

# The Paradox of Drug Abuse, Poverty and Criminal Behaviour among Youth in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** - The degree of unemployment also correlates with poverty. Higher unemployment level would increase poverty and at the same time engenders crime activities due to depression associated with being unemployed. In their perspective, poverty to individual behavioral characteristics and choices such as alcohol and substance abuse, rape, theft etc. they suggest that the problem of poverty is within the control of the poor themselves and therefore policies and programs need to influence those choices through incentives and prohibitions. This paper examines the Paradox of drug abuse, poverty and criminal behavior in Nigeria. Theoretically the paper employed Merton's strain theory of crime to explain the issue of poverty, drug abuse and criminal behavior. Appropriate recommendations were also derived from the paper such as empowerment of youths through skill acquisitions, adequate training and retraining of youths enlightenment campaigns and struggles for good governance in Nigeria society.

**Key Words:** - Drug abuse, Poverty, Criminality Behaviour, Nigeria

## I. INTRODUCTION

The explanation of crime causation has taken various dimensions according to different theorists and scholars. Some blame it on defective family structure or arrested personality adjustment. Others emphasize factors such as inequality, environmental influence, poor socialization process (Henslin, 2006). In this regards, criminal acts may be induced by many unforeseen factors and circumstances.

Crime, according to Taylor (2006) could be seen as a fault of the social system whose institutions do not work equally for all its members. Sociologists look at the society in which individuals find themselves. Could it be that the problem lay not with the individual but in the social condition under which the individual live? The concern here is why people should exhibit behavior that is in violation of established norms, violations that may ultimately result in their being labeled as criminal behavior in terms of social processes.

According to Anasi, (2010) Mostly, persons known to commit street crimes as reported in the crime index are poor, uneducated, often unemployed and residents of low income neighborhoods. Krugman (2008) is of the view that many youth growing up in poverty is like being exiled from

society, it is being alienated in your own country one of the reasons that poverty has been associated with crime is because it is an opportunity for the poor to acquire materials that they could otherwise not afford. Poverty can also produce violent crimes because force is an easy way to get a large quantity of goods. Many impoverished criminals feel the hope of treasures is worth the possibility of being caught. Thus, poverty causes desire, and in turn, increases the crime rate (Ludwig, Duncan and Hirschedl 2001).

A drug refers to a substance that could bring about a change in the biological function through its chemical actions (Okoye, 2001). It is also considered as a substance that modifies perceptions, cognition, mood, behaviour and general body functions (Balogun, 2006). They could thus, be considered as chemical modifiers of the living tissues that could bring about physiological and behavioural changes (Nnachi, 2007). Drug abuse is a major public health problem all over the world (UNODC, 2005). The use and abuse of drugs by youth have become one of the most disturbing health related phenomena in Nigeria and other parts of the world (NDLEA; 1997). Several school youths experience mental health programme, either temporarily or for a long period of time. Some become insane, maladjusted to school situations and eventually drop out of school.

According to Fawa (2003), "Drug is defined as any substance, which is used for treatment or prevention of a disease in man and animals. Drug alters the body functions either positively or otherwise depending on the body composition of the user, the type of drug used, the amount used and whether used singly or with other drugs at the same time". NAFDAC (2000) as cited by Haladu (2003) explained the term drug abuse as excessive and persistent self-administration of a drug without regard to the medically or culturally accepted patterns. It could also be viewed as the use of a drug to the extent that it interferes with the health and social function of an individual. World Book Encyclopedia (2004) defined drug abuse as the non-medical use of a drug that interferes with a healthy and productive life Manbe (2008) defined drug abuse as the excessive, maladaptive or addictive use of drugs for non-medical purpose. Drug abuse and poverty correlate to increase criminal activities among youths as both factors has a unique way to influence each

other according to the report of BJR 2006 it was observed that drug use is related with crime as many of the prison inmate tested positive to drug use at the time of their arrest. (Bureau of justice reports 2006).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Drug abuse inflicts immeasurable harm on public health and safety around the world each year, and threatens the peaceful development and smooth functioning of many societies. An understanding of the economic costs of drug abuse is necessary to develop policies that reduce such costs. Attempts to calculate the global monetary burden of drug abuse (INCB, REPORT 2013)

The degree of unemployment also correlates with poverty. Higher unemployment level would increase poverty and at the same time engenders crime activities due to depression associated with being unemployed (Short, 2007). In their perspective, Chukuezi (2009) and Oruh (2004) attributed poverty to individual behavioral characteristics and choices such as alcohol and substance abuse, rape, theft etc. they suggest that the problem of poverty is within the control of the poor themselves and therefore policies and programs need to influence those choices through incentives and prohibitions.

According to reports of Home Office, (2001). At any one time, there are very roughly 550,000 people in Britain who are persistently involved in crime, of which slightly more than 100,000 are high-rate, persistent to offenders the majority of these offenders are known to the police. They are much more heavily involved in drug use, and in problematic drug use, than the general population. Poverty and the harsh conditions of deprivation place families under significant stress and can undermine the ability and capacity of parents to provide the kind of environment which fosters pro-social behaviour. However, even children who have been well socialized in a conventional way within the family are open to being influenced and persuaded by peer-groups and the powerful subculture surrounding them. (James and Morag, 2007) it against this back drop this paper intended to subsume an assessment of drug abuse and poverty as major causes of criminal behaviour among youth.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This section provides information on the conceptual clarifications of some selected variables associated with this study. It also looks at the assessment of literatures in connection to this topic. Hence, this section emphasizes on these few sub-topics, meaning of drug abuse, definitions of poverty, definition of crime.

### *1 Meaning of Drug Abuse*

According to Fawa (2003), "Drug is defined as any substance, which is used for treatment or prevention of a disease in man and animals. Drug alters the body functions either positively or otherwise depending on the body composition of the user,

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NAFDAC (2000) as cited by Haladu (2003) explained the term drug abuse as excessive and persistent self-administration of a drug without regard to the medically or culturally accepted patterns. It could also be viewed as the use of a drug to the extent that it interferes with the health and social function of an individual. World Book Encyclopedia (2004) defined drug abuse as the non-medical use of a drug that interferes with a healthy and productive life. Manbe (2008) added that, drug abuse as the excessive, maladaptive or addictive use of drugs for non-medical purpose.

Abdulahi (2009) viewed drug abuse as the use of drugs to the extent that interferes with the health and social function of an individual. In essence, drug abuse may be defined as the arbitrary overdependence or mis-use of one particular drug with or without a prior medical diagnosis from qualified health practitioners. It can also be viewed as the unlawful overdose in the use of drug(s).

### *2 Definition of the Concept Poverty*

Wenger (2007) describes poverty as a living condition in which individuals fail to achieve a minimum standard of living. Haralambos & Holborn (2000) assert that poverty is a situation where a person is unable to acquire the minimum necessities that make for well-being. Poverty is marked by the inability to get good livelihood, have good house to live in, support oneself without depending on others, inability to acquire good healthcare, good educational training etc.

The concept of poverty have assumed not only local but global trend resulting in many countries administering numerous policies in a bid to curb this menace. Haralambos & Holborn (2000) identifies three (3) kinds of poverty. These are absolute, relative and subjective poverty. They describe absolute poverty as a state where the living condition is really critical and there is difficult in survival. According to them, to determine absolute poverty a yardstick is established against which to measure poverty. Poverty is in this context measured by pricing the basic necessities of life, mapping out the poverty line in terms of the price. The relative poverty according to them is in terms of adjustment from people of a particular society of what is taken as a reasonable and acceptable standard of living and way of life due to the conditions of the day.

According to World Bank (1990) poverty is the inability to attain a minimum level of a standard of living which considers income and expenditure per capita to be the standard of measuring welfare. This definition is meant to determine the household who falls below or above the minimum standard of living and classify them as poor or non-poor respectively. Gewwe and Gaag (1990) define poverty as an interlocking condition of assertiveness, unemployment, low wages and income, proneness to disease, illiteracy, gender

and economic vulnerability, social advantages and political powerlessness which reflect on the living conditions of the people

According to Kulkarni (2005) poverty levels may be defined in absolute terms or relative in relations to the incomes of other members of the society thus family income is expressed as half of the medium income for all similar families. These illustrate that income disparities is the one that shows the economic difference in the standards of living in order to explain poverty cycles in the world. Kulkarni further states that, the official measure of poverty in the United States is based on more direct estimate the income is needed to provide a minimum standard of living, it begins with an economy food plan devised by the department of agriculture. The plan is supposed to provide a balanced diet at the lowest possible cost given the prevailing market prices (Kulkarni 2005; 411). This means the government of United States has to set the low income level the dividing line between the poor and non poor at three times the cost of the economy food plan.

### 3 Definition of the Concept Crime

According to Oxford Dictionary of Sociology crime is defined as ‘an offence which goes beyond the personal and into the public sphere, breaking prohibitory rules or laws, to which legitimate Punishments or sanctions are attached, and which requires the intervention of a public authority.’ (SCCJR, 2006)

Hagan (1987), for example, identifies seven different approaches to the definition of crime, ranging from a ‘legal-consensus’ definition to a ‘human rights’ definition. For present purposes, we can summarize broad differences in definition as follows: • Formal legal definition: regards crime as that activity defined by the state; that is, if an act is proscribed by the criminal law, and is subject to state sanction in the form of a specific penalty, then it is a crime. • Social harm conception: considers crime to involve both criminal offences (e.g. assault) and civil offences (e.g. negligence), given that each type of action or inaction brings with it some type of harm. According to this perspective, all acts resulting in harm should attract some sort of penalty.

Cross-cultural universal norms perspective: states that crime is ubiquitous; in essence, it does not vary across cultures. Thus, murder is murder regardless of the society in which it is committed, and we can therefore postulate conduct norms that cut across diverse cultural backgrounds. • Labeling approach: argues that crime only exists when there has been a social response to a particular activity that labels that activity as criminal. If there is no label, there is, in effect, no crime. • Human rights approach: regards crime as having occurred whenever a human right has been violated, regardless of the legality or otherwise of the action. Such a conception expands the definition of crime to include oppressive practices such as racism, sexism and class-based exploitation. • Human diversity approach: defines crime in terms of the manner in which deviance represents a normal response to oppressive or

unequal circumstances. A major focus here is on power relations, and the attempts by dominant groups to restrict human diversity of experience, language and culture (e.g. the interventions of the British Empire in reordering indigenous peoples’ ways of life). From a strictly legal perspective, the answer to ‘what is crime?’ is an unproblematic given; it is simply what the law says it is (White et al. 2012).

### III. EMPIRICAL REVIEWS

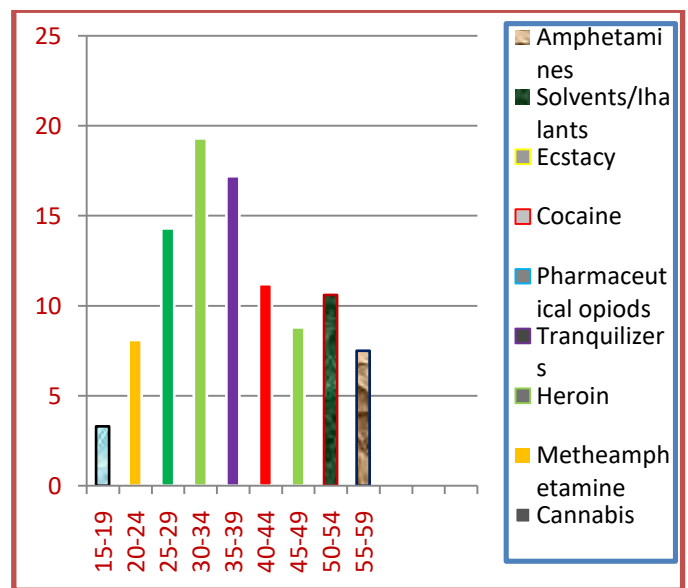
This section reviews literatures on the empirical findings of studies conducted by scholars particularly as it relate, with the topic an assessment of drug abuse and poverty as major causes of criminal behaviour among youth

#### *The Relationship between Drug Abuse and Crime*

According to, World Drug Report (2012.) USA There is a close relationship between drug abuse and crime. Thus it was noted that most Drug abusers commit crimes to pay for their drugs and this inflicts damages to the society. Moreover, many criminals are under the influence of drugs while committing crimes. Further reports has also shown that Drug trafficking is another outcome of drug abuse.

According to a research in the United States in 2010, 70% of male prisoners were drug abusers which are significant compared to the 11.2% rate of drug abuse in the entire male population. (Idaho state police statistical analysis center; 2010). Alcohol has the highest relationship with aggressive crimes. According to reports, criminals who had abused drugs and alcohol simultaneously committed 21.4% of aggressive crimes. Among individuals, who were arrested in Australia during 2004, 82% had a history of drug abuse, 69% had abused drugs at least 6 months before their arrest and 62% frequently abused drugs) (Canberra.; 2004).

Annual Prevalence of Drug Use: by Age Group and Drug Use in Nigeria 2018



Source: United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (2018)

### Age and drug use

While the use of drugs is observed among all age groups in Nigeria, overall past-year use of most drug types is high among young people within the age brackets of 25 and 39 years. This is true for cannabis as well as for non-medical use of prescription opioids (tramadol, codeine, morphine) and cough syrups containing codeine or dextromethorphan. While the use of amphetamines and ecstasy is seen more among young people, there is negligible use of these drugs among the older population. However, there is considerable non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids and cough syrup among older people within the age brackets of 45 and 64 years.

However this statistics expressively explain while crime is highly prevalent among the youth than the older population, according to the reports gathered from division police head office Gwagwalada area council Abuja FCT, it is was noted that most youth who were arrested for theft and other crimes, tested positive to Cannabis and Methamphetamine. BRFSS (2009) cited Idaho State Police Statistical Analysis Center 2010) maintained that Crime and drug use both indicate an individual with lower self-control. Those willing to try drugs are more impulsive and may turn to street crime because of addiction. Drug use does not create a criminal offender; however, it may intensify such actions. In addition, individuals who use drugs are less likely to have a legitimate occupation or the education necessary to find a good job Lifestyle choices, environmental factors as well as genetic determinants factor into who will abuse drugs as well as who will commit crime.

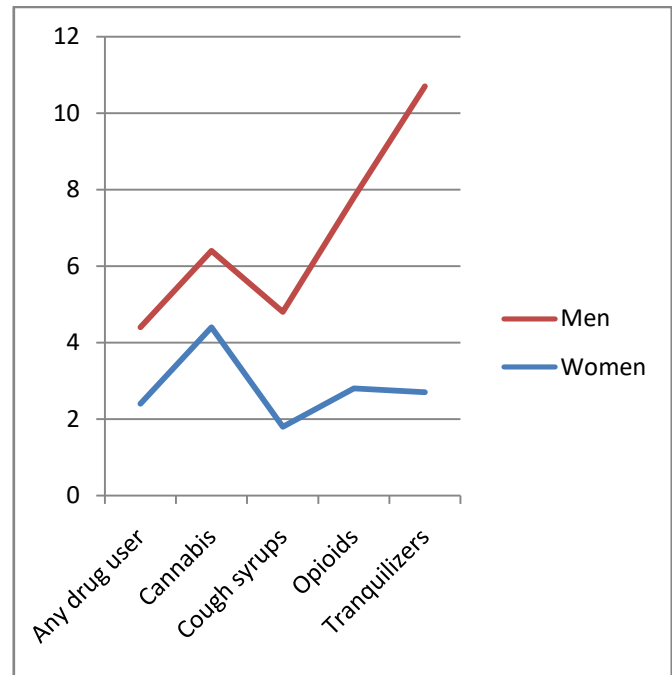
IDOC, (2009) noted that, most individuals who either drink or smoke do not engage in serious crime. However, higher rates of substance addiction exist among individuals on probation, parole or incarcerated than among the general population.

This is also in line with the report presented in Fawa (2002), it was noted that, about a quarter of convicted property and drug offenders in local jails had committed their crimes to get money for drugs, compared to 5% of violent and public order offenders. Among state prisoners in 2004 the pattern was similar, with property (30%) and drug offenders (26%) more likely to commit their crimes for drug money than violent (10%) and public-order offenders (7%). In federal prisons property offenders (11%) were less than half as likely as drug offenders (25%) to report drug money as a motive in their offenses.

### Gender and drug use

Proportionally more men than Women have used drugs in Nigeria in the past year - one in four drug users in Nigeria is a woman. While men are 7 times more likely than women to use cannabis, the gender difference in the non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids - such as tramadol, codeine, and morphine, tranquilizers and cough syrups containing codeine or dextromethorphan is less pronounced. Men are also more

likely than women to be high-risk drug users, including those who inject drugs.



UNODC (2018)

### The Links between Poverty and Crime

In the U.S, crime is often perceived as a problem amid areas with high levels of poverty (Urdang 2012), however, many other factors such as population density, minority population, locality, unemployment are correlated with poverty and affect crime as well. In countries where social discrimination factor is high scholars have opined that less education meant more criminal activities ranging from casual theft to drug related offenses.

Anasi (2010) stated that there are huge consequences of this kind of situation for public policy which needs to be fine-tuned to have a positive impact of keeping children in school on a bid to reducing poverty. Statistically, countries with higher poverty level especially poorer areas and ghettos have usually much higher crime rates than other areas made up of middle or high class individuals. (Danziger & Haveman, 2001).

Adding to this point, Ludwig (2000) opined that people resort to crime only if they perceive that potential benefits outweigh the cost of committing a particular crime. As Ludwig (2000) puts it "if legal ways of obtaining finances cannot support one, then illegal ways are resorted to in order to survive". Crime offers a way in which impoverished people can obtain goods and services that they cannot get to or achieve through legitimate means.

The degree of unemployment also correlates with poverty. Higher unemployment level would increase poverty and at the same time engenders criminal activities due to depression

associated with being unemployed. In their perspective, Chukuezi (2009) and Oruh (2004) attributed poverty to individual behavioral characteristics and choices such as alcohol and substance abuse, rape, theft etc. they suggest that the problem of poverty is within the control of the poor themselves and therefore policies and programs need to influence those choices through incentives and prohibitions.

#### *The Nexus of Drug Abuse, Poverty and Criminal Behaviour*

The relationship between poverty and problem of drug use, in an attempt to understand the causal links and examine the UK evidence for how much problem drug use is both a response to, and a driver of, poverty. Establishing the temporal relationship is crucial and there must be clear evidence that the cause precedes the effect, whether this it is poverty and problem drug use. However, It has been estimated that in 2015, approximately 60,000 people in the UK experienced multiple serious needs, including mental ill health, substance misuse, offending, family breakdown, and homelessness (Drinkwater et al., 2015).

Recent analysis of linked data from homelessness services ('Supporting People' and In-Form), substance misuse treatment systems (NDTMS, including both alcohol and drug use), and criminal justice systems (Offender Assessment System; OAS), suggested that 24% of alcohol treatment clients presented with additional offending and housing needs (Bramley et al., 2015). Only 9% of individuals who experienced problems in all three domains were in employment or training. Whilst this group is relatively small in number, their complex needs result in high service and societal costs. Although previous work has investigated relationships between individual needs with alcohol misuse or poverty

Fuller, (2013) little research has been undertaken examining the moderating effects of additional (multiple) needs on the relationship between the two. The majority of literature identified in the current review focused on simple relationships and interactions between indicators of poverty and alcohol use, and so whilst it is not currently possible to fully understand associations with complex needs, it is important that they are at least acknowledged.

#### IV. THEORETICAL REVIEWS

Theories Robert K. Merton (1968) developed the first major strain theory in criminology. He argues that all people in the United States are encouraged to strive for the cultural goal of monetary success. Lower-class individuals, however, are often prevented from achieving this goal through legitimate means. Their parents may fail to provide them with the skills and attitudes necessary for school success, they may live in communities with inferior schools, and their parents often lack the money to send them to college or set them up in business. As a consequence, lower-class individuals more often experience strain, with this strain being a function of the disjunction between their goals and the legitimate means for

achieving them. The strain theory of crime was reviewed to explain drug abuse and crime: many youth turn to crime because they lack the means to attain societal goals this make them to settle for crime, Excessive poverty result to crime and drug abuse also lead to crime as many youth engage in property crime to get money to acquire drug.

Merton states that there are several ways to cope with this strain, some of which involve crime. Individuals may attempt to achieve monetary success through illegitimate channels, such as theft, drug selling, and prostitution. They may strike out at others in their frustration. They may engage in drug use to alleviate their frustration. And they may reject the goal of monetary success and focus on the achievement of other goals, certain of which involve crime. Merton noted that most strained individuals live with their strain rather than cope through crime, and he went on to describe factors that influence the likelihood of criminal coping –such as the extent to which individuals are socialized to condemn crime.(Sung joon jang and Robert Angnew 2015)

Robert K. Merton strain theory explain explicitly why drug abuse and poverty causes criminality, as most youths that were involved in drug abuse were from the poor resident and ghetto or slum, as they are more prone to commit crime than their counterpart in the developed environment. So the strain theory best explain this topic.

#### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Drug abuse and poverty remains one of the major causes of crime in many societies. Nigeria as a nation is not left out of these trends. The government should consolidate poverty eradication programmes to curb the problem of poverty in Nigeria, the gap between the rich and the poor should be slimed. As the issue of inequality remains the leading causes of criminality, there is an urgent need to check this trend through affordable access to social life of providing quality education, infrastructures, employment opportunities and good governance. Government should make a strict law that will guide against selling and consumptions of drugs abuse with adequate campaign on the dangers for consuming such drugs. Skill acquisition programmes should be established in rural and urban centres in Nigeria to empower the youth so as to eradicate the challenges of social inequality among the citizenry.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

The explanation of crime causation has taken various dimensions according to different theorists and scholars. Some blame it on defective family structure or arrested personality adjustment. Others emphasize factors such as inequality, environmental influence, poor socialization process in this regards, criminal acts may be induced by many unforeseen factors and circumstances in which drug abuse and poverty forms the major factors. Drug abuse is a problem that is causing serious concern to both individuals and government all over the world. The problem is prevalent among

adolescents who in most cases are ignorant about the dangers inherent in drug abuse. Many of them engaged in drug abuse out of frustration, poverty, lack of parental supervision, peer influence and pleasure. However, with effective counseling programme, the problems can be tackled.

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