

**PATTERN OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCE USE IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Recent events in Nigeria seem to suggest that young people are being indoctrinated and used under the influence of psychoactive substances to perpetrate various crimes including terrorism. There is need to examine and control use of these substances in order to prevent escalation of these social maladies. The purpose of this study was to assess the pattern of psychoactive substance use among inmates at Kiru Rehabilitation Centre, Kano in the North Central Region of Nigeria, to determine the extent of their involvement. A total of 148 male inmates completed a modified form of 117-item self-report instrument based on the World Health Organization guidelines for students' substance-use surveys. The mean age of the inmates was 23.7±3.9 years. A total of 58.9% had primary school and below level of education; 14.9% were school dropped-out; 29.1% unemployed; while 65.9% were engaged in menial jobs. The lifetime prevalence of psychoactive substance use was 47.4%. Current use prevalence of more than one substance was 54.6%. Ready available substances were consumed more and the potent habit-forming ones like Cocaine and Heroin were used more than alcohol. Uses of inhalants were also on the increase. Reasons for use of substances were ready availability, feeling high, enhancing performance and unidentified personal problems. This study has shown that psychoactive substances are commonly used and abused, especially among the uneducated youths in the Northern part of Nigeria. There is need for massive enlightenment campaigns to increase awareness and strategies aimed at discouraging youths from indulging in substances.

**Key Words:** Alcohol; Psychoactive substances; Youths; Northern Nigeria

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**INTRODUCTION**

Psychoactive substance use is common in many countries (UNODC, 2010). The

resultant abuse of these substances has been reported as one of the major public health problems worldwide (Weiss, 2008). Although studies have shown that

the problem is more in poorly developed countries, the control and prevention are difficult even in advanced societies (UNODC, 2012). This is because health facilities are not equally distributed. In developing countries, the situation seems to be overwhelming due to the myriads of associated social problems (Obot, 2012; Abasiubong et al., 2012). Psychoactive substance use is not limited to geographic boundaries (Atkinson et al., 2011). It is a universal problem (UNODC, 2007). There is no doubt that rapid socioeconomic changes including urbanization and globalization appear to have contributed to the use of these substances. However, one major factor militating against its control in many developing countries is poverty (Omigbodun & Babalola, 2004; Obot, 2005; Gureje et al., 2007; Parry, 2005). Illiteracy and ignorance have also contributed significantly to a fair share of this social problem in many rural communities. In Nigeria, the presence of some of these substances in large quantities in traditional functions and ceremonies implies that the use is not restricted. This is because of the traditional importance attached to them. Substances like alcohol in the form of palmwine and local gin; kolanuts, tobacco and snuff are local substances often required as a custom in many traditional ceremonies (Adelakan & Ndon, 1997; Obot, 2005; Gureje et al., 2007). Failure to provide them in such functions may be regarded as an offence and usually attract penalties. Many of these substances are widely reported as gate-way to the use and abuse of more potent habit-forming ones like, cannabis, cocaine and heroin (Omigbodun & Babalola 2004); Adelakan,1989). Although, several reasons including unemployment, peer group pressure, experimentation and dysfunctional family dynamics are usually

reported as being responsible for their increasing use; custom and ready availability seem to influence their use and control.

Nigeria in recent times seems like a culture where social order and the extended family structure may have broken down. The emerging trend of use of alcohol and other substances has assumed a dangerous proportion. The socioeconomic impact has been widely reported and youths and young adults are at risk. The dramatic resurgence of social and economic phenomena with risk of people developing mental illness has been attributable to the use of these substances (Adamson et al., 2000; Igwe & Ojinnaka, 2010). As a result, communities are experiencing increasing rates of antisocial vices. Various problems such as militancy, armed robberies, kidnapping, raping and even the “Boko-Haram” insurgency have defied reasonable efforts of control. Some of these social problems have been associated with the use of habit-forming substances such as alcohol, cannabis, cocaine and heroin (Abasiubong et al., 2008; Abasiubong et al., 2013). These are events with potential impact on the mental health of the people. Several studies have reported evidence of the presence of the severe mental and psychological disorders associated with alcohol and other psychoactive substances (Omigbodun & Babalola, 2004; Igwe & Ojinnaka, 2010). The implication of abuse is that more people are at the risk of developing mental illness. Therefore, there is need to control and prevent the use of these substances, if efforts aimed at preventing the associated social and health hazards are to yield positive results.

Despite the increasing adverse social indicators of these substances in Nigeria, the widespread use, as well as the emerg-

ing pattern and nature including prescription drugs seem to suggest that adequate strategies for control is lacking. A large part of the country lacks basic mental healthcare facilities to contend with the associated health hazards. Therefore, there is a need to routinely examine the use and nature of these substances. This study was aimed at assessing the nature and extent of use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances among young people in the Northern part of Nigeria. It is hoped that findings of this study will increase awareness through massive educational campaigns and strategies for control in Nigeria as a whole.

## METHOD

**Location of the study:** The study was carried out at Kiru Rehabilitation Centre, Kano, in the North Central Region of Nigeria. The town Kiru is the capital of Kiru Local Area, one of the 42 Local Government Councils in Kano state. It was created in 1997 and has an area of about 966.632 kilometres, with a population of 267,168 people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Kiru is about 86 kilometers from Kano City, capital of Kano state. The rehabilitation centre was established by the Kano State Government in 2012, to take care of youths and young adults with a history of substance use problems.

**Participants:** As part of the surveillance, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), established by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1989, for purposes of exterminating illicit drug trafficking and consumption in Nigerian society, routinely arrests suspicious individuals for questioning. Those that are found

to be using substances are detained. This agency has offices in major cities in Nigeria including State capitals and Abuja. Participants in this study included a total of one hundred and forty eight male inmates arrested and camped at the Kiru Rehabilitation Centre, Kano, between October and December, 2013.

**Data collection:** A total of 148 male inmates of the Kiru Rehabilitation Centre completed a self-report questionnaire adapted from a modified form of a 117-item self-report instrument based on the World Health Organization guidelines for students' substance-use surveys (Smart et al., 1989). This was done after the consent was obtained from each participant. Information on biodata such as age, marital status, educational level and occupation were elicited through a semi-structured sociodemographic questionnaire. Those with little or no education were assisted to fill the questionnaire. This self-report questionnaire has been used in several studies in many countries including Nigeria (Adelakan & Ndon, 1997; Fatoye & Morakinyo, 2002; Courtois et al., 2004; Abasiubong et al., 2008). The participants were also assessed on reasons for using the substances. Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the authority of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency. This study passed through the Ethics and Research Committee of the hospital and was given approval.

**Data analysis:** The results of the study were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0). Sample means and percentages were calculated from which simple frequency tables were created. Standard deviation from the mean was calculated.

## RESULTS

Of the 148 male inmates recruited into the study, data from 141(95.3%) were analyzed, 7 (4.7%) inmates were discarded due to incomplete information. Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the inmates. The mean age of the inmates was 23.7(SD=3.9 years). Of the 141 inmates analyzed, 83 (58.9%) had primary school and below level of education; 21 (14.9%) dropped-out of secondary school; 29 (20.6%) completed secondary school education; while 8 (5.7%) had post secondary school education. Majority, 117(82.9%) were single; 24 (17.0%) married. A total of 93 (65.9%) were self-employed in menial jobs like shoe mending, hawking, load carrying, labourers; 41 (29.1%) were unemployed; while 7 (5.0%) were civil servants.

Table 2 shows the pattern and prevalence of alcohol/substance use among the inmates. The lifetime use prevalence of

these substances is 47.4%. Multiple substance use account for 54.6%. Current use prevalence of more than one substance is 54.6%. Locally available substances like Kolanuts (64.5%); cigarettes (66.0%); cannabis (43.3%); cough syrup (47.5%) and sleeping drugs (34.7%) such as Rohypnol, Diazepam are consumed more frequently by the inmates.

Remarkably, alcohol consumption among the inmates is low (9.2%).The prevalence of current use of potent habit-forming substances is also significant: Cocaine 14.8%; Heroin 12.0%. The use of inhalants such as petrol (20.6%); glues (23.4%); shoe polish (19.1%); formalin (15.0%) are also on the increase.

Different substances were identified and used by the inmates. Various reasons were also given for using a particular or group of substances. Table 3 shows various reasons given. A total of 85 (60.3%) of the inmates claimed they used especially cannabis to get power (enhance perfor-

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Inmates	
	Frequency	Percentage
Mean	23.7 (SD=3.9 years)	
Marital Status		
Single	117	82.9
Married	24	17.1
Educational Level		
No formal education	32	22.7
Primary school	51	36.2
Secondary school (drop-out)	21	14.9
Secondary school (completed)	29	20.6
Post secondary school	8	5.7
Occupation		
Unemployed	41	29.1
Employed	7	5.0
Self-employed (menial jobs)	93	65.9

mance), 53 (37.6%) used substances like cigarettes, cannabis and kolanuts because of ready availability. A significant number 21 (14.9%) of inmates used alcohol/substances for unidentified personal problems, while 11 (7.8%) used for no known reasons.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have shown a high level of alcohol and other psycho-active substance use among youths in the North central part of Nigeria. The current use prevalence of these substances is

**Table 2.** Pattern and prevalence of substance use among the Inmates

Types of substance	Inmates	
	Frequency	Percentage
Kolanut	91	64.5
Bitter kola	25	17.7
Tobacco/Snuff	15	10.6
Cigarette	93	66.0
Alcohol (P/wine, local/hot gin, b/beer)	13	9.2
Sleeping (Diazepam, Rohypnol)	49	34.7
Cannabis	61	43.3
Cocaine	21	14.8
Heroin	17	12.0
Cough syrup (Codeine contained syrup)	67	47.5
Benzhexol (Exol)	19	13.5
Shoe polish	27	19.1
Glue	21	23.4
Formalin (Suku dye)	33	15.0
Petrol	29	20.6
Anabolic steroids	-	-
Multiple substances (>one substance)	77	54.6

**Table 3.** Reasons for using substance among the respondents

Reasons	Inmates	
	Frequency	Percentage
Easy to get (availability)	37	26.2
Unidentified personal problems	9	6.4
Unemployment	21	14.9
Feeling high (euphoria)	19	13.5
Enhanced performance	31	22.0
Influence from others	13	9.2
Unidentified reasons	11	7.8

an indication that the problems are real and the trend is ongoing. This is serious because of the damaging effects on the individuals, families and communities. The adverse effects of these substances have been widely reported globally (Adamson et al., 2000; Madu & Matla, 2003; Morojele et al., 2005). Anecdotal reports from general surveys have shown the increasing incidence of youth restiveness in many countries. In Nigeria, there is overwhelming evidence that the various antisocial vices and killings are perpetrated under the influence of these substances. Although several attempts aimed at reducing the associated health hazards have been made in many countries, several studies still report a high incidence of emotional and psychological problems in individuals with positive history of substance use (Dervaux et al., 2003; Yunusa et al., 2011; Awopetu & Ajonye 2011; Abayomi et al., 2012). There is also abundant of evidence linking involvement of youth in antisocial activities such as armed robberies, kidnappings, prostitutions and rapes to the influence of substances (Ekpo et al., 1995; Adamson et al. 2000). Therefore, efforts must be made to control use of these substances, in view of the adverse social and economic impact.

Our study demonstrates the basic demographic characteristics of the youths involved in the use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances in the North. The mean age of  $23.7 \pm 3.9$  years implies that substance use is common among youths and young adults. Many factors may be responsible for the widespread involvement of youths in substances use. One possible explanation may be the break down of family dynamics and unrealistic societal values. Evidence has shown that family upbringing and soci-

etal pressure are very crucial to the use of substances, especially the local ones (Abasiubong et al., 2012). Though largely observational and empirical, factors such as poverty, ignorance and strong cultural disposition may be responsible for the widespread use of substances among youths in the Northern part of Nigeria. Therefore, besides stability within the family, there is a need for behaviour adjustment and strengthening of moral values. This is because the involvement of this young age group in psychoactive substance use could no doubt have significant effects on the work force with the possibility of slowing down economic activity and social progress in the country. Moreover, judging from the depreciating standard of living and healthcare facility development in the Northern part of Nigeria, the impact of substance use on healthcare delivery and even school attendance/literacy level are serious challenges. The findings of this study have shown that youths are at great risk of substance use problems. The fact that about 60 % of inmates had little or no education, 15% dropped-out from school, 29% unemployed and even of those that were employed, majority were involved in menial jobs, can only be explained in terms of adverse socioeconomic impact. The burden could better be understood clearly when examining the effects on households, families and communities, as well as national economic growth and productivity. Therefore, alcohol/substance use in both rural and urban communities should be assessed routinely and proper control instituted.

The finding that 54% of the participants in this study use and abuse more than one substance is very significant. Regardless of the level of use, some of these substanc-

es have the potential effect of addiction (Obot, 2007; Roerecke et al., 2005). As reported in this study, the level of use of potent habit-forming substances is high. These substances are known to be associated with serious social health hazards. The high incidence of youth restiveness and other social vices in the Northern Nigeria maybe attributable to the influence of habit-forming substances. Therefore, there is need to put in place measures aimed at discouraging continued use of these substances.

Despite the widely reported harmful effects of alcohol and other psychoactive substances, the findings of this study seem to suggest that majority of the inmates used them for various reasons. The findings reported here indicate that 60% of the inmates used these substances, especially cannabis to enhance performance. This is not surprising, considering the fact that majority of them were not well educated. However, one major reason that needs to be looked at seriously is the issue of ready availability. This is because 38% of the inmates indulged in substances due to availability. This is similar to the findings in previous studies (Omiggodun & Babalola, 2004; Obot, 2007; Gureje et al., 2007). This could be a positive development, since ready availability has contributed to a widespread use of substances in many countries including Nigeria. It therefore can be used as an effective strategy to control the use and abuse of substances. Some of the inmates indulged in substances for no specific reason, while unemployment, feeling high and unidentified personal problem seem to contribute significantly to substance use. This is in consonance with previous studies (Gureje et al., 2007; Abasiubong et al., 2012).

The major constraints of this study are that the sample size was small and may not have been a representation of the entire population of youths and young adults in the North. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized. Also being a self-report survey, it is likely to be biased.

In conclusion, the findings of this study have shown that alcohol/substance use among youths in the Northern part Nigeria is on the increase. Majority of the users because of their low levels of education are ignorant of the associated harmful effects. Therefore, there is need to adopt strategies that would focus mostly on educating the youths, to increase awareness concerning multitude of harmful consequences of substance use and abuse. Since poor socioeconomic characteristics have been linked with widespread use of substances, there is need to embark on programs that would change the socioeconomic status of the youths in the North in particular and Nigeria as a whole. This will help to engage their idle minds in more productive ventures. More importantly, the enable environment and culture that encourage the use of substances need to be sanitized by reducing availability of these substances, as well as modifying lifestyle. Furthermore, there is also need to provide and improve mental health facilities and services, in order to meet the health needs of the users.

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