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DRUG ADDICTION AMONG THE ABANDONED CHILDREN: THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

Drug addiction is one of the major health challenges across the globe. The rate at which youths engage in drug addiction, especially among the abandoned children is gradually becoming increasing, and thereby affecting the economic and national development. Addiction is a negative health behavior of people that has ability to threaten the total wellness. Studies have confirmed that more than 400 abandoned children were rescued in the city of Lagos in 2012. Though, there have been several studies on drug addiction generally, there is dearth of such among abandoned children, particularly in Nigeria. It is therefore, concluded that governments at all levels should discourage the use, sale, trafficking and recycling of illegal drugs. The following recommendations were made, that regular enlightenment should be given to the public, particularly mothers on the heinous crimes of child abandonment and that culprits should be sentenced to jail, governments should ban smoking in public places.

Keywords:

Drug addiction, Child
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INTRODUCTION

Unpleasant youthful activities are widespread in Africa, particularly in Nigeria and this has been a major concern to government at all levels and the general public. The rate at which parents abandon their babies this day is of great concern. Aborisade (2013) lamented the rising cases of child abandonment and that the ungodly act is fast becoming an embarrassment to the government. He continued that the Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development in Ondo State noted with great concern the number of abandoned children picked up from different parts of the state in the month of August, 2013. The number of innocent children being abandoned in Nigeria is almost becoming a security threat to the people. In Lagos State which is the economic nerve centre of the Nation has witnessed many cases of child abandonment in the last few years. Ugbodada (2012) noted that the level at which mothers dump their new babies has increased drastically in Nigeria, especially in Lagos with no fewer than 497 abandoned children rescued in the city of Lagos.

Besides this dastardly act, school children up to the tertiary level engage in organized crimes which disrupt normal academic programmes. In the opinion of Aluede (2000) who noted that the activities of secret cults are known to have been the source of threat to lives and properties and that outside the campuses, a lot of ritual killings are taking place day-in, day-out. Drug use has been identified as a catalyst for youth disruptive behaviour. Drug is a substance which may have medicinal, intoxicating, performance enhancing or other effects when taken into the human body or the body of animal and is not considered a food or exclusively a food (Mirchel, 2004).

Drug abuse may be defined as the arbitrary over dependence or mis-use of one particular drug with or without a prior medical diagnosis from qualified health practitioners. Brown (2012) wrote that drug abuse is the harmful use of mind altering drugs. He stressed that the term, usually refers to problem with illegal drugs, which also include harmful use of legal prescription, such as in the case of self medication. Adelusi (2012) reported that two hundred kids were confined in a village called Ayeye in Ibadan, Oyo State where they live and learn how to smoke indian hemp.

Some of the Nigerian children ignorantly depend on one form of drug or the other for their various daily activities such as social, educational, political, moral, among others. Such drugs include: **Tobacco, Indian hemp, cocaine, morphine, Heroine, Alcohol, Ephedrine, Madras, Caffeine, Glue, Barbiturates, Amphetamines.** In a study by Oshikoya (2006) on drug abuse amongst Nigerian children, identified dependence and addiction as one of the major consequences characterized by compulsive drug craving seeking behaviours being used to persist even in the face of negative consequences. These behaviours are maladaptive and inappropriate to the social or environmental settings, thereby putting individual at risk.

Drug addiction

Drug abuse and addiction is less about the amount of substance consumed or the frequency, and more to do with the **consequences** of drug use. No matter how often or how little you are consuming, if drug use is causing problems in your life, at work, school, home, or in your relationships, you likely have a drug abuse or addiction problem. Adeleke (2008) affirmed that addiction is a complex disorder characterized by compulsive drug use and that each drug produces different physical effects. He continued that all abused substances share one thing in common and that repeated use can alter the way the brain looks and functions. Abandonment and substance addiction are complex issues when considered separately but when both problems exist simultaneously, the impact is devastating to emotional health. Abandonment is a contributing factor in many instances of drug abuse. Working through an underlying abandonment issue will help in resolving the substance abuse problem.

According to Counselor Magazine (2012), the common forms of abandonment are a loved one's death, separation because of divorce and outright abandonment. Of these forms, outright abandonment and divorce have a bigger impact. With death, many people have the ability to cope without blaming themselves for the absence of the loved one. Divorce and abandonment cause a person to believe he is the cause of the abandonment.

Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment (2006) established that child abandonment occurs when parents or caregivers fail to maintain contact with their child or contribute regular support both physically and financially. This can occur both permanently and short term. The Department of Health and Human Services reported that 105 babies were found abandoned in 1998.

DRUG ADDICTION AND ABANDONMENT

Drug use among children should be a matter of great concern to all Nigerians, especially government at all levels, school heads, religious leaders and Nongovernmental Organizations. Experimentation with drugs during childhood and adolescence is common as they try new things and use drugs for many reasons including curiosity, peer influence, to imitate, and the like. Moronkola and Akinloye (2012) affirmed that one of the reasons for tobacco smoking prevalence in the world today, is its availability which make many people attracted to smoking, particularly the young adolescents.

According to a report by the Centre for Non-Communicable Diseases (2007), the situation of tobacco smoking is not helped by the fact that tobacco smoking habit is on an upward swing which led the World Health Organization and Non-Governmental Organizations to conclude that government must promote more public awareness of the harmful effects of smoking, enforce the law prohibiting smoking in public places and ensure availability and affordability of treatment options for tobacco dependence. Using alcohol and tobacco at a young age increases the chance of using other psycho-active substances which lead to abandonment. Abandonment is considered a type of neglect which occurs when someone has been withdrawn or given up on supporting a child, or left a child alone in dangerous circumstances. Abandonment is a common fear for children and it is important to understand the types of abandonment and its effects on a child in order to provide comfort and care.

Child abandonment also occurs when one or both parents feel they cannot properly take care of a child, whether it be a newborn, young child or teenager. National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (2009) stated that drug addiction harms the baby and the decisions the mother makes before, during and after birth. Children raised in a drug-related home environment are at high risk for long periods of abandonment and neglect. World Book Medical Sciences (2004) explained that indications of child neglect or abandonment may include a child in dire need of medical or dental care, frequent school absences, stealing food, begging for money, dressing inappropriately for winter and not answering questions directly about his parents or caregivers. Any drastic changes in appearance or personality may also indicate a sign of abandonment. For a child who has been abandoned, the first step is that he receives proper medical care to assure a healthy and mental stability. The next step is finding out whether one or both parents are willing to sign off their parental rights. If so they may give permission to another family member or the state to make decisions for the child's care. Some children with no stable family members are placed in the foster care system. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, more than 500,000 children are in the foster care system (Jerald, 2004). The reasons that act as boosters are numerous but everybody is too busy to take heed of the situation. Throwing some light on the reasons that make a child drug addict are very shocking. The pressure created by parents upon their children to bring home bright report cards, shining trophies, medals and top charts in extra-curricular activities but not lending a helping hand when the child needs it the most, which in turn, backfires both the parents and children. Sometimes, parents feel devastated when they know that their children are drug addicts. Jaap (1998) highlighted the reasons that force a child to indulge in drugs are usually:

- Inability to express himself
- Imposed responsibilities that are meant for an adult
- If both or one of the parent is alcoholic
- If the child starts facing domestic problems at home from an early age
- When a child gets into bad company and starts spending time at bars, etc
- If the child is less educated or unaware about drugs and their impacts
- If a child is going through a tough time, especially during teenage
- If a child becomes part of humiliation, maltreatment, inferiority or consistently faces failure
- Also, if the youngsters strongly feel drinking alcohol, smoking, intake of any form of drug as vogue. As a result, the neglected youth usually inculcates habit of drug intake.

Some parents are mistaken or unaware of their child taking drugs and alcohol. But surely a close observation in regards to the symptoms of drug intake can really help a lot. Though, children, especially adolescents show many of the symptoms mentioned below when they are depressed. It is the responsibility of parents and guardians to sort out with the child about his or her problem. A child that is into drugs usually shows signs like: tiredness to classes, lectures, workshops, appointments, sudden fall or drop in grades, losing interest in the activities the child probably enjoyed, disconnecting with old friends and joining new groups, personality changes, an extrovert child suddenly becomes introvert, sudden mood changes - get furious or sad without any prior indications, seem hung over, decrease in memory retention, increase in keeping secrets, withdrawal from family, eager or disposed to fight, red Eyes, weight loss, insomnia, fatigue or being too hyper. Nwillia (2008) affirmed that if parent suspects about his or her child consuming drugs then he/she should start making quiet and slow moves, generally which involve

- Locking the liquor cabinet
- Being strict in regard to the child's lifestyle
- Keeping double check alarm systems
- Check their bedrooms
- Closely observe the physical attributes of child eyes, lips, etc
- Never assume that your child is too young to be exposed to drugs
- Know who your child's friends are
- Consider the places where they can get drugs
- Check your child's attendance at school
- Keep a check or ask for expenditure record from your child
- Check your child's vehicle for suspects of drugs
- Look through their pockets, backpacks, wallets, purses
- Take your child for random drug test

- Develop an open, strong and trusting relationship
- Most importantly, teach your child to say NO to drugs and make him aware about the harmful effects of drug intakes.

If the child is struggling hard to free himself from drugs and experiencing extreme behavioural problems, then it is an alarming point for the parents. In fact, everybody should take up several ways so as to protect and safeguard the future generation of our nation. Mirchel (2004) said that the adolescent brain is different from that of an adult and that behaviours may put them at much higher risk to want to try drugs than the brain of an adult.

1.1. CATEGORIES OF ABANDONMENT

Psychological Abandonment

Psychological abandonment occurs when parent stops bonding with the child or becomes mentally disabled. Physical abandonment can be the result of death or giving the child away to have contact with the child in the event of a divorce. Parents may abandon the child because of the feelings of being overwhelmed, incompetent or find themselves in an unwanted and unaccepted role of parenting. Though, cases of child abandonment sometimes involve parent separating from a child without prior warning. John (2007) wrote that although each case of child abandonment is unique but distinct stages in the abandonment process commonly exist.

1.2. Emotional Abandonment

The initial stage of child abandonment involves emotional distancing by the parent (Brown, 2012). Parent becomes emotionally detached from the child and the detachment could be the result of emotional or mental health issues. It could also be the result of external factors from the parents with the use of mind-altering substances.

1.3. Reduction in Daily Care

The child abandonment occurs when parent starts to pay less attention to the child's daily needs. Parent loses interest in the child's activities. For instance, education or career pursuits. Sometimes parents feel less concerned about a child's dietary and requirements. At this stage, people from the outside start noticing changes in child's living situation.

1.4. Physical Abandonment

At this level, parents physically separate from their children. Some parents dump their babies after birth in the hospitals, fire stations even inside gutters. Oloyede (2002) affirmed that physical abandonment is, when parent makes arrangement for a family member or friend to babysit the child for a period of time and fail to reclaim the child.

1.5. EFFECTS OF CHILD ABANDONMENT

- Aggression
- Criminal tendency
- Low self-esteem
- Relationship disorders
- Trust imbalance
- Divided interests
- Love dissolved
- Terrorism

Abandonment has a lot of health effects on children which might affect their total development later in life. According to Adelusi (2012), children need to be attached to their parents, particularly mothers for emotional development and real survival. The mother-child bond is important to learn trust. Contemporary psycho-analysis states that a father-child bond helps to foster development in a son and also helps a daughter form an identity separate from her mother and relate to her social world. Obot (2005) noted that a child who has been abandoned may become withdrawn, angry and restless because of the fear that he might be abandoned again and develop nightmares or fear of sleeping alone. According to Hope (1998), abandonment may lead a child to develop attachment disorder with severe symptoms which include **control problems, dishonesty, learning difficulties and defiant, destructive or impulsive behaviour.**

1.6. WAY FORWARD

If a child is abandoned, the earlier he receives intervention, the better:

- ❖ Encourage him to discuss his feelings and re-assure him if he is afraid of being abandoned again.
- ❖ Be sure that he fosters nurturing relationships with other loved ones and family members.
- ❖ If you are concerned about his behaviour or emotional state, take him to see a Medical Doctor among others.

CAUSES OF CHILDREN VULNERABILITY TO DRUG ADDICTION

Oyebode (2006) said that most of the drug addicts started smoking from their childhood. He went further that as they grow older, they seek new thrills and gradually go into hard drug abuse. A nationwide survey of primary school pupils reported that 65% use drugs to have good time with their friends, 54% wanted to experiment to see what it is like, 20% to 40% use it to alter their moods, to feel good, to relax, to relieve tension and to overcome boredom and problems.

Anumonye (1980) said no single factor could be defined as solely responsible for the abuse of drugs but listed the following factors as frequently found among both Nigerians and other nationalities:

- Defective personality; including chronic inadequacy, poor frustration, tolerance, insensitivity and egocentricity.
- Widespread belief in the magic of medicines
- Enjoyment of induced euphoria and excitement
- Dissatisfaction and disillusionment of young persons
- Search for sharpened perception, especially by music lovers
- Self – medication of primary psychological disorders.
- Lack of alternatives for various cultural changes.

However, apart from the above factors, other studies have also shown the followings as responsible factors:

- ❖ Parental neglects of their children
- ❖ The prevalence of drugs in the community
- ❖ Pathological family background; broken homes, illegitimate relationships, alcoholic parents or parent's involvement in antisocial and illegal activities
- ❖ Peer influence
- ❖ Imitation of film stars and teenage idols
- ❖ Media adverts; radio, TV, and billboard inter
- ❖ Ambition
- ❖ Urbanization and unemployment
- ❖ Ignorance of the dangers of illegal drug use
- ❖ Alienation, they feel isolated and want to belong etc (Abudu, 2005).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We are aware that government on its own has tried in Nigeria to curtail, eradicate or discourage the use, sale, trafficking and recycling of illegal drugs by promulgating various decrees against such drug use. There is the popular Anti-narcotic Decree under which the NDLEA was set up. We also have the Dangerous Drug Act and the Decree banning smoking in public places. We cannot forget National Agency for Food and Drug, Administration and Control which the Federal Government set up to tackle importation and the sales of expired drugs and the like.

These organizations have been doing very well. But for these agencies, the situation in Nigeria concerning dangerous drugs would have been unbearable. On the part of the NDLEA, a lot of hard drugs such as heroin, cannabis etc. has been seized both at border points, airports, and sources of production and among street gangs. Despite the loss of some operatives of the agency to cannabis growers while trying to destroy their farms, the agency has won notable victories against them, but it is far from defeating them. Based on this, it is therefore recommended that regular enlightenment should be given to the public, particularly mothers, on the heinous crimes of child abandonment and culprits should be sentenced to jail. More so, governments at all levels should ban smoking and alcohol intakes in both hidden and public places.

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