

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AMONGST SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TWO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Background: The use and abuse of psychoactive substances is very rampant, even in our secondary schools. In recent times, there has been a growing concern about negative effects of these substances on youths. The high incidence of school dropouts and other nefarious activities are the resultant impacts on the students.

Objectives: The objectives of the study were: (1) To determine the prevalence of substance use amongst secondary school students. (2) Compare the findings in two different local settings. (3) To determine the sociodemographic variables.

Materials and Methods: Four hundred secondary school students from two Local Government Areas were assessed for use of psychoactive substances, during the second term of 2004/2005 school session, using a Youth Survey Questionnaire.

Results: A total of 254 (63.5%) students, consisting of 119 from Uyo and 135 from Eket were analyzed. The mean age of the students in both schools was 17.1 +2.0 and 16.6 + 1.7 years respectively. The difference in the mean was statistically significant ($t=1.14$; $df=3$, $p>0.05$). More students from Uyo, 37 (31.1%) used kolanuts, 54 (45.4%) sedatives, while more students from Eket, 47 (34.8%) used tobacco/cigarettes, 76 (56.3%) alcohol, 21 (15.6%) Indian hemp, 5 (3.7%) cocaine and 1 (0.7%) heroin. Class level ($P=0.04$), upbringing ($P=0.02$) and parents' marital status ($P=0.01$) was statistically significant in the use of tobacco/cigarettes. Also, class level ($P=0.02$) parents' marital status ($P=0.00$) was statistically significant in the use of alcohol, while family type ($P=0.00$) and parents' marital status was significant in the use of sedatives. Similarly, parents' marital status ($p=0.05$) was statistically significant in the use of Indian hemp, while family type ($P=0.00$), upbringing ($P=0.03$) was significant in cocaine.

Conclusion: The findings of this study confirm the presence and use of psychoactive substances in varying proportions among students. Therefore, there is need to strengthen the monitoring and preventive programmes aimed at reducing their spread in schools.

Key words: Use; Psychoactive Substances; Secondary School; Students, Local Government. (Accepted 9 March 2007)

INTRODUCTION

Drug use and/or abuse have reached an epidemic proportion worldwide and this has remained a major social and public health problem¹. Indications are that it is on the increase among junior and senior high school students in most advanced countries^{1, 2}. It is estimated that more than 50% of America youths try illicit drugs before they finish high school². Efforts at curtailing the "cankerworm" have only achieved a modest success. In developing countries, the impact

is more due to the fact that some of these substances are locally produced and have been used over the years. The negative effects of psychoactive substances have been extensively reported, especially on youths who are the vulnerable targets³⁻⁵. The medical, psychological and social consequences of this menace could be daunting and pervasive in diverse manifestations. This has added additional strain on the human and economic development of many countries already ravaged by human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). The initiation and continuation of substance (drug) use

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is determined by a complex interaction of the pharmacological properties and relative availability of each drug, the personality and expectancy of the users, and the environmental context in which the drug is used¹. Several factors have been identified to be responsible for youths' involvement in substance use, such as peer group pressure, the fear of being different and the desire to "fit in". Others include curiosity, boredom, escape, pleasure seeking, insecurity and rebellion including the desire to prove independence^{6,7}. There are strong reports indicating that before early 80s, most of the potent habit-forming substances were not available in many African countries, probably for the reasons of cost or lack of awareness^{3,6}. The emergence of civil and tribal wars, increased urbanization and aggressive advertising in these countries are some of the factors adduced for the ready availability of these substances⁶. In Nigeria, these same factors play a crucial role in accounting for the presence of these substances in all nooks and crannies. Several studies have shown that youths in secondary schools are recklessly involved in the use of some of these substances, resulting in dysfunctional and disruptive behaviours^{4, 8,9,10}. The locally available and socially acceptable products like tobacco (in the form of snuff and pipe), kolanuts and alcohol (in the form of palm wine and local gin) are used predominantly by the adult population⁷. Their unrestricted use, availability and affordability render them accessible to the youths. This single privilege has been found to act as leeway to other potent substances, such as the antidepressants, hypno-sedatives, Indian hemp, cocaine heroin and others^{4, 6}. The involvement of those at-risk in unhealthy activities and the resultant effect of emotional and psychological illnesses have been attributed to the use of these substances^{5,11}.

In African countries, there is paucity of data on successful medical and psychosocial rehabilitation of drug victims. The only hope of reducing the enormous problems associated with the substances seems to be prevention and early detection. Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine the presence of psychoactive substances in our schools and compare the pattern of use among students in different environmental and social settings

MATERIALS METHODS

Study Location: The study was carried out in 2 secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria each located in Uyo and Eket Local Government Areas (LGA) of the State. The choice of Uyo was because of her status as the capital city, with rapid urbanization process underway. Eket is a fast growing town with an oil-based economy, being the

operational base of the Exxon Mobil and other related companies. The estimated population of Uyo and Eket are 1.1million and 43,615 people respectively. The population estimates are based on the 1991 National population census with projections based on 3% annual population increase.

Data collection: Coeducational Schools were used for the study and the schools were chosen using the World Health Organization (WHO) Random Sampling Method. A part of the 'Youth Survey Questionnaire' for substance use by (WHO) was used to elicit information on sociodemographic variables and pattern of use of psychoactive substances by students. Substances investigated in the survey were kolanuts, tobacco/ cigarettes, alcohol in the form of beer, hot drinks, palm wine and locally brewed alcohol (ogogoro), sedatives (valium, phenobarbtonone and librum), cannabis, cocaine, heroin, lysergic diethylamide acid (LSD) and anabolic steroids. The Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the State Ministry of Education and Principals of the schools involved. Informed consents were obtained from the parents by a letter written through the principals to the chairmen of the parents' teachers association (PTA) of the two schools. This was presented to all the parents in one of the general meetings. The approval was then communicated in writing to the researchers. The study was carried out in the Second term of 2004/2005 School Session. In each of the school studied, 200 questionnaires were randomly administered to senior students (SS1-3), using the table of random numbers. The study was anonymous and the researchers guided the students to fill and complete the questionnaires.

Statistical Analysis: The data was analyzed using SPSS.10 Package. Sample means and percentages were calculated from which simple frequency tables were created. Standard deviation was also calculated and students t test was used to compare two means. Comparisons of categorical data were done by Chi-square, using Yates correction factor. The P-value of 0.05 was used to determine the statistical significance.

RESULTS

1. Sociodemographic characteristics:

A total of 400 students took part in the study, 254 (63.5%) were analyzed. This consisted of 119 students from Uyo and 135 from Eket. One hundred and forty six (36.5%) data were discarded due to incomplete information. Of the 119 students from Uyo that were evaluated, 76 (63.9%) were males and 43 (36.1%) females. Similarly, 84 (62.2%) students

from Eket were males and 51 (37.8%) females. The age range of students in Uyo and Eket were 11-30 and 11-25 years respectively. The mean age of the students in Uyo and Eket was 17.1 2.0 and 16.6 1.7 years respectively. The difference in the mean was statistically significant ($t=1.14$; $df = 3$, $P >0.05$). Majority of the students, 97 (81.5%) from Uyo and 127 (94.1%) from Eket were under 20 years of age. Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the students in both schools. The parents' marital status of the students was statistically significant ($X^2=7.95$, $df=2$; $P>0.02$).

Using Chi-square analysis (Table 111), there is no association between sociodemographic variables and the use of kolanuts in both schools. However, class level ($X^2=6.48$, $df=2$; $P>0.04$), upbringing

($X^2=9.61$, $df=3$; $P>0.02$) and parents' marital status ($X^2=8.92$, $df=2$; $P>0.01$) was statistically significant in the use of tobacco/cigarettes. Also, class level ($X^2=7.96$, $df=2$; $P>0.02$), parents' marital status ($X^2=23.75$, $df=2$; $P>0.00$) was statistically significant in alcohol, family type ($X^2=12.69$, $df=2$; $P>0.00$), parents' marital status ($X^2=16.78$, $df=2$; $P>0.00$) was significant in sedatives. Parents' marital status ($X^2=6.11$, $df=2$; $P>0.05$) was statistically significant in the use of Indian hemp, family type ($X^2=8.00$, $df=2$; $P>0.00$), upbringing ($X^2=4.44$, $df=1$; $P>0.03$) was significant in cocaine. The use of kolanuts, tobacco/cigarettes and sedatives cut across all ages and classes. However, the use of Indian hemp was found in higher classes.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of The Study Population In Both Schools

Characteristics	Students (Uyo)		Students (Eket)	
	n (%)	N (%)	X^2	P-value
1. Sex: M	76 (63.9)	84 (62.2)	0.07	0.79
F	43 (36.1)	51 (37.8)		
2. Age in Years:			2.20	0.53
Under 16 years	35 (29.4)	48 (35.6)		
16-20	62 (52.1)	79 (58.5)		
21-25	10 (8.4)	7 (5.2)		
26-30	2 (1.7)	1 (0.7)		
3. Class level:			1.37	0.50
SS1	31 (26.1)	42 (31.1)		
SS2	50 (42.0)	58 (43.0)		
SS3	38 (31.9)	35 (25.9)		
4. Family Type:			1.36	0.51
Monogamy	82 (68.9)	101 (74.8)		
Polygamy	25 (21.0)	21 (15.6)		
Single Parents	12 (10.1)	13 (9.6)		
5. Upbringing:			1.97	0.74
Both Parents	97 (81.5)	109 (80.7)		
Father only	6 (5.0)	9 (6.7)		
Mother only	13 (10.9)	11 (8.2)		
Relation	3 (2.5)	5 (3.7)		
Orphanage	-	1 (0.7)		
6. P/marital life:			7.95	0.02*
Never married	23 (19.3)	10 (7.1)		
Married	86 (72.3)	112 (83.0)		
Separate/ divorced or widowed	10 (8.4)	13 (9.6)		

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that there is presence and use of psychoactive substances among secondary school students in our environment. Substances like kolanuts, tobacco in the form of (snuff and pipe) and alcohol in the form of (palm wine and local gin) are traditionally popular products often used in most ceremonies and functions⁷. In this study, the rates of use of these substances vary among students of both schools and sexes. Although, the consumption of substances is more among males, the results show that a higher percentage of male students from Eket used tobacco/cigarettes, alcohol, Indian hemp and cocaine compared to male students from Uyo. Furthermore, no student from Uyo used heroin, compared to 0.7% found in Eket. Due to the oil exploration business, there is an influx of people and companies into the area. This could influence the presence and use of these substances. Earlier researchers have reported different geographical variation in the use of substances^{9,12,13}. Significantly, females in this study were not found to be involved with illicit substances. A higher percentage of them in both schools used sedatives, but the rate was more among female students from Uyo. The findings in this study is similar to those in previous studies that have reported a wide range of male involvement in illicit substances (drugs) and more sedatives among females^{14, 15}. Although, illicit substances as recorded in this study are low, the scope of use is expanding despite the intimidating harmful effects. The presence of alcohol, Indian hemp, cocaine and heroin in our schools pose great danger, considering their social, economic and medical consequences. Delinquent acts and lack of achievement of life purposes are some of the hazards associated with substance use. Several studies have also shown that criminal behaviour such as stealing, rape, armed robbery and murder could be due to the influence of substance use^{3,5}.

Many factors have been reported to influence the habit of substance use among students^{6,7}. In this study, the sociodemographic characteristics of the students were examined so as to determine any inherent factors that could predispose youths to substance use. The revelation that majority of students in both schools were below 20 years of age, with a mean age of 16 1.7 and 17 2 years is very disturbing and this could have a negative impact in their lives. It has been observed that in life and development, this tender age is very critical; several physiological and psychological changes take place during this period. The tendency to be lured and the craving for new experiences and experimentations

are the characteristics of this age group⁷. The early initiation and prolonged use of substances has been reported to be associated with social and psychological problems³. Various studies have linked the use and abuse of substances to psychiatric illnesses such as psychosis, anxiety and depression.^{3, 5,16}

There are also positive associations between class level, family type, upbringing, and parents' marital status and substance use (Table 111). It is usually fashionable for students in their final year in colleges to feel liberated and free. Majority of them may see themselves as big men and women and feel too big to adhere to basic school rules and regulations. The carefree attitude and behaviour could expose them to alcohol/ substances and other antisocial acts. This may probably explain the involvement of students in higher classes in the use of some of these substances. Furthermore, the erroneous believe that the use of substances could aid them in reading and understanding so as to pass examinations, may also lure them into the habit. The complexities and interrelationship of family type, upbringing and parents' marital status could result in poor parental supervision and less emotional and material investment in the children. Parental deprivation due to separation, divorce, death of spouse and unemployment/underemployment is one of the several factors that could predispose youths to substance use. The positive association of these variables in this study is in line with the findings in previous studies that reported polygamy, poor parental education and marital disharmony as confounding factors in the use of substances by the youths^{11,12}. The limitations of this study are: first, the small population size, which was due to a significant number of students that returned incomplete filled questionnaires and were discarded. Secondly, the dependence on the self-reports by the students to assess their own habits of substance use could affect the authenticity and genuineness of the behavioural intentions expressed about the substances. In conclusion, substance use and/ or abuse in both junior and high schools is no longer conjectural and exaggeration. The effect is real, complex and constantly changing in form and nature with serious adverse consequences. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop adequate and comprehensive intervention programmes in schools, to check the use of substances with its associated emotional and social problems.

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