

Assessment of the Sociological and Health Implications of the Arbitrary use of Drugs and Illicit Substances by Youths in South East Nigeria: The Way Forward

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Abstract

The main thrust of this study was to evaluate the sociological and health implications of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances and the resultant outburst of uprising in the southeast region by youths. The study is semi- qualitative because survey research design was employed and 1500 respondents selected through the judgmental sampling technique from the five states that constituted southeast, but analyzed qualitatively using percentage count distribution. In essence, in each state, 300 respondents were selected. Amongst the findings, the paper revealed that discrimination, marginalization and abandonment of youths in south east region have become very unpredictable due to the use of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances. Further, the paper revealed that the region has witnessed the gradual erosion of family values and also a fall in the educational development of many youths the government intended to rely on in driving the economy to the next level. The paper also showed several health challenges such as anxiety, headache and vomiting, mental illness, lung cancer, and premature deaths arising from substance use. Based on this, the paper concluded that the insurgency in the southeast powered by discrimination and marginalization was aided by the incessant abuse of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances. Following this, the paper recommended amongst others that the secessionist agitations posture against the Nigerian state by youths due to exclusion should be addressed urgently to salvage the future of youths and curtail their abuse of these illicit drugs/psychoactive substances. Again, parents/ guardians should adopt the Harm Reduction method through the use of persuasive messages to calm and reeducate the youths of the negative consequences of their action. Further, syringe supply, condoms, naloxone, Fentanyl testing as a form of assistance, and other medications to reduce overdose and even deaths.

Keywords: *Drugs; Illicit substance; Addiction; Erosion of family values; Guidance and counseling
Broken homes;*

Introduction

The outburst of the use of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances and their obliterating effects among youths in the southeast has not only become a regional, but a national embarrassment. Most scholars and commentators have linked the ugly scenario to the unfortunate Supreme Court judgment that removed an elected peoples' governor and installed a candidate that came third in the southeast region of Nigeria. Prior to the Supreme Court verdict, there were drugs and illicit substances, but the patronage was never in the public domain and no one feared for the safety of young people like today. Nowadays, the availability and easy procurement of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances of different chemical compositions in the region has, from epidemiological studies shown to have severe consequences. Despite this, the quick embrace to substances as a way of revolt could be faulty; there could be other reason(s) aside from the infamous Supreme Court verdict. Are the issues of marginalization, lack of integration, unfair treatment, and a lack of complete acceptance of the people, particularly the youths of the region by the federal government since the civil war ended be the plausible explanation? Recent observations in the southeast region are said to be in tandem with studies from India and Pakistan where the influence of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances has become the live-wire of the rise of insurgency. Coincidentally, the narrative in the southeast region resulted to a major disruptive event leading to violence, blood-letting and most disturbingly, senseless killings of innocent people and destruction of properties when least expected.

In the southeast region the audacity to arbitrary use illicit drugs and substances by youths is troubling and destructive to society. According to Agency Report (2022), over 100 million Nigerian youths are said to be involved in the arbitrary use of drugs and illicit substances, with at least sixty million sliding into mental health. In the same report, Taiwo Obindo, President of the Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria (APN), and also the chairman, Faculty of Psychiatry, West African College of Physicians, Nigeria Chapter, said more than 90 per cent are unable to access care and this group is called the treatment gap for mental illnesses. Despite this, Anambra state, one of the states that constitute the region is reputed to be a major source of the synthetic drug "ice," or methamphetamine going by evidence based report by experts in Substance Use Disorder (SUD). In an in-depth interview with Prince Uche Ekeanyawu, winner of this year NIDA (2023), he asserted that the Onitsha and Akwa axis is estimated to produce huge number of metric tons of the drug annually. In the midst of this horrendous destructive activity, there has also been the introduction of another pernicious synthetic narcotic named fentanyl; a nefarious substance, shrouded in aura of lethal potency, surpassing the potency of morphine by an astonishing magnitude of 50 to 100 times and other psychoactive substances. While it is becoming more and more clear that the arbitrary use of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances is expanding in the entire southeast, the negative implications and safety of the region's youths are being disregarded. As a result, there is this fear that the southeast region will be disaster-prone if nothing is done to reduce and arrest the ugly trend among youths in the region.

The uprising that accompanied the infamous Supreme Court verdict was just a reminder of the pains of untold economic deprivations coupled with the refusal to have their choice of candidate to rule

over them. As a result, youths in the southeast region of the country have become the largest hostage of the threat of the arbitrary use of drugs and illicit substances and their vulnerability is increasingly frightening. Insurgency and kidnapping, and other vices are daily being powered by drugs and illicit substances due to marginalization, lack of integration, unfair treatment, and lack of acceptance of the people of the region, particularly the youths since the civil war ended over half a century ago. Aside from this, the abuse of these illicit drugs and psychoactive substances is increasing at an alarming rate, causing serious threats to the country; deteriorating health, increasing crimes, and hampering productivity, destroying relationships, eroding moral values and impeding the overall progress of the southeast region. Thus, under the influence of substances, violent tools such as coercion, terrorism, assassinations, kidnapping are employed in the agitation by the vocal minority whose unwholesome activities are powered by drugs and illicit psychoactive substances; this is because of the enhanced perception that the region has been comprehensively and strategically marginalized more than ever. In the nutshell, the power and effects of random use of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances has continued to be directed against the existing political authority “with an unwavering will to change the status quo.

Based on the foregoing, it is estimated that around 275 million people who used psychoactive drugs in 2020, an expected rise by 11% worldwide and 40% in Africa alone are expected in 2030, and with an estimated 36 million people who suffered from different kinds of drug disorders(Ohuabunwa, 2019). Regrettably, the scope of public health problems related to drug use, drug use disorders and related health conditions continues to be very high. However, this burden is to a large extent preventable. According to the WHO estimates, around 583 000 deaths were directly and indirectly attributable to drug use in the year 2019, with close to 450 000 deaths attributable to opioids, and around 14000 to cannabis. *Currently*, the abuse of these substances/drugs among youths has become a regional embarrassment due to the physiologic and behavioural impact on education, family values and security of the youths. With these happening, can the youths still rise to become the dreamed leaders of tomorrow?

Taking a broad-spectrum of the threats of illicit substances, Ohuabunwa(2019) said the estimated 275 million people who used drugs and illicit psychoactive substances in 2020, rose by 11% worldwide and 40% in Africa alone. Going by this, Ohuabunwa projected that in 2030, an estimated 36 million people would suffer from different kinds of drug disorders. While youth are supposed to be driving force of change and development, the narrative in every nook and cranny of the society is that they have been wrapped up by illicit substances thereby making them untrustworthy and unproductive. This observation is in line with the earlier submission of Falco (2008) who stated that the chronic use of drugs harm, sometimes cause irreversible serious physical and social damage despite the pleasure the consumer enjoy. Little wonder, the scope of public health problems related to drug use, drug use disorders and related health conditions continues to be very high.

Despite this, the importance of drugs and illicit substances to a healthy living cannot be over emphasized. Obviously, they are universally used by both young and old since it is one of the most effective ways to guarantee good healthy life (Onyema & Chukwu, 2019). But today, youths are deliberately using illicit drugs and psychoactive substances illegally, unlawfully and intentionally.

As a result, the use of cannabis, tramadol and various other psychoactive substances, particularly methamphetamine, popularly known as *Mkpuri miri* in the southeast region has increasingly become a permanent feature of the region social formation.

Despite the observed negative consequences of the use of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances, literatures on the menace have identified nonusers of illicit drugs into two subcategories, namely, resolute and vulnerable (Crano et al., 2007). Vulnerable nonusers have not used the different substances, but are expected to do so with time, while resolute nonusers are never going to touch, smell or have any relationship with drugs and illicit psychoactive substances. In other words, comparable to resolute nonusers, vulnerable nonusers are most likely to participate in drugs and illicit substances because they are usually burdened with situations that seem set to swallow them in their undertakings both private and open (Crano et al., 2007). Corroborating this observation, Wakefield et al. (2006) averred that there are systematic differences between resolute and vulnerable nonusers in exposure to substances.

However, there seems to be more awareness of the challenges of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances today than ever, but how to turn that knowledge into constructive action is one of the major challenges the regional government and critical stakeholders are faced with. Little wonder from different epidemiological studies, the wild consumption of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances has birthed an inappropriate and maladaptive behaviour among youngsters in the region; one of which has been the disconnection in the central nervous system leading to heart attack, mental disorder (depression), hallucination, distortion of perception, sleeplessness, preventable accidents, bad conducts, mental disorder, and others hazards. In line with these developments, there has been a steady decline of family values, and fall in educational development in the region.

However, since there are hundreds of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances cheap and easily available, the researchers are not going to ask why some drugs are more available and used more often than others. If they delved into that, some of the questions that would arise from this investigation would expand the scope of this study wider than intended. If it were not so, it would have been necessary to ask the following questions: What pharmacological properties of specific drugs made it easily and cheaply patronized? What personal characteristics of the users and the social or cultural factors that influenced the attractiveness of a given drug? Or, asked another way, why did users want certain drugs as opposed to others and how did this influence their willingness to pay for them? Perhaps, these questions could to a subsequent study by other researchers.

Despite this, there have been unrelenting efforts on the part of psychologists, sociologists and critical stakeholders including regional government at different levels to change the ugly narrative of the sociological and health implications of the arbitrary use of drugs and illicit substances by youths in south east Nigeria with the aim of curbing the menace.

From the foregoing, youths in the southeast region of the country have become the largest hostage of the threat of the arbitrary use of drugs and illicit substances and their vulnerability is increasingly frightening. Sociologically, the abuse of these illicit drugs and psychoactive substances is increasing at an alarming rate, causing serious threats to the country; deteriorating health, increasing crimes, and hampering productivity, destroying relationships, eroding moral values and impeding the overall progress of the southeast region. Based on these, it has become an issue of national importance

because concerns have been focused not only on the physiologic and behavioural impact of their abuse on young people.

Lending credence to this ugly trend, the increasing rate of the arbitrary use of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances has changed the values of society and emerged as a major public health concern in the southeast region. Sociologists, Social workers, Psychiatrists, and other related health professionals, and educators have shown deep apprehension and interest for the security of youths in the southeast region going by the enormous responsibilities placed on them as leaders of tomorrow; they must be protected from the menace of the arbitrary use of drugs and illicit substances. But the unrestrained prevalence drugs and illicit psychoactive substances has triggered maladaptive behaviour that has continued to depress the central nervous system leading to hallucination, distortion of perception, sleeplessness, preventable accidents, bad conducts, mental disorder, heart attack and others hazards. Besides, there has been a steady decline of family values, and fall in educational development in the southeast region. Based on these, there have been unrelenting efforts of psychologists and critical stakeholders including government at different levels to change the ugly narrative due to their harmful effects to health and social development.

Against this background, it is imperative to state that there are hundreds of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances and, each reacts differently; some mild, others wild. Nevertheless, what is important is that substance abuse is increasing at an alarming rate, causing serious threats to every society, deteriorating health of individuals involved, increasing crimes, destroying relationships, eroding family values, hampering productivity, and impeding the overall progress of societies. In the southeast of Nigeria, young people are becoming the largest hostage of the threat of substance abuse and their vulnerability is increasing nationally. It is in this context that this study assessed the sociological and health implications of the arbitrary use of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances by youths which, has culminated to the outburst of insurgency, high crime rate, risky sexual behaviour, erosion of family values and also a big drop in the educational development of youths that the government intended to rely on in driving the economy to the next level. There have researches on drugs, but none has been on the assessment of the sociological and health implications of the arbitrary use of drugs and illicit substances by youths in south east Nigeria and suggesting the way forward.

Therefore, it is this vein that the study becomes relevant. Besides, consensus of opinion seems to agree that drug abuse has become such a problem of great concern. Sequel to this, it is the objective of this study to critically assessed the sociological and health implications of the abuse of illicit drug and psychoactive substance on the fate of youths in Southeast Nigeria. To this effect, this study sought (a) To determine the threat of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances in the southeast region (b) To ascertain the sociological threat of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances (c) To examine the health implication of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances among youths

Research Questions

In furtherance to achieve these specific objectives formulated, the study raised three research questions:

- (a). What is the pervasiveness of the threat of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances in the southeast region?

- (b). What are the sociological threats of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances?
- (c). What are the health implications of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances among youths

In view of the foregoing, the study focused on the assessment of sociological and health implications of the abuse of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances on the fate of youths in Southeast Nigeria.

3. Methods

Survey research design was employed in this study. This research design was preferred because it has the ability to collect large samples from the population, describes, and interprets the relationships that exist between the variables under study. The study employed the judgmental sampling technique to draw three(300) hundred respondents from each of five states, namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo who understood what the focus of the study meant. In the end, 1500 respondents were selected. Rather than analyzed the data wholly, the researchers preferred state by state in order to assess the sociological and health implications of the random use of drugs and illicit psychoactive substance on the fate of youths in each of the states that constitute southeast Nigeria. The questionnaire used as the major instrument used for data collection was divided into two sections, namely section A and section B. Section A was made up of questions covering the personal data of the respondents, while section B was structured to address issues in the research question and to satisfy the sole objective of the study. It was subjected to face and content validation by two experts at the Imo State University and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The findings presented in the analysis section showed the level of the abuse of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances in the south east region.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Structural functionalist theory

Structural functionalism, simply called functionalism was chosen for this study. It is a broad theory that sets out to interpret society as a structure with interrelated parts. Structural functionalists liken the different parts of society to organs of the body such as heart, kidney, and liver that work toward the proper functioning of the entire body system. In the most basic terms, the structural functionalists emphasize the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, each organ of the body or part of the society to function as a stable and cohesive system to attain by all accounts the desired goal. Herbert Spencer, and some other functionalism scholars, including Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore to mention, but a few, are some of the prominent proponents and modifiers of the theory who have delved into different aspects of structural functionalism.

Essentially, the basic assumption of the theory is that the society is like a living organism made up of component parts, which function harmoniously for the survival of the whole system. However, if any part fails to contribute positively to the overall good of the system, such inactivity or non-functionality of the part negatively affects the consensus among the different parts of the entire system because the parts are interrelated. Extending the analysis further, the basic tenet of the theory, among others, is the interactions among various parts within the system (inter – dependence). By implication, a dysfunction of one part unconstructively affects the smooth workability of the entire system. Accepting the foregoing as correct, we could assert that the complaint of discrimination, marginalization and abandonment of youths unattended to by government have triggered the prevalence of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances in south east region. Regrettably, this singular

act of inattention of government to attend to the grievances of youths has pushed the region into an unpredictable phenomenon of uprising (insurgency and terrorism), gradual erosion of family values, and a fall in the educational development. Most worrisome is the fact that these are the youth government intended to rely on to driving the economy to the next level. Aside from the poor enrollment of youths into schools leading to the fall in educational development, several health challenges such as anxiety, headache and vomiting, mental illness, lung cancer, and premature deaths have also been linked to the abuse of illicit drugs and psychoactive substance in the region.

The relevance of this theory is central to the functionalist perspective that underlines the sociological and health implications of the use of drugs and illicit substances when taken unregulated. For example, nicotine affects the lungs and other vital organs of the body, while mkpur miri leaves behind a trail of impaired health, poverty, broken homes, and smashed dreams. Besides, the sociological setting of the southeast is utterly averse to the menace of illicit substances without medical prescription as contributory to the blood-letting, broken homes and insurgency and a fall in educational development.

4. Literature review

4.1 The arbitrary use of drug and illicit psychoactive substance

Perhaps, it is appropriate to attempt to describe what drug means before delving into the subject matter. A drug is any chemical substance that causes a change in an organism's physiology or psychology when consumed. Drugs are typically distinguished from food and substances that provide nutritional support (Wikipedia, 2022). According to Britannia (2023) drug treatment is the most frequently used type of therapeutic intervention in medicine. Its influence and versatility derive from the fact that the human body relies extensively on chemical communication systems to achieve integrated function between billions of separate cells. The body is therefore highly susceptible to the calculated chemical subversion of parts of this communication network that occurs when drugs are administered. Clearly, drugs produce harmful as well as valuable effects, and decisions about when and how to use them therapeutically always involve the balancing of benefits and risks. Drugs approved for human use are divided into those available only with a prescription and those that can be bought freely over the counter. The availability of drugs for medical use is regulated by law.



Source: Punch Newspaper: An image of an individual suffering SUD; he deserves our concern to restore him to normalcy

In Nigeria, Drug abuse has become increasingly troubling with many young people, including teenage girls and young women, getting addicted to drugs on a daily basis. Confirming this, a 2018 survey on drug use in Nigeria sponsored by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime stated that “one of four drug users is a woman.” At local joints, rave parties, event centres, clubhouses and even motor parks, the sight of exuberant youths wedded to narcotics and alcohol is a commonplace. According to Punch Newspaper, methamphetamine or meth for short has assumed a disgusting trend, largely in the eastern part of the country. With weird photos and videos of youths hooked on *mkpuru mmiri* or *gusoro*, as the crystal narcotic hallucinogen is locally called, there have been concerns among community leaders, politicians and groups over the ravaging effects of the hard drug. According to WebMD, crystal meth can cause a spike in a person’s body temperature and the user could pass out or even die. Also, a young man, reportedly under the influence of meth, was videoed in a park in the South-East enmeshed in a risible show of martial arts. It is what *mkpuru mmiri* tells him to do that he does. Jokingly, a passerby called on people dealing in *mkpuru mmiri* to come and observe how this victim is engaging in karate.



Source: Punch Newspaper (22/01/23). A young man tied to a pillar and spanked mercilessly for acting strangely after overdosing on *mkpuru mmiri* in the Ekwe Isu Local Government Area of Imo State.

But the whipping, flogging and other forms of barbaric punishments meted out to persons suffering from Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is archaic and primitive; should always be done away with; professional counselors should be contacted at all times. Today, the increasing abuse of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances due to their easy availability and the changing values of society have culminated in the increasing abuse of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances emerging as a major public health concern in Nigeria. From the perspective Undeniably, the random use of drug and illicit psychoactive substance is a universal problem and a major threat to the socio-economic development of the world; whether it is admitted or not, it is a worldwide problem, affecting everyone, including the rich and poor, educated or uneducated, able or disabled, black and white, not only in developing nations but also in developed nations. According to Chukwu (2015), it transcends national, cultural, racial and class boundaries. Put differently, the predominance of drug and illicit psychoactive substance is virtually in all colours and since literature mirrors life as it is with a particular race and milieu, both pleasant and unpleasant experiences of a people are also engraved in their literatures. It is in this view that he defined drug and illicit psychoactive substances as the excessive or addictive use of drugs and substances in ways not recommended by medical or pharmacological practitioners. In simpler terms, Sahu & Soma Sahu (2016) described that any chemical that alters the physical or

mental functioning of an individual is a drug. Going by this, they assert that a drug may or may not have medical uses; its use may or may not be legal.

Drugs and illicit psychoactive substances are depressogens, and their repeated use without guidance bring into being both the subjective feelings of depression. The neuro-vegetative symptoms induce sleep, appetite disturbance, while the cognitive impairment include decreased energy characteristic of the depressed syndrome. However, depending on the kind of drug and illicit psychoactive substances taken, Manish, Deepali and Neetu(2020) maintain that most have the immediate effects of an initial stimulation which fades into relaxation accompanied by euphoria, increase ability to communicate, drowsiness, blood-shot eyes, clumsiness, decrease muscular coordination, dizziness etc. The arbitrarily use of substances also affect the function of the lungs and kidneys and effectively destroying it. Explaining further, Hanafi, Punch Newspapers reporter, narrated a disturbing clip on drug abuse that hit the Internet. At the beginning of the two-minute-seventeen-second video, some youths were seen in a room preparing a drug cocktail. Energized by hip-hop music wafting through the background, two of them, one holding a wrap of smoke, emptied contents of different bottles into a bowl of juice while another stirred the liquid with a spoon. The video then revealed different scenarios of teenagers and adults acting wildly after becoming inebriated. In one of the instances, two persons attended to a young man writhing on the floor as others immersed in drinking and smoking looked on background of the short viral video, the unidentified lad flung himself uncontrollably, hitting his head on the ground and planks across the drain. Apart from *Colorado* and *mkpuru mmiri*, other commonly abused drug mixtures with far-reaching, debilitating effects on the users include *omi gutter (gutter juice)*, a blend of cocaine, codeine, tramadol, Indian hemp and black currant juice; *skushi*, a locally-fermented alcoholic herbal concoction; codeine containing cough syrup and *lacatomtom*, a mixture of tramadol and tomtom in a bottle of a popular soft drink (Afeez Hanafi, 2022).The consequences of the abuse of drugs and illicit substances are legion. They weaken and destroy an individual's physical body and also alter the brain and affect individuals' ability to make proper decisions, sound judgment.

To this effect, Manish, et al., (2020) described drug abuse as the deliberate use of chemical substances for reasons other than intended medical purposes and which results in physical, mental, emotional or social impairment of the user. Or, stated clearly, drug abuse is the use of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances in a way that is harmful to an individual's physical and mental health to the extent of impairing the ability to function constructively in daily life. Further, the United States Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) released its annual National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) and the findings showed how people living in America reported about their experience with mental health conditions, substance use, and pursuit of treatment in 2021.

According to the report of drug Abuse, it was shown that over 700,000 people died in the US between 1999-2017 over drug overdoses, and in 2017, 67.8% of the 70,237 drug overdose deaths were opioid-

related. Apart from this, 28,466 deaths were fentanyl-related. 17,029 deaths were prescription-opioid-related. 15,482 deaths were heroin-related. In addition, drug overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, and tramadol increased by 10% between 2017 and 2018. Furthermore, the average life expectancy in the United States actually declined between 2015 and 2017 due to opioid overdose deaths, only increasing 0.16% to 78.93 years in 2019. In 2019, clinics who dealt with primary care, pain management or substance abuse disorders saw drastic increases in urine samples testing positive for potentially fatal drugs: 4% of urine samples tested positive for meth, compared to 1.4% in 2013 and 5% of urine samples tested positive for fentanyl compared to 1% in 2013.

In the survey conducted by NSDUH (2021), findings on drug use and substance use disorder by the organization were very frightening:

- Among people aged 12 or older in 2021, 61.2 million people (or 21.9 percent of the population) used illicit drugs in the past year. The most commonly used illicit drug was marijuana, which 52.5 million people used. Nearly 2 in 5 young adults 18 to 25 used illicit drugs in the past year; 1 in 3 young adults 18 to 25 used marijuana in the past year.
- 9.2 million People 12 and older misused opioids in the past year.
- 46.3 million people aged 12 or older (or 16.5 percent of the population) met the applicable DSM-5 criteria for having a substance use disorder in the past year, including 29.5 million people who were classified as having an alcohol use disorder and 24 million people who were classified as having a drug use disorder.
- In 2021, 94% of people aged 12 or older with a substance use disorder did not receive any treatment. Nearly all people with a substance use disorder who did not get treatment at a specialty facility did not think they needed treatment.



Source: Punch Newspaper: A young man suffering from Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

For the major depressive episodes (MDE) among youths, the findings showed that in 2021, 1 in 5 adolescents had a major depressive episode in the past year. Of these, nearly 75 percent had symptoms consistent with severe impairment, which caused severe problems with their ability to do chores at home, do well at work or school, get along with their family, or have a *social* life. Also in co-occurring substance use disorder with any mental illness, 13.5 percent of young adults aged 18 to 25 had both a substance use disorder and any mental illness in the past year. The survey also revealed that serious thoughts of Suicide, Suicide Plans, and Suicide Attempts were also recorded as 12.3 million adults aged 18 or older had serious thoughts of suicide in the past year, 3.5 million made suicide plans, and 1.7 million attempted suicide. Among Americans aged 12 years and older, 37.309 million were current illegal drug users (used within the last 30 days) as of 2020. Further, 59.277 million or 21.4% of people 12 and over have used illegal drugs or misused prescription drugs within the last year. 138.543 million or 50.0% of people aged 12 and over have illicitly used drugs in their lifetime. Usership among people aged 12 and over is down 0.4%

S/N	Substance	First –Time Users
1	Alcohol	4.9 million
2	Marijuana	3.1 million
3	Pain Killers	1.9 million
4	Tobacco	1.8 millio
5	Hallucinogens	1.1 million
6	Cocaine	874,000
7	Methamphetamine	205,000
8	Heroin	117,000

Source: SAMHSA,2021

Aside from this table, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) also assessed the abuse of Opioid and showed that 9.49 million or 3.4% of Americans aged 12 and older misuse opioids at least once over a 12-month period. 12-month opioid usership among Americans 12 and over declined 8.1% from 2019 to 2020. 2.702 million or 1.0% individuals 12 and over qualify as having an opioid use disorder. 9.7 million Or 96.6% of opioid misusers use prescription pain relievers. 745,000 or 7.4% of opioid mis-users abuse heroin; 404,000 or 4.0% use heroin and prescriptions. Hydrocodone is the most popular prescription opioid, with 5.1 million mis-users. Taking opioids for a period longer than 3 months increases the risk of addiction 15 times- most persons in acute pain rarely need more than 7 days' worth. The national opioid prescription rate peaked in 2012 with over 255 million prescriptions, an average of 81.3 prescriptions per 100 persons. Additionally: In 2015, opioids were still being prescribed at a rate that would medicate every American around the clock (5mg of hydrocodone every 4 hours) for 3 weeks. By 2018, the number had declined to 51.4 prescriptions per 100 persons. In 11% of US counties, there are still enough opioid prescriptions dispensed for every resident to have one. In 2018, 51.3% of Americans obtained their illegal pain medication from a friend or relative. Between 2016 and 2017, global opium production jumped 65% to 10,500 tons.

The statistical findings from the United States are reliable and verifiable yet, shocking. In Nigeria, particularly in the southeast region, statistics are hardly available, and there are, they are usually doubtful and unreliable. With this mindset of no reliable statistics, the menace of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances can only be imagined. In the south eastern Nigeria, the most abused drug and illicit substances among youths are not just alcohol, marijuana, various kinds of cough syrups, sedative tablets, brown sugar, heroin, cocaine, but methamphetamine (*MkuruMmiri*). *MkuruMmiri* is highly potent and very low in price and can be easily made in small laboratories, with relatively cheap over-the-counter ingredients such as pseudoephedrine, which is an ingredient found in common cold medications. It raises the amount of dopamine, a natural substance found in the brain. It is taken by smoking, swallowing the pill form, snorting or sniffing, or by injecting the powder that has been dissolved in water or alcohol. Due to its ability to alter judgment, Methamphetamine use can lead to risky behaviors, such as sexual violence and unprotected sex, which also increases risk for infection. Corroborating, Professor Ezenwa, in a television programme on African Independent Television (AIT) recently described the substance as one with a molecular structure that is chemically comparable to Amphetamine, a medicine used to treat Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, and Narcolepsy, a sleep disorder. Furthermore, Professor Ezenwa stated *MkpuruMmiri* resembles glass fragments or shiny, gleaming glass shards with bluish-white boulders. At the moment, it is taken

by smoking, swallowing the pill form, snorting or sniffing, or by injecting the powder that has been dissolved in water or alcohol.

As earlier noted, since there are hundreds of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances cheap and easily available, however, it is imperative to state that each reacts differently; some mild, others wild. Nevertheless, what is important is that substance abuse is increasing at an alarming rate, causing serious threats to every society, deteriorating health of individuals involved, increasing crimes, destroying relationships, eroding family values, hampering productivity, and impeding the overall progress of societies. In the southeast of Nigeria, young people are becoming the largest hostage of the threat of substance abuse and their vulnerability is increasing nationally. Over the years, scholars have concentrated on drugs and illicit psychoactive substances in the urban centers, while ignoring the rural areas. Sequel to this, the arbitrary use of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances has become part of the most recurring issues in southeast's body politic. Be it as it may, the uniformed use of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances have not only resulted in economic and humanitarian tragedies, but are seriously threatening the fundamental fabric of the southeast region.

Prior to this, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the sole agency saddled under Decree 48 of 1989 with the responsibility of supervising, controlling, coordinating all the functions and activities relating to arrest, investigation, prosecution of all offences connected with matters relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances was established to restoring sanity to the entire Nigerian society. Initially at creation, the Agency left no one in doubt in its effort to curb the menace among Nigerians, particularly in a series of seminars, conferences to eradicate and create awareness on the negative effects of substances on the health, especially on youths.

4.3 Insurgency

Perhaps, it is necessary to state that the rate of uprising in recent time in the southeast region of the country has been linked to the use of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances. First, what is Insurgency and how is it being propelled by the arbitrary use of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances? In attempting an explanation, a definition of insurgency is apt at this juncture. According to Bard O'Neill (1990), an insurgency as "a struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities in which the non-ruling group consciously uses political resources and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics." When a government fails to provide economic opportunities and security for its population, the government's legitimacy is questioned, the insurgency in the southeast region is nothing, but an affirmation that illicit drugs and psychoactive substances as Mkpur miri has continued to create a trail of impaired health, poverty, broken homes, and smashed dreams because government negligence to accommodate the grievances of youths. The whole idea of the abuse of drugs and illicit substances by youths in the southeast region is strange, but it remains one of the major problems supporting insurgency, against the development of education and the preservation of family values.

Result from various epidemiological researches in different countries globally has established that the capricious use of drugs and illicit substances fuels insurgency. Concurring to this, the erstwhile governor of Kebbi State, Abubakar Atiku Bagudusaid drugs and illicit substances have been identified as the major motivation for insurgency other criminal activities like banditry, and kidnapping (Adebayo, 2023). According to the report, the impulsive use of illicit substances has further provided an opportunity for insurgents or non-state actors to provide oxygen to fuel the

discontent within the region as a result of poverty and economic deprivation in the northwestern region, of which Kebbi state is one. While insurgency, kidnapping, banditry in the north western states were due to decades of failed government and elite delinquency finally ripening into social chaos, this deficit in governance has pushed youths into drugs and illicit substances as a result of poverty, and socio-economic deprivations. In the southeast region, insurgency and kidnapping, and other vices are daily being powered by drugs and illicit substances due to marginalization, lack of integration, unfair treatment, and lack of acceptance of the people of the region, particularly the youths since the civil war ended over half a century ago. However, the uprising that accompanied the infamous Supreme Court verdict was just a reminder of the pains of untold economic deprivations coupled with the refusal to have their choice of candidate to rule over them. Thus, under the influence of substances, violent tools such as coercion, terrorism, assassinations, kidnapping are employed in the agitation by the vocal minority whose unwholesome activities are powered by drugs and illicit psychoactive substances; this is because of the enhanced perception that the region has been comprehensively and strategically marginalized more than ever. In the nutshell, the power and effects of random use of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances has continued to be directed against the existing political authority “with an unwavering will to change the status quo.



A member of Unknown gunman under the influence of drug and illicit psychoactive substances enforcing the Sit-at – home Order in one of south eastern states



Source: Punch Newspaper: Faces of roads amidst sit-at-home order by the unknown gunmen

4.4 Erosion of family values and drop in educational development

In the ever swiftness of the changes occurring in social, economic and technological development in the southeast region, the stability and influence of the family on youths has dwindled. Prior to this era, the family was regarded as the basic source of strength that provides nurturance and support for family members as well as ensuring stability and generational continuity for the community and culture. But in reality, the strong influence of the arbitrarily use of substances has halted the protection and sustenance of both strong and weak members. Due to drugs and illicit substances, families have lost the powerful influence to shape and form the attitudes, values and behaviour of young people.,

The issue of illicit drug and psychoactive substances has caused broken home and the loss of family highly held values. With the prevalence of drugs and illicit substances right in most homes, some adolescents have suffered from prolonged absence of parental affection as a result of divorce and other related matrimonial problems. With the threat of drugs and illicit psychoactive substances, the researchers tenaciously contend that the present day family value system is a direct contrast to yesterday's family value arrangement, where everyone's conduct was open to discussion in order to instill discipline, credibility, and faith in the family treasured heritage(). Unambiguously, family value system has been fractured, particularly in the southeast region to the extent that the peril of drug abuse has triggered frequent arrests, and broken marriages. In the mad rush to acquire the new status of being free, most youths no longer cherish the moral values of the family. Based on this, honesty, moral rectitude, respect for elders, and respect for fellow citizens, respect and loyalty to family values,

hard work, resourcefulness, truthfulness, transparency, accountability, and responsibility are values that have lost their relevance in contemporary southeast region.

In southeast, majority of youths are abusers of cannabis, tramadol and various other psychoactive substances, particularly methamphetamine, popularly known as *Mkpuri miri*. Consequently, the abuse of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances has increasingly become a permanent feature of the social formation. According to Manish, Deepali and Neetu (2020), drug abuse is the deliberate use of chemical substances for reasons other than intended medical purposes and which results in physical, mental, emotional or social impairment of the user. In other words, drug abuse is characterized by a compulsive drug craving seeking behavior in the face of negative consequences. Essentially, the firmness of relationships, environment and expectations used to be powerful forces in helping people manage their lives, especially important for children and young adults. In some societies, substance abuse problems have been in direct opposite to the classical problem of balancing discipline and control of children with nurturing support to encourage their exploration. Aside from this, education is the principal means of preventing drug abuse. In addition to educational institutions, other settings are important for the contributions they make to learning and socialization.

Nowadays, educational stakeholders are worried over the prevalence of drug and illicit psychoactive substances and its consequences on the educational pursuits of individuals, particularly students. It was in this vein that Falco (2008) stated that the chronic use of drugs could cause serious damage, sometimes irreversible physical and social damage (either temporarily or for a long period of time). Internal damage could result as well. To this effect, some of undergraduates, engagement with drugs have become unstable in personality and ultimately dropping out of school. Despite the numerous reasons often advanced for patronizing drugs, findings, from the work of Ibrahim, Mahmud, Abubakar, Harazimi and Abdulkadir (2016) showed that the main consequences of drug abuse among undergraduates was low self-esteem; their windings also reported memory losses, poor school attendance, difficulty in concentration, poor performance. This finding is similar to Njeru and Lewis (2014) who reported that poor performance is the greatest effect of drug and substance abuse among students in Dagoretti Division, Nairobi West District-Kenya.

5. Analysis of the of questionnaire

S/N	STATE S	SEX		AGE			EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION			PERCENTAGE %
		M	F	16-20	21-25	26-30	SSC E	NCE/Diploma	Degree/Higher degrees	
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1	Abia	220	10	90	105	35	82	96	52	
2	Anambra	272	15	98	155	34	178	60	49	
3	Ebonyi	235	23	70	145	43	158	82	18	
4	Enugu	215	20	80	120	35	80	35	120	
5	Imo	250	18	82	145	41	168	70	30	
TOTAL	5	1192	86	420	670	188	666	343	269	
	----	1278		1278			1278			

Source: Researchers' field work (2023)

6. Findings and Discussion

Shown on the table were the five states where the study covered. From the analysis, the total number of respondents who returned their questionnaires properly filled were 1278(85.2%) as against 1500 questionnaire distributed. For the age distribution, those between 16-20 years were 420; those between 21-25 age brackets were 670 and those between 26-30 brackets were 188. This agreed with the number of returned questionnaires. With respect to education attainment, the respondents with the senior school certificates were 666; those with NCE/ Diploma were 343 and finally those with degrees and higher qualifications were 269. Further analysis showed that Anambra state had the highest number of male respondents 272 and 15 female respondents; Imo came next with 250 male respondents and 18 females; Ebonyi had 235 male respondents with 23 female respondents. For Abia state, male respondents were put at 220, while female respondents were 10, while for Enugu state, the number of male respondents was 215 and females, 20. However, for education attainment, Enugu state had the highest number of respondents with Bachelor degrees and other higher qualifications.

From the five southeast states, namely, Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi, Abia and Enugu were represented accordingly. In each of the states, 300 copies of questionnaire designed were administered. In Anambra, 287 questionnaires were returned; Imo state, 268 respondents. From analysis of the questionnaire, the respondents unanimously agreed that the abuse of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances was at the root of the outburst of uprising in the southeast region, particularly in Anambra and Imo states. In an in-depth interview with some respondents, they stated that almost on a daily basis, these states record cases of arson on both government and private organizations, including the killing of innocent people, including security operatives. What was rather strange was the claim that the civil unrest was due to the marginalization, discrimination, and abandonment of youths from good governance. Rather than admitted that they were under the influence of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances, the self rule autonomy agitation had been hijacked by the so called unknown gunmen. There was not much difference in the case of Ebonyi state that had 258 respondents. In these three states discussed, the table representation was very disturbing. It showed a high number of young people dependent on illicit psychoactive substances in the three states of the southeastern. The findings suggested the three states in the region were in grave danger. But when number of sampled respondents was considered, it was observed that the randomly selected 300 respondents in each of the states could not be used to generalize as the results seemed to have concluded. Abia and Enugu had 230 and 235 respondents respectively. From the table, Enugu state had the highest number of respondents with bachelor degrees and other higher qualifications. The near non-volatile nature of the state was attributed to the role of education in the state. Obviously, education is the principal means of preventing drug abuse.

From the table analysis, it was evident that the high rate of young people participation in the abuse of illicit drug and psychoactive substances arose from the secessionist agitations posture against the Nigerian state by young people from the southeast region due to their marginalization, discrimination, exclusion and antagonism against their dreams and aspirations, particularly the use of instrument of court (as in the case of governorship seat in Imo State where an elected Governor was removed by the country's supreme court and installed a candidate that came fourth in the election). This singular act triggered mass protest powered by the abuse of illicit psychoactive substances because 'Dutch courage' is said to emanate from there. 'Dutch courage' is an extraordinary power makes an individual bold, confident and courageous, but short-lived that causes anomie in society. This extraordinary power is continuously sustained by the abuse of these psychoactive substances. During the period, there was lawlessness and series of senseless killings of huge numbers of innocent people, especially at crowded squares and wanton destruction of properties. In the entire states, these youngsters go by the name "**Unknown gunmen**" and held everyone

hostage. There was no security official anywhere to protect anybody. The officials themselves are not safe! They appear to have been cowed to submission. They went to work on mufti and holed themselves in their stations until the close of duty. Following this, the unknown gunmen are operated undeterred. They set public institutions on fire; they seize arms and ammunition belonging to security officials and kill them in the process.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The abuse of illicit psychoactive substances is increasing at an alarming rate, causing serious threats to the southeast region of the country. It has deteriorated security of lives, the protection of government infrastructure, increased health hazards and crimes. Also, it has hampered productivity, destroyed relationships, eroded social and moral values and above all, disrupted the overall progress of the south eastern region. Criminological enterprises dominate thought processes of victims. In the nutshell, the use and abuse of illicit psychoactive substance is a threat to the development and advancement of youths in the southeast Nigeria.

1. Following this, the paper recommended that since the foundation of this illicit abuse of psychoactive substances originates from the discrimination, subjugation, marginalization, neglect and abandonment of young people from the scheme of good governance, it is important that the government addresses these fears. Apart from this, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), there are more than 30 other separatist organizations (unknown gun men) in the South-East zone of the country agitating for inclusion and thus, positive dialogue to allay these fears and assurances of inclusion will pave way for other measures.
2. Further, parents/ guardians should adopt the Harm Reduction method through the use of persuasive messages to calm and reeducate these young people of the negative consequences associated with the use of these psychoactive substances.
3. Again, since the abuse of psychoactive substance use is a public health issue, government assistance to abusers should include syringe supply, condoms, naloxone, Fentanyl testing, and other medications to reduce overdose and even deaths.
4. In addition, government should convoke a colloquium on education to give a realistic idea on how to improve the educational standard and halt the increasing rate of young people participating in the abuse of illicit psychoactive substances. In addition, the States Ministry of Education in the five south-eastern states, namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states should add to their curricula “Drug Education” for both the primary, secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria.
5. Also, Regulatory bodies should be strengthened to effectively halt the widespread of illicit psychoactive substances and to enlist qualified professionals to provide guidance and counseling to curtail the menace of illicit psychoactive substances use. Also, public enlightenment programmes should be intensified to keep youths away from the dangers of illicit psychoactive substance use.

6. Above all, States Ministry of Education in the five south-eastern states, namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states should add to their curricula “Drug Education” for both the primary, secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria. They should always organize lectures, seminars, rallies, film show etc for the Nigerian youths on the effects of drug abuse.

Conflict of interest

The Authors do not have any conflict of interest as far this study is concerned.

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