



Drug Abuse in Nigerian Schools: A Study of Selected Secondary Institutions in Bayelsa State, South-South, Nigeria

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Abstract

Drug abuse is becoming increasingly problematic in Nigeria. A number of recent studies suggest that almost all Nigerian youth experiment with drugs at some point, particularly alcohol and nicotine. The foremost concern is the number of these youth that will form an addiction to serious substances, jeopardizing their own health and safety and creating difficulties for their families and the public at large. Drug use, it is widely accepted, has negative consequences for the academic, social, psychological and physical development of users. This study aims to explore the perceptions of public secondary school students around drugs and substance abuse and how these perceptions influence their behaviours. This study was carried out in four secondary schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings of this study reveal that the perceptions the students with regards to drugs and substance abuse contributed considerably to their behaviour on these issues.

Keywords: Drugs, Perceptions of Drugs, Secondary School Students, Institutions, Bayelsa, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

According to a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Report (2005), some 200 million people, or 5 percent of the world's population aged 15 - 64 have used drugs at least once in the last 12 months – 15 million more than the previous year's estimate. Likewise, according to the World Drug Report (2005), the use of illicit drugs in all nations has increased in recent years. The report goes on to note that the increasing availability of a variety of drugs to an ever widening socio-economic spectrum of consumers is disconcerting, although the main problem at the global level continues to be opiates (notably heroine) followed by cocaine. For most of Europe and Asia, opiates accounted for 62 percent of all drug treatment sought in 2003. While 3.3 to 4.1 per cent of the global population admits to consuming drugs, the most worrisome trend for the UNDCP Executive Director is the younger and younger ages at

which people are becoming addicted. In Pakistan for example, the share of those who started heroine use at 15-20 years of age has doubled to almost 24 percent. A survey in the Czech Republic showed that 37 percent of new drug users were teenagers between 15 and 19 years old. In Egypt, drug use - in particular heroin use - is becoming a serious problem and nearly 6 percent of secondary school students admit to having experimented with drugs.

Drug abuse has a negative impact on the education of secondary school students. The overall health of the user is affected negatively and behaviours associated with drug abuse predispose the abuser to crime and contagious diseases including HIV/AIDS (CDC, 2000). Drug abuse has thus become a national concern in Nigeria, given its impacts on education and future leadership, innovations and human resources. Secondary school students are particularly at risk given that they are in their formative years of education, career development, social skills and identity formation.

Reports from education officials in Bayelsa State suggest that students are using alcohol and nicotine, in particular, at a rate that is causing concern. Despite National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and other organization-based interventions, drug abuse is on the rise with over 40% of students abusing various types of drugs. Drug abuse appears to be a well-entrenched behaviour among secondary school students. In shopping centres and other public spaces, students who have dropped out of school because of drug abuse, can be found loitering and participating in other forms of criminal activity. Given the availability, consequences and increasing use of drugs in Nigeria, it is important to establish students' perception of drugs and substance abuse and how these perceptions influence their behaviour when it comes to drugs and drug users. It is against this background that the current study was undertaken. This study seeks to establish student perceptions of the drug problem and to critically analyze strategies used to address the problem.

Objectives of the Study

The overall purposes of this study are to assess drug abuse among students in secondary schools in Nigeria, assess student perceptions of drugs and drug abuse, and analyze the strategies used to address the problem. This study aspires to contribute to the knowledge and understanding needed to ultimately help decrease drug abuse among students.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- (a) Examine the causes and extent of drug abuse among secondary school students;
- (b) Identify commonly abused drugs among secondary school students;
- (c) Identify student perception of drugs and substance abuse;
- (d) Identify and evaluate strategies used in secondary schools to address drug abuse and the effectiveness and shortcomings of these strategies; and
- (e) Identify new strategies that may help to decrease drug abuse in secondary schools.

Operational Definition of Key Terms

Drug: Any product other than food or water that affects the way people feel, think, see, and behave. It is a substance that, due to its chemical nature, affects physical, mental and emotional functioning. It can enter the body through chewing, inhaling, smoking, drinking, rubbing on the skin, or injection.

Drug abuse: Use of drugs for non-medical purposes. Drug abuse refers to the misuse of any psychotropic substances resulting in changes in bodily functions, thus affecting the individual socially, cognitively or physically. Social effects may be reflected in an individual's enhanced tendency to engage in conflicts with friends, teachers, and other school authorities. Cognitive effects can be seen in the individual's lack of concentration on academic work and memory loss (Eysenck, 2002).

Drug addiction: Addiction to drugs or alcohol means that a person's body can no longer function without these substances. An addicted person may show a decline in academic performance, frequently fail to attend classes, lose interest in school work and display weakened motor coordination, poor health, and a lack of interest in old friendships.

Addiction by its nature distorts thinking processes giving prominence to thoughts, which justify the addictive behaviour and minimize or exclude thoughts about ceasing the behaviour (Miller, 2002; Diclemente, 2006).

Drug related problems: This term is used to describe all the negative effects associated with drug abuse including ill health, violence, conflicts with friends or school authorities, destruction of school property and academic underperformance.

Illegal/legal drugs: In this study illegal drugs refer to the substances deemed harmful to the mental and physical wellbeing of the individual by the government who seeks to control or discourage consumption by law. Legal drugs refer to those such as alcohol and tobacco that are potentially dangerous but whose consumption the government allows.

Intervention: Attempts to help drug users positively modify their behaviour and change their attitude towards the misuse of drugs are referred to as interventions. These can include activities and programmes put in place to address or end drug abuse.

Prevention: Prevention is best understood when explained in its totality which includes three levels of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary prevention involves preventing the initiation of psychoactive substance use or delaying the age at which use begins (UNICEF & WHO, 2006). Secondary prevention is intervention aimed at individuals in the early stages of psychoactive substance use. The goal here is to prevent substance abuse from becoming a problem thereby limiting the degree of damage to the individual (Rossi, 2000). Tertiary prevention aims to end dependence and minimize problems resulting from use/abuse. This type of prevention strives to enable the individual to achieve and maintain improved levels of functioning and health. Tertiary prevention is sometimes called rehabilitation or relapse prevention (UNICEF & WHO, 2006). For the purposes of this study, prevention will refer to educational activities, programmes or policies aimed at enabling young people to stay healthy and productive and inhabit an environment free from drug abuse (primary prevention). It also refers to the education of young people about the effects of substance abuse with the intention of preventing their use/abuse and enabling them to make informed decisions when faced with offers of illegal substances.

Protective factors/risk factors: Research has shown that in order to prevent substance abuse, two things must happen (O'Malley, et al., 2001) factors that increase the risk of the problem must be identified, and ways to reduce the impact of those factors must be developed.

Factors that help to prevent substance abuse are called protective factors and those that contribute to or increase the risk of abuse are called risk factors. Knowledge of these various factors can help those in drug prevention to better understand the dynamics of drug use and to develop strategies that will enhance the protective factors while minimizing the risk factors.

Psychoactive Substance: Refers to any substance that when taken can modify perception, mood, cognition, behaviour, or motor functions (UNICEF & WHO, 2006).

Strategies: This term refers to the methods or approaches that schools have put in place to address drug related problems.

Substance abuse: Refers to the use of all chemicals, drugs and industrial solvents that can produce dependence (psychological and physical) (Cheryl & Gert, 2003). It can also refer to repeated non-medical use of potentially addictive chemical and organic substances. According to UNICEF and WHO (2006), substance abuse includes the use of chemicals in excess of normally prescribed treatment dosage and frequency, even with knowledge that they may cause serious problems and eventually lead to addiction.

Youth: Refers to young people between 13 and 25 years of age or their activities and their characteristics. The majority of students in Nigerian secondary schools are between 13 and 19 years, a stage referred to as adolescence. The term youth therefore includes this age bracket of students.

Drugs and Substance Abuse

Drugs are substances which when introduced into the body will alter the normal biological and psychological functioning of the body, especially the central nervous system (Escandon & Galvez, 2006). The term 'drug' in a general sense includes all substances that can alter brain functions and create dependence. UNICEF and the World Health Organisation (2006) defines drug abuse as the self-administration of any drug in a manner that diverts from approved medical or social patterns within a given culture. Legal or licit drugs and substances are socially accepted and their use does not constitute any criminal offence. In Nigeria, these include alcohol and nicotine. Drug abuse among students is dominated by the use of these legal drugs and substances. Among the illegal drugs commonly used by students are cannabis, ecstasy, heroine, mandrax and lysergic acid diethylamide (NAFDAC, 2004).

Prescription and over the counter drugs are abused when taken without the specified medical condition and/or proper prescription. Some of these drugs can be mood elevators, pain killers or antidepressants. Prescription drugs include pain killers with codeine, *phenorbaritone*, valium, *piriton* and sleep control drugs. A study by Rew (2005) found that these psychoactive substances can produce feelings of surplus energy, euphoria, stimulation, depression, relaxation, hallucinations, a temporary feeling of well being, drowsiness and sleepiness. Their misuse often leads to physical or physiological addiction.

Drug abuse by students in western countries is also alarming (Portner, 1998). The United States, one of the world's largest markets and a country that sets standards for many other countries, has experienced a notable recent increase in marijuana use. This has influenced the decisions of students from other countries in terms of drug use. Many American films and magazines with young audiences sensationalize drug use. This portrayal of drugs can be highly deceiving, making youth in America and elsewhere more vulnerable to drug addiction. A report by NAFDAC (2008) noted that the abuse of licit and illicit drugs is forming a student sub-culture in Nigeria. This development is a significant concern for Nigerian society and immediate attention is required. When a drug is abused it causes injury to the brain and often irreversible alterations in the central nervous systems. When psychoactive substances destroy several thousand neurons, the consequences are fatal and a number of students have died from drug overdoses.

Types of Drugs and Substance Abused by Students

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (2000), alcohol is the most abused psychoactive drug in the United States with approximately 90% of students using it before they leave high school. In Nigeria a report by NAFDAC (2008) found that alcohol is also the most commonly abused drug with about 61% of the population engaging in its use. The same report indicated that 40.9% of students were abusing alcohol in Nairobi Province and 26.3% in Central Province. According to Perkinson (2002), alcohol is a central nervous system depressant and dulls the brain making learning a difficult task. When students abuse alcohol their reasoning becomes impaired and education becomes of less priority in their life.

Research by Nte (2008), found that 37% of the students in Bayelsa State were abusing tobacco products. Tobacco products are readily available in Nigeria. Research in Australia revealed that bhang smoking leads to the use of other more serious drugs. In the Bayelsa it was found out that 5.3% of the students were smoking *bhang*.

The Effects of Drugs Abuse

Drug use by students has hampered education and management in Nigerian secondary schools. In Nigeria, recent statistics suggest that one in every three secondary school students consumes alcohol. Another 8.3% smoke cigarettes while almost one in every ten (9.1%) chew Miraa. About 3% smoke bhang and use hard drugs like heroin, cocaine, mandrax and tranquilizers (The DailyTimes, 2004).

Drugs have varied physiological effects. Some adverse consequences include insomnia, prolonged loss of appetite, increased body temperature, greater risk of hepatitis and HIV/AIDS infection (Perkinson, 2002), death, various forms of cancers, ulcers and brain damage. A study by Winger, Wood and Hofmann (2004) identified

accelerated heartbeat, speeding in the peripheral circulation of the blood, alteration of blood pressure, breathing rate and other body functions as potential effects. Cannabis affects the hormonal and reproductive system and the regular use of cannabis can reduce male testosterone and sperm cells. Drug abuse contributes to the formation of uric acid which accelerates conditions like arthritis, gout, osteoporosis, and heart attacks, particularly those with pre-existing coronary hypertensive problems.

Drug abuse also affects the brain, resulting in a major decline in its functions. Drugs can affect a student's concentration and thus interest in school and extracurricular activities. This leads to increased absenteeism and drop outs. Most psychoactive drugs affect the decision making process of students, their creative thinking and the development of necessary life and social skills. Drugs also interfere with an individual's awareness of their unique potential and thus their interest in their career development (Louw, 2001).

Drug habits also affect an individual's self-concept. Self concept refers to the way an individual perceives himself or herself in a variety of areas for example academically, physically, and socially (Luow, 2001). Low self-esteem can lead to a detrimental redefinition of self-concept and this in turn can lead the student to indulge in escapist behaviour such as drug and substance abuse. A study by Merki (1993) found that when the students are feeling bad about themselves or are feeling unworthy, unloved or rejected, they turn to drugs. Students are affected more by these emotions and their inability to cope given their adolescent stage of development. During this stage, identity formation is important and self-concept plays a major role (Erikson, 1974). Addiction can develop when students' insecurities combine with the influence of peers and the media. Drugs then become the social and emotional focus at the expense of other interests and activities. This gradually leads to social, emotional and physical problems and new feelings of guilt, despair and helplessness.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Modified Social Stress Model (MSSM) for understanding drug use guides this study (ESCAP 2000). The model was developed by Rodes and Jason (1988) and modified by the World Health Organization/Programme on Substance Abuse (WHO/PSA) to include the effects of drugs or substances, the personal response of the individual to drugs and additional environmental, social and cultural variables.

Research has shown that in order to prevent substance abuse, two things must be taken into consideration: factors that increase the risk of developing the problem must be identified, and ways to reduce the impact of these factors must be developed. This theory maintains that risk factors are those factors that encourage drug use. Factors that make people less likely to abuse drugs are called protective factors. The key to health and healthy families is increasing the protective factors while decreasing the risk factors.

According to this model, if many risk factors are present in a person's life, that person is more likely to begin, intensify and continue the use of drugs. The model identifies risk factors as including: stress (which could be due to the school or home environment, and adolescent developmental changes); the normalization of substance use which could be seen in terms of legality and law enforcement; the availability and cost of drugs; and advertising, sponsorship and promotion through media, as well as the cultural value attached to various drugs.

The more protective factors that are present, the less likely a person is to become involved with drugs. Protective factors are identified as: attachments to people such as family members and peers, and institutions such as religion and school; physical and performance capabilities that help people succeed in life; the availability of resources, within the person or the environment, that help people meet their emotional and physical needs; positive role models; and anti-drug campaigns along with guidance and counseling services.

According to this model, it is easier to understand the drug problem if risk and protective factors are considered at the same time. Probability of drug abuse is determined by these factors and this framework is useful as a way of planning interventions to prevent or treat problems related to drugs. It is important to note that the factors listed above are not exhaustive. The presence of risk and protective factors is context dependent and the proportions of their contribution depend on their intensity in given situations. Thus, it was important to examine the factors unique to students in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Method

Substance abuse is one of the foremost problems affecting secondary schools in Nigeria. It impacts negatively on the academic, social, psychological and physical development of abusers. The goal of this study was to explore the perceptions of public secondary school students of drugs and substance abuse and how their perception influences their behaviours.

The target population of this study was four public secondary schools: Southern Ijaw Secondary School (Oporoma), Community Secondary School (Eniwari), Government Secondary School (Amassoma), and Community Secondary School (Angiama), all in southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The survey research design was used in this study. According to Ololube (2009), survey research seeks to obtain information that discloses existing phenomenon by asking individuals about their perceptions, attitudes, behaviours or beliefs (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The purposive sampling method was used to select two schools and stratified random sampling was used to select the sample size of the study respondents. A representative sample was randomly selected from the classes two, three, four and five. A questionnaire was used to gather information from student respondents and an interview schedule was used for teachers and counselors. The questionnaire and interview schedule were self-administered to ensure confidentiality. Piloting was done for the purpose of establishing the reliability and construct validity of the instruments. Reliability was tested using the Cronbach alpha method, and was established at alpha 0.7. The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and the representation was done through frequencies, percentages and t-tests. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 16 was used in the data analysis.

Methods of Data Collection

Data was collected through a student questionnaire and an interview schedule for teacher counselors in the selected schools. The student questionnaires were used to obtain information on the age, gender, class, and category of school of the student. The sets of questions in the questionnaire were designed to help determine the perceptions of secondary school students towards drug and substance abuse and how these affected their behaviour when it came to drug abuse. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Section B consisted of statements that were coupled with a five-point Likert-type scale. Scores on this scale ranged from 1 to 5 and the respondents checked the box that best reflected their view on drugs and substance abuse.

The validity of a questionnaire was established and refers to the extent to which the questionnaire measures what it claims to measure (Ololube, 2009). Validity means the extent to which the scores and the conclusions based on these scores can be used for the intended purpose of the questionnaire. Put differently, it is the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of the data actually represents the phenomena under the study. For the purpose of this research, face validity and content validity of the instruments were measured. The study ascertained the reliability of the instrument by applying the Cronbach alpha method. The reliability coefficient was established as 0.7 after piloting the instruments and modifying some of the items.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher began this study after seeking and obtaining permission from school management. The sampled schools were visited and the principals informed about the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents. Confidentiality was assured and questionnaires were self-administered. The interview schedule for teacher counselors was used after explaining to them the purpose of the study. The data collected was organized, tabulated and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used and the presentation of data was done through summary graphs. Gender differences on perceptions of drug abuse were analyzed with the t-test at the 0.05 level of significance. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 16 for Windows assisted in the data analysis. The data from the interview schedule for teacher counselors was also analysed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of secondary school students towards drugs and substance abuse and the effect of their perceptions on their behaviour. Based on the study objectives the following findings were established. The study established that 116 (31.4%) of student respondents had a positive perception of drug abuse. A far greater number of students, 222 (60.0%), had a negative perception of drugs and substance abuse. This suggests that the majority of the students were aware of the dangers of drug use. The minority, however, cannot be ignored, given their likely influence of those in the majority. The remaining 8.6% of students had a neutral perception of drug abuse, meaning they didn't identify a positive or negative perception of drug abuse. Six (60%) of the teacher counsellors reported that students who have been going to counseling for drug abuse had a positive perception about the abuse. The teacher counsellors also reported that peer influence was playing a major role in the perceptions held by students about drug abuse.

In terms of the rate of drug abuse among students, this study established that 125 (33.8%) of the study participants were abusing drugs and 245 (66.2%) were not abusing. All the teacher counsellors agreed that there was a certain level of drug abuse in their schools. The teacher counsellors reported that alcohol and cigarettes were most frequently used along with miraa and bhang. The teacher counselors and students agreed that there is a certain laziness and lack of concentration among students abusing drugs. Other effects of drug abuse included a poor relationship with others, lack of interest in studies, absenteeism, withdrawal and indiscipline.

T-test analysis results indicated that there was a significant difference, at $p < 0.05$, between boys and girls in their perceptions of drugs. Specifically, boys showed a lower drug perception mean scores than girls, indicating that boys had a higher proclivity for drug abuse than girls. The percentage of girls using drugs, however, is on the rise.

The findings of this study can be summarised as follows: A good percentage of secondary school students have a positive perception of drug and substance abuse; this perception has been formed mainly from their immediate environment. The types of drugs and substances abused by secondary school students include alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana and bhang, although alcohol was the most commonly used. The impacts of drug abuse on student behaviour include laziness and lack of concentration, poor relationships with others, lack of interest in school work, absenteeism from school, withdrawal, and indiscipline. This study also found that the perception of students towards drugs affects their behaviour in terms of drug use. The majority of those who had positive perceptions about drugs were drug users (35%).

CONCLUSION

In this study, an undertaking has been made to examine the consequences, and panacea for drug abuse in Nigerian schools. Drug abuse, and its detrimental personal and social consequences, is rampant in schools today. Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that most students have a negative perception of drug abuse. As some still have a positive perception, a cognitive restructuring program is necessary. Students' perceptions about drugs had an impact on their behaviour when it came to drug use. The drugs which were most often used, were legally and culturally substances including alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana. The use of these drugs had detrimental effects on students' academic progress and their interpersonal relationships.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered as a way of mitigating the problem of drug and substance abuse:

Behaviour modification techniques: These are associated with interventionist approaches, which though reactive, respond to problems as they arise. This is an approach that is concerned with the modification of behaviour through positive and negative reinforcements. It assumes that any action that is rewarded will tend to be repeated and learned whereas actions which have no favourable consequences will cease to be done. Some educators question the goal of behaviour change and propose a more education-oriented approach to drug prevention in schools.

Preventive methods: Most drug users begin the habit before the age of twenty and schools are the primary institutions with access to this group. Preventive methods aim at developing structures and approaches geared towards

reducing problems since they anticipate crisis within the school itself. One of the reasons for disaffection in secondary schools is the abject failure of pastoral care – students’ needs are not met on time thus increasing disaffection leading to misbehavior especially drugs use. Research programmes need to be comprehensive and have sufficient intensity to reasonably expect that skills can be taught. Content areas that are necessary include normative education, social skills, social influence, protective factors, and refusal skills.

Educational programme interventions: Drug prevention programmes known as life skills training have been found to be successful with young adolescents. Life skills training is based on findings that most adolescents first use drugs in social situations and that their decisions are influenced not just by one factor but a variety. Effective programs focus on enhancing problem solving skills and aiding students to evaluate the influence of the media. Effective programs help improve self-esteem, and reduce stress and anxiety. These skills are taught using a combination of methods including demonstration, practice, feedback and praise. Another proven approach is training designed to teach skills to confront a problem-specific focus, emphasizing the application of skills directly to the problem of substance abuse (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2007).

Role of the community: Because of the complexity of the problem, co-ordination of prevention messages and activities with other institutions in a student’s life is essential. The community, not the school, is where most students’ drug use occurs. Communities can be active in changing and supporting non-use norms and reinforcing messages given at school. Communities can send a clear and consistent message by developing and implementing a broad, comprehensive approach to dealing with substance abuse.

Punitive methods: These methods are associated with crisis management approaches which are reactive in their policies and locate the problem in students. Punitive methods rely on the infliction of punishment with the aim of deterring students from committing the crime. This method applies the principal of stimulus-response connection. The purpose of punishment should be communicated, understood and accepted if it is to be effective in enforcing student discipline. Obviously, however, drug abusers cannot be rehabilitated through punishment alone.

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