

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION: THE PROBLEM OF ADOLESCENTS AND DRUGS

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Abstract

In the present age that we are living, Education in Nigeria is faced with a lot of contemporary issues. These issues are threatening the very foundation of education in our nation. One of them is drug abuse and addiction by our young people and also adults. Many young people in the field of education have been adversely affected by drugs.. Some, their entire lives have been affected dangerously - some dead, some their brains have been badly injured, some are sick because of damage of one organ or the other. Some are school drop-outs because they could not contain while some were sent out of schools by the school authority for lawlessness and gross misconducts. Some have been pushed into cultism which is a threat to the lives of fellow students, lecturers and our educational system. The problem of drug abuse and addiction in Nigerian education is mountainous and destructive, therefore, the position of this paper is to consider the problem of adolescents and drugs as it affects our educational systems and to proffer possible remedies.

Introduction

Mellado (1995), once said, "Many drugs transform the brain into wet paper". This brings out clearly the danger of drugs to our young people and education. In a layman's language, it shows the consequential effects of drugs to the brain. Drugs can cause damage to the brain. In the same vein, White (1915) has this to say, "Immoderation of any kind is a violation of the laws of our being," This he said in relation to young people and drugs. And the truth is that an abuse of anything is a serious problem to the body. The abuse of drugs or addiction has caused lots of havoc to our young people, especially their education. Let us consider this story recorded by Melgosa, Julian in her book, *To Adolescents and Parents*.

She suspected, with good reason, that her son Steven was into drugs; but it never occurred to her that he would end up with such problems. Being a single mother, she had to work long hours both outside and inside her home.

The possibilities of spending time with her son were minimal, and she thought that the boy was growing up and could look after himself. A few days after Steven's 17th birthday, the hospital called her to tell her that her son had been admitted. They did not tell her the reason; they only said that he was out of danger. There she found out that he had tried to commit suicide by slitting the veins on his left wrist

Steven had started smoking at 12 years of age. He did not really like it, but he wanted to be like his friends. In addition, he had started drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana and other drugs. His link with a gang made his behaviour worse: he skipped school many days, he stole beer from shops, and lied to his mother constantly to get money. As the months went by, he learned to steal cars "for fun". He had several incidents with the police. His explanations to his mother were always embellished and it was "never his fault".

Drinking alcohol and smoking "joints" had become part of Steven's habits. He had neither plans nor dreams for the future. He failed all his school subjects, but by now this did not matter to him at all. Some days, particularly on weekends, he spent hours with his friends, smoking "joints" and drinking.

One weekend, when he was under the effects of drugs, he got really upset about something which one of his friends said. They insulted each other and a fight soon broke out. Steven lost. With his pride wounded, Steven went to a friend's house to spend the night. There, in the bathroom, he attempted to take his life. His friend managed to rescue him in time and took him to the hospital. His mother found him there. Later, the boy declared he did it because he felt depressed and had no desire to live because he had been humiliated in the fight. This exaggerated way of feeling and of acting was because of the effect of the substances he had taken. In a normal state, Steven would never have done anything like this. This is a true life story and shows the serious implication of drugs to health and education.

What are Drugs?

By 'drugs' we mean all the substances which alter the organic functions and the behaviour of those who take them. There are illegal drugs, like heroin, and there are legal ones, like the tranquilizers which the doctor prescribes; whenever used in the prescribed dose, there are benefits. Other drugs are open to public consumption, such as tobacco or alcohol. In some culture these drugs are not only tolerated, but their consumption is explicitly encouraged. All of them have the following in common:

- * They affect the brain and its functions,
- * They leave harmful chemical remains in the body.
- * They create a habit.

Many drugs generate dependency. That is to say, if you stop taking them, you experience very unpleasant symptoms.

Tobacco: Smokers inhale poisonous substance such as tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide. This poisonous gas is also breathed in by non-smokers when they are close to a smoker. Tobacco produces its effects very slowly. It can take decades to see the results of smoking. Sometimes it does not even seem to affect certain people. However, according to WHO (World Health Organization), tobacco is the first preventable cause of death. Science has no doubts that tobacco causes disease of the heart, cancer, strokes, bronchitis, bad circulation and ulcers. Pregnant women who smoke usually have smaller children, which have a greater risk of death at birth. The smoking habit is very strong. Most smokers who propose giving up do not manage to do it alone. Also, tobacco provokes withdrawal symptoms: smokers feel an intense desire to smoke when they have not done it for a while.

Alcohol: The effects of alcohol are immediate. Drinkers feel happy and talkative shortly after drinking alcohol. And if they continue to drink, they become drunk. Short term, alcohol makes all muscles, including the heart, numb. Sharpness of sight is lost, particularly at night and with artificial light. There are also personality changes such as the person becoming more impatient and aggressive. In the long term, drinkers have a high risk of cirrhosis of the liver, cancer of the mouth and esophagus, as well as chronic gastritis, anemia and malnutrition. Drinkers run the risk of suffering from memory loss, hallucinations and degenerative dementia. There are those who think that a little drink does no harm, but all the victims of alcohol began with a little drink. The indirect risks of alcohol are greater than those of any other drug. Thousands of people die every year in road accidents, homicides and suicides which would never have happened without the effects of alcohol.

Amphetamines: Amphetamines are medications the doctor sometimes prescribes for depression. Some are manufactured in illegal laboratories. Some people take them to keep themselves awake. Amphetamines are usually in the form of pills; or, when they have been illegally handled, in powder to be "snorted" through the nose; they may even be injected. When they are taken, feelings of euphoria and self-confidence follow; but when the effect passes, feelings of anxiety (fear) and irritability appear. It is very easy to "get hooked" on this drug. Also, the dose must be increased to achieve the "high" of the previous times. For this reason, those who use them can intoxicate themselves easily and suffer from hallucinations.

Cocaine: ("Coke," "snow," "White lady") Cocaine may be taken in several forms. The most common is by nasal absorption. It may also be injected or smoked in a cigarette in a pipe. Although the makeup is very different from amphetamines, the effects are virtually the same and the symptoms of intoxication are also similar, although the hallucinations come quicker. Intoxication by cocaine provokes the risk of accidents and suicides. As it is very expensive, cocaine is frequently adulterated. Adulterations cause very unpleasant effects and sometimes even death by poisoning.

Mdma-Ecstasy: (XTC, "Adam," "arm drug") This is a "designer drug" (synthetic) similar to amphetamines. It is presented in pills the size of a lentil. It may be offered at a dance club or at a party, with someone telling you that you will feel more talkative and more affectionate. It started out by being used as a drug in psychiatry, but it was made illegal in the 1980s due to its risks. After the desired effects come side effects; difficulties in muscular coordination, blurred sight or cold feelings. The fundamental risk is its toxicity on the nervous system. If taken regularly, it can produce psychiatric disorders; panic, psychosis, paranoia etc.

LSD: ("acid," "trippies") "Acid" is a hallucinogenic: it produces unreal image in the person's mind,

with alterations in the perception. For example, something very big is seen as small and vice versa. The content of the hallucinations varies according to the state of mind and the context. For example, if the user is nervous, worried or in a strange place, the "trip" can be very unpleasant, like a nightmare. The mental faculties and the reflexes decrease and it is very dangerous to drive or to operate machinery when taking this drug. The psychiatric risks are significant: paranoia, convulsions, depression. The indirect risks are also significant: accidents and suicides.

Cannabis: (hashish, marijuana, dope, and "grass"). This drug is mixed with tobacco and is smoked in cigarettes, colloquially called "joints". It may also be presented in the form of chocolate drops. The effects are quick and smokers feel relaxed, talkative and unworried about their problems. Its regular smoking affects certain mental functions; it decreases memory, reasoning and capacity for resolving problems as it disturbs the connection between neurons. It also affects personal motivation. Those who take "grass" regularly are usually unmotivated, apathetic, without goals or objectives, and without the wish to succeed in anything. Recent research shows 'cannabis' smoke to be more carcinogenic than tobacco smoke. Ninety percent of the addicts of heroin and other "hard" drugs began by smoking "joints".

Inhalants: Certain gases given off by solvents produce effects similar to those obtained by alcohol. The presence of these solvents in glues, paints, aerosols, etc, make many young people try these volatile substances. The effects of the solvent are immediate, because they pass quickly into the bloodstream and then reach the brain. Similar to alcohol, sniffing drugs make you feel happy and eventually drunk. The hallucinations caused by these substances can be pleasant or terrifying. Prolonged use can damage the brain, the kidneys or the liver irreversibly. However, the most serious risk of inhaling drugs is the speed of their effects. There are cases of teenagers who have died, asphyxiated when putting the spray in their mouths, paralyzing their respiratory tracts; or after becoming unconscious when breathing in from a plastic bag with the substance in it.

Heroin: ("*horse*", "*smack*") Heroin is obtained from opium, a substance from an oriental plant called the opium poppy. Its effect is calming; it takes away physical or psychological pain leaving a feeling of pleasure. It is injected into the veins and some people smoke it or sniff it. Heroin is very addictive. Those who start using it "get hooked" quickly, committing robberies and even homicide to get a "fix". Addicts feel euphoric. This feeling lasts a few hours. When this feeling leaves, they experience muscular pains, cold sweats, shaking, fever and diarrhea. This shows the need for another dose. If obtained, all the symptoms disappear, at least for a few hours. After this another dose or "fix" is needed. Tolerance is a problem in this cycle. Addicts need a greater dose to achieve the same effects. In this way an overdose may be reached: convulsion, irregular breathing, state of coma and death. Other risks from heroin:

- * **Decreased Immunological System:** The organism loses defenses and tends to contract disease.
- * **Chemical Adulteration:** To obtain more doses, the dealers use inexpensive substances. Some are very dangerous and can cause death.
- * **Hepatitis and AIDS:** The virus of these diseases is easily transmitted by the use of needles and syringes which have been used by other people.
- * **Hematomas:** The repeated injections produce internal injuries and deterioration in the tissues and prevent blood circulation.

Why Adolescents Fall into Drug Abuse or Addiction

There are several reasons for this and some of them will be considered here:

1. **To Avoid Withdrawal Symptoms:** Young people try drugs out of curiosity or due to peer pressure. After taking them several times, the organism acquires tolerance. This indicates that, to obtain the same effect, they need to take a slightly larger dose than before. If the dose does not arrive, the symptoms of abstinence appear (in street language: the monkey on your back), which are very unpleasant. This theory explains the fact that young people show addictive behaviour because they want to avoid the pain and discomfort of these symptoms. Example: the heroin addict has acquired tolerance. Therefore, the moment will come when his organism asks for a dose, by way of cold sweats, diarrhea, fever, hypertension and other unpleasant symptoms. Consequently, the heroin addict does whatever is necessary to obtain a dose and avoid the symptoms.
2. **To Obtain Satisfaction:** Young people start taking drugs because they are looking for the

pleasure which these substances give. The reward comes when they feel the desired effects. The wish to continue in this state or to experience the pleasure again is what pushes the addict to look for more drugs and to remain in the addiction cycle. Example: The "joint" smoker knows the effects of marijuana: it makes him feel more sociable and more relaxed, at the same time producing a certain feeling of well-being. Even knowing about the disadvantages, he smokes to obtain this desired state.

3. Because Habit has Been Formed: Young people take drug because they are offered or because initially they feel curious. With continued use, they acquire the habit or the custom of taking them. The nervous connections which intervene in the behavior reinforce themselves. In this way, the habit begins to form part of the daily life. This theory particularly explains the psychological addiction mechanism of drugs. Example: The smoker has a long list of stimuli in front of him to encourage him to smoke; waking up, finishing lunch, feeling nervous, meeting a friend, and sitting down in his favorite chair .. All these stimuli have created and continue the habit of smoking.

Family: Many of the young people who take drugs come from families which also use them.

The example of the parents (particularly during the first years) creates a subconscious desire of imitation in the children. In many homes parents drink alcoholic beverages, smoke cigarettes and take tranquilizers and even other socially accepted drugs many people believe to be innocuous. This contributes to generating a favorable attitude to their consumption.

5. Friends: Different research studies emphasize that the influence of the group is the main factor in the first stages of drug use. In fact, the circle of friends from school and from the neighborhood holds a front page in the adolescent's life. If the use of certain substance is approved of by the group, adolescents feel a strong desire to conform to these expectations. Also, when they give in to peer group pressure, they get the approval and applause from others. This recognition is essential for certain adolescents, so they will do whatever it takes to get it.

6. Socio-Cultural Environment: Using drugs is proportionally greater in large cities than in rural areas and even more in areas where it is available. In general, the social attitude toward drugs affects their consumption. For example, the drug information and prevention programs make

consumption drop and help avoid many accidents which are produced through ignorance. When drugs are endorsed (for example, rock stars declare that they use them, or movies show addictive behaviour as something desirable), consumption increases. This environment invites many young people who, under other circumstances, would never feel inclined toward drugs.

7-Genetic Predisposition: Several studies about twins and families have shown that there are people who have a greater genetic predisposition than others to be victims of alcoholic beverages. Apart from alcohol., there are no studies which reveal the influence of genetics on the consumption of other drugs. However, because of the similarity of all the addiction mechanisms, this factor may be present in other drugs.

8.The Person Himself/Herself: In spite of family and social environment and even the genetic predisposition, personal determination plays a key role. In fact, the firm decision to not use harmful substances is a factor which strengthens the willpower. The desire to live a fulfilling life keeps young people occupied in productive tasks and prevents drugs use.

Problems

Each drug has its own list of disadvantages. However, all share a series of common dangers. Below is an outline of the most well known ones:

- * Drugs create addiction. Addiction deprives users of their freedom of action.
- * Drugs attack the brain, the center of all the vital functions. When a substance causes a brain injury, alterations are being produced, at times irreversible ones, in the organic functions. Also, when a psychoactive substance destroys several thousands of neurons, the loss is final.
- * Drugs make the organism develop tolerance. When a harmful substance is introduced into the human body, it reacts by trying to eliminate it. At the same time, it prepares itself to tolerate it. This means that the drug user, in order to get the desired effects, needs a larger dose each time. Logically, the organic balance is broken when the dose is excessive and this produces very serious symptoms, even causing death in some cases.
- * Many drugs create a high physical dependency. This means that the drug addict who stops

taking the substance or reduces the dose suffers from withdrawal symptoms: intense pains, nausea, cold sweats, general weakness and social problems which arise as a result of impatience, intolerance and irate, aggressive moods.

- * Virtually all drugs create psychological dependency. The drug user needs the drug to be able to continue to function and he or she feels unable to go on without it.
- * Drugs affect specific organs. Alcohol, for example, attacks the liver and the heart; the smoke and tar from tobacco damage the lung; opium derivatives-heroin, morphine, methadone-affect the brain considerably.
- * Drugs wake up latent mental disorders and may also provoke them. The DSM-IV manual for psychiatric use lists over 60 clinical disorders associated with drug taking.
- * Also, there are associated risk factors. This is the case of using drugs via parental or intravenously, which can transmit AIDS. For example, in Spain, two-thirds of the HIV (AIDS virus) are transmitted by drugs.

Behavior patterns can be related to drug-taking. These are usually the most common ones.

- * Loss of appetite
- * Unexpected changes in the state of mind
- * Loss of interest in studies, sports and normal hobbies
- * Sleepiness and laziness
- * Lies
- * Need for money without reasonable explanation.
- * Stealing at home (money, valuable objects).
- * A lot of time spent outside the home without any explanations as to where and whom they are with.

But be careful not to blame your child too quickly. This same behaviour may be caused by irregularities of adolescent development. If it is probable that your child is using a drug, act quickly.

Recommendation

Having seen the gravity of the problems of drugs to the adolescents, their future, education, families and the entire society, parents and all must rise up to remedy the situation. And this will be in two stages;

Remedy for Early Stage: Do not wait until the day when you find evidence of drug addiction. The ideal is for all parents with school age children to prepare them to face decisions which they will almost inevitably have to make regarding drugs use.

* **Talk to Your Children about the Problem of Drugs from Early Childhood.** Before someone offers them some substance, children must be informed. Sometimes, schools educate children on this, but conversation with a parent is even more effective. Talk to them about what the drug produces in the brain and in other organs. Explain to them the addictive power of all drugs. Warn them that there are drugs (such as tobacco, alcohol or tranquilizers) which are legal, but are still dangerous. Nevertheless, do not exaggerate with horrendous or incredible stories. The great danger of drugs is precisely that they appear to be harmless. Therefore, it will take credibility away from the rest of the statements. However true they may be.

* **Devote Time and Attention to Your Children.** This is perhaps the best and cheapest method to prevent drug taking, and many other problems. Talk regularly to your son or daughter. Perhaps they do not want to chat now, but they will later. Make the most of opportunities. Do not start watching television or reading the newspaper without first having talked to your children. Be active with them; sports, games, excursions. Encourage the family ties, so that when they are tempted to use drugs, the family wins.

* **Preach by Example.** If you smoke, drink or take other drugs, you are taking credibility away from any warning you give your children. This should not be limited to giving an example with regards to toxic substances; harmony in the home is fundamental. Situations of family crisis have influenced many adolescents in drugs use.

When Your Children Start the Adolescent Period (11-12 Years): change your discipline

technique. Many parents are surprised that their children are not the same as they were, but it is natural for the child to leave childhood behind and want to be an adult. Therefore, parents must change their technique. The father must be less authoritarian (ordering and shouting) and listen more. From this friendly relationship it is much easier aim more productive to make suggestions.

- * Study the Reasons for adolescent drug-taking. This will determine your general attitude.
Make Friends with your Children's Friends: Invite them to your house and get to know them. During adolescence the group has a stronger influence than at any other time in life. Remember that the young people themselves are the initiators for other young people to get into drugs.
- * **Avoid Overprotection:** Many overprotected adolescents feel caged in during their childhood. This parental attitude creates dissatisfaction which can lead the youth to an escape route through drugs.
- * **Give them Arms to Defend Themselves:** Instead of prohibitions, propose ideas of creative, healthy activities: nature, sports, music, reading, soldiery collaboration.
 - * **Reaffirm Self-Esteem:** Some adolescents take drugs because they want to be grown up, or they want to be like others, or they want adults' attention. Many do it because they have a very poor self-concept. These teenagers need the acknowledgment of their positive traits. Unfortunately, many only receive reprimands and criticism from their parents and -their virtues and desirable qualities that deserve praise incomplete sentence. Look for the right moment to acknowledge their positive points. Talk about your love for them. These declarations of affection can prevent the child from using drugs as a source of support:

Remedy for Later Stage

When drug-taking has reached an extreme, parents need outside help. The rehabilitation of drug addicts has a technical and professional component. If we want to work with an acceptable level of trust and a good probability of success, we must look for professional help. Town councils and public health systems have good rehabilitation programs. But the effectiveness of any method is subject to the role of the family or the circle of friends around the addict. Here are some advices for those who live close to the addicts;

1. Be available to the therapists. They will indicate the specific attitudes which help with the effectiveness of the treatment.
2. Use a warm, affectionate tone with the young person undergoing rehabilitation, but be clear and firm. There is a danger of overprotection and of false compassion which could interfere with the treatment.
3. Trust the rehabilitation plan. It is better to change the plan than to follow it skeptically. Trust that the treatment for your child will work.
4. Remember that the drug addicts willpower is fragile and great progress cannot be expected by means of willpower, instead of this method, use incentives. Help him or her to understand the positive consequences of victory over the drugs. Promise rewards when short-term goals are reached.
5. Do not give in by giving money or means to obtain drugs: Any rehabilitation plan includes the corresponding dose, if it forms part of the treatment; but the affected person is never expected to go to the streets to obtain it.
6. Keep the addict far from the environments which encourage consumption: other drug addicts, objects used for taking drugs, and place where drugs are taken.
7. Do not be manipulated by "good intentions" or the affectionate tone of the drug addict. Now he or she needs your support and your love, but always accompanied by the limits outlined by the treatment.
8. Trust and help them to trust in the supernatural power. Willpower is so weak and the barrier is so strong that certain changes can only occur by way of divine help. Use prayer and exercise faith. Encourage the young person to do the same.
9. Be very patient; detoxification processes take time.

Conclusion

Use of drugs has affected our adolescents and their education in Nigeria and parents must not keep quiet. In my conclusion, I wish to advise parents and other concerned individuals as follows-always talk to your young people to become interested in the problem. Do not hesitate in showing your disapproval and your concern over such problems. Try to find the root of the problem so as to be in better position to handle it. Show the young person by word and by action that you are ready to help in any way he or she needs. Continue to build a good relationship.

Be ready to look for help for your son or daughter. Also look for help for yourself because in such a situation, you also need support to be able to help your son.

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