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POVERTYAND DRUGABUSE IN NIGERIA: ATHEORETICALANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Drug Abuse and poverty are serious social problems faced by contemporary societies and as such they are often assumed to be relational. However, despite significant expenditure on drug abuse prevention and poverty alleviation programmes by successive governments (administrations), World Health Organization and other related local and International Agencies, the trend has rather increased with new related problems emerging, especially with more types of drugs being abused every day. One of the greatest risks associated with all drug abuse is the tendency for it to lead to addiction or physical dependence. Many studies have attributed the increasing trend of drug abuse to widespread poverty. Other researches however revealed that the relationship between poverty and drug abuse is not linear, instead, drug abuse is a by-product of the life style led by people of limited financial means. This study is an investigation of Poverty and Drug Abuse in Nigeria. The objectives were to examine the concept of Poverty and Drug Abuse in Nigeria and to determine the relationship between Poverty and Drug Abuse in Nigeria. Three major sociological theoretical perspectives: Functionalism, Marxist Conflict and Interactionist perspectives were used in the analyses the study. The study found that there is no strong relationship between poverty and drugs abuse. How wealthy a person is has very little to do with his/her propensity toward drug abuse. Drug abuse affects people of all ages, economic, and education background. The relationship between poverty and drug abuse is not linear. Drug Abuse is a combination of many factors such as reduced family and community cohesiveness, or weak family and social bonds, psychological discomfort or personal distress, increased unemployment and underemployment or low employment opportunities, depression, financial stress, anxiety, social marginalization and limited high school graduation rather than poverty. However, the study also found that poverty plays enormous role on drug abusers. The risk factors that predispose people to drug abuse are more prevalent in lower economic areas and families than others. Those in poverty are often times more exposed to drug trade. People with lower income or those who live in environments that are not conducive to economic growth are at the risk of abusing drugs. Drugs abuse is more common among people living in poverty or lower economic status because drug is often used as a means of escapism. Many people in poverty abuse drugs in order to avoid the serious problems they may be facing in their lives. Homelessness was also found to be associated or linked to drugs abuse. Many people who are without a place (home) to live turn to drugs to avoid dealing with their feelings and life problems. In addition, various aspects of the social environment, including peer influences, weak social bonds, and the larger drug culture were also linked with drug abuse. It is recommended that quality jobs should be provided to people in order to help them get out of poverty stricken areas where drug abuse is common. More so, there is need to introduce courses that can teach life skills and self-actualization along with happiness that can help people gain purpose in their lives. Furthermore, functional quality education should be introduced to help get people out of poverty. Moreover, parents need to keep a close eye on who their children (kids) are hanging out with to protect

KEY WORDS:

Poverty, Drugs Abuse, Economic Status, Theoretical Analysis

them from bad peer influence. The study concludes that policies designed to reduce drug abuse and poverty should include efforts to change the structural conditions of environments where the abuse of these drugs thrives more.

Introduction

Poverty and drug abuse are two (2) serious social problems that are often assumed to be interrelated (Smyth & Kost, 2018). There is a long standing belief that poverty and drug abuse go hand in hand (pari passu) and several studies have indicated that people with lower income or those who live in environments that are not conducive to economic growth are more at risk of falling victims to drug abuse (Capistrano, 2019: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018: Peto., Lopez., Boreham., Thun., & Heath, 1994). Reinberg (2018) observes that of the more than 515,000 Americans who have died from drug abuses since 2006 most lived in poor areas where there were few job opportunities. With the widespread poverty and higher rate of drug abuse in North East Nigeria, many policy makers are of the view that poverty is the fundamental cause of drugs abuse. However, drugs affect people of all ages, economic, and educational backgrounds. The constant news about celebrities dying from accidental drug overdose (drug abuse) is an example that drug abuse affects all people irrespective of their socio-economic status. It is therefore, fallacious to jump into conclusion that those in poverty, abuse drugs at a higher rate than those who are wealthier because of their economic situation. Drug abuse is not as simple as that since there many reasons/factors why people start abusing drugs. These include genetics (biological factors), mental health, psychological factors, and childhood experiences (Charles, Ikoh., & Iyamba, 2011). It is difficult or hard to believe or assume that someone without a job or who has little income can afford the expenses of drug abuse. In some cases, drug abuse (consumption) can be the cause of poverty itself rather than the other way round. Thus, the connection between drug abuse and poverty is a more complex issue.

A variety of factors contribute to drug abuse and other problem outcomes, which could be both individual and environmental. While drug abuse prevention and treatment have traditionally focused on changing individual behaviours, such efforts can have only limited impact when changes are not made to the environment, that is, to the social determinants of drug use (Spooner & Hetherington, 2005). These include the social and cultural environments, the economic environment and the physical environment. Sociological explanations emphasize the relevance of certain elements or aspects the social environment – social structure, social bonds to family and school, social interaction, and culture in achieving better outcomes regarding drug abuse and prevention efforts. Social bonds to families and schools also make a difference. Adolescents with week bonds to their families and schools, as measured by such factors as the closeness they feel to their parents and teachers, are more likely to use drugs of various types than adolescents with stronger bonds to their families and schools (Tonry, 2011). Their weaker bonds prompt them to be less likely to accept conventional norms and more likely to use drugs and engage in other delinquent behaviour. Peer influences greatly influence one's likelihood of abusing drugs (Hanson, Venturelli

& Flockenstein, 2012). Most drug abuse begins during adolescence, when peer influences are especially prominent. When our friends during this stage of life are drinking, smoking, or using other drugs, many of us want to fit in. Relatedly, sociologists also emphasize the society's "drug culture" matters for drug use. For example, because we have a culture that favours alcohol the consumption of alcohol, many start consuming it to fit in. And because we have a drug culture in general, it is no surprise, that drug use of many types is so common. To some extent, social inequality, social interaction and a drug culture matter for drug use. Sociologically, it is a mistake to view most drug use as stemming from an individual's biological or psychological problems. Although these problems play a role for some individual's use of some drugs, drug use as a whole stems to a large degree from the social environment and must be understood as a social problem, and not just an individual problem (Capistrano, 2019). It is based on this prevailing situation that this study was initiated to investigate poverty and drug abuse in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

For better understanding of this study, the following concepts are selected and clarified:

Poverty: Poverty is a lack of sufficient income or material possessions. It is also a condition in which people lack prestige and have less access to resources. The poor often have different lifestyles and different values from those of people not living in poverty. The conditions that poor people often cope with may include: unemployment or off – and on employment, low – status and low – skill jobs, unstable family and relationships, low involvement in community, a sense of being isolated from society, low ambition and feelings of helplessness.

Drug and Drug Abuse: Drug can be broadly defined as substance that changes the way the brain and body functions, mentally, physically or emotionally. Drug can also be defined as a substance that could bring about a change in the biological function through its chemical action. A drug refers to a substance that modifies the perceptions, cognition, mood, behaviour and general body function (Balogun, 2006: Fawa, 2003). A Drug is any substance which is used for the treatment or prevention of a disease in man and animals.

Drug abuse, also known as substance abuse, refers to the use of certain chemicals for the purpose of creating pleasurable effects to the brain (Mandal, 2019). Drug abuse is also used to mean a condition characterized by a self-destructive pattern of using a substance that leads to significant problems and distress, which may include tolerance to or withdrawal from the substance, as well as other problems that use of the substance can cause the sufferer. These problems could manifest

either socially in terms of their work or school performance. According to Zaman et.al (2015), drug abuse is a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, wherein the person may also suffer from tolerance and withdrawal. Drug abuse, therefore, can be defined as a patterned use of a drug in which the user consumes the substance in amount or with methods which are harmful to themselves or others. It is the taking of any substance or drug which harms or threatens to harm the physical or mental health or social well-being of an individual or other individuals or society at large, or which is illegal. Drug abuse is also use to refer to the non-medical use of a drug that interferes with a healthy and productive life of a person. For the purpose of this study, drug abuse can be defined as excessive persistent self-administration of a drug without regard to the medically or culturally accepted patterns. It is considered as the use of a drug to the extent that it interferes with the health and social function of an individual. Drug abuse is the non-medical use of a drug that interferes with a healthy and productive life or it is the excessive, maladaptive or addictive use of drugs for non-medical purposes.

Economic Status: This refers to the bracket or class a person or household falls into based on their income population level.

Theoretical Analysis on Poverty and Drugs Abuse

Sociological insights on drug abuse and poverty reflect on the three sociological perspectives namely: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. Functionalist theory emphasizes the need for social stability, the functions that different aspects of society serve for society's well-being, and the threats (or dysfunctions) to society's wellbeing posed by certain aspects or society. In line with this perspective, functionalist sociologists emphasize that drug abuse may actually be functional for several members of society. For the people who use illegal drugs, drug use is functional because it provides them the various positive physiological effects that drugs have. For the people who sell legal or illegal drugs, especially the poor, drug use is functional because it provides them a major source of income. Illegal drug use is even functional for the criminal justice system, as it helps provide jobs for the police, court officials, and prison workers who deal with illegal drugs. It also provides jobs for the social service agencies and other organizations and individuals whose work focuses on helping drugs abusers or drugs addicted persons.

Conflict theory stresses the negative effects of social inequality and the efforts of the elites at the top of society's hierarchy to maintain their position. Conflict theory focuses on how structural factors in society affect rates of drug abuse. Conflict theory holds that there are higher numbers of chronic drug abusers in lower social classes, disorganized neighbourhoods, low-income families, and

relatively politically powerless communities. Structural disadvantage factors identified by conflict theory (Goode, 2012: Celia, 2003) contribute to explaining arrestees' use of illicit drugs. Social conflict theory emphasize that the likelihood of recent hard drug use would be higher among arrestees who lived in areas with high degrees of structural disadvantage, namely, low income, widespread, poverty, high unemployment, limited high school graduation, numerous female–headed households, high population density, low stability, and large poverty population. Conflict theory provides us with three valid explanations. First, that much of the drug abuse in poor urban areas results from the poverty, social inequality, and other conditions affecting the people in these locations. Thus, people turn to illegal drugs partly to feel better about their situation, and partly because the illegal drug market is a potentially great source of income that does not require even a high school degree. Second, conflict perspective emphasizes that ethnic prejudice and inequality help determine why some drugs are illegal as well as the criminal penalties for these drugs (Tonry, 2011). Third, conflict theory emphasizes the huge influence that multinational corporations have in the marketing and sale of drugs that often have harmful individual and societal consequences. In order to maximize their profits, these companies do their best, to convince people to use their products. They also spend huge amounts of money to lobby. The tobacco industry for example, for years hid evidence of the deadly effects of its products. All these efforts illustrate conflict theory's critical view of the role that corporations play in today's society.

Symbolic Interactionism focuses on the interaction of individuals and on how they interpret their interaction. Given this focus, symbolic interactionism views social problems as arising from the interaction of individuals. As such, it understands drug abuse as a behaviour arising from an individual's interaction with people who engage in drug use. From this type of social interaction, an individual learns how to use a drug and also learns various attitudes that justify drug use and define the effects of a drug as effects that are enjoyable.

Poverty and Drug Abuse in Nigeria

The relationship between poverty and drug abuse is complicated. Beyond the lack of money, poverty leads to certain attitudes, behaviours, and life conditions. These same attitudes and conditions can contribute to drug abuse. Biologists for instance, assume that people are especially vulnerable to drug abuse for genetic reasons. Psychologists assume that drug abuse results from certain personality traits and problems. While Sociologists attributes drug abuse to various aspects of the social environment, including peer influences, weak social bonds, and the larger drug culture. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH, 2018), in general, people take drugs for some of these reasons: (i) to feel good. Drugs can provide intense feelings of pleasure. This initial euphoria is followed

by other effects, which differ with the type of drug used. For instance, with stimulant drugs such as cocaine, the high is followed by feelings of power, self-confidence, and increased energy. In contrast, the euphoria caused by opioids such as heroin is followed by feelings of relaxation and satisfaction. (ii) To feel better. Some people who suffer from social anxiety, stress, and depression start using drugs to try to feel less anxious. Stress can play a major role in starting and continuing drug use as well as relapse (return to drug use) in patients recovering from addiction. (iii) To do better. Some people feel pressured to improve their focus in school or at work or their abilities in sports. This can play a role in trying or continuing to use drugs, such as prescription stimulants or cocaine. (iv) Curiosity and Social Pressure. In this respect, teens are particularly at risk because peer pressure can be very strong. Teens are more likely than adults to act in risky or daring ways to impress their friends and show their independence from parents and social roles.

How wealthy a person is has very little to do with his/her propensity toward drug abuse. The reason that these stereotypes form is because drug abuse is in fact, more common among individuals living in poverty or lower economic status; however, drugs and poverty are not directly linked, and does not show cause and effect (Edwards, 2014: Pearson & Patel, 1998). Instead, drug abuse is more of a by-product of the life style led by people of limited financial means. The indirect link is spread across many contributing risk factors, not just one sole cause (Celia, 2003). In essence, the risk factors that predispose people to drug abuse are more prevalent in lower economic areas and families than in others (National Institute on Drug Abuse, MIDA 2018). However, factors that influence drug abuse rather than poverty includes the following;

1. **Pre-Teen or Teen and Economic Situation**: Drugs abuse generally starts in the pre-teen or teen years (Hanson, Venturelli, & Fleckenstein, 2012: Goode, 2012). This time in young people's lives is when they often like to experiment with drubs and many get hooked. If the economy is not thriving and jobs are not available, it is more plausible that someone who is bored, with nothing else to do to pass the time, would get indulged in drug abuse. Drugs abuse could be a combination of many factors rather than poverty.
2. **Deprivation, Genetic Factors and Fast Money:** On why others fall for the effect of drugs immediately while others do not. Many experts believe it is due to genes that predispose someone and it doesn't matter whether they are wealthy or not. Though poverty plays enormous role on drug abusers, because those living in poverty and attempting to quit drugs are often times more exposed to the drug trade (Smyth & Kost, 2018). People in poverty stricken areas find that the selling of drugs can offer them fast money. For someone who is not used to having a lot of money, the ideas of

making money on a daily basis by selling drugs is very appealing.

3. **Marginalization, Homelessness, Standard Forms of Leisure, Limited School Opportunities, Weak Families and Social Bonds:** People who are at risk of developing drug use dependencies are those who are at the margins and disaffected from school, family, work and standard forms of leisure. However, the relationship between these factors and drug abuse is not linear. Although, the majority of drug users may experience a number of these problems, the converse may not hold true, that is, individuals who are economically and politically/socially marginalized will not necessary become problematic drug users. Neale (2003) suggests however, that particular sub-groups of the population such as the homeless, those who have been in care and/or excluded from school and those in contact with the criminal justice system or mental health services are more susceptible to the various risk factors and that drug abuse is more prevalent among these particular groups. Drug abuse and homelessness often occur. Many people who are without a place to live turn to drugs to avoid dealing with their feelings and life problems.

4. **Social Environment and Peer Influence:** According to Spooner and Hetherington (2005), the social environment is a powerful influence on health and social outcomes. In this context drug abuse and related problems result from the complex interplay of the individual and the environment whereby social institutions or structures can influence the environment in a manner that can influence drugs use and related problems. Social structures include government policies, taxation systems, laws and social systems such as welfare, education, health and justice. As such increased attention to the social determinants of drug use is required.

5. **Financial Stress, Depression, Anxiety, Lack of Better Mental Health Institutions and Social Exclusion:** People from all backgrounds and classes take drugs for many reasons for pleasure, to treat physical or emotional pain, for stress or anxiety, or because their friends do. But the pattern of who develops a drug problem and encounters other problems shows a close link between drug abuse and social exclusion. Buchman (2004) argues that the problem of drug use for a significance number of people is a socially constructed phenomenon that has less to do with individual choice or physical dependence, and much more to do with the structural disadvantages, limited opportunities, alternatives and resources. He (Buchman, 2014) further contends that not all people who suffer deprivation will go to develop problem of drug use. He however, does argue that compared to the wider population, drug users are more likely to have suffered different childhoods and often being taken into care or excluded from school.

Financial stress is a very real thing and can lead people to indulge in drug abuse as a means to cope (Buchman, 2004). Depression is another common mental problem in poverty stricken communities. Depression often occurs due to lack of money and other issues that come with living in poverty. Whatever, the diagnosis may be, stress, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) depression, it is a known fact that many of these people will use drugs to cope with these problems. If there were better mental health institutions in poverty stricken neighbourhoods, it could help reduce the rate of drug abuse.

6. **Problems and Escapism:** Drug abuse can be heavily linked with poverty, not just because drugs are expensive, but because drug abuse is often a means of escapism. Many people living in poverty abuse drugs in order to avoid the serious problems they may be facing in their lives. Drugs can provide an instant gratification, that is virtually absent in all other areas of life.

The implication of drug abuse is the loss of productivity and income. Abusing drugs can make one significantly less productive. Poor work performance can mean missing out on promotions or bonuses, a cut back on shifts and could even lead to loss of jobs. Many drug abusers lose their jobs and remain unemployed as a result of their drug habits. Others end up in jails, prisons, or long – term rehabilitation facilities, which can result in years of loss of productivity. Social security and retirement benefits can also be affected, so even after recovery, one will continue to experience the financial impact of his/her drug habit years.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is obvious that many factors influence a person who decides to abuse drugs in their lives. From education, to family history, and genes, some are more prone than others to becoming drug abusers. There is little doubt that drug abuse and poverty are related whether poverty comes before drug abuse or the other way around, there is evidence that for those without financial resources it is much harder to break the cycle of drug abuse, than it is for those who have the means to do so. More so, those in lower income levels have a harder time finding resources to help them recover and turn their lives around. Moreover, if parents are drug abusers, the chances of their children becoming drug abusers are higher especially from watching their parents use drugs. The lack of access to rehabilitation, where they find recovery from drug abuse or addictions is one of the biggest problems the society faces in the battle against drug abuse.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations were made:

1. Quality jobs should be provided to people in order to help them get out of poverty stricken areas where drug abuse is common.
2. There is need to introduce courses in schools that can teach life skills and self-actualization along with happiness that can help people gain a purpose in their lives.
3. Functional quality education should be introduced to help get people out of poverty.
4. Parents need to keep a close eye on who their children are hanging out with to protect them from bad peer influence.
5. The use of illegal drugs should be discouraged in totality.

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