

# **ADDRESSING YOUTH DRUG ABUSE TOWARDS PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA**

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## ***Abstract***

*Development is about change. The youths are the engine that drives the coach of development. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, youths must participate actively at national, regional and global levels. But, youth drug abuse is an issue, rendering the youths unavailable for social inclusion in the formulation and implementation of development policies. About 14.3 million Nigerians of 15-64 age bracket are engaged in drug abuse. About 40% of Nigerian youths aged 18-35 are deeply involved in drug abuse. Drug use is prevalent among 25-39 age bracket. One of every four drug users in Nigeria is a woman. By 2021 statistics, 4.6 million Nigerians have used opioids, such as tramadol codeine or morphine for non-medical purposes, while an estimated 376,000 Nigerians indulge in high-risk drug use. More so, one of every five Nigerians, who had used drugs in the past or at the moment is suffering from one form of drug related health challenge or disorder. The study employed qualitative and descriptive approaches to generate data from primary and secondary sources for analysis for Anambra State. Findings show a vicious cycle of social exclusion that lead to frustration*

*and alienation of the youths, resulting to abuse of psychedelic drugs, which leads to abuse of psychedelic drugs, thereby reinforcing social exclusion. Using the socially inclusive techniques, the study made apt recommendations on how to break the vicious cycle.*

**Keywords:** *Psychedelic drug abuse, inclusive governance, development.*

## **Introduction**

Nigeria, with an estimated population of about 211.4 million in 2021, is the seventh most populous country in the world. With the average annual population growth rate of 2.6% for 2015-2020 (UNFPA, 2021), she has a high persistent fertility and consistently declining mortality. Nigeria's total fertility rate is 5.3 with crude birth rate of 38 per 1000 population. The population is projected to increase to 263 million in 2030 and 401 million in 2050 when Nigeria would become the third most populous country in the world. That would be a jump of about 49% in 20 years.

About 43% of Nigerian population comprised children 0-14 years, 19% aged 15-24 years and about 62% below age 25 years for 2020. Less than 5% is aged 60 years and above. This makes Nigeria a youthful population with a median age of about 18 years, which is lower than African and world estimates of 20 and 29 respectively (UNFPA, 2021). Nigeria's population is among the youngest in Africa as well as in the world, with a mean age slightly above 18 years (Varrella, 2021a).

The youth dependency ratio stood at 80.9, which means that there were about 81 young people aged up to 14 years for every 100 inhabitants at working age. This shows a higher investment needs to be made in schooling and child-care (UNDESA, 20016).

Regarding sustainable development, Nigeria's economy faces a greater burden to support and provide the social services needed by children and by older persons who are often economically dependent. The dependency ratio suggests that the working age population will support

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these other two portions of the population, and in fact produce a surplus. To be able to do that, they must be employed. The prospect seems rather dim because the unemployment rate in Nigeria was estimated to reach 32.5% in 2021. This figure was projected to increase further in 2022. Chronological data show that the unemployment rate in Nigeria rose constantly in the past years. In the fourth quarter of 2020, over 33% of the labour force was unemployed (Varrella, 2021b).

Youth unemployment rate is 42.5% and youth underemployment is 21.0% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This has implications both on personal and social levels. Personal and social costs of unemployment include severe financial hardship and poverty, debt, homelessness and housing stress, family tensions and breakdown, boredom, alienation, shame, and stigma, increased social isolation, crime, and erosion of confidence and self-esteem. Hence, political thuggery, militancy, restiveness, and other social vices, including; drug abuse and trafficking, prostitution, crime rate and poverty are on the increase.

It is difficult to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 without the active participation of the largest generation of change-makers – the youths. To ensure active participation of youths in both national, regional and global development, social inclusiveness in the formulation and implementation of policies that affect the social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects of the life of the society is imperative (World Bank, 2021; UNDESA, 2019).

Using the theory of social exclusion, this study analyzed the effects of psychedelic drug abuse on youth participation in national development. Qualitative research method was used to generate and analyze the data. One-on-one interview and a semi-structured interview guide were used on 20 respondents (youth psychedelic drug users and sellers) in commercial towns of Awka, Onitsha, Ihiala, and Oko in Anambra State, Nigeria. Snowball sampling technique was used to get the targets. Using socially

inclusive techniques, recommendations were teased out on how to assist those already addicted to these drugs to break from the habit. Ways to prevent indulgence in such addictive behavior were also suggested.

Questions that guided the study were: Why do youths use psychedelic drugs for non-medical purposes? What structures make the youths to go into taking psychedelic drugs? How does addiction to these drugs deny the youths opportunities to participate in the development of the nation? What can be done to remedy the situation?

### **Psychedelic drugs and their effects**

Psychedelic drugs, also known as hallucinogenic drugs or simply hallucinogens, are a class of psychoactive substances that produce changes in perception, mood and cognitive processes (ADF, 2021). They are a group of substances that are usually used recreationally to change and enhance sensory perceptions, thought processes, and energy levels, and to facilitate spiritual experiences. They include chemicals, such as LSD, and plants, such as peyote (Hartney, 2020). They affect all the senses, altering a person's thinking, sense of time and emotions. They are mind-expanding drugs that can induce states of altered perception and thought, frequently with heightened awareness of sensory input but with diminished control over what is being experienced. They can also cause a person to hallucinate, seeing or hearing things that do not exist or are distorted. There are many kinds of psychedelics. Some occur naturally, in trees, vines, seeds, fungi and leaves. Others are made in laboratories (Hartney, 2020).

Psychedelics have also been used experimentally to mimic psychosis and to exert mind control, although they have not been found to be particularly effective in doing either. They were used in psychotherapy in the 1960s, but this was halted for mainly political reasons until quite recently. Psychological research has since revived the use of psychedelics in experimental psychological treatment (Hartney, 2020).

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Use of hallucinogens dates back to centuries in many cultures, and some are still used in religious ceremonies. The rave culture of the 1980s brought a new wave of ecstasy use, which continues today. Most psychedelic drugs fall into one of the three families of chemical compounds: tryptamines, phenethylamines, or lysergamides (ADF, 2021).

There is no safe level of drug use. Psychedelics affect everyone differently, based on the person's size, weight, and health, whether the person is used to taking it, whether other drugs are taken around the same time, the quantity taken, and the strength of the drug (varies from batch to batch) (ADF, 2021).

The effects of psychedelics can last several hours and vary considerably, depending on the specific type of psychedelic. The following may be experienced during this time: feelings of euphoria, sense of relaxation and wellbeing, seeing and hearing things that aren't there, confusion and trouble concentrating, dizziness, blurred vision, clumsiness, fast or irregular heartbeat, breathing quickly, vomiting, sweating and chills, numbness. In addition, sometimes the person can experience a 'bad trip', which is frightening and disturbing hallucinations. This can lead to panic and unpredictable behaviour, like running across a road or attempting suicide. If a person takes a large amount or have a strong batch, the person is likely to experience negative effects of psychedelics. Also, the most common long-term effect of psychedelic use is the 'flashback' – a re-experience of the drug which can occur days, weeks, months and even years later. Flashbacks can be triggered by the use of other drugs or by stress, fatigue, or physical exercise. The flashback experience can range from being pleasant to causing severe feelings of anxiety. They are usually visual and last for a minute or two (ADF, 2021).

Sometimes, these psychedelic drugs are mixed with other drugs and taken by some persons. The effects of mixing psychedelics with other drugs, including alcohol, prescription medications and over-the-counter

medicines, are often unpredictable. Mixing psychedelics with stimulant drugs increases the stimulant effects and can further increase heart rate and place the body under extreme stress. Stimulants can also increase anxiety which can lead to a negative experience. Combining psychedelics with depressant drugs such as alcohol may further reduce coordination and increases the chances of vomiting. Alcohol may also decrease the effects of the psychedelic.

It is difficult to predict the strength and effects of psychedelics (even if they have been taken before), as the strength and potency can vary from batch to batch. Also, people with mental health conditions or a family history of these conditions can be adversely affected by using psychedelics. Use of psychedelics is likely to be more dangerous when taken in combination with alcohol or other drugs, particularly stimulants such as crystal methamphetamine ('ice') or ecstasy, driving or operating heavy machinery, judgement or motor coordination is required, alone (in case medical assistance is required) and if the person has mental health issues.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework is based on social exclusion because social exclusion is a theoretical concept, a lens through which people look at reality (de Haan, 2001). Although there is no universally agreed definition or benchmark for social exclusion, lack of participation in society is at the core of nearly all definitions put forth by scholars, government bodies, non-governmental organizations, and others.

Generally, social exclusion is a complex, multi-dimensional and dynamic process (Levitas et al., 2007; Barnes, 2005) in which various forms of exclusion are combined; participation in decision-making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes (Byrne, 1999). It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to

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participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to many people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural, or political spheres of life. It is a society wide, process, induced by wider changes and working itself through in specific ways shaped by national contexts and negatively affecting the ability of particular groups (Madanipour, 1998). It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole (Mack, 2016).

It is a process that systematically deprives individuals and families, groups and neighborhoods of the resources required for participation in the social, economic, and political activity of society as a whole (DFID, 2005; Pierson, 2002). Participation may be hindered when people lack access to material resources, including income, employment, land, and housing, or to such services as education and health care which are essential foundations of well-being that are captured in Agenda 2030. Yet participation is also limited when people cannot exercise their voice or interact with each other, and when their rights and dignity are not accorded equal respect and protection. Thus, social exclusion entails not only material deprivation but also lack of agency or control over important decisions as well as feelings of alienation and inferiority (UN, 2016). These are due to transformations beyond their individual control.

The underlying points here are, that social exclusion is both a state and a process which is undertaken systematically and makes those targeted unable to participate, citizens' rights on livelihoods and living standards are not recognized and respected, and it the opposite of social integration (Gore & Figueiredo, 1997 pp.17-18). It is a kind of injustice (Fraser (2003, p.56). It emphasizes horizontal ties of belonging, although these may give rise to vertical distribution (Silver, 2007).

Social exclusion can be a conscious or and unconscious process. Conscious when it is planned and systematically executed, unconscious when it is imbedded in social structures like culture or social institutions

and have taken time to be assimilated by the inhabitants within the institution who accept that it is a way of life that may or may not be changed based on the tradition they inherited. When it is accepted as a social norm, it is upheld through invisible and sometimes unwritten traditions that works to foster the hegemony.

### **Youths and social exclusion**

Youth exclusion is a form of social exclusion in which the youths are deprived of access to and their right to participate actively in the social, economic, and political lives of the society. It is a form of social exclusion in which youths are at a social disadvantage in joining institutions and organizations in their societies.

Youth exclusion is multi-dimensional in that age, race, gender, class, and lifestyle affect youth life experiences within a given society. This intersectionality affects the extent to which an individual youth experiences exclusion. More so, youth exclusion is relational because as social exclusion contains two parties, the excluders and the excluded who interact in different forms and experience different aspects of the society in different ways. In most cases, the excluders are often older generations who believe that the political, social, and economic support services and institutions that help the youth participate and grow within the society would empower them to sideline or puts their own comfortable standard of living at risk.

Youth exclusion is contextual in the sense that, youth are excluded in different ways depending on their spatial and socio-cultural, political, and economic location. A youth in an urban area experiences a different form of exclusion with a youth in a rural area. The same applies with a youth in an urban rich neighborhood and a youth in an urban poor neighborhood, they experience different forms of exclusion. The differences in the opportunities and access to resources provided in one

neighborhood can create a divide among youth who are included and youth who are excluded from their communities.

**The cyclical effects of Social Exclusion of Youths on the abuse of psychedelic drugs and vice versa**

For the purposes of this study, we will interchange Youth social exclusion and social exclusion as we analyze the data generated from our fieldwork. This is to make easy understanding of the meaning embedded in the flow of information.

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) said recent statistics have revealed that 40 per cent of Nigerian youth between 18 and 35 years are deeply involved in the abuse of drugs. This high percentage of youths' involvement in drugs was blamed in poor parenting for the increasing wave of drug abuse in the country (*The Premium Times*, 2021) and this is a threat to the nations development as well as has negative impact on public health and safety.

In another development, NDLEA also disclosed that, a total of 14.3 million Nigerians between the ages of 15 to 64 engage in one form of drug abuse or the other. One of the commanders of the agency added that while drug use is prevalent among ages 25 to 39, one of every four drug users in Nigeria is a woman (*The Sun Newspaper*, 2021). While shedding more light into the distribution, he noted that cannabis, popularly known as Igbo, is the most commonly abused drug in Nigeria with a population of 10.6 million indulging in it. He added about 4.6 million Nigerians had used opioids such as Tramadol codeine or morphine for non-medical purposes, while an estimated 376,000 Nigerians indulge in high-risk drug use. In addition, it is regrettable that one of every five Nigerians, who had used drugs in the past or at the moment is today suffering from one form of drug related health challenge or disorder (*The Sun Newspaper*, 2021).

This has negative impacts on the individual drug users as well as on the Nigerian society in general.

As a result of the unstable economy, lack of employment opportunities, lack of government empowerment programs, lack of participation in decision-making that affect their lives, barriers to education, dysfunctional social institutions, cultural norms that stipulate that they are not of age and several other “lacks” and “deprivations” in the Nigerian society, most youths are frustrated because they do not see a bright future for themselves.

The resultant effect of the above makes some of them to take to the use of psychedelic drugs for non-medical purposes to reduce the effects of what they are feeling or to do jobs that ordinarily they would not do to make a living. Most respondents explained that the reasons they use these drugs are because of boredom, curiosity, emotional pressure, peer influences, to make them bold, for solace, media influence, positive reinforcement, rebellion, self-medication, social celebration, to avoid feeling bad, to feel good, to study, to delay premature ejaculation when having sex.

In addition, as a result of the influence of these drugs, they have the morale to engage in extraordinary activities or crimes such as drug possession and use, drug trafficking, robbery, prostitution and other sex crimes, terrorism, political gangsters, which results in loss of lives and properties, loss of productivity, loss of labour force, anarchy in society and sense of satisfaction that they have taken their pound of flesh from the society that neglects and excludes them.

Furthermore, a closer look at the data generated from the interview with respondents, there is a cycle of social exclusion leading to abuse of psychedelic drugs, and the abuse of psychedelic drugs reinforcing social exclusion.

Economically, social exclusion over the years has created a poverty trap among majority of Nigerians. With the unstable economic

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growth, most people fall in and out of poverty at different times. Being on the margins of poverty line creates a sense of hopelessness especially when the rich continue to be rich at the expense of the poor and parade their affluence to other members of the community without qualms of conscience.

In Nigeria, the majority of the population live at the threshold of poverty line. As a result of a systematic negligence and subtle politicization of almost every facet of the decision-making and implementation arms of the government, the majority who are excluded from the political, economic, and social lives of the nation feel frustrated as a result of constant manipulation from those at the helm of affairs.

The prolonged deprivation of empowerment and the constant sense of exclusion creates a sense of aloofness and alienation among the population thereby luring many affected individuals into the use of abuse of psychedelic drugs and crime as a reaction to the situation and/or as a means of survival.

Culturally, the youths are regarded as being at a stage in life where they are still learning how to manage the vicissitudes of life. They have not come of age, they are still observing, asking questions, and understanding what life throws at them as such they cannot analyze comprehensively how to manage themselves and others in the society. They still have time to graduate to the stage where they will do that. This whole scenario creates a sense of alienation, exclusion, frustration, and detachment from the society.

Socially excluded youths live in poor housing and insecure neighborhoods. They also lack opportunities to be educated, which makes them to have low skills and mainly engage in low-income jobs. They are exposed to poor amenities in terms of education, healthcare, security, transport and often live on low dietary foods. The constant rise in food prizes and other essential commodities affect them drastically.

On the contrary, the elites (rich) who exclude the disadvantaged in the society live in affluent, well secured neighborhoods that have all the basic infrastructure that makes life comfortable. Their children have opportunities to be educated in good and quality schools and in the end acquire best skills and jobs available. Elites are highly rich and try always to maintain the status quo. They build an intergenerational dynasty of wealth at the expense of the disadvantaged and they recycle themselves in power with hegemonistic attitudes that would keep the youths excluded in the society.

Socially excluded people feel both deprived and cheated especially when they live in a community where they see on daily basis how the gap between the rich and the poor is widening, when they experience the affluence of the rich who use the community resources to enrich themselves at the detriment of the majority who are poor.

So, the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor created a sense of hopelessness to the poor who struggle to make a living but the effort they put is not commensurate with the gains they make. This increases the rate of property, economic and violent crimes as well as dependence on drugs or solace.

Problematic drug users often come from poor and socially excluded communities. They have a restricted scope of choices and experience disadvantages. Socially excluded individuals rush to the use of hard drugs due to the feeling of detachment, alienation, and hopelessness that they experience.

When the youth see the older members of the society living comfortably as a result of inequitable distribution of the nation's resources, some of them feel manipulated, cheated and not having a voice in their society and in determining their future destinations. Some opined that this consequently leads them to violent activities in order to be recognized and respected in the society since violence seems to be the only way the political and social elites seem to understand.

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On the other hand, it is important to point out that from the data generated that, most times, abuse of drugs leads to social exclusion. Exclusion at this stage is at two different levels. An individual may exclude himself or herself and an individual maybe excluded by the society.

The influence of psychedelic drugs affects the behavioral patterns of the user. This in turn makes the person to be hyperactive or low in carrying out daily tasks like assignments given in a workplace. This affects the output of the user in utilizing his or her skills in the workplace and subsequently it leads to low income.

Psychedelic drug user may consider himself or herself not fit to work or mingle with other members of the society. This low self-esteem affects both the user's outlook to life and the level of integration in the society too.

Drug users are most times considered immoral and stigmatized in the communities where they live. These experiences traumatize the users and if not addressed may lead to low self-esteem and its consequent negative behavioral patterns.

Economically, drugs in this case psychedelic drugs are expensive to maintain when one is addicted to them. Bearing in mind that most socially excluded youths lack the financial muscle to maintain the constant intake of these drugs, they will constantly be impoverished.

Also, most youths who are drug users are not well educated and even if they are, the influence of the drugs affects the output in using their skills to make more income. But for the uneducated drug users, they lack skills to work and make a comfortable living. This entails they work in low paying jobs and are low-income earners. Stretching this further means that they are sometimes unemployed depending on the state of the economy. They live in low housing neighborhoods, are exposed to unhealthy environment with diseases and sicknesses. When sick, they receive poor healthcare. All these lead to low life expectancy.

### **Conclusion**

Social exclusion leads some youths to drug abuse and drug abuse reinforces social exclusion both at individual and societal levels. To break this vicious cycle, we need the intervention of the members of the family, the government, and the conscious efforts of the youths.

Social inclusion is the remedy for growth, integration, and maturity in a society. The youths cannot grow, learn, integrate properly, and mature in the society if they are excluded from participating in the life of the society at different times and in different capacities. The youths cannot belong to the society if they are denied opportunities to experience, contribute and develop the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of the life of the society they find themselves.

An inclusive society to make the youths develop their potentials and contribute towards the sustainable development of the society in which they live is imperative. This would make the youths not to see any reason or need of psychedelic drug abuse in any way, thus breaking the vicious cycle of social exclusion that leads to drug abuse, and drug abuse that reinforces social exclusion.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the research findings:

1. The collaborative efforts of all stakeholders – Government, Drug Control Agencies, Community, Schools, family members etc. are needed to arrest the situation.
2. The family is the nucleus of every society. Parents should be encouraged to learn and be informed on drug education and teach their children the implications of the use, abuse, and the danger of

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drugs to individuals and the society as part of health, moral and character development.

3. Ministry of education (State and Federal) should add drug-related education to the school curricula at all levels of education.
4. The Ministry of Education in conjunction with the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse (NACADA) should facilitate the provision of services to support students with social and behavioral problems emanating from drug abuse.
5. School administrators should develop, implement, and regularly monitor and review, in consultation with the school community and governing council, a school behavioral code which is consistent with the drug abuse policies.
6. Teachers should develop and foster positive relationships with students and families; communicate and interact effectively with students.
7. Counseling centers should be established in every community by the government or private individuals. Qualified health counsellors should be employed in helping drug addicts or those dependent on drugs by giving them special advice on how to go about the withdrawal system.
8. National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) should intensify their campaigns on antidrug to have a drug free society. The campaign against use of certain drugs and misuse of drugs should be more intensified at the secondary school level because it is the peak of adolescent. Also, government and other relevant authorities should launch out campaigns against drug abuse as well as dependence.
9. The government (Federal, state, and local levels) should enact measures on people that are selling drugs indiscriminately and illegally. Through the law enforcement agencies, the government

should monitor and supervise the target area for illicit drugs sales at least monthly if possible and check the activities of the victims of drug abuse.

10. Establishment of more drug rehabilitation centers in addition to upgrading the existing rehabilitation centers.
11. Government at all levels should give room for youths to participate actively in governance. Confidence on the capabilities of youths to lead is needed to make this possible.
12. Youths' empowerment and skill acquisition opportunities should be made available by government at all levels and monitored to avoid politicization of these opportunities.

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