

ALCOHOL AND DRUG USAGE AMONG ADOLESCENT STUDENTS: A CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM IN NIGERIA

By

AMADI STELLA

Stellaamadi@gmail.com

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt.

Abstract

This paper examined the trends of students (adolescence) involvement in alcoholism and other forms of drug abuses and the effects on adolescents' education and as a contemporary social problem in Nigeria. Alcohol and drugs amongst adolescents have become a daunting menace in Nigeria. Noteworthy, adolescents learn how to adapt to society swiftly and that aberrant behaviour of consuming alcohol and drugs may lead to problems with conformity to societal cultures, tradition, values and norms. This study aims at examining the effects alcohol and drugs on adolescent's education as a social problem in Nigeria, and identify main strategies to combat the issues as it has become critical in society. The paper explicated basic concepts such as drugs, drug abuse, adolescence and adolescent. It also identified various forms/types of drug/substances students abuse, reasons why they indulge in it and the consequences of it to the individual, family community and the society at large. the paper identified and discuss negative effects of drug abuse to the individual, family school, community and the society. It also pointed out that drug abuse affects the social, academic, cultural, political and educational life of the victim if not [promptly and properly handled. The paper suggested among other things that; Compulsory courses on drugs/substance intake, abuse and health implications should be introduced in all levels of education including primary education. This would, to a large extent, inculcate in the learners, basic knowledge of drugs intake and abstinence methods which could be of great health security to youths and that health surveillance teams should be constituted in all institutions to monitors students' social activities in relation to what they take, where they visit and how they behave; students suspected to be involved in drug abuse should be followed up with rehabilitation methods

Introduction

In recent times, alcohol and drugs have commonly been abused by adolescents, alcohol and drug abuse varies between different age groups, the younger teeming adolescents tend to tilt towards inhaling of substances ranging from house hold items to cleaning agents and alcoholic drinks that could easily be found in one's immediate environment at any given time. The older teenagers tend to take marijuana, alcohol mixed with various substances and cough syrups, and they tend to explore in respect of discovering new illegal drugs and alcohol that would make them

'high' in morale. Generally, adolescence entails a series of challenges for everyone, for some, those challenges can quickly change from conquerable to overpowering, once adolescents enter secondary school, they are bombarded with the pressures of maintaining excellent academic grades, engaging in extra-curricular activities, getting ready for college, choosing career paths, having a social life, and figuring out what they want to do for the rest of their lives, facing peer pressure and ridicule from peers, enormous amounts of pressure from parents or academic advisors and the society at large.

Sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria, are confronted with a high prevalence of alcohol use. Evidence from the 2016 Global burden of disease study estimated that Nigeria was one of the countries with the highest prevalence of current alcohol use among adults 15 years and older in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), 40 to 59.9% at a population level, for both males and females (GBD, 2016). In the United States, one in four individuals between the ages of 12 and 20 drinks alcohol on a monthly basis, and a similar proportion of 12th graders consumes five or more drinks in a row at least once every two weeks (Newes-Adeyi, Chen, Williams, & Faden, 2007). In Nigeria, adolescents are mostly exposed to drugs through peer pressure and influence. Albeit, there are numerous literatures about adolescents' consumption of alcohol, other substances (drugs) and their effects. However, no study has succinctly answered the looming question of why the consumption of alcohol and drugs of adolescent consumption has not been treated as a major social problem in Nigeria. Noteworthy, the consumption of alcohol and drugs are major determinants of how the social system (interactions and interrelationship) works and its effect on the society. Supporting this view, Zeigler et al., (2004) stated that, alcohol consumption could be an important determinant of how much a high school student learns without having a strong impact on his or her decision to stay in school or attend college he further noted that the question is fundamental and timely, given recent research showing that underage drinkers are susceptible to the immediate consequences of alcohol use, including blackouts, hangovers, and alcohol poisoning, and are at elevated risk of neurodegeneration (particularly in regions of the brain responsible for learning and memory), impairments in functional brain activity, and neurocognitive defects. To drive the objective of the paper home, it is systematically approached in subheadings as follows:

Concept of Adolescent

Human development is in stages. The stage where the child develops to becoming an adult; the transition from childhood to adulthood is called adolescence. It is a period that represents a unique stage in every person's development circle. It is a period when rapid physiological and psychological changes occur in an individual with serious demands for new social roles to take place (Ogena, 2004). The adolescent, due to these changes, often face a number of social challenges and dilemmas which include where to go, what to do, who to associate with, and what to take (including alcohol and other related substances/drugs). It is the period when the child moves from dependency to relatively autonomous in decision making about his/her social life. It demands significant adjustment to the physical and social changes (Csikszentmihalyi, 2023). In most cases, such individuals, who are sometimes desperate, settle for alcohol and other substances without

expertise guidance, thereby resulting in abuses. One who has experienced adolescence is called adolescent. An adolescent is a person who is in adolescence period; someone who has reached puberty but is not yet an adult (Deeksha, Nd.).

Concept of Substance Abuse

Man, consciously or unconsciously, takes drugs every day through what he takes in as food, drink or herbs. Thus, man by default lives by drugs. However, through science and technology, herbs, roots and liquid substances from plants are pounded and processed into drugs/substances; used as medication on man for treatment of different diseases, ailments and for enhancement of the body system. The use of drugs in itself does not constitute any danger, because drugs correctly administered have been a blessing to man. Natasha, (2023) viewed that chronic use of substances can cause serious, sometimes irreversible damage to adolescents physical and psychological development. The use of drugs could be beneficial or harmful depending on the mode of use. The arbitrary use of drug/substances without expertise input and guidance is called drug abuse. Drug abuse or substance abuse also refers to the use of certain chemicals for the purpose of creating pleasurable effects on the brain (Mandal, 2023). Drug refers to a substance that could bring about a change in the biological function through its chemical actions. It is also considered as a substance that modifies perceptions, cognition, mood, behaviour and general body functions. They could thus, be considered as chemical modifiers of the living tissues that could bring about physiological and behavioural changes (Natasha, 2023)

Adolescent Students and Substance Abuse

One of the concerns of the international community on health is drug control. This is largely due to the degree of drug/substance abuse engaged in by youths, especially adolescents. The world in general and Nigeria in particular, acknowledges the fact that drug/substance abuse, especially, the use of alcohol and other drugs that are inhaled, amongst adolescents have become a major challenge, not only at homes, public places and worship centres but also in the school system. This inhibits successful implementation of education policies and the attainment of set goals. Since the 1970s, several approaches have been adopted to educate youths on the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. Traditionally, education on control of substance abuse, particularly alcohol, has been on ground through conscious dissemination of information on the negative effect of such substances on human health, including the social, and legal consequences of it. Contemporary approaches include social resistance and competence-enhancement programmes, which focus less on didactic instruction but more on interactive-skills training techniques. The most promising contemporary approaches are conceptualized within a theoretical framework based on the etiology of drug abuse and have been subjected to empirical testing using appropriate research methods. Contemporary programs are typically categorized into one of three types: (1) universal programmes focus on the general population, such as all students in a particular school; (2) selective programmes target high-risk groups, such as poor school achievers; and (3) indicated programmes designed for youth already experimenting with drugs or engaging in other high-risk behaviours. All these point to the

fact that, students, who are majorly adolescent, are deeply into substance abuse, even in schools. students are into smoking, sniffing, inhaling, injecting and drinking of substances that are dangerous to their health and cognitive system. Brown, Tapert, Granholm, and Delis (2000) noted that; students at both secondary and tertiary levels of education are neck-deep into indiscriminate use of drugs/substances, such as drinking of alcohol smoking of marijuana/cigarettes, sniffing of cocaine/heroin and other related substances which may have negative effects on the physical development of brain structure and thus, their social and academic behaviour.

Students (adolescents) see drinking of alcohol as a new normal and therefore tend to take any form of alcohol readily available for their consumption because they are easily accessible even in school environments (Mesic, Ramadani, Zunic, Skopljak, Pasagic, & Masic, 2013). In Africa, alcohol is a major part of several social gatherings and events, it is also integrated into the cultural life and activities of the people. Furthermore, the sale of alcohol in Nigeria is regulated but not checkmated; hence, anyone could walk up to store buy and drink with ease.

Types of Drugs Commonly Used by Students (Adolescents)

Drug abuse and addiction are two of the most prominent problems in many countries in transition, including Nigeria. Age limit of drug users and addicts has shifted to the younger age groups, especially in troubling manner; the increase in number of injection drug users is also becoming alarming while drinking drugs has escalated due to the near negligence attached to it because of cultural attachment. However, Patterson (2023) stated that, students take assorted drugs which include but not restricted to; Cocaine, Saviva, MDMA, popularly known as ecstasy pills, Opium, Hallucinogens, Crystal Meth, Tranquilizers, Sedatives, Cough Syrups, Cow dung, Lizard Dung, Human Faeces, Prescribed pain killers, Synthetic Marijuana, Marijuana generally referred to in Nigeria as Igbo, weed and kush, Indian Hemp, Amphetamines, Mixtures of candy and soda, Inhaling substances (such as fumes of household cleaners, glues, or pens). Students take these at deferent degrees.

Reasons why adolescents take alcohol and drugs

Adolescents engage in drug abuse for several reasons as they vary from one another in values orientation and interest. Zimmer (nd); O'Connell, Boat and Warner (2009); Patterson (2023) identified several reasons why students engage in substance abuse. Some these reasons include;

To fit in/Peer pressure: Most adolescents start utilizing drugs at a tender age because their peers are doing using them or they feel left out cause they others are doing it (taking drugs) and consequently they fear not being accepted in a social circle, worthy of note is the fact that when adolescents' best friends offer them drugs, it is very unlikely that they will reject it.

Self-Medication and Escape (A bid to feel better): It is not uncommon and unfounded for mental health symptoms to begin to make an appearance during adolescence, most times at this stage, development, grasping the harshness and sad realities of adulthood which isn't particularly early

easy as anticipated comes to play in form of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, stress-related disorders, physical pain and other forms of mental health disorders, as a corollary, In an attempt to cope with these sad realities and lessen the feelings of distress they are experiencing, they tend to begin using drugs as a coping mechanism, it helps them minimize the pains, symptoms and also numb out.

Experimentation: Adolescence is a naturally curious phase in human development this is when kids grow into teenagers. they are often motivated to explore new experiences/horizons especially those they perceive will be thrilling or daring, at this stage, adolescents also tend to seek out drugs just to know what the sensations of being inebriated feels like, unfortunately, they are not fully abreast with the dangers involved in what they are experimenting on.

To feel good: When adolescents abuse drugs, these drugs consequently tend to interact with the neurochemistry of their brains to produce euphoria/toxins/feeling/highness of pleasure, furthermore, the intensity of the euphoria differs in respect of the type of drug, how it is used and the quantity that is consumed.

Performance Improvement: Today's society has become an extensively competitive one, ranging from technological discoveries, inventions, exploration, blasting academic grades, quest to make name become famous, quest to perform excellently athletically, general societal pressures and other forms of extra-curricular activities, lots of adolescents consequently turn to drugs either illegal or prescription stimulants because they feel that those substances will enhance and aid their performance stimulants in order to meet the expectations of their parents, teachers, coaches and the world at large.

To Feel Grown Up: Adolescents want to feel grown-up, which is utterly understandable, the idea of being an adult is new and exciting, and being able to drink, smoke cigarettes, or use illicit and harmful drugs is also exciting for many teens, consequently, they tend to venture into drugs.

Effects of Substance abuse on Adolescents

Abuse of drugs has always been a major issue in any civilized society because of the negative lasting and devastating effect it leaves not just on the abuser but on the entire society. The situation becomes more critical and more troublesome when young people get involved with the use and abuse of lethal drugs that misdirect their future as their physical, mental and social life could be altered. Zaheer (2021) stated that, abuse of substance can affect the abuser psychologically, emotionally, mentally, medically, physically, and socially, especially on adolescents. The scholar listed the following areas of effect to include; damage of mental health, damage of self-esteem, foster ddepression, anxiety, stress-related disorders, physical pain and engaging in risky adventures. A child who is negatively affected in all these areas can hardly be comfortable in school and academic activities. Such a child is most likely to be a liability in society. The effect may vary from one person to another and from one level of abuse to another. This can be explained in line with the type of abuse.

Alcohol

The negative consequences of student alcohol use span well beyond the parameters of the school environment and affects adolescents, and the society at large. Alcohol is associated with increased absenteeism from class and poor academic performance, which results in a lower grade point average. The majority of injuries, accidents, vandalism, sexual assaults and rape, fighting, and other crime in schools, are linked to alcohol and other drug use. Unplanned and uninhibited sexual behavior may lead to pregnancy and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Alcohol use can be associated with injury and death from drinking and driving, alcohol poisoning, and suicide.

Other Substances (Drugs)

By their nature, illicit drugs do not carry a legal age for purchase, consumption, or distribution. Therefore, schools must address the problem somewhat differently than they do alcohol. Students are entering higher education with increased exposure to drugs, which predisposes them to substance dependency. Illicit drug use factors into tragedies that include rape, overdose, vandalism, violence, and death. Memory loss, diminished concentration and attention, increased absenteeism, impaired academic performance, and physical illness are also associated with drug use (Zaheer, 2021).

Secondhand Effects

The secondhand effects of substance use in schools amongst adolescents are often overlooked and underappreciated for the deleterious effects they may have on students and the quality of their collegiate experience. Students who abstain, use legally, or in moderation often suffer secondhand effects from the behaviors of students that use substances in excess. Nonbinding and abstaining students may become the targets of insults and arguments, physical assaults, unwanted sexual advances, vandalism, and humiliation (Patterson, 2023). Sleep deprivation and study interruption results when these students find themselves caring for intoxicated students. Passive smoke is associated with life-threatening health risks, and smoking within residence halls places people at risk due to fire.

Consequences of adolescence alcohol and drug abuse

Adolescents who often use drugs and consume alcohol experience arrays of mental, social, academical and health-related problems, consequently, the effect goes beyond the adolescent involved but also the family members, the community, and the society at large, below are diverse consequences of

Academics

Declining grades, absenteeism from school and other activities, and increased potential for dropping out of school are problems associated with adolescent substance abuse. Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller (1992) cite research indicating that a low level of commitment to education and higher truancy rates appear to be related to substance use among adolescents. Cognitive and behavioral problems experienced by alcohol- and drug-using youth may interfere with their academic performance and also present obstacles to learning for their classmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992).

Physical health

Injuries due to accidents (such as car accidents), physical disabilities and diseases, and the effects of possible overdoses are among the health-related consequences of teenage substance abuse. Disproportionate numbers of youth involved with alcohol and other drugs face an increased risk of death through suicide, homicide, accident, and illness.

The Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN,) study in a representative sample of hospitals throughout the United States -- reports trends in people seeking emergency department treatment related to illegal drug use or nonmedical use of legal drugs. Preliminary 1994 estimates indicate drug-related emergency department episodes for youth ages 12 to 17 increased by 17 percent from 1993 to 1994. This increase was greater than for any of the older age groups reported. Significantly, emergency department visits related to marijuana/hashish for youth ages 12 to 17 increased 50 percent between 1993 and 1994 (McCaig, 1995). Ninety-one youth between the ages of 12 and 17 died of drug abuse in 1993 (Office of Applied Studies, 1994).

Transmission of HIV/AIDS primarily occurs through exposure to body fluids of an infected person during sexual contact or through sharing of unsterile drug-injection equipment. Another primary means of transmission is from mothers to infants during pregnancy or the birth process. Many substance-abusing youth engage in behavior that places them at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. This may include the actual use of psychoactive substances (particularly those that are injected) or behavior resulting from poor judgment and impulse control while experiencing the effects of mood-altering substances. Rates of AIDS diagnoses currently are relatively low among teenagers, compared with most other age groups. However, because the disease has a long latency period before symptoms appear, it is likely that many young adults with AIDS were actually infected with HIV as adolescents.

Although alcohol-related traffic fatalities for youth have declined, young people are still overrepresented in this area. In 1995 alone, more than 2,000 youth (ages 15 to 20) were killed in alcohol-related car crashes (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1997).

These limited examples illustrate the catastrophic health-related consequences of substance abuse among adolescents. Besides personal and family distress, additional healthcare costs and loss of future productivity place burdens on the community.

Mental health

Mental health problems such as depression, developmental lags, apathy, withdrawal, and other psychosocial dysfunctions frequently are linked to substance abuse among adolescents. Substance-abusing youth are at higher risk than nonusers for mental health problems, including depression, conduct problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and suicide. Marijuana use, which is prevalent among youth, has been shown to interfere with short-term memory, learning, and psychomotor skills. Motivation and psychosexual/emotional development also may be influenced (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992).

Peers

Substance-abusing youth often are alienated from and stigmatized by their peers. Adolescents using alcohol and other drugs also often disengage from school and community activities, depriving their peers and communities of the positive contributions they might otherwise have made.

Delinquency

There is an undeniable link between substance abuse and delinquency. Arrest, adjudication, and intervention by the juvenile justice system are eventual consequences for many youth engaged in alcohol and other drug use. It cannot be claimed that substance abuse causes delinquent behavior or delinquency causes alcohol and other drug use. However, the two behaviors are strongly correlated and often bring about school and family problems, involvement with negative peer groups, a lack of neighborhood social controls, and physical or sexual abuse (Hawkins et al., 1987; Wilson and Howell, 1993). Possession and use of alcohol and other drugs are illegal for all youth. Beyond that, however, there is strong evidence of an association between alcohol and other drug use and delinquent behavior of juveniles. Substance abuse is associated with both violent and income-generating crimes by youth. This increases fear among community residents and the demand for juvenile and criminal justice services, thus increasing the burden on these resources. Gangs, drug trafficking, prostitution, and growing numbers of youth homicides are among the social and criminal justice problems often linked to adolescent substance abuse.

Effect of Substance/drugs Abuse by Adolescents on the Society

The effect of substances abuse transcend the individual life to the society. When such happens, the effect could be far reaching because of scope. The effect could be explained in line with the family factor, the peer factor and the societal factor.

Families

In addition to personal adversities, the abuse of alcohol and other drugs by youth may result in family crises and jeopardize many aspects of family life, sometimes resulting in family dysfunction. Both siblings and parents are profoundly affected by alcohol- and drug-involved youth (Nowinski, 1990). Substance abuse can drain a family's financial and emotional resources (Natasha, 2023).

Social and economic consequences

The social and economic costs related to youth substance abuse are high. They result from the financial losses and distress suffered by alcohol- and drug-related crime victims, increased burdens for the support of adolescents and young adults who are not able to become self-supporting, and greater demands for medical and other treatment services for these youth (Gropper, 1985).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Substance intake such as alcohol consumption and arbitrary use of drugs are agents of social malady that need immediate and utmost attention to prevent teenagers from doing harm to themselves or other people and the society at large. Alcohol and drug use amongst adolescents is not a school-centered problem but one that impacts the entire society. To effect changes, schools need to acknowledge the need to form committees and coalitions, comprising administrators, students, parents, faculties, alumni, campus organizations, governmental and law enforcement agencies, and the community. By activating multiple, campus-wide policies, campus leaders ensure that initiatives span all facets of the institution.

Schools are tightening regulations, strengthening academic requirements, adjusting course scheduling, and offering extended hours for library and recreational facilities, while providing alternative alcohol-free campus-sponsored activities. Schools are withdrawing endorsement of alcohol and drug industry advertising on campus and establishing substance-free residences. By targeting social groups such as fraternities and sororities for programming and monitoring of policy compliance, schools are attempting to further shape the social climate. Novel disciplinary actions exhibit the decisive consequences of such behaviours, provide support services, and offer mandatory alcohol or drug assessment with the possible introduction of counseling services which could go a long way curbing the devastating effects and consequences of substance abuse among adolescents.

Suggestions for Curbing the Trend of Substance Abuse

The following are ways of curbing adolescents' intake and abuse of substances;

1. Compulsory courses on drugs/substance intake, abuse and health implications should be introduced in all levels of education including primary education. This would, to a large extent,

inculcate in the learners, basic knowledge of drugs intake and abstinence methods which could be of great health security to youths.

2. Health surveillance teams should be constituted in all institutions to monitor students' social activities in relation to what they take, where they visit and how they behave; students suspected to be involved in drug abuse should be followed up with rehabilitation methods. This could prevent potential victims from indulging in such experiences and save others from social oblivion.
3. Guidance Counselling services should be made compulsory in all institutions of learning and should be made functional with qualified personnel. This could help pull out some possible victims from falling for it.
4. Rehabilitation centres should be attached to every higher institution of learning for accommodation and rehabilitation of victims. Students knowing and understanding that victims of drug abuse are real and it could be anybody; would help to checkmate students' involvement in it.

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