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Brief Review of Causes and Effects of Substance Abuse on Young Adults: Focus on Bonny Island Residents

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Abstract

Substance abuse is fast becoming a global social concern especially among young adults. Young people often experiment with a variety of activities and substances. Unfortunately, this experimentation can lead to substance abuse and addiction. Statistics show that drug abuse is a growing problem among young adults. This review highlights the causes of substance abuse among young adults in the society, the effects of this harmful substances and possible preventions of this social menace on young people. In Bonny Island, it has become most worrisome the rate at which young people are embracing drugs freely and unchecked. Worst still, young people are generating their mixtures using modern substances with unusual elements to create their own formula for severe drug intake. This means that drug intake has graduated from the use of sedatives like cocaine, heroin and cannabis that we used to know to potent mixture of several drugs to attain fatal overdose. For example, a cocktail of drugs like codeine, tramadol, cannabis with juice or soft drink is called "gutter water". More crude is the smoking of lizard dung, sniffing of petrol, glue, urine and sewage as inhalant. This is gradually eating deep into our society like cancer. Actually, substance abuse is now part of a modern society but very worrisome is the alarming rate at which young adults are embracing hard substances.

Keywords: Substance abuse, Young Adults, Causes, Effects, Bonny

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Introduction

Bonny Island is situated at the southern edge of Rivers State in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It is a riverine area near Port Harcourt; ferries are the major form of transport to and from the Island. The local language spoken in Bonny Island is Ibani, but many natives also speak the Igbo language. The community is subdivided into two main segments – the Mainland and the Hinterland. The Mainland comprises Bonny Island and its segments, namely: Town, Amaomu, Sand Field, Iwoama, Orosikiri, Aganya, Ayambo, Akiama, Workers Camp, Wilbros and some outlying fishing settlements lying along the Bonny River's coastline. The Hinterland includes the village communities such as Kuruama, Ayama, Otobie, Abalamabie, Dema-Abbey, Kalaibiama, Oloma, Minima etc.

Prior to the coming of the multinational companies in the 1990s, fishing (both for commercial and subsistence) was the major economical activity in Bonny; Life was private, calm and peaceful.

However, in the early 1990s the Federal Government of Nigeria, in collaboration with three international partners namely: Shell Gas

BV., CLEAG Limited (ELF) and AGIP International BV started the multi-billion dollar project - Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas Limited, and due to its strategic location, Bonny Island, particularly the Finima community, was chosen as one of its operational base.

Currently, Bonny Island hosts various multinational oil companies including: Royal Dutch Shell, Mobil, Chevron, Agip and ELF. The Island has grown to an urban area in the last two decades.

However, it is important to note that urbanization has its merits and demerits. One of the disadvantages of urbanization is social vices - prominent on the Island are insecurity and substance abuse.

For the purpose of this study, substance abuse shall be used interchangeably with drugs, and young adults shall be used interchangeably with young persons.

Substance abuse also known as drug abuse is the use of drug in amounts or by methods which are harmful to the individual or others [1]. It is a form of substance related disorder. Differing definitions of drug abuse are used in public health, medical and criminal justice contexts. In some cases, criminal or anti-

social behavior occurs when the person is under the influence of a drug(s) and long term personality changes in individuals may occur as well. In addition to possible physical, social and psychological harm, use of some drugs may also lead to criminal penalties, although these may vary widely depending on the local law.

Drugs are chemicals or substance that change the way our bodies work. Some are medicines that help people when prescribed by a doctor. Many have no medical use or benefits. When taken (usually by swallowing, inhaling or injecting), abused drugs find their way into the bloodstream; from there, they move to the brain and other parts of the body. In the brain, drugs may intensify or dull the senses, change how alert or sleepy people feel and sometimes decrease physical pain. Because of the way these drugs work on the brain, they affect the ability to make healthy choices and decisions. Even drinking makes people more likely to get involved in dangerous situations like driving under the influence or having unprotected sex. Although substance can feel good at first, they can do a lot of harm to the body and brain. Drinking alcohol, smoking or using tobacco, taking illegal drugs, even sniffing glue all damage the human body. Commonly abused drugs include: alcohol, amphetamines, bath salts, cocaine and crack, cough and cold medicines (DMX), depressants, inhalants, heroin, ketamine, marijuana, methamphetamine (meth), mushrooms PCP, prescription pain relievers (opioids), Rohypnol and Salvia [2].

In Bonny Island, substance abuse is most pronounced among young adults; people between the ages of fifteen and twenty five years old are deeply involved in the sale and consumption of these harmful substances. They carry out their illicit activities mainly along Amaomu (commonly called Ama-Hausa) area and Burukutu area along Abalamabie Road of the Island. The drugs that are most commonly used by young people are alcohol, tobacco and marijuana [3].

Recently, more young people have started vaping tobacco and marijuana. There is still a lot we don't know about the dangers of vaping. Some people have unexpectedly gotten very sick or have even died after vaping. Worthy of note is the fact that most young people involved in substance abuse are non indigenous but residents on the Island [4].

Substance abuse is one of the health related problems among young people and has been a source of concern to national stakeholders. Among Nigerian youths, it has been a scourge to the overall sustainable development of the nation. It is a serious issue; a global and international issue, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. It is also a major public health, social and individual problem and is seen as an aggravating factor for economic crises. While young people are supposed to be the major agent of change and development, some of them have been destroyed by drugs (rendering them unproductive). Substance abuse has a negative effect on the education of undergraduates in different tertiary institutions of learning [5].

Consequently, the overall health of the user is affected negatively and behaviours associated with substance abuse predispose the abuser to crime and contagious diseases including HIV/AIDS [6].

Invariably, drugs are abused for a variety of reasons. A number of effects of substance abuse include liver cirrhosis, pancreatic peptic ulcer, hypertension, neurological disorder, tuberculosis etc. Also, mental effects consist of retardation, growth deformity, nervous system deficiency, delayed motor development, amnesia and dementia among others. The various effects of substance abuse are so devastating and very shameful to the extent that both the nation and international organizations are also worried about the spread of this scourge among young people.

Literature Review

According to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the use and abuse of drugs by adolescent have become one of the most disturbing health related phenomena in Nigeria and other parts of the world. In Nigeria, most people use drugs such as coffee, kola nut and cigarettes for staying awake; or take alcohol and tobacco as a way of relaxation, or take painkillers like aspirin in reducing body pains. These are seen as licit drugs. However, the use or abuse of drugs such as cannabis or marijuana, cocaine, heroin and meth are seen as illicit drugs and frequency in its usage engenders its abuse [7].

Similarly, a research carried out in University of Lagos Nigeria using a WHO's student drug survey proforma, of the one thousand students surveyed, a total of 807 responded to the questionnaire resulting in 80.7% response rate. Majority (77.9%) of the students were aged 19 – 30 years and unmarried. Six hundred and ninety-eight (86.5%) claimed they were aware of drugs abuse but, contrarily, they demonstrated poor knowledge and awareness. Marijuana, 298 (45.7%) was the most common drug of abuse seen by most of the students. They were unable to identify very well the predisposing factors to drug use and the attending risks. Two hundred and sixty six (33.0%) students were currently taking one or more drugs of abuse. Coffee (43.1%) was the most commonly used drug followed by alcohol (25.8%) and marijuana [8].

According to results from 2010 monitoring the Future Survey, a nationwide study on rates of substance use in the United States show that 48.2% of 12th graders report having used an illicit drug at some point in their lives. In the 30days prior to the survey, 41.2% of 12th graders had consumed alcohol and 19.2% of 12th graders have smoked tobacco cigarettes. In 2001 in the United States, about 21% of high school students had taken prescription drugs without a prescription. And earlier in 2002, the World Health Organization estimated that around one hundred and forty million people were alcohol dependent and another four hundred million with alcohol-related problems [9-11].

Causes of Substance Abuse

The exact cause of substance abuse is not clear, the two predominant factors are: Environmental and Genetic factors. However, there are different reasons why young people engage in substance intake/abuse, these include, but not limited to, the following:

Peer Pressure: Peer pressure is a major factor in starting to use and misuse drugs especially among young adults.

Lack of Family Involvement: Difficult family situations or lack of a bond with parents or siblings may increase the risk of substance abuse as can a lack of parental supervision.

Peer Acceptance: Young people may do drugs because they want to be accepted by friends or peers who are doing drugs - they want to belong.

Pleasure: Substance abuse can produce feelings of pleasure to the user

To Feel Better: Some young adults suffer from depression, anxiety, stress related disorders and physical pain which may lead them to substance abuse to get some relief.

To Do Better in Academics or Sports: Some young people may take stimulants for studying or anabolic steroids to improve their athletic performance.

To Experiment: Young adults often want to try something new, hence, the mixing of substances.

Neglect by parents, government and society

Stressful Early life Experiences: Such as child abuse, child sexual abuse and other forms of trauma.

Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol or other Harmful Substances

Lack of Parental Supervision or Monitoring

Keeping Wrong Company: Having peers and/or friends who use drugs.

Mental Health Disorder [12-16].

Symptoms of Substance Abuse

Problem at School or Work: Frequently missing school or work, a sudden disinterest in school activities or work or a drop in grades or work performance.

Physical Health Issues: Lack of energy and motivation, weight loss or gain or red eyes.

Neglected Appearance: Lack of interest in clothing, grooming or looks

Changes in Behaviour: So much efforts to bar family members from entering his or her room or being secretive about where he or she goes with friends; drastic changes in behavior and in relationship with family and friends.

Money Issues: Sudden requests for money without a reasonable explanation or your discovery that money is missing or has been stolen or that items have disappeared from home indicating maybe they're being sold to support drug use.

Changing Friends a Lot.

Spending a Lot of Time Alone.

Losing Interest in Favourite Things.

Being Really Tired and Sad.

Being Very Energetic, Talking Fast or Saying Things That Don't Make Sense.

Always in a Bad Mood Especially When at Home with Family.

Missing Important Appointments.

Eating More or Eating Less than Usual.

Having Hard Time in Personal or Family Relationship [17].

Effects of Substance Abuse

Substance abuse at any age can cause damaging health effects but young adults who engage in substance abuse are at a higher risk of negative consequences; they are more likely to struggle with addiction later in life and have permanent and irreversible brain damage. The following are some effects of substance abuse on young people:

Mental Disorder: Young people who involve in substance abuse run mad at the middle age of their lives, even before they are old enough to be useful to their parents and the society. This is obvious in the increase of young insane people on the street.

Diseases: young adults who inject substances with needle increase their risk of blood-borne diseases like HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B and C.

Risky and Unprotected Sex: Young people that use drugs are five times more likely to have sex than those who don't use drugs; they are more likely to have unprotected sex and have sex with a stranger. This leads to higher risks of STDs, unwanted pregnancy, rape and sexual assault.

Learning Problems: Substance abuse damages short-term and long sexual memory and can lead to problems with learning and loss of memory in life.

Environmental Problems: Because they have lost touch with their senses, they become nuisance in the society – roaming around aimlessly and polluting the environment.

Addiction and Dependence: Studies prove that the younger a person is when they begin drugs; the more likely they are to develop a substance abuse relapse in the future.

Behavioural Problems: Young people who abuse substances have an increased

Accidents: Young people who engage in substance abuse are more likely risk of social problems, depression, suicidal thoughts and violence. To be involved in accident related injuries or death.

Suicide: Young adults who are substance addicted die by suicide more often than normal people.

Brain Damage: Substance abuse can result in serious and irreversible damage to the brain or nervous system. Illicit drugs can cause brain shrinkage, impaired learning abilities, amnesia, impaired reasoning, perception and intuition, increased or decreased socialization and changes in sexual desire (weak erection in men).

Family Problems: Substance abuse can lead to broken homes thereby exposing kids to danger.

Work Issues: Substance abuse can cause declining performance at work, absenteeism and eventual loss of work.

Academics: Most young people that do drugs find it difficult to concentrate in their academics and this has made some of them school drop outs.

Legal Issues: Legal problems are common among drug abusers. It can stem from buying or possessing illegal drugs, stealing to support substance use, driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol and disputes over child custody.

Financial Problems: Spending money to support drug takes away money from other needs, could lead to debt and can lead to illegal or unethical behaviours.

Consequently, substance abuse appears to occur when repeated use of a drug changes the way your brain feels pleasure. The addicting drug causes physical changes to some nerve cells (neurons) in your brain. Neurons use chemicals called neurotransmitters to communicate. These changes can remain long after you stop using the drugs [18].

Prevention / Recommendations

Substance abuse is preventable and the best way to prevent an abuse of a drug is not to take the drug at all. Preventive measures of substance abuse in young adults should involve families, most especially parents, schools, communities, media, government, companies and the society at large [19]. Some of these measures are:

Education / Orientation: Educating young people on the dangers of substance abuse is very important as it helps to control possible use before the age of maturity. This can be done in primary and secondary levels of learning by non – governmental organizations, company representatives (in the case of Bonny Island), government functionaries and well-meaning individuals. Creating awareness and orientating young people on the consumption of illicit drugs will help them make better decisions

Recreational Activities: In Bonny Island, multinationals should make provision for recreational activities such as sports, quiz competition; skill acquisition programmes etc regularly and make them accessible and affordable to our youths. By so doing, they will not only be giving back to the host community but also keeping the young adults away from substance abuse.

Good Communication: Parents should maintain good communication with their children; a good parent should be able to talk to his child about the dangers of selling and consuming drugs.

Set a Good Example: Parents and guardians should live an exemplary life as the kids are watching and emulating. Don't consume alcohol, tobacco and other abusive substances in front of your children. In most cases, children of parents who abuse drugs end up being drug abusers themselves.

Listen to Your Children: most parents are guilty of this, in the bid to make ends meet; we neglect and abandon our children thereby creating a void that needs to be filled. Parents be a good listener when your children talk about peer pressure and be supportive of their efforts to resist it.

Encouragement: Young adults should be encouraged and get all the necessary support they need to go to school, learn a trade / skill and build confidence and strong sense of self to help them manage crises instead of taking solace in drugs

Setting Limits: Parents should not over pamper their young children rather, teach them self – control and responsibility, set boundaries and show that you care.

Strengthen the Bond: A strong bond cannot easily be broken. Parents' \ guardian should build friendship with your kids so they can feel free to discuss their substance abuse struggle with you.

Sensitive and Active Parents/Guardians: Young people are easily influenced to do drugs by friends, so it is important for parents to know the cycle of friends they keep as to advice and take quick action when necessary.

Involvement of Government: Government should enforce the ban on the sale of illicit drugs and see to it that defaulters are prosecuted.

Employment of Youths: Government, companies and employers of labour should make youth employment a priority; also, there should be appointment of young adults into sensitive positions thereby keeping them conscious of their actions in the society.

Conclusion

Substance abuse is an over indulgence in and dependence on a drug(s) or other chemicals. Drugs play a major role in young people's morbidity and mortality; it is a major attribute to the increased rate of insanity among young adults. Drugs most often associated with this term include alcohol, tobacco, amphetamines, barbitures, benzodiazepines, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens, methaqualone and opiods.

When under the influence of alcohol or other substance, young people are at increased risk for injuries, unprotected sex or interpersonal violence. Depending on the actual substance, substance abuse may lead to health problems, social problems, morbidity, deaths, motor/vehicle accidents, homicides, suicides, physical dependence or psychological addiction. Because of its many effects, psychologically, mentally, socially, academically, financially, spiritually and otherwise, young people are advised to stay away from substance abuse.

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