

ROLES OF THE CHURCH IN COMBATING DRUGS ABUSE IN MANGU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The challenge of drug abuse has been on the increase in Nigeria, especially in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State. The focus of this study is to find out the meaning of drug abuse, to investigate the types of drugs commonly abused in Mangu Local Government Area and around the world, to determine the effects of drug abuse, and to examine the roles of the Church in combating drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area. The data for this study were collected from the field and the library. In the field, the researcher used the qualitative approach to elicit the views of his respondents. The researcher used books, journals, dictionaries, and encyclopedias in the library and internet. The data were analyzed using simple percentages, discussion, and descriptive methods. The study found that the Church has significant roles in combating drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area, including prayer, teaching and preaching the word of God, seminars, conferences and awareness creation, punishment, counseling and employment. The study recommends that the Church should pray and teach against the menace of drug abuse, the Church should liaise with parents, community, and government in combating the risk of drug abuse, the Church should discipline culprits of drug abuse to deter them and others from getting involved.

Keywords: Roles, Church, Combating, Drugs, and Abuse

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the countries in the world suffering from the challenge of drug abuse. The challenge is one of the many problems threatening the growth and development of the country as a nation. This has challenged the government in many areas and sectors, including health, security, peace and stability, economic development, and religious progress. For example, the population of Nigeria is just 3% of the world's population. However, it accounts for 6% of the users of cannabis and 14% of those that misuse pharmaceutical opioids around the

world. This made Nigeria one of the countries with the highest users of tramadol and cough Syrups, which contain codeine or dextromethorphan. Victims of drug abuse in Nigeria are usually adults. It was discovered in 2018 that 14.3 million adults between the ages of 15 and 64 (making up 14.4%) had at least once used a psychoactive substance (besides tobacco and alcohol) in the previous year. This brings about substance use disorder to about 20% of the 14.3 million people who have used drugs (Agwogie 4-5; UNODC 13; Peacock and others 17; Agwogie 17; Oshodi, Aina and Onajole 20).

The researcher collected his data both from the field and the library. In the area, the data were collected using the qualitative approach method, which deals with oral interviews to extract the respondents' views on the topic of discussion. Fifty (50) respondents comprising twenty (20) members of the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN), twenty (20) members of the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), and ten (10) Pentecostals were consulted for this research. The ratio of these respondents is 25 leaders to 25 members. This is necessary to help the researcher have an equal representation of the respondents across the three (3) main denominations. The researcher used three (3) research assistants, one from each of the three main denominations. This is to help make the researcher's work easy and faster. In the library, the data were collected from books, journals, and other relevant materials which were sourced from the internet and libraries, including Gindiri Theological Seminary's (GTS) library, College of Education (COE), Gindiri's library, Theological College of Northern Nigeria's (TCNN) library and University of Jos' (UJ) library, among others. The data were analyzed using simple percentages, discussion, and descriptive methods.

The fact is that many scholars have written about the subject of drug abuse from various perspectives covering causes of drug abuse, types of drug abuse, forms of drug abuse, challenges of drug abuse, effects of drug abuse, prevention of drug abuse, roles of government in fighting drug abuse, roles of non-governmental organizations in fighting drug abuse, roles of Christians in the fight against drug abuse and many others. However, the peculiarity of this research is that it discusses the roles of the Church in Combating drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria

Conceptual Clarification of the Phrase "Drug Abuse"

In this section, the phrase "drug abuse" is clarified.

Drug Abuse

Drug abuse refers to the arbitrary over-dependence or misuse of one particular drug with or without a prior medical diagnosis from qualified health practitioners (Lakhanpal and Aqnihotri 7). In addition, it refers to the harmful use of mind-adhering drugs or the harmful use of legally prescribed drugs such as self-medications (Oluremi 12). Also, it relates to the use of drugs other than for medical purposes, thus affecting the individual negatively - socially, cognitively, or physically, or a pattern of drinking that affects one's health, interpersonal relationship, or ability to work (Osoki, Ahmmed and Baba 2)

Drugs and Substances Commonly Abused

Different types and categories of drugs and substances are commonly abused in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State and various parts of the world. Some of these drugs and substances are legally produced, while others are illegally constructed. However, the legality and the illegality of these drugs vary from one country or nation to the other. Examples of these drugs and substances that are commonly abused include alcohol, marijuana, heroin, opium, valium, methadone, sedatives, hallucinogens, crystal methamphetamine, and inhalants (Chinedu 20; Matowo 13; Ongwae 16; Brecher 19; Brunn and Rexed 75; Ebie and Pela 20; Royce 19; Volkow 18).

Effects of Drug Abuse

Social Effects

Drugs, in general, and hard drugs in particular, usually make those that take them to be hyperactive, especially at the point of taking them. Given this, those who take these drugs do behave abnormally; they are usually vulnerable to all kinds of social vices and immoral practices such as armed robbery, kidnapping, trafficking, murder, ritual practices, and sexual immorality (Fatima 6; Peacock and others 18; Oshodi, Aina, and Onajole 22).

Financial Effects

Victims of drug abuse who have developed an addiction are usually vulnerable to spending a lot of money on drugs. This is because the habit creates a desire for more drugs for people with an addiction and this usually makes the people with addiction look for money to get the medications at all costs and by all means. This plunges the people with an addiction into various kinds of financial

problems. This attitude does not only impoverish the people with a substance use disorder but also their family members and people around them (Fatima 7; Peacock and others.17; Oshodi, Aina, and Onajole 20).

Health Effects

One of the most common effects of drug abuse is sicknesses. These drugs, when abused, have different effects, including depression and anxiety, panic disorder and paranoia, increased aggression, and hallucination, diseases and illnesses, poor work performance, poor academic performance, poor relationships, poor hygiene, and economic hardship (Fatima 7; Peacock and others 19; Oshodi, Aina, and Onajole 23),

History of Mangu Local Government Area

Mangu, one of the seventeen Local Government Areas of Plateau State, was established in 1976 under the military regime of the head of state, General Murtala Mohammed. The establishment was done alongside 13 other local government areas in the state. The Local Government Area was carved out of the defunct Pankshin Division under the leadership of the Late military governor, Joseph Deshi Gomwalk. It is located in the central senatorial zone of the state, 77km South-East of the state capital, Jos. The Local Government Area has a total population of over 300,520 according to the 2006 national census and a total land mass of 1,578 sq km, approximately 6% of the state's total land mass. It is located at latitude 9.49' to 9.47'N and longitude 9.15' and 9.15'E. The northern part of the area is on the plateau with undulating highlands ranging from 1300-1400 meters above sea level, but slope down to the narrow southern edge where the landscape is very rocky, having granite rocks, volcanic mountains laced with narrow valleys as standard features (Mwanbu 46-47; Dickson 8-17; Dahip 25-37).

The climatic condition of the Local Government Area is characterized by low-temperature with an averagely chill weather that can be equated with that of the capital, Jos. The atmosphere is tropical, comprising of dry and rainy seasons. The rainy season commences in April and ends in October, while the dry season starts in November and terminates in March. The rainy season usually lasts 6 to 7 months, with an average rainfall of about 1,390 and 1,410mm annually. March and April are averagely hot, while November and February are cold. During the dry season, the average annual temperature is between 20°C and 30°C. The temperature is often quietly cool in the night and early morning hours, while it is

averagely warmed in the afternoon. It usually experiences harmattan winds between December and February, and the weather at this time is generally characterized by intense coolness (Mwanbu 46-47; Dickson 8-17; Dahip 25-37).

Similarly, March and April are the warmest periods of the year, with an average temperature of about 28°C. This climate makes it conducive to producing various crops and supports the rearing of different animals. The local government is usually prided as a safe place for businesses, agricultural production, and cultural/traditional heritage (Mwanbu 46-47; Dickson 8-17; Dahip 25-37).

The Local Government is also bordered to the North by Bauchi State, to the north-west by Barkin Ladi Local Government Area, to the east by Pankshin Local Government, to the west by Bokkos Local Government and to the south by Quanpan Local Government. The Local Government Area 2003 had eleven districts, including Mangu, Kombun, Panyam, Pushit, Kerang, Ampang-West, Mangun, Chakfem, Jipal, Gindiri and Langai. However, three additional districts were created under Chief Joshua C. Dariye's leadership, including Bwai, Bungba, and Chanso, totaling 14 districts (Mwanbu 46-47; Dickson 8-17; Dahip 25-37).

Roles of the Church in Combating Drug Abuse in Mangu Local Government Area

The three main denominations used for this research include the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN), Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), and Pentecostal. In the above three major denominations in Mangu Local Government Area, 50 respondents were consulted for the research. The ratio of these respondents is 25 leaders to 25 members. The 50 respondents unanimously agreed on 5 significant roles the Church can play to combat drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area. These roles include prayer, teaching and preaching the word of God, seminars, conferences and awareness creation, punishment (Church discipline), counseling, and employment. Of these respondents, 20 representing 40% held that prayer is the role. Similarly, 13 respondents representing 26% maintained that preaching and teaching the word of God is the role. Again, 7 respondents representing 14% observed that seminars, conferences, and awareness creation are the roles. Likewise, 5 respondents who represent 10% stressed that punishment (Church discipline) is the role. Finally, 5 respondents representing 10% opined that counseling is the role.

For example, one of the respondents who held that prayer is the role of the Church in combating drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area

argued that the place of prayer in tackling the challenges of this life in general and the challenge of drug abuse in particular, cannot be over-emphasized. She opined that the devil and evil spirits are usually behind people committing sin and getting involved in different kinds of social vices, including drug abuse. She quoted Ephesians 6:10, which supports her argument that we fight not against flesh and blood but against principalities, power, rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness in the high places. She says that whenever one wants to deal with the problem of sin in general and drug abuse in particular in the lives of people, one must do it spiritually through prayer. She added that this is why God said that his people should pray without season (1 Thess.5:17). So, according to this respondent, prayer is the most reliable way of combating drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area (Lohnan Interview). Levy affirms this by arguing that prayer takes seconds to utter. Still, it can profoundly affect mood, behavior, and ability to overcome life challenges, including anxiety, stress, sleepless problem, and drug abuse. Fomum adds that the intercessor can accomplish the impossible on his knees; he can move the hand and heart of God to make people do his will (1). This shows that prayer is a powerful weapon the Church can use to combat drug abuse.

Similarly, one of the respondents maintained that preaching and teaching the word of God is the role of the Church in combating drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area. He opined that this is an essential weapon for tackling the challenge of drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area in particular and Nigeria in general. He observed that this is the weapon Jesus used during his days to solve the problem of sin and social vices in the lives of people of his time. He quoted Jeremiah 23:29, which says that the word of God is like fire and a hammer that breaks the rock into pieces. He also quoted Hebrews 4:12, which states that the word of God is alive, active, and sharper than the double-edged sword that can penetrate the spirit, soul, heart, and mind to bring about change. He quoted these two scriptures to support his argument that when faithfully preached and taught, the word of God can be a tangible weapon for granting repentance and salvation to drug abusers (Alex Interview). Chinedu corroborates this by arguing that the Church should preach and teach repentance and salvation to people. This is very important because when victims of drug abuse are morally regenerated, they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to desist from that lifestyle (80). Jenkins added that faithful preaching and teaching of the word of God provide the needed

knowledge to grow and become like Jesus and, thereby, desist from deviant lifestyles (including drug abuse) (8).

In the same vein, one of the respondents who observed that seminars, conferences, and awareness creation are the roles of the Church in combating drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area saw seminars, conferences, and awareness creation as formally meetings organized for discussions to create education, knowledge, understanding, and enlightenment on a particular subject (especially drug abuse). He added that the main aim of this is to provide information on the effects and dangers of drug abuse, which can serve as a warning to abusers of drugs. These seminars, conferences, and awareness creation can be organized for students, youths, parents, business people, and the entire community. This can help the Church contribute her quota for a drugs-free community (Manasseh Interview). Chinedu attests to this by arguing that the Church should regularly organize seminars on drug abuse and expose drug abuse and its effects for people to know. The Church can organize these seminars within and outside the Church (80). Ramya adds that seminars have numerous benefits, including improving communication skills, gaining expert knowledge, networking, and renewing motivation and confidence (1).

Likewise, one of the respondents who stressed that punishment (Church discipline) is the role of the Church in combating drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area said that the Bible very much supports the teaching and the practice of punishment. He quoted Hebrews 12:6-7, saying Christians should not dislike punishment because God loves those he punishes. He maintained that the Church should emulate God in punishing members of the Church who are drug abusers because that will prove their love for the members. The punishment is vital because it will help to correct, deter, and discourage these backsliding members (Victor Interview). Ezekiel agrees with this by arguing that punishment is the most critical way to make people behave better because it shows them that their actions have consequences (1).

Finally, one of the respondents who said that counseling is the role of the Church in combating drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area argued that this is an essential role for the Church in the Local Government Area. He said that counseling is necessary because it guides those straying into drug abuse to be guided aright. To support his arguments, he quoted Proverbs 11:14, which states that in the absence of guidance, the people fail, but there is victory in the multitude of counselors. He opined that when the Church gives time to

counseling, it will go a long way to prevent people from falling into the temptation of drug abuse and help those who are already involved in drug abuse to come out of it successfully. The Church can do this by specially giving training to some of its members to look after victims of drug abuse (Nanle Interview). Madeson attests to the importance of counseling by saying that counseling can help improve mood, treat mental illness, reduce medical costs, improve communication and relationships, and promote self-esteem and resilience (2).

Conclusion

Mangu Local Government Area is plagued with the challenge of drug abuse. The drugs that are commonly abused in the Local Government Area include alcohol, marijuana, heroin, opium, valium, methadone, sedatives, hallucinogens, crystal methamphetamine, and inhalants. The abuse of these drugs in Mangu Local Government Area has devastating effects on those involved. However, this challenge of drug abuse in Mangu Local Government Area can be eradicated or at least minimized through the roles of the Church. These roles include prayer, teaching and preaching the word of God, organizing seminars, conferences and awareness creation and the exercise of punishment (Church discipline), counseling, and employment. The fact is that when the Church successfully plays the above roles, it will go a long way to help in combating the menace of drug abuse, especially in the Local Government Area.

In the light of above findings, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. The Church should pray and teach against drug abuse.
2. The Church should liaise with parents, the community, and the government in combating the menace of drug abuse.
3. The Church should punish (Church discipline) culprits of drug abuse to deter them and others from getting involved.

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