Advances in Psychology and Neuroscience
2017; 2(2-1): 15-20
http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/j/apn
doi: 10.11648/j.apn.s.2017020201.13

The Influence of Substance Abuse on Youths' Prospects in Nigeria and the Way Forward

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To cite this article:
Madaki, Maikano, Dukku, Aminu Mohammed. The Influence of Substance Abuse on Youths' Prospects in Nigeria and the Way Forward. *Advances in Psychology and Neuroscience.* Special Issue: Substance Abuse: Perspectives, Trends, Issues and the Way Forward. Vol. 2, No. 2-1, 2017, pp. 15-20. doi: 10.11648/j.apn.s.2017020201.13

Received: September 24, 2016; **Accepted:** September 30, 2016; **Published:** February 14, 2017

Abstract: The youth today, live with two contrasting facts or social realities. Glowing potentials and prospects on the one hand, enormous challenges on the other. The first social fact reflect existing unlimited accomplishments and prospects in form of growing educational pursuits, surging rates of wider internet access, computer and IT services utilization, etc. The enormous and ever growing problems in form of unemployment, poverty, insecurity, crime/deviance, electoral malpractice and drug and substance abuse render the laudable accomplishments punctured in the second instance. This article amplifies the strategic position the youth occupy in every society, conceptual explanations were offered, relevant review undertaken under which a schema of drug use behavior is presented, with the growing problems facing the youth, especially drug and substance abuse, amidst potentials and prospects unveiled. Other sections dwell on the general approach to the way forward and a conclusion and summary of the points identified therein.

Keywords: Youth, Substance Abuse, Poverty, Thuggery, Unemployment

1. Introduction

Every aspect of the youth and youth life is worth studying. In the world today, the youth face, on the one hand, growing potentials and prospects and on the other hand, enormous challenges particularly the phenomenon of drug and substance abuse. These two broad and contrasting facts or social realities about the youth today reflect a paradox. In the first instance, there exist unlimited prospects for accomplishments in form of growing educational pursuits, glowing rates of wider internet access, computer and IT services utilization, etc. while enormous and ever growing problems in the second instance in form of unemployment, poverty, insecurity, crime/deviance, electoral malpractice and drug/substance abuse render the laudable prospects for accomplishments punctured. Very disturbingly among the challenges facing the youth today, drug and substance abuse features prominently in trapping large numbers of youth in Nigeria (Radda, 2006). Although many researches have established the existence of strong relationship between drug and substance use and crime, its connections to violent behavior and other social vices too have been established (Omeiza, 2010). Drugs and substances affect the quality of life of those involved, are the major destroyer of youth usefulness on earth (UNODC, 2011). With Nigeria's return to democracy, the issue of drug use, abuse and dependence generally became very pronounced especially during political campaigns, rallies and during elections. This article is divided into five parts - the introductory part, which amplifies the strategic position the youth occupy in every society, the second part on the growing problems facing the youth amidst potentials and prospects and a third part on conceptual review, the fourth part on the general approach to the way forward. A conclusion section presents a summary of the presentation as the fifth part.

2. Conceptual Review

For the purposes of clarity and more insights, this section presents key conceptual explanations relevant to the issue at hand. Vast literature on the youth traces the obvious fact that the youth have always been an entity of focus in the history of human race. The concept youth is multi-dimensional and consists of several age ranges. Youth refers to anybody within the period between early childhood and adulthood or

those between 6 - 30 years. The United Nations (UN) defines the youth as those in the age category of 15 to 24 years (Attahiru, 2007). The Commonwealth of Nations recognizes the age between 16 and 29 years. The Nigerian State defines the youth to include those in the age bracket of 18 to 30 years while for some countries; the age range of the youth is from 12 to 40 years (Mohammed, 2015; Lawan & Dukku, 2013; Ashiru, 2010; Bello-Kano, 2010; Attahiru, 2007). The relevance of these definitions depends on the objective situation of social policy in a given social formation (Dukku, 2012).

The term youth is defined further as a psycho–mental and socio–economic age category with certain attributes such as physical and mental agility, buoyancy, freshness, vigor, curiosity, deviance, vulnerability and a 'can do it' disposition, etc. (Radda, 2006). Other attributes of the youth are activeness and restlessness, sociability, faster rate of physical development, adventurous and risk bearing, curious and very inquisitive and fantasy-seeking. Specifically, the kind of focus and attention attached to the youth is based on the facts that (Lawan, 2009):

- The youth are believed to constitute an important and strategic segment of the society.
- They are seen to be the successors of the adult generation.
- The youth are understood in terms of their potential as adults-in-the-making
- They are the future leaders of the community.
- They are the most productive segment of any community or society.

Most importantly, the youth (Mohammed, 2015; Lawan & Dukku, 2013; Morgan, 2010; Attahiru, 2007):

- Constitute the majority population in any geopolitical entity.
- In Nigeria, the 2006 National Population and Housing Census reported that the youth stood at close to 50% of the overall national population.
- Morgan (2010) views the youth as a critical age group since 50% of all Nigerians is youth.
- Up to 33% of the total population in Africa is young between 10-24 years.
- They form 20% in North America and 19% in Europe comparatively.
- One out of every four Africans is young.

Therefore the youth are earnestly needed to achieve the following:

- Building a functional and productive society;
- Having and entrenching a vibrant democracy;
- Establishing a promising and secure future; and
- Having a dynamic and creative society.

The youth are identified as a distinct social group taken to refer to the driving force for societal development. Luqman (2010) stressed that the future of human societies depends highly on the innovation and dynamism of the youth. Considering the fact that the society is faced with myriad of social problems, it is important to note that societies need all the energy, the brains, imagination and talent that young people can bring to bear the difficulties societies face. Whichever yardstick is employed, Lawan (2009) stressed that the youth are considered as the greatest asset any country can boast of in terms of future leadership and development potential. However, despite all the extolled qualities and characteristics identified above, the youth in Nigeria are faced with several obstacles among which drug and substance abuse features prominently.

3. The Problems Facing the Youth

Social theories generally maintain that all people have the potential to violate the law (Siegel, 1998) and that modern society presents many opportunities for violations such as drug/substance abuse; theft; robbery; *Daba*; electoral and exams misconduct and violence. Although some of these behaviors are often exciting and attracts immediate rewards and gratification, Umar (2010) reveal that in Nigeria, social, economic and political practices are full of discontents and distortions that subject youth to confusion and bewilderment. Factors such as rising economic crisis, inflation and declining quality of life contribute to the plights of the youth (Umar, 2010). Such social contexts lure significant number of the youth in Nigeria into dislocated and maladjusted subcultures which render the youth short of access to proper socialization, education and employment opportunities thereby raising serious security and safety issues in the society. Some of the broad problems facing the youth summarized below include (Luqman, 2010; Omeiza, 2010; Lawan, 2009):

1. Poverty/Unemployment/Idleness;
2. Thuggery/gang life/electoral malpractices – provides a fertile ground where opportunists may find potential recruits into different sorts of forms of deviance and/or criminal activities;
3. Violence – The youth can only exploit their full and unlimited potentials in safe and supportive environments;
4. Traffic rule violations;
5. Exams misconduct/malpractice;
6. Cultism;
7. Insecurity/vandalism;
8. Weapons possessing and carrying (you don't need weapons to succeed in life);
9. Weakening social values (indiscipline, family in crises, weakened parental control);
10. Divorce/broken homes; and
11. Drug/substance use and abuse – Tramol, Roche, Bennylin, Tutolyn, etc.

Drug and Substance Abuse

One major social problem this article seeks to dwell more on is drug and substance abuse. There is the growing fear and apprehension that the future of our semi urban and rural societies is highly at risk. Various research reports have confirmed that Nigerian youths in both urban and rural areas and of different socio-economic backgrounds have indulged in the use and abuse of drugs and substances (Abdullahi,

2003). When this fact is viewed against the background that youths are often larger in number as compared to other age groups in any society, much cause for alarm and concern is raised.

Drug is anything that modifies and influences the workings of the body system consumed by an individual in liquid, tablet, powder, and/or glue form (Beirne and Messerschmidt, 2006). Ordinarily, anything that change or alters the functions of the body when taken can be called a drug. But drug abuse simply means excessive and persistent use, usually by self-administration, of any drug without due regard for accepted medical practice (Akers, 1992). Therefore, drug abuse is the unspecified use of drugs against the prescribed medical purposes. It is also the self-administration of drugs especially commonly abused drugs referred to as "psychoactive drugs." These drugs exert major effects on the brain and the central nervous system by sedation, stimulation or changed mood (WHO, 2003). Names of commonly abused substances and drugs include tobacco, alcohol, cocaine, heroin, Indian hemp, cannabis, opium, amphetamine, Kolanuts, coffee, aspirin, codeine, panadol, paracetamol, etc.

According to Beirne and Messerschmidt (2006), over one thousand drugs/substances are abused in the world. However, they can generally be categorized into seven:

- Narcotics, e.g. opium, heroin, codeine, benelyn, etc.
- Depressants, e.g. sedatives, valium, roche, rafenol, Librium, tranquilizers, etc.
- Stimulants, e.g. cocaine, methamphetamine, amphetamines (drugs used in treating obesity and some brain dysfunction), etc.
- Hallucinogens, like Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD)
- Cannabis, e.g. marijuana/hashish/Indian hemp/wee-wee, etc.
- Anabolic steroids (drugs used for weight gain and corrective tissue disorder).
- Inhalants, e.g. solvents, glues, tube repair solution, perfumes, petrol, etc.

Some drugs and substances put users to sleep; while others wake the users up thereby posing danger to human life in general. Drug use behavior has been divided into stages. In the Oxford Handbook of Criminology, Maguire, Morgan and Reuner (2012) identified five drug use behaviors – experimental, functional, dysfunctional, dependent and continued. On the one hand, the experimental use depicts occasional, curious short term trial of one or more drugs, on the other hand, functional use represent use that serves some purpose, e.g., recreation but one does not cause problems for the user. As the name implies, dysfunctional use leads to impaired psychological or social functioning, harmful use that causes damage to the user's physical or mental health. Dependent use involves tolerance and/or withdrawal symptoms if use is ceased while continued use represents the extreme and compulsive use behavior that signals addictive tendencies. Similarly, other scholars have summarized drug and substance use behaviors as follows:

Experimental Drug/Substance Use

Experimental drug/substance use is defined as the occasional, short-term trial of one or more drugs. The individual user simply feels curious about drug effects or wants to experience new feeling states. After giving the drugs a few trials in the company of some drug-experiencing friends or acquaintances; the individual never uses the drugs again (Maguire, Morgan & Reuner, 2012).

Recreational Drug/Substance Use

Recreational drug/substance use involves the use of drugs for the purpose of having a good time at a party with friends/acquaintances. Such drug users are like social drinkers. Compared to experimental users, recreational users are more knowledgeable about drug effects and use drugs more often but they do not escalate to uncontrolled use (Maguire, Morgan & Reuner, 2012).

Situational Drug/Substance Use

Situational drug/substance use refers to the use of a drug for coping with a specific situation. Students may utilize stimulants to keep alert for exams, Long Distance Drivers (LDDs) use similar drugs (e.g. *gadagi*) to stay awake, soldiers may rely on drugs to relieve stress in combat situations, athletes may resort to drugs as a means of improving performance, house wives may take sedatives/tranquilizers to deal with their boredom, tension, anxiety or sleeplessness (Maguire, Morgan & Reuner, 2012).

Intensified Drug/Substance Use

Intensified drug/substance use is the outcome of drug-use escalation among a small minority of 2 – 3 users above. As intensified users, individuals ingest/take drugs every day in order to seek relief from persistent problems, but they are still capable of functioning normally in their social and economic lives (Maguire, Morgan & Reuner, 2012).

Compulsive Drug/Substance Use

Compulsive drug/substance use represents the involvement with drugs. Such users have developed a psychological dependence on the drug/substance; drug use has become a dominant factor in their lives such that failure to take the drug/substance will expose compulsive users to experience withdrawal sickness and/or symptoms (Maguire, Morgan & Reuner, 2012).

Drug abuse refers to an unusual, wrong and excessive use of substances; the excessive and persistent self-administration of a drug without recourse to the medically or culturally accepted pattern (NAFDAC, 2000). As such, taking a drug that alters mood and perception without medical prescription or advice denotes drug abuse (Stevens and Smith, 2001). It occurs when a drug is taken without medical prescription or advice; and when socially acceptable drugs are taken in excess, e.g. Kolanut, alcohol, cigarette or local substances and when legally banned drugs are possessed or misused. A drug is abused when its usage is socially and medically disapproved. Usually, drug and substance abuse typically begins in adolescence when tendencies toward risk-taking behaviors occur and movement towards independence increases reliance on the peer group (Stevens and Smith, 2001, p. 93).

4. The Causes and Implications of Drug/Substance Abuse

The causes of drug/substance use and abuse are complex involving many issues some of which are situated within or revolve around the individual, some of which are external to the individual and are situated within the society or the environment where the individual resides. As such there are many factors that predisposes youth to drug/substance abuse in all human societies. The factors include poverty, unchecked unemployment/joblessness/idleness, broken homes/inadequate parental supervision, enticement, curiosity, influence of peer group, influence of politicians, availability and easy access, and so on (Dukku, 2012). Some youth may be influenced by a single factor, while some by two or more factors depending on the circumstances.

Sociologically, both conforming and deviant substance use are explained as products of the general social structure and culture, and the immediate groups and social situations with which individuals are confronted. In line with this argument, the World Health Organization (WHO) (Awake, 2003, p. 3) presents five basic reasons why young ones might be drawn to drug abuse:

i. They want to feel grown up and make their own decisions;
ii. They want to fit in;
iii. They want to relax and feel good;
iv. They want to take risks and rebel; and
v. They want to satisfy their curiosity.

Among several factors, drug availability and peer pressure increase the likelihood that a youth will begin the self-destructive behavior. Parents are usually regarded as the first line of defense in the war against drug abuse; serving as the most important factor in protecting young ones from substance abuse (Radda, 2010). By far, they remain a pillar and a source of example and information for the youth. Unfortunately, not all parents take up that challenge (Awake, 2003, p. 4). Uzoka (1992) had amplified the following as some of the predisposing factors that can lead to drug abuse:

i. Peer group influence characterized by the desire to be accepted among friends or in social cycles;
ii. Social pathologies such as unemployment, economic frustration, etc.;
iii. Emotional and psychological stress characterized by anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, etc.;
iv. The desire to achieve success in a competitive world;
v. Warped (materialistic) value system in the society such as the craze to get-rich-quick;
vi. Easy availability of the substances;
vii. Environmental influence from family (broken homes), school, workplace, neighborhood or community, weather/climate; and
viii. Adverts in the mass media and government policies.

Similar to the complexity of the causal factors, the consequences that come along with drug and substance abuse are unquantifiable across all spheres of human life. It has broad implications to the abusers, to the immediate family of drug users and to the larger society. They are enormous and emerge, largely, as a result of behavior modifications influenced by drugs and substances. Among the broad consequences are the following (Mohammed & Madaki, 2010; Luqman, 2010; Madaki, 2002):

- Loss of money/poverty
- Drowsiness/relaxation
- Nervousness/restlessness
- Severe abdominal cramps
- Watery & dry eyes/nasal discharge
- Perceptual distortions/psychological discomfort
- Political thuggery/gang life
- Emotional imbalance/mental illness
- Low intelligence/low performance/memory loss
- Violent behavior/crime/accidents
- Blockage of meaningful use of time, energy and creative thinking
- Waste of talents and skills
- Eroded self-discipline/motivation
- Decline in productivity
- Destruction of a person's ambition to become great;
- Rendering users hopeless and unproductive.
- Health risks – that include headache, stomach ache, vision loss, hearing loss, high blood pressure, decrease appetite, insomnia, increased mental activity, brain damage, and even death.

5. The Way Forward

Societies and other stakeholders, at different points in time, have initiated efforts aimed at preventing youth from getting involved into unwanted behaviors and/or violations. With regard to drug and substance abuse, the following abridged measures are thought to be worthy of experimenting and are put forward:

1. The need to have a rethink and self-evaluation on the part of members of the society by critically reflecting on the position of the youth thereby recognizing potentials, competence and rewarding excellence in form of:
   - Scholarship (funding education opportunities)
   - Motivation
   - Mentoring,
   - Employment & empowering opportunities, etc.
2. Government, NGOs, CBOs and other stakeholders should urgently come up with genuine and functional employment opportunities, initiatives and programs. And advocate for and organize drug zero-tolerance campaigns in schools and out-of-school focal points.
3. Traditional institutions should reactivate their critical place as the custodians of the cherished norms and cultural values (align with honesty, transparency, positive perception, etc.).
4. The establishment of viable vocational training centers for the teaming population of youth (including the drug dependents).
5. The *Ulaama* and other FBOs should scale up their moral teachings practically, approximate towards

teaching others to learn to live in peace amidst diversity in order to minimize non-conformity.

6. Parents should stand up to their primary socialization responsibilities especially ensuring the aspect of entrenching good moral training in children.
7. Law enforcement agents are expected to live up to their expectations by ensuring violations are met with sanctions – selling, distribution and use and punishing other drug abuse promoters should be real.
8. Creating professionally-oriented guidance and counseling centers for drug addicts to facilitate rehabilitation and reform.
9. Advocacy for and organizing drug zero-tolerance campaigns in schools and out-of-schools by governments, NGOs, CBOs, FBOs and other stakeholders.
10. Creating professionally-oriented guidance and counseling centers for drug users to facilitate effective rehabilitation and reform of those already trapped.

6. Conclusion

Studying the youth and youth life is an ongoing endeavor that attracts serious attention especially with the contrasting social realities of growing potentials and prospects and the enormous problems confronting the youth. The youth have achieved great accomplishments in terms of educational pursuits, access to the internet and other ICT services yet are dwarfed by unemployment, poverty, insecurity, crime/deviance and drug and substance abuse among others. Achieving greater heights in ensuring sustainable productivity, democracy, creative and secure society, calls for the engagement of the youth for their innovativeness and dynamism. To achieve this, the problems youth face, particularly, drug/substance use and abuse, unemployment/poverty, thuggery/gang life, traffic rule violations, weapons possessing and carrying, among others, require urgent society's critical reflection on the position of the youth. Government, NGOs, CBOs should create more genuine employment opportunities, the traditional institutions, the *Ulaama*, parents and the law enforcement agents are not spared out of the multi-faceted approach of setting the youth free of captivity and dilemma.

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