

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG ADOLESCENTS

by

Alfred Afamefuna Ezejiegwu
Department of Educational Psychology
Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State-Nigeria

Abstract

Drugs are commonly defined as chemical substances capable of altering the physical and psychological functions of the body. Drugs are also seen as any chemical substance that alters mood perception to the apparent detriment of the society. Adolescents are especially vulnerable to drug abuse because of stress and problems, some of which according to psychologists include need for love and acceptance, self identity and peer influence. Availability of drugs, family history of substance abuse, low self esteem, lack of parental involvement/supervision, are other factors that predispose teenagers to drug abuse. Adolescents are also disposed to drug abuse as a result of stress and work, family problems and lack of self control in eating habit especially when poverty and ignorance can also lead adolescents to self medication and consequently drug abuse. The commonly abused drugs include hallucinogens, opiates and analgesics, inhalants, alcohol, benzodiazepines, harbiturates; stimulants and cannabis. Adolescents who abuse drugs experience lots of problems in life like academic difficulties, health problems, poor peer relationships, depression, delinquent behaviour and criminal activities. It is therefore recommended that drug free clubs should be established in secondary schools to dissuade adolescents from irresponsible behaviours. Parents should be enlightened through seminars and workshops on the evils of drug abuse. Those adolescents who decide to be heady and recalcitrant should be sent to the reformatory for at least six months so as to be reformed.

Keywords: *Causes, consequence, drug abuse and adolescent*

Concept of drug

Drug in everyday parlance, is any substance taken as medicine to cure illness. While some people take drugs to relax or sleep, others take drugs to maintain good health (the multivitamins) or to enhance performance especially in sports and even in everyday work in the office or farm. Ray and Ksir (2004) defined drug as any substance, natural or

artificial other than food that by its chemical nature, alters structure or function in the living organism

Classification of drugs

Drugs are classified based on their effects and uses. The New Mexico state University, department of health and human services/substance abuse and mental health services administration, listed drugs under socially legal or illegal. They are:

| Socially Legal | Socially Illegal |
|--|--|
| Alcohol | Stimulants eg cocaine, Crack and speed. |
| Prescribed drugs | Hallucinogens (LSD, PLP, Ecstasy, Mescaline, Magic Mushrooms). |
| Over the counter cough, cold, sleep and diet medications | Opiates (Heroin, Opium, Morphine). |
| Inhalants (glues, gerosols, and solvents) | Marijuana (pot). |

From internet health information resources, drugs are classified based on their categories and effects.

These are:

1. Hallucinogens, (LSD, PCP, etc): These are drugs that dramatically affect perception, emotions and mental process. They distort the senses and can cause hallucinations. Hallucinogens are sometimes called "psychic drugs".
2. Opioid Analgesics, (Codeine, morphine etc): These are highly addictive pain killing drugs that may also produce an extreme sense of well-being.
3. Alcohol (beer, rum, vodka, etc), it affects the central nervous system producing relaxation and decreased inhibition in low doses. At higher doses, it produces intoxication, impaired judgment and coordination, and at very high doses, coma and death.
4. Inhalants: (Glue, paint, gasoline etc.): These are depressant drugs that produce feelings of euphoria, high headedness, acceleration and vivid fantasies. It also slows down bodily functions such as breathing. Their use can result in brain damage, asphyxiation and death.
5. Benzodiazepines (valium, ativan etc): They produce a sense of calm and well-being at lower doses. At very high doses they can cause effects similar to barbiturates including unconsciousness.
6. Barbiturates-(Nembutal, seconal etc): At lower doses, they produce a feeling of calm, drowsiness and well being, at very high doses, they can produce severe intoxication, unconsciousness, coma and death. When combined with another central nervous depressant drug such as alcohol, their use can be life threatening.
7. Stimulants (cocaine). These are drugs that excite or speed up the central nervous system.
8. Cannabis- (marijuana, Hashish) although basically a hallucinogen, cannabis also produces depressant effects as well as increased heart rate.

Drug abuse

When a drug or chemical substance meant for a medical cure is taken outside of its purpose or in excess, for personal enjoyment or for avoidance of a situation, without medical reason or guidance, it is drug abuse. Ngamkhuchung (2002) defined drug abuse as the consumption of illegal drug such as bhang, heroine, cocaine, marijuana for purposes other than social and medical needs.

Drug abuse is an increasing problem in our affluent societies and carries great social and economic costs through its impacts on crime and health. Official policy in the Western world for the past 50 years has been to treat addicts as criminals and to punish them, but this has manifestly failed to prevent the increase in drug abuse. The campaigns to educate people about the dangers of drug, tobacco and alcohol had nothing other than relatively minor effects. In Nigeria also, attempts to educate people on the dangers of drug by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the mass media have not had the desired effect.

Causes of drug abuse

Adolescents are especially vulnerable to drug abuse for several reasons which include the fact that contemporary adolescence is filled with stress and problems some of which according to psychologist include need for love and acceptance, self identity and peer influence. The peer influence is very prominent because teenagers are adept conformists and will always do things that they think will make them look cool and belong. Availability of drug, family history of substance abuse, low self-esteem, lack of parental involvement/supervision, are other factors that predispose adolescents to drug abuse.

Adolescents are sometimes disposed to drug abuse as a result of stress at work, family problems and lack of self control in eating habit especially when it has to do with intake of alcohol, poverty and ignorance can also lead adolescents to self medication and consequently drug abuse.

However MacDonald (2002) adduced some other reasons for drug abuse. There are those who use it for experimental purpose in that case they use it once or twice and give it up. Some of the adolescents use it for recreational purposes. Onyejiaku (1991) observed that some adolescents do not take alcohol or hard drugs unless in specific social gatherings, parties or special events where drinking is the norm of the peer relations. These adolescents take alcohol in such settings to have a sense of belonging and active participation. Most adolescents stop usage of these substances after such events.

Hindmarch (1971), in his work found out that adolescents involve themselves in drug abuse because they wanted to enhance their personality. None drug users can also take them in order to increase their social contact. The media promote drug role models and adolescents imitate them. Likewise the family or the home

environment acts in the same way and adolescents take a cue from that. (Made line et al, 2002). Lack of parental support, monitoring and communication and lack of feeling close to parents have been significantly related to frequency of drinking, heavy drinking and drunkenness among adolescents. Pete (2002).

The negative peer relationship problems that adolescents experience leads to drug abuse. (Hoberg, 2002).

Consequences of drug abuse

Drug abuse has different effects on the users. It leads to physical tolerance. This is a case whereby somebody takes the drug and keeps on using it in order to feel well and for the body to function normally, the body gets hooked or dependent on the drug used. There are pains experienced by the user when he stops the use of the drug to which his body has become dependent already.

Some of the drugs like cocaine and amphetamines give the users false sense of performing at high level when on the drug. Drug abuse has caused self destruction of society and family. Societal effects of drugs include violence, immorality, school dropouts, truancy, poor performance, suicide, lack of self respect, indiscipline, poor relationship between parents and children and unproductive population.

The effects of drug abuse depend on the substance abused. Depressants or sedatives cause blurred vision, slurred speech, unsteady walk, impaired perception of time and space, loss of memory, delirium, fits, anxiety, liver and kidney damage, hepatitis and some more permanent and long term effects.

Stimulants also cause rapid speech, increased body temperature, hallucinations, convulsions and can cause death. Opiates cause depression, anxiety, low esteem and reduced coping ability. Steroid anabolic has the general effect of building the body, increasing the size of the muscles, making users feel aggressive and better able to perform strenuous physical activity during athletics and sports. They are usually used by sportsmen to increase their strength and better their performance.

Measures to control drug abuse

These measures should be put in place so as to minimize the effects of drug abuse. Drug free clubs should be formed in schools so as to divert the attention of the adolescents from drug addiction.

- i. Enlightenment campaigns on the harmful effects of drug should be carried out in

towns, villages and communities. This enlightenment campaigns should be through seminars and workshop.

- ii. There should be strong bonds within the family between parents and their children. Parents should give their children proper moral education and sound upbringing.
- iii. Adolescents who despite all the efforts made to reform them fail to be amenable to discipline should be put in a reformatory for at least six month for them to reform themselves.

References

- Hindmarch, R. (1971). The pattern of drug among school children. *Bulletin on Narcotics* XXIV (3): 23-26.
- Hoberg, S. M. (2002). *Adolescents peer interactions: perspectives on substance abuse*. Novo Scotia: Continuum press.
- MacDonlad, B. (2002). *Substance abuse*. New Delhi: Dashrathpuri Publishers.
- Madelline, A., Dalton, J, James; D., Sargen L, L. A.; Mott, M. D, Beach, B, Annarent, J., Todd., & Healtherton, F. (2002). Relationships between parental Restrictions on moves and adolescent use of alcohol and tobacco. *Psychological Bulletin* 117 (1), 66-86.
- New Mexico State University (NMSU): (2008) alcohol, Drugs (youths). Department of Health and Human Services/substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The National Cross Site Evaluation of High Risk Youth Programs. Retrieved 11/02/2008.
- Ngamkhuchung, J. (2002). *Substance abuse*. New Delhi: Dashrathpuri publishers.
- Onyejiaku, F. O. (1991). *Psychology of adolescents*. Calabar: Rapid Publishers Ltd.
- Pete, H. (2002). C. N. N. Medical reporter: Rule to improve parent child relationship. (www document) htt: www.cnn.com/2002/Health/parenting/02/211drugsite ens.
- Ray O & Ksir C. (2004). *Drugs, society and Human Behaviour*. Boston, MC Graw Hill.