

DRUG USE AND YOUTH VIOLENCE IN TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY: A STUDY OF PETROL HAWKERS IN MINNA– NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the relationship between drug abuse and violence among some youths in a transitional society. Petrol hawkers who were almost exclusively males, within the age bracket of 15-35 years with a penchant for violence in the city of Minna, were studied. The paper is aimed at providing knowledge on the relationship between drug abuse and violent activities among petrol hawkers. A multi-stage random sampling procedure was used to select four out of the eleven wards that constitute Minna metropolis. A sample of two hundred (200) respondents were selected out of which 165 were found to be good for analysis (after data cleaning), representing 83% response rate. Some twenty five petrol hawkers, who did not participate in completing questionnaires, were also interviewed, after the 2011 post election violence in Minna. Violent activities among petrol hawkers were attributable to learning and gangsterism than drug use. It is recommended that petrol hawkers constitute a group that needs close monitoring and that they should be integrated into youth empowerment programmes in order to stall violence activities by these set of youths in Nigeria.

Key words: Drug abuse, youth, violence, learning and gangsterism

INTRODUCTION

This paper explored the relationship between the abuse of drugs and involvement in violent activities by petrol hawkers in a transitional society. A transitional society implies society in period of election, be it general or parliamentary and the period span from campaigns to verdict time and shortly after. The petrol hawkers otherwise known as “black marketers,” in Minna, had their activities examined as a particular

reference point for youth violence. These black marketers constitute a group that has a penchant for violence. The hawkers are young persons, almost exclusively males, who sell petroleum products by the road sides at strategic locations in the city of Minna. The petrol hawkers in Minna range in age from 15 to 35 years, even though the National Youth Policy (NYP) sees youth in Nigeria as “all males and

females aged 18- 35 years”(NYP 2009:7)

The economic situation in Nigeria that paved the way for emergence of youth unemployment and subsequently petrol hawking was traced to the time of the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). It was stated that:

Following the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) from about 1984, the country started experiencing a serious contraction in the labour market. This resulted in a large proportion of urban youths, both in-situ and migrants, searching for jobs under the prevailing harsh economic conditions. The presence of this enormous pool of idle youths, who are both skilled and unskilled and sometimes homeless, created a fertile ground for deviant activities. This culminated in an increase in urban crime of different types, including drug-trafficking and drug abuse by youths (Oruwari, 2006:5).

Petrol hawking began in Nigeria in the mid-eighties when fuel scarcity started in the country. Fuel scarcity along with the bites of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), with its attendant high rate of unemployment and poverty, forced people, especially youths into menial jobs and businesses as coping strategies for the gnawing economic situation. Petrol hawking was one of the strategies developed. The poverty stricken youths that engaged in petrol hawking were ready raw materials for politicians who needed political thugs to execute political campaigns for the 1993 aborted military transition. This has not stop even in year 2012 (Kukah, 2012).

The aftermath of the annulment of the

election results was an unprecedented social uprising and civil disobedience which brought the country to the brinks of civil war, (Usman, 2009:135). The violence which greeted the 1993 annulled presidential election was a test ground for petrol hawkers who were then already on the street, wearied by poverty and vulnerable to all kinds of manipulations.

The continuation of military administration from 1993 through 1999 also indicates the persistence of fuel scarcity as little was done to reduce the problem. While fuel scarcity persists, the need to be more aggressive and bold to be able to acquire the product frequently for commercial purposes became expedient, hence the use of drugs by petrol hawkers.

One other factor which makes petrol hawkers indulge in drug abuse and violence is the western influence as a result of uncritical imitations of film and other media characters which equally serves as an off-shoot of the impact of globalization. Increasingly, people in the developing countries are exposed to lifestyles of people in the developed (Western European and North American) countries, and tend to use them as role models,”.. (Soyombo, 2005). Soyombo further listed the following factors which predisposes to drug use, to include peer pressure, stress, to enhance performance, unemployment, psychological problems, drug use in the family, parental deprivation, loneliness and curiosity.

A common parlance has it that a hungry man is an angry man. Poverty could be a potent factor in the explanation of violence. Social condition and livelihood of urban people serve as the cause of urban violence (Ezekiel and Emmanuel, 2008). Kukah (2012) attributed violence in

Nigeria to the failure of the state. According to him, violence in the country “are the fruit of years and years of degradation by the Nigerian state, years and years of unconscious sanctification of the gun.” Also, Mohammed (2005) believes youth violence were due to social/moral decadence, influence of peer group, culture of drug abuse, role of mass media, ethnic nationalism, elitist role, family influence etc. All these have been identified as causative factors of youth involvement in violent crimes.

The petrol hawkers constitute an emergent gang that serves as a pool for political thuggery, particularly during electioneering periods. Having politicians as patrons for whom they (petrol hawkers) serve as thugs provided these youths with the impetus to do what they like, including intimidating others around. The aggressive nature of these youths is also more pronounced whenever there is fuel scarcity. *When we are at mega station is as if we are in the battle field. You know what happen in the war front* says a 26 year petrol hawker in Kpakungu axis of Minna.. The anti-social behaviours (like assault, insult, intimidation) of these hawkers in the city of Minna have earned petrol hawkers an identity and from whom peace loving residents try to maintain a safe distance. Petrol hawkers are also always seen as trouble making people.

This paper, therefore, examines the issues of drug abuse and violence among petrol hawkers within transitional period in Minna, which has also retard development activities, from a sociological perspective. For instance, government structures torched and private properties destroyed by these

irate youth cannot said to be in the interest of development. The aim is to establish a linkage between the variables and to highlight other factors which may have any bearing on drug use and youth violence in a transitional society and how this has affected development activities therein.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The central argument of social learning theory is that “elements in the structure of society promote deviance by making deviant behaviour a viable adaptation to living in the society” (Clinard and Meier, 1995:107). The theory further argues that modern societies emphasized certain values such as education, health, wealth while at the same time limiting access to certain segments of society. Those blocked to these societal goals are the poor, the lower class in the society. “Anomie is (therefore) the social condition in which success goals are emphasized much more than the acceptable means by which to achieve them” (Clinard and Meier, 1995:108).” It is ... my central hypothesis that aberrant behaviour may be regarded sociologically as a symptom of dissociation between culturally prescribed aspirations and socially structured avenues for realizing these aspirations” (Merton, 1969: 164). Merton further argued that:

It is only when a system of cultural values extols, virtually above all else, certain common success-goals for the population at large while the social structure rigorously restricts or completely closes access to approved modes of reaching these goals for a considerable part of the same

population, that deviant behavior ensues on a large scale(1969:171).

Since the society cannot provide for all in terms of success goals through legitimate means, others who could not achieve success through the acceptable ways do so through drug abuse, violence and distortion of social order thereby threatening societal development.

VIOLENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Violence in whatever form it take does not only send fear into the citizens of the society concerned, development of such society is stalled. Peace and security is the correlate of development. A World Bank(2011) report on 'Conflict, Security and Development indicates that 1.2 billion people live in countries affected political and criminal violence- causing human misery and disrupting development. Preliminary estimates suggest that Cote d'ivoires conflict wasted over 1, 000 lives of men, women and children; displaced another 1 million; reduced Gross Domestic Products (GDP) by between 3 to 7 percent; pushed up poverty between 2.5 and 4 percentage point; and created additional fiscal needs of between 4 and 5 percent GDP. (Guardian, 2011: 25).

Omoyibo (2012) made us to understand that societal development hinge on human resources of a country and when the people live in fear courtesy of violence, development become illusive. Also, Ikoh and Charles (2010) reported that violent activities of Agaba boys in Calabar has retarded development activities in areas where the violence were prevalent.

METHODS

For the purpose of this paper, the existing division of Minna into 11 areas by the Niger State Independent Electoral Commission (NSIEC) as political wards was used to avoid bias. The presence of hawkers at different locations within these areas was considered. These wards include Limawa 'A', and 'B', Makera, Minna Central and Minna South. Others are Nasarawa 'A','B' and 'C', Sabongari and Tudun Wada North and South.

The wards were then arranged alphabetically and numbered. From a pre-research survey each ward had an average of 50 hawkers present. From the frame which had 11 wards, four (4) wards were selected using a lottery method of simple random technique. The 11 numbers were written one each on separate pieces of paper, squeezed and kept in a basket where a neutral person was called upon to select four. The four wards selected include Limawa 'A', Makera, Nasarawa 'B' and Tudun Wada South. Four wards were selected because this represents one third of the entire study population. The one third of eleven is 3.7 which were approximated to four. The figure was adequate for a fair representation of the population which was one key element of sampling as argued by Carely and Lury (1984) and Blalock and Blalock (1971) and Mohammed (2006).

The research subjects were obtained through snowball and accidental sampling methods. Considering the mobile nature of some of the research subjects, questionnaires were administered to them based on where petrol hawkers were found and convenient (accidental). Mobile in the sense that some of these petrol hawkers

follow market and hardly stay in one location for long. Such hawkers were obtained as research subjects through snowball (one petrol hawker making reference to another at a different location and that to another and so on and on, Mohammed, (2006:123). Through this process, questionnaires were administered to the 200 respondents found in the four selected areas. Simple percentage method was used in addition to Likert principle to analyse the data with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-economic Background of the Respondents

A total of two hundred (200) questionnaires were either self-administered or distributed among petrol hawkers in Minna metropolis. As stated earlier, four out of eleven wards that constitute Minna metropolis were selected for this research. The four wards include Limawa 'A', Makera, Nasarawa 'B' and Tudun Wada South. After checking the completed questionnaires for valid and invalid ones (data cleaning), a total of one hundred and sixty five (165) were found appropriate for analysis. This represents 83 percent of the response rate.

Table 1 Socio Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
15-19	3	1.8
20-24	94	57.0
25-29	54	32.7
30-34	12	7.3
35 & above	1	.6
Missing value	1	.6
Sex		
Male	160	97.0
Female	3	1.8
Missing values	2	1.2
Religion		
Islam	137	83.0
Christianity	25	15.2
Missing values	3	1.8
Marital Status		
Single	115	69.7
Married	45	27.3
Separated	3	1.8
Divorced	1	.6
Missing value	1	.6
Level of Education		
Quranic	33	20
Primary	16	9.7
Junior secondary	35	21.2
Senior secondary	66	40.2
Tertiary	14	8.5
Missing values	1	.6

Sources: Field work 2009

Self-Reported Data

A number of questions were asked to solicit information from respondents on what they actually do with regards to drug use and violent activities. The use of

alcohol is referred to this research as the gatekeeper to the use of the following drugs that is why it is not listed among drugs used by respondents.

Table 2 Types of Drugs used by Respondents

Type of drug	Frequency	Percentage
Marijuana	62	37.6
Glue/petrol (solution)	32	19.4
Cough syrup/Codeine	49	29.7
Morphine	13	7.9
Cocaine/ Heroin	3	1.8
Missing values	6	3.6
Total	165	100

Source: Field Work (2009)

Table 2 indicates that marijuana with 37.6 percent is the most abused drug by petrol hawkers in the study. This is consistent with the findings of Badru (2005), who reported that alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana were the commonest abused substances. The 1.8 % for cocaine use is due likely to no availability of the substance in the open market when compared with substance like cough syrup or glue. The costly nature of the drug may also explain the low use among poverty stricken group of petrol hawkers. This is in accord

with Dawkins' (1997), study whose finding indicates that the overall use of cocaine among youths was much lower than the use of alcohol or marijuana. Also, on poly drug usage, 26.1 percent of the respondents were reported to have used more than one drug. Respondents combined Marijuana with petrol, codeine, cocaine or heroin. On whether respondents engaged in criminal acts to support drug use, 57 per cent respondents affirmed to have committed criminal offences to sustain drug use habit.

Table3: Responses on Criminal acts to support drug use

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	94	57.0
No	69	41.8
Missing Value	2	1.2
Total	165	100

Source: Field Work 2009

Analysis of data revealed that he respondents are violent. For instance, 63 per cent of respondents reported to have ever hit and injured someone deliberately in the last one year, even though, only 45.5 percent of the respondents reported to have ever committed criminal offence

under the influence of alcohol or any substance of abuse. So their violent acts may be due to other factors like gangsterism and learning but not directly due to drug abuse. Gangsterism and learning are the factors that propelled petrol hawkers to violence as they both do

not only correlate at .735 but also with violence activities at .780 significant levels, respectively, precisely when $P \geq 0.01$. This implies that 73.5 percent of petrol

hawkers are gangsters while 78 percent of this group learn violence from friends and other associates.

Table 4: Respondents' view on whether they have ever hit and injured someone

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	104	63.0
No	59	35.8
Missing Value	2	1.2
Total	165	100.0

Source: Field Work (2009)

Opinion Questions

Respondents were also asked some questions to seek their opinion on central issues of drug abuse and violent activities.

The first of such questions reads: It has been said that excessive drug use can lead to violent activities?

Table 5: Opinion of Respondents on Drug Use and Violent Activities

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	40	24.2
Agree	98	59.4
Undecided	15	9.1
Disagree	9	5.5
Strongly disagree	2	1.2
Missing value	1	.6
Total	165	100.0

Source: Field Work (2009)

On poverty, respondents believed poverty was not only responsible for drug abuse, it could also lead to aggressiveness and violence. As response to the following question indicates: Poverty led me to engage in violent activities

This finding though it invalidates the earlier assumption of the researcher, was however validated by the consensus views of those interviewed, who held that drug

abuse and violent behaviours of petrol hawkers are strongly linked to their group (gangsterism) and imitation habits. A 34 year old diploma holder who had 12 years petrol hawking experience has this to say: *some of these boys you see that people today complain about as bad boys joined this trade as good boys. It was later they changed through following of bad friends. Today they are kings in what they've learnt*

from their friends. That testimony was from an elder in the business, what does a newcomer to the business have to say? *People copy each other in terms of doing bad things here,* said an 18 year old petrol hawker who has one month hawking experience. The qualitative and the quantitative data indicate that drug abuse among petrol hawkers does not lead them to violence as gangsterism and learning do.

SUBCULTURE (PEER GROUP, GANGSTERISM) AND VIOLENT ACTIVITIES

The data after using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16 to compute factor loading for the variables, showed that peer group, with 90.3 factor loading, and gangsterism with, 87.2 factor loading under 0.50 cronbach alpha, relate positively with violent activities at a significance level of 0.05. This is consistent with Dawkins' (1997) study which showed that marijuana use was strongly related with gang- related violence. Campbell and Muncer's (1989) study also supports the assertion that peer group influence was a potent factor in sub-cultural groupings and their delinquent behaviours, including violence.

One vital finding from the data was the way learning correlated with violent activities at .456 and gansterism with learning at .217, all at 0.01 levels of significance. These imply that petrol hawkers learned the art of violence from members of their gang who often times define such actions as normal. The study is consistent with the social learning theory as postulated by Sutherland. The gang members defined conditions favourable to

law breaking and the perpetuation of anti-social activities, like violence. Empirical studies by Akers et al (1979) and Dawkins (1997) were also consistent with this study when they tested the theory.

This study reinforces the fact that petrol hawkers were gangsters whose violent activities were related to conforming to the sub-cultural norms. It was observed that petrol hawkers within areas like Mega Station in Tudun Wada ward, Total Filling Station in Makera ward and Kpakungu Motor Park were more violent than others. This was due to the fact that hawkers in these areas live in groups where a lot of learning and imitations take place. In fact, petrol hawkers in these areas have stable leadership and attain regular meetings. For example, those in Kpakungu Motor Park schedule their meetings weekly on Fridays and those at the Mega Station fortnightly on Saturdays. During the post presidential election violence in April 2011, a stallion-like statue at the Kpakungu round about was set ablaze, while eight cars were torched at New Market area which is part of Makera area. The recent violent that greeted the removal of fuel subsidy saw 15 vehicles and parts of Minna office of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) main building, burnt. The INEC office is located within Tudun Wada petrol hawker's territory.

Again, the violent activities of the respondents as shown by the research are in conformity with the type of gang Fagan (1989), called the entrepreneurial. That is, youths who were concerned with attaining social status by means of money and the things money can buy. Petrol hawkers can do anything to ensure the petrol business was not threatened. The overall chairman

of petrol hawkers in Minna a 32- year old man said when he was asked to explain the aggressive behavior of his members particularly at filling stations: *Most of them are under the influence of alcohol or hard drugs and you know that when one is blue (under the influence of drug or substance), there is nothing that person cannot do. It is just like going to war.*

CONCLUSION

The environment in which petrol hawkers operate, particularly under the sun or rains all day, and the zeal with which they pursue fuel, especially when the product is scarce, could be another factor that makes petrol hawkers behave the way they do. As a vulnerable group which feels abandoned by the very society that produced it, petrol hawkers' anti-social behaviours often exhibited could be another unconscious reaction to a perceived injustice the society has put on their shoulders. *Our lives are always in danger and nobody cares what happens to us. Since we don't have paid job with the government, we just have to survive in a more honourable way and that why most of us are less tolerant,* says a 32 year old leader of petrol hawkers in Minna.

Based on the findings of this paper, policy makers need to establish elaborate poverty alleviation programmes to empower the petrol hawkers with enough funds for them to establish other businesses. Among other programmes policy makers need to address includes:

- a. Scholarship schemes could be put in place for hawkers and particularly targeted at those with secondary school education who show interest of furthering their education.
- b. Further sociological research should focus on other variables like peer group and gangsterism as well as environmental factors so as to adequately explain the phenomenon of petrol hawking and the involvement of youths in this activity in Nigeria. More critically, further research is required to focus on the socio – economic and political implications of prevalent youth unemployment in our society.
- c. The petrol hawkers need to be equally monitored by the security agencies, particularly during their regular weekly meetings.

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