

Exploring The Perceived Factors That Lead To Substance Abuse Among The Youth In Northern Nigeria

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Abstract:

Substance abuse is a maladaptive use of a drug, resulting in impairment of functioning or distress, as manifested by a failure to perform adequately at home, school or work. In Nigeria, a large number of the population mostly the youth buy drugs without any physician's prescription. The aim of this study was to explore the perceived factors that lead to substance abuse among the youth in Gawon Nama area of Sokoto, Sokoto state, Nigeria. An exploratory descriptive qualitative design was used. Twelve youth between the ages 18 to 30 years who abuse different substances but were not in psychotic state were recruited using snowball and purposive sampling methods. Semi-structured interview guide was used to interview the respondents after obtaining an informed consent from the respondents. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim, the data was analyzed using content analysis. The findings of this study revealed that the most common factors that lead to substances abuse were availability and affordability of these substances. The implications for policy and future research were considered and recommendations were made based on the findings of the study such as the government and non-governmental organizations should provide job opportunities for the youth.

Key Words: Substances, abuse, substance abuse, youth, factors

Introduction:

According to World Health Organization (WHO), substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. Psychoactive substance use can lead to dependence syndrome which is a continuous, repeated and persistent use of the substance despite its harmful consequences; leading to a high priority being given to the use of the substance to the detriment of other activities and obligations³⁰. According to World Drug Report (2014), the prevalence rate of problem of substance abuse users varies between 2.7% in Greece and 9.0% in UK as rate per 1,000 of populations aged 15-64 years in Europe²⁹.

Generally, drugs are helpful when they are properly used and destructive when they are misused or abused, but most youth are guilty of substance abuse¹⁸. The use of illicit substances is a major public health problem in high income countries like the US. However, this problem of illicit substance use has spread rapidly to include middle and low income countries where most of its youth and adolescents are actively engaged in this illegal practice^[4,18].

Many authors and researchers have shown that there are many contributing factors that lead to substance abuse among the youth. Terry-McElrath, O'Malley and Johnston^[28] , argue that substance abuse is caused by a combination of environmental, biological, and psychological factors. Youth abuse substances because of: peer pressure or influence, boosting energy, coping with stress, enhancing cognition or for curiosity and imitation.

The reasons for substance use among youth varied, the most common reasons are; to boost self-confidence, to cope with stress, anxiety, to get high (euphoria)^[6], to socialize, to keep awake, to try to get sleep^[2,16,21,], to reduce physical and emotional pain, to experiment and to alleviate feelings of hunger^[11]. There are many reasons why youth abuse substances. In many situations, substances are being used as artificial problem-solvers such as frustrations, stress or tiredness^[19]. Others choose to use substances to enjoy the feelings or for recreational purposes^[27]. But most of the times, youth use substances for experiment to find out more about the sensations they produce^[6,16,]. Studies have found that, most of the youth have the perception that; peer group^[11,6,20,18], unemployment, availability and affordability of drugs^[2,5], family upbringing or background^[20] and gender^[1,2,21], are the most common influencing factors or causes of substance abuse among them.

The fact that Sokoto State is predominantly a Muslim state and coupled with the fact that public sale and consumption of alcohol is completely disallowed within the entire territory of Sokoto, compels young men and women to resort to taking other substances in order to get high (euphoria),^[2,6,16].

Federal Neuro-psychiatric hospital Kware in Sokoto is the main referral center for Neuro-psychiatric patients including those for substance abuse. There was an increase in the number of admitted cases of substance abuse as shown in the table below.

Table1. 1: Number of admitted cases of substance abuse from 2008-2013

S/NO.	YEAR AND MONTH	NUMBER OF ADMITTED CASES OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE
1	January 2008 To December2008	4099
2	January 2009 To December2009	4216
3	January 2010 To December2010	5114
4	January 2011 To December2011	5011
5	January 2012 To December2012	5385
6	January 2013 To December2013	5632

(Source Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital Kware, Sokoto, 2014).

Further studies are therefore required to explore the perceptions of the youth on the substances they abuse, especially in the Northern part of Nigeria; highlighting in the need for this study.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived factors that lead to substance abuse among the youth in sokoto.

Method:

2.1 Design. An exploratory descriptive qualitative design was used for this study. This design is appropriate for areas where little has been reported and that is the reason that motivated the researcher to explore the perception of the youth on substance abuse.

Also, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to use a naturalistic method to gain in-depth understanding on perceptions of the youth on substance abuse. Accordingly, this study employed qualitative techniques in both the collection and analysis of the data^[7]. The research was conducted in Gawon Nama area, Sokoto, Sokoto state, Nigeria. A non-probability sampling methods (purposive and snowball sampling techniques) were used to select the participants from Gawon Nama area, Sokoto

2.2 Studypopulation and setting. The populations for this study were twelve (12) youth between 18-30 years who abuse substances but do not have obvious signs of psychosis in Gawo Nama area of Sokoto, Sokoto state, Nigeria, where an in-depth interview was conducted with each participant, using open ended interview questions and following a topical semi- structured interview guide after obtaining an ethical approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board of Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research. Each

interview lasted for about 30-45 minutes. The interviews were audio taped and later transcribed in English, verbatim. Interviews conducted in Hausa were also translated in English. The transcript was discussed with an expert in Hausa to ensure accuracy of the translation 2.3 Data analysis. Data was analyzed using a content analysis as described by^[17]. Also, content analysis of the individual participant's in-depth interview was used to achieve all the objectives of the study.

In this study, data was analyzed to identify the main themes and sub-themes within the narratives given by the participants. The analysis began once the first interview was conducted and continued throughout the data gathering process. Following the completion of each interview, the researcher would then transcribe the tape recordings. Each written transcript was read several times, while listening to the corresponding audio tape to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed tape. In addition, the transcripts were given to the supervisors to ensure integrity of the transcription. Important phrases, sentences or paragraphs were highlighted and assigned a label or code; this process was repeated until all the data was coded. The coded passages were then compared and codes that had common elements were grouped to form major themes and sub-themes. These themes and their supporting passages were continuously revised during the process of going through the transcripts. Every data was scrutinized to ascertain its suitability within the assigned theme. The themes were compared with each other and this helped to identify the relationships among the themes which were used to describe the perceived factors that lead to substance abuse among the youth.

Results and discussion:

Results:

Interviewees were between the ages of 18-30 years old. One (1) out of the twelve had a national certificate of education and three (3) had primary education and the remaining nine (9) had secondary school education. Only four (4) participants were not working and eight (8) were working, out of which two (2) were motor mechanics, one (1) was a businessman who sells cloth and the other one (1) was a watchman whilst the other two (2) were primary school teachers in a private and public primary school each. One (1) was working at an international airport in Sokoto. Half of the participants were single whilst the other half were married. Two (2) out of the married participants had children. All the participants were males and Muslim by religion. All the participants were interviewed in Hausa because they understood the language better and preferred to be interviewed in Hausa. All the participants were living in Gawon Nama area of Sokoto, Sokoto state, Nigeria. The sub-themes that were discussed included: peer pressure, energy booster, imitation and curiosity, political influence, cognitive enhancement, and coping with stress.

It was found that peer pressure, family conflict, political influence, ability to boost energy, thinking process, curiosity, coping with the stress influenced youths to abuse substances.

3.1.1. Peer Pressure. The study revealed that friends or peers had an influence on the use of illicit substances. Majority of the participants explained that they were influenced into substance abuse by their peers:

“It is when I was with one of my friends who abuses substances.... One day there was misunderstanding between me and my parent... I then left my father's house because I was annoyed. So, when I went out I met my friend..... He then asked me to follow him and he told me that if I want to get rid of this, there is something I can do. He will give me something that will make me forget and get relief of this situation I then agreed that I will take it.... He brought out marijuana and gave me to smoke...he insisted, finally he convinced me with words, and smoked it and since then, I have been smoking it”. (MP3)

It was found that, the relationship between peers who abused substances and those who did not abuse substance were terminated. This implies that all friends of substance abusers were also abusers:

“All my friends abuse substances, those that are not abusing substances are no more my friends.... All my friends abuse substances because if you are not abusing substances, then you are not my friend. A friend influenced me into substance abuse and I influenced others too to join”. (MP1)

Similarly, participant number three explained how he was influenced by friends into this menace:

“The thing that made me to start abusing substances was my friend, when I was in primary school; I had some friends who abused substances, so one day I went out with them, and they told me that I was still a village boy. So I asked them why? One of them answered that because I don’t use substances. I then told him that I was not a village boy, so he asked me to prove that, and I said how? He then brought out a cigarette and asked me to smoke and I did, after some days again we went out and they gave me marijuana”. (MP2) “Yes, my friends in the school....but I also want to belong, I want to join my friends”. (MP9) “My friends influenced me into it, even though I resisted for a long time, but later I joined them....My friends are the reasons why I am taking it, if not because of my friends I would not have gotten involved into substance abuse,So, most people abuse substances because they are influenced or even forced to do that by their friends”. (MP5) 3.1.2. Energy Booster. Furthermore, it was revealed that, one of the reasons for engaging in substance abuse was to boost ones energy level. This helped them to carry out their schedules without much difficulty: “We have those that take substances to go on errandsI used substances so as to gain the required energy for me to work. That is the reason why I am using drugs. The drug will enable me to work so as to earn a living..... it also helps me to get relieved. Whenever I work and I don’t get tired easily it means I have used” (MP6) “For the Tramadol it makes me feel strong, whenever I take it, I will be so strong. So, whenever I feel weak in my body, I must take it. And the highest I will take is like four, five sometimes six tablets”. (MP12) “Some people take it so that they will feel normal, that is, they will feel so strong...” “It makes me to be so strong, I feel so strong whenever I smoke Marijuana. Once I feel weak, I will smoke it and that is all, the weakness will go” (MP4)

Apart from boosting the energy, others could eat better and felt stronger: “It helps to boost my energy and also to eat better, so if I smoke marijuana it will make me to eat well while tramadol makes me to work hard. The only thing is that if I didn’t take tramadol, I will not be as strong as compared to when I took it. Sometimes I feel weak if I don’t take it”. (MP5)

It was revealed that indulgence in illicit substances affects one’s work. Respondents said: “I can still do my work, but not as good and perfect as the way I will work when I smoke it. So that is why I have to smoke it so that I can do my work well”. (MP8) “Yes, it makes me feel so strong. If I take some I can work hard and I will not be tired....those that make me to be strong are different, like Tramadol when I take it, it will boost my energy... and it will make me strong. So a work I can do within one hour, I can do it within....Just like thirty minute if I take the tramadol”. (MP10)

3.1.3. Imitation and Curiosity. Again, it was found that the youth abused substances due to curiosity or to imitate others. The study revealed that, the youth in the study area wanting to know how other people felt when they took the substances of which they later become addicted. Respondents said:

“Ok, what made me start using these substances was that, where I stay, that is where we normally sit especially in the evening, almost everybody who use to sit there was smoking marijuana. So, all the youth were smoking and I have been sitting there for some time, till one day when I asked myself how do they feel if they smoke? So I wanted to find out, how they felt and that is how I got into smoking”. (MP3)

“I started smoking marijuana because I saw others smoking, I learned smoking marijuana by going where people use to smoke it, when they were smoking they do not finish everything, so they will throw some away, so I then park the remaining and smoke. That is how I learned smoking”. (MP4)

It was reported that some youth got into substance abuse because they saw their parent abusing substances:

“Some of us are abusing drugs because we saw others abusing drugs, if a child saw or observed that his father or any other family member is taking substances, he tries to imitate. For example, some youth are smoking cigarette because they saw their parents smoking and they imitated using stick, from there they become smokers. My friend was smoking because of that. He learned how to smoke by imitating his father”. (MP5)

Respondent six said, most of the times he smoked whenever he saw others smoking: “Most of the time I smoke whenever I see other people smoking”. (MP6) 3.1.4. Political Influence. The study also revealed that; politics

and politicians influenced the youth to abuse substances. It was revealed that during campaigns, some politicians supply illicit substances to the youth as a bait to win their votes. It was found that, the practice persists for long and abusers do not even remember the last time they used their own money to buy the drugs: “Yes political leaders, especially when it is voting year. They are the ones that make us to abuse substances, and they do give us these substances. I have forgotten the last time I used my money to buy these substances. They either give us the drugs or give us money to buy the drugs”. (MP2)

Respondent seven claimed that politicians encouraged them by buying the substances for them: “The politicians were also to be blamed, as they are the ones that even encourage us to use it as they even buy it for us”. (MP7)

3.1.5. Cognitive Enhancement. It was found that some youth abused certain substances with the aim to help them concentrate, think and remember things easily. It was revealed that students often abuse some substances particularly marijuana to enable them remember all what they read during examination. Respondents four and eight explained:

“When I smoke it, maybe because I have an assignment or an exam to write at school, it makes me to think and write my exam very well, because it will help increase my thinking and make me write my exam very well and pass. So it helps you to retained and remember whatever you read. That is one of the reason I smoke marijuana”. (MP4) “I have been smoking since when I was a small boy, so our teacher observes and begin to wonder, that whenever a chapter of the Quran was written to me I will finished it on the same day, unlike my other colleagues. So this was one of the reasons why I smoke marijuana, because it makes me to concentrate and also read very well”. (MP8)

Respondent six also confirmed that it helped him in his studies at school:

“It was when we were in the school, and it helped me in my studies. Because when I smoke marijuana, it makes me to study well and it enhanced my understanding. No matter how difficult the subject was, when I smoke, it will make me understand”. (MP6)

3.1.6. Coping with Stress. Again, it was found that, one of the perceived reasons for indulgence in substance abuse was to cope with stress. It was revealed that when the youth were pressurised or annoyed, they took some substances to enable them cope and feel better. Respondents number two and four narrated this as follows;

“Ehhh, another reason that make me abuse substances was, whenever someone annoyed me or I am under any stress or pressure, I will get relieved when I drink cough syrup or smoke marijuana, it makes me forget whatever is worrying me. It makes me feel better”. (MP2)

“Whenever I am not happy, maybe somebody annoyed me, the only thing I can do is to get one of the substances such as Diazepam and take, it will make me to sleep and before I wake up all my worries are gone, So that was the reason why I am using diazepam”. (MP4)

Respondent nine emphasised this by saying he used substances so as to get rid of any challenging circumstances he found himself in: “I use some when I am not happy, sometimes this life is challenging and I have to use some of these substances so as to get rid of some circumstances that I find myself. Sometimes one can find himself in a difficult condition like you lost something very important, the only thing you can do to cope is to use these substances. They help me to cope with any stressful situation”. (MP9)

Discussion:

It was found that; family conflict, peer pressure, the desire to boost energy, imitation or curiosity, political influence, desire to improve thinking capacity and adaptation to stress were the causes or reasons for substance abuse among the youth in Sokoto. Various studies also affirm these findings.

Peer pressure was found to be the most influential factor of substance abuse in this study. This finding support previous studies in northern Nigeria^[18,2,6,16], southern part of Nigeria^[20,31,32], in India^[11] and in Saudi Arabia^[3]. Therefore, it is very possible that peer group had a strong influence on substance abuse than parents^[32]. Based on the finding of this study, it was concluded that majority of the youth were abusing substances due to pressure from their peers. However, peers had strong influence on the youth's indulgence in substance abuse.

The peers used certain reasons or words to convince their friends to abuse substances. One of the reasons given was that the substances were used as energy boosters^[28]. In contrast to the finding of this study, a study in the same northern Nigeria (Kano) found that majority of the respondents (61.2%) abuse substances due to political influence^[26]. Another finding of this study regarding imitation and curiosity as a perceived cause or reason of the youth's indulgence in substances abuse agrees with the findings of previous reports^[13,23,2,]. In this study, the youth abused substances because they had heard that substances such as marijuana and cigarette can be fun, or make a person feel and act differently. As such, they were curious to find out what people felt when they smoked^[2]. The study also found that the youth abused substance because they saw their parent or other family members abusing substances. This is consistent with the findings of Yusuf^[32], who reported that the youth tend to imitate what they see their parents or other family members do. By implication, family is a primary institution of socialization, as such the youth are expected to imitate most of what they see their family members such as the parents do, both good and bad behaviour^[13,2]. Although, the youth whose parent were not abusing substances, were found to be abusing substances, imitation and curiosity was observed to be a factor that influenced the youth to abuse substances.

This study also found that politics and politicians also influenced the youth to abuse substances. During political campaigns, some politicians supply illicit substances to the youth as a bait to win their vote and or to attack their opponents. These findings reflect the findings by Salaam^[24] and Siro^[26]. For example, Salaam^[24], found that, majority of the youth in Kano metropolis (Nigeria) abuse substances due to political influence and politicians give the youth campaign vests, money and substances such as marijuana so as to serve as guards and provide security for them against their political opponents. The politicians also influence the youth to abuse substances by providing them, the substances and also pay them for such services rendered^[26]. This practice has gone on for some time such that users of illicit substances did not remember the last time they used their own money to buy the substances. The supply of these substances to the communities is particularly high during election years.

Moreover, enhancement of cognition was another factor that influenced the youth to abuse substances. This study found that the youth who did not prepare adequately for examinations used the substances to enable them recollect all that they were taught so as to pass their examinations. This finding support previous studies^[9,8,10,14,22,25] who found that substances were abused with the intension to boost cognition. Although, majority of these studies were conducted in an education setting such as colleges and universities, it is possible for the respondents to abuse substance for enhancing cognition than for other purposes. However, this finding contradicts the report of Yusuf^[32], who found that involvement in substance abuse lead to poor academic performance.

This study also found that, one of the perceived reasons for indulgence in substance abuse was to cope with stress. The finding support the previous findings^[21,2,12,31,3]. This study found that the youth who were pressurized or annoyed, used substances as a coping mechanizing or strategy with the aim to cope with the stress and feel better. This is in line with the findings of Oshodi et al.^[21], who found that majority of the students in selected secondary schools in Surulere, Lagos were abusing substances with the aim of coping with stress.

Conclusion:

The study explored the perceptions of the youth on the substances they abused in Gawon Nama area of Sokoto, Sokoto state, Nigeria. The objectives of the study was to explore the perceived factors that lead to substance abuse among youth in Sokoto, The study adopted a qualitative exploratory desing. Twelve youth between the ages 18 to 30 years were recruited using snowball and purposive sampling methods. Semi-structured interview guide was used to interview the respondents after obtaining an informed consent. Data was analyzed using the principles of content analysis. Ethical approval was obtained and anonymity was ensured.

The main limitation of this study is generalizability. However, this is the inherent nature of a qualitative study design since the study participants are selected by the investigators 'purposefully' and all the participants were

males. Hence the views expressed are those of the participants and may not necessarily reflect the views held by every youth who abuse substances in the area.

It was recommended based on the findings of this study that; parents should monitor the kind of friends their children interact with and advise them. Parents who abuse substances should be discrete, to avoid negative influence on their children. Also, the parents should endeavor to stop this negative practice. The Government and non-governmental organizations should provide job opportunities for the youth. The media should collaborate with the NAFDAC and NDLEA in the awareness and sensitization campaign on the dangers and effects of substance abuse.

It was highly recommended that further studies can be carried out on substance abuse among other segments of the society such as the adult in order to find out factors in respect to the causes, effects and control measures. Also, since the study was limited to only Gawon Nama area Sokoto, future research should be expanded to cover the whole of Sokoto state or even northern Nigeria so as to be able to generalize these findings.

Data availability:

The original transcripts from which the paper emanated are available upon request.

Conflicts of interest:

There is no conflicts of interest as declared by all the authors

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