods. Semi-structured interview guide was used to interview the respondents after obtaining an informed consent. Data was analyzed using the principles of content analysis. Ethical approval was obtained and anonymity was ensured.

It was recommended based on the findings of this study that; parents should monitor the kind of friends their children interact with and advise them. Parents who abuse substances should be discrete, to avoid negative influence on their children. The Government and non-governmental organizations should provide job opportunities for the youth. The media should collaborate with the NAFDAC and NDLEA in the awareness and sensitization campaign on the dangers and effects of substance abuse.

The main limitation of this study is generalizability. However, this is the inherent nature of a qualitative study design since the study participants are selected by the investigators 'purposefully' and all the participants were males. Hence the views expressed are those of the participants and may not necessarily reflect the views held by every youth who abuse substances in the study area. Therefore, it was highly recommended that further studies can be carried out on substance abuse among other segments of the society such as the adult in order to find out factors in respect to the effects of substance abuse. Also, since the study was limited to only Sokoto, future research should be expanded to cover the northern Nigeria so as to be able to generalize these findings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work is part of a larger study conducted during MSc study. The Authors would like to appreciate all the participants of this study, who gave their time and share their perceptions in this study.

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