

The Social Construction of Drug/Substance Abuse among Youths in Jos, Nigeria

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Abstract— The use and abuse of drugs by individuals and the far reaching consequences of this maladaptive behaviour is a universal phenomenon. More often than not, the youths of most societies constitute the highest population involved in using and abusing drugs/substances. The social construction of the use and the abuse of drugs/substances by the youths, is vital in determining their behaviour towards it. Having an understanding of how drugs/substances are perceived by youths is a step towards knowing how to tackle the problem. The study investigated the reasons behind youths' involvement in drug/substance abuse and the consequences of their involvement in Jos South, Plateau State. The social cognitive theory was utilized to understand and explain the social construction of drugs/substance abuse among youths. Employing the qualitative research method, twenty-five (25) participants were purposefully selected, and data was obtained from them through key informant and in-depth interviews. Findings from the study revealed that youths construct the abuse of drugs/substances at two major points and in two major ways; before their experience with drug/substance abuse and after their involvement with drugs/substance abuse. Before their actual experiences, drug/substance abuse was perceived as an activity that came with numerous benefits at a low cost. After their actual experiences however, drug/substance abuse was seen as a behaviour that enslaved the actor and rendered them unproductive to themselves and the society. Permissive culture towards drug/substance use was also identified as a major factor that predisposes youths in Jos South to drug/substance abuse. Proper enlightenment, on the subject of drug/substance use may significantly reduce youths' involvement in drug/substance abuse, in addition to change or modification of the popular culture of drug/substance use in Jos.

Keywords— Youths, Drug/substance Abuse, Drug use, Jos, social cognitive theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Drug and substance abuse constitutes a global problem that is on a consistent rise [1]. It is not restricted to certain places nor is it peculiar to a specific race, nationality, gender, age or sex. The undesirable effects of drug and substance abuse threaten the wellbeing of the individual, the family and the entire society [2]. The holistic problem, and specific negative effects of drug and substance abuse has evolved to the extent that it affects virtually all countries of the world with slight differences in extents and degrees [3]. Drug abuse is a great threat to families, society and any nation, creating dynamic dangers in all domains of human endeavour including well-being, profession, interpersonal, social and economic spheres.

Drugs and substances are not bad or constitute social vices, they are typically used to diagnose, prevent and the treatment of diseases and alleviation of pain. The improper utilization of substances is what births problems. Drugs are essential parts of human development. Early men explored the properties and potentials of different roots, plants nuts and fruits to determine their pharmacological relevance [4].

Similarly, reference [5] holds that leaves, herbs and barks have been used in different societies to treat diseases.

The World Health Organization (WHO) define drug and substance abuse as the reckless consumption of alcohol, illicit drugs and other psychoactive substances to the extent of causing harm to the actor. The continuous abuse of such drugs and substances may create in the user a problem of dependence characterized by hardship in stopping the use of the drugs/substances, a compelling urge to keep consuming the drugs/substances, a committed practice of taking drugs and substances despite being fully aware of the health and psychological risk associated with the practice. The use of drug/substances is then prioritized above all other roles and activities [6].

The problem of drug and substance abuse is associated with psychoactive drugs and substances that are highly addictive. These substances trigger pleasurable and euphoric feelings that motivate individuals to keep going back to using them, which leads to addiction [7]. Reference [8] define drug and substance abuse as the unstable and unusual consumption of drugs and substances that triggers

many health problems. It is an extreme and intentional misuse of drugs. Drug abuse is said to have occurred or is occurring when a person develops a compulsive attitude towards drugs, and builds his/her daily routine around drugs and substance use, and is unable to stop the behaviour in the face of harmful consequences [9]. Drugs may further be categorized under legal and illegal drugs. Legal drugs encompass the drugs that are socially and culturally accepted and used such as tobacco, alcohol, prescription drugs and other over-the-counter drugs such as pentazocine, tramadol, codeine, cough syrups. Illegal drugs refer to drugs such as cannabis, cocaine, heroin and amphetamine [6].

The World Health Organization revealed that in 2013, 246 million people, that is 1 out of 20 individuals who are between the 15 and 65 years of age, have used a psychoactive substance [11]. Several young people in France use cannabis consistently, and they began the use even before the age of 12. This evidence indicates that the use of psychoactive substances, especially by the young people is indeed a global problem, and sheds light on the fact that the degree and dimensions to which it exists only vary slightly depending on space and time. Several young people in France start smoking before the age of 12 [12] with their subsequent dependence on drugs in later years. Turkey and some other European Union (EU) member states reported around 3,300 young people who were receiving treatment as a result of drug abuse related problems [13]. The report went on to show that in 2005, a total of 2,739 children were reported to have enrolled for drug problem treatment, with 80% of the patients coming from the United Kingdom (UK).

Coming to Africa, in Kenya, 68% of university students across all ages consume alcohol, tobacco, mira, sniff glue, and use hard drugs like heroin and cocaine [14]. Also, 400,000 students (males and females) in Kenyan secondary schools were addicted to drugs [15]. This is a very disturbing statistics that generates lots of questions begging for answers. To have such a high number of cases would mean that drugs and substances are becoming more and more readily and easily available to young people. For a person to be addicted, there must have been a consistent exposure to such substances which further indicates that these young persons have such products within an arm's reach of their desire or urge. [10]

In Nigeria, it was uncovered that young persons in Nigeria between the ages of 18-25 are the most vulnerable segment of the population when it comes to exposure to drugs and substance abuse as they are completely helpless to the use and abuse of psychoactive substances [16]. The phenomenon of youth and drug abuse was explored from the dimension of public transportation, with specific focus on motorcycle riders (Okada). They discovered that several risky behaviours and hyperactive tendencies exhibited by young Nigerian motorcycle riders that cause social disorder and fatal motorcycle accidents were due to the intake of drugs and other substances by the young riders [17].

Reference [18] discovered that even kids in primary schools mobilized themselves, thanks to the influence of drugs and substances to execute organized crimes, which destabilizes academic schedules. There are also unhealthy cases of cultism in some Nigerian secondary schools and universities that has triggered ritual killings, gang fights, and the general destruction of life and property. Abudu (2008) contends that drug abuse among Nigerian youths goes beyond surface understanding or just another problem. For him, it is a reflection of higher level of decay taking place in the Nigerian society. The social control mechanisms are weak, and the rate of permissiveness of anti-social behaviour is on a continuous rise [19].

Drug abuse is common among different segments of the population, however, it has dramatically increased among the youths in Nigeria, and in other parts of the world [2]. World Health Organization, submits that the present society is hugely characterized by drug and substance abuse, and the youths are the most involved. A valid reason for this may be the fact that it is during the formative years of individuals, which constitute the younger years that most persons experiment on diverse lifestyles and practices with the aim of discovering who they are [20]. It is also at this stage that there are all kinds of pressure from family members and the society at large to meet certain expectations. At this stage, peer influence and pressure is at its peak. It is during this growing up stage that most people get involved in using and abusing drugs and substances. It may be argued that the possibility of an adult falling into the practice of drug abuse is extremely low for the fact that they did not engage in it when they were younger. Young people in most countries of the world appear to use drugs and other substances in greater and riskier ways than other segments of the population. It is, thus, against this background that this study assesses the Social Construction of Drug/Substance Abuse among Youths in Jos South Local Government Area. The manuscript is organized as follows; Section I introduces drug/substance abuse, Section II contains the review of related works and theoretical framing, Section III contains the experimental procedures, Section IV presents the results and discussions, Section V comprises the conclusion while Section VI contains the recommendation for policy implementation and future research.

II. RELATED WORK

Drug/substance abuse by youths has been discussed within many contexts, and along different dimensions. The subject of drug/substance abuse has enjoyed significant attention locally and globally due to the threat it poses to individuals and society, including its wide-spread and global reputation.

Human history may equally be described as the history of drug abuse [5]. Several cultures and societies use and abuse drugs to the extent that it is safe to conclude that drugs are as old as man himself [21]. Throughout the process of human civilization, from AD 1200 to AD 1558,

the South American Incas consumed cocaine. This had a prominent and symbolic role in their religious and social systems [22]. Similarly, alcohol was widely available as a beverage and was utilized for several medical purposes in colonial America. Early men explored the properties and potentials of many roots, plants, nuts and fruits to determine their pharmacological relevance. Thus, substances were used for diverse purposes, ranging from sacred food and drinks, religious functions, to even being utilized as love potion [4]. The passage of time has witnessed significant human advancements, improvements in medicine being one of the most prominent ones. Advancement in many areas of human endeavour, have all been accompanied with some negative consequences, one of which is drug and substance abuse [23]. Drug and substance abuse is a universal problem that constitutes serious threat to the lives of persons and society in general. It has the ability to disrupt political stability, and rapidly increase insecurity [9]. The United Nations reports that there is a global increase in the use of illegal drugs and substances, characterized by the introduction of many kinds of drugs targeted towards a pool of heterogeneous consumers. [24].

Originally proposed for use as therapeutic compounds for restoration of health, the development of medicinal Chemistry led to the creation of several synthetic compounds such as barbiturates, benzodiazepines and amphetamines. These compounds were later refined to more potent compounds. Faster routes of administration were devised, favoring most rapid transport of central nervous system contributing to abuse [25]. There is a change in the global context of drugs and substance use that indicates the erosion of traditional theoretical boundaries. This also affect the beliefs, value systems and perceptions towards use of drugs and substances [26].

The period of youth for most people is the period when individuals desire to enjoy freedom, to be free from any form of supervision and restriction. It is also a time when youths indulge in delinquent activities such as drug abuse, rape and cultism [20]. Furthermore, the problem of drugs and substance abuse has infiltrated the society leaving devastating consequences, but with effective counselling, the problem may be significantly reduced. [20]. Drug and substance abuse poses a significant level of risks to the young ones. It influences engagement in armed robbery, it affects the mind to the point of causing mental illness and encourages cultism. [27]. Drug and substance abuse has been a steady and consistent practice with grave consequences that young individuals in Nigeria continue to engage in despite the fact that the negative consequences are very glaring [27].

Most young people get initiated into the use of drugs and substances at a very early stage, more often than not, from secondary school. This is however not to say that all those who start using drugs eventually become addicted to it. Although the major category of youths who subsequently become addicted to drugs are those who started at an early

stage. A substantial number of youths who develop drug use disorder commenced smoking when they were teenagers. Some, before even becoming teenagers. As they get older, the initial drugs/substances they started with lose their thrill and hence, they start seeking for new drugs and substances that can provide more thrilling experiences [27]. Reference [19] contends that drug abuse among Nigerian youths goes beyond surface understanding or just another problem. For him, it is a reflection of higher level of decay taking place in the Nigerian society. The social control mechanisms are weak, and the rate of permissiveness of anti-social behaviour is on a continuous rise.

With respect to possible factors that may influence individuals to abuse drugs/substances, the element of curiosity in the early men led them to explore the pharmacological relevance of various fruits, nuts, herbs and barks and leaves from which came different drugs and substances utilized for medical, religious, and social purposes. One may assert that curiosity is what triggered the creation of drugs and substances [28]. The urge to quench curiosity, drove many youths to begin the use of drugs/substances [4]. It however becomes a major problem when the use of drugs/substances go beyond the urge to satisfy curiosity to something they cannot do without. Also, the desire to gain some experience on things they have never experienced, prompts youths into the use of drugs and substances [20]. More often than not, the first experience with drugs and substances creates many pleasurable feelings that plants a greater desire to want to try it out again in order to reproduce the same blissful moments. The natural need to discover how really effective a specific drug is, motivates youths into first indulgence in drugs and substance abuse. If the drug in question passes the effectiveness test, they are tempted to continue the use of that drug/substance [27].

This is further buttressed, that curiosity plays a prominent and an ever consistent role in the initiation of youths into drug youths [29]. It is one of the influencing factors that cuts across borders, wherever drug and substance use is concerned [30]. Drug and substance abuse also commences when a particular substance, or combination of substances is able to meet a sensational desire. Here, a young person may have some desires to experience certain feelings, the curiosity to know if drugs and substance use can produce such feelings, become a strong motivation to experiment on the drugs and substances [10]. Majority of youths who eventually start the use of drugs and substances are generally fascinated by those who engaged in the act, and the observed and learned experiences of these individuals [2]. Noticing how others were committed and given to the consumption of those drugs/substances, they believed there must be truly something incredible about the drugs/substances, which prompted them to also try it out. Curiosity and other factors have been identified as natural elements found among youths that may predispose them to the use of drugs and substances. In themselves, such tendencies are not harmful. They become problematic only

when those behaviours become permanent and reoccurring as reflected in substance use disorder [30].

Peer influence has also been identified as a prominent factor that compels youths to start using drugs/substances which eventually evolves into abuse. One interesting discovery is that peers convince youths to use drugs and substances by making the targets believe that drugs are capable of stimulating appetite for food, boost physical strength and supply deep wisdom, and the boldness to face life and all types of challenges that may come their way [32]. Additionally, young persons who live with their peers compared to young persons who lived with their parents or guardians are more likely to engage in drug/substance use and abuse. Similarly, living in close proximity with peers who use and abuse substances, rapidly increases the chances of being initiated into drug and substance use [14]. Other factors such as environment, boosting of self-esteem, and depression have been discussed as potent factors that make young individuals prone to the abuse of drug/substances [10], [23], [31], [33], [34]. It is, therefore, against this background that this study investigates the reasons behind youths' involvement in drug/substance abuse and the consequences of their involvement in Jos, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framing

This study adopts the Social Cognitive Theory for its theoretical underpinning. The social cognitive theory was propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977. The theory was originally conceptualized as the Social Learning Theory before it was modified in 1986 and renamed the Social Cognitive Theory. The social learning theory provides that all forms of behaviour are learned, both socially acceptable behaviour and anti-social behaviour. This learning process occurs in three organized ways [9]. The first is by intentional study of proximate characters that exhibit the behaviour that would be copied. The second, is through oral statements where the behaviour is spelt out and clearly described. The third is through the use of symbols and non-real life characters that portray the behaviour. Thus, the sources of learning available to individuals are virtually unlimited and no two people have the same exact sources of learning.

The social cognitive theory propose that learning takes place within social contexts, with a diverse and mutual interaction between the individual, the environment and behavior [35]. In explaining behaviour, the social cognitive theory adequately considers the role of the environment and the individual in shaping behaviour; how the individual adopts a particular behaviour and maintains it and how the environment where the person performs the behaviour influences the behaviour. The theory thus proposes that the individual, his/her environment and their behaviour are engaged in a continuous cycle of mutual influence and interaction [36]. The interaction between the person, his environment and behaviour affects all the aspects of their reality. Behaviour is not exclusively the end product of or response to an environmental stimuli, but

persons are regarded as having the capacity to think and evaluate situations, to the extent of forming an opinion about those situations, considering the potential consequences of specific behaviours and eventually choosing the most appropriate action [37]. By implication, humans are rational and so analyse via mental processes the conditions designed by their environment and carefully assess the implications of engaging in certain actions, their costs and rewards, and making a final decision. The theory considers a person's past experiences which factor into whether behavioural action will occur. It is these past experiences that influence reinforcements, expectations, and expectancies, all of which shape the reasons and whether a person will engage in a specific behaviour.

Linking the social cognitive theory to the study and understanding of drug and substance abuse, one may argue that people attach positive expectations and attitudes to drugs and substances via the process of observing or copying positive feedbacks and predispositions from those around them (friends, family, role models). This view holds that the major reason for drug use and abuse is located within people's understanding and interpretation of the effects of substances, their personality traits and the peer influence to use drugs and substances. Thus, the process of abusing drugs commences from observation of others; here the mental process and the environment are engaged in the sense that the mind processes the information that is provided by the environment, studies the potential outcomes of engaging in the activity, and makes an evaluation and conclusion regarding the cost and benefits of taking part or developing a specific attitude or behaviour towards the observed phenomenon, which essentially constitutes the personality. In other words, the elements of cognition, environment and behaviour are all found in the development of a favourable disposition towards drugs and substances.

When individuals eventually engage in the use and abuse of drugs, and find the results attractive or meeting up with the expected desire, a positive reinforcement is created which motivates the user to keep going back for more. The environment also plays a significant role in this process as availability of drugs and substances is maintained by it. If from the premise, the environment does not house or permit the practice or accessibility to drugs and substances, then there is nothing for the individual to processes and eventually make a decision about.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria (Fig.1 and Fig. 2). Located between latitudes 9° 30' to 10° N and longitude 8° 30' E, Jos South Local Government Area is located at the north western part of the state. It has its headquarters at Bukuru, which is about 15 km from the state capital, Jos. Jos South has four districts: Du, Gyel, Kuru and Vwang districts [38]. The local government area has an estimated population of 429,300 people. The major ethnic group is

the *Berom*. High incidence of drug/substance use and abuse among the youths of this area [39], is one of the reasons that prompted the choice of this study area.

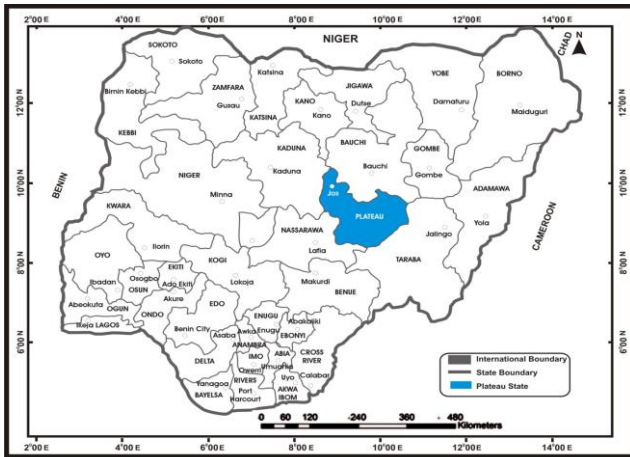


Fig. 1: Nigeria Showing Plateau State.
Source: (GIS Lab, University of Jos, 2022).

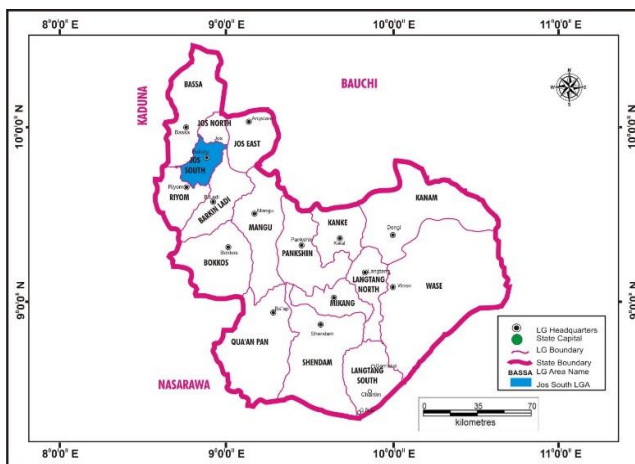


Fig 2: Plateau State Showing Jos South the Study Area.
Source: (GIS Lab, University of Jos, 2022).

The study is a cross-sectional one, and adopts the qualitative research approach, which by nature focuses on capturing the interpretive and contextual nuances of social reality. Twenty-four (24) participants; made up of 19 individuals between the ages of 18 and 38, which were at the time of the study undergoing treatment for drug/substance addiction, including Five (5) health providers attending to the health needs of the youths were involved in the study. In-depth (IDI) interviews were conducted with the 19 youths undergoing treatment, while Key Informant interviews (KII) were conducted with 5 health providers. The qualitative data secured from the IDI's and KII's were analyzed through a content analysis.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perception of Drug Abuse by Youths

Perception within the context of this study has to do with the way actors understand, define and rationalize their actions. It is an opinion and a point of view regarding lifestyles and practices a person subscribes to and

associates with. If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences [40]. This typically means that the outcome of a situation is dependent on the individual's definition of the situation, and not by the situation itself. The Perception of any situation is the foundation for a person's subsequent action and disposition towards that situation. Drug abuse from the evidence gathered in this study, and from literature, has been perceived in several ways by actors involved in it and shaped actors' attitudes towards drug/substance abuse. Youths often perceived drugs/substance abuse as a requirement for being part of the social groups they desired to be part of [2]. The abuse of drugs/substances is understood by a number of youths as a potent tool of experimentation [28]. Due to social media influence, social learning, and several other factors individuals are exposed to many different practices, behaviours, beliefs and lifestyle. When young people see drugs and substances being used abused and promoted, it becomes an object of experimentation. They are motivated to want to experience what those involved in the behaviour experience. Findings from this study indicated that drug use was facilitated by the following:

a. Drug Experimentation

The findings from the study uncovered that for many youths, their involvement with drugs/substances was a result of the idea that drugs/substances were potent tools to experiment with. This finding agrees with [7]. The initiation into drug/substance use may be triggered by curiosity and the simple need to experiment and try out new things. At this point, serious thought is not given to the consequences of one's action in relation to drug/substance use.

One of the participants stated that:

"I used (drugs/substances) for recreational activity at the initial stage, after I started using it properly, I started using it as a form of social gathering, for every social gathering, I think I have to be intoxicated with marijuana, codeine or alcohol. I was a social drinker and marijuana user. My marijuana, I felt was not a serious problem it wasn't much of a big deal for me. I basically used marijuana for social gatherings; partying, clubbing, meeting girls, just so I could enjoy the whole gathering... it was just for fun, and not for addiction purposes, but along the line, it got out of hand. And I had to start using consistently because I was not normal without marijuana". (IDI/M/ 21/Client/2019)

The comment above illustrates that drug/substances were like social spices that could make one enjoy social gatherings better. This discovery is similar to [2]. It was not in the original plan or conception that their future endeavours would completely revolve around the use of drugs and substances, or that it would birth a lot of negative consequences. There is a sovereignty of sorts that is possessed by psychoactive substances, which youths and other users may not be initially aware of. At the initial or take off point, the entire power lies in the individual to

start using or not to. However, after the individual succumbs to using these psychoactive substances, there is a physiological shift in sovereignty. Psychoactive substances affect the brain and nervous system directly, that is why they can create pleasurable and euphoric feelings, including false realities [1]. The psychoactive substances, take over control, and even at this stage, the individual may still retain a little power in terms of staying away, but the rewards are too enticing. Reflecting on the social learning theory, one of the assumptions is that when there is a positive reward for an action, individuals tend to repeat or continue that behaviour [35]. Thus, there is continuity in the use of drugs/substances which would then result to compulsive use or drug dependence.

Similarly, another participant narrated thus:

“It was an unbelievable day; I did not even care to know what effect it would have on me. My thought was that it is part of fun, part of life. I started it with some friends in 1994 (25 years ago), I just went out on my own, not that they had annoyed me I was still in school then I just went out and bought cigarette, and said since I am alone, let me try doing it.” (IDI/M/38/Client/2019)

The participant, having a retrospective view about his history of initiation finds it difficult to believe that what began so innocently led him to this point of absolute dependence, to the extent of needing medical, social and psychological treatment.

b. Family and peer influence

When family members are involved in the enterprise of drugs/substances, it may mould the youth's foundational ideas regarding substance use, and prompt them into their first experimental use of drugs/substances. This reveals that the involvement of significant others in the use of drugs/substances could be a major element in the initiation of young persons into the use of drugs and substances. Following this line of argument, a person whose parents are actively engaged in the consumption, production and distribution of drugs/substances, is very vulnerable to unchecked use of drugs and substances. To this effect, a participant submitted that:

“I grew up in a house that my both parent use alcohol and basically I use alcohol and cigarette. I don't do drugs. I have tried cannabis before but it wasn't my thing so I stopped. Taking alcohol was very easy for me because at a point in time my mum had a beer parlor. I saw it as something that was okay because it was always around me and sometimes I do go to beer parlor. As I was growing up I tried to hide it from people at home, but they eventually found out. My dad died when I was younger and it got to a time that my mum couldn't talk to me about it because she was using it as well.” (IDI/M/33/2019)

Similarly, another participant responded that:

“While I was in school, my mom used to bake cakes so there was this liquor that was used as preservative, that was when I first used drugs/substances”(IDI/MALE/PARTICIPANT/201).

The submission above renders the mother as an involuntary enabler of drug/substance use due to the fact that she did not intend the liquor to be consumed by the child, but the presence of it served as an avenue for the child to begin experimenting with alcohol. Parents are ideally supposed to set good examples to their children, but it becomes ironic when youths define drug/substance use as something acceptable and a profitable venture because their parents and peers also engage in the behaviour. Social learning also takes place within the context of family and social confines where there are friends and other role models to imitate.

A former drug user, reveals that:

“I started first with cigarette, I saw it with a family relation, so I felt there was no harm. It was me and my cousin that tried to use cigarette together” (IDI/M/ 37/Client/2019)

The above picture adequately depicts learning via imitation. It implies that the behaviour of individuals in the immediate and even distant environment of the youths, contributes significantly to how he/she perceives and defines different situations including drug/substance use. Apart from family, which has been identified as playing a prominent role in the way youths perceive drug/substance use and their subsequent involvement, other factors such as friends and peer pressure was also quite prominent. The need and desire to be part of social groups irrespective of age, sex, race and status is a strong motivation behind the actions and decisions of individuals. Groups are typically distinguished by the nature of their actions. There is a shared and acceptable mode of behaviour. Being in a group automatically implies that one identifies with the common beliefs and practices of that group. To belong to a group and act contrary to the group behaviour may attract negative sanctions from other members of the group. So, for the purpose of being part of a social or any other group, individuals have to conform to the modes of behaviour adopted by such groups and also abide by their code of conduct. To this end some participants revealed that:

“I had a friend that introduced me to drug and substances. He introduced me to marijuana, so I started using marijuana, I enjoyed the way I felt when I started to use it” (IDI/M/ 19/Client/2019)

To buttress this point further, another participant asserted that:

“My friends, they were cool with it (use of drugs/substances) because as a drug user, most of the friends I move with are also drug users, or get influenced to drug using. So most of my friends were cool with it because we use the substances together.

The other friends that were not users just had to tolerate my use because they knew me as a drug user. Those friends that knew me before I started using, just look at me very wired and wonder how come I started using, like what's up? And I am just telling them, sorry, it is peer pressure, and it happens. And there are friends that don't use, but due to your own act of using, you pressurize them into using." (IDI/M/19/Client/2019)

The above presents a slight understanding of how youths are initiated into drugs/substances. Sometimes, it becomes a condition for gaining some benefits whether real or perceived. The social learning theory makes us understand that calculated benefit from engaging in a particular relationship, behavior or action influences a persons' eventual decision. It is also clear from here that a basic characteristic of sub groups, is homogeneity in many forms.

Similarly, another participant submits that:

"I started using drugs and substances as a result of influence; friends. My friends introduced me to the use of drugs/substances." (IDI/M//Client/2019)

Some youths start using drugs/substances majorly to present a good picture of themselves to others, especially a person whose approval they value. This is reflected in the next quotation.

"I was close to this guy, and it was like I wanted the guy to like me and be cool with the guy, and he was smoking, I think whenever we go out together, to feel among, I had to smoke" (IDI//M/24/Client/2019).

c. Emotional Support

Over time, many youths have come to rely on drugs as a way of gaining inspiration, dealing with grief, performing better in different spheres of life and many other reasons. According to a participant,

"Well I started taking drugs 10 years ago but that is as a result of the loss of my mother she was the most beloved to me, when she passed away I was like suicidal I was even thinking of killing myself then a friend introduced me to drugs and it really worked for me, the first drug I took was marijuana, I used it to quench the pain of my mother, and it worked for me" (IDI/M/Client/2019)

Similarly, the next participant declared that:

"Dugs have helped me to deal with difficulties. Back when I was in school and this difficulty was when I lost my mother, it is still related to losing my mum you understand it was not easy for me to move on and I was aided by drugs to move on" (IDI/M/31/Client/2019)

Within the context of the narration above, drugs/substances serve as a back door of escape to avoid the natural feelings of pain, disappointment and sadness associated with grief.

"The untimely death of my father forced me to start using drugs" (IDI/M/27/Client/2019)

Similarly, another participant asserted that to deal with the feeling of rejection and heart break, he had to start abusing drugs and substances.

"I started abusing drugs because of my ex-girlfriend, that is what prompted me to go deep into it because I never wanted to think about her again, I found means of removing her thought from my mind" (IDI/M//33/Client/2019)

For some others, it is a way of dealing with anger:

"when I see it I feel this is something that helps me to relax. Anytime I see it I feel like taking it, I also take it when I am angry" (IDI/M/38/Client/2019)

Similarly,

"when I am angry or stressed up or I have to achieve something or want to celebrate something that is the only thing it has help me to achieve." (IDI/M/27/Client/2019)

With respect to academic performance, drugs/substances appear to be perceived as agents that improve concentration and aid assimilation and retention. This participant narrated that:

"Then, I thought of it as an advantage like using of substances. When I started using, I was this kind of a very brilliant student that answers question in class, people gave me their assignments... I was doing things well. Everything was going smoothly. In fact, there were people who walked up to me and said, I like you, and the way you do your things. All because of the way I behaved when I was on drugs and substances. I also do music, so as of then it was like..... I enjoyed being high and going to the studio to record" (IDI/M/25/Client/2019)

It is safe to assert that drugs/substances have the ability to create utopian experiences that allows the individual to live in euphoria and false realities in utmost bliss. The reward for engaging in drug/substance abuse within this context is almost priceless as a brand new world is more or less created where the individual is the most supreme and important entity.

Even within the context of coping and relieving stress, drug/substance abuse may still breed negative consequences, but the individual learns to accept both the cost and the rewards, especially when the perceived reward is higher than the perceived cost. For the next participant, the cost of using psychoactive substances was higher than the benefits, yet she chose to use them.

“Sometimes, I get restless or I get burned out, or I can’t sleep, because of course, it is a psychoactive substance.... Once I start taking it, sometimes I just stop and then I just get this rebound, insomnia; I can’t sleep then I go back. So, it helped me in a way cope, but in two different ways; in a good way and in a bad way. It helped me cope such that I could rest and I could sleep, but again, it took a lot from me because I couldn’t really function well. I could just say it had its bad and good, but it had more of the bad”. (IDI/F/32/2019)

Others have also used it to revive energy and renew motivation to do more work. Thus, drug/substance use here is constructed as a source of energy and industrial motivation

“Well it is just when I am exhausted, there was a time I was having a lot of work so the stress was so much, so when I just take the substance; alcohol or cigarette or marijuana I will just be relaxed, I will be able to relaxed myself quickly so that I can do more work, so when I smoke, I come back and I am energized for the next job” (IDI/M/32/Client/2019).

d. Unforeseen consequences

Findings further showed that irrespective of the reason(s) for starting the use of drugs/substances, and the subjective definition of drugs/substances by young persons, drug abuse can more often than not become addictive with continuous use, making it almost impossible to stop. This compulsive urge to use drugs, now substitutes the initial reason for starting. Now, the individual continues to use because he/she can no longer do without the drugs and substances. They no longer feel normal when they are not on drugs.

A participant disclosed that:

“it was just for fun when I started using drugs, and not for addiction purposes, but along the line, it got out of hand. And I had to start using consistently because I was not normal without marijuana” (IDI/M/32/Client/2019).

It could be inferred from the statement above that the use of marijuana, for this individual was an indispensable element that constituted an integral part of his personality, such that the absence of it, made him abnormal.

Another participant declares that:

“At the initial stage, you get the whole euphoria, ginger, motivation to use and go to school and go to class and be attentive. But along the line when it becomes too much, because your tolerance will keep on increasing, and as it is increasing, it is not as though you can actually do a lot with it. When you take too much, and your tolerance is really high and you feel you are not intoxicated enough, you start using the substances a lot and you can’t function properly in class again” (IDI/M/33/Client/2019).

Similarly, a participant disclosed that:

“I feel like when I use drugs, that’s when I become normal, but when I am sober, I feel high; like I am going out of my mind. When I use the drugs, everything becomes better, I start thinking better seeing clearer” (IDI/M//24/Client/2019)

The above unveils that drug/substance use can overturn the normal functioning of the body system, such that everything works in the reversal. It leads to a complete transformation of the victim in a negative way.

The next account sheds more light on how drug abuse becomes drug dependence:

“Initially, I started doing drugs because I had low self-esteem, so when I drink and I am in public talking, it is like I don’t have anything to worry about, but when I am sober, it is like I won’t be able to talk and all. But after a while, I stopped taking drugs because of the self-esteem, and started taking drugs like I needed it to survive. I feel like when I am not on drugs, I am high, but when I am on drugs, I am normal. Taking drugs became like a normal daily activity”. (IDI/M/27/Client/2019)

For this respondent at the beginning, drugs/substances served a particular beneficial function, one that boosts their confidence. It was a justifiable action for this person because he only used it on specific occasions. It was never in the plan that he would eventually need it to do all other things, including being himself. Eventually, drug/substance use became like having a daily meal, a precondition for survival.

During an in-depth interview, a participant submitted that:

“I was addicted to weed, cigarette, alcohol, sometimes, tramol... I could not do without weed. I liked the feeling it brought. They now call it SK. There was a time that I became addicted to it, and felt like I could not do without it. It is especially because of that I was brought to the rehabilitation institution.” (IDI/M/40/Client/2019)

Two major thoughts may be drawn from here. As discussed earlier peers have a way of influencing the initiation process into drugs/substance use. For this participant he only wanted to have a taste. To know why his friends enjoyed it so much, and that ushered him into addiction.

Other individuals who eventually got addicted to drug/substance use in the light of retrospection, argue that drugs/substances did not help them in any way. This then begs the question of why they kept using the drugs and substances, despite recognizing that it yields no lasting positive result and births a multitude of negative consequences. A potential answer may be found in the establishment that psychoactive drugs/substances have chemical components that can create compulsive use in the individual [9]. The habit of using drugs is no longer a

voluntary action. It is more of a stimulus reaction that an individual is helpless against, especially in the context of the person's will power to abstain.

"Drugs have not helped me cope in any difficulty, instead, it just gave me the hallucination that I forget the time phase where I was before, and I still come back facing the same problem. It doesn't bring a solution it only helps me escape the problems I am facing when I am induced or intoxicated. But when the intoxication wears off, I am still facing the same problem. It has never helped me." (IDI/M/31/Client/2019).

Other responses in this line of thought are seen here too

"Well, I have not been coping well with drugs because it makes me start doing things that I shouldn't do. For example, I keep wondering around instead of being in a particular place. It makes me miserable. I don't stay in one place when I am under the influence of substance. I keep seeking for more. It has not really helped me." (IDI/M/33/Client/2019)

While drug abuse may linger through addiction, the experience is not necessarily pleasant but miserable and unfulfilling as framed and socially constructed by the above interviewee.

For another individual, drug abuse is a very big deal because it has cost him a lot of valuable things that cannot be easily restored.

"Drugs have rather worsened things for me because it has affected my financial capacity, my relationship with friends, family and associations and more." (IDI/M/38/Client/2019).

One of the effects of drug abuse is reflected in poor educational performance and even termination of educational career. The study unravelled that when youths are exposed to drugs at an early stage, the chances of a successful educational career is significantly reduced. Education is a fundamental aspect of any nation's development. When this structure is affected, there is a ripple negative effect.

A key informant revealed that:

"One of the effects is, it affects their education a lot. That's why most of them are school dropouts. Some battle legal issues too. Because they engage in drug abuse, most of the time, the sense of judgement is impaired; so they engage in all sorts of activities they shouldn't get involved in. for instance fights, rape, because you are under the influence of these drugs, your sense of judgment is impaired" (KII/M/31/Health Provider/2019)

A client disclosed that:

"I have lost my schooling. There is nothing as much as learning. I have not been able to fulfil major goals". (IDI/M/30/ Client/2019).

Involvement with drugs also denies the victims different opportunities that may be life transforming, and even world transforming. Drug/substance abuse makes people live below their potential, makes them highly unproductive and diminishes motivation to be committed to any meaningful project as the victims would only be preoccupied with getting and using drugs.

"I have lost a lot of opportunities. I have lost too many opportunities. There was a point in time when my dad got this little job for me, he said all I had to do is just to come to work, by then I just started university, my obligation that summer was just to be going to work and get paid, but because of my drug use, I couldn't do it. It was too stressful, so I just missed out. In school, I have missed out on examinations, so I had many carry overs, I am not doing so well in school right now, I got suspended because of my drug use." (IDI/M/19/Client/2019)

Another participant lamented that:

"After my service, that is my NYSC in Kaduna state I came back I was desperately looking for job but I was also taking drugs so I got a job they sent me an email, they sent me an offer of appointment letter but I did not know because I was taking drugs so I missed that opportunity" (IDI/M/30/2019)

A client also stated that:

"I have lost a lot from drugs, because for instance, I should have been a graduate by now, but I have spent like 13 years in the university without a degree. Like now that I am here, I am meant to be at home, preparing for school, sometimes, even when school is in session, I still go to rehab and then when I resume, I have to pick up from where I stopped. So it has really cost me a lot. If not, I should have been married by now, with at least one or two kids." (IDI/M/33/Client/2019)

The submissions from virtually all the participants involved in the study reflects a common theme with regards to the use and abuse of drugs/substances. It is that first involvement always appears harmless with some promises of reward and potential for the creation of pleasurable and euphoric feelings. Most of the victims did not think that they would become addicted to the use of drugs/substances, and that it would eventually cost so much; affecting their mental, social and emotional capacity, education, career, health and relationships. Many have come to realise that drug and substance use for them is something that should be made unpopular and reduced to the barest minimum.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

Findings from this study has shown that a plethora of reasons exist as to why different youths engage in drug/substance use. These include; curiosity, experimentation, dealing with difficult situations and emotions, relaxation; to have a good time, to gain social acceptance, to boost confidence and compensate for low self-esteem. Some started using drugs following a legitimate prescription from health personnel to treat a disease or ease pain. Results further showed that the reasons for getting involved with drugs and substances are also backed by a mental picture of potential benefits, rewards, cost and even consequences. The youths had a mental picture of what they were expecting from the drugs and substances in line with meeting specific desires. This basically constitutes their first conception and construction of drugs and substances. Drugs/substances were elements capable of meeting those needs and possibly birthing other experiences. However, there is conflict and disorientation as the drugs would produce, in addition to their expected results, extra outcomes which are not very pleasing. The psychoactive properties in drugs are able to alter perception and impair judgements. Drugs have the ability to manipulate the brain and the nervous system to create false reality, euphoria and calmness. By possessing such ability, the individual loses control of the power to decide whether or not he/she wishes to continue in the light of new unpleasant realities. At this stage, drug use has metamorphosed into drug addiction, and the youth is plagued by the compulsive desire to keep using these drugs despite the fact that they are damaging his/her health and rendering the individual unproductive. At the initial stage, the drug was to serve the user but the roles eventually switch and the individual starts living for the drugs. The entire schedule of the person revolves around getting and using drugs and substances. The impact of drug and substance use leaves the victims requiring medical, social and psychological attention and intervention in order to reverse the effects of the drugs and mitigate the harm done. Most youths are easily initiated into drug/substance use which eventually leads to drug/substance addiction. This easy initiation is due to the lack of sufficient understanding of the full consequences of their choices in relation to drug/substance abuse. Thus, deep and intense awareness on the dangers of drugs/substance use should be created among youths and other segments of the population. Also, since findings showed that most youths get initiated into the use of drugs/substances from primary and secondary school, subjects and courses should be designed in line with the dynamics of drugs and substances and should be taught at all levels of education.

Popular notions and cultures that encourage and normalise drug/substance use should be discouraged as this would go a long way to reduce the incidence of the drug/substance abuse in the society, and especially among the youths. A society free of drug and substance addicts is at less risk of chaos and disorder. Individuals in these societies are more focused and more productive, which enhances a general

improvement of the economy and ultimately the development of the nation.

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