

NIGERIAN YOUTHS AND ALCOHOLISM

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Abstract

Some anti-social behaviours such as accidents, kidnappings, robbery, getting into fights leading to the destruction of life and property, especially during elections, capable of scuttling the dreams and aspirations of our youth today are associated with alcohol. This sociological problem is sometimes fuelled by, among other things, the vacuum created by the lack of focused leadership with its resultant effect on the army of unemployed youth who end up indulging in alcohol, the drug of their choice, as an escape route from reality. In this paper, the researcher attempted at understanding what this phenomenon entails and highlighted the possible causes and damaging effects on the Psychology, Sociology and physiology of individuals and the nation as a whole.

Keywords: Nigerian, Youths, Drug Abuse, Alcoholism, Anti-Social Behavior

Introduction

Alcoholism is a chronically relapsing disorder that has been characterized by the compulsive use of addictive substance despite adverse consequences to the individual and to the society (Koob, G. and Volkow, N., 2009). Many anti-social behaviours such as accidents, kidnappings, robbery, getting into fights leading to the destruction of life and property, especially during elections, capable of scuttling the dreams and aspirations of our youth today are associated with alcohol. This sociological problem is sometimes fuelled by, among other things, the vacuum created by the lack of focused leadership with its resultant effect on the army of unemployed youth who end up indulging in alcohol, the drug of their choice, as an escape route from reality (Pala, O., 1986). We shall try to understand what this phenomenon entails and highlight the possible causes and damaging effects on the Psychology, Sociology and physiology of individuals and the nation as a whole.

Alcohol and Alcoholism among Youths

Alcohol is a drug found in all drinks designated as alcoholic, namely, beer, wine, spirits such as brands of vodka, Schnapps, Rum, whiskey, etc. Alcohol is a depressant drug. It slows down various sections of the brain and the central nervous system. This affects one's ability to control one's behaviour and one's bodily functions, such as thinking, talking, walking and even breathing. Alcohol is also described as a psychoactive drug. This refers to drugs that affect the mind, or mental processes. While some drinks have more alcoholic content than others, the type of alcohol in all alcoholic drinks is the same – a type of alcohol called ethanol. Alcohol is a colourless, odourless and inflammable fluid. Alcohol is one of the most highly abused substances

worldwide (Ali, et al 2011). Alcoholism is the most serious form of abusive drinking and describes a strong, often uncontrollable, desire to drink. Sufferers of alcoholism will often place drinking above all other obligations, including work and family, and may build up a physical tolerance to it and experience withdrawal symptoms if they stop.

Our youths are our future and hope for tomorrow; they are the new face of Nigeria and they are our hope for a better tomorrow. They will become the leaders of tomorrow. One needs to pause and wonder what our Nigerian future might be in the face of the present situation of the increased youth addictions according to research and experience on a day to day base. It is very important to note that a healthy nation is a wealthy nation. It is also common belief that only the healthy can tend to the needs of others. According to the former Director General, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Mr Otunba Ipinmisho, about 40 per cent (40%) of our youths are on substance abuse. The percentage mentioned above is very disturbing and should be a matter of urgent concern for us, putting us all on a red alert on how best to halt, manage and prevent this crisis. The implications and effects of this to both individuals and to the nation cannot be overemphasised. How could stability and growth of any kind such as economic, social, academic, etc. be expected in a sick nation? Each well-willing citizen should answer this question for himself/herself and sincerely look for solutions and a way forward.

The abuse of alcohol and alcoholism cause significant number of severe and fatal-health, social and economic problems in Nigeria. Alcoholism among youths can be very detrimental to not only to the abuser, but as well the immediate family members, friends, colleagues, and others who could in turn become victims of the abuser. The major victims of this physical violence which results from alcohol abuse or addictions include girlfriends, siblings, spouses and parents amongst others. This could be through fighting, nagging, apportioning blames, stealing, break down in families, carelessness, lack of coordination, loss of jobs, physical and sexual abuses and so on. Apart from affecting friends, siblings, spouses and parents, it seriously affects the entire nation because she begins to lose her citizens to alcoholism.

When our youths constantly abuse alcohol every day, they waste their future and the future of Nigeria. Unfortunately, not much of this epidemic is reported in the media or emphasised upon by opinion leaders who appear more concerned about enriching themselves through any means including politics. Yet the dangers of alcohol abuse of all sorts confront us every day on the roads, at the workplaces, schools, and at our homes among others. It is a thing to worry about.

Factors Encouraging Youth Involvement In Alcoholism In Nigeria

Keep in mind that alcoholism is a disease that does not discriminate and can impact on anyone – regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, body type or personal beliefs. Many studies have recently focused on the causes of alcoholism. Alcoholism is therefore influenced by a variety of factors such as psychological factors, personal choice factors, age factors, religious factors, educational factors, career factors, personality factors, social and cultural factors, environmental factors and family factors (Saheed, U., 2019). Alcohol manufacturers are also bombarding the general public with advertisements, many of which could be misleading, presenting drinking as an acceptable, fun and relaxing pastime. For these reasons and many more, youths believe that alcohol consumption can be used for fun during social gatherings which includes matriculations, convocations, parties, initiation into clubs, etc. There is also the peer factor influence which includes peer relations and pressures such as competitive drinking, betting, gangs, etc. Genetic and societal factors are also vital aspects because the kind of home and environment wherein one is raised contributes and somehow determines what they become for example, there is a greater probability that one raised by alcoholic parents/guardian will tend to become one in the future if there is no resilience or intervention. Unemployment is a major factor that contributes to alcoholism (Ojo, L., 2018). Jobless youths tend to while away their time by drinking and getting high in order to forget their plights and frustrations.

Effects of Alcohol

Psychological effects: There are two major psychological effects of alcoholism which are grouped into short- or long-term. It can be tricky to spot the signs of alcoholism as alcoholics can be secretive about it and can become defensive when confronted. Some of these psychological effects includes difficulty focusing, reduced inhibitions, problems with memory, increased depression and anxiety, interrupted brain development, tolerance development and increased substance use, dependency (alcoholism), mood swings, change in sleep pattern, cognitive inhibition and so many others (Odejide, A et al, 1989). These could have lasting negative effect on the individuals.

Sociological effects: Alcohol consumption can have adverse social and economic effects on the individual drinker, the drinker's immediate environment and society as a whole. Indeed, individuals other than the drinker can be affected, for example, traffic accidents could be occasioned by driving under the influence of alcohol or violence due to reduced inhibition. Reduced inhibition due to alcoholism could lead to high risk sexual behaviour which could result in unwanted pregnancy and transmission of infectious diseases such as STDs, etc. alcoholism has a great impact on the society as well, in terms of resources required for health care and other social institutions. It also

affects work performance in several ways such as frequent absences, work accidents, reduced productivity and unemployment. Alcohol abuse or alcoholism can impact on families by impairing a person's performance as a parent which can have lasting effect on their spouse and children. This can lead to breakdown in marital relationships and family life, accidents, poverty and violence (Ali, et al 2011). We cannot forget the fact that all these place an economic and financial burden on the nation.

Physiological effects: According to medical experts and researchers, alcohol has been known and identified to cause adverse/serious damages to our body systems especially when consumed in excess. Alcohol's impact on the body starts from the moment the first sip is taken (Pietrangelo, A. and Holland, K., 2017). Below is a table illustrating the many parts of our body that can be affected by constantly consuming alcohol.

Table 1. Some effects of excessive alcohol to the body system.

EFFECTS	EXPANSION
Brain shrinking	Long-term exposure to alcohol shrinks the frontal lobes of the brain
Blackouts	Alcohol interferes with how the brain makes memories
Dependence	When one becomes physically dependent on alcohol, it starts to affect one's ability to perform well
Behavioural changes	It can leave one without the mental clarity to make smart decisions
Hallucinations	There can be a serious effect such as hallucination
Slurred speech	This is one of the first symptoms of excessive alcohol consumption
Heart damage	Chronic heavy drinking is one of the leading causes of cardiovascular disease
Liver damage	This can damage the liver and prevent it from properly removing harmful substances from the body
Lung infection	Heavy drinkers have a hard time fighting off bacteria and virus, exposing them to TB and

	pneumonia
Cancer	Chronic drinkers are more likely to develop throat, mouth, oesophagus and breast cancers
Infertility	Drinking excess amounts of alcohol over a period of time may cause infertility
Sexual dysfunction	Men who have alcohol use disorder are more likely to experience erectile dysfunction
Birth defects	A pregnant woman's heavy drinking can increase a baby's risk for several conditions.
Diabetes complications	Excessive alcohol consumption prevents one's organs from properly balancing one's blood sugar levels

The list is endless as alcohol does much more than what we can see in the table above. There are other conditions such as stomach distress, malnutrition, muscle cramps, changes in coordination, fatigue, numbness, thinning bones, frequent diarrhoea, pancreatitis etc. It is just obvious and common sense that alcohol abuse is sickness and detrimental to the person, group or nation. It causes more harm than any good. It literally affects all parts of our bodies as individuals, groups or nation.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Alcoholism in general, but much specifically among our youths, is, no doubt, a socio-economic problem that requires prompt and constant attention because among other things, the future, health and strength of our nation depend on these young people. Now is the right time for everyone with or without interest in human dignity to articulate and advocate an alcohol education programme. Education in this regard means the intentional investment of time and resources by all especially those involved in decision making to teaching and counselling on alcohol, its use and abuse.

I strongly advocate that this training should be integrated into school curriculum and take multidisciplinary approach. Also, very importantly, young and middle-aged parents of youths from all homes should be involved in this education process. I recommend that awareness should be created in schools, churches, work places and all public and private sectors with the sole aim of constantly emphasizing the dangers and effects of alcohol abuse. I also strongly recommend the use of the media with its influence as popular platform

of information for the young to create wider awareness. Any country that intends to reduce substance abuse and alcoholism among its youth should dedicate resources to project consistent on messages on the dangers of alcohol use to their youth through the media. All over the world, parents, teachers, religious leaders, and others are struggling to deal with the volume of misleading messages and negative influences that young people are exposed to through the media, especially when it comes to alcohol use. Anti-Alcohol Media Campaigns are effective ways to push back against these negative messages and “unsell” the idea of alcohol use to young people.

The misuse of alcohol is dangerous to health. Alcohol consumption can cause or have adverse social and economic effect on the individual consumer, its immediate environment and the society as a whole. Let us therefore save ourselves, our environment and the whole society by avoiding the misuse of alcohol.

Save the young people, save our future: say ‘NO’ to alcohol abuse.

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