

Adolescents' Drug Abuse and Cultism in Nigeria: The Way Out

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Abstract

The future of reasonable number of potential youths who could have been good leaders of their families have been destroyed by drug abuse and cultism which are two negative elements that complement each other. The adolescents are vulnerable to a lot of influences as a result of their mental, psychological and physical disposition and as such are easily lured into both positive and negative activities. The paper examined the concept of adolescent, drug abuse and cultism. It also explored the determinants of drug use and abuse, evolution of cultism in Nigeria, effect of drug abuse and cultism on behaviour. It also suggested among others that adolescents should be properly guided through guidance and counselling by the school counsellors, and closely watched and assisted by guardians and parents.

Keywords: drug, adolescent, cultism, behaviour, youth

Introduction

Adolescents are the future leaders and hope of a nation. One wonders what the future holds for the Nigerian adolescents as a good proportion of them are secret cult members and drug abusers. Drug abuse and cultism are globally prevalent social menace which has led to loss of life and property, violence, social disharmony, breakdown of norms and values. Unfortunately, efforts made from different quarters of the Nigerian nation to curb the ills have so far yielded very little or no result; drug abuse and cultism still remain threatening social problems and serious obstacle to peace and harmony. Also, the adolescents have continuously engaged in them inspite of the known risks associated with them. It then becomes necessary to redress these issues and reposition the adolescents to where they can realize their full potentials,

become responsible and productive citizens who are useful to themselves and the nation. This article highlights the concepts of adolescence, drug abuse and cultism. It also looks at some of the drugs taken by adolescents, determinants of drug use and abuse, evolution of cultism, reasons for joining cultism, effects of drug abuse and cultism on the behaviour of adolescents. Finally, suggestions are made on how the menace can be curbed.

Adolescence

Adolescents are persons in the developmental period of adolescence which encompasses the period ranging from ages 10years to 21 years (Nwosu, Okoye & Anyanwu, 2014). World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) regards an adolescent as an individual in the age bracket of 10years to 19years, who is in the critical phase marked as a period of biological, social and psychological transition between childhood and adulthood. According to Amalu and Ntamu (2018), adolescents are youths who are preparing to transit into adulthood; while Maaji (2015) describes the child that happens to be in the stage between the end of childhood and beginning of adulthood as an adolescent. Adolescents, according to Aliyu (2015), are teenagers who belong to the world of childhood and adulthood.

Adolescents show peculiar social thinking which is characteristically egocentric and those that think more egocentric are depressed and more likely to underestimate the negative consequences of risky behaviour. These adolescents are also over sensitive to social evaluation. Indeed, adolescents are those at the middle of personality development which, according to Freud (1905), starts at the genital stage of psychosexual development. During this period, there is re-energization of sexual and aggressive desires which if not well directed may lead to psychological fixation. The adolescent may experience intense emotion, frustration, self-doubt, stress, pressure and feeling of rejection and failure as they go through the physical developmental stages and search for identity. The period of adolescence is also characterized by quest for experimentation with drugs, alcohol, sexual activities saddled with numerous live threatening adverse effects. They relate more with their peers; and because of fear of rejection by their group, they join cult if their friends are cultists.

Drug Abuse

Drug abuse remains a major challenge all over the world (UNODC, 2005). It refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances including alcohol and illicit drugs (WHO, 2017). Haladu (2003) describes drug abuse as excessive and persistent self-administration of a drug without regard to medically or culturally accepted pattern. Odejide (2000) posited that a drug is said to be abused when its use is not pharmacologically necessary especially when it is used in the face of legal prohibition; or when socially acceptable beverage is used excessively. Berk (2003) refers to drug

abuse as using drug in wrong and harmful way that can lead to health problems or affect both social and other activities of a person. Abdullahi (2009) sees it as the administration of one particular drug without prior diagnosis and prescription from medical professionals. Drug is abused when its use is not medically necessary, not recommended by a health worker, forbidden by law, and is socially unacceptable. It can be socially acceptable but becomes abused when taken excessively. Adolescents and young adults are mainly the group of individuals that abuse drugs. They misuse drugs when they take more of it than the prescription stated, not minding that this can lead to overdose. They also misuse drugs when they take much of it at the same time without checking first with a physician or pharmacist, forgetting that combination of certain drugs may cause severe side effect arising from drug interaction. Adolescents abuse drugs by using the prescription meant for another person thinking that he has the same problem another person is having.

Abusers of drug, according to Goldberg (2000), aim to achieve some sense of feeling of hallucination so as to engender sense of pride, fearlessness or boldness which can reduce their ability to see, think or reason, learn and perform activities. Mburza and Ngohi (2011) opined that engagement in drugs gives adolescents a sense of independence from parents, and at the same time, wins popularity and approval from peers. Hard drugs users die quick of suicide or overdose, some of them perform low at school and at work, while some dropout of school when they can no longer cope (Santrock, 2000). Adolescents notably abuse drugs by using them at the wrong time and for the wrong purpose. Hashidu (2014) expressed that the present increase in the trend of drug abuse among adolescents cannot be divorced from availability of the drugs, curiosity, peer group influence, parents and teachers' influence, family neglect, advertisement by electronic or print media. Some of drugs abused by adolescents, according to Mulima (2008), are alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, codeine, phosphate, caffeine, petrol framol, ICD, glues, phenigal, soneryl, amphetamine, morphine horolon, dexadrine, proplus, chlordiazepoxide, mandraxlimbritol and pethidine.

Cultism

Cultism in educational institutions in Nigeria has become a social menace to students, administrators, parents and society at large because activities of the groups have physically, emotionally and psychologically maimed and rendered a good number of youths useless. Cultism, according to Olayiwole, Dada, Eyo and Abiona (2016), is a religious belief by a small group of people who are not part of any established religion but an organization whose activities are kept away from the knowledge of others. Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi (2010) defined it as a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation, formalities as well as their mode of operations are done in secret and kept secret, with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike. Adesina and Oribabor (2012) further

define cultism as a movement exhibiting great or excessive devotion or dedication to some persons. Iheanacho, Ikpeme and Sabe (2013) added that the activities of this group are not only exclusively kept away from the knowledge of others but are carried out at odd hours of the day and that they often clash with the accepted norms and values of everyday life and hence the name 'secret cult'.

Secret cult, as stated by Jekayinka (2007), was coined for these groups by Nigeria's former military President, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (Rtd) between 1983 to 1994; adding that before this time, these groups were called fraternities. Godgift (2014) describes secret cult as a sect devoted to a belief or specific system of religious worship whose activities are kept hidden from the public. Oluwatobi and Babatunde (2010) referred to the group as a formation of a group of initiates or adherents round the figure of a god, a saint or even a living. It can also involve the practice of a particular doctrine within the body. Cults are group of people formed together by common interest whose activities are essentially covert, disguised and are usually carried out behind closed doors. The group employs unethical manipulation or coercive techniques of persuasion or control. They also use techniques such as toasting, deception, psychological manipulation, brainwashing, luring, inducement, and threats to recruit members to their fold. The members at initiation are bound by solemn oath with threat of reprisal to keep mute about their hidden activities. Members identify themselves through coded language, special mode of dressing, and body decoration (Nwanna-Nzewunwa, Girigiri & Okoli, 2007). Okengwu (2004) and Fageyinbo (2004) suggested vengeance, ignorance, indoctrination/coercion, poverty, lack of parental control, peer group influence, search for protection, security and identity, social decadence, erosion of educational standard, god fatherism as some of the reasons why adolescents indulge in cult activities. A recent survey by Hazzan (2011) on cult activity confirmed that about 40 or more different groups of secret cults exist in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and each with particular style of recruitment policy, objectives and membership drive.

Types of drugs

A drug is a combination of medical chemicals or substances formulated and prepared by chemists and pharmacists for the treatments or cure of different illness under the recommendation and supervision of medical doctors (Adeyemi & Adediran, 2009; Agabi & Egbezor, 2005). Drugs are substances other than food which its chemical and physical nature interact with human body system to modify the physiological and biochemical composition of the body. Drugs serve as a major modifier of behaviour, perception, memory, consciousness, thought and personality. Below are common drugs and their respective effects.

Alcohol: These are beverages which come from fermentation of many foods and drinks and even tree sap. Though legal, alcohol is a toxic substance.

Amphetamines: This group of drugs comes in many forms from prescriptions medication like methylphenidate (for example, Ritalin, Concerta, Focalin) and dextroamphetamine and amphetamine (Adderall) to illegal manufacturing drugs like methamphetamine (crystal meth). They are potent central nervous system (CNS) stimulant that is prescribed for treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Narcolepsy.

Anabolic steroids: A group of substances that is most often abused by body builders and other athletes. This group of drugs can lead to devastating emotional symptoms like aggression and paranoia as well as severe long-term physical effects like infertility and organ failure.

Caffeine: This is consumed by many in coffee, tea and soda drinkers; but when consumed in excess, this substance can be habit-forming and produce palpitations, insomnia, tremors, irritability and significant anxiety.

Ecstasy: Also called MDMA to note its chemical composition (methylenedioxymethamphetamine); this drug tends to create a sense of euphoria, an expansive love or nurture for others. In over-dose, it can increase body temperature and cause death.

Hallucinogens: Examples includes LSD and mescaline, as well as so-called natural occurring hallucinogens like certain mushrooms. This drug can be dangerous in their ability to alter the perceptions of the user. For example, a person who is intoxicated (high on) hallucinogen may perceive danger where there is none and may think that situations that are dangerous are not. Those misconceptions can result to dangerous activities like jumping out of the window because the person thinks they have wings and can fly.

Marijuana: This is also known as cannabis; the scientific name for cannabis is tetrahydrocannabinols (THC). Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug with nearly 29million people who are 12years or older reporting having used this drug in the past year. The effects of the drug amongst others include infertility, difficulty in sexual performance, paranoia, and lack of motivation. Marijuana is a drug that is commonly mixed with other substances by drug dealers which exposes users to the dangers associated with addictive drugs. Example of ingredients that marijuana is commonly mixed with includes baby powder, oregano, embalming fluid, phencyclidine (PCP), opiates and cocaine.

Inhalants: This is one of the most commonly abused group of substances due to its easy accessibility. Inhalants are usually in household cleaners like bleach, ammonia and other substances that emit fumes, glue, paints and gasoline. The use of inhalants can cause brain damage and even death depending on the individuals.

Opiates: This group is also called narcotics and includes drugs like heroin, codeine, hydrocodone, morphine, methadone, vicodin, oxycontin, percocet and percodan. This group of substances sharply decreases the functioning of the nervous system.

Sedative, hypnotic, or anti-anxiety drug: This group is the second most commonly used illicit drugs that quite depresses the nervous system. They can therefore cause death by stopping the breathing (cardiac arrest) of individual who either uses this drugs in overdose or mixes one or more of these drugs in another nervous system depressant.

Cocaine: Is a drug that tends to stimulate the nervous system; cocaine can be snorted in powder form, smoked when in form of rocks (crack cocaine) or injected when made into a liquid. This drug is alkaloid extracted from coca leaves.

Phencyclidine: Commonly called PCP; this drug can cause the user to feel highly suspicious, become very aggressive and to have an exceptional amount of physical strength. This can make the person quite dangerous to others.

Nicotine: This is an addictive substance found in cigarette and alkaloid of tobacco. Nicotine is usually one of most addictive substances that exist. Infact, nicotine addiction is often compared to the addictiveness associated with opiates like heroin.

All the opium derived drugs such as heroine and morphine and their chemical equivalent are called narcotics. While some of the synthetics or artificial drugs include barbiturates, amphetamines and lysergic acids diethylamide (LSD).

Determinants of adolescent drug use and abuse

There are various reasons why adolescents indulge in drug use and abuse. These include:

1. **Behaviours:** Behaviours such as low religious involvement, short-term goals in life, depressive symptom and poor sense of well-being, low self-esteem, and impulsivity make the youth succumb to substance (Ramsoomar, 2015).

2. **Boredom:** Boredom as stated by Wegner, Flisher, Chibokvu, Lombard and King (2008) is associated with dropping out of school, which in turn causes joblessness, which further places youth at risk of substance abuse.

3. **Vulnerability:** Adolescent are vulnerable to drug abuse because they are in a phase of substantial experimentation, unemployed, have no income and are poor,

among other things (Mohasoa, 2010).

4. **Parents Habits:** Morojele and Ramsoomar (2016) posited that parents who drink heavily and/or are tolerant of alcohol use, as well as having close acquaintances with people who drink, places youth at risk for heavy drinking. In other words, role models play a significant part in the substance abuse space. Youths tend to imitate the behaviours of their parents, guardians, or other influential people. Quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that those with positive role models are less likely to indulge in substance abuse.

5. **Peer Pressure:** Peer pressure is one of the most significant and most consistent predictors of substance use among youth. Peers encourage their uninitiated peers to use drugs, and more often drug or alcohol use is celebrated with those taking illegal substance held in high regard. Youth will then want to associate with their peers in these substance abuse networks at all costs.

6. **Community factor:** Legislative laws and instruments also play a significant part in the illegal drug abuse challenge. Lee, Hill, Lacy, Boden, Guttmannova, Kosterman, Bailey and Catalano (2015) have shown that community disorganization, poverty and high levels of unemployment are risk factors for illegal substance abuse. When a community is well organized, economic and social problems are well-addressed, young people are less likely to engage in drug abuse. Similarly, if the community is intolerant of illegal drug abuse, the likelihood of a youth accessing such substances is low. If societal norms favour drug abuse (e.g., in mass media), or if community exposes youths to public drunkenness and peddling of drugs, then youths are at risk of drug dependency.

Evolution and growth of cultism in Nigeria

Cultism in Nigeria can be traced back to pre-colonial era when a group of individuals, with the main objective of seeking protection from ancestors, conducted rituals. The Ogboni Secret Cult notably among the Yorubas, Ekpe Secret Cult among the Efiks, Ekine Cult in the Delta region and Owegbe Cult among the Edo have been in existence in many parts of the country (Ajayi, Ekundayo & Osalusi, 2010). In some of these cults, membership is secret but the rituals are not, while in some others membership is made public but the rituals are secret. One positive thing about these societies, as stated by Opaluwah (2009), is that they do not harm unless provoked and they could serve as an instrument for cleansing the society of any cultural debris.

Educational institutions in Nigeria were not associated with cultism until 1952 at the University College Ibadan, now University of Ibadan, when Prof. Wole Soyinka, Puis Oleghe, Raph Opara, Sylvanus Egbuchie, Ikhehare Aig-DaighImokhuede, Nathaniel Oyelola and Olumuyiwa Awe formed Seadogs confraternity (aka Pirates). The main objectives of the Seadog were to be non-violent but intellectually and effectively (up) against the imposition of foreign convention; to revive the age of chivalry and to find

a lasting solution to the problem of tribalism and elitism. The group commanded the respect and administration of many people (Oluwatobi & Babatunde, 2010). Some years after the graduation of the founding fathers, internal wrangling and power tussle began to rent the organization as other similar organization such as Buccaneers Association of Nigeria and Eiye confraternity in 1968, Black Axe in 1970 and others sprang up. Then students' confraternity became derailed from the original path of fighting against oppression, exploitation and social injustice. Surprisingly, what started as intellectual platform eventually became known and associated with violence and members were deeply involved in drunkenness, excessive smoking, brutality, drug abuse, maiming, rape and killing of innocent students. As from 1990s, the activities of secret cult have taken a sorrowful and worrisome dimension. Many criminal activities became associated with them including arson, armed robbery and murder.

Godgift (2014) listed Vikings confraternity, Pyrate, Buccaneer, Mgba, MgbaMafia etc as some of the male cult groups while Okengwu (2004) gave some of the names of female cult groups as Jezebel, Amazon, Black Brazier, Viqueen etc. He went further to state that these female groups also engage in clandestine and violent activities as the male cult groups.

Reasons for joining cult

The adolescents may join cult for the following reason:

- ❖ Search for protection, wealth and fame.
- ❖ Peer pressure and influence from friends.
- ❖ Lack of proper home training.
- ❖ To overcome low self-esteem, depression, loneliness.
- ❖ Exposure to violent or crime related films.
- ❖ To exert revenge on enemies and to be feared by peers.
- ❖ To find solace after being victims of rape, intimidation, child abuse or cyber bully.

Effect of drug abuse and cultism on behaviour

Drug abuse has led to increased secret cult activities in Nigerian schools which have been a source of threats to life and property. Some of the effects of drug abuse and cultism on behaviour are as follows:

1. Lack of self-esteem and self-respect: Drug abusers and cultist lose their self-esteem and self-respect as a result of their acts (Adeyemo, Onaeri, Okpala & Oghale, 2016).
2. Drug abuse and cultism block meaningful use of time and creative thinking of the individual and therefore destroy a person's ambition to become great thereby making such an individual hopeless and useless.

3. Diseases like Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome could spread by sucking blood during oath-taking and exchange of needles through injection of drugs.

4. Youngsters who are drug abusers or cultists are prone to deviant behaviour such as armed robbery, murder and prostitution in order to meet up with their extravagant lifestyle.

5. Drug abuse and cultism can lead to financial, academic, social and psychological frustration (Godgift, 2014).

6. Drug abusers and cultists, as observed by Oyemwinmina and Aibeyi (2015), are living in perpetual fear of being arrested by law enforcement agents. A lot of them have abandoned their education as a result of health problem or cult activities and those caught by the police languish in cells in the police stations.

Conclusion

Drug abuse and cultism are social menace that has bedevilled the life and health of Nigerian youths. Well-meaning Nigerians should be concerned and worried that many adolescents are fast joining secret cult groups and indulging in drugs and these activities pose a threat to the health of these adolescents. But with proper interventions, strategies and awareness on the adverse effect of these challenges to the health and life of the adolescents, the menace can be curbed

The way out of adolescent drug abuse and cultism

Various decrees and laws both at the Federal and State levels have been enacted outlawing secret cult activities and drug related crimes in Nigeria; these activities have attained dangerous dimensions. Due to negative effect of drug abuse and cultism on the adolescents and educational system, the following suggested remedies may help to curb the menace.

1. Adolescents and the general public should be sensitized through dramas, videos, seminars and workshops by governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), religious bodies, law enforcement agencies on the inherent dangers of drug abuse and cultism.

2. Adolescents should be kept busy as idle minds are usually the devil's workshop. This can be done by providing recreational activities in schools and in the community so as to engage these youth positively apart from academic work.

3. Age should be considered when admitting adolescents into the different levels of education because under-age constitutes easy prey for cult group and drug addicts to be indoctrinated and recruited into their fold.

4. Parents should monitor their children/wards to ensure that they are not negatively influenced by peer group. They should also understand their children, create enough time to listen to them at home and satisfy their emotional, psychological and physical needs.

5. Moral education should be made compulsory in primary, secondary schools and also taught as general studies in tertiary institution.
6. Known cult members and drug addicts should be exposed and prosecuted by National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and other Law Enforcement Agencies.
7. Government should provide more counselling centres both in and outside the adolescents' schools.
8. Adolescents should be properly guided through guidance and counselling.

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