



Assessing the Efforts of Selected Pentecostal Churches in Solving the Problem of Drug Addiction among Youth in South-Western Nigeria

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Abstract

The prevalence of substance addiction among Nigerian youths, is quite alarming, despite all efforts made by the government and non-governmental organisations, the church inclusive, in South-western Nigeria to reduce the social menace. The study evaluates the efforts of Pentecostal churches in solving the vice among youths in South-western Nigeria. This research is fundamentally descriptive in its approach. The target demographic for this investigation encompassed the Pentecostal congregations located in the South-Western region of Nigeria, viz: Osun, Ekiti, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, and Lagos states, predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group. Two pentecostal churches in this geo-political zone are chosen for this study, viz: the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM). It is concluded that drug addiction is prevalent among youths in the South-Western geo-political zone of Nigeria and that Pentecostal churches are active in curbing drug addiction among the churched and unchurched youths. Standing on the principle of collaborative efforts, the following suggestions were made: the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency should collaborate with non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders responsible for preventing drug addiction to strengthen their campaigns against drug addiction, particularly among young people, in order to create a drug-free society; parents should be actively encouraged to pursue drug education and teach their children this



knowledge as an essential component of health, moral, and character development; and counselling centres should be established in every community by the government or private individuals.

Keywords: Pentecostal Church, Youth, Drug Addiction, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency

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Introduction

Drug addiction constitutes a complex and pervasive issue that numerous nations, including Nigeria, have encountered. 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. According to NAFDAC (2008), the proliferation of illicit drug consumption has engendered a distinctive sub-culture among students in Nigeria. The ramifications of such addiction, misuse, trafficking, or even cultivation can be profoundly detrimental; regrettably, young individuals are particularly susceptible to the allure of hard drugs, which engenders a plethora of adverse repercussions for the community (Ajibulu, 2014).

The physiological repercussions of substance abuse encompass liver cirrhosis, pancreatitis, peptic ulcers, hypertension, neurological disorders, tuberculosis among others. Furthermore, the psychological impacts entail cognitive impairment, developmental deformities, deficiencies in the nervous system, delayed motor skills, amnesia, and dementia, among various other conditions (Dankani 2012, 101-115). The extensive ramifications of drug addiction and substance misuse are profoundly concerning and deeply stigmatizing, to the extent that both national and international organizations across the globe express alarm regarding the proliferation of this affliction among the youth population.

The recurrent abuse of drugs has precipitated an escalation in the incidence of delinquent behaviours, including rape, robbery, cult participation, violent disturbances, and vandalism among Nigerian youth and most especially in the South-West. These deviant behaviours contradict African values, including the South-Western



part of Nigeria. Hence, Dairo, in an attempt to examine how the beliefs of Africans affect their morality, opined that the African man's actions and behaviour must not precipitate calamity for him, his family and or for society at large (Dairo, 2014). Drug abuse has significantly hindered societal progress in Nigeria, adversely impacting national development as the youth represent the essential foundation of any advancing society. Many psychiatric facilities in Nigeria house numerous youths undergoing treatment attributable to substance misuse. Some youths have become school dropouts, unable to continue their education due to the debilitating effects of drug use that has resulted in mental health crises. A considerable number of youths find themselves homeless, aimlessly wandering, engaging in delinquent behaviour, remaining unemployed, or participating in criminal activities such as rape and robbery, primarily as a consequence of their addiction to drugs.

This research is fundamentally descriptive in its approach. The target demographic for this investigation encompassed a selection of Pentecostal congregations located in the South-Western region of Nigeria, which includes Osun, Ekiti, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, and Lagos states, predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group. Two Pentecostal churches in this geo-political zone are chosen for this study. These are the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed in this research is predicated upon the Pastoral Circle Theory conceptualized by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, which serves to address pressing social issues. This framework encompasses experiential engagement, socio-cultural analysis, theological contemplation, and pastoral strategizing (Holland & Henriot 1983: 7-10). Moreover, Cimperman expands upon this theoretical foundation by delineating four sequential phases within the inquiry: experiential observation, socio-cultural analysis, reflective consideration, and action-oriented response within the analytic process (Cimperman & Henriot 2015).

The theoretical model is anchored by the following inquiries:

Immersion Question- What is transpiring in this context?

Analysis Question- What are the underlying causes of this occurrence?



Reflection Question- What are the implications of this situation when interpreted through a faith-based perspective? and

Response Question- What actions should we undertake in response to this issue? (Packiam 2020: 15). The four-moment circular framework of this theory is applicable to this study in the following manners:

Immersion: The immersion inquiry seeks to discern the current happenings. It scrutinizes the alarming rise in drug addiction cases among the youth demographic.

Analysis: The inquiry into the causative factors elucidates a multitude of influences including peer pressure, insufficient parental and spiritual guidance, alongside an innate curiosity, among other determinants. Nonetheless, the aforementioned contributory factors can ultimately be traced back to the pervasive influence of sin in the lives of those afflicted, compelling them towards transgression, despite their intentions to avoid displeasing the divine (Genesis 8:21; Psalms 51:5, 58:3; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23, 5:12, 7:15-25).

Reflection: The reflective inquiry concerning the significance of this phenomenon is examined through a theological lens. Drug addiction constitutes a transgressive act in the sight of a holy God, thereby undermining the divine image and likeness inherent in humanity (Genesis 1:27). Such sin acts as a barrier, preventing the afflicted from experiencing the presence of God (Isaiah 59:2) and ultimately results in spiritual death (Romans 5:12, 6:23; Antony & Barlow 2020: 494).

Response: The response inquiry centres on the appropriate measures to address this issue. Both the ecclesiastical community and the individuals grappling with addiction have pivotal roles to fulfil in devising viable solutions. Churches are encouraged to implement pertinent programs aimed at the prevention and rehabilitation of those afflicted by drug addiction. Spiritual initiatives can facilitate the recognition of their own vulnerabilities and despair, guiding them towards seeking divine assistance, meaning, and purpose. The church is called to extend unconditional love towards individuals struggling with drug addiction (Mbewe & Lyons 2020: 34). Rehabilitation programmes are instrumental in reversing the adverse effects associated with substance abuse.

Drug Addiction

Addiction is derived from the Latin word "*addico*," which means "giving over" and has both positive meanings (devotion, dedication)



and negative meanings (being enslaved to a creditor in Roman law). This dual meaning persisted in traditional English dictionaries, encompassing both legal surrender and personal devotion to habits. Later, temperance movements of the 19th century narrowed the definition of addiction to just drug-related disease, ignoring behavioural addictions and the possibility of positive or neutral addictions. Such a restrictive view is in opposition to the modern understanding of addiction ((Steverson 2020, 206).

In medicine, the term "addiction" is frequently used to describe neuropsychological symptoms that indicate widespread, excessive, and strong impulses to engage in a category of behavioural compulsions or impulses towards sensory rewards, such as alcohol, betel quid, drugs, sex, gambling, or video gaming (Sahithya & Kashyap 2020, 95-98). Addiction is a chronic, relapsing disorder that is characterised by compulsive drug seeking and use despite negative consequences (Chen et al 2009, 319). It is regarded as a brain disorder because it involves functional changes to brain circuits related to reward, stress, and self-control, and these changes may persist for a long time after a person has stopped using drugs (Goldstein & Volkow 2011, 667-669). Addiction is a chronic condition that can also result from taking medications.

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, addiction is "a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviours that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences." Addiction is similar to other diseases, such as heart disease, which interfere with the normal, healthy functioning of an organ in the body, have serious harmful effects, and are, in many cases, preventable and treatable. If left untreated, they can become fatal. Substances like alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine are also classified as drugs. Drug addiction, also known as substance use disorder, is a disease that affects a person's brain and behaviour and results in an inability to control the use of a drug or medication, whether legal or illegal.

Addiction is a neuropsychological disorder that is characterised by a persistent and intense urge to use a drug or engage in behaviour that produces natural reward, despite significant harm and other negative consequences. Repetitive drug use can alter brain function in synapses similar to natural rewards like food or falling in love in ways that prolong craving and impair self-control in people who already have pre-existing vulnerabilities. Addiction is the inability to stop using



a substance or engaging in a behaviour even though it may cause psychological or physical harm (Fluyau, 2021). Addiction is not limited to dependence on substances like heroin or cocaine; some addictions involve the inability to stop performing certain activities, such as gambling, eating, or working (Crane, 2021). This means that individuals in recovery are at risk of resuming drug use, even after years of abstinence.

Drug addiction is a chronic brain disease that causes a person to use drugs repeatedly despite the harm they cause. It is characterised by profound changes in appearance, such as weight loss and a noticeable abandonment of hygiene, declining grades or difficulty at school, poor performance at work, relationship difficulties that often involve lashing out at people who identify the addiction, and appearing defensive when asked about substance use (Sharp, 2021). Alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, opioids, cocaine, amphetamines, and even foods high in fat and sugar are among the substances involved in drug addiction. (Skylstad et al March 2022, e001242). Drug addiction is a chronic and relapsing brain disorder that features drug seeking and drug abuse despite their harmful effects (Levy 2019, 45-47). This form of addiction alters brain circuitry such that the brain's reward system is compromised, producing functional consequences for stress management and self-control (Rosenthal & Faris, 2019: 437-439).

Prevalence of Drug Addiction among Youths in South-Western Nigeria According to a recent study by the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency, or NDLEA, as cited in Adepaju et al. (2022), 15–25% of drug addicts are female, while 50–55% are male. These individuals include traders, students, unskilled labourers, and the unemployed. Buba (2023) claimed that the drug problem in Nigeria has gotten so bad that it will take intentional measures to stop it in its tracks. Atinuke (2022) supported these findings by pointing out that 40 percent of Nigerian adolescents between the ages of 18 and 35 are heavily involved in drug usage. The statistic has grown extremely concerning, indicating that the issue has spread like wildfire throughout the nation. The alarming rate at which young people are developing an illicit drug addiction has made the rising wave of drug abuse a threat to the nation.

The high rate of drug abuse in Nigeria and its detrimental effects on public health and safety make it imperative that everyone work together to address the problem in the nation. Supporting the claim, Ortokpa (2023) conducted a survey from the perspective of health professionals, claimed that drug abuse is becoming more popular



among Nigeria's youth, citing a United Nations Population Fund survey, which found that while the country's population is young, with roughly 60% of its people under 30, an increasing number of them are becoming victims of drug traffickers.

Two federal agencies were established in Nigeria as a result of the significant rise in drug and substance abuse: the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency in 1990 and the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control in 1993 (John, 2022). The South West, a region of serious concern that includes the states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo, is said to have the highest prevalence of drug and substance use (22.49 or 4,382,000 users), particularly in Lagos and Oyo state. Drug abuse is widespread throughout Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Peer pressure, low self-esteem, the need for extra energy for everyday tasks, a poor socioeconomic situation at home, and experimental curiosity are some of the factors that lead to drug abuse (John, 2022).

The majority (77.9%) of the students were unmarried and between the ages of 19 and 30. Six hundred and ninety-eight (86.5%) of the students claimed to be aware of drug abuse, but they showed poor knowledge and awareness (John, 2022: 32-35). Marijuana, 298 (45.7%), was the most common drug of abuse seen by the majority of the students, according to a study conducted at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, using a WHO student drug survey proforma (Durowade et al, 2021: 85-87). The predisposing factors to drug use and associated risks were not well identified. Of the students, 266 (30.0%) were currently using one or more drugs of abuse, with coffee (43.1%) being the most commonly used drug, followed by alcohol (25.7%) and marijuana (7.4%). Addiction is not a common finding, even if these drugs have been used for five years or more (Oshikoya 2006: 133-139).

Factors Responsible for Increase in Drug Addiction

Genetics, developmental stage, and ethnicity are biological factors that can influence an individual's risk of addiction; researchers estimate that between 40 and 60 percent of an individual's risk of addiction is attributed to genes, including the impact of environmental factors on gene expression, known as epigenetics (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014); teens and individuals with mental disorders are more likely to use drugs and develop addiction than others (Biederman et al 2000, 792-794).

The home environment, particularly during childhood, is a very important factor. Parents or older family members who use drugs or



abuse alcohol, or who break the law, can increase children's risk of future drug problems (Bevilacqua & Goldman 2009, 361). Peers and friends can have an increasingly strong influence during the teen years. Teens who use drugs can influence even those without risk factors to try drugs for the first time. Additionally, struggling in school or having poor social skills can put a child at further risk for using or developing a drug addiction (Whitesell et al 2013).

Effects of Drug Addiction

Effects on the Family: The family, which is the smallest unit in the society, is very susceptible to negative effects of drug addiction, (Lengsi Manurung, 2024, 239-244). This is because emotional pressure and stress are not far from the family members of drug addicts. Stigma, discrimination and financial difficulties are other negative effects of drug addiction on the family (Lengsi Manurung, 2024).

Social Effects: People who use drugs especially hard drugs tend to be hyperactive especially when they are taking them. As a result, they tend to act out; they are more likely to engage in a variety of social vices and immoral activities, including murder, ritual practices, trafficking, armed robbery, kidnapping, and sexual immorality (Fatima 2017: 6).

Financial Effects: This attitude not only impoverishes the person with a substance use addiction but also their family members and others around them. According to Fatima (2017), individuals who have developed an addiction are typically at risk of spending a lot of money on drugs because the habit makes them want more drugs, which typically leads them to look for money to get the medications at all costs and by all means.

Health Effects: Drug addiction results into depression, anxiety, panic disorder, paranoia, increased aggression, hallucinations, poor work and academic performance, poor relationships, poor hygiene, and financial hardship (Oshodi, Aina & Onajole 2018: 23). One of the most common effects of drug addiction is illness.

Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostal churches focus on the emotional, mystical, and supernatural: miracles, signs, wonders, and "the gifts of the spirit" (*charismata*), particularly "speaking in tongues" (*glossolalia*), faith healing, and "casting out demons" (*exorcism*). The subjective religious experience of being filled with or possessed by the Holy Spirit is given



the utmost importance. The churches teach the inspiration of the Bible, salvation by conversion, revival, instantaneous sanctification, and divine healing; they also claim to be a restoration of original Christianity (Owoeye 2008: 294). Acts 1 and 2 tell the story of the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell upon the first Christians: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4).

The origin of Pentecostalism in Nigeria cannot be directly traced to the 1906 Azusa street revival in California, but in the early twentieth century, some parts of Africa saw conversion movements led by some indigenous prophets who were persecuted from historic mission denominations. The prophets' actions were considered to be Pentecostal. Pentecostalism's origins can be partially traced back to the July 1930 Oke-Oye (Ilesa) revival led by Joseph Ayodele Babalola, who later left the Faith Tabernacle for the Christ Apostolic Church (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 395). Of course, 1930 was considered the beginning of indigenous Pentecostalism in Nigeria. Today, Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria include the Assemblies of God, which originated in the United States, Deeper Christian Life Ministry, which was founded in 1973, The Life Gate International, which was founded in 1981, The Winners' Chapel, also known as The Living Faith Church, which was founded in 1981, The Gospel Faith Mission International, which was founded in 1955, and The Redeemed Christian Church of God, which was founded in 1952 and Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries. This current study focuses on the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM).

Efforts of Pentecostal Churches in Solving Problem of Drug Addiction among Youths

The church has a divine role in addressing the issue of drug addiction among youths with the ultimate goal of giving them the opportunity to worship and glorify God. Through evangelism, discipleship, mentoring, counselling, and preaching, the church may lead young people in the correct direction. The responsibility of the church as God's people is to be the world's salt and light (Matthew 5:13-15). Spiritual gifts have been given to believers for the purpose of edifying the church of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27-28; 1 Peter 4:10). Reaching out to young people who are incarcerated due to drug addiction should also be done using these gifts.

Some of the Pentecostal churches focus on recovery and reconciliation for victim of drug addiction. What sets the Pentecostal



programmes distinct from government and other civil society projects is their emphasis on spiritual formation, empowerment and equipping for ministry as evangelists to their former partners of drug addiction (Fatima, 2017: 9-11). The church equally adopts a holistic approach. Hence, in one of his articles, Adedibu (2019), cited the example of Bishop John Francis, the founder and pastor of London City Church as well as the presiding bishop of Ruach Network who uses a holistic ministry to facilitate drug rehabilitation and youth advocacy.

To draw closer home, according to a study carried out by Ayomide (2024), Christ Against Drug Abuse Ministry (CADAM) is a rehabilitation centre under the auspices of the Redeemed Christian Church of God which engages in drug-related rehabilitation using psycho-therapeutic techniques and Christian faith exercises. The preliminary investigation of this study reflects that the Mountain Top Rehabilitation and Health Centre, owned by the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM), specializes in rehabilitation, long term passionate care and skilled nursing services.

Conclusion

Since humans are gregarious animals, drug addiction is a menace that has spread to become a global subculture with cataclysmic effects that affect all societies, creeds, and races. Although no one is born addicted, various human activities such as learning, interacting with others, and being curious have led to the development of this habit, which is empirically more common among youth in South-West Nigeria. The habit develops as an attempt, for example, to justify a curiosity in daily interactions because humans are gregarious animals. On an individual basis, its effects can be physiological and psychological, which gradually permeate society and impact all productive endeavours, both socially and economically. Drug addiction has become a common means to an end, a threat that necessitates the cooperation of religious organisations such as churches, individuals, families, groups, communities, societies, and the Nigerian government. However, if preventive measures and strategies are implemented, the effects of drug addiction among young people in the South-Western region of Nigeria will be addressed and eradicated.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered based on the findings of the study:



There should be collaboration between the entire body of Christ if this social menace is to be conquered. This is supported by two scholars when they opined that interfaith collaboration should be embraced in promoting shared ethical values, and institutional reforms in the society Alao and Dairo, (2024).

The church should liaise with other stakeholders outside the auspices of the church so as to permanently curb drug addiction among the youths.

To make this collaborative effort a reality, parents should be actively encouraged pursuing drug education and imparting this knowledge to their children as an integral aspect of health, moral, and character development. Furthermore, they should adequately inform their offspring regarding the usage, abuse, and inherent dangers associated with drugs.

Still in the spirit of using joint efforts to create a drug-free society, the government or private sector should set up counselling centres in every community and hire qualified counsellors to assist drug addicts. In the same vein, the Federal and State Ministries of Education should include drug education courses in the academic curriculum at all educational levels.

Also, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) should collaborate with non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders who are responsible for preventing drug addiction to step up their efforts to combat drug addiction, particularly among young people.

Following the same principle of collaboration, state and local governments should also outlaw establishments and recreational centres that are known to be venues for the sale and consumption of illegal substances, and they should make sure that owners finish any unfinished buildings that serve as hideouts for illegal substance use or face demolition.



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