

***Curbing the Menace of Drug Abuse among Secondary School Students in Calabar  
Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria***

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**Abstract**

*The focus of this paper is on the menace of drug abuse among secondary school students. It discussed the reasons of drug abuse, drugs commonly abused, the theories of drug abuse and the effects of drug abuse on students. Youths are exposed early in life by their environment to drinking, smoking and substance abuse. This negative exposure influences them to get involved in drug without understanding its consequences. The involvement of youths in drug is a global threat and is cancerous to national development. They can stay free from drugs and live a happy live if they are educated on the adverse effect of drugs on their wellbeing and on the nation. The paper concluded that as a matter of urgency, all should work as a team to redeem the secondary school students who are trading their future for the destructive pleasure of drugs and drowning in the sea of drug abuse. Recommended among others is the need for teachers to be trained on identifying students using drug, having withdrawal syndrome and how best to manage them.*

**Keywords:** Drug, abuse, secondary, school, students

**Introduction**

Ancient men had used leaves, herbs, roots and plants as drug in the treatment of diseases. The problems they faced was not in the efficacy of the drugs but the unscientific use of the drugs as they were inaccurate in the dosage, route and time of drug administration. A drug signifies any medicine that is prescribed by a licensed medical personnel for the treatment and prevention of diseases. Drug is anything which when introduced into the body changes

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the normal functioning of the body. Dorwick and Maline (2007) defined drug as any substance, either artificial or natural, apart from food, that by its physical or chemical nature alters structures or functions in the living organism. Drug is a chemical compound or a non-infectious substance other than food which when taken into the body alters chemical, physical and mental state of the body (Worth, 2003). According to Balogun (2006), drug is any substance that can modify the perception, cognition, mood, behaviours and the general body function of any organism. It is any substance which is used for treatment, or prevention of a disease in man and animals (Fawa, 2003).

Drug abuse is the use of drug without medical prescription or indiscriminate use of prescribed drug by an individual. It is the use of drugs for any other reasons other than what it was prescribed for. Odejide (2000) as cited in (Akanbi et al., 2015) posited that drug is said to be abused when its use is not pharmacologically necessary especially when used in the face of legal prohibition or when a socially acceptable beverage is used excessively. Drug abuse include the indiscriminate sales of drugs by unlicensed medicine dealers, drug addiction, drug trafficking or peddling, self-medication, taking expired drugs, over dose or under dose of drugs. It also includes unhygienic storage of drugs and exposure to heat by manufactures (Wima, 2000). Manbe (2008) defined drug abuse as the excessive, maladaptive or addictive use of drugs for non-medical purpose. Oshikoya and Alli (2006) described drug abuse as non-medical self-administration of any substance to produce psychoactive effects, intoxication or result in altering of the body image not minding the potential adverse effect of the drug which is well known to the user. NAFDAC (2000) as cited in Haladu (2003) defined drug abuse as excessive and persistent self-medication of a drug without consideration to the medically and culturally accepted patterns.

Drug abuse is a contemporary issue and a public health concern in Nigeria that affects all ages most especially adolescents who at this age are in secondary schools. It is a global health and social problem with different conditions and problems depending on the locality (Whicstrom & Hegna, 2003). Drug abuse is not bounded by age, sex, culture, socio-economic, ethnic or religious background; it cuts across boundaries. The use of illicit drugs by students in secondary schools in Nigeria is a source of embarrassment to the nation. At this age, the youth should be developing themselves as the leaders of tomorrow as the strength and versatility of any society rest on its productive workforce which is mainly made up of the youth (Dankani, 2012).

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2013) as cited in Akanbi et al. (2015) posit that substance abuse is a major problem in schools, colleges and universities in Nigeria. The alarming involvement of youths in drugs brings to light the impending doom on the peace and security of the nation. Youths under the influence of drugs are not in the right frame of mind as they feel “high” and engage in anti-social behaviours like rape, robbery, murder and other vices. If drastic measures are not taken, the future of the nation is at risk. This paper focuses on the menace of drug with the following subheadings: the reasons for drug abuse, types of drugs commonly abused among secondary school students, effects of drug abuse on students and strategies for curbing drug abuse among students.

### **Reasons for drug abuse**

Stating the reasons for drug abuse may seem a difficult task as the reasons vary for individuals. Many factors may be responsible for the abuse of drugs among secondary school students regardless of their gender, class, religious and cultural background. Ekeagwu (2018) identified the causes of drug abuse as personality problems as a result of socio-economic conditions, curiosity, peer group influence, the drive to perform or long work hours, and mental and emotional problems. According to Haludu (2003) cited in Fareo (2012), experimental curiosity, peer group influence, lack of parental supervision, personality problems due to socio-economic conditions, the need for energy to work for long hours, availability of the drugs and the need to prevent occurrence of withdrawal symptoms are the reasons for drug abuse. Nwakunor et al. (2016) blamed government’s inability to provide employment for the teeming youths, lack of parental affection, parental neglect, abject poverty, frustration, social deprivation among others as reasons for drug among youths. Yunusa et al. (2017) identified desires to relax/sleep, increased physical performance, the need to relieve stress, the need to relieve anxiety, and derive pleasure, as factors responsible for drug abuse. According to Oshikoya and Alli (2006), experimentation with drugs out of curiosity, to feel grown up or reduce stress among others are responsible for drug abuse among adolescents. The major reasons for drug abuse among secondary school students are:

A. **Peer group pressure:** This is one of the major reasons of drug use and addiction among students. It is the influence that friends of the same age and status have on the behaviours of one another. Peer pressure is emotional or mental force from people belonging to the same group (such as age grade or status) to act or behave in manner similar to themselves (Peter, 2020). Many students are into drugs because of their friends who are drug addicts; they compromise their moral values because they want to be loved and accepted by their friends and avoid being called “mummy’s baby”.

**B. Unguarded curiosity:** Youths are curious about everything around them; they want to experiment and explore their environment. The curiosity to experiment with drug especially when hanging out with the negative group has led many youths into drug addiction as the first experience with drug, to some, produces great pleasure which motivates them to continue taking the drug.

**C. Stress:** Secondary school students are exposed to academic and emotional stress such as competition with other students, poor relationship with other students or teachers, fear of failure, desire for higher marks or grades, too many assignments to submit, and lack of money. Other stressors include parents' inability to pay their fees such that they have to trade or do some menial jobs after school, and family problems such as divorce. In the face of these stressors, instead of looking for proper medical attention and counselling, they embark on self-mediation or taking of coffee or hard drugs to stay awake (Adetiloye & Abel, 2022).

**D. Easy access to drugs:** The Nigerian society is such that people can open medicine shops and chemist stores indiscriminately thereby making drugs easily accessible in the society. Drugs are sold in the market place, motor parks, medicine shops or pharmacy without prescriptions making it possible for youths to have easy access to drugs.

**E. Environmental influence:** Youths that are raised in families and environments where people, especially significant people in their lives, abuse drugs grow up to do same as they see it as a normal way of live. Youths that have parents that smoke cigarettes or are drug addicts will imitate their parents because they have grown to see it as a normal way of life. In practicing or smoking with an ordinary paper, they will become perfect in cigarette smoking or in drug addiction (Adetiloye & Abel, 2022). Children that are raised in the ghetto where crime is accepted and rewarded as a means of survival will happily get involved in drug as they are employed and rewarded by drug addicts to traffic drugs in the neighbourhoods. They will gradually start taking the drugs themselves as some of the rewards they are likely to get as errand boys are the drugs they traffic.

**F. Mass media:** Advertisement on the televisions, radios, newspaper and the social media greatly influences ones' thought and acceptance of what is being advertised. Youths are enticed to smoke or drink by the advertisement they see or hear, especially when the advertisement is done by a model they admire. They do so with the belief that if a model could smoke or drink then it is good. They will never pay attention to the caution given at the end of the advert that "smokers are liable to die young" or "not to be sold to people below eighteen years".

### **Types of drugs commonly abused by secondary school students**

i. **Cannabis:** Cannabis also known as marijuana, pot, bhang and hashish was introduced into Nigeria by soldiers returning from Second World War (Odejide, 2009). Cannabis has been used for centuries primarily for its euphoric (mood altering) effects and is one of the leading drugs abused particularly among the youths (Adetiloye & Abel, 2022).

ii. **Alcohol:** This is commonly abused in the society as people generally accept it as a means of entertainment and relaxation. Alcohol can be viewed as a depressant, although it can be a stimulant; and for some, it is a hallucinogen (Adetiloye & Abel, 2022).

iii. **Cocaine:** Cocaine is a very powerful addictive drug. It is also known as crack, coke, blow or snow. It looks like a fine white powder making it easy to be snort through the nose, rub on the gum, dissolved and injected into the bloodstream or heated to vapourize. Cocaine gives a feeling of extreme joy and confidence, mental alertness and extreme energy.

iv. **Caffeine:** This is a natural stimulant that is mostly found in nuts, seeds and leaves of certain plants. It is processed and added to beverages and drinks. Caffeine when used minimally can be of benefit as it helps one stay awake and stave off tiredness; but it can result in physical dependence.

v. **Amphetamine:** These are drugs used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) but it is highly addictive as it gives a feeling of high and improved performance. It is also known as recreational or street drug when taken primarily for these reasons without a doctors' prescription.

vi. **Opium:** Opium is derived from opium poppy. The abusers of opium are mostly adolescents and health care professionals (Obiechina & Isiguzo, 2016). It is used to relieve pains and induce sleep. It produces physical and psychological dependence (Adetiloye & Abel, 2022).

vii. **Codeine:** This is derived from opium poppy but its analgesic and sedative effect is mild. Codeine is present in cough syrups which is sold as over the counter drug. Codeine is generally abused by students of secondary and higher institutions, who mix the syrup with soft drink or use it to soak garri for drinking (Obiechina & Isiguzo, 2016).

viii. **Tramadol:** This is a pain killer that is prescribed for moderate to severe pains for arthritis patients (Obiechina & Isiguzo, 2016). After a long usage of the drug, some patients may become addicted to the drug because of the narcotic nature of the drug.

ix. **Sedatives:** Sedative are drugs taken to induce sleep or to cause relaxation and are capable of producing physical or psychological dependence (Adetiloye & Abel, 2022).

x. **Inhalants:** This includes glue; they are poured or sprayed into a plastic bag, or on a cloth and the fumes are inhaled (Adetiloye & Abel, 2022). Reynolds (2023) defined inhalants as highly volatile household or industrial substances that emit chemical vapours

or fumes that produce psychoactive effects when inhaled. The most common means of taking in inhalant is through the nose (sniffing), through the mouth (huffing), holding a bag over the nose and mouth (bagging), and spraying of the substance directly into the mouth. Some examples of inhalant are volatile organic solvents, fuel, gases, nitrites and anesthetic gases (chloroform, nitrous oxide and ether), commercial solvents like gasoline, kerosene, glue, and typewriter correction fluid, among others.

### **Theories of drug abuse**

Different theories have been put in place to explain the origin and reasons of drug abuse in the society. Some of these theories are:

a) **Label theory of drug abuse:** This theory was propounded by Howard Becker (1963). Becker believes that people develop their identity by who the society say they are. Labelling theory holds that addiction is not inbuilt in an individual but that individuals focus on the likelihood of majority in the society to negatively label them an addict; and because they are labelled addicts, they accept it and indulge the more in drugs to actually be who the society has labeled them (Gay, 2000).

b) **Social learning theory of drug abuse:** This theory was propounded by Albert Bandura (1977). According to this theory, people learn to abuse drug by observing others around them, either in the family, among their peers or in the larger society abuse drug. Surajo et al. (2023) explained social learning theory of drug abuse as a behaviour that is learned by observation, reinforcement and modelling. According to them, people may imitate drug use behaviour they witness or be influenced by social norms that promote substance abuse. Youths that observe their parents, friends or others in the society relax by taking alcohol will learn to do same; if they manage stress by smoking, they will also manage their stress by smoking because that is the only example they have learnt and will accept it as a good way of stress management. Youths that have peers that take drugs and become unusually bold and fearless such that others respect or fear them will learn to take drugs with the belief that drugs make one to command respect.

c) **Rational theory of drug abuse:** Gary Becker and Kelvin Murphy (1988) propounded the theory of rational addiction (Rogeborg, 2020). This theory believes that individuals indulge in drug as a matter of choice. Their desire and best interest on taking or abstaining from drug inform their decision. Smoking of cigarette may relieve the stress of an individual and he does not mind the negative effect of the cigarette on his health and the finances. He had weighed the cost, risk and benefit of taking cigarette. Another person who knows the negative effects of drugs on his health and finances will choose to manage his stress in other ways but smoking. In both cases, these individuals made their choices based on their personal preference of what works best for them.

### **Effects of drug abuse on students**

Drug affects the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of the users. The chronic use of substances can cause serious and sometimes irreversible damage to adolescent's physical and psychological development (Sambo, 2008). Students who abuse drugs pay less attention to their academics; this results in their poor academic performance and eventual drop out of school. Youths who abuse drugs become insane, socially unfit in school situation and eventually drop out of school (Okafor, 2020). The result of findings of the study carried out by Fayombo and Aremu (2000) revealed that the misuse of marijuana had reached an epidemic level in Nigerian society, and that drug abuse could lead to reduced academic achievement or even halt one's academic process. Drug addicts are likely to suffer from loss of memory, loss of appetite, insomnia, distorted vision, increased libido, constipation and stress.

Surajo et al. (2023) explained the consequences of drugs in three aspects: socially there is low performance at school and work place; crime, headstrong behaviour at home; and cruel treatment of family members. Financially, drug addicts are unable to meet up with their basic responsibilities as they are focused on getting their next fix, they would not mind using the money for payment of school fees or textbooks to satisfy their addiction. Healthwise, drug weakens the immune system so every organ in the body is affected. Addicts have a poor sense of judgement, lack self-control and suffer from hallucination. Drug addicts are prone to mental health disorder, heart, lungs, kidney diseases and early death as a result of compromised immune system and poor nutrition. They have a feeling of anger and are prone to violence. The influence of drug makes them behave without human sympathy, so that they can kill, maim and destroy property without remorse.

Drug Addicts are likely to be infected with HIV/AIDS because of sharing of needles or the use of unsterile instruments. They feel high under the influence of drugs, lack the sense of judgment and engage in risky sexual behaviours which may result in unwanted pregnancy and infection with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Some drugs may result in drowsiness or insomnia and this may likely make the student user sleep in class or lose concentration while lectures are going on. This makes learning difficult and results in failure and subsequent drop out of school. Drug addicts crave for more drugs; to satisfy their cravings, they steal from parents, family members, fellow students and the society. Youths that use drugs neglect their physical appearance, appear unkempt with the smell of alcohol or cigarette such that they cannot stay in the midst of others.

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Santroek (2001) and Nyaga (2001) stated that drug addicts have watering eyes and nose, they are unusually quiet or talkative, their temper is unpredictable, they suffer from low attention span and loss of interest in academics. Okafor (2020) noted some of the consequences of drug abuse to be carelessness, neglect of personal hygiene, irresponsibility; addicts are highly irritable or hostile to close friends and wear dirty or tattered clothes. The findings of Enueshike et al. (2022) revealed that drug abuse may result in poverty, low productivity, waste of individual resources and little or no savings by the addict which will in turn affect the general economy of the nation. Their findings further show that youths on drugs have questionable character, they show no respect to authority and even the family image is affected as a result of drugs; these in turn have affected the education of the youth.

Lawal (2023) reported on the findings of the World Health Organization (WHO) that alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs are major global risk factor for disability and premature loss of life. According to WHO, the burden of these drugs on school children is accompanied by significant academic, medical, social and economic cost, namely expenditure on health, poor grades, law enforcement issues, lost productivity and harm to others.

### **Strategies for curbing drug abuse among students**

The fight against drug abuse is a fight for all. The family, community, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), religious organizations and the government should synergize to achieve a drug free society. The strategies for curbing drug abuse among students should be a goal-oriented process and well-structured to dissuade youths from taking drugs and help drug addicts seek for help without shame. These strategies may succeed when it gives a welcoming opportunity for students that are drug addicts to willingly seek for help rather than confronting or condemning them.

Vidona and Willy-Vidona (2021) identified three community-based intervention strategies in curbing drug abuse, these includes: school, family and religious based intervention strategies. The school intervention strategies include the use of bill board, tracks, mass media and educational programmes to promote and provide students with useful knowledge on the evils associated with illicit drugs. The family which is the primary source of socialization should be safe and friendly for the child, from the family the child is taught the dangers associated with abusing drugs. Religious organization should be aggressive in their messages against drug abuse; they should partner with other faiths which are like-minded and non-governmental organizations to establish rehabilitation



centres. This rehabilitation centres will provide guidance and counselling services, skill acquisition and other functional programmes that will gainfully occupy the youths. The following strategies if put in place may help reduce students' involvement in drug abuse:

1) **Family education:** The family is a great determinant in the involvement of the youths in drug. Families that accept drugs, are always in conflict, living apart/divorced, working late and spending little or no time with their children so that the children are left unsupervised; this predisposes the children early in life to drug abuse. Intervention strategy in the family should be structured to help train the parents on the importance of effective child supervision, creating a safe and friendly home environment for the development of the child. Parents should not send nor allow others send their children to buy alcohol, cigarette or go to places that is likely to expose the child to the possibility of using drug. Parents and adults should refrain from using drugs indiscriminately in the presence of youngsters and they should discourage their wards/children from associating with "unknown" gangs or suspicious neighbourhood peer groups (Fareo, 2012). Parents should keep an eye on their wards, be observant of their behaviour and note the company they keep.

2) **Introduction of drug education in school curricula:** The Federal and State Ministries of Education should ensure that drug education is added to the school curriculum from the primary to the tertiary level. It should be designed in such a way that as the child goes through school, he gains a better understanding of the dangers of drugs. This may be achieved by the creation of good audio-visual instructional materials that will enhance learning, pasting of instructional materials on drugs in the classrooms and placing of bill boards in strategic locations in the school.

3) **Formation of peer group clubs:** Students should be encouraged to join various association in the school like boys' scout, boys' brigade, girls' brigade, drama club, debate club, among others. Youths in these clubs are trained to be disciplined, develop decision-making skills and ability to cope with psycho-social challenges without yielding to peer pressure influence. These associations gainfully occupy the youths so that they do not have time to get involved in drugs.

4) **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** NGOs should work in collaboration with the government and religious bodies to build and fund rehabilitation centres. Kodjo (2002) and Obiechina and Isiguzo (2016) stated that the primary mission of NGO in curbing drug abuse is to promote, prevent, and reduce harm related to chemical dependency on alcohol and drug through advocacy, networking, collaboration and by treating people for their dependency problems, in order to limit the negative impact of substance abuse known to be a major cause of premature death, interpersonal violence, disability and poverty, throughout the world.

5) **Religious organization intervention strategy:** People have great faith in their religious leaders and believe everything they tell them. The leaders of the various religious institutions should preach against the use of drugs and help those already caught in the web of drug addiction to break free. Counselling units should be established and man by professional counsellors among their members who will counsel youths that are into drug.

6) **Government:** The government as a major employer of labour in the nation should employ more counsellors into the school system. Agencies of government like the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency should be well funded by the government to create awareness on the evil effects of drug through the mass media, regular organization of seminars and workshops on drugs. The government should build counselling and rehabilitation centres in various communities for effective education, detection and prompt intervention in the management of drug addicts.

### **Conclusion**

Drug is anything which when introduced into the body changes the normal functioning of the body. Drug abuse is rapidly engulfing the youths in secondary schools in Nigeria; the youths are the leaders of tomorrow and all hands must be on deck to redeem the youths who are drowning in the sea of drug abuse. To achieve this goal and keep crime out of the nation, government should invest more on the youths as most youths caught in crime are giving to one drug or another. Nigerian youths can be useful to themselves and the nation as they stay off drug, live a happy life and contribute to national development if they are educated on the adverse effects of drugs and helped to channel their youthful energies and curiosity into productive ventures.

### **Recommendations**

Teachers should be trained on how to identify students using drugs and having withdrawal syndrome. They should be equipped with appropriate skills on how to manage students exhibiting behavioural problems. Teachers should engage the students with extracurricular activities like debates, dramas and plays on the evil of drug abuse. Lectures and seminar on coping with stress, developing a positive self-esteem, resisting peer pressure and drug abuse should be organized regularly for the students.

Government should pass stringent laws on drug traffickers and take legal actions against pharmacies that ignore government directives with regards to controlled drugs. The Government should sponsor programmes and advertisement on mass media on the evil of drug abuse among youth, honour models who are drug clean with ambassadorial honour

giving them the responsibility of campaigns against drug abuse especially among students or the youths.

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