

Adolescents' involvement in Drug Abuse: Causes, effects and strategies for checkmating

Rosemary O. Ogbodo Adoga, Ph.D

Faculty of Education

National Open University of Nigeria

Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria

rosemaryogbodoadoga@gmail.com



Abstract

Drug abuse is defined as the use of mood modifying substance in dosage many times in excess of those used medically and over lengths of time impacting negatively on individuals, society and family. In other words, it refers to the intemperance and persistence of self-administration and wrong use of drugs without regard to accepted medical practice. This paper therefore focuses on effects of drugs on adolescents and youths. It first and foremost reviews various concepts of drug abuse; it further highlights factors that give rise to this deviant behavior including peer group influence, experimentation, social acceptance factor, idleness, success in examination, self medication among others. Common used drugs such as amphetamines, caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, cocaine and heroin are x-rayed in this article. Some strategies for mitigating drug abuse are also highlighted. It is recommended that counsellor-parents-family-relationship, individual counselling, group counselling among other strategies should be deployed in solving drug abuse problems among the adolescents and youths in Nigeria. It is also recommended that collaboration between the school and home through take home work and interface should be adopted in checkmating this social problem.

Keywords: Drug Abuse, Effects, Counselling intervention.

Introduction

Drugs can either be natural or synthetic. The use of drug itself does not precipitate danger when it is correctively used. It is important to note that when drugs are administered under proper medical supervision, they can be a source of relief to pains and sickness and at the same time helps to combat diseases. Fawa (2003) described drugs as any substance that is used for the treatment or prevention of disease in human beings. Drug can alter the body system positively or negatively depending on how such drugs are used. From the scientific point of view, drug refers to any substance used in medicine for the treatment of disease. Drug simply put, are

substances other than food which when taken affects the body system. Drugs are mainly used in medical setting for the prevention and treatment of diseases and can be grouped into narcotic, hallucinobis, Stimulant and inhalant. These are psychotropics as opposed to other drugs used for curing various ailments. Some of the aforementioned classes of drugs are discussed extensively in this paper. Drugs are also obtained traditionally from several sources and equally used for the prevention and treatment of various ailments (Rimfat, 1996).

Drug abuse or misuse can be defined as the used of drug in a manner that deviates from medical prescription. When drugs are misused, it can cause a lot of damage to the body. Drug abuse, on the other hand refers to sporadic and excessive use of drugs in violation of medical advice. Drug abuse is the use of psychoactive drugs to the extent that they interfere with the physical health, social relationship or vocational function of an individual (Bolu-Steve & Adeboye, 2016). Drug abuse has now become a menace to world health and a major health problem especially among adolescents. It is usually abused by adolescents because of the inability to stand the body reaction, if it is stopped, hence the avoidance of withdrawal syndrome. Drugs are also abused because of the happiness and pleasure at the first instance. This lures one to continue. The curiosity or trial period produces adequate pleasure, excitement and makes the individual reluctant to stop.

In the past two decades, there has been a general belief in Nigeria, like other countries that drug use and abuse is essentially a problem of the developed countries. According to Ekpo (1996), "the use of drugs has found its way from the international to the Nigerian scene." This is as a result of rapid social change and the breakdown of values system in Nigeria. Traditional values and structures have been seriously affected as a result of drug abuse which is already creeping into an alarming proportion with disastrous implication if not checked. From the late sixties, causality of drug abuse has been on the increase (Ekpo, 1996).

Drug abuse recognizes no frontiers; countries which thought they were immune have now found themselves faced with the menace. Both developed and developing countries have been affected. The later are more vulnerable because they have limited means to cope with the situation. Tor-Anyin (2015), explained that "when living things are hungry and take food, they satisfy the hunger, when water is taken, it quenches thirst and when one is sick, he takes the appropriate tablets or medicine to get relieved or cured. When any of these necessities of life such as food, water and medicine is taken to excess, it can result not only to some physical discomfort but also some abnormal behaviors or even death". When people want to be stimulated or induced, they take stimulants or drugs and other substances. When an individual is under the influence of stimulants, drugs or other substances, his/her

actions, speech, thinking and feelings become questionable because such individual is likely to do many things he would have done or not done without taking the drug or substance. This abnormality and psychological crisis associated with drug abuse and the role of counselling in the situation form the basis of this paper.

The Concept of Drug Abuse

A drug is any substance which produces physical, mental or psychological changes in the user. Drug, generally, is anything created by God that can be used to treat, prevent and cure diseases that affect man, plants and animals. Drugs are substances taken by eating, inhaling, swallowing to stimulate or induce human behaviour and action. Drug abuse therefore is the self-prescription of any substances to influence behavior through drug dependence, drug habituation and drug addiction (Tor-Anyin, 2015). According to Petters (2015), drugs are substances that change the way the mind or body works. Drugs are useful in curing diseases and also in preventing them. To be safe and effective, drug must be used as directed by medical doctors. Drugs abuse therefore, can be described as taking dosage in breach of the doctor's approval. In Petters' (2015) view, using drug prescribed for someone else and using a drug longer than a doctor prescribes constitutes drug misuse. On the other hand, using substances that are against the law or hazardous to human's health amount to drug abuse. When a drug is use in a way that hurts the user's mental, social and emotional wellbeing, it implies that the drug is abused. According to Ikeotuonye and Babtimir (1986), when the drug is not physiologically or pharmacologically needed by the body and when it is taken for therapeutic purpose without medical prescription it is also termed as drug abuse. Rimfat (1999) talks of drug abuse as a pattern of use of substance that places the users on unacceptably high level of health risk. This implies that drug abuse is not only the excessive intake but any amount or quantity that affects the normal behaviour or health of the person who has taken the drug or others around him.

Drug abuse therefore can be referred as self administration or prescription of any drug in a manner that deviates from the approved medical or social patterns within a given culture. Drug abuse is the recurrent use of illegal drugs or the misuse of prescription of certain drugs with negative consequences. These substances can result in dependence syndrome which occurs following repeated usage. It leads to a strong desire to take the drug, and difficulties in controlling the appetite for it (Petters, 2015).

World Health Organization (WHO, 1995) defines drug abuse as persisted or sporadic excessive drug use that is inconsistent with or unrelated to acceptable medical practices. It is an unintentional inappropriate use of drugs. Hence a drug is said to be abused when:

- i. It is not medically recommended or prescribed by a doctor.
- ii. It is not medically necessary.
- iii. It is prohibited by law or it is socially unacceptable.
- iv. It is used excessively.

Tor-Anyin further views drug as substances taken by eating, injecting, involving or inducing human behaviour and action. The word 'drug' according to Ekpo (1999) is perhaps most commonly used to describe narcotics and psychoactive substance that affects the central nervous system. Narcotic drug dulls the senses, relieve pain and induce sleep. Psychidemics drugs fondly called psychademics produce altered states of mind and in many cases, feeling of euphoria as well. Oladele (2004) said that a drug is a chemical agent which has the capacity to alter the psychological function of an organism. Adesina (1975) in Ekpo said secondary school students take drugs for various reasons for "kick" and "action" while the girls take it to "feel good" and to reduce tension. Anene (1984) cited in Ekpo (1996) said that the current disciplinary problem in Nigerian secondary school can be associated with the problem of adolescence. These problems according to him range from truancy, stealing, smoking, drug use to alcoholism. Ikeotuonye and Babtimir (1986), Ogbodo (2016), Merki (1990), Petters (2015) identify the following sources of drug abuse and their effects

1. Amphetamines: Experts have rated amphetamines as one of the common among the ranks of drugs consumed by students and others. It is primarily used to check sleep. Some students refer to its potency in restraining sleep. The motive here is to sustain alertness and concentration during reading; this has proved to be amiable alternative to kola nuts and coffee. They are consumed either by eating, smoking or injection, primarily to cushion pain and motivate contentment. Their side effects include feeling of euphoria, drowsiness and sometimes vomiting. Excessive consumption may result in death. Generally, the life expectancy of an addict is limited.

2. Caffeine: is dangerous to health, when excessively consumed. Like coffee, tea and soda drinks e.g. coca cola drink when consumed in excess can become habit forming. It can cause palpitations, insomnia, tremors and anxiety; it increases stomach acid production that can enhance the development of gastric acid ulcers.

3. Alcohol: Alcohol is a legal drug but it is a toxic substance. It can have devastating effects on the individual's physical health. It depresses the brain and impairs one's ability to function interpersonally. Alcohol lessen one's inhabitation, slurs speech, decreases muscle control and coordination and may lead to alcoholism. Alcohol can cause irregular heartbeat, hallucinations, anxiety, and tremor; it is the most common cause of liver failure. It can cause heart enlargement and cancers of the oesophagus, pancreas and stomach. Alcohol is associated with fatal motor accidents on roads. It is advisable to abstain from it.

4. Tobacco: This is strictly consumed by smoking through the nose. Some of the reasons people indulge in using tobacco is for pleasure, improved performance and vigilance, relief of depression, curbing hunger and weight control. Nicotine is the major addictive substance in cigarettes. Health hazards associated with cigarette smoking include heart diseases, lung cancer, damaged liver, peptic ulcer, and stroke. Withdrawal symptoms of smoking include hunger, sleep disturbances, anxiety and depression.

5. Marijuana: Also known as Indian hemp, dope, grass and hash. Marijuana comes from the plant known as *cannabis sativa*. The drug is usually smoked but can also be eaten in food. Its smoke irritates the lungs and contains more cancer-causing chemicals than tobacco smoke. Pleasure, relaxation, impaired coordination and memory are common effects of marijuana. It is associated with increased risk of progressing to more powerful and dangerous drugs like cocaine and heroin. This drug weakens the body's defense system (Merki, 1990).

6. Cocaine: is a stimulant, designed to assist in alertness and concentration. This is derived from South African Plant known as cocoa plant. It can be smoked, snuffed, injected or swallowed. Desired effects include pleasure and increased alertness. Short term effects include constriction of blood vessels, irregular heartbeat, and paranoia. Withdrawal is usually associated with depression and reduced energy. Long-term use can lead to damage to the heart, brain, kidneys and the lungs. Users of cocaine boast that the drug gives them a rush or short burst of high energy (Merki, 1990). Overdose leads to excitement with mental disorder. It can cause damage to the nasal passage, if used through the nose.

7. Heroin: Heroin can be administered through injection. Heroin use continues to be on the increase and this is most popular among users of 18 years to 25 years age bracket. Drowsiness, pleasure and slowed breathing are some of the effects of heroin intoxication. Overdose may lead to death caused by respiratory arrest; withdrawal can be of intense consequences and may include vomiting, diarrhea, confusion, abdominal cramps, aches and sweating.

8. Methamphetamines: This is a powerful stimulant that increases alertness, decrease appetite and gives a sensation of pleasure to people involved in taking them. The drug can be injected, smoked, snuffed or eaten in food. Its side effects include heart attacks, high blood pressure and stroke. Long term effects include hallucinations, paranoia, weight loss and heart damage.

General Causes of Drug Abuse

Drugs are often taken and abuse for several reasons among the adolescents in Nigeria. It varies from one person to another. Most adolescents take drugs to change the way they feel, others take in order to feel better or happier, to avoid pains, stress or frustration. They may take drugs to escape from boredom or to satisfy their curiosity or trial period which produces adequate pleasure, happiness and excitement

and make the individual reluctant to stop. According to Ige (2000), Chibuko (2008), Tor-Anyin (2015), Adegoke (2003) and Ogbodo (2016), the causes can be discussed under the following headings:

1. Peer Group Influence

“Evil associations corrupt good manners” is a wise and relevant saying. Peer group influences school youths to get into drugs. The saying that “show me your friends and I will tell you who you are,” is very true of peer group influence. If the group is the type that hides to smoke, the adolescents and youths will gradually learn to smoke. Sometimes during puberty, they experience much anxieties and frustrations, succumb to the powerful promises drugs offer in getting rid of these as informed by the peers. The student learns of some drugs through sharing of ideas and interpersonal relationship. He comes to know and take drugs like valium, Librium, periactin etc without knowing the implications.

2. Experimentation

Adolescents may have been taught or know about the effects of some drugs and will want to try such drugs on themselves. Therefore, when disturbed, they would want to experiment on the drug whether it will give them the type of relief they expect. If the expected relief does come, the student gradually becomes a regular user of such drug.

3. Social acceptance/factor

Some adolescents are shy and would tend to distance themselves from their social group. Such students may also not fit into the social system. In order to be socially acceptable into the group, the student may find drug as a necessary impetus. Some of them take drugs simply because it is “fashionable” to do so. They fear being unpopular and want to be regarded as “tough guys”.

4. Medication

Adolescents often involve themselves in self medication which on its own is drug abuse. Students take drugs to relieve them of every little pain, tension or anxiety, minor stomach irregularity, without doctor’s prescription. This concept though generally practiced in our society has been acknowledged as drug abuse.

5. Idleness/personal factor

There is an adage which says that an idle mind is the devil’s workshop. Adolescent who is idle is more likely to be emotionally disturbed hence the tendency for drug consumption as a way of ventilating his emotion. In other words, an idle adolescent is more likely to be involved in drug usage in a wrong way.

6. Success in examination

Adolescents use and abuse drugs in schools, especially during examinations. This means that drugs are consumed during examination period to sustain the user’s ability to stay awake which is obviously detrimental to health.

General Effects of Drugs Abuse

All the different types of drugs have different effects on individuals who abuse them. The United Nations and Drug Abuse Control (1987:38-43) acknowledges the devastating effects of drugs when it states that:

Growing abuse of drugs is much more than a “street problem”. It has invaded the home, the work place and educational institutions, affecting individuals of all ages and classes. Beyond the human destruction caused by drugs dependence is the damage to traditional values, life styles and national economies. In short, drug abuse poses a serious threat to societies everywhere.

Drug Abuse has effects on health and life expectancy; it is associated with multifarious problems including psychological crisis. Drug abuse causes personal withdrawal syndrome. The withdrawal resulting to loneliness is an indication of poor social adjustment as it also creates feelings of guilt. It can also be said that drug abuse affects one’s level of understanding and proper decision. It is also likely to cause anger leading to poor social interaction. Drug addicts can therefore easily express their frustration leading to aggression. This indicates that drug abuse is a social evil which all hands must be on deck to eradicate.

Strategies for tackling the menace of drug abuse

The aim of any counselling relationship is to understand his/her client’s problems and help or assist the client(s) to change. Tor-Anyin (2015) outlined the following counselling strategies that must be put in place to help in drug abuse:

1. There should be well defined counselling programme in school to curb drug abuse knowing individual child and helping to position and monitor them properly in collaboration with the class teachers and parents who provide feedback on the child’s behavior.
2. The school Guidance and Counselling practitioners should go beyond the confine of school and offices and reach out to the masses. Many homes are building grounds for drug abuse. The present pressure on drug abuse among youth in the society demands the help of the counsellors.
3. Adolescents should be properly guided by the school Counselling Department and other stakeholders concerned against the influence of peer group pressure especially in area of drug consumption. Periodic workshops and seminars can be helpful in this direction.
4. Counsellors are obliged to put in place surveillance mechanism around students vulnerable to drug related habit and to ensure that prompt and decisive measure is engaged in case of proven evidence.
5. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies (NDLEA) could be invited to schools periodically to discuss drug abuse and its effects on the abusers and the society at large.

6. The schools should organize workshops, seminars, public lectures and conferences or debates and essay competitions in the school or in the general community halls on drug abuse. This can go a long way in exposing the effects of drug abuse on the victims and the society at large.

Recommendations

In view of the above discussion, the following recommendations are made:

1) Family involvement has been seen as very crucial to solving drug abuse problems (Alimi, 2012). Expectedly, parents and family are very connected with what a child is. This is because acquisition of behaviour is commonly associated with family or parental upbringing. Thus drug abuse is a behaviour that might have developed as a result of such connection. Based on this information cited, there is the need for government and non-governmental organizations to establish family friendly counselling centres where parents and their children could have interface on drug related issues and useful information that would enhance appropriate or healthy attitude towards drug use can be accessed. Children and parents identified with drug problem could also access the centre for remediation.

2) The design of drugs counselling centres will purposively be for drug issues and family based prevention interventions. As parts of its focus, such counselling would be concerned with skill development in parents-child management practices and parent-child relationship (Alimi, 2012). This simple implies that both parents and child should improve their communication with each other and reduce dependence or affiliations with anti-social peers.

3) The family based strategies also involve the use of homework, assignments around the issues of drug use to change family in discussions that provides acceptable drug behavioral tips and potentially enhancing free communication.

Conclusion

From the aforementioned analysis, it can be undoubtedly asserted that drug abuse or misuse as commonly associated with adolescent crisis is one of the social problems that call for serious concern due to its effect on the health of individual victims and the entire society. There is therefore the need for tripartite synergy between the school, parents and the government to assiduously strategize towards eliminating the menace.

References

- Adegoke, A. A. (2003). *Adolescents in Africa: Revealing the Problems of Teenagers in a Contemporary African Society*. Ibadan: Hadassah publishing Nigeria Limited.
- Akinboye, J. O. (1987). *Guidance and Adolescents Strategies for Handling Adolescents and Youths Problems*. Ibadan.

- Alimi, K. M. (2012). Psycho-Social Correlates of Drug Use Behavior among Secondary School Students In Osun State, Nigeria. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife.
- Bolu-Steve, F. N. & Adeboye, A. (2016). Drug Abuse Counselling in Schools. In A. I. Idowu (Ed.), *Guidance and Counselling in Education*. Ilorin: Unilorin Press,
- Chibuko, V. C. (2008). *Useful hints on Students Counseling*. 2nd edition. Port-Harcourt: Pharez Printing press.
- Ekpo, S. (1996). *Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria*. Uyo: Albany Educational publishers.
- Fawa, M. S. (2003). Drug Abuse Eradication Programme in Schools: The Relevance of Team Approach Alternative. In A. Garba (ed.), *Youth and Drug Abuse in Nigeria. Strategies for Counselling, Management and Control*. Kano: Matasa Press.
- Ige, J. K. (2000). Counselling Drug Abuse Addicts for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria. *The Counselor*, 18(2), 344-350
- Ikeotuonye, A. I. & Babtimir, F. A. (1986). *Three Successful Students, a Guide to University Life*. Zaria: Tanafa publishers.
- McDowell, J. & Hostetter, B. (1996). *Handbook on Counselling Youth, a Comprehensive Guide for Equipping Youth Workers, Pastors, Teachers, Parents*. London: Word Publishing
- Merki, M. B. V. (1990). Abuse and Misuse of Drugs. *The Nigerian Journal of Pharmacy*, 14(2), 32.
- National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (1991). Drug Abuse Data Collection
- Ogbodo, R. O. A. (2016). *2nd Survey of Cultism, Examination Malpractices and Drug Abuse*. Abuja: Gracehlands Publishers Nig Ltd.
- Oladele, J. O. (2004). *Guidance and Counselling, a Functional Approach*, 4th edition Focus on 6-3-3-4 Educational System. Lagos: John-LAD Publication Ltd
- Petters, J. S. (2015). Counselling for Healthy Living in Credible Educational Response to Current Challenges Plaguing Nigeria. In D. I Denga (ed.), *Credible Educational Response to current challenges plaguing Nigeria*. Calabar: Rapid Educational Publishers Ltd.
- Rimfat, D. Z. (1999). Drug Abuse: The Medical Concepts and Implications. Paper Presentation for Staff and Students of Government College Pankshin, May 13th.
- Tor-Anyin, S. A. (2015). *Juvenile Delinquency and Crime Studies for Counselors*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.
- United Nations (1995). United Nations and Drug Abuse Control Board. Geneva
- World Health Organization (1995). Drug and Effects on Health: Report of World Health Organization Expert Committee Geneva, Switzerland.