

# Drug Intake Among Teenagers in Nigerian Primary and Secondary Schools: A Challenge to School Social Workers

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## Abstract

*The study examined drug intake among teenagers in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria and the challenges posed to school social worker in the process of handling this ugly trend using Ilorin metropolis as a case in point. The study relied purely on primary data (quantitative and qualitative) collected from pupils/students, teachers and other staff attached to both public and privately owned primary and secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis. Findings of the study revealed that the major drugs commonly abused by teenagers include tramadol, methamphetamine, marijuana/cigarette, codeine and others. It was also revealed from the study findings that peer pressure, bad parenting, economic challenges/hardship, unconducive school environment amongst other were the major precipitating factors. The study revealed that the application of social work interventional approaches/techniques and skills (counselling, advocacy, teaching, mediation, coordination and others) have been highly relevant in stemming down the wave of this social malice meddling with the future of Nigerian youths. The study recommended the need for every primary and secondary schools to have social workers and a clinical centre established in each school.*

**Key Words:** Drug, Drug intake/abuse, Challenges, Social work, School.

## Introduction

The use of illicit drugs and other psychoactive substances by teenagers in the school system have become a global phenomenon and not peculiar to Nigeria and other Sub-Saharan African countries. Initially, this social decadence used to be associated with tertiary institutions but have now assumed an epidemic level sweeping across countries and found in almost every tier of the society from primary to secondary schools, among business people, civil servants, artisans as well as artists (Oladeinde, 2021). In 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) carried out a global survey where it was revealed that between 25-90% of teenagers in the streets and schools globally use psychoactive substances of different forms (Owoyomi, 2018). Similarly, in 2019 it was reported that about 165.5 million people across the world were into the use of harmful drugs (Miller, 2022). In South Africa for instance, 15% of teenagers were said to be addicted to drugs (Fernandes & Mokwena, 2016) while Afghanistan and Iran seems to record the highest among all countries of the world with 2.7% and 2.3% respectively of her population aged 15 years and above involved in use of harmful drugs (Khanyi & Malesa, 2022). In the western pacific region, more than 80% of teenage (Boys & Girls) aged 10-19 years were also reported to have indulged in drugs and alcohol at one particular point or the other (Idowu et al, 2018). In Nigeria, the situation is not different. In other words, Nigerian teenagers have equally become addicted to different types of harmful drugs just like their foreign counterpart, which they consume daily in the schools and at street corners. According to one of the reports released by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), about 40% of Nigerian youths are deeply into drug use and alcohol consumption which has become a threat to nation building.

Prominent among the drugs commonly used or abused by these teenagers include; marijuana, methamphetamine, cannabis, nicotine, tramadol, caffeine, diazepam, codeine which is said to have a sweet strawberry taste and hot drinks; sachet and small bottled ones (Jaffe, 2017, Okezie-Okeh, 2022). In most of these liquors, the ethanol or alcoholic contents could be very high ranging from 45% to 50% while some may have about 12% to 14% (Kambo, 2015). Okezie-Okeh (2022) also revealed that it was South Americans, Columbians and their partners in Nigeria that introduced methamphetamine which appears to be the most populous one being used by teenagers and others in Nigeria in 2009 and which had caused an incalculable mental havoc among the growing population of the country. The drugs have become so easy to access by anybody who may need them. In some countries like the United States, the use of marijuana and cocaine among teenagers seem to be very high about four times compared to their use in

other countries like New Zealand and Brazil (Warner,2013). Africa seems to be presently experiencing a kind of geometrical increase in the consumption of many of the illicit drugs by her teenagers and which emanated from the African's role in South Africa's drug trafficking routes (Haysom et al, 2018). It was revealed that consequent to the attainment of political independence in 1994, South Africa operated a porous border that opened the way for all forms of illicit drugs into the continent (Khanyi & Malesa, 2022).

In Nigeria and like many other countries, the use of the illicit drugs by teenagers and others appear to be more rampant in the urban areas although spreading gradually to many rural areas of most countries especially in Africa. Eeguranti et al (2009) in a study conducted in Osogbo, Osun state on the prevalence of drugs and other substance abuse among secondary school students reported that 20.3% displayed positive response to the abuse of harmful drugs and other alcoholic substances. In a related study among secondary school students comprising of those in public and privately owned schools in Jos, Plateau State, North-Central Nigeria. Onoja (2010) revealed that 15% of the students were involved in the use of harmful drugs. Similarly, in another empirical study conducted in Osun state, South west, Nigeria, Ogunsola and Fatusi (2016) reported that two-third of in-school adolescents in the state had been addicted to illicit drugs and other psycho-active substances in both rural areas (65.7%) and those of urban areas (66%). In another study conducted by Idowu et al (2018) among secondary school students in Oyo state, it was revealed that teenagers (40%) within the ages of 14 and above had positive attitude towards drug use. According to the results of the survey, tramadol was the most commonly abused drug among teenagers which they take purposely to enhance their intellectual capacities.

Research evidence has shown that drug intake among teenagers especially in primary and secondary schools could result from multi-dimensional forces which ranges from personality traits, family environment/poor parenting, peer pressure, economic hardship and unemployment, school environment, lack of well-defined policies and other contextual issues (Owoyomi, 2018, Kheswa & Makhalemele, 2020, Gunda & Mbwirire, 2020, Snoubar, 2020, Oladeinde, 2021). Ogunnaike (2021) posits that drug intake and consumption of other alcoholic substances among teenagers in the school are caused by parents who have abandoned their parental responsibilities in pursuit of material things as well as poor government policy on corporal punishment. Since the number of working mothers are increasing on daily basis, the tendency is that children are left in the hands of house maids and care givers to look after them (Gunda & Mbwirire, 2020) while the government at the same time feel less concerned in coming up with adequate disciplinary measures to be applied to students and pupils involved in drug use (Oladeinde, 2021). Studies have also revealed that teenagers who grew up in a family characterized by domestic violence and other forms of conflicts are usually addicted to drugs as they see nothing wrong in drug dependence (Van Brada, 2017, Snoubar, 2020). On the other hand, Oladeinde (2021) also pointed out that parents and care givers in Nigeria and other African countries have in the recent time tolerated immorality publicly by allowing their children to imbibe bad contents from entertainers and artists.

Peer pressure also appears to be another potential factor that drive many teenagers to drug addiction right from primary school level. In other words, the peer influence, experiential curiosity or the attempt to fit in or feel high increases ones sensation for drug intake (Idowu et al, 2018). Van-Atta (2005) also stated that association with drug abusing peers is often the most immediate risk factor that expose teenagers to drug addiction. Edwin Sutherland's "Differential Association Theory" equally confirmed that the principal part of learning all forms of juveniles or criminal activities including drug intake are within intimate peers or personal groups (Conklin, 2007). That is to say that individuals tend to associate with peers who share similar behaviors and attitude favourable to the activities they are likely to engage in. In a study conducted in Hhohho region in Swaziland Mhlongo (2005) revealed that peer group pressure and perception of being accepted by friends formed one of the major predisposing factors that push teenagers into drug intake especially in the schools. In other places like Chicago, Hughes and Short (2014) noted that male teenagers who demonstrated strong affinity to low quality peers were identified to be drug and substance abusers.

The economic situation of many nations including Nigeria where the unemployment rate is high with acute inflationary trend, the involvement of teenagers in drug intake could be rampant as parents who are unemployed may not have the basic necessities of life for the children. It is extremely difficult to train children without providing them with their basic needs as the children's inability to cope with hunger and other necessities may result to frustration which automatically drag them into substance intake (Snoubar, 2020, Ogunnaike, 2021). More so, the school environment is deemed to be another risk factor that push teenagers into drug use in Nigeria. According to Kheswa and Makhalemele

(2020), an overcrowded school environment is a fertile ground for teenagers to engage in drugs and other alcoholic substances especially where there is no system in place to check those in possession of such hazardous substances. Many schools in the rural areas in Nigeria operate in collapsed buildings and under tree sheds with few teachers resulting to little or no supervision on the general conduct of the pupils. In addition, the use of some hazardous drugs and alcoholic drinks by teenagers may not be seen as a social problem in some societies, hence, children from such climes see drug or alcoholic intake as a way of life (Snoubar, 2020). This assumption may be true especially in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Studies have shown that the escalating rate of drug and substance abuse among teenagers in primary and secondary schools has a colossal effect on the overall development of any nation (Owoyomi, 2018, Idowu et al, 2018, Nkhoma & Mafumbate, 2019). Apart from subjecting the abusers to depression, mental illness and imminent death through suicide, homicide, accident or illness, it also opens the chapters of failure, nightmare, cultism, yahoo boys, ritualism and desperate urge to make money by all means (Oladeinde, 2021). In the United States, research evidence had confirmed that about 30% of incidence of suicides by teenagers are related to drug intake (Adeparua, 2022). The academic performance of the children is also bound to be relatively poor as most of them play truancy and lack concentration in the school. In addition to damaging the body system of the abuser, drug intake by teenagers put a heavy financial burden on the individuals, families and society in general. Nkhoma and Mafumbate (2019) remarked that the increasing drug use by teenagers have been the bane for underdevelopment of many countries as resources are being diverted to strengthen the health care services and security apparatus. Apart from the increased financial costs for medical and other treatment services for the teenagers, there still exist a kind of an unimaginable distress and injuries suffered by people who happen to become victims of drug/alcoholic related crimes (Gropper, 1985).

Social work as a profession is concerned with people who are vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed and socially excluded. In other words, social workers champion issues concerning the well being and adjustments in the situation of people for whom the wider society have no interest on what they are going through in life (Okitikpi & Aymer, 2003). School social work being an aspect of the general social work practice has as its core mandate to help pupils/students in primary and secondary schools attain a high sense of competence and readiness for continued learning as well as developing the ability to adapt to changes (Brieland et al, 1980). According to Pierson (2011), the emergence of school social work in the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century was greeted with renewed sense of personal responsibility and determination to act as moral adviser and friend for children with special needs and to promote responsible behavior among pupils and students in schools.

For the fact that many children in the school operate from broken homes where parents do not care for them adequately and resulting to frustration and indulgence in drug abuse, the school social workers see to the enhancement of the educational needs of the pupils/students (Drupper, 2007). This they do through counselling, teaching, mediating, linkages and advocating for situation that is deemed favourable to their wellbeing. In the same vein, Okah et al (2017) stated that school social workers play some vital roles on the wellbeing of students and pupils in schools through advocacy that makes it possible for the social worker to intercede and speak to ensure that students are not exposed to any harm in respect of decision taken concerning their overall wellbeing. The authors also posited that in addition, the school social workers undertake therapeutic role; that is, to ensure that adequate psycho-social stability is guaranteed for good academic performance as well as collaborating with other allied professionals to better the lots of students/pupils. The use of therapeutic or clinical approach has the advantage of bringing the pupils and the social worker on a one-on-one interaction to ascertain the psychological and emotional deficiencies capable of exposing the individual to drug intake (Miller, 2022). Studies have shown that clinical intervention could be most effective in the early stage of substance use through generating information and awareness of the discrepancy between current behavior and desired behavior (Jensen et al, 2011, Barretti, 2012). Okah et al (2017) also argued that apart from the clinical or therapeutic approach adopted by the school social workers, they also employ the 'School change and social interaction models' meant to neutralize all forms of dysfunctional norms and conditions within the aspects of the school environment. In addition, the school social worker undertakes the community welfare approach to assess treatment centres that will assist or treat students /pupils addicted with drugs (Miller, 2022). They also play the role of coordinators of community resources for parents, teachers and students as well as participate in teaching the students some relevant skills to prevent boredom and frustration which may breed anti-social behaviours.

Evidence from some studies have revealed that for the school social worker to record positive results in the interventional techniques and bring about changes in the lives of teenagers involved in drug use, there is the need to observe some aspects of knowledge and skill development (Miller, 2006, Okah et al, 2017). The researchers maintained

that communication skills, counseling/advisory skills and others are necessary as they enable changes from such an undesirable emotional state occasioned by drug use/addiction to a more desirable situation capable of enhancing one's wellbeing. Social workers in the school system try to maintain effective communication connecting all sub-systems of the school for positive changes on the individuals and the overall environment.

For the fact that social work is concerned with the maladjusted individuals or those who are impaired in their day-to-day functioning of their lives, it is necessary to consider the school system as a very veritable area where social workers can comfortably deploy their skills and knowledge to assist students and pupils who have been trapped by use of harmful drugs. This is the concern of this study. The study was anchored on 'Differential Association Theory' enunciated by Edwin Sutherland in 1939. According to the theorist, delinquent or criminal behaviors which include the abuse of drugs and consumption of other harmful substances are learned and passed to others in the process of communication and interaction among intimate personal groups (Conklin, 2007). In other words, most teenagers in both primary/secondary and other educational levels take to drugs as a result of association and influence from peers, class mates and others that are already abusing drugs (Henslin, 2009). The implication is that a teenager who associate with a marijuana smoker for instance may become even more oriented toward the use of methamphetamine, codeine, cocaine and other hard drugs hence the need for social work intervention.

As this social malady keep rising on daily basis in Nigeria, the recurring messages from many stake holders and policy makers is that the final decision lies with the drug abuser and that it has to be a personal conviction never to abuse drugs (Oladeinde, 2021). This lack of concerted effort have increased the number of conflicting burdens and incompatible expectations placed on social workers (Khanyi & Malesa, 2022). Prior studies were conducted mostly in developed countries with few in Nigeria and dwelling solely on counseling services (Nkhoma & Mafumbate, 2019, Gunda & Mbirire, 2020). The present study examines the role and challenges posed to school social workers in Niger is on drug intake among teenagers in primary and secondary schools using Ilorin metropolis as a reference point.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general objective of the study was to examine the role of school social workers in Nigerian Primary and secondary schools and challenges experienced with teenagers in drug intake . In addition to this general objective, the following specific objectives also came into play.

- (i). To ascertain the precipitating factors that compel teenagers in Nigeria primary and secondary schools to drug intake.
- (ii). To find out the techniques or approaches and skills employed by school social workers in the process of assisting teenagers involved in drug abuse in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria.
- (iii). To find out the major obstacles meddling with social work intervention program with teenagers involved in drug intake in Nigerian primary and secondary schools.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were posed in line with the study objectives.

- (i). What are the major factors that are likely to instigate teenagers in primary and secondary schools to drug intake?
- (ii). What are the approaches adopted by school social workers in Nigeria while handling teenagers in drug abuse in primary and secondary schools?
- (iii). What are the obstacles or limiting factors that confront school social workers in their intervention process with teenagers in drug abuse in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted descriptive survey research design which has as one of its advantages the inability of the researcher to exercise control or manipulate the variable of interest. The population of the study comprises of all students/pupils, teachers and other staff in primary and secondary schools situated in Ilorin metropolis. Data for the study were sought primarily using the questionnaire and in-depth interview (IDI). Cluster sampling was used to bring together all privately owned schools (primary and secondary) and put differently from those owned by the government. Thereafter, simple random sampling was used to choose four (4) schools from each of the clusters (2 each for primary and secondary schools owned by private individuals/organizations and another 2 each for those schools i.e. primary and

secondary schools owned by the government) giving a total of eight (8) schools on the whole from two major areas in Ilorin metropolis (Tanke and Taiwo) that were purposely chosen because of the great number of schools therein.

Going by the fact that most pupils in primary and secondary schools may find it difficult in completing the questionnaire, the administration of the questionnaire was then restricted to teachers and other staff in the selected schools. These workers are always with the children and can comfortably give genuine information concerning their activities especially as it relates to issues of drug intake as no child can ever admit being a drug user. Ten (10) respondents were drawn from each of the schools making a total of eighty (80) respondents. In addition, eight (8) students/pupils were chosen, that is, one (1) per school purposively from those in senior or final year (primary/secondary) of selected schools for in-depth interview. Data collected from questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics with frequency, tables and percentages while the qualitative data were tape recorded, transcribed and content analysed.

## Results

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=80).**

	Frequency	Percentages (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	30	38
Female	50	62
<b>Age (in years)</b>		
Below 20	6	8
21-30	11	13
31-40	30	38
41-50	21	26
50+	12	15
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	31	39
Married	44	55
Ever married	5	6
<b>Religion</b>		
Christainity	26	33
Islam	54	67
Others	-	-
<b>Level of Education</b>		
SSCE/NECO	-	-
NCE	52	65
HND/Degree	28	35
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Teaching Staff	63	79
Non-Teaching	17	21
<b>Grade Level</b>		
01-04	19	24
05-09	43	53
10 and above	18	

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

The above table (Table 1) presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Majority of the respondents (62%) were females and 38% and 26% within the ages of 31-40 and 41-50 years respectively. More than half (55%) of the sample were married with only 39% and 6% respectively being single and ever married. Similarly, more than two-third of the total sample belong to the Islamic religious faith with the remaining 26% being christians as the two forms the dominant religion in the study area. More than half (65%) had NCE or its equivalent while 28% possess HND/Degree with non for SSCE. In addition, 79% of the respondents were teaching staff leaving only 21% who are non-teaching. The grade level/ranking shows that 53% were within level 05-09, 24% in level 01-04 while 23% composed of those within the salary grade level 10 and above.

**Table 2: Respondents' view on the Nature of Drugs being Abused by Students/Pupils (N=80).**

Nature of drugs	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Tramadol	27	34
Methamphetamine	22	28
Marijuana/Cigarette	20	35
Others	11	

**Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022.**

From the above table (Table 2), majority of the respondents (34%) indicated that tramadol was the most frequently used drugs by student/pupils in primary and secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis followed by methamphetamine (28%) while 25% indicated marijuana/cigarette. A very small percentage (13%) of the sample indicated 'others' which may include such drugs like codeine and alcoholic syrups. Expressing similar opinion, a male participant of senior secondary in the IDI had this to say:

*I have never involved myself in taking any harmful drugs but I am aware that many boys are into that. I have seen many boys drinking alcohol in sachets and in small bottles but I can't just say the names although outside our school, I can say that marijuana is one of them.*

**Table 3: Respondents' view on factors that push pupils/students into drug intake (N=80)**

Issues	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor parenting	19	24
Peer pressure	22	28
Socio-economic challenges	18	23
Neglect of traditional value system	5	

**Source:** Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

Efforts made to ascertain the major factors that compel teenagers in primary/secondary schools into the use of harmful drugs shows that peer pressure (28%) and poor parenting (24%) or inability of parents to inculcate or give appropriate attention to children were on top of the list. Socio-economic challenges in the form of unemployment, loss of job by parents/guardians or collapse of business ventures and unconducive school environment followed (23% and 20% respectively) while others (5%) were those who were of the view that our current neglect of the traditional value compelling factor. In the same way, a female participant in IDI in a senior stated thus:

*Peer pressure can drag you to do what you never intended to doing. Most of our boys do take such substances in order to meet up while some girls also mess themselves up. I thank God for the type of parents I have. If you try such in my family, you are gone.*

**Table 4: Respondents' view on the role of school social workers and techniques employed to handle teenagers in drug intake (N=80).**

Issues	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Promote responsible behavior through Counseling	27	34
Advocate for pupils/students wellbeing	15	19
Enhancing the educational needs of pupils	20	25
Teach pupils/students some relevant skills that help to overcome frustration	10	13
Coordination of community resources	5	6
Don't know	3	3

**Source:** Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

As seen from the above table (Table 4), virtually, all the respondents acknowledged the crucial role and techniques employed by school social workers on the wellbeing of students/pupils especially as it relates to use of harmful drugs. 34% of respondents indicated promotion of responsible behaviors on the parts of the pupils through counseling while 25% and 19% respectively indicated enhancement of students' educational need and impartation of some relevant skills that help pupils/students overcome boredom and frustration. Equally, 6% mentioned 'coordination of resources for both parents, teachers and students while the remaining 3% expressed no knowledge. A male participant in the IDI in Tanke corroborated thus:

*Students social workers were once in our school, we really benefited from their counseling They play the same role like our school Guidance/Councillors. I wish they continues to come They also advice you and teach you some skills that will help you even after school*

**Table 5: Respondents' view on obstacles experienced by school social workers (N=80).**

Issues	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Ambiguity/conflict of role with other allied professionals	20	25
Bureaucratic/unclear legislations	5	6
Inadequate trained social workers	41	51
Lack of awareness	12	15
Others	2	3

.Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

Data from the above table (Table 5) shows that more than half of the respondents (51%) claimed that inadequate trained school social workers have been the bottleneck on handling students/pupils involved in drug use in Nigeria primary and secondary schools while 25% saw a kind of mix-up/conflict in roles with other professionals like Guidance/Counsellors, psychologists and others. Similarly, 15% of respondents maintained that there is lack of awareness on the nature of social work and its role in the school system while a small percentage (6%) of respondents pointed at the bureaucratic and unclear legislations in governmental system. A very small percentage of the sample (3%) however indicated 'others' which included some socio-cultural issues and unfriendly social environment. An IDI participant also said:

*Our problem is that what we have here is guidance/counsellors. We don't have social workers. Please what are their roles?*

## Discussion of Findings

The rate at which Nigerian teenagers in primary and secondary schools become deeply involved in drugs and consumption of other psychoactive substances seems to have taken an epidemic dimension. According to Adeparua (2022), there is no better time than now for all stakeholders to rise up to save the Nigerian youths who are seen as the leaders of tomorrow. Findings from the study revealed that the most widely used drugs by students/pupils in primary and secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis include tramadol (34%), methamphetamine (28%), marijuana/cigarette (25%) and others (13%) like codeine or cannabis. This finding confirms the view of Oladeinde (2021) that Nigerian youths have become addicted to different types of drugs which they consume both in the schools and other places on daily basis. Adeparua (2022) also corroborated this view and stated that these harmful drugs are procured from every parts of the streets and districts in the urban and rural areas, pharmaceutical/patent medicine stores, open drug markets, fellow abusers and drug hawkers.

The major factors that compel these teenagers into the use of illicit drugs according to respondents' opinion were peer pressure (22%) followed by poor parenting and socio-economic challenges (19% and 18% respectively). This finding is in line with the provisions of Edwin Sutherland's 'differential association theory' which formed the theoretical framework of the study. Adeparua (2022) noted that such negative peer pressure is very toxic and difficult to resist in most occasions. The author also remarked that some parents and care givers do not live up to the expectations in terms of providing the children with their basic needs and services.

Study findings also revealed that the role of the school social worker is highly imperative especially in promoting responsible behavior on the parts of the teenagers which could be achieved through counseling skills (34%)

while 25% indicated the enhancement of pupils' educational needs. Similarly, 13% and 6% of respondents indicated 'impartation of relevant skills and coordination of community resources for parents, teachers and students (13% and 6%). This finding is in tandem with the views expressed by Snoubar (2020) and Balli (2019) which states that social work in addition to promoting the wellbeing of the individuals also prepare them for the future. On the challenges or obstacles experienced by social workers, respondents' opinion shows that inadequate trained social workers top the list (51%) followed by conflict of role with other allied disciplines; Guidance/counseling, psychology and others (25%) while 15% indicated lack of awareness of what social work is all about.

## Conclusion

The use of harmful drugs by teenagers in both primary and secondary schools in Nigeria have become the order of the day. The outcome of this study has shown that among the drugs being consumed by these teenagers both in Ilorin and other places include; tramadol, methamphetamine, marijuana, codeine and many others. The major factors that tend to compel the teenager to drug intake according to the study findings were peer pressure, bad parenting, economic challenges/hardship, unconducive school environment and others.

## Recommendations

In view of the issues raised in the study, the researcher put forward the following recommendations;

- i. There is the need to train more social workers that will be deployed to all primary and secondary school in Nigeria
- ii. Social clinical or therapeutic centres should be provided to schools.
- iii. The government should wake up and review the security system to stop the proliferation of harmful drugs into the nation.

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