

CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO METHAMPHETAMINE (MKPURU-MMIRI) ABUSE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at the Catholic Church's response to methamphetamine abuse by young people in Southeast Nigeria. Methamphetamine is an amphetamine-type stimulant (ATS). This class of drugs excites or speeds up the nervous system and produces effects similar to adrenaline. The Igbo Language renders it as mkpurumiri (seed of water). Presently methamphetamine is a drug primarily abused in the Southeast zone. There is not yet a definite effort to study the phenomenon in-depth to know its remedial measures. Such is the reason for this investigation. It employs a self-constructed questionnaire as a data-collecting instrument, and the theoretical framework is the integrative model. The study population is 21,955,414, and the sample size is 386. The finding showed that Catholic Church responds to methamphetamine abuse among young people through Christian counselling, prayers, awareness campaign, conferences, seminars, rehabilitation, care, and collaboration with the government. The study recommends the establishment of more clinics for the victims and synergising with others concerned the drug abuse in the zone.

Key Words: Abuse, Church, Methamphetamine, Response, Stimulant.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the social-moral and psychological problems plaguing contemporary society, especially young people, is the issue of substance or drug abuse. Such drugs include cocaine, marijuana, Indian hemp, heroin, cannabis, methamphetamine, etc. This study, however, focused on the Catholic Church's response to methamphetamine abuse in the Southeast of Nigeria. As a substance, methamphetamine belongs to amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS). These drugs belong to the stimulant class of drugs, and as such, they excite or speed up the nervous system and produce effects similar to adrenaline. Methamphetamine abuse results from euphoric effects, sometimes described as a sense of well-being lasting up to twenty-four hours. Despite this effect, the drug is harmful. For instance, it could lead to cognitive disorder, rapid heart rate, increased blood pressure, and smaller brain blood vessel damage. Besides, it might result in a stroke. Chronic drug use can lead to inflammation of the heart lining, while overdosing may result in hyperthermia (elevated body temperature), convulsions, and death. Victims of the drug are susceptible to violent behaviour, paranoia, anxiety, confusion, and insomnia. It could also produce psychotic symptoms that endure for months or years after an individual has stopped taking the drug. The abusers of the drug that inject it are prone to additional risks, such as contracting HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), hepatitis B and C, and other blood-borne viruses. Chronic users injecting the drug are vulnerable to scarred or collapsed veins, heart lining and valve infections, abscesses, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and liver and kidney disease. It is cheap and comparatively easy to produce - making it affordable and readily available to teenagers. Street names for methamphetamine are beanies,

brown, chalk, chicken feed, cinnamon, crink, crypto, fast, getgo, methlies, quik, mexican crack, redneck cocaine, rock, tick tick, wash, and powder (National Drug Intelligence Centre)

In the Southeast of Nigeria, methamphetamine is called *mkpurumiri*. Here its consumption has risen at an alarming rate among young people. Daily, various media outlets are awash with instances of this abuse, with attendant punishments meted out by different communities. However, this study focused on the Church's response to the above phenomenon in Southeast Nigeria. The zone comprises five states: Imo, Abia, Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi. Also, it consists of many Christian denominations: the Catholic Church, Anglican, Methodist, Assemblies of God, and African independent Churches, to name a few. Interestingly, the five blocks of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) are all in the zone. Despite this, to ensure an in-depth study of the Church's response, this study is delimited to the Catholic Church. It is a case study with the integrative model as a theoretical framework. Its study population and sample size are 21,955,414 and 386, respectively. Then the method of data analysis was a simple percentage.

1.2 Statement of the problem/justification

The issue of methamphetamine abuse is currently dominating the scene in many parts of the Southeast of Nigeria, particularly among young people. Such has generated some concern as these individual crops constitute crucial components of society. It raises not just the question of the proximate consequences of their actions but, most importantly, the zone's future. Unfortunately, even though some have made efforts to curb the situation, such have not yielded the desired result, as some of the measures are uncivilised and barbaric. Then, as the zone is predominately Christian, one would naturally ask, what is the Church doing in the face of such an appalling scenario? Hence, this study dealt with the response of the Catholic Church to the issue.

1.3 Research objectives

This study investigated the Catholic Church's response to methamphetamine abuse among young people in Southeast Nigeria. Mainly, it aimed to:

- i. discover if methamphetamine abuse is predominant in Southeast's rural areas vis-a-vis cities.
- ii. ascertain the Church's psycho-spiritual response to the issue;
- iii. determine the Church's socio-moral response to the issue;
- iv. find the Church's theological response to the issue and;
- v. establish the Church's political response to the issue.

1.4 Research Questions

This study raised four research questions on the Catholic Church's response to methamphetamine abuse among young people in the Southeast, namely:

- i. Is methamphetamine abuse predominant in Southeast's rural areas vis-a-vis cities?
- ii. What is the Church's psycho-spiritual response to the abuse?
- iii. Determine the Church's socio-moral response to the issue?
- iv. Find out the Church's theological response to the situation?
- v. Establish the Catholic Church's political response to the ugly phenomenon?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section dealt with conceptual, empirical, and theoretical reviews, respectively. The conceptual review began with the term methamphetamine. This concept is a synthetic (man-made) stimulant

that is of high addictive nature (National Drug Intelligence Centre). It is an addictive stimulant drug that affects the central nervous system. One could use it in powdered or pill form, which can be ingested orally, snorted, smoked, or injected (S E OW, Methamphetamine, 2019). Other names for methamphetamine are meth, blue, ice, speed, and Crystal (Methamphetamine Research Brief, 2019). The Igbo language renders it as *mkipurumiri*. Methamphetamine could be of different colours: white, yellow, brown, grey, orange, and pink (National Drug Intelligence Centre). WHO (2011) notes that the usual age of first methamphetamine use appears to be mid-adolescence, and boys are its typical users. Studies carried out in the United States showed that the use of methamphetamine is higher among adolescents and young adults dwelling in rural areas compared to urban areas (Monnat & Rigg, 2015a; Monnat & Rigg, 2015b; and UNODC, 2017). UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) further observed that use rates for rural adolescents increase per level of rurality: the more rural the location, the higher the use rates. It noted that those living in the interior areas had nearly double the rate of methamphetamine use vis-a-vis urban young adults.

WHO (2011) maintained that the rate and frequency of its usage tend to increase from early adolescence to early adulthood and gradually diminish. The document viewed the following as vulnerable to experimentation with it: working/homeless children, incarcerated and institutionalised youth, sexually abused children, unemployed youth, sex workers and others working in the entertainment/hospitality industry, young people frequenting places of entertainment such as clubs and discothèques, homosexuals, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth. The document further noted the consequences of methamphetamine: high risk of dependence and harmful psychological effects.

McKetin et al. (2008) observed that methamphetamine is sometimes mixed with other drugs and sold as "ecstasy. Li X et al. (2020) held that methamphetamine-dependent individuals show disrupted functional connectivity between the cerebellum and several cerebral functional networks compared to healthy controls, including default mode, affective-limbic, and sensorimotor networks. It also has socio-economic and legal consequences (Barman-Adhikari et al., 2016).

The concept of Church is another term that deserves attention in this conceptual framework. Attwater (2010) gave the following descriptions of the Church: A place of Christian worship; the whole society in communion with the Pope; the Church of Christ; the Christian of the patriarchate or other delimitation; the christens of a particular diocese; a single family of Christians; the pastor of a church (Matthew 28:17); those who are in the clerical state or whose lives are devoted to the service of the Church; the ancient non-Catholic churches of East. However, for Doohan (2004), "the people of God" is the most appropriate description of the concept of the Church. It regards every other description of the concept as secondary.

For the Church, drug abuse has negative consequences. One such Church document that dwelt on issues of drug abuse is the pastoral handbook of the *Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care* (2001). Even though it did not mention methamphetamine abuse in particular, it highlighted the adverse effects of drug abuse and ways of preventing such. Three ways it suggested are prevention, care, and suppression. Cornelio & Lasco (2020) argued that Church's emphasis has shifted over

the years, especially in the Philippines. The paper indicated that it shifted from emphasising the destruction of the youth, the attack on human dignity, to its role in socio-moral decay.

Bernhardt et al. (2020) was an empirical study on methamphetamine abuse. It studied neurocognitive dysfunctions and therapeutic modulation in patients with methamphetamine dependence, using 30 patients with methamphetamine dependence and 24 non-substance-abusing control participants for three months. The result showed that at baseline, methamphetamine-dependence patients showed a significantly higher number of omissions compared to controls, indicative of lower sustained attention. It shows that methamphetamine dependence results in cognitive deficits.

Along with the empirical studies, Chomchoei et al. (2019) studied perceived factors affecting the initiation of the drug use among Akha and Lahu youths in Thailand. They used a qualitative approach and interview method of data collection comprising 16 questions. The interview was conducted among 19 Akha and 22 Lahu youths. The result showed that four major perceived factors (low self-esteem, family member use, optimistic expectation regarding the application, and accessibility) and five helpful factors (social norm perception, school dropout, family level challenges, poor economic, and no Thai citizenship) contribute to the initiation of the drug use among the Akha and Lahu youths in northern Thailand.

2.1 Theoretical framework

This study adopted integrative models as its theoretical framework. This model combines elements from other models. Prominent among the elements combined here are those of contemporary moral and social cognitive theories. Fingarette & Peele advocated the former and maintained that addiction results from bad choices. Albert Badura propounded the latter and considered the influence of individual experiences, the actions of others, and environmental factors on individual health behaviours. It offers prospects for social support through imparting expectations, self-efficacy, applying observational learning, and other reinforcements to realise behaviour change. The rationale for the integrative model rests on the challenges of establishing a supermodel that could account for and respond to divergent methamphetamine abuse.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

Southeast is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, comprising five states: Anambra, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi, and Enugu. Its population is 16,395,555 according to the 2006 National Population Census, and its 2016 projected population is 21,955,414. It has boundaries with Benue and Kogi States in the North, Rivers and Bayelsa States in the South, Cross River and Akwa Ibom States in the East, and Delta and the Edo States in the West.

3.1 Description of the study site

The study sites comprised the Catholic Churches in the two rural areas and one municipal city of each selected State of the Southeast. The states are Imo, Enugu, and Ebonyi. Then, the city and two selected rural areas are Owerri, Okigwe, and Orlu (Imo State), Enugu, Nsukka, Udi (Enugu State), and Abakiliki, Izaa, and Afikpo (Ebonyi State) respectively.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Analysis

Table 4.1.1a: Methamphetamine abuse predominates in Southeast rural and among boys.

	Rural	Cities	Total		Boys	Girls	Total
Response	252	134	386		276	110	386

Table 4.1.1 shows that 252 (65.28%) respondents admitted that methamphetamine abuse predominates in rural areas, while 134 (34.72) held that it prevailed in the cities. Besides, the table showed that 276 (71.5%) respondents maintained that drug abuse is common among boys, while 110 (28.5%) said it is prevalent among girls.

Table 4.1.1b: The age bracket of the young people involved in methamphetamine abuse.

Age bracket	5-14	15-24	25-35	Total
Response	56	120	210	386

Table 4.1.1b shows that the age of victims of methamphetamine abuse is 15-35, between the age of exit from secondary school and the time young people search for greener pastures.

Table 4.1.2: The Church responds psycho-spiritually to the issue of methamphetamine abuse by young people in the Southeast.

S/NO	ITEM STATEMENT	SA	A	U	D	SD	Σf	Σfx	WMS X	Remarks
1	By caring for the victim through counselling.	153	163	42	12	16	386	1583	4.10	Accepted
2	By caring for the victim through prayers.	191	158	16	16	5	386	1672	4.33	Accepted
3	By caring for the victim through music.	46	37	148	119	36	386	1096	2.77	Rejected
4	By suppressing it through the victims-motivation.	148	127	49	32	30	386	1489	3.86	Accepted
5	By suppressing it through the victims-monitoring	76	134	54	47	75	386	1247	3.23	Accepted

Table 4.1.2 shows that 316(81.87%) respondents admitted that the Church psycho-spiritually responds to the methamphetamine abuse by caring for victims through counselling. Only 70 (18.13%) respondents adopted a contrary posture. 349 (90.42%) believed it cared for the victim through prayers. 275 (71.24%) said it achieved such by motivating, while 210 (54.40%) held that the Church achieved the objective by monitoring the victims. Their weighted mean score is above the minimum, leading to their acceptance. However, 303 (78.50%) maintained that the Church does respond to the issue by using music to care for the victims. Its weighted mean score is below the minimum mean score, leading to its rejection.

4.1.3: The Church responds socio-morally to the issue of methamphetamine abuse by young people in the Southeast.

S/NO	ITEM STATEMENT	SA	A	U	D	SD	Σf	Σfx	WMS X	Remarks
6	By educating young people	204	133	16	21	12	386	1654	4.29	Accepted
7	By forming a youth organisation.	88	132	100	54	12	386	1388	3.60	Accepted
8	By collaborating with other concerned groups.	98	146	96	30	16	386	1438	3.73	Accepted
9	By rehabilitating the victims through positive peer-group influence.	64	183	83	42	40	386	1425	3.69	Accepted
10	Through effective media use.	72	125	120	26	43	386	1315	3.41	Accepted
	By caring for the victim through medication	56	143	140	38	9	386	1357	3.52	Accepted

Table 4.1.3 shows that 337 (87.31%) respondents held that the Church socio-morally addresses drug abuse by educating young people. 220 (57%) admitted that she does so by organising them into groups, while 244 (63.21%) disclosed that the Church achieved such by collaborating with other concerned groups. 247 (63.99%) respondents acknowledged that the Church intervenes on the issue by rehabilitating the victims through positive peer-group influence, while 197 (51.04) and 199 (51.55%) said that she does so through effective media use and medication, respectively. Their respective weighted mean scores exceed the minimum score.

4.1.4: The Church responds theologically to the issue of methamphetamine abuse by young people in the Southeast.

S/NO	ITEM STATEMENT	SA	A	U	D	SD	Σf	Σfx	WM S X	Remarks
11	By creating awareness through preaching, seminar, workshops, etc	183	127	33	20	23	386	1585	4.11	Accepted
12	By emphasising African cultural values	79	177	80	46	4	386	1439	3.73	Accepted
13	By training theological experts to help the victims.	80	206	42	18	40	386	1426	3.69	Accepted

14	By placing canonical sanctions on the victims	25	54	178	80	49	386	1084	2.81	Rejected
15	Encouraging the victims to join religious congregations	32	45	156	120	33	386	1081	2.80	Rejected

Table 4.1.4 indicates that 310 (80.31%) respondents upheld that the Church theologically tackles drug abuse by creating awareness through preaching, seminar, workshops, etc. 256 (66.32%) agreed the Church emphasises African cultural values to achieve the same. In comparison, 286 (74.09%) disclosed that the Church also train theological experts to help the victims. Their respective average scores surpass the minimum score. In contrast, 307 (79.53%) dismissed that the Church could realise such by sanctioning the victims, while 309 (80.05%) held that it could do so by encouraging them to join religious congregations. Their respective weighted mean scores exceed the minimum score.

4.1.5: The Church responds politically to the issue of methamphetamine abuse by young people in the Southeast.

S/NO	ITEM STATEMENT	SA	A	U	D	SD	Σf	Σfx	WMS X	Remarks
16	By encouraging the government to employ the youth.	98	195	21	50	22	386	1455	3.77	Accepted
17	By inspiring the victims to participate in partisan politics	19	41	53	27	246	386	718	1.86	Rejected
18	Encourage the government to rehabilitate the victims and provide them with free skill acquisition.	132	156	16	46	36	386	1460	3.78	Accepted
19	By encouraging the government to arrest the victims.	18	32	78	175	82	386	884	2.29	rejected
20	By encouraging the government to ban the sale of the drug	196	121	5	38	26	386	1581	4.10	Accepted

Table 4.1.5 reveals that 29.91%) maintained that the Church responds to substance abuse politically by encouraging the government to employ the youth, while 288(74.61%) said that the Church does so by encouraging the government to rehabilitate the victims and providing them with free skill acquisition. Besides, 317(82.12%) admitted that it intervenes in the abuse by encouraging the government to ban the sale of the drug. Their respective weighted mean score surpasses the

minimum score. Conversely, 326(84.46%) held that the Church does not respond to the issue by inspiring the victims to participate in partisan politics. Also, 335(86.79%) maintained that it does not respond to the abuse by advocating for the victims' arrest. Their respective weighted mean scores are below the minimum score.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The analysis indicated that methamphetamine abuse prevailed in rural areas vis-a-vis cities, corroborating the earlier finding by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Methamphetamine abuse is also common among males between 15-35 years. It is usually towards the end of secondary school and the period of search for greener pastures among young people, a period often full of ambitions and imagination. The analysis also showed that the Church responds psycho-spiritually to methamphetamine abuse in the Southeast by caring for the victim through counselling, prayers, motivation, and monitoring. Through counselling, the Church achieves two things: counselling out and in. In the first case, it helps the victim quit their drug intake habit, and in the second, it helps them embrace a new and better mode of life. Such corroborates the research carried out by King'ori (2020) among secondary school students in Bahati Division, Kenya, in which proper application and deployment of counselling services reduced drug abuse among the students. Also, the Church uses prayer to recognise God's omnipotence and mercy towards humans. God has power over human beings and can intervene in their ugly situations. Such is the case as extant studies have shown that religious beliefs and practices contribute immeasurably towards drug abuse prevention (Grim & Grim 2019; Johnson et al. 2015, 2016a; Lee et al. 2017; Post et al. 2015, 2016). It also leads to its reduction (Grim & Grim 2019; Yu et al. 2016; Elmholdt et al. 2017). God can change a methamphetamine addict for the better. Besides, the Church understands the role motivation plays in people's life. Motivation can help people overcome their deplorable situations and emerge more robust and better. Thus, Hoffman et al. (2000) observed that once a counsellor notices poor motivation during counselling, he/she has the option of either continuing or discontinuing the process, given that poor motivation is an obstruction to effective drug abuse treatment. Further, the Church uses and advocates monitoring strategies to safeguard young people from engaging in methamphetamine abuse and to prevent those already in it from continuing. In contrast, even though a piece of music could serve as a tool to calm the victims, the Church does not consider it a potent antidote. It arises from the fact that some music could even worsen the situation of the victims or spur some young people into methamphetamine abuse.

Besides, the analysis showed that the Church socio-morally addresses the issue of substance abuse by educating young people, drafting them into youth organisations, collaborating with other concerned groups, rehabilitating the victims through positive peer-group influence, embracing effective media use, and offering medication to the victims. The Church has always looked at the education of young people as a way of pace-setting them for a more fantastic future, given that education is the life wire of any nation. Through education, it catches children young and reconfigures them into an acceptable societal image, predisposing them to discern, know and responsibly choose among conflicting values in life. The Church also organises them into groups, as it understands peer-group influence, bearing in mind that such influence could make or mar them. Also, the Church understands her limitations and the need to collaborate with other stakeholders in youth formation and promotion. So, she does not hesitate to synergise with other like minds in youth development, such as other Christian denominations, members of other religions, and governmental and non-governmental organisations. Further, the Church extensively

uses media to drive its campaign against methamphetamine abuse. It does so, understanding that young people are society's most social media-friendly sector and the media's potency to set people's agenda. Research by the National Institutes on Drug Abuse has shown that "currently no medications counteract the specific effects of methamphetamine or ... prolong abstinence from and reduce the abuse of methamphetamine by an individual addicted to the drug." However, the Church does not hesitate to use available ones for treating general substance abuse as alternatives. The analysis of table 4.1.3 showed that the Church theologically responds to methamphetamine abuse by creating awareness campaigns, emphasising African cultural values, and training theological experts to help the victims. Conversely, it does not address the issue by sanctioning the victims and encouraging them to join religious congregations, but rather by inspiring them to join pioneer total abstinence. The awareness campaign, the Church has brought to the public consciousness methamphetamine abuse, thereby charging all the stakeholders in children's upbringing with their responsibility towards eliminating the socio-moral decay. Interestingly, this awareness has borne tremendous fruit, giving parents, age grades and other concerned groups a template for critiquing and arresting the matter. As a result, many communities and age grades have passed by-laws to curb drug abuse. Alongside with awareness campaign, the Church also evokes African cultural values as a part of the moral template to drive home her catechesis and awareness campaign against the drug abuse. What governs the Church's action is the realisation that "the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures" (Evangellii Nuntiandi, no. 20). The war against methamphetamine abuse is one of the gospel strategies requiring African cultural values' instrumentality. Human culture is a people's identity and value definers. Idang (2015) argued that culture maintains those values necessary for people's survival. Besides, the Church has integrated the care for drug abuse victims in forming its missionary agents, as evident in the emergence of some priests and religious sisters that have today specialised in caring for victims of drug abuse and are working in various hospitals in the zone. Some church hospitals have undertaken to handle drug abuse victims. Here we have one run by the Missionary Companion of St Dunstan, located at Ehime Mbano Local Government Area, and another at Nkpo in Anambra State, owned and run by Immaculate Heart Sisters. Lastly, the analysis indicated that the Church tackled the issue by encouraging the government to employ the youth, rehabilitate the victims and provide them with free skill acquisition, and ban drug sales. In contrast, the Church does not respond to the issue by inspiring the victims to participate in partisan politics and encouraging the government to arrest the victims. The Church's appeal for government intervention rests on the Church's realisation that the war against drug abuse is not one it can do alone but requires collaboration with the government. Hence, it keeps urging the government to provide employment opportunities to youth. It does so because youth unemployment is one of the causes of many unwholesome practices among the youths in contemporary society, given that idle minds are the devil's workshop. According to Galadima (2014) & Serifat (2020), such practices include engagement in political thuggery, ethnoreligious clashes, local militancy, and antisocial vices. The Church has also encouraged the government to rehabilitate the victims of drug abuse and other youth with disabilities, as disability does not mean a lack of ability. The Church has also helped rehabilitate some victims through its various skill acquisition centres, such as Hopeville rehabilitation centre Uturu, in Isuikwuato Local Government Area, Abia State, Nigeria. Besides, the Church has encouraged the government to restrict access to the drug to only lawful end users. Such would step down the tide of drug abuse among youths.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of findings

The findings showed that the Church considers methamphetamine abuse:

- i. predominant in rural areas and among young boys,
- ii. a product of societal socio-moral decay, worth eradicating and remediable through prevention, care, suppression, awareness campaigns, seminars, workshops, and curriculum development;
- iii. indicative of societal, spiritual decay, a hindrance to spiritual growth in the geopolitical zone, and remediable through Christian counselling and prayer.;
- iv. a matter of theological concern and so entails training future Church ministers to address the challenge in the various areas of the apostolate and;
- v. should collaborate with the government to deal with the abuse.

5.2 Conclusion

Methamphetamine abuse by young people in Southeast Nigeria is an issue of much concern. It has several adverse effects on the victims, such as cognitive disorder, rapid heart rate, increased blood pressure, damage to the small blood vessels in the brain, etc. This paper has exposed the Catholic Church's response to the abuse using psycho-spiritual, socio-moral, theological, and political lenses. As this study fills the knowledge gap in the Church's response to the abuse in the zone, it would benefit young people, the Church, the government, and other researchers in Nigeria and beyond.

5.3 Recommendations

The study recommends that the Church should:

- i. improve its awareness campaign in rural areas through traditional institutions,
- ii. establish more clinics to care for methamphetamine abuse,
- iii. embed training on the evils of methamphetamine abuse into its school curriculum,
- iv. integrate the methamphetamine awareness programme in the ongoing formation of its priests and religious,
- v. develop greater synergy with other stakeholders in Methamphetamine abuse.

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