

**SHORT COMMUNICATION**DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3329/mediscope.v9i1.58528>**Substance abuse: causes and effects*****Obehi. O Osadolor¹****Abstract**

Substance abuse is a rising public health problem especially among young people and a challenge to the family, community and society. It is a complex behaviour seen among young people and it exposes the youth to several physical, medical and psychological consequences. The methods used to abuse these substances could be by drinking, smoking, inhaling, injecting, chewing, sniffing, swallowing, and mixing with food or beverages, or combination of two or more methods; and this can occur in construction sites, hostels, bushy areas, specific spots where illicit substances are sold, hotels and in recreational centres. The prevalence of substance abuse varies from country to country, urban, semi-urban to rural areas. There is a dire need to raise awareness on the effects of substance abuse to young people especially adolescents, and help them adopt positive attitudes, values, behaviours, skills and life-styles that will enable them to contribute maximally to social welfare.

Keywords: Substance abuse, causes, effects.

Introduction

Substance abuse is a rising public health problem especially among young people and a big challenge to the family, community and society. It is a complex behaviour seen among young people which exposes the youth to several physical, medical, social, oral and psychological consequences.¹ It is common among adolescents who in some cases might not be aware about the various dangers of substance abuse.² Some commonly abused substances include tobacco, marijuana, mescaline, alcohol, cocaine, local plants, methamphetamine, kolanut, cannabis, amphetamine, codeine, khat, rafenol, tramadol, heroin, steroids, mandrax, local concoctions, designer/club drugs, phenobarbitone and pethidine.²⁻⁸ The methods used to abuse these

substances could be by drinking, smoking, inhaling, injecting, chewing, sniffing, swallowing, and mixing with food or beverages or combination of two or more methods²; and this can occur in construction sites, in their rooms, hostels, bushy areas, parties, specific spots where illicit substances are sold, motor parking areas, hotels and in recreational centres.

Causative factors and effects of substance abuse

Substance abuse refers to the harmful or wrong use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs.⁹ It is an increasing global problem that affect high income, middle income and low income countries worldwide. The physical, oral, psychological, social and economic consequences of substance abuse among youth are becoming more disturbing. Young people who

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regularly abuse substances often experience a plethora of problems, including poor academic performances, health related problems (including mental health), poor peer relationships and involvement in social crimes such as stealing, bullying, domestic violence, etc. All these have negative consequences for family members, community and the entire society.² Substance abuse is common among undergraduate students; many of them abuse substances such as drug, alcohol and tobacco. Young people often start by taking substances like cigarette and alcohol from which they gradually progress to other substances to such a degree that fully control their behaviour.¹ Complications of substance abuse by young people and adults include personality disorders, sexual violence, criminal tendencies, drug dependence, mental illness, liver and kidney related diseases, low productivity, child abuse, sexual abuse, loss of individual integrity, financial mismanagement, withdrawal symptoms, untimely death, traffic violations, mental disorder, depression, social violence, gang formation, lack of respect for elders, rape, domestic violence, and others.^{2,4,5-7}

Many factors have been identified to be responsible for substance abuse among young people, these include: experimental curiosity, peer pressure, psychological or physiological factors, environmental factors, unemployment, unmet expectations, availability and affordability of substances or drugs, media advertisement, poor socio-economic condition at homes, parenting style, broken homes, parental negligence, locality of residence, over protection by parents, having parents/guardians who are substance abusers, family structure, substance availability, negative influence of western media, frustration, depression, co-wives rivalry, cultural transition and the need for extra energy for daily activities.^{2,4-7,9}

The prevalence of substance abuse varies from country to country⁴, urban, semi-urban to rural areas. Regular information on substance abuse and its associated factors could therefore hold significant impact regarding appropriate and dynamic interventions towards reduction or eradication of substance abuse among

adolescents in North Africa, South Africa, East Africa, West Africa and also worldwide.⁴ Substance abuse prevalence among secondary school students in Abakaliki, Nigeria was 32.9%.¹ Prevalence rates of substance abuse from a community-based medical outreach¹⁰ in Jos, Nigeria was: Tobacco 13.33%, Marijuana 5.72%, Cocaine 0.17%, Amphetamines 0.85%, Inhalants 0.34%, Sedatives 1.45%, Hallucinogens 0.34 and Opioids 4.02%. In Finland, Karpov et al. reported a prevalence of 27.5% among individuals with mental illness.¹¹⁻¹² Various factors have been identified as the causative factors of substance abuse and there is need to raise awareness on the effects of substance abuse to young people especially adolescents, and help them adopt positive attitudes, values, behaviours, skills and life-styles that will enable them to contribute maximally to social and national wellbeing.

Conflicts of interest: Nothing to declare.

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