

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND THE NIGERIAN YOUTHS

NOTE: Helping drug users require early stage counselling and referral. Where the situation has gone out of parents' control, contact Trios Foundation Clinic for proper treatment and rehabilitation. Telephone 07064404909.

Introduction

Human beings have used one sort of drugs or another for thousands of years. Wine for example was used from the time of early Egypt; narcotics from 4000BC; marijuana as medicine in China as far back as 2737BC and by 19th century AD, active substances in drugs were extracted to discover newer substances like morphine, cocaine, laudanum and so on (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2012). Since the middle of the last century, drugs have been part of human culture; however, popularized in the 1960s by music and mass media but in present time, it has invaded all aspects of the society.

What is drug?

In its simplest form, Ade Bodunde defined drug as anything that finds its way into your body that is not food, water or fruit which causes a change in feeling, behavior or performance.

Literarily, the word "abuse" means to use wrongly or in an illegal manner. Therefore, drug abuse simply explains the act of using drugs in a wrong way or taking illegal drugs. Moreover, it also means an excessive use of drug contrary to the medical practices.

The typical Nigerian youth's vulnerability exposes them to various activities which either benefit them or otherwise. One of such negative activities is the indiscriminate use of drugs which has dangerous effects on them and the society. From alcohol to other psychoactive or performance enhancing drugs, the effect of the dependence on these drugs tend to alter responses to sensations, alertness and stability of moods which are all controlled from the Central Nervous System (C.N.S).

Despite efforts specific and concerted efforts to fight the menace, more youths are increasingly becoming addicted to drugs. In Nigeria, many youths, mainly from well-to-do homes are increasingly joining the 'big boys club' that abuse drugs such as heroin and cocaine. Other form of drugs like marijuana (also called cannabis, weed or hemp), which is commonly produced in Nigeria and others like methamphetamine, syrups and tablets with codeine capable of intoxicating are mostly found in brothels, schools, car parks and even with local traders that sell provisions in kiosks.

The head of clinical services, Drug and Alcohol Treatment Education and Rehabilitation Unit at Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital in Kaduna, Dr. Ebiti Williams said over 6 million bottles of codeine are sold on a daily basis in the North-West part of the country. National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) report of 2010 also shows that over 11% of people in the North-West zone use drugs. He also said due to the rise in drug addiction, young people make use of cough syrups to make themselves high. "We have had few newspaper reports where people kill owners of pharmacy shops or chemists because they refused to sell codeine to them," (Nigeria News, 2012).

The doctor further explained that in the northern part of the country, younger people abuse prescription drugs almost much more than what is referred to as illicit drugs. Majority of patients who visit the facility are those who use combination of substances. “We don’t have people that use single substance; some take cocaine, heroin, codeine, cannabis and alcohol at the same time,” he said. Speaking on what addicts benefit, he said that they derive a ‘high’ from the drugs while some said it makes them feel very elated; it makes some have a sense of happiness and often times make them forget about their problems or challenges while it inspires others to write, sing, draw and do so many other things.

On her part, Amina Duniya, a sociologist and psychologist, suggested that there are different kinds of drugs including the hard drugs and the prescribed drugs. “When you abuse any of them, it becomes drug abuse. When we talk of drug abuse, it could be the hard drugs including cocaine, weed among others and when we talk about prescribed drugs we mean codeine even though it’s meant for medication some people use it for something else,” she explained. She said, recently, I went to a pharmacy to buy drugs and a boy just came in and asked for Codeine and he was given; right in front of me, he shook the bottle and drank the whole bottle after he finished he asked for water and left. It was surprising that the pharmacy attendants did not even see anything wrong with what the boy did.”

Impacts of illicit substance abuse on youths

Illicit substance abuse has a very severe impact not only on the individual, but to those closest to them, and the society as a whole. Funds which could have been channelled into more developmental projects have been diverted to interdiction, prosecution, international law enforcement, prisons, treatment, prevention, and drug-related health care. In general terms, Mordey (2012) attributed these costs to crime, disease, accidents, domestic violence, abuse, job loss, and homelessness.

Mamman (2014) identified various consequences of illicit substance abuse and concluded that they are so devastating and very shameful to the extent that both the nation and international organizations are worried about the spread of this scourge among the youths and adolescents. Some of the consequences includes: mental disorder, drop out from school, cultism, social violence, internet frauds, gang formation, destructions of normal academic activities, armed robbery, 419 syndrome, social miscreants (area boys and girls) lawlessness among youths, lack of respect for elders, rape, instant death, wasting of innocent lives and loss of senses, accidents, loss of job, unemployability and untimely death.

Odejide (1997) confirmed that drug abusers experience academic failure, distortion of the senses, dream like thinking, false confidence, hampered performance, illusions, hallucinations and delusions. Other health effects include loss of brain cells. Omage and Omage (2013) on their part attributed the impact of illicit substance use to be evident in loss of respect, mental disorder, being useless to one’s family and friends, wastage of funds and property, loss of job due to instability, truancy and absenteeism, having cases with the laws of the land, diseases of the heart and liver, weight loss, nervousness and a desire to steal just to get the drugs to use. Oliha (2014) asserted that in Nigeria today, the consequences of substance abuse are diverse, including acute and chronic health, social as well as psychological problem; disruption of interpersonal relationships particularly within the family; marginalization; criminal behaviour; school failure; vocational problems and failure to achieve normal adolescent milestones.

Oshikoya and Alli (2006) in their studies on perception of Drug Abuse amongst Nigerian undergraduates identified dependence and addiction as one of the major consequence of drug abuse, this according to them is characterized by compulsive drug craving seeking behaviour, which persist even in the face of negative consequences. These changes are maladaptive and inappropriate to the social or environmental setting therefore may place the individual and others around at risk of harm.

According to the Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia (2012) the effects of substance abuse can be felt on many levels viz the individual, on friends and family, and on the society. The effects on individuals who use drugs experience a wide array of physical effects other than those expected. For instance, the excitement of cocaine high is followed by a crash (a period of anxiety, fatigue, depression, and an acute desire for more cocaine to alleviate the feelings of the crash).

On the other hand, marijuana and alcohol interfere with motor control and are factors in many automobile accidents. In other cases, users of marijuana and hallucinogenic drugs may experience flashbacks, unwanted recurrences of the drug's effects weeks or months after use. Equally, sudden abstinence from certain drugs results in withdrawal symptoms. For example, heroin withdrawal can cause vomiting, muscle cramps, convulsions, and delirium. With the continued use of a physically addictive drug, tolerance develops; i.e., constantly increasing amounts of the drug are needed to duplicate the initial effect. Sharing hypodermic needles used to inject some drugs however, dramatically increases the risk of contracting AIDS and some types of hepatitis. In addition, increased sexual activity among drug users, both in prostitution and from the dis-inhibiting effect of some drugs, also puts them at a higher risk of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Many drug users engage in criminal activity, such as burglary and prostitution, to raise the money to buy drugs, and some drugs, especially alcohol, are associated with violent behaviour.

Effects on the family can be observed in the user's preoccupation with the substance, plus its effects on mood and performance, which can lead to marital problems and poor work performance or dismissal. Drug use can disrupt family life and create destructive patterns of co-dependency, that is, the spouse or whole family, out of love or fear of consequences, inadvertently enables the user to continue using drugs by covering up, supplying money, or denying there is a problem. Pregnant drug users, because of the drugs themselves or poor self-care in general, bear a much higher rate of low birth-weight babies than the average. Many drugs (for example, crack and heroin) cross the placental barrier, resulting in addicted babies who go through withdrawal soon after birth, and fetal alcohol syndrome can affect children of mothers who consume alcohol during pregnancy.

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