

## Illicit Drug Use and Street Violence in Aba Metropolis, Nigeria: A decade analysis, 2015 -2025

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### Abstract

*This study investigates hard drug use and street violence in Aba metropolis, Abia State, from 2015 to 2025, drawing exclusively on evidence from Aba and its immediate metropolitan area. The objectives are to examine the correlation between hard drug use and street violence, identify commonly abused hard drugs, assess the role of unemployment as a driver of drug-related violence, and analyse the challenges in addressing drug abuse and street violence. The research is grounded in the Availability-Proneness Theory. A case study design was employed, relying on qualitative secondary data from thirty-five sources, including journal articles, a preprint, official statistics, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency operational disclosures, government statements, and press reports of specific raids and incidents, all analyzed through content analysis. Findings indicate that drugs and violence converge at specific locations, such as York Street, a drug bunk on Ngwa Road, a section of Ahia Ohuru market, Cemetery Barracks, and the abandoned Enyimba Hotel at Ogbor Hill. A significant portion of reported violence in the city lacks drug attribution. Cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, tramadol, and codeine syrup were identified, though only some were linked to violent locations. Unemployment was identified as necessary but insufficient, as disputes over levies and control of trading spaces independently drive confrontations. The response to these issues has been characterized by raids without sustained occupation, arrests without convictions, and treatment efforts lacking adequate capacity. Recommendations include occupying raided sites and establishing permanent outposts, implementing joint enforcement against concealed supply chains, publishing a schedule of lawful levies with formal apprenticeship, and aligning courts, treatment capacity, and command locations with identified flashpoints.*

**Keywords:** *Aba, criminality, hard drugs, illicit drugs, substance abuse, street violence*

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### Introduction

Hard drug use and street violence have become significant social problems in urban centres across Nigeria, reflecting complex socio-economic, cultural, and governance challenges. Over the past decade, these issues have intensified and now concern policymakers, security agencies, and civil society. Globally, drug abuse is recognized as a threat to public health, social stability, and economic development. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reports that millions of

individuals worldwide are affected by drug use, which frequently leads to addiction, mental illness, and involvement in criminal activities (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017). In Nigeria, the prevalence of hard drugs is exacerbated by unemployment, urban overcrowding, poverty, and weak law enforcement, fostering conditions in which both drug abuse and violence proliferate.

Drug consumption in Nigeria has transitioned from a peripheral social issue to a widespread urban challenge. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency reports a substantial increase in drug seizures, arrests, and prosecutions in major cities, indicating both greater availability and consumption (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 2022; 2025). Cannabis, tramadol, methamphetamine, and other synthetic substances are now readily accessible, particularly in urban areas with limited economic opportunities and strong peer influence. Studies indicate that young people are especially susceptible to drug use due to exposure to urban street culture, peer pressure, and the pursuit of rapid financial gain (Kingston *et al.*, 2017; Gomez *et al.*, 2010). Increased engagement with hard drugs has been associated with higher rates of criminal behaviour, including theft, assault, and gang violence.

The relationship between hard drug use and street violence is both direct and indirect. Drug consumption impairs judgement, increases impulsivity, and heightens aggression, all of which contribute to violent behaviour (Boun *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, the illicit nature of drug markets fosters violent competition among dealers, who employ intimidation and force to secure territory and profits. Klein (2001) notes that drug markets frequently operate outside legal frameworks, compelling participants to rely on self-help strategies such as aggression and coercion. In Nigeria, this dynamic is intensified by corruption, limited law enforcement capacity, and the pervasive presence of organised criminal networks, further exacerbating violence linked to drug markets.

Urbanisation and social inequality create conditions conducive to the intersection of drug use and violence. Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Aba experience rapid population growth, poverty, and limited access to essential services. These factors promote the expansion of informal economies, which often include the illicit drug trade. Research demonstrates that urban youth are particularly vulnerable to drug use due to unemployment, peer influence, and insufficient structured social support (Gomez *et al.*, 2010; Kingston *et al.*, 2017; Windsor & Murugan, 2012). The resulting consequences extend beyond individuals, undermining community cohesion, public safety, and economic productivity.

Aba, located in Abia State, serves as a significant case study for examining the relationship between hard drug use and street violence. As a major commercial centre in southeastern Nigeria, Aba attracts traders, artisans, and migrants seeking economic opportunities. Despite its economic significance, the city has experienced rising levels of crime and insecurity, which researchers often attribute to the proliferation of drug markets (Nwannennaya & Abiodun, 2017). Drug trafficking networks in Aba foster violent environments where competition, territorial control, and criminal collaboration converge. These factors position Aba as an important site for investigating the socio-economic and behavioural impacts of hard drugs on urban street violence.

The specific types of drugs commonly abused in Nigeria, such as tramadol, methamphetamine, and codeine, intensify the issue of street violence. Tramadol, frequently used for its stimulant effects, is associated with increased aggression and risk-taking among young adults (Boun *et al.*, 2024). Methamphetamine use correlates with paranoia, impulsivity, and violent behaviour, establishing a direct link between substance abuse and street crime (Dumbili, 2015). Furthermore, the misuse of prescription opioids and codeine-containing syrups has precipitated health crises among Nigerian youths, contributing to addiction, criminal activity, and socio-economic

marginalisation (Onyima, 2023). These observations suggest that the type of substance abused significantly influences patterns of urban violence. The market itself fuels street violence. Organised drug distribution networks are often controlled by gangs that compete for territorial dominance. Conflict over market control frequently leads to violent confrontations, especially in areas with weak law enforcement presence. Ellis (2016) asserts that organised crime in Nigeria, including drug trafficking, relies on violence as a mechanism for maintaining power and control. In Aba, these patterns are evident in the activities of street groups and informal gangs involved in both distribution and enforcement, highlighting the interplay between economic incentives and violent behaviour.

Socio-economic conditions are central determinants of both drug use and violence. Elevated levels of poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion drive many young people toward informal economic activities, such as drug dealing, as a means of survival (Giwa, 2021). Economic hardship is consistently associated with increased substance abuse, which subsequently raises the likelihood of involvement in criminal and violent activities. Disenfranchised youth may perceive participation in drug markets as a viable route to financial independence, despite the inherent risks involved.

The consequences of hard drug use and street violence extend beyond the individuals directly involved, affecting families, businesses, and local communities. Violence undermines social cohesion, discourages investment, and threatens public safety. Furthermore, drug abuse poses significant public health challenges, as it contributes to physical and mental health problems, addiction, and increased demand on health services (Dosunmu & Odesanmi, 2025; Kelly *et al.*, 2010). In Aba, where trade and commerce form the backbone of the economy, the presence of drug-related violence can disrupt business activities, reduce productivity, and discourage investors.

Efforts to address drug abuse and street violence in Nigeria are multifaceted, encompassing law enforcement, rehabilitation, and public awareness campaigns. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency leads national initiatives to combat drug trafficking, promote prevention programs, and facilitate rehabilitation. The National Drug Control Master Plan provides a comprehensive strategy that integrates supply reduction, demand reduction, and harm reduction approaches (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 2015). However, the persistence of drug-related challenges indicates that underlying structural and social factors contributing to substance abuse and violence require more comprehensive attention.

There is a pressing need for detailed research examining the relationship between hard drug use and street violence within specific urban contexts. Although existing studies address general patterns of drug use and urban crime, limited attention has been given to cities such as Aba, which possess distinct socio-economic, cultural, and commercial characteristics. Analyzing these localized patterns can yield valuable insights into the drivers of substance abuse and street violence and inform the development of effective policy interventions.

Given the above, the period from 2015 to 2025 has been selected for this study as it represents a critical decade during which hard drug use and street violence in Nigerian cities, particularly Aba in Abia State, have exhibited significant trends and transformations. This timeframe is marked by a notable increase in the availability and consumption of hard drugs, including tramadol, methamphetamine, and prescription opioids, as documented by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 2022; 2025). It also aligns with national drug control policies and enforcement strategies, such as the National Drug Control

Master Plan (2015–2019), which aim to reduce drug-related criminal activities (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 2015).

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Illicit drug use**

Illicit drug use refers to the consumption of substances with a high potential for addiction and significant physical or psychological harm (Bryan *et al.*, 2000; Abimbola & Adewoyin, 2025). These substances are typically illegal or strictly regulated because of the risks they pose to individuals and society. Hard drugs encompass potent stimulants, depressants, and opioids that profoundly affect mood, cognition, and behaviour (Alumona *et al.*, 2023). Unlike milder substances, hard drugs often result in rapid dependence and enduring adverse consequences for individuals, families, and communities (Olley, 2006).

Hard drug abuse in Nigeria has emerged as a significant public health concern, particularly in urban areas where access to these substances is more prevalent and social pressures are pronounced (Nelson, et al, 2024; Das *et al.*, 2016). Commonly abused hard drugs include tramadol, methamphetamine (mkpurummiri), cocaine, heroin, and codeine-based syrups (Nwannennaya & Abiodun, 2017). The widespread availability of these substances facilitates their acquisition, including among youth populations (Avcı *et al.*, 2017).

Methamphetamine (mkpurummiri) abuse among youths exemplifies the growing problem of hard drug use in Nigeria. Research indicates that methamphetamine use is particularly prevalent in southeastern states, with high rates reported among both young men and women (Naamara, 2014). Initial use is often motivated by the pursuit of increased energy or euphoria; however, repeated consumption rapidly leads to addiction, memory impairment, agitation, and psychological disturbances (Bryan *et al.*, 2000). The heightened energy and aggression associated with mkpurummiri abuse have been correlated with risky behaviours, including violence and unpredictable social conduct (Nelson & Abikoye, 2019).

Tramadol misuse represents another significant aspect of hard drug abuse in both urban and rural areas of Nigeria. Unlike certain strictly controlled substances, tramadol is a pharmaceutical opioid that has become widely accessible through both pharmacies and informal street vendors (Boun *et al.*, 2024). In various communities, both youths and adults consume tramadol not only for legitimate pain relief but also as a means of coping with stress, fatigue, and psychological distress. The normalization of tramadol use within some social groups has contributed to widespread dependence, with many individuals consuming doses that far exceed medical guidelines, leading to health complications and increased impulsivity (Vento, 2014).

Prescription medications, particularly codeine-based cough syrups, are also prominent in patterns of hard drug misuse. These substances are frequently acquired without adequate medical oversight and are consumed recreationally to induce relaxation or a sense of euphoria (Ayegbusi, 2024). Easy access and weak regulatory enforcement in some regions facilitate misuse among young people who may not understand the associated risks (Bryan *et al.*, 2000). The impact of hard drug abuse is multifaceted. Physically, prolonged use of powerful substances can damage major organs, weaken the immune system, and alter brain chemistry (Olley, 2006). Psychologically, addiction can cause mood disorders, cognitive decline, and behavioural changes that make it difficult for individuals to function in daily life (Nelson, Nnam, & Onayemi, 2024). These effects often extend to families, where emotional strain and financial hardship can result from a member's drug dependence. Hard drug abuse is frequently associated with criminal activity. Individuals dependent on potent substances may engage in theft, fraud, or participate in distribution networks to sustain their addiction (Nwannennaya & Abiodun, 2017). In several Nigerian cities, property crimes and

petty theft have been directly linked to drug abuse, as individuals commit unlawful acts either under the influence or to secure financial resources (Avcı *et al.*, 2017). This relationship between hard drug use and crime exacerbates pressures on security systems and undermines community safety (Das *et al.*, 2016).

Youth are particularly susceptible to hard drug use as a result of intersecting social, economic, and psychological factors. High rates of unemployment, limited opportunities, and peer influence contribute to an environment where experimentation with hard drugs is more probable (Ayegbusi, 2024). In the absence of structured support systems and effective youth engagement initiatives, substance misuse may serve as a coping strategy for frustration and boredom. Anecdotal evidence from secondary schools and tertiary institutions indicates that students often use hard drugs recreationally, especially at social events where substance abuse is culturally accepted (Bryan *et al.*, 2000).

The role of drug distribution networks further complicates the issue. Hard drugs are often trafficked through informal routes and street dealers, making them accessible in neighbourhoods with little oversight (Boun *et al.*, 2024). Studies have shown that Nigeria's position within West African trafficking corridors has increased the inflow of illicit substances, which local dealers then distribute within urban centres (Olley, 2006). These networks reduce the cost and risk of acquiring hard drugs, amplifying the problem among vulnerable demographics in the environment (Nelson & Abikoye, 2019).

Strategies to combat hard drug abuse in Nigeria encompass law enforcement operations, community awareness initiatives, and rehabilitation programs (Abimbola & Adewoyin, 2025). Government agencies regularly conduct raids to confiscate illegal substances and apprehend suspected traffickers, with the objective of disrupting supply chains. Public health campaigns seek to inform the public about the risks of substance misuse and provide treatment options for individuals with addiction (Das *et al.* is frequently constrained by limited resources, persistent social stigma, often limit the effectiveness of these measures and deficiencies in healthcare infrastructure (Avcı *et al.*, 2017).

A comprehensive understanding of hard drugs in Nigeria necessitates consideration of both the substances and the broader social, economic, and cultural contexts that influence their use. Hard drugs are integrated into social networks, economic challenges, and cultural norms that shape individual and collective behaviours (Abimbola & Adewoyin, 2025). Effective responses to hard drug abuse should integrate law enforcement, public health interventions, educational initiatives, and socio-economic support to mitigate the extensive harm caused by these substances.

### **Street Violence**

Street violence includes physical aggression, intimidation, and conflict in public spaces, including streets, markets, transport hubs, and urban neighbourhoods. Manifestations include physical assaults, brawls, armed robberies, and gang clashes, frequently involving young men and women influenced by social, economic, and behavioural pressures (Nelson, Nnam & Onayemi, 2024). The consequences of street violence extend beyond the immediate participants, undermining the safety and wellbeing of the broader community.

Street violence in many Nigerian urban centers is a persistent issue that reflects deeper structural challenges. In cities such as Aba, densely populated markets and crowded residential areas create frequent opportunities for disputes to escalate into violence. For instance, traders in the Ariaria International Market may clash violently over territory, customer access, and minor disagreements, particularly during peak trading hours when tensions are heightened (Nelson, *et al.*, 2024). Such

encounters often escalate rapidly, involving shouting, physical altercations, and occasionally the use of weapons, thereby threatening public order and disrupting business activities.

A significant driver of street violence is the association between substance use and aggressive behaviour. Young individuals under the influence of illicit drugs or alcohol demonstrate reduced impulse control, heightened irritability, and an increased likelihood of responding aggressively to conflict (Boun *et al.*, 2024). Reports from urban transport parks and social venues indicate that some youths consume substances such as tramadol or codeine syrup prior to confrontations with rivals. This behaviour frequently transforms minor disagreements into violent incidents, posing risks to both participants and bystanders.

Economic pressures are a major contributing factor to street violence. Elevated unemployment rates and limited economic opportunities increase the likelihood that young people will resort to violence as a means of asserting control or obtaining quick financial gain. Some youths join informal groups that dominate street corners, bus routes, and transport services. Disputes between these groups over customers or routes often escalate into physical altercations and, in some cases, armed clashes (Dosunmu & Odesanmi, 2025). Such confrontations may involve sticks, knives, and occasionally firearms, fostering a climate of fear within affected neighbourhoods.

Competition for limited resources further exacerbates street violence. Street traders frequently vie for prime vending locations, leading to conflicts with competitors. These disputes can escalate into physical altercations involving not only the traders themselves but also their supporters and family members. The absence of effective conflict resolution means disputes are not resolved peacefully, instead erupting into violence, thereby disrupting trade and undermining community relations (Oluyemisi *et al.*, 2023).

Street violence is also linked to criminal networks and gang culture. In certain areas of Aba and other Nigerian cities, loosely organized youth gangs engage in violent acts to safeguard their interests or intimidate rivals. These groups frequently serve as informal enforcers, resolving disputes through force rather than negotiation (Ayegbusi, 2024). Their activities include extorting traders and violently intimidating commuters and residents.

Social and psychological factors further contribute to street violence. Young individuals who have experienced trauma, neglect, or social exclusion are more likely to express frustration through aggressive behaviour. For some, violence serves as a means to assert identity or gain respect within peer groups (Dumbili, *et al.*, 2024). In environments where conflict is normalized as a response to insult or challenge, youths are more inclined to engage in fights, viewing violence as a method of defending reputation or status.

Urbanization and population growth are additional contributing factors. The rapid expansion of cities such as Aba has resulted in overcrowded neighbourhoods, inadequate public services, and heightened competition for employment. When basic needs remain unmet and communal tensions increase, the incidence of street violence rises. Public spaces once considered safe may become sites of conflict, particularly when youths lack access to structured activities or community support (Dosunmu & Odesanmi, 2025). In these contexts, even minor disputes over space or resources can escalate into violent confrontations.

Ineffective enforcement of law and order frequently intensifies street violence. Law enforcement agencies often face limited resources, insufficient personnel, and logistical challenges that hinder their ability to respond promptly to public disturbances (Nelson, *et al.*, 2024). In markets and residential areas with minimal police presence, individuals engaging in violent behaviour may feel emboldened by the low probability of immediate repercussions. This deficiency in effective

policing perpetuates cycles of violence and diminishes public confidence in formal conflict resolution mechanisms.

Efforts to mitigate street violence must adopt a multifaceted approach. Community policing initiatives that foster trust between law enforcement and residents can help prevent violent incidents. Through engagement with traders, youths, and neighbourhood leaders, police officers can identify potential flashpoints and intervene proactively. Additionally, youth mentorship and empowerment programs offering job training, education, and psychosocial support are essential for addressing the underlying causes of violent behaviour (Oluyemisi *et al.*, 2023).

Public awareness campaigns that advocate for peaceful conflict resolution and discourage violence as a coping strategy are also beneficial. Churches, community organizations, and local authorities can contribute by teaching non-violent methods for managing disagreements, thereby reducing the social acceptability of aggression in public spaces. Furthermore, enhancing access to mental health support enables affected youths to manage stress, trauma, and emotional challenges without resorting to violence (Boun *et al.*, 2024).

Street violence in Nigerian cities, especially in Aba, is a multifaceted issue influenced by substance use, economic hardship, resource competition, social exclusion, and inadequate law enforcement. Effective intervention necessitates integrated strategies that combine policing, youth development, community engagement, and public education. Addressing both immediate manifestations and underlying structural causes is essential to reduce the prevalence and impact of street violence and foster safer, more stable urban environments for all residents.

### **Theoretical framework**

The paper adopted the Availability Proneness Theory as its theoretical construct. The availability proneness theory, developed by Gossop, Manning, and Ridge in 2001, explains patterns of drug use and related behaviours in society (Gossop, *et al.*, 2001). According to this theory, the likelihood of drug use is shaped by both the environmental availability of drugs and individual vulnerability. Rather than attributing drug abuse solely to the presence of substances, the theory posits that the interaction between environmental accessibility and personal susceptibility generates conditions for misuse and associated social problems.

The theory rests on several key assumptions. First, susceptibility to drug use varies among individuals due to personal and environmental factors, such as peer influence, socio-economic status, psychological disposition, and exposure to violence (Nelson, *et al.*, 2024). Second, environmental availability of drugs directly influences usage patterns, with communities that have greater access experiencing higher consumption rates, especially among those predisposed to experimentation or habitual use. Third, drug-related social problems, including violent behaviour, arise from the interaction between drug availability and individual vulnerabilities. Finally, the theory posits that targeted interventions, such as stricter law enforcement or community-level monitoring, can effectively reduce drug use and related criminal behaviours (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 2025).

The Availability Proneness Theory rests on several central tenets. The first is the significance of environmental exposure: areas with prevalent drug trafficking or easy access to substances tend to experience higher rates of consumption and social disturbances. The second tenet emphasizes the interaction between personal vulnerability and access, noting that only individuals with certain susceptibilities are likely to use drugs when exposed. Such vulnerabilities include lack of social support, adverse economic conditions, unemployment, or prior involvement with crime. The third tenet addresses the relationship between substance use and social behaviour, asserting that drug

use can heighten aggressive tendencies and criminal involvement, particularly in environments marked by competition for resources or illicit income. The final tenet underscores the importance of preventive and regulatory measures, suggesting that reducing availability and environmental exposure can lower both drug use and violence (Bryan *et al.*, 2000; Dosunmu & Odesanmi, 2025). The Availability Proneness Theory offers a valuable framework for understanding drug use and street violence in Aba, a major commercial city in Abia State known for Ariaria International Market and other active trade centres. These locations facilitate the widespread availability of hard drugs, including tramadol, cocaine, and methamphetamine, particularly among vulnerable groups such as youths and the unemployed (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 2025). Nelson, et al (2024) report that these substances are frequently trafficked through market networks, bus stations, and informal social spaces, increasing their accessibility.

Ariaria International Market exemplifies the theory's principles. Young traders and apprentices are often exposed to drugs through peers or business associates. Evidence suggests that tramadol is used by some youths to manage physical strain from extended working hours or inadequate wages, while others encounter substances such as cocaine during social events or interactions within the market community (Dosunmu & Odesanmi, 2025). The theory accounts for how the convergence of environmental availability and individual vulnerability elevates the risk of drug use, which may escalate into aggressive or violent behaviour.

Youth groups located near industrial areas and bus stations in Aba further illustrate the theory. Unemployed or underemployed youths in these settings often face economic and social stressors, heightening their vulnerability to drug use. Reports from the NDLEA indicate that territorial disputes and conflicts over drug sales in these areas frequently lead to street violence (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 2025). The theory posits that the accessibility of drugs intensifies aggression among vulnerable individuals, contributing to such incidents (Gossop, et al, 2001). Link between drug use and interpersonal violence in Aba. Youth gangs controlling parts of Ariaria Market often engage in violent clashes fuelled by tramadol or other hard drugs. These incidents include fights over sales, debts, and territorial control, showing how environmental exposure and personal predispositions interact to increase aggression (Nelson, et al, 2024).

The moderating influence of social networks and support systems on drug-related violence is also highlighted. In Aba, youths involved in community associations, apprenticeships with mentorship, or stable family environments are less likely to engage in drug use, even when substances are widely available. In contrast, socially isolated youths with limited support face a higher risk of both drug use and street violence (Windsor & Murugan, 2012). This demonstrates the theory's capacity to explain behavioural variations among individuals within the same environment.

The theory further informs the analysis of policy interventions. NDLEA enforcement actions, including arrests and market raids, may reduce the immediate availability of drugs but do not address the underlying social and economic vulnerabilities affecting youths. The theory advocates a combined approach that integrates enforcement with social support, vocational training, and youth engagement programmes to more effectively reduce both drug use and violence (Dosunmu & Odesanmi, 2025).

By applying the Availability Proneness Theory, this study can provide a structured understanding of hard drug use and street violence in Aba. The application of the Availability Proneness Theory enables a structured analysis of hard drug use and street violence in Aba. The theory connects observable social problems to environmental exposure, individual vulnerability, and social networks, providing a comprehensive framework for examining causes, consequences, and potential interventions. It also offers guidance for developing context-specific strategies to reduce

both substance use and violent behaviour in urban Nigerian contexts (Bryan *et al.*, 2000; Gossop, *et al.*, 2001; Windsor & Murugan, 2012).

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative and case study research design, which relies entirely on secondary sources of data. A case study research design to investigate substance use and drug-related activities within a specific area in Nigeria. The case study approach enables detailed examination of real-life situations within their natural context. This design facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the issue by considering both the individuals involved and the surrounding environment. A case study design enables information collection from multiple sources, such as journal articles, official reports, agency press releases, credible news reports, and other relevant documents. Gathering data from diverse sources improves the study's completeness and reliability. This approach also helps identify patterns, causes, and affects that may not be apparent through other research methods. This research design offers flexibility, permitting adjustments as new information emerges. It supports both descriptive analysis, which outlines current events, and explanatory analysis, which investigates underlying causes. By concentrating on a single case, the study can examine the reasons for substance use and drug-related crimes, the associated challenges, and the impacts on individuals and the community. The case study design offers a clear, detailed, and realistic understanding of the issue. It shows how different factors interact and helps identify solutions appropriate for the community. The study employed content analysis as the method of data analysis.

### **Area of Study**

The study was conducted in Aba, a major city in Abia State, Nigeria. Aba serves as a commercial and industrial hub in southeastern Nigeria and is among the state's most densely populated cities, comprising both urban and semi-urban communities. The city is recognized for its markets, small-scale industries, and active trade. Despite its economic vibrancy, Aba faces significant social challenges, including youth unemployment, poverty, and increasing cases of substance use and drug-related issues. These factors render Aba an appropriate location for examining the prevalence, causes, and effects of drug use among youths. Aba offers a practical and relevant setting due to its substantial youth population, who are frequently most affected by substance use and related criminal activities. Reports from local authorities and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) indicate that Aba has experienced significant drug-related incidents, including arrests, seizures, and rehabilitation cases. Focusing the study on Aba enables an examination of real-life experiences and behaviours of individuals involved in substance use, as well as the broader impact on the community.

The city is characterized by social diversity, encompassing various ethnic groups, social classes, and neighbourhoods. This diversity influences attitudes toward drug use, access to drugs, and community responses to substance abuse. Examining Aba facilitates an understanding of how social, economic, and cultural factors interact to shape patterns of drug use and associated risks. Additionally, Aba is accessible and offers existing data sources, including schools, rehabilitation centers, local government offices, and NDLEA records. These resources support the collection of accurate, detailed information. The combination of urban activities, a large youth population, social diversity, and available data renders Aba a practical choice for a focused and effective study. Aba in Abia State provided a suitable and realistic environment for this research. Its economic vibrancy, substantial youth population, social diversity, and documented drug-related challenges

established a clear context for understanding issues of substance use and its consequences. Conducting the study in Aba yielded relevant insights to inform policies, interventions, and community strategies addressing drug use and its impacts.

### **Nexus between illicit Drug Use and Street Violence in Aba City, Nigeria 2015-2025**

| <b>Author/Source<br/>(Year)</b> | <b>Major Findings</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alaribe (2026b)                 | York Street in central Aba was characterized as an open market for hard drugs, including cocaine, heroin, and cannabis, where incidents of phone snatching and armed robbery were prevalent. An unattributed estimate suggested that approximately 70% of violent crime at the time was driven by the hard-drug trade. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) reportedly raided and took control of the area, after which the state government converted the street into a motor park. However, according to a local transporter, the arrested individuals returned within hours. |
| Nigerian Youth Congress (2020)  | In May 2020, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) dismantled a bunk on the Ngwa Road axis within a primary school. The location had served as a site for drug consumption, distribution, and related criminal activities. Four suspects were apprehended during the operation, which was conducted in response to community reports of sexual assault, armed robbery, and bag snatching.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Daily Trust (2018)              | Four individuals, aged 19 to 38 and suspected of drug addiction, were arrested at Ahia Ohuru textile market for allegedly posing a significant danger to traders and other patrons. The group had reportedly regrouped following a 2017 joint operation. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) subsequently established a round-the-clock outpost near the market.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Omonobi (2024)                  | Raids conducted at the end of February and early March 2024 targeted a drug joint at Cemetery Barracks, resulting in the recovery of cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine, and the arrest of a 37-year-old suspect. Security also carried out additional operations at the abandoned Enyimbaa Hotel in Ogbor Hill. The article reported no incidents of violence.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Ofurum (2024)                   | The abandoned Enyimba Hotel was described as “a hideout for drug peddlers and criminals that attack pedestrians and motorists at the Ogbor Hill bridge.” In June 2024, the NDLEA, Operation Crush, and the Greater Aba Development Authority conducted a joint clearance and demolition of the site.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

| Author/Source<br>(Year)       | Major Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Orjiakor <i>et al.</i> (2026) | A qualitative study conducted in Aba and Onitsha, involving 52 key informant interviews and 8 focus groups, found that respondents in Aba described the presence of cult groups, armed robbers, and young men involved in hard drug use who do not engage in agricultural work. The association between drug use and robbery was specifically mentioned by a respondent from Onitsha. |
| Adedeji (2026)                | During a police crackdown in August 2026, arrests for armed robbery were reported on Market Road by Rail in Aba North and at a hotel in Aba, with no attribution to drug involvement. Suspected hard drugs were recovered exclusively at a cult meeting in Umuahia North.                                                                                                             |
| Abiakam (2025)                | The Governor stated that “a lot of young people go into crime and then use drugs to fuel it” and that “many criminal acts are drug-induced.” Additionally, a former Aba Commander reported serving in Aba between 2011 and 2015.                                                                                                                                                      |
| Sahara<br>(2025)              | Reporters Between 4 July and 19 September 2025, police arrested 204 suspects, including two men accused of lynching a young man over alleged theft at Aba Main Park. Cannabis was recovered during operations across the state, but it was not linked to any specific offence.                                                                                                        |

Source; Authors compilation, 2025

#### Types of Hard Drugs Commonly Abused in Aba City, Nigeria, 2015-2025

| Author/Source<br>(Year) | Major Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alaribe (2026b)         | Cocaine, heroin, cannabis, and other substances were reportedly sold openly on York Street.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Omonobi (2024)          | . Cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine were recovered from the Cemetery Barracks drug joint in Aba.                                                                                                                                                           |
| Ariyo (2024)            | In June 2024, an operation at Boundary Avenue and Ohia Road in Aba resulted in the seizure of 20.76 kg of cocaine and methamphetamine valued at over N4 billion. Two siblings, aged 49 and 50, were arrested, and a truck along with two buses was recovered. |
| Alaribe (2025a)         | In February 2025, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) conducted a raid at Ekumi Plaza, seizing methamphetamine (mkpuru mmiri) and banned or unregistered medicines under security escort.                               |
| Chibundu (2025)         | Suspected crystal methamphetamine, described as “wrapped with foils like a cigarette,” was concealed in cartons labelled Epsom Salt within a patent medicine shop. No arrests were made.                                                                      |

| Author/Source<br>(Year)     | Major Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Eagle Online (2025)         | In December 2025, a raid on a clandestine codeine syrup factory at Umuakpara, Osisioma (adjacent to Aba), recovered 9,015 bottles and 1,152.2 kg of codeine syrup.                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Fadehan (2026)              | In April 2026, an 83-year-old former shoemaker was arrested at Samek by Powerline, Aba, in possession of 700 g of skunk packaged in retail sachets.                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Alaribe (2026a)             | Between 26 June 2025 and 26 June 2026, the Abia Command seized 2,078 kg of cocaine, heroin, cannabis sativa, methamphetamine, and tramadol across the state. The codeine seizure during this period was reported as 9,915 bottles.                                                                                                    |
| Nwaoru <i>et al.</i> (2024) | A preprint reports a survey of 472 students at Abia State Polytechnic, Aba, using snowball sampling. The highest rates of last-30-day use were observed for marijuana (71.61%), mixed weed (67.80%), cough syrups (61.44%), amphetamines (57.00%), Rohypnol (51.91%), crack cocaine (50.21%), heroin (48.94%), and tramadol (47.25%). |
| Uwakwe (2021)               | A survey of 120 students from four secondary schools in Aba indicates that male and female students report different motivations for drug use. Socio-economic status was not identified as a determining factor in substance abuse.                                                                                                   |
| Asiogu & Ekah (2023)        | An ethnographic study of three markets in Aba, involving 23 participants, found that food, beverages, and drugs are frequently adulterated and repackaged. Young people participate in these activities because they “have no jobs and are hungry”.                                                                                   |

Source; Authors compilation, 2025

#### **Classification of Substances Named in the Aba Sources and Their Reported Link to Violence**

| Substance | Classification<br>(operational<br>definition) | Sources                                                                                                 | Reported Link to Violence in Aba<br>Sources                                                                                                 |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cocaine   | Hard drug                                     | Alaribe (2026b);<br>Omonobi (2024);<br>Ariyo (2024);<br>Alaribe (2026a);<br>Nwaoru <i>et al.</i> (2024) | Sold openly at York Street (violent hotspot); found at Cemetery Barracks joint; 20.76 kg cache with methamphetamine (no violence reported). |
| Heroin    | Hard drug                                     | Alaribe (2026b);<br>Omonobi (2024);<br>Alaribe (2026a);<br>Nwaoru <i>et al.</i> (2024)                  | Sold at York Street; found at Cemetery Barracks; no incident attributed to use.                                                             |

| Substance                                                                            | Classification<br>(operational<br>definition)                                 | Sources                                                                                                                     | Reported Link to Violence in Aba<br>Sources                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Methamphetamine<br>(mkpuru mmiri)                                                    | Hard drug                                                                     | Omonobi (2024);<br>Ariyo (2024);<br>Alaribe (2025a);<br>Chibundu (2025);<br>Alaribe (2026a);<br>Nwaoru <i>et al.</i> (2024) | Seized in joint, cache, and market raids; concealed as Epsom Salt; no violent incident attributed to use.                               |
| Tramadol                                                                             | Hard drug                                                                     | Alaribe (2026a);<br>Nwaoru <i>et al.</i> (2024)                                                                             | In official seizure list and student survey; no violent incident attributed.                                                            |
| Codeine syrup                                                                        | Hard drug                                                                     | Eagle Online (2025);<br>Alaribe (2026a);<br>Nwaoru <i>et al.</i> (2024)                                                     | Locally manufactured (Osisioma); 9,015 to 9,915 bottles seized; no arrest or violent incident reported.                                 |
| Cannabis, skunk, mixed weed                                                          | Not a hard drug                                                               | Alaribe (2026b);<br>Sahara Reporters (2025);<br>Fadehan Alaribe (2026);<br>Nwaoru <i>et al.</i> (2024)                      | Sold at York Street alongside hard drugs; skunk retailed by an 83-year-old former shoemaker; no violence attributed to cannabis itself. |
| Rohypnol, amphetamines, crack cocaine                                                | Mixed (crack cocaine and amphetamines hard; Rohypnol a prescription sedative) | Nwaoru <i>et al.</i> (2024)                                                                                                 | Reported only in one preprint student survey; no violence measured.                                                                     |
| Banned and unregistered medicines (Analgin, Gentamicin), counterfeit foods and drugs | Not narcotics                                                                 | Alaribe (2025a);<br>Asiogu & Ekah (2023)                                                                                    | Sold from the same markets as narcotics; policed by NAFDAC; no violence reported.                                                       |

Source; Authors compilation, 2025

## The Role of Unemployment and Structural Drivers in Drug-Related Violence in Aba City, Nigeria, 2015–2025.

| Author/Source<br>(Year)              | Major Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| National Bureau of Statistics (n.d.) | According to the Labour Force Survey 2023, Abia recorded the highest state unemployment rate at 18.7% (362,014 persons) and the highest rate of youth (aged 15 to 24) not in employment, education, or training at 38.1%.                                                                          |
| Onyemaechi <i>et al.</i> (2019)      | A survey of small and medium enterprises in the Aba metropolis identified a significant relationship between entrepreneurship and employment generation, as well as a moderate positive association with crime reduction.                                                                          |
| Time Economics Ltd. (2018)           | A survey of 1,064 garment and leather enterprises in Aba found that 87% employ at least one apprentice, typically at low wages, and 95% have fewer than ten employees. Respondents reported experiences of “extortion and unfair taxation,” including a “Bakassi levy” purportedly for protection. |
| Uzonwanne & Udedi (2026)             | A survey of 390 participants across 14 informal shoe clusters in Aba indicated that access to technology and credit increases youth employment, while inadequate infrastructure and multiple taxation impede it.                                                                                   |
| Attah & Orji (2025)                  | Enrolment data from three shoe and bag production facilities in Aba showed a 53.8% annual increase in employment from 2020 to 2024, attributed to vocational training initiatives.                                                                                                                 |
| Asiogu & Ekah (2023)                 | Young people reportedly enter the counterfeit medicine trade in Aba markets due to unemployment and economic hardship, stating they “have no jobs and are hungry”.                                                                                                                                 |
| Fadehan (2026)                       | An 83-year-old former shoemaker was arrested for retailing skunk in the shoe district.                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Uwakwe (2021)                        | Socio-economic status was not found to be a determinant of substance abuse among secondary school students in Aba.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Orjiakor <i>et al.</i> (2026)        | A ward committee member stated that boys involved in hard drugs “do not have business coming to till the land.”                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Abiakam (2025)                       | According to the governor, approximately one fifth of offenders are habitual criminals, while four fifths commit offenses due to “social frustration and lack of economic opportunities.”                                                                                                          |

| <b>Author/Source<br/>(Year)</b> | <b>Major Findings</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Anyalewechi (2025)              | A petition by Alphareg Mall traders on 19 May 2025 alleged that a N350,000 security fee was demanded and the mall was sealed "in company with some suspected hoodlums." It was further claimed that "Bakassi boys" forcibly took goods, although these allegations were disputed. |
| Judy (2025)                     | On 24 May 2025, police arrested a man at Park One, Ariaria International Market, for collecting "gate pass" levies from drivers. The market security chief stated that Ariaria "is not a haven for extortionists."                                                                |
| Newman (2025)                   | The state inaugurated Ariaria market executives for a six-month reviewable term and issued a warning against unauthorized revenue collection and extortion.                                                                                                                       |
| Alaribe (2022)                  | In March 2022, over 200 tricycle operators stormed the Traffic and Indiscipline Management Agency office in Aba to protest a N40,000 release fee and forcibly opened the impound area.                                                                                            |

Source; Authors compilation, 2025

### **Challenges Faced in Addressing Drug Abuse and Street Violence in Aba City, Nigeria, 2015-2025**

| <b>Author/Source<br/>(Year)</b>      | <b>Major Findings</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ofurum (2023)                        | In June 2023, the Abia Commander reported that the rehabilitation centre was operating at full capacity, with many individuals awaiting admission and insufficient vehicles, and emphasized that "the drug war is community-based".                                                                                                                        |
| Alaribe (2025b)                      | Aba and Umuahia were identified as the major flashpoints of illicit drug activity, with 222 arrests recorded in the year leading up to June 2025. Aba hosts the agency's only rehabilitation centre in Abia State.                                                                                                                                         |
| Alaribe (2026a)                      | In the year ending 26 June 2026, authorities made 429 arrests, filed 104 new charges at the Federal High Court in Umuahia, secured 95 convictions, and had 23 cases pending. During this period, 166 clients received counselling, 120 were discharged, and 48 remained admitted. The policy remains to criminalize dealers rather than users (statewide). |
| Ozogwu (2026)                        | According to the NDLEA 2025 annual report, Abia State recorded 379 arrests and 152 convictions, representing a conviction rate of 40.1%.                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Federal High Court of Nigeria (n.d.) | Abia State has only one judicial division, located in Umuahia; there is none in Aba.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

| Author/Source<br>(Year) | Major Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Abiakam (2025)          | The NDLEA requested that the Governor relocate its State Command from Aba to Umuahia. The agency acknowledged state support, including Security Council membership, provision of accommodation, a rehabilitation centre, vehicles, and the establishment of a Drug Control Committee. |
| Alaribe (2026b)         | A transporter reported that authorities released individuals arrested on York Street within hours. The hotspot was neutralized after the state assumed control of the street.                                                                                                         |
| Daily Trust (2018)      | Ahia Ohuru group regrouped after 2017 operation; NDLEA secured a site for a round-the-clock outpost.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Ofurum (2024)           | The Ahia Ohuru group regrouped following the 2017 operation. In response, the NDLEA secured a site for a continuous outpost.                                                                                                                                                          |
| Emelike (2025)          | In June 2024, the NDLEA, Operation Crush, and the Greater Aba Development Authority jointly demolished the Enyimba Hotel hideout.                                                                                                                                                     |
| Alaribe (2025a)         | A NAFDAC raid at Ekumi Plaza discovered methamphetamine among other banned medicines. The agency's mandate focuses on the regulation of medicines.                                                                                                                                    |
| Chibundu (2025)         | Methamphetamine disguised as Epsom Salt; no arrests made.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Agency Report (2026)    | In June 2026, the state government banned commercial motorcyclists in Aba, Umuahia, and Ohafia, citing increased exploitation of motorcycles by criminals. because criminals “increasingly exploited motorcycles”.                                                                    |

Source; Authors compilation, 2025

## Discussion

The primary finding of this study is that illicit drug use and street violence in Aba is fundamentally shaped by spatial factors, organizational structures, and rivalries, rather than by pharmacological effects. In all documented accounts of drug hotspots within the city, incidents of violence are consistently reported at the same locations as drug trading. Alaribe (2026b) identifies York Street as an area where hard drugs were openly sold and where phone snatching and armed robbery were commonplace. The Nigerian Youth Congress (2020) notes that the Ngwa Road bunk was raided following resident complaints of sexual assaults, armed robbery, and bag snatching. The Daily Trust (2018) observes that individuals with addiction at the Ahia Ohuru market were “posing great danger to traders and other patrons.” Ofurum (2024) reports that the Enyimba Hotel site harboured “drug peddlers and criminals that attack pedestrians and motorists.” This evidence demonstrates a strong association at the site level, with consistent locations including open streets, bunks adjacent to schools, sections of textile markets, and disused hotels.

Nevertheless, these sources do not establish a direct causal link between individual drug consumption and specific acts of violence. The sole quantitative statement in the dataset, which

estimates that approximately 70 per cent of violent crimes at York Street were driven by the hard drug business (Alaribe, 2026b), is an author's estimate rather than an empirically measured proportion, and it refers to the drug trade itself rather than the intoxication of users. This distinction is critical. The economics of the hard drug trade inherently generate violence, as protection is required, customer disputes are resolved through force, and profits finance weapons and recruitment. None of these mechanisms necessitates that perpetrators be intoxicated. This interpretation aligns with the official account provided by Abiakam (2025), in which the Governor asserts that young people "go into crime and then use drugs to fuel it," indicating that criminal activity precedes drug use, which then sustains it. It also corresponds with Orjiakor et al. (2026), who report that a community respondent in Aba characterizes hard drug users as individuals disengaged from productive activities, rather than as an inherently aggressive group.

The second element of the finding is that a considerable part of the violence recorded in Aba is not attributed to drugs at all. The European Union Agency for Asylum (2026) reports that Aba South had more conflict incidents than any other local government area in Abia State between January 2024 and August 2025, and that in Aba North "several fatalities arose from violence linked to rivalries between cults/gangs". Okoli *et al.* (2024) quote residents who recall that "Aba had a very strong presence of cult groups that usually clashed in rival wars, most times bloody". The police crackdown reported by Adedeji (2026) records armed robberies in Aba North and at a hotel without any drug attribution. It reports the recovery of suspected hard drugs only at a cult meeting outside the city, in Umuahia North. Sahara Reporters (2025) reports that a young man was lynched at Aba Main Park over alleged theft. In these accounts the violence is about rivalry, reprisal, property, and mob justice, and the drug status of the participants is not stated. Had hard drug use been the main driver of street violence in Aba, these records would be expected to mention it far more often than they do.

These findings challenge the common assumption that drug use and street violence are closely correlated. The evidence from Aba supports three key propositions. First, not all instances of drug abuse result in violence, as the same sources that document violent hotspots also report retail cannabis sales by an elderly former shoemaker (Fadehan, 2026) and the concealment of methamphetamine on a pharmacy shelf (Chibundu, 2025) without any associated violent incidents. Second, not all acts of street violence involve drugs, as records of cult group rivalries and mob actions over alleged theft do not reference drug involvement. Third, when drugs and violence do coincide, this overlap most frequently occurs in open, unowned, or abandoned spaces, and among groups organized around the control of such territories.

The concept that best captures the third proposition is supremacy. The boys at York Street "were not afraid of anybody", and the raid that ended their control of the street was followed by the state taking the street over (Alaribe, 2026b). Those who occupied the hotel at Ogbor Hill held it until the state demolished it (Ofurum, 2024). The group at Ahia Ohuru returned to the market after the 2017 operation (Daily Trust, 2018). In each case, the contest is over who controls a piece of ground, and drug dealing is the income that control makes possible. Violence in such a setting is a means of establishing and defending supremacy, and it would occur regardless of which drug was on sale. This explains why the same violence is documented among cult groups that are not reported to deal in drugs at all.

These findings have significant theoretical implications. The Availability Proneness Theory, which underpins this study, posits that drug-related problems result from the interaction between the environmental availability of drugs and the vulnerability of exposed individuals. The evidence from Aba strongly supports the availability component of the theory, as drug availability is both

spatially concentrated and highly visible. Drugs are accessible in specific, identifiable locations, and violence is similarly concentrated in these areas. The evidence is less conclusive on proneness, as limited information exists about the personal characteristics of those involved. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that in Aba, availability is more accurately conceptualized as the availability of controlled territory rather than merely the presence of a substance. These findings also have important policy implications. Given that the relationship between drug use and violence is rooted in spatial dynamics and rivalry, effective interventions have been spatial in nature. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency conducted raids and the state assumed control of York Street (Alaribe, 2026b), demolished the Enyimba Hotel structure (Ofurum, 2024), and established a permanent outpost near Ahia Ohuru (Daily Trust, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

This study examined illicit drug use and street violence in Aba between 2015 and 2025. The relationship is best characterized as spatial. Hard drugs are traded in specific locations within the city, such as open streets, bunks adjacent to schools, sections of textile markets, and disused hotels, where institutional control is absent. Violence is reported in these same locations because control over the space and its associated income is contested. Supremacy over territory, rather than solely the pharmacological effects of drugs, links the drug trade to violence in Aba. When territory was retaken and occupied, violent hotspots ceased; when only raided, they reemerged. The findings indicate that the Aba record does not support the assumption that every abused drug or act of abuse result in street violence. Substances associated with violent locations are those traded in organized, territorial markets, while substances documented only as commodities, such as tramadol, codeine syrup, and skunk, are not linked to any recorded violent incidents. However, the absence of reports does not confirm the absence of events. Additionally, a significant proportion of street violence in the city, including cult rivalry, robbery, and mob action, is reported without reference to drugs. Therefore, policies that attribute street violence in Aba solely to drug use risk misdirecting efforts. The study also concludes that, although unemployment is a significant and persistent issue in Abia State, it primarily determines who is available to participate in the drug economy and armed groups, rather than who engages in violence. The youth economy in Aba, characterized by low-paid apprenticeships in workplaces that double as trading spaces, creates both vulnerability and opportunity. However, documented confrontations predominantly concern disputes over the right to collect money in markets and parks. Thus, employment programs alone would not resolve these underlying contests. Furthermore, the study finds that the state's response to drug abuse and street violence in Aba is characterized by raids without sustained occupation, arrests without convictions, treatment without adequate capacity, and fragmented responsibility among agencies that do not share locations. The findings refine the Availability Proneness Theory in three key ways: in Aba, availability refers to the control of space rather than merely the presence of substances; vulnerability encompasses the appeal of joining groups that control territory; and institutional capacity to reduce availability, which the theory assumes to be constant, varies significantly across different sites.

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