

DRUG ABUSE AMONG THE IGBO YOUTHS IN SOUTHEAST, NIGERIA: A SEARCH FOR CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

The increasing menace of hard drug trafficking, abuse and the attendant addiction to them among the Igbo Youths in SouthEast, Nigeria is a point of great concern to all and sundry. While it is gratifying that relevant government authorities in Nigeria are doing their best to combat this menace, it is however still on the rife. This study attempts to source for Christian religious solutions to end this menace. Both the primary and secondary means of data collections were employed in this study. The necessary generalizations and conclusions were drawn purely on the qualitative analysis and synthesis of the gathered data made through culture centered and phenomenological approaches: Adopting the Social Learning Theory on drug abuse and addictions, it was discovered that apart from cocaine, marijuana, and cannabis; Mkpulummiri which is the Igbo slang for methamphetamine or Crystal Meth is the dangerous illicit drug that the Igbo youths persistently abuse and eventually gets addicted to. Drug abuse and its attendant addiction equally persists among the Igbo Youths in South East, Nigeria because of ignorance, unemployment, lack of proper parental control and training, peer pressure, false assumption, deception and manipulation of the transfers of Service location of the determinate top officers of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in the South East regions of Nigeria by some political top shots, amongst others. This study submits that with the concerted efforts of parents, local authorities, government authorities and the church; as well as laying emphasis on core Christian virtues of discipline, abstinence, sobriety amongst others, the menace of drug abuse and its corollary addiction among the Igbo Youths of South East, Nigeria will be addressed.

Keywords: Drug Abuse, Drug Addiction, Igbo Youths, Mkpulummiri, SouthEast Nigeria

Introduction

The Igbo people are the tribe domiciled within the South Eastern regions of Nigeria. Isidienu (2016), affirmed that the cultural heritage of the Igbo is one replete in peaceful coexistence, brotherhood, lawfulness and to a large extent industrious and honest in their original way of life. The burning absurdity of drug abuse as well as the corollary negativity of drug addiction is totally not of the Igbo initial stock in trade. It stems from inordinate desires. A 2013 study (cited by Baje, 2022), had it that 90 percent of drugs abusers in Nigeria are teenagers and young adults between the age of 15 and 29. The resultant effect is that these youths constitute a wasting generation. Unwittingly, the

addict becomes a financial and social burden on his parents and the larger society. The victim is predisposed to criminal activities to raise all the huge funds needed to keep up the self-wrecking habit in addition to reducing the country's labour force.

Ezeonye (cited by Chukindi, 2022), painted a gloomy picture of drug abuse and trafficking among the Igbo youths when she declared that one in every four drug abusers/users is a female youngster. Ezeonye (cited by Chukindi), re-affirmed as well that the notable age groups in these drug abuse and addiction saga are mostly young people who are either in secondary, tertiary institutions or are on the verge of graduation from higher institutions. This study intends positing Christian solutions to this menace of drug abuse which facilitates addiction among the Igbo youths.

The Concept of Drug Abuse

Heinz, Beck, Halil, Pilhatsch, Smolka and Liu (2019) elucidated that Dual-process theories of learning and addiction proposes that the development of drug addiction involves a shift from goal-directed to habitual control of action: Just like Animal models of drug addiction which equally suggests that occasional drug use becomes habitual and ultimately compulsive. This implies that drug abuse leads to, drug addiction. World Health Organization (2006), declared that drug abuse is drug misuse hence they defined it as the use of a substance for a purpose not consistent with legal or medical guidelines. It is actually illegal to abuse or misuse both routine and hard drugs. Alewu and Nosiri (2014), explained that drug abuse is not a pharmacological problem but a social problem with pharmacological implications.

Belcher and Shinitzky (1998), launched into positing that drug abuse is not just about illicit administration of drugs but that it becomes a genetic manipulator that the victims offsprings after being addicted to those hard drugs may become susceptible to drug abuse in their own peculiar stance. They insisted for instance that biological children of alcohol-dependent parents who have been adopted continue to have an increased risk (up to 2-to9-fold) of developing alcoholism. They equally elucidated as they carried out indepth research on substance abuse in children and its remedy, that the risk factors of parents'addiction to hard drugs includes children being adversely effected in character deformation. Again, they expressed that illicit drug use is associated with an increased risk of contracting Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Thus the sharp rise in pediatric HIV infection from 1985 to 1990 paralleled the occurrence of the crack cocaine epidemic. They affirmed that in 1990, 68%of perinatally acquired HIV infection was attributable to intravenous drug abuse in one or both of the child's parents. Thus even without a history of intravenous drug use, an alcohol and drug-abusing lifestyle places the abuser, partners, and even unborn children at risk of HIV infection due to assessment, reduction ofinhibitions, and sex-for-drug.

Empirical Studies

Many Igbo communities in South East region of Nigeria are currently facing the

dangerous effects of methamphetamine nicknamed by the youths as *mkpurummiri* which is translated seed of water. Amongst other hard drugs, *Mkpurummiri* is the one predominantly abused by the Igbo Youths. Ujumadu (2021), reflected that it is estimated that 75 percent of the users in Igbo communities are adversely affected; thus becoming burdens to their families and the communities at large. Ujumadu (2021), stressed that drug literature asserts that methamphetamine is a powerful highly addictive stimulant that affects the central nervous system. The crystal form of the drug looks like glass fragments and is chemically similar to amphetamine, a drug used to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy, a sleep disorder. Addicts self-administer methamphetamine by smoking, swallowing, snorting or injecting the powder that has been dissolved in water or alcohol. According to Ujumadu, methamphetamine affects the brain adversely: It increases the amount of a natural chemical called dopamine in the brain. Dopamine as Ujumadu explained, is involved in body movement, motivation, and reinforcement of rewarding behaviours. Thus the drug's ability to rapidly release high levels of dopamine in reward areas of the brain strongly reinforces drug-taking behavior, thereby making the user want to repeat the experience. .

Ujumadu (2021), further elucidates that methamphetamine or crystal meth (*mkpurummiri*); is a very addictive stimulant that renders the user hyperactive and prone to violence which may equally lead to suicide or homicide at the slightest provocation and without a feeling of remorse at the extreme cases. The drug equally induces the feelings of paranoia and hallucination which facilitates the exhibition of anti-social behaviours. The drug also takes a toll on the physical look of its users. According to Ujumadu, it typically makes them look older and their faces prone to acne. Excessive use sometimes leads to damaged gum and teeth, commonly called "Meth-Mouth". Most frightening terrifying stance is that *mkpurummiri* – meth addiction is one of the most difficult to treat, since no drug can cure it, except by behavioural therapy, which at the moment is scarce and not readily available in Nigeria.

Ilozue (2023), declared that *mkpurummiri* had become so common in most Igbo communities. To the communities where *mkpurummiri* is common, rape is equally common because it is believed that the drug increases the libido of affected youths. Some women equally indulge in it and in that case, it usually results in madness. Ilozue (2023) and Njoku, Odita, and Thomas-Odia (2021), exclaimed that *mkpurummiri* is imported from the Northern states of Nigeria into the Igbo regions. They exposed that the production of crystal meth was hijacked by Mexican drug cartels since the 1990s, they came into Nigeria to set up laboratories in 2016. Njoku, Odita and Thomas-Odia , exposed so many cases on the menace of drug abuse among Igbo Youths.

There exists many of drugs in Igbo local parlance banned and its sales proscribed alongside *mkpurummiri*; for instance in Umudioka, Dunukofia local government area of Anambra state, they banned; *Isi na Awa agu*, *Aju Achu Enwe* and *Stonch*, including Indian Hemp as Njoku, Odita, and Thomas-Odia (2021) declared. Eze, Anyanwu, Agwu,

Onyejiuwa, Sampson and Odogwu (2021), exclaimed that the prevalence of drug use in the South East is about 13.8 percent, based on a United Nations office on Drugs and Crime(UNODC) estimate. This ranked third highest in Nigeria followed by South South and South West with 22 percent and 16.6 percent respectively. This implies that one out of every seven persons in the South East between 15 to 64 years of age has used an illicit drug, as they exclaimed. Eze, Anyanwu, Agwu, Onyejiuwa, Sampson and Odogwu intimated that a young man was once stoned to death by a peculiar villager because he killed his mother and only sister after taking *mkpurummiri*. Okoli, Ujumadu, Agbo and Oko (2021), lamented that a good number of commercial sex workers or ladies of easy virtue hustling on the streets of Enugu and Owerri take *mkpurummiri*.

Meth factories had been recently discovered in the following specifics in South East region of Nigeria; Some remote areas in Anambra state, some hideouts in Asaba and Enugu (wielding the unenviable record of hosting the highest number of smashed factories of illicit drug in the zone), thus between 2017 and 2019, up to seven crystal meth manufacturing laboratories had been uncovered by the Enugu state command of NDLEA in various parts of the state, recovering so much heavy tons of meth at each site as recorded by Hanafi 2022 and Eze, Anyanwu, Agwu, Onyejiuwa, Sampson and Odogwu (2021). Furthermore, between 2020 and of date the Ebonyi state command of NDLEA had seized about 196 pinches of meth from suspected drug dealers as recorded by Eze, Anyanwu, Agwu, Onyejiuwa, Sampson, Odogwu and Bilabi(2023). These seizures were made by the operations of NDLEA in various locations in Ebonyi state including rural communities. Various communities in Imo, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu states had equally banned and proscribed the selling of hard drug in their localities because of the menace it causes on the youths in Igbo land according to Nwannekanma (2023).

The Social Learning Theory on Drug Abuse/Addiction

This theory attempts to explain the socio-portion of the model for drug abuse and addiction. That is to say, how learning and socialisation – the influence of one's environment and even culture - contributes to the development of abuse and addiction. Amaral (2011), expounded that the main foundation of (Social) learning theory is that all behaviours of addiction are learned. According to Bandura (1998), and other scholars promoting social learning theory, individuals tend to adopt certain types of behaviours such as alcoholism and related acts because they might have observed such related behaviours from others like their parents, superiors, mentors and peers; and then subsequently learn them and equally start exhibiting them as well. Lyons (2023), asserted that the things that people learn from others through direct observation or instruction can often times lead such persons to take actions that are similar to what they have learned from such instructions. He condemned social media cum internet sites that teach for example how to quickly prepare and administer homemade Meths. Charlotte (2023), in her explanation declared that the initiation of addiction behavior can be explained by social learning theory. This is typified in the fact that smoking addiction can

be the result of influence from role models or peers, via various reinforcement. Merray (cited by Charlotte), supported this stance by affirming that children of smokers are twice as likely to start smoking as children of non-smokers.

Christian Solutions to Drug Abuse Among the Igbo Youths

Irrespective of the facts that various Christian solutions to drug abuse amongst the youths had been proffered abinitio, these study additionally suggests the following apposite to the Igbo youths distinctive stance. The bible which is the holy writ of Christianity will form the base of the solutions because theologically and structurally, the bible addresses all human problems and is ever relevant in positive and result oriented behavioural formation. The Christian solutions follows thus:

1. The bible made it clear in 1st Corinthians 15:33 that Bad company ruins good morals. This is the age when youngsters in Igbo land must avail themselves of the truth. They should always avoid bad companies of drug abusers. Social learning theoretical stance is very easily overcome by this simple sincere advice.
2. Youngsters must learn to shun associations that will harm their relationship with God. One must never “fell among”. Peer pressures can be subdued by keeping away from such ungodly hang outs. The bible made it clear that one should not tread in the counsel of the ungodly (Psalm 1:1). To maintain the steady joy of the Lord in ones innermost being, one must learn to resist enticing words of peer groups underscoring that consenting to evil is disobedient to God (Proverbs 1:10).
3. Youngsters must endeavor to be diligent, humble, submissive to the teachings of their parents as well as ever ready to yield themselves to the dictates of the word of God. It takes these virtues to achieve greatness in the contemporary Igbo setting without being deceived. Romans 12:1-3 insists that people should not conform to abnormalities.
4. Core Christian virtues of sobriety, abstinence from every appearance of evil, temperance and gravity must always be enthroned over covetous pursuits being enthroned in the contemporary Igbo societies.
5. Youngsters in Igbo land must learn to be contented with what they have and where they come from. They should endeavor to be Christ centered and not self-centered. They should always settle for the legal and honourable means of making money. The bible declared in 1 Timothy 6:6, that Godliness with contentment is great gain.
6. Parents must learn to be always involved in the affairs of their children. The Igbo Parent must not be absent in their children life endeavours. They must start from the cradle in training their children up in the ways of Christ. Proverbs 22:6 maintained that a child hardly derails from the good training of the parents. Parents must always direct their children. There is nothing like “child's right”; it is deceptive and diabolic. The Igbo will always say “*Na Nwamakaria mu bualu*” (a

- child can never be above the parents).
7. South Eastern Governors forum, *OhanaezeNdi Igbo* and the Igbo political top shots must employ concerted efforts to maintain that the official posting and location of NDLEA diligent, determined commanders and officers are not being influenced and manipulated by drug lords.

Conclusion

This study had delved deep into the core pre-colonial set up of the Igbo people. It had underscored the reasons for the prevalence of drug abuse amongst the Igbo youths in southeast, Nigeria. Previous and suggested solutions to drug abuse amongst youngsters and the Igbo youths in particular had been equally proffered in this work. It is obvious that drug abuse amongst the Igbo youths will never take the Igbo youngsters and communities at large down the drain of destruction.

This work does not in any way claim to have exhausted all relevant issues on the subject of discussion. However, this study still upholds that if all the solutions proffered herein are diligently employed by the youths in Igbo regions, the government and relevant authorities on drug related issues; the psycho-social psychosomatic and physiological problem of drug abuse amongst the Igbo youths will be nipped at the bud.

Recommendations

Since Abazie et al (2022), Onwubiko (2022), Ramalan (2022), and Anulika and Achufusi (2019), all portrayed that the dangers of drug abuse amongst the Igbo youths includes, propelling of insecurities, mental derangement, poor academic performance, adverse negative effects on the Nigerian labour force, hinders developments, increases mortality rates amongst others: these work equally makes the following recommendations for restoring and maintaining sanity amongst the Igbo youths.

Igbo youngsters who are Christians should be free and bold to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ among their peers. They should always be bold to identify with their faith in the open. Emphasis should be laid on good reputation and integrity as well as making money via disciplined means, and laying enviable landmarks for posterity as against exulting ill-gotten wealth in the Igbo contemporary societies. Evil men and drug lords should not be applauded but rather exposed. It is quite unfortunate that even the church in recent times exult wealthy individuals in the society without laying emphasis on the source of the wealth. Irrespective of the fact that this study is not encouraging undue suspicion or judgement; however, it should be established in Igbo societies that money is not everything. The craze to make money by all means facilitates drug trafficking, drug abuse and consequently, drug addiction. The Igbo contemporary society is so corrupt that the church should sit up or lose its relevance completely as being evidenced already.

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