

Drug Abuse and Exacerbation of Violent Crime among Youths in Calabar Metropolis in Nigeria's Cross River State

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[0177] Abstract

The study examined the incidence of drug abuse and violent crime among youth Calabar Metropolis. The study specifically examined the relationships between drug abuse and armed robbery, sexual assault, cultism and exacerbation of Violent Crime among Youth in the study population. The descriptive survey design was for the study. The purposive and simple random sampling technique was used for selecting the research participation. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire. The standard mean deviation was used to analyse the respondents' responses. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was used to statistically test the study hypotheses with a significance of 0.05. The finding of the study revealed that armed robbery, sexual assault, and cultism have a significant relationship with incidence of drug abuse among youth in Calabar Metropolis. The study concluded that the impact of incidence of drug abuse among the Nigerian youth is a cog in the wheel of progress as well as a malaise that malaise the growth of the youth vis- a -vis the society. It was recommended among others that, as a matter of urgent concern government should initiate both reactive and proactive policies and programmes aimed at creating public awareness and sensitizing the masses about the risk associated with indulging in drug abuse. Also, as the saying goes, charity starts at home, therefore parents should teach their kids good morals and reorient them to on the negative effects of drug abuse and violent crimes on their health, society, and human dignity.

Keywords: Armed robbery, Cultism, Exacerbation of violent crime, Incidence of drug abuse, Sexual assault

Introduction

Nigeria, with a youth proportion surpassing 70% of the country's population is plagued by an increasing rate of substance use amidst the frightening projections (Habila, et al., 2024) Majority of contemporary issues and debates borders on incidence of drug abuse and violent crime. This is because its occurrences have exacerbated and affected a substantial number of people expressly or impliedly notwithstanding the race, nationality, ethnicity and geographical regions. According to United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC, 2022) report, around 284 million people aged 15-64 used drugs worldwide in 2020, this a 26 per cent increase over the prior decade. Young people are using more drugs, with use levels today in many countries higher than with the previous generation. In Africa and Latin America, people under 35 represent the majority of people being treated for drug use disorders. In Nigeria, the prevalence of any drug use is estimated at 14.4 per cent or 14.3 million people aged between 15 and 64 years (UNODC, 2018). Substance abuse is a significant concern among the Nigerian youth population, posing a substantial threat to the health and functionality of the independent working population. With young people constituting over 70% of Nigeria's population, the country faces an alarming rise in substance use, which has serious implications for its future workforce (UNODC, 2018; Olanrewaju et al., 2022). The Calabar Metropolis has been identified as one of the key hotspots for this growing epidemic of drug use, thus exacerbating the national crisis (Ekanem & Eyong, 2020).

The most commonly drug used across the globe is cannabis. According to the same report of UNODC (2021), cannabis - has risen from around six per cent to more than 11 per cent in Europe between 2002-2019, and around four per cent to 16 per cent in the United States between 1995-2019, while the percentage of adolescents that perceived cannabis as harmful declined by 40 per cent in the United States and by 25 per cent in Europe. Cannabis is also the most widely used substance in Nigeria, followed by pharmaceutical opioids (mainly tramadol, and to a lesser extent codeine or morphine) and cough syrups containing codeine or dextromethorphan (UNODC, 2018), and more men (annual prevalence of 21.8 per cent or 10.8 million men) than women (annual prevalence of 7.0 per cent or 3.4 million women) reported past-year drug use in Nigeria. The findings of UNODC (2018) also revealed that the estimated annual prevalence of drug use is 10 per cent in North-Central zone, equivalent to 1.5 million past year drug users. The extent of drug use in the North-Central zone is 30 per cent lower than the overall national past year prevalence of drug use in North-Central zone of Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Plateau and Niger States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. Cannabis, cough syrups (containing codeine or dextromethorphan) and pharmaceutical opioids (tramadol, codeine, morphine) are the three groups of substance with high prevalence in the North-Central zone.

One the causes of this drug abuse are peer pressure, family upbringing, age, poverty, unemployment amongst others. Peer pressure plays a major role in influencing many adolescents into drug abuse. This is because peer pressure is a fact of teenage and youth life. As they try to depend less on parents, they show more dependency on their friends. In Nigeria, like other parts of the world, one may not enjoy the company of others unless he conforms to their norms (Onah, Okafor & Onah, 2019). According to Oluremi (2012) youth with personality problems arising from social conditions have been found to abuse drugs. The social and economic status of most Nigerians is below average. Poverty is widespread, broken homes and unemployment is on the increase, therefore our youths roam the streets looking for employment or resort to begging. These situations have been aggravated by lack of skills, opportunities for training and re-training and lack of political will and action to promote job creation by both the government and private concerns (Akwaji et al, 2024).

The prevailing effects of these drug abuses are evidenced on violent crime. Supporting this assertion, Garg and Prusty (2017) highlighted in their study the relationship between drug use and criminal tendencies. They reviewed 35 articles and categorized the factors to include; psychological, family, and educational, peer pressure, biological, and socioeconomic. Not surprising Ezikeudu and Terso (2023) observed that political thuggery, unemployment, poverty and get rich quick syndrome have a significant relationship with youth involvement in banditry. Consequently Ezikeudu and Opara (2025a) also affirmed that there is urgent need for government to strengthen public-private-partnership (PPP) as one of the best policy options and economic approaches. This will assist in the provision of employment to able youths across Nigeria thereby pooling people out of poverty and unemployment who may be willing tool in the hands of politicians. Corroborating the above, Nwagboso, et al. (2024) observed that Nigeria's crucial economic metrics, such as poverty, unemployment, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), have been significantly aggravated by the country's poor internal security situation. As a result, residents, internally displaced persons are now experiencing significant economic hardship prompting the creation of gangs which is negatively impacting Nigeria's current internal security governance (Ezikeudu, et al., 2025c). The researchers noted that the effect of drug addiction/use on violent crimes for the young is indisputable (Anetor & Oyekan-Thomas, 2018; Gotsang, Mashalla, & Secoilwe, 2017). Although there is no published data on the number of cases for 2017 and 2018, data for 2014-2016 showed cases at 8,805, 8,778, and 8,257, respectively indicating how drug addiction may have pushed young adults into violent crimes to feed their habits. Drug-addicted young adults incapable of exercising good judgement with access to firearms kill and maim for resources to purchase drugs, which partly accounts for the large number of young adults involved in armed robbery activities (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016). To arrest this menace police patrol has been touted. Little wonder Ezikeudu, et al. (2024a) observed

that police patrol method of policing improves public safety, reduces crime, of police stop-and-search vis a vis crime prevention. From extant literature consulted, little or no attempt has been made to examine the incidence of drug abuse and the exacerbation of violent crime in the study area lies the gap. It is against this background that the study interrogated the incidence of drug abuse and the exacerbation of violent crime in Calabar metropolis.

Statement of the Problem Drug misuse among young people in Nigeria is currently a widespread issue. Women are not spared from this sinister conduct. According to a recent study by the NDLEA, traders, students, unskilled laborers, and the jobless make up the majority of drug addicts—50–55 percent of them men—while females make up roughly 15–20 percent of the total (Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency). Drug abuse has played a role in society's decline. Despite this, many young people still partake in it. In several mental facilities in Nigeria, many of our adolescents are there getting drug therapy. The numbers of the youths that are mad are larger than old individuals that are insane and youths' insanity is mostly caused by drug misuse. Some young people quit school because they were unable to continue because of the amount of drugs they were doing, which made them insane. Calabar metropolis is not an exception.

Because of compulsive tendency to use drugs a lot of young people are homeless, wandering, delinquent, unemployed, rapists, thugs, and armed robbers among others. Due to drugs, many people's lives and valuables have been lost in accidents and acts of violence. Because of compulsive drug use, which has been a major concern in Nigeria, young people who should be the future of their families, the society at large and beneficial to themselves have wasted their lives. There have been reported cases of violent criminal behavior orchestrated by the illicit use of drugs in and around Calabar metropolis. Such violent crimes include but are not limited to armed robbery, sexual assault, cultism, murder, arson, terrorism, kidnapping, gang violence among others. The perpetration of these violent criminal activities is not without its cost and consequences to both the primary and the secondary victim and the society at large. Criminalisation of politics in Nigeria in general and Cross River State in particular have also exacerbated the problem of armed robbery, cultism, terrorism, kidnapping, and gang violence among others (Ezikeudu, et al., 2025e, Ezikeudu and Opara 2025d, and Njoku and Yusuf 2025). Little, or no research has been carried out in the area of incidence of drug abuse and an exacerbation of violent crime in Calabar Metropolis. This is the knowledge gap this study seeks to fill.

Against these backdrops, this study is set out to examine the relationship between the exacerbation of armed robbery, sexual assault, cultism, and incidence of drug abuse. However, the study raised the following research questions: what is the relationship between incidences of drug abuse and the exacerbation of cultism, rape, sexual assault and armed robbery.

Statements of Hypotheses (a) There is no significant relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of armed robbery in Calabar Metropolis. (b) There is no significant relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of sexual assault in Calabar Metropolis (c) There is no significant relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of cultism in Calabar Metropolis

Theoretical Framework The strain theory propounded by Robert Merton, is used as theoretical framework for this study. The theory was developed by Merton (1957) using Durkheim's concept of anomie. The theory held on five modes of adaptations as its assumptions;

First, the conformist, who accept the culturally defined goals and socially institutionalized means of achieving them, second, the innovator; those who accept the cultural goals but reject the institutional means of achieving the goals e.g. armed robbers. Third, the ritualist; those who reject the goals but accept the institutional means of achieving the goals. Here, the ritualist embraces the rules to a point that they lose sight of the goals completely. Such people insist on the minutiae of detailed adherence to bureaucratic norms even at the expense of achieving the cultural goals. Fourth, the retreatist; those who abandoned both the cultural goals and the institutional means of achieving them. They may be aware of the goals and the

means to achieving them, but may consider themselves alien to the society and refuse to take responsibility, and fifth, the rebellionist; those who reject both the cultural goals and the institutional means of achieving them. Rebels develop new methods or means of achieving cultural goals as modes of adaptation to achieve societal goals. Innovation and rebellion which is the adaptation strategy most associated with criminal behaviours, explains the high rate of crime committed by the youths especially the unemployed in the society who lack access to legitimate means of achieving the societal goals of employment/wealth.

The theory is relevant to the study because the youths in Calabar metropolis seek employment for various reasons and once they cannot secure a job to satisfy their purpose in life and they are faced with strain, this will eventually lead to frustration and other physical and psychological problems due to non-accomplishment of goals and objectives. To achieve socially approved goals through the institutionalized means by the youths in Calabar Metropolis have become disenchanted therefore, they tends to deviate from the conventional and legitimate way of achieving the goals (innovation) and thus indulging in drug abuse which predispose them to violent crime such as arm robbery, cultism, rape amongst others. In Nigeria, scholars such as Ezikeudu, et al. (2025e) and Njoku, Gulu, Joel, & Idris (2025), exploited this theory in their study title "Effects of Voter Intimidation on Political Participation and Criminality in Politics: A Study of Nigeria's Cross River South Senatorial District" Their research discovered that there is a significant relationship between intimidation of voters and criminalization of politics in the study area.

Literature Review

Research on alcohol use and crime, on the other hand, has more often suggested a direct pharmacological effect of alcohol use on violence and hence a larger effect on violent crimes than on property crime. A number of controlled laboratory studies have shown that alcohol intoxication is related to aggression when the subject is provoked (Exum, 2002; Giancola, Helton, Osborne, Terry, Fuss, & Westerfield 2001). Etta and Ojedokun (2017) examined the surge in demand and supply of illicit drugs within Katsina in Nigeria and found a general increase in the use of the drugs benelyn, diazaferm (cough syrup), cannabis, and cigarettes by young adults. The researchers used interpretive or phenomenological approaches and found patterns of drug-related criminality within the peri-urban spaces of Katsina. Young adults were generally poor, socioeconomically deprived, frustrated, and depressed; thus, they found solace in drugs. Etta and Ojedokun disclosed that these drugs are mind-altering. Having conducted a related study focusing on university students in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, Donald (2017) found that peer influence, frustration, and family history of parental deprivation were notable factors that predisposed young adults to criminal behavior, thus concluding that violence and crime were associated with the use of psychoactive drugs.

Supporting these findings, Garg and Prusty (2017) highlighted in their study the relationship between drug use and criminal tendencies. They reviewed 35 articles and categorized the factors to include (a) psychological, (b) family, (c) educational, (d) peer risk, (e) biological, and (f) socioeconomic. The researchers noted that the effect of drug addiction/use on violent crimes for the young is indisputable (Anetor & Oyekan-Thomas, 2018; Gotsang, Mashalla, & Secoilwe, 2017). Although there is no published data on the number of cases for 2017 and 2018, data for 2014-2016 showed cases at 8,805, 8,778, and 8,257, respectively indicating how drug addiction may have pushed young adults into violent crimes to feed their habits. Drug-addicted young adults incapable of exercising good judgments with access to firearms kill and maim for resources to purchase drugs, which partly accounts for the large number of young adults involved in armed robbery activities (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016). Researchers have also shown that many cult members are into drugs (Atere, 2003; Raufu, 2003).

Armed robbery is an especially costly and frequent crime committed by some drug involved offenders. Literature from the United States, Canada, Australia, France and the United Kingdom suggest that over the past 10 years there has an increase in the use of drugs and alcohol to immobilise victims for the purpose of carrying out a sexual assault (Dorandu, Pages & Sordino, 2006; Nutt, 2006). According to

the 2001 British crime survey, 5% of rape victims had been drugged in some way, while a further 15% reported being incapable of those victims subjected other serious sexual assault, 6% reported being drugged and 17% were incapable of giving consent owing to the influence of alcohol (ACMD, 2007).

Dawgert (2009) found that alcohol and drug use have been shown to increase vulnerability to violence through exposure to unsafe situations. Teens with drug problems are 18-21 times more likely to be sexually abused. Approximately one-half of all sexual assault victims report that they were drinking alcohol at the time of their assault. This does not mean that substance use causes sexual violence, but rather suggests that perpetrators target victims who are perceived as vulnerable. Perpetrators often use substances to incapacitate their victims in order to facilitate a sexual assault. Alcohol is the most commonly used by perpetrators to help commit sexual assault.

Methodology

The area of study was Calabar metropolis, Cross River State. Calabar is the capital of Cross River State. It is adjacent to great Kwa rivers and creeks of Cross River State. Calabar has a total population of 371,022 according to 2006 census, with a good percentage of patent and proprietary medicine vendors in the location. It is often described as the tourism capital of Nigeria. Administratively, the city is divided into Calabar Municipality and Calabar South Local Government Areas comprising of 22 wards. it has an area of 275 square kilometres (157 sq. miles) and a population of 685,000 (Awuh et al., 2018; Macrotrends, 2024). English, Ejagham, Efik and Better are the major languages of the state. Most occupants in Calabar metropolis are civil servants, traders, farmers and fishermen. For this study, the researcher focused on Calabar metropolis. Calabar metropolis is divided Calabar Municipality and Calabar South. Calabar Municipality is a local.

The study employed cross sectional survey designed. This designed is considered appropriate for this study because it has the capacity to accurately gather necessary information within a limited time frame. The designed is economical and focuses on studying large and small populations with emphasis on relative incidence, distribution, and interrelation of sociological and psychological variable (Isangedeghi, Joshua, Asim & Ekuri, 2014 cited in Ezikeudu, et al., 2024c). A simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 wards out of the 22 wards in Calabar metropolis. Four streets were randomly selected out of the 10 wards selected, giving a total of 40 streets. Thereafter each respondent was selected using random simple technique. The study used quantitative method. The categories of the population used for this study comprised first; the youths, parents and vigilante groups. The sample size for the study is was determined using Taro-Yamene (1967) formula. This formula is concerned with the application of the normal approximation with the 95% confidence level and 5% error of tolerance. The formula is stated thus:

$$N = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

For data collection, quantitative instrument was used. The questionnaire was use as the quantitative tool. The instrument was chosen because it thought to be more reliable than any other tool for gathering data in this investigation. The aforementioned hypotheses were tested statistically using Linear Regression at the 0.05 level of significance. The researcher retrieved three hundred and eighty-nine (389), completed questionnaires used for the study analysis from the four hundred (400) distributed questionnaires. However, eleven (11) questionnaires were either not returned or were incorrectly completed, and hence could not be used in the analysis.

Results

Table 1: ONE-WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (ANOVA) MEASURING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCIDENCE OF DRUG ABUSE AND EXACERBATION OF ARMED ROBBERY AMONG YOUTH IN CALABAR METROPOLIS

Sources of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	25.849	3	.698	.864	.460
Within Groups	312.049	386	.808		
Total	314.144	389			

**The mean difference is significance at the 0.05 level*

This hypothesis was to determine the relationship between incidence of drug abuse and armed robbery among youth in Calabar Metropolis. The result of the analysis as represented in table 1 shows that the value of F is .864 which reaches significance with a P-value of .460 (which is greater than the .05 alpha level). With this outcome, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was accepted. The alternate hypotheses hold that there is statistically significance relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of armed robbery among youth in Calabar Metropolis.

Table 2: ONE-WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (ANOVA) MEASURING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCIDENCE OF DRUG ABUSE AND EXACERBATION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AMONG YOUTH IN CALABAR METROPOLIS

Sources of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.304	3	.435	.588	.623
Within Groups	285.219	378	.739		
Total	286.523	388			

**The mean difference is significance at the 0.05 level*

This hypothesis was to determine the relationship between drug abuse and sexual assault among youth in Calabar Metropolis. The result of the analysis as represented in table 2 shows that the value of F is .588 which reaches significance with a P-value of .623 (which is greater than the .05 alpha level). With this outcome, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was accepted. The alternate hypothesis holds that there is statistically significance relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of cultism among youth in Calabar Metropolis.

Table 3: ONE-WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (ANOVA) MEASURING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCIDENCE OF DRUG ABUSE AND EXACERBATION OF CULTISM AMONG YOUTH IN CALABAR METROPOLIS

Sources of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.685	3	.228	.359	.782
Within Groups	245.389	386	.636		
Total	246.074	389			

**The mean difference is significance at the 0.05 level*

The last hypothesis of this study centered on determining the relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of cultism among youth in Calabar Metropolis. The result of the analysis as represented in table 3 shows the value of F is .359 which reaches significance with a P-value of .782 (which is greater than the .05 alpha level). With this outcome, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate

hypothesis was accepted. The alternate hypothesis holds that there is significance relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of cultism among youth in Calabar Metropolis.

Discussion of Findings

With regard to hypothesis one, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that incidence of drug abuse influence violent crime such armed robbery in the study area as this is evidenced in table 1. Similarly hypothesis was tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA), confirmed the assertion of the respondents presented in table 1 at 398 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 level of significance. The result of the hypothesis, after testing, the result showed the value of F is .864 which reaches significance with a P-value of .460. Based on this outcome, the alternate hypothesis was accepted while the null hypothesis was rejected. The alternate hypothesis states that there is statistically significance relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of armed robbery among youth in Calabar Metropolis. Little wonder, there has been reported cases of armed robbery orchestrated by illicit cases of drugs in the study population. The finding of this study is in consonance with the findings of Aigbovo & Eidenoje (2016) who observed that drug-addicted young adults incapable of exercising good judgement with access to firearms kill and maim for resources to purchase drugs, which partly accounts for the large number of young adults involved in armed robbery activities.

As evidenced also in table 2, majority of the research subjects are of the view that incidence of drug abuse is also related to exacerbation of sexual assault in the study population. Also hypotheses was tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA), confirmed the assertion of the respondents presented in table 2 at 398 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 level of significance. This hypothesis tests whether there is relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of sexual assault among youths. The result of the hypothesis, after testing, the result showed that the value of F is .588 which reaches significance with a P-value of .623. Based on this outcome, the alternate hypothesis was accepted while the null hypothesis was rejected. The alternate hypothesis states that there is statistically significance relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of sexual assault among youth in Calabar Metropolis. No wonder, there has been an increase in reported cases of sexual assault most especially rape by the Nigerian police force among the study population. The finding is similar to the findings of Dawgert (2009) that alcohol and drug use have been shown to increase vulnerability to violence through exposure to unsafe situations. Teens with drug problems are 18-21 times more likely to be sexually abused. Approximately one-half of all sexual assault victims reported that they were drinking alcohol at the time of their assault.

In the same vein, this hypotheses was tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA), confirmed the assertion of the respondents presented in table 3 at 398 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 level of significance. The result of the hypothesis, after testing showed that the value of F is .359 which reaches significance with a P-value of .789. Based on this outcome, the alternate hypothesis was accepted while the null hypothesis was rejected. The alternate hypothesis states that there is statistically significance relationship between incidence of drug abuse and exacerbation of cultism among youth in Calabar Metropolis. This finding is in line with the findings of Atere (2003) and Raufu, (2003) that many cult members experiments with drugs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study findings conclude that the consistent and compulsive use of drugs, especially among the youths has been a problem to the study area, Cross State in particular and Nigeria and the world in general. As this very act always predisposes the people the engage in it to violent crimes such armed robbery, cultism, and sexual assaults as was evidenced in the study. The impact of drug abuse among the Nigerian youths has been a stigma to the society. The implications of drug abuse among the youths in the society are so devastating and are not without its costs and consequences to the offender, the primary victim as well as the secondary victims. The high level of violent crime such as armed robbery, sexual assault and cultism evidenced in the study is so alarming and worrisome that an urgent concern to initiate both reactive and

proactive policies to ameliorate the situation is needed in the study population and beyond. Thus, social institutions such as the family the family, church, community, school and Nigerian government have role to play in controlling drug abuse in Nigeria especially among the youths.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made: In order to make Nigeria a drug abuse-free society, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, and other control groups should as matter urgency intensify efforts in the fight against drug abuse. As a matter of urgent concern, governments at all levels should initiate both reactive and proactive policies and programs at creating public awareness and sensitizing the masses about the risk associated with engaging in drug use. There is also an urgent need incorporate the subject matter of drug abuse and misuse in the school curriculum system at all levels *vis- a-vis* primary, secondary and tertiary. As the saying goes, charity starts at home, therefore parents should teach their kids to fear the Lord and reorient them to the negative effects of drug misuse on their health, society, and human dignity.

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