



CURBING THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

Obinna Victor Obiagwu
Samuel Ugochukwu Obasi
Donatus Uzoma Okwara
Obioma Daniel Chukwukere

Directorate of General Studies,
Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria.
obinnaobiagwu71@gmail.com

Abstract

Substance abuse, defined as the misuse of illegal, prescription, or over-the-counter drugs, is a growing public health and social issue in South-East Nigeria. The increasing prevalence of drug abuse among youths has far-reaching consequences, including health complications, social instability, and economic decline. The phenomenon is exacerbated by factors such as unemployment, peer pressure, family breakdown, and weak law enforcement mechanisms. This paper critically examines the scope, causes, and consequences of drug and substance abuse in South-East Nigeria. It also explores policy responses, intervention strategies, and community-based initiatives aimed at curbing the menace. The study highlights the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement, including government agencies, religious institutions, and civil society, in addressing the problem. Recommendations include enforcing stricter drug policies, implementing youth empowerment programs, integrating drug education into school curricula, and strengthening family and community support structures.

Keywords: Substance abuse, drug addiction, youth intervention, policy response, South-East Nigeria.

Introduction

Substance abuse is a critical challenge affecting societies globally, with dire implications for public health, social stability, and economic development (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). The phenomenon involves the misuse of substances such as marijuana, opioids, amphetamines, and prescription drugs beyond medically prescribed limits (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency [NDLEA], 2021). In Nigeria, particularly in the South-East, drug abuse has reached alarming levels, predominantly among the youth, raising concerns among policymakers, healthcare professionals, and law enforcement agencies (Nwankwo & Eze, 2020).

This paper explores the growing issue of drug and substance abuse in South-East Nigeria, analyzing its causes, health effects, and policy responses. It further examines intervention strategies and suggests recommendations for effectively mitigating the problem.

The Scope and Prevalence of Drug Abuse in South-East Nigeria



The prevalence of drug abuse in South-East Nigeria has escalated over the years, with a significant number of young people engaging in the consumption of illicit substances. Reports indicate that substances commonly abused include:

- i. Marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*): Widely available and used for its psychoactive effects.
- ii. Methamphetamine (Mkpurummiri): Highly addictive and linked to aggressive behavior and psychosis.
- iii. Codeine-based cough syrups: Misused for their sedative effects.
- iv. Tramadol: A prescription painkiller often abused for its euphoric effects.
- v. Cocaine and heroin: Though less prevalent, they are used among certain high-risk groups.

A study by Chukwu et al. (2023) found that 65% of university students in South-East Nigeria had experimented with at least one illicit drug. Another report by NDLEA (2021) noted that Imo, Anambra, and Enugu states recorded some of the highest drug abuse cases in the country.

Factors Contributing to Drug Abuse in the Region

Several factors contribute to the rising trend of drug abuse in South-East Nigeria:

- i. Unemployment and Poverty: High levels of youth unemployment have led many to drug abuse as a means of escapism (Okonkwo et al., 2021).
- ii. Peer Pressure: Social influence from friends and social circles has been a major driver of drug experimentation (Eze & Uchenna, 2019).
- iii. Family Breakdown: Lack of parental guidance and dysfunctional homes contribute to youth vulnerability (Nwankwo & Eze, 2020).
- iv. Weak Law Enforcement: Limited resources and corruption within law enforcement agencies have allowed drug markets to thrive (NDLEA, 2021).

The Health and Social Consequences of Drug Abuse

The effects of substance abuse extend beyond the individual, affecting families, communities, and the broader society.

Health Implications

Drug abuse has severe health consequences, including:

- i. Neurological Disorders: Chronic drug use can cause brain damage, seizures, and stroke (Okonkwo et al., 2021).
- ii. Mental Health Issues: Depression, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, and suicidal tendencies are commonly associated with substance abuse (Eze & Uchenna, 2019).
- iii. Respiratory and Cardiovascular Diseases: Smoking-related drugs increase the risk of lung disease and heart conditions (Ogunjimi, 2022).
- iv. Weakened Immune System: Long-term drug abuse leads to immune suppression, making users more susceptible to infections (NDLEA, 2021).

Social and Economic Consequences

- i. Crime and Violence: Drug abuse has been linked to increased crime rates, including theft, domestic violence, and gang activities (Chukwu et al., 2023).



- ii. School Dropouts and Unproductivity: Drug-dependent youths often struggle with academic performance and job retention (Nwankwo & Eze, 2020).
- iii. Family Disintegration: Substance abuse leads to broken families and strained relationships (Okonkwo et al., 2021).

Policy Responses and Social Controls

In response to the rising cases of drug abuse, both governmental and non-governmental organizations have intensified efforts to control the epidemic.

Governmental Interventions

Legislation and Drug Control Laws: NDLEA has strengthened existing laws to combat drug trafficking and distribution.

Rehabilitation Programs: Establishing more treatment centers to support drug addicts.

Youth Development Policies: Promoting economic empowerment and vocational training to reduce drug dependency.

Community-Based Approaches

Public Awareness Campaigns: Advocacy programs in schools, religious centers, and social media platforms.

Grassroots Mobilization: Involving traditional rulers and religious leaders in sensitization efforts.

Recommendations for Mitigating Drug Abuse in South-East Nigeria

To effectively curb substance abuse in South-East Nigeria, a comprehensive approach is necessary:

- i. **Stronger Drug Policies:** Enforce stricter regulations on the production and distribution of controlled substances.
- ii. **Educational Reforms:** Introducing compulsory drug education programs in schools.
- iii. **Job Creation and Economic Empowerment:** Providing employment opportunities for youths to reduce the appeal of drugs.
- iv. **Family and Community Engagement:** Strengthening family values and parental involvement in child upbringing.
- v. **Rehabilitation and Support Services:** Expanding access to mental health and addiction treatment services.

Conclusion

Substance abuse remains a significant public health and socio-economic challenge in South-East Nigeria. While government policies and interventions have made some progress, more needs to be done to address the root causes of drug abuse. A holistic strategy that includes legislative enforcement, community engagement, and educational interventions is essential for tackling the issue. By fostering a drug-free environment, Nigeria can secure a brighter future for its youth and society at large.

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