A CURSORY EXAMINATION OF THE SCOURGE OF DRUG ABUSE IN NIGERIA

 REV. FR. TIMOTHY ETSENAMHE

Every 26th of June, the world celebrates the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, also known as World Drug Day. The purpose is to galvanize ideas and actions to achieve a world free of drug abuse. The reality of drug abuse in our world today calls for concern, especially in our country Nigeria where there is increased presence of acts of terrorism, insurgency, banditry, armed robbery, fraudsters, sexual abusers, mob-killings, frequent death resulting from over use of alcohol and preponderance of cases of organs failure among young people, just to mention but a few.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2021 report, ‘’Africa has enormous challenges which include the excessive use of cannabis, the non- medical use of tramadol and the increased use of the continent as a transit area for cocaine and heroin trafficking.‘’ Nigeria is one of the most populous nations in Africa. No doubt most of these cases would be a heap in Nigeria. NDLEA reports that it has seized estimated amount of drugs totally 2,351.439kg. These seizures take place mostly at the airport and on inter-state borders. Only recently at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos, NDLEA intercepted N6.5bn worth of Heroine going to the UK and Dubai. And about 843kg skunk and cocaine were intercepted almost at the same time in kogi, Nasarawa and Benue states.

 The 2018 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, UNODC reports that Nigeria has a reputation for drug trafficking and usage, that one in seven persons, ages 15 – 64 years, had used a drug in the past year. And that one in five individuals who had used drugs in the past year is suffering from drugs related disorders. This report consciously investigated the extent of drug use in the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. In the North- Central, the estimated amount of drugs prevalence in a year is about 10 percent, approximately about 1.5 million people who have abused drug in the past year. In the North- East, it is about 13.6 percent or over 2million people in the past year.

In the North-West, the area with the largest population in Nigeria, with about 25million people, has about 12 percent, about 3million people who have abused drugs between the ages of 15 to 64, in the previous year. The South-East has the percentage of past year drug abuse prevalence to be at 13.8 percent. That would be about 1.5 million people aged between 15 to 64 years. The South-West has a percentage of drug prevalence case in the past year to be about 22.4 percent or 4.38 million people aged between 15 to 64. The South -South has an estimate of drug abuse to be 16.6 percent, approximately about 2.1 million drug abusers.

The report states the types and classes of drugs usually trafficked across these zones to include cannabis, opioids like heroin, pharmaceutical opioids - tramadol, codeine, morphine; cocaine- tranquilizers or sedatives, methamphetamine; cough syrups containing codeine or dextromethorphan. The report shows that the enunciated drugs are accessible easily by their users in clandestine arrangement and illicit deals by some pharmaceutical stores. To state that drugs dependency is on the rise in Nigeria is to state the obvious. The number of teenagers who flaunt drugs these days is alarming. On the other hand the spectrum of responsible adults from varied strata of life who are into drugs deal and intake is shocking too. It is indeed a scourge that cannot be ignored. We now have cookies, drinks and food laced with cannabis and pharmaceutical opioids. The sellers and buyers operate in syndicate and it is often very thriving.

There are a plethora of reasons that people depend on drugs. People who abuse drugs may be because of stress. They need to relax and so they take to drugs. Stress and substance abuse go hand-in-hand. Some do drugs out of curiosity. Drugs and alcohol displayed on television without censor can spur on such curiosity. Teenagers and adults may be tempted to try out what they watch and when they do, they might be caught in the web of addiction. A lot of people take drugs for energy. Our society today is a sex loosed one. A lot of people involved in sexual relations depend on drugs to get the required energy to satisfy their spouse or partner. Some take drugs to work, read, and even drive. This continuous intake of drugs for energy leads to abuse. We have the social or peer pressure factor, absence of the family, economic pressure, propaganda by traffickers and the desire for new wild experiences. These factors could nudge anyone to take to drugs.

However, the adverse effects of drug abuse in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. There is overtly decline in moral probity amongst young people in the country. One of the reasons for this is not far-fetched- the accessibility and indulgence in drugs. The extent of moral depravity in our nation is alarming. There is lack of respect and decorum mostly among young people. There is a decline in the degree of respect for God, government institutions, dignity of the human person and value of property. That is why today in any slight protests people are killed, police stations are raised down and businesses are destroyed without qualms of conscience.

 Drugs alienate and diminish the dignity of the person which makes it difficult for such person to appreciate the dignity of other persons. Little wonder then, Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, the Prefect of the Dicastery For Promoting Integral Human Development asserted in his message for the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking that, “The lacerating drama of drugs is an evil that threatens the dignity and freedom to act of every person, and progressively breaks down the image that the Creator has formed in us.’’ Once a person is high on drugs nothing makes sense anymore except his or her inclinations. That is why such a person could see another person as a tool, an object to be used and discarded. A sexual abuser who uses drugs exploits his or her victim not minding the age and the injuries inflicted on the victim. An armed robber who is high on dope sees every other human being as lower animal to hunt down without remorse. The kidnapper is rootles because drugs have made him lost value and dignity of the sacredness of human life.

Drug abuse has contributed in recent time, to the prevalence of sexual abuses in the country. Abusers in most cases pretend to pass time with their victim in their hide out which could be a hotel and introduce or secretly mix drugs in the drink of their victim. Most of these drugs have paralyzing effects to the extent that the victim cannot resist any rape attempt. The victim is made incapacitated even though with eyes wide open and would not even remember anything afterwards because these drug also impairs memory. The person experiences loss of muscle control, confusion, drowsiness and amnesia. These make it very easy for the abusers to easily prey on their victims. The recent Chidinma Adaora and the Super TV CEO, Usifo Ataga is still very fresh. Drugs played a pivotal role in the sexual escapade that became a tragedy.

 The cruel effects of Drugs in-take and trafficking are also felt in marriage and family life. Drugs addiction has been noted to be one the reasons there is frequent domestic violence in some homes in Nigeria. The victims of domestic violence could be children, husband or wife, but in most cases women and children are the commonest victims of domestic violence as a result of drug abuse. This is so because in most cases men seem be on the forefront of addicts who molest their family- wife and children. On the other spectrum, some families have lost their loved ones to the heinous business of drug trafficking, a loss which is never replaceable.

The addiction to drugs poses a threat to health. Jamie Eske defines drug abuse as ‘’a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress.’’ Using any drug in moderation according to medical prescription can have short term effects. Many of the hard drugs like Nicotine from cigarettes and tobacco products raise blood pressure and increase alertness. A drug can make you change your appetite, give you insomnia, increase your heart rate, slurred speech, change your cognitive ability. It could also affect the person’s psychological life; the inability to cease using a drug, relationship problems, poor work and academic performance , difficulty in maintaining personal hygiene, noticeable changes in appearance, such as extreme weight loss, increased impulsivity and risk-taking behaviours and loss of interest in formerly enjoyable activities.

On a long term bases, those who misuse drugs could be depressed, suffer from anxiety disorder, increased aggression, panic, paranoia and hallucinations. According to Eske, experts have linked chronic drug use with the following health conditions; cardiovascular disease; that stimulants, such as cocaine and methamphetamines, can damage the heart and blood vessels; respiratory problems; drugs that people smoke or inhale can damage the respiratory system and lead to chronic respiratory infections and diseases; kidney damage; heroin, ketamine, and synthetic cannabinoids can cause kidney damage or kidney failure; liver damage; drugs and alcohol use can damage the liver cells, leading to inflammation, scarring, and even liver failure. This could account for the muckle of young people suffering from the above chronic diseases which often lead to death because of poor treatment and the dearth of hospitals in Nigeria.

One step we can take to ameliorate the adverse effects of drugs among abusers is proper education on drugs. This is where the role of government in curbing drug abuse should be emphasized. There should be free and compulsory education from primary school to secondary school levels. Early enough, young people in secondary schools should be thought about drugs and the dangers they could portend. Agency like the NDLEA should go on frequent advocacy to schools and tertiary institutions, national youth service orientation camps, mechanic villages and organized markets to educate people. Just as sex education is necessary and important, drug education has become inevitable. Government should setup centres for drug addiction diagnosis and treatment in every federal medical health centre. This would help to rehabilitate and detox addicts.

Another way to curb drug abuse is to get an effective mechanism to handle peer pressures. A lot of people do things just because their friends do such things. Just because everyone around does it should not be a justifiable reason for someone to do what he or she is not convinced is morally suitable. Whenever there is such a situation the person involved should muster the courage to say no. Better still associate with people who would not pressure him or her into copying their habits.

Trailing behind getting effective mechanism to handle peer pressure is finding better ways to coping with quagmire situations in one’s life. A good number of people abuse drugs because they want to cope with the negative things they face in life. Life throws us good and bad situations, the vicissitudes of life. It is important to let people know that there is nothing bad in experiencing tough times. Instead of turning to drugs talk to someone responsible, engage in exercise and meditation. These could ease your mind off drugs and make you deal squarely with the issues of life.

 Besides, the ability to choose one’s circle of friends wisely could go a long way to curb the rise of drug abuse. Psychologists believe that ‘’making friendship Plays a major role in a person’s overall health and well-being.’’ Socializing with the wrong crowd can easily lure you into drug abuse. No one is a superman. No matter how you try to resist, soon you will be pressured to give in and the impact would be devastating. Make friends whose mind set is not about drugs and illicit lifestyle. Your circle should be people who would provide a safe environment where there is less likelihood of triggering drug abuse risk factors.

In all of these proffered solutions, it remains the choice of the individual to choose life over drug or drug over life. Life is beautiful and meaningful if it is drug free. The moment you decide to abuse drugs you would have chosen drugs over life which would lead to bad health and eventually early death. The choice to abuse any drug is entirely a personal one. There are people who have good family background, education, career, good marriage relationship going on, who are not drugs free; they abuse and traffic drugs. On the other hand, there are those who have no good family background; who are poor, uneducated and jobless, who are drugs free and not abusers of drugs. After all said and done, the choice lies on the individual to abuse drugs or not.