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PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER AND YOUTH DRUG ABUSE: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF RISING CRIME IN OTUKPO, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Youth drug abuse has emerged as a significant sociological and public health issue in Nigeria, closely intertwined with alarming rates of psychological disorders and escalating crime. Recent data reveals that approximately 14.4% of Nigerians between the ages of 15 and 64 are involved in the abuse of psychoactive substances, translating to around 14.3 million individuals within the population. This article delves into the specific manifestations of this troubling trend in the Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State, shedding light on its profound social implications for families, the fabric of community cohesion, and the rise in criminal activities. Utilizing theoretical frameworks such as social disorganization, strain theory, and labeling theory, we interpret the findings and provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges posed by substance abuse in this region. Furthermore, this discussion includes critical policy implications and highlights the need for community-based interventions designed to address this pervasive issue and support affected individuals and families. Through this exploration, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of youth drug abuse and its ripple effects on society.

Keywords: youth, drug abuse, psychological disorder, crime, Otukpo, Nigeria, sociology

Introduction

Youth involvement in drug abuse is an increasingly pressing concern in Nigeria, particularly in regions like Otukpo Local Government Area (LGA). According to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), approximately 14.4% of Nigerians aged 15 to 64 engage in drug abuse, with a substantial proportion of these

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individuals being young people (Elemile et al., 2023). In Otukpo, the prevalence of drug abuse has escalated sharply in recent years, often correlating with a notable increase in criminal activities, including theft, assault, cultism, and other forms of violence (Akpa & Sunday, 2023). While comprehensive quantitative statistics detailing the correlation between youth substance abuse and crime specifically in Otukpo are limited, numerous reports highlight a troubling trend of rising insecurity and youth involvement in criminal behavior within both Otukpo and the broader Benue State. For instance, the youth wing of the Idoma sociocultural organization in Otukpo has raised alarms over a surge in kidnappings, cult-related violence, and other criminal acts, attributing many of these issues to a combination of youth discontent and the growing prevalence of substance misuse. The cyclical relationship between drug abuse and crime is particularly alarming (Adamu & Ben, 2017). Raji et al. (2025) asserted that substance abuse often leads to psychological disorders that impair judgment and increase impulsivity. Consequently, youths who become dependent on drugs may resort to criminal activities to finance their habits or may be more likely to commit offenses while under the influence of substances (Okoru & Chukwudi, 2024). Furthermore, the social disorganization prevalent in many neighborhoods diminishes informal social control mechanisms, thereby exacerbating crime rates (Weisburd et al., 2024). According to Quist (2024) the stigmatization of these youths as troublemakers can further restrict their access to legitimate opportunities, trapping them in a cycle of deviance and criminality. This study aims to delve into the intricate sociological relationship between drug use, psychological disorders, and crime among the youth in Otukpo, shedding light on the underlying factors and possible interventions to address these interconnected challenges.

Drug Abuse among Youths in Nigeria & Implications for Psychological Disorder

Recent research has uncovered a troubling drug abuse prevalence rate of 49.8% among Nigerian adolescents, specifically within a sample of 1,304 high school students (Aderibigbe et al., 2024). This alarming statistic highlights a strong connection between drug use and significant mental health issues, including suicidality, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. On a national level, according to Oweibia et al. (2025) 14.4% of Nigerians aged 15-64 are using drugs, with the youth segment clearly bearing the brunt of this epidemic. It is crucial to recognize that drug abuse in this context transcends mere recreation; it often occurs alongside serious psychological disorders, as individuals resort to self-medication or are influenced by the neurochemical effects of substances. In Otukpo, despite lacking specific prevalence data, local youth leaders report a dramatic increase in drug consumption hotspots, escalating school drop-out rates, and a rise in crimes tied to substance abuse (Kerker & Adeyongo, 2024). The repercussions of this crisis extend far beyond individuals, impacting families and communities through emotional

trauma, economic strain, and a blatant disregard for social norms. Immediate action is necessary to address these pressing issues and mitigate their widespread effects.

Cultism and Drug Abuse

Cultism around Nigeria has proven to be a structure for availability and drug normalization among youths, especially in tertiary institutions. Otukpo, Benue state is not an exception in this menace as secret cult groups in Otukpo and Benue state at large have a history of facilitating the distribution of drugs like cannabis, tramadol and other hard substance so as to gain confidence and easily confront rival groups (UNODC, 2023). According to the research of Oweibia *et al.,* (2025), 1 in 7 people aged 15-64 used at least one illicit or non-medical psychoactive drug. Their research reviewed 32 studies across Nigeria and the pool estimates revealed a 14.4% prevalence use and abuse of drug between people between age 15-64. The research of Oweiba *et al.,* (2025) thus reveals a public-health burden for Nigeria and an urgent need for policy intervention not excluding communities like Otukpo. As devastating as the effects of drugs are, youths have overtime turned to drugs mainly due to peer-pressure and other social reasons of belonging (Aderibigbe, 2024). Neurochemical effects of opioids and stimulants, combined with trauma from initiation violence and social exclusion in cults, produce high rates of mood disorders, PTSD symptoms and suicide risk among recruited youths (Garrison-Desany, H. M., Meyers, Linnstaedt, House, Beaudoin, & Denckla, 2024). Addressing this requires targeted NDLEA–community hotspot mapping, school counselling, disruption of cult supply chains and accessible mental-health services for Otukpo youths.

Sociological Implications for Crime in Otukpo

Youth substance abuse in Nigeria has reached critical levels, demanding immediate attention and action. Recent statistics from the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reveal that 14.4% of individuals aged 15 to 64 are engaged in illicit drug use, with a staggering 27.7% of these users classified as youths (Bahago et al., 2024). Despite these alarming figures, there is a glaring lack of localized sociological research, particularly in semi-urban areas like Otukpo, where issues such as soaring youth unemployment, social dislocation, and escalating crime rates intersect (Umoh, 2025). This article decisively explores the sociological ramifications of drug misuse among young people in Otukpo, establishing a clear link between substance abuse, psychological disorders, and increased criminal behavior. It is imperative to understand the intricate social dynamics and economic hardships that fuel this crisis. By doing so, we underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions and robust support systems specifically designed to combat youth drug abuse. Recognizing that this issue extends beyond individual struggles, we assert that a collective response is

essential to safeguard the future of our communities. Addressing youth drug addiction is not merely a priority, it is a necessity for creating safe, resilient, and thriving environments for the young people of Otukpo and beyond.

Theoretical Framework

Three sociological theories provide the analytical backbone for this study:

Social Disorganization Theory: This posits that communities with weakened institutions (family, schools, social control) suffer higher rates of deviance and crime (Opoku-Ware, Osei Akuoko, Ofori-Dua, & Mensah Dapaah, 2022).

Strain Theory (Merton): Youths unable to achieve culturally prescribed success goals may resort to illicit means such as substance abuse as alternative responses to strain (Stephenson, 2024).

Labeling Theory: Once youths are labeled as "junkies" or "criminals", they may internalize the label, perpetuating deviance and social exclusion.

Beyond individual users, drug abuse and associated psychological disorders impose heavy burdens on families (Manurung, 2024): caregivers manage erratic behaviour, unexplained expenditures, emotional trauma, and social stigma. Communities face collective decline: youth disengagement, weakened institutions (schools, churches), and eroding social capital. The cost extends into healthcare (mental health services), law enforcement and lost economic productivity.

Policy and Community Response

Given the complexity of the interplay between drug abuse, psychological disorder and crime, interventions must be multi-layered:

Youth Empowerment & Skills Development: Addressing unemployment and idle time, which are risk factors for drug use and crime will drastically reduce the surge in drug abuse situations (Nte, Nte, Featherstone, & Eyengho, 2024).

School & Community Based Prevention: Drug education, counselling services and peer support groups targeted at adolescents.

Mental Health Infrastructure: Integration of mental health screening and treatment into primary health care in Benue State.

Law Enforcement with Rehabilitation: While crackdowns are necessary, punitive approaches must be coupled with rehabilitation and social reintegration.

Community Mobilization: Local leaders, religious institutions and families must build social networks and informal controls to combat disorganization.

Proposals for Further Research

a) A comparative studies comparing the effect of drug abuse on youth involvement against other communities in Benue state.
b) A gender based study exploring the gendered-specifics effects on male and female youths in Otukpo, Benue State.
c) The influence of social media and peer relationships on normalization of drug abuse among youths in Otukpo, Benue State.

Conclusion

Drug abuse among youths in Otukpo is a significant sociological challenge, rooted in psychological disorders, structural inequality, and crime. Addressing substance abuse requires tackling deeper issues like poverty, unemployment, family breakdown, and community disorganization rather than just treating symptoms. To foster sustainable change, collaboration among policymakers, researchers, and community leaders is essential. This effort should focus on rebuilding social institutions, enhancing access to mental health services, and redirecting youth energy into constructive activities like mentorship programs and vocational training. By empowering the next generation, we can reduce drug abuse and promote a healthier, more resilient community in Otukpo.

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