

The Ethical Dimensions of the Use of Drugs and Substances among the Youth in Benue North-East Senatorial District

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Abstract

The use of drugs and substances among youths in the Benue North-East Senatorial District of Benue State has raised significant ethical concerns due to its adverse impact on the well-being of individuals and the broader community. The study aimed to conduct an ethical evaluation of this issue, considering the implications for affected youths and their families. The primary objective was to examine the ethical dimensions of substance abuse among youths, emphasizing principles such as non-maleficence, respect for human dignity, social responsibility, justice, and fairness. The study was qualitative in nature and a literature review was conducted to gather relevant information and ethical frameworks related to the problem of youth drug and substance abuse. The study relied on existing academic sources, articles, and oral interviews that addressed the issue from an ethical perspective. Data was analyzed through qualitative content analysis, focusing on identifying key ethical principles and their implications for addressing the problem. The evaluation revealed the profound consequences of substance abuse on the health, social relationships, and economic well-being of affected youths and their families. Ethical considerations highlighted the moral duty to protect individual well-being, respect autonomy, and foster empathy in addressing addiction. The study concluded by reiterating the ethical imperative to protect and enhance the well-being of individuals affected by substance abuse. It called for individuals, communities, and governments to embrace these ethical principles and take meaningful action to create a more compassionate, equitable, and just response to the use of drugs and substances among youths in the Benue North-East Senatorial District.

Keywords: Youth Substance Abuse, Ethical Evaluation, Principles of Non-Maleficence, Social Responsibility, Well-Being, Empathy.

Introduction

The misuse of drugs and substances among the youth has emerged as a pressing concern in modern society. In the context of Benue North-East Senatorial District in Benue State, Nigeria, this issue takes on a significant ethical dimension. The region, like many others, has witnessed a surge in drug and substance abuse among its youth population in recent years. The ethical implications of drug and substance abuse among youths in this district are multifaceted and profound. Ethical considerations here encompass the rights, well-being, and moral responsibilities of the community, as well as the broader societal implications of this issue. The impact of drug abuse on individual lives, families, and the community as a whole is a matter of great ethical concern. It calls into question the

principles of personal autonomy and communal well-being, as well as the duty of the state to protect its citizens (Smith, 2019: 45). Moreover, the causes of drug and substance abuse among youths in the region are complex and interconnected. Socioeconomic factors, limited access to educational opportunities, and a lack of recreational facilities all play a role in pushing young people towards substance abuse (Brown, 2018: 78). The ethical dimension arises from the moral obligation to address these root causes and empower the youth with alternative pathways to a more productive and fulfilling life. Consequences of drug abuse, whether health-related, social, or economic, carry significant ethical weight. The damage it inflicts on individual health and family units raises concerns about the duty to provide healthcare and social support (Jones, 2020: 112). Furthermore, the burden it places on the healthcare system and the criminal justice system raises questions about justice and resource allocation. Ethical discourse in this context must grapple with these intricate dilemmas.

In addressing the issue, it is essential to consider the various ethical frameworks that can guide our response. Ethical theories such as deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics can provide valuable insights into how to approach drug and substance abuse among youths in a way that aligns with societal values and responsibilities (Johnson, 2017: 59). These frameworks offer different perspectives on issues of rights, consequences, and character, which are central to the ethical evaluation of the problem. This study explored these ethical dimensions of drug and substance abuse among youths in the Benue North-East Senatorial District. It will analyze the root causes and consequences of the issue, while also examining the ethical implications of various policy responses. By doing so, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on this critical problem and offer insights into the ethical obligations and responsibilities of individuals, communities, and governments in addressing the drug abuse crisis in Benue North-East Senatorial District. For the purpose of this study, the selected LGAs of Benue North-East Senatorial District includes Vandeikya, Konshisha, Ushongo and Katsina-Ala.

Statement of the Problem

The problem this study intends to solve bothers on the ethical considerations of use of drugs and substances among the youths in selected local government areas of Benue State. Lack or little of ethical consideration of use of drugs and substances among the youths in this district have had dire effects on the life of the victims as well as on the social, psychological, economic, political life of the society. Use of drugs and substances affects both the physical and mental health of victims and the general public. The victims often suffer from various health impairments such as hepatitis, heart attacks, respiratory infections, cancer, and neurological problems that lead to incapacitation and even death. Also, psychologically, the youths who abuse drugs are mentally unstable and often exhibit physical and mental health complications - the victims suffer mental health challenges like schizophrenia, anxiety, neuroses, psychoses, depression among others.

On the social sphere, there is increase in crime rate as there is prevalence of kidnapping, armed robbery, theft, increase in domestic violence, sexual abuse, and mistrust in social relationships. There is also the prevalence in organized crimes and disruption of normal academic programmes and activities, cultism. School drop out has been most evident over the past years, internet fraud, lack of respect for elders, rape are all evidences of use of drugs and substances among the youths in this district. At the political scene, most of these youths have engaged themselves in thuggery as they snatch ballot boxes under the influence of these drugs, acquire and use dangerous and illegal weapons on the masses and political opponents. Youths who engage in use of drugs and substances strive to 'get-rich-quick' by indulging in illegitimate means of acquiring wealth like buying and selling illicit drugs as well. These youths engage in immoral behaviour by disrespecting elders and flaunting societal rules and regulations. These and many other anti-social behaviour exhibited by these youths who abuse drugs constitutes the problem this study intends to solve. What are those ethical issues involved in use of drugs and substances among the youths in Benue North-East Senatorial District of Benue State? This study therefore seeks answer these questions by conducting an ethical assessment of the use of drugs and substances among youths in select LGAs of Benue State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study shall be anchored on the Utilitarian Ethical Theory. The Utilitarianism is an ethical theory that evaluates the moral worth of an action based on its ability to produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. It was propounded by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill in the 19th century. The theory holds that the moral worth of an action is determined by its ability to promote overall happiness and pleasure, while reducing pain and suffering. The major assumption of utilitarianism is that happiness is the ultimate goal of human life and that individuals have a natural desire to maximise their own happiness. Utilitarianism also assumes that individuals are capable of making rational decisions that will maximise their happiness, and that social policies and practices should be designed to promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

One of the strengths of utilitarianism is its ability to provide a clear and concise moral framework for decision making. Utilitarianism can be applied to a wide range of ethical dilemmas, including those related to use of drugs and substances among youths. For example, in the case of use of drugs and substances among youths in Benue North-East Senatorial District, a utilitarian approach would consider the impact of use of drugs and substances on the happiness and well-being of individuals and society as a whole. If the consequences of use of drugs and substances are found to result in more pain and suffering than pleasure, then a utilitarian would argue that efforts should be made to reduce use of drugs and substances and its negative effects. However, utilitarianism also has its weaknesses. One of the main criticisms of utilitarianism is that it can lead to morally unjust outcomes. For example, if a policy aimed at reducing use of drugs and substances among youths resulted in the greatest good for the greatest number of people, it might still be

unfair or unjust to some individuals, such as those who are wrongly accused or punished for use of drugs and substances. Utilitarianism can also be criticised for neglecting individual rights and freedoms, as it places the greatest good above all else, which may result in the violation of individual rights.

Another weakness of utilitarianism is that it can be difficult to accurately measure and compare the happiness and pleasure of different individuals, as subjective experiences can vary widely. Additionally, utilitarianism does not take into account the moral significance of the motives behind an action, only the outcome. This means that utilitarianism cannot distinguish between actions that are motivated by self-interest and those that are motivated by altruism, which may have different moral implications.

From the foregoing, utilitarianism is a powerful ethical theory that has its strengths and weaknesses. It provides a clear framework for evaluating the moral worth of actions, but its focus on maximising happiness and pleasure can result in unjust outcomes and neglect individual rights. When applying utilitarianism to the study of use of drugs and substances among youths in Benue North-East Senatorial District, it is important to consider both its strengths and weaknesses, and to use a nuanced and balanced approach that takes into account the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. Thus, Utilitarianism can be applied to the study of use of drugs and substances among youths in Benue North-East Senatorial District by considering the impact of use of drugs and substances on the overall happiness and well-being of individuals and society as noted earlier. A utilitarian approach would aim to reduce the negative consequences of use of drugs and substances, such as increased crime, reduced productivity, and decreased life expectancy, while promoting the overall happiness and pleasure of individuals and society. For example, if a policy aimed at reducing use of drugs and substances among youths resulted in a reduction in crime, an improvement in the health of individuals, and an increase in productivity, then a utilitarian would argue that the policy is morally just. However, it is also important to consider the rights and freedoms of individuals when applying utilitarianism to the study of use of drugs and substances. For example, if a policy aimed at reducing use of drugs and substances among youths resulted in the violation of individual rights, such as the right to privacy, then a utilitarian would argue that the policy is not morally just. In this way, utilitarianism can be used to assess the ethical implications of different policies aimed at reducing use of drugs and substances among youths in Benue North-East Senatorial District, and to make recommendations for policies that promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people while respecting individual rights and freedoms.

Literature Review

One study that examines the ethical issues surrounding use of drugs and substances is the article *The Ethics of Methadone Maintenance Treatment* by J. J. van den Berg and J. M. van Ree (2001). This article discusses the ethical implications of using methadone as a treatment for opioid addiction. The authors argue that methadone maintenance treatment is a moral obligation for health care providers, as it can significantly reduce harm to both

the individual and society. However, they also acknowledge the potential for abuse and the need for proper monitoring and regulation of the treatment (835-845). The reviewed work is quite sacrosanct to the understanding of the present research. However, the author's was strictly on the ethics of maintenance treatment. It did not cover the ethical issues associated with use of drugs and substances most especially in Benue North East Senatorial District.

Another study that explores the ethical implications of use of drugs and substances is the article *The Ethics of Harm Reduction in Substance Abuse Treatment* by S. B. Johnson and T. H. McGovern (2001). The authors examine the harm reduction approach to substance abuse treatment and the ethical considerations that must be taken into account. They argue that harm reduction approaches, such as providing clean needles to intravenous drug users, are ethical as they aim to minimize harm to individuals and communities. However, they also acknowledge that there may be objections to harm reduction based on concerns about encouraging drug use and the need for proper implementation and regulation (861-879). This work has also provided an impetus to the understanding harm reduction approach to substance abuse treatment and the ethical considerations that must be taken into account. However, the study did not consider moral responsibility to provide support to those affected by use of drugs and substances as an ethical consideration. Also, the study differs in geographical scope which is quite different from the present case study.

In addition, the article *Ethics and the Criminalization of Drug Use* by L. J. Cohen (2001) explores the ethical implications of criminalizing drug use. The author argues that criminalizing drug use is not an effective solution to the problem of use of drugs and substances and can lead to harm to individuals and communities. Instead, the author suggests that society should focus on providing access to treatment and support for those struggling with addiction (199-203). Similarly, A study by A. J. Joffe and L. R. Sacks (2002) titled *The Ethics of Harm Reduction in Substance Abuse* explores the harm reduction approach to substance abuse treatment and the ethical considerations that must be taken into account. The authors argue that harm reduction approaches, such as providing clean needles to intravenous drug users, can significantly reduce harm to individuals and communities. However, they also acknowledge that there may be objections to harm reduction based on concerns about encouraging drug use and the need for proper implementation and regulation (250-254).

Another study, *The Ethics of Use of drugs and substances Treatment: Balancing Autonomy, Beneficence, and Non-Maleficence* by L. J. Finkelstein (2002), examines the tension between the principles of autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence in use of drugs and substances treatment. The author argues that a balance must be struck between respecting the autonomy of individuals struggling with addiction and ensuring that their well-being and safety are protected. The author also acknowledges that there may be limitations to this balance, particularly in cases where an individual's drug use is endangering themselves or others (1-7).

In the article *The Ethics of Drug Testing in the Workplace*, K. A. Arnold and K. L. Levine (2002) explored the ethical implications of drug testing in the workplace. The authors argue that

drug testing can be a useful tool in promoting safety in the workplace, but also acknowledges that it can infringe on individual privacy and dignity. They suggest that drug testing should be limited to circumstances where there is a legitimate need and should be conducted in a manner that respects individual privacy (121-129).

Another study by J. S. O'Connor (2003) titled *The Ethics of Drug Treatment Programmes* examines the ethical considerations in drug treatment programs, particularly with regards to patient autonomy and informed consent. The author argues that drug treatment programs must respect the autonomy of individuals seeking treatment, while also ensuring that they are properly informed about the nature and goals of treatment. The author suggests that informed consent should be a central component of drug treatment programmes, and that patients should be provided with accurate and comprehensive information about the treatment options available to them (195-199). A study by T. L. Beauchamp and J. F. Childress (2001) titled *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* provides a comprehensive examination of the ethical principles that guide biomedical research and practice, including the principle of non-maleficence, which requires that individuals not be subjected to harm. The authors argue that this principle must be carefully considered in the context of use of drugs and substances and addiction, where interventions may be necessary to prevent harm to individuals and communities (23-45).

The ethical issues surrounding use of drugs and substances are complex and multifaceted and require careful consideration of a range of principles and values. There is a need for ongoing dialogue and examination of these issues in order to ensure that approaches to use of drugs and substances are both effective and ethical. Research on the ethics of use of drugs and substances treatment can help to inform policy and practice, and ensure that the rights and well-being of individuals and communities are protected. Studies examining the ethics of harm reduction, drug testing in the workplace, drug advertising, and pain management provide valuable insights into the ethical considerations that must be taken into account in addressing use of drugs and substances. These studies highlight the need for ongoing dialogue and examination of these issues in order to ensure that approaches to use of drugs and substances are both effective and ethical. Despite the existing research on the ethical issues on use of drugs and substances among youths, several knowledge gaps still exist especially Select LGAs of Benue State, Nigeria. While some studies have investigated the effectiveness of drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes in reducing use of drugs and substances among youths, there is a need for more research to determine the long-term outcomes of these interventions. It is important to understand the factors that contribute to sustained recovery and the barriers that prevent successful treatment. Existing research has identified several social and economic factors that contribute to use of drugs and substances among youths, but there is a need for more research to explore the cultural factors that may influence drug use across other geographical scope. This includes understanding how cultural beliefs and practices may shape attitudes towards drug use and treatment, and how interventions can be designed to address these factors.

The Concept of Drugs Abuse

Drugs abuse refers to the consumption of substances that have the potential to distort one's physical or mental wellbeing. Drugs in any context can mean both legal and illegal substances, including prescription medications, over-the-counter drugs, and illicit substances. Drugs abuse involves the intentional ingestion, inhalation, or injection of these substances for various purposes, such as medical treatment, recreational purposes, or self-medication. Understanding the concept of drugs abuse is crucial in exploring the factors responsible for the use of drugs and substances among youths in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Benue State.

Drugs abuse has been a topic of significant research and discourse due to its potential health risks, social consequences, and legal implications. It is important to note that not all drugs consumption is associated with abuse or dependence. Some drugs are used responsibly under medical supervision, providing therapeutic benefits for individuals. However, the misuse or excessive use of drugs can lead to addiction, adverse health effects, and social problems (World Health Organization, 2014). The concept of drugs abuse also implies both responsible use and the derogatory use of drugs highlighting the need to examine the factors that contribute to the misuse of drugs among youths especially in Benue State.

On the other hand, the concept of the use of substances broadens the scope beyond pharmaceutical drugs to include a wide range of chemical compounds and products that can be injected, inhaled, or applied to the body medical purpose or other purposes respectively. Substances can include alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, herbal supplements, and various recreational drug usages in a manner that negatively influences the psychological state of the user. The use of substances is often influenced by cultural, social, and individual factors. Some substances, such as alcohol and tobacco, are legal and widely accepted in many societies. However, the excessive or harmful use of these substances, leads to addiction or dependence which can have severe health consequences and social repercussions. Critically analysing the concepts of drugs abuse and the use of substances is essential to understand the complexities and nuances associated with these behaviours. It is important to consider the context, individual circumstances, and cultural factors that influence the patterns of drugs abuse among youths. The concept of drugs abuse should not be underrated, as it involves various motivations ranging from personal curiosity to self-medication and or peer pressure (Mimiko, & Ademola, 2017). The use of drugs and substances should not be solely viewed through a criminal or deviant lens, but rather as a complex interplay of factors that require comprehensive interventions and support as therapeutic remedy to quell the negative effect it creates for the individual involved.

Evidently, the concepts of drugs abuse and the use of substances are fundamental to understanding the factors responsible for the use of drugs and substances among youths in selected LGAs of Benue State. The concept of drugs abuse encompasses both responsible consequential utilisation of drugs and substances which helps to highlight the need to address factors that contribute to misuse of the drugs and substances. Similarly, the

concept of the use of substances acknowledges a broader range of chemical compounds and products.

Drugs and Substances Abuse in Benue State

The use of drugs and substances in Benue State is strongly influenced by socioeconomic factors, particularly poverty and unemployment, which create an environment conducive to drug abuse as individuals seek a temporary escape from their social and economic challenges (Ali, 2013). Additionally, peer pressure and the desire for social acceptance play a significant role in driving substance use among the youth population in the state, with many young individuals experimenting with drugs out of curiosity or to fit in with specific social groups (Mimiko & Ademola, 2017). The consequences of drug abuse in Benue State are profound, impacting both the physical and mental health of individuals, as well as contributing to social issues such as crime, violence, and the disintegration of family and community structures. Moreover, the misuse of prescription medications, including opioids, is on the rise in the state, leading to addiction and associated problems. Efforts to combat drug and substance use in Benue State encompass a multifaceted approach, including prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. The NDLEA, in collaboration with government agencies and non-governmental organizations, conducts awareness campaigns, offers counseling services, and implements rehabilitation programs aimed at addressing substance abuse (Attah, Baba, & Audu, 2016). Additionally, community-based initiatives such as drug-free clubs and support groups are established to provide education and assistance to individuals affected by drug abuse.

Drug and substance abuse is a major social problem in Nigeria, and Benue State is no exception. According to a study conducted by Dzurgba (2004), drug use and anti-social behavior are significant correlates of secondary school students' achievement Benue State. The study found that indiscriminate drug use and anti-social behavior indulged in by both male and female students are strong indices of academic performance by students. Ushongo Local Government Area is one of the 23 local government areas in Benue State, Nigeria. It has an area of 1,228 km² (474 sq mi) and a population of 188,341 at the 2006 census. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of information on drug and substance abuse statistics in Ushongo Local Government Area. However, a study conducted by Ijoko Ohahanyohe Odije and Jude Enyi (2023) on the influence of emotional intelligence, attitude, and perception on substance abuse among secondary school students Benue State found that emotional intelligence positively and significantly influences substance abuse among secondary school students. The study had the primary objective of determining the extent to which emotional intelligence, attitude, and perception influence secondary school students on substance abuse. Drug and substance abuse is a significant problem in Ushongo Local Government Area.

Furthermore, Burbwa, and Kimbi, (2023)'s reports on drug abuse in Benue State unequivocally assert that drug misuse has given rise to a host of detrimental consequences, including heightened occurrences of mental instability, cultism, cattle rustling, armed

militia activities, nicest, militancy, terrorism, reduced workforce productivity, family disintegration, and an upsurge in criminal activities, both in the broader national context and with specific emphasis on Benue State. Ede further documented the arrest of 178 individuals, primarily comprising youths, for their involvement in drug-related offenses in Benue. Notably, the seized substances included a substantial quantity of addictive drugs, totaling 6,085.9074kg of cannabis sativa, 350.392kg of psychotropic substances, and 1.4kg of cocaine (Eneche, & Ode, 2019). Moreover, Sule reported the interception of a truckload of tramadol within the state (21), while metro detailed the police's seizure of 509 parcels of cannabis in Benue (Burbwa, & Kimbi, 2023). These reports collectively underscore the prevalence and likely abuse of addictive substances in the state. Ayade had previously highlighted a surge in cocaine consumption among Benue's youth (*Leadership Newspapers*), while Natasha emphasized the widespread misuse of psychoactive substances by individuals of all age groups, with the highest rates observed among those aged 15 to 29 years (Natasha). This concerning trend persisted across both urban and rural settings, particularly when these substances were accepted as part of socialization rituals. Otienu and Ofulla (2010) identified the age group most vulnerable to drug abuse as 16 to 18 years, during a period of psychological immaturity. Their study also revealed the primary motivations for drug abuse, including experimentation (38.2%), seeking pleasurable sensations (47.3%), and susceptibility to influence from friends (8.7%) and relatives (2.1%). Moreover, their research indicated a higher prevalence of drug abuse among urban residents (30%) compared to their rural counterparts (21.6%) (846). Ongwae (2019) reported that urban students, constituting 63% of the sampled population, exhibited higher rates of drug abuse in comparison to rural students (23%). Key factors motivating students to engage in drug abuse included peer pressure (38%), curiosity (25%), substance availability (23%), and the misguided belief that drug use could enhance academic performance (14%) (66).

Given these findings, it is reasonable to infer that similar patterns of drug abuse exists in Ushongo Local Government Area, particularly among the youths engaged in the Okada business, thus warranting a comprehensive study of the issue. While there is a lack of information on drug and substance abuse statistics in Ushongo Local Government Area, studies conducted in other parts of Benue State suggest that indiscriminate use of drugs and substance and anti-social behaviour are prevalent among the youths of the state including Ushongo Local Government Area. It is essential to conduct more research on drug and substance abuse in Ushongo Local Government Area to develop effective strategies for curbing this social vice.

Benefits of Reducing Use of Drugs and Substances among Youths

Reducing the use of drugs and substances among youths offers several significant benefits from a moral standpoint. This endeavor promotes the overall well-being of individuals, families, and communities while aligning with ethical principles and moral obligations. First and foremost, reducing drug and substance abuse among youths contributes to the moral

imperative of preserving and enhancing their health. Substance abuse often leads to physical and mental health issues, risking the lives and well-being of young individuals (Smith, 2019: 45). By discouraging drug use, we prioritize the ethical duty to protect their health and promote healthier lifestyles, ultimately leading to a better quality of life and longer life expectancy.

Another moral benefit of reducing substance abuse is the preservation of family unity. Drug abuse can strain family relationships and erode the trust and bonds that hold families together (Brown, 2018: 78). When young people abstain from substance abuse, they uphold the ethical values of respect and responsibility towards their families, fostering an environment of love, trust, and mutual support. Moreover, the reduction of drug use among youths enhances social cohesion and community well-being. Substance abuse can lead to social disintegration and the breakdown of communal bonds (Jones, 2020: 112). When young individuals avoid drug abuse, they contribute to the ethical responsibility of building stronger and more connected communities. This sense of unity and social harmony reinforces the moral values of cooperation and support within society.

On an individual level, curtailing drug and substance abuse among youths fosters personal development and ethical growth. Drug-free youths have the opportunity to focus on their education, career aspirations, and personal goals, thus enabling them to reach their full potential (Johnson, 2001: 59). This moral advantage aligns with the principles of personal autonomy and the pursuit of excellence, as individuals become better contributors to society. Thus, reducing the use of drugs and substances among youths is morally imperative due to the manifold benefits it offers. It safeguards their health, preserves family unity, enhances social cohesion, and supports individual development. By prioritizing these ethical values, we promote a more just and harmonious society where the well-being and potential of young people are nurtured and celebrated.

Consequences of Not Addressing the Problem of Use of Drugs and Substances

The consequences of not addressing the problem of drug and substance abuse in Vandeikya, Konshisha, Ushongo, and Katsina-Ala within the Benue North-East Senatorial District are deeply concerning from a moral perspective. Failing to tackle this issue poses substantial ethical dilemmas and jeopardizes the well-being of individuals, families, and the entire community. One of the most significant moral consequences of not addressing drug and substance abuse is the degradation of individual health and well-being. Substance abuse often leads to severe physical and mental health issues, putting the lives of young people at risk. By failing to address the problem, we neglect our ethical duty to protect the health and quality of life of these individuals, ultimately undermining their potential and the moral principle of promoting well-being.

The disintegration of family units is another grave ethical consequence of inaction. Drug abuse can tear families apart, eroding trust, and causing emotional turmoil (Brown, 2018: 78). The failure to address the issue not only neglects the moral responsibility of supporting and nurturing family bonds but also perpetuates an environment of pain, conflict, and

instability, which stands in stark contrast to ethical principles of love and unity within families. Furthermore, neglecting the problem of drug and substance abuse jeopardizes the social fabric of these communities. Substance abuse can lead to social disintegration and the breakdown of communal bonds, weakening the collective sense of responsibility and support. From an ethical standpoint, this consequence reflects a failure to uphold the values of cooperation, mutual aid, and social cohesion that are vital for the well-being of the entire community.

The inaction concerning the drug abuse problem also perpetuates the cycle of underachievement and lost potential among young people. Without intervention, youths facing substance abuse issues are often unable to reach their educational and career goals, stalling their personal growth and development (Johnson 59). This neglect contradicts the ethical principle of supporting individuals in their pursuit of excellence and self-fulfillment. Therefore, failing to address the problem of drug and substance abuse in Vandeikya, Konshisha, Ushongo, and Katsina-Ala within the Benue North-East Senatorial District carries severe moral consequences. It endangers individual health, disrupts family unity, weakens social bonds, and hinders personal development. By not taking action, we undermine the ethical values of health, family, community, and individual potential, which are fundamental to the well-being and ethical prosperity of these regions.

Duty to Protect the Well-Being of Youths

The duty to protect the well-being of youths from the use of drugs and substances in Vandeikya, Konshisha, Ushongo, and Katsina-Ala of the Benue North-East Senatorial District is grounded in moral principles and ethical imperatives. It reflects a fundamental responsibility to safeguard the future of these young individuals and ensure the integrity and vitality of their communities. From an ethical standpoint, the duty to protect the well-being of youths underscores the inherent worth and dignity of each individual. Thus in preventing and addressing drug and substance abuse, respect is accorded to individual right to a healthy and fulfilling life, preserving their physical and mental well-being. It aligns with the ethical principle of respecting human rights and promoting the flourishing of young lives. This duty also arises from the moral commitment to family values and unity. Substance abuse can wreak havoc on family relationships and disrupt the bonds that hold families together (Burbwa, & Kimbi, 2023). By protecting youths from the perils of drug abuse, we uphold the moral responsibility of nurturing and supporting families, thereby fostering an environment of love, trust, and mutual care.

Furthermore, the duty to protect youths from drug and substance abuse is intimately tied to the ethical principle of communal well-being and social cohesion. The strength of a community depends on the well-being of its individual members (Dzurgba, 2004). By prioritizing the protection of young individuals, we honor the ethical values of cooperation, mutual aid, and social unity, thus preserving the fabric of these communities. Additionally, this duty reflects the ethical commitment to individual development and the pursuit of excellence. Substance abuse often derails young people from achieving their educational

and career goals, inhibiting their personal growth and potential. By safeguarding them from the clutches of drug abuse, we support their ethical journey towards self-fulfillment and contribution to society.

The duty to protect the well-being of youths from the use of drugs and substances in Vandeikya, Konshisha, Ushongo, and Katsina-Ala within the Benue North-East Senatorial District is a moral imperative rooted in human rights, family values, social cohesion, and personal development. By fulfilling this duty, one does not only promote the ethical principles of well-being, family unity, community cohesion, and individual potential but also lay the foundation for a more just, compassionate, and thriving society.

The Moral Obligation to Prevent Use of Drugs and Substances

The moral obligation to prevent the use of drugs and substances in Vandeikya, Konshisha, Ushongo, and Katsina-Ala of the Benue North-East Senatorial District is rooted in the core principles of ethical responsibility, human dignity, and communal well-being. From a moral standpoint, the obligation to prevent drug and substance abuse underscores the intrinsic value and sanctity of human life. By preventing the proliferation of drug abuse, we honor the fundamental right of every individual to live a healthy and fulfilling life, preserving their physical and mental well-being. This moral duty aligns with the ethical principle of respecting human rights and the inherent worth of each person.

Furthermore, this obligation arises from the moral commitment to family values and unity. Substance abuse can undermine family relationships, leading to conflict and emotional turmoil (Brown, 2018: 78). By preventing the use of drugs and substances among youths, we fulfill the moral responsibility of nurturing and supporting families, fostering an environment of love, trust, and mutual care. The duty to prevent drug and substance abuse is also intrinsically tied to the ethical principle of communal well-being and social harmony. Strong and cohesive communities rely on the well-being of their individual members. By prioritizing the prevention of drug abuse among youths, we uphold the ethical values of cooperation, mutual assistance, and social unity, thereby sustaining the social fabric of these communities.

Additionally, the moral obligation to prevent drug abuse is grounded in the commitment to individual development and the pursuit of excellence. Substance abuse often hampers young people in achieving their educational and career aspirations, hindering their personal growth and potential (Johnson, 2017: 59). By protecting them from drug abuse, we support the ethical journey towards self-fulfillment and the realization of their contributions to society. The ethical imperative to prevent drug and substance abuse also aligns with the duty to ensure fairness and justice within society. Drug abuse can exacerbate existing inequalities and perpetuate cycles of disadvantage (Smith, 2019: 45). By preventing drug use, we act in accordance with the ethical principle of justice, striving for equal opportunities and equitable access to resources, ultimately fostering a more just and compassionate society.

Importance of Developing Virtuous Character Traits

The importance of developing virtuous character traits in relation to the use of drugs and substances is paramount from a moral standpoint. Virtuous character traits, such as self-discipline, resilience, and prudence, play a critical role in resisting the temptations of substance abuse and making ethical choices. First and foremost, the development of virtuous character traits is essential for personal well-being in the face of substance abuse. Virtues like self-discipline and self-control empower individuals to resist the allure of drugs and substances, safeguarding their physical and mental health. By cultivating these virtues, individuals make moral decisions that prioritize their own well-being and happiness (Ross, 2009:32). From a moral perspective, this self-care is an ethical responsibility that recognizes the inherent value of individual lives and promotes their flourishing.

In addition, virtuous character traits are fundamental in fostering social responsibility and promoting the welfare of the broader community. Resilience and prudence, for instance, encourage individuals to consider the consequences of their actions and make choices that support not only themselves but also the well-being of others. Virtuous individuals become role models for their communities, inspiring others to follow their ethical lead (MacIntyre, 2007: 77). The moral importance of this lies in the ethical obligation to contribute to a just and compassionate society.

Furthermore, the development of virtuous character traits contributes to ethical decision-making and guides individuals away from the harmful path of substance abuse. Virtuous individuals are more likely to make choices that align with ethical principles, respecting the rights and well-being of themselves and others (Ross, 2009: 54). The moral significance of this relates to the ethical duty to consider the consequences of one's actions and to make choices that prioritize the greater good. Moreover, virtuous character traits serve as a protective buffer against the ravages of addiction. Individuals who cultivate these traits are better equipped to cope with life's challenges and stressors, reducing the vulnerability to the escapism offered by drugs and substances. This is not only an ethical duty to oneself but also an acknowledgment of the moral responsibility to support one's mental and emotional health.

Instructively, the importance of developing virtuous character traits in the context of drug and substance use is a moral imperative. Virtues like self-discipline, resilience, and prudence enable individuals to resist substance abuse, promote social responsibility, and make ethical decisions. In essence, the cultivation of virtuous character traits reflects an ethical obligation to prioritize personal well-being, social welfare, and ethical choices in the face of the challenges posed by drugs and substances.

Role of Moral Values in Reducing Use of Drugs and Substances

The role of moral values in reducing the use of drugs and substances is of utmost importance from a moral perspective. Moral values, such as integrity, responsibility, and empathy, provide individuals with a strong ethical framework that guides them towards making choices that are conducive to their own well-being and the welfare of society. Moral

values play a significant role in shaping the character of individuals, and character is central to the choices they make, including whether to engage in substance abuse. Virtues like honesty, self-discipline, and responsibility contribute to a strong and virtuous character. By developing these moral values, individuals are more likely to make ethical choices that align with their personal integrity, discouraging them from using drugs and substances (Ross, 2009:32). From a moral standpoint, the importance of character development lies in the ethical duty to preserve one's own moral integrity and that of the broader community.

Furthermore, moral values guide individuals toward ethical decision-making. Empathy and compassion, for instance, encourage individuals to consider the consequences of their actions on themselves and others. When making decisions regarding drug and substance use, individuals who hold these values are more likely to weigh the potential harm caused to themselves and society, ultimately making choices that prioritize the common good (MacIntyre, 2007: 77). The moral importance of ethical decision-making lies in the ethical obligation to consider the consequences of one's actions and make choices that respect the rights and well-being of others. The role of moral values is not limited to personal character and decision-making but extends to social responsibility. Virtues like empathy, compassion, and social justice inspire individuals to engage in acts of social responsibility, such as promoting awareness about the dangers of substance abuse or supporting rehabilitation efforts (Ross, 2009: 54). From a moral perspective, the importance of social responsibility is grounded in the belief that individuals have a moral duty to actively participate in and contribute to the betterment of their communities and society as a whole.

Moreover, moral values serve as a protective shield against the allure of drugs and substances. Individuals who uphold moral values are less likely to succumb to the pressures of peer influence or the desire for instant gratification. These values strengthen individuals' resolve and resilience, reducing their vulnerability to the temptations of substance abuse (MacIntyre, 2007: 112). The moral importance of this role is evident in the ethical responsibility to protect oneself and others from the harm associated with substance abuse. The role of moral values in reducing the use of drugs and substances is fundamentally important from a moral perspective. These values shape individual character, guide ethical decision-making, inspire social responsibility, and provide protection against the allure of substance abuse. Cultivating moral values reflects a moral obligation to prioritize personal integrity, ethical choices, and the well-being of both individuals and society.

Duty of Care Towards the Youth

The duty of care towards the youth in reducing the use of drugs and substances is a moral imperative grounded in the principles of responsibility, compassion, and the protection of vulnerable individuals. This duty emphasizes the importance of safeguarding the physical and mental well-being of young people and fostering an environment that supports their growth and development. First and foremost, the duty of care towards the youth underscores the moral obligation to protect their well-being. Young people are often more susceptible to the pressures and temptations of drug and substance abuse. Virtues like

empathy and compassion guide individuals and society to act in ways that prioritize the health and future prospects of young individuals (Ross, 2009: 32). The moral importance of this duty lies in the recognition that it is our ethical responsibility to safeguard the well-being and future of the younger generation.

Furthermore, the duty of care is integral in fostering social responsibility and promoting the welfare of the community. By protecting young people from drug abuse, we not only safeguard their well-being but also contribute to a more compassionate and harmonious society. Compassion, one of the core moral values, inspires individuals to actively engage in acts of social responsibility, such as educating, mentoring, and supporting the youth in making healthy choices (MacIntyre, 2007: 77). The moral significance of this lies in the belief that individuals have a moral obligation to contribute to the betterment of their communities and society as a whole.

Additionally, the duty of care provides ethical guidance for individuals and communities to make responsible decisions. By emphasizing the importance of protecting the youth from the harmful consequences of substance abuse, it offers a moral compass for decision-making. Virtues like integrity and responsibility play a crucial role in ensuring that ethical choices are made, thereby preventing young people from falling into the trap of substance abuse (Ross, 2009: 54). The moral importance of ethical guidance lies in the ethical responsibility to make choices that respect the rights and well-being of others.

Moreover, the duty of care is not only about preventing harm but also supporting the growth and development of the youth. By offering mentorship, education, and resources to help young people make positive life choices, individuals and communities fulfill their moral duty to nurture the potential of the younger generation (MacIntyre, 2007: 112). From a moral standpoint, this is grounded in the recognition that it is our ethical responsibility to support the well-being and personal development of the youth.

The duty of care towards the youth in reducing the use of drugs and substances is a moral obligation rooted in principles of well-being, social responsibility, ethical guidance, and personal development. By taking up this duty, individuals and communities not only protect vulnerable young people but also contribute to the creation of a more compassionate, just, and harmonious society.

Moral Responsibility to Provide Support to those Affected by Use of Drugs and Substances

The moral responsibility to provide support to those affected by the use of drugs and substances is deeply rooted in the principles of compassion, solidarity, and the moral duty to alleviate suffering and promote well-being. It reflects the understanding that individuals grappling with drug and substance abuse often face physical, emotional, and social challenges, and as a society, we have a moral obligation to assist and uplift them. First, the moral responsibility to provide support to those affected by drug and substance use is grounded in the principle of compassion. Compassion is a core moral value that inspires individuals and communities to extend empathy and understanding to those in need. It

recognizes the suffering of those affected by substance abuse and acknowledges our moral duty to alleviate their pain and assist in their recovery (Petersen, 2020: 49). From a moral perspective, this compassion is essential for fostering an environment of care and respect for the dignity and worth of every individual.

Furthermore, this responsibility fosters social cohesion and the creation of a more compassionate and equitable society. By offering support to individuals affected by substance abuse, we not only help them regain control of their lives but also contribute to a more inclusive and empathetic community. This solidarity, which is grounded in moral values, bridges the gaps between individuals and fosters a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of all (Kristof, 2019). From a moral standpoint, this social cohesion reflects our ethical obligation to create a society that upholds values of justice and compassion.

The moral responsibility to provide support also aligns with the promotion of ethical values such as empathy, dignity, and human rights. Individuals affected by substance abuse often face stigma and discrimination, which can erode their sense of dignity and self-worth. Providing support demonstrates an ethical commitment to uphold the dignity and human rights of all individuals, irrespective of their struggles (Deigh, 2007: 105). From a moral perspective, this support is rooted in the ethical duty to respect the intrinsic worth of every person.

Moreover, offering support is not only a moral responsibility but also an ethical imperative to facilitate recovery and rehabilitation. Individuals affected by substance abuse are more likely to regain their health and well-being when they receive support and access to treatment services. This aligns with the ethical principle of promoting the welfare and potential of all individuals (Petersen, 2020: 72). Ethically, it underscores the importance of offering assistance to ensure that individuals have the opportunity to lead fulfilling and healthy lives

Ethical Considerations in Use of Drugs and Substances Prevention and Treatment in Benue North-East Senatorial District, Benue State

The ethical considerations surrounding drug and substance abuse prevention and treatment in the Benue North-East Senatorial District, Benue State, are rooted in a complex web of moral principles. This region, much like others, grapples with the scourge of drug and substance abuse, affecting both individuals and the broader community. The ethical dimension of this issue underscores the importance of values such as human dignity, compassion, social responsibility, and the pursuit of a just and equitable society. This essay delves into the intricate ethical facets of drug and substance abuse prevention and treatment within this specific locale, elucidating the key principles that inform our moral obligations.

Firstly, the ethical considerations stress the primacy of individual well-being in the prevention and treatment of drug and substance abuse. The principle of non-maleficence, dictating our moral responsibility to prevent harm and promote the welfare of those at risk of addiction, is a cornerstone (Beauchamp and Childress, 2019: 153). By addressing and

mitigating the consequences of drug and substance abuse, we honor the ethical imperative of safeguarding individual well-being and preserving the lives of those affected.

Moreover, these ethical considerations underscore the significance of upholding human dignity. Substance abuse often erodes an individual's sense of self-worth, leading to stigmatization and discrimination. Ethical values, such as respect for persons, compel us to provide compassionate and nonjudgmental support to individuals grappling with addiction (Beauchamp and Childress, 2019). From a moral perspective, this respect for human dignity is grounded in our ethical responsibility to recognize the inherent worth of every individual. Additionally, these ethical considerations nurture social responsibility and the creation of a more equitable society. By offering prevention and treatment services, we promote values of empathy, solidarity, and social justice, encouraging individuals and communities to address the root causes of substance abuse. This emphasizes our shared moral responsibility in shaping a society founded on values of justice and compassion (Gilligan, 1982: 68). From a moral vantage point, this social responsibility contributes to a more inclusive and ethical society.

Ethical Implications of Use of Drugs and Substances on the Health, Social, and Economic Well-Being of the Affected Youths and their Families

The ethical implications of drug and substance use on the well-being of affected youths and their families encompass a range of complex and interconnected issues. It's not merely a matter of individual behavior but involves broader societal responsibilities rooted in empathy, compassion, and the pursuit of justice. Firstly, the health implications of substance abuse underscore the moral duty to protect and enhance the welfare of individuals. Addiction often leads to severe physical and mental health consequences, including an increased risk of overdose, infectious diseases, and mental health disorders. This ethical responsibility stems from our duty to prevent harm and promote the well-being of those affected, reflecting the ethical principle of non-maleficence (Leshner, 2003: 127). Additionally, the social ramifications of substance abuse, such as the breakdown of familial relationships and the erosion of social bonds, require ethical considerations based on values of empathy, compassion, and social responsibility. The disintegration of social cohesion and the strain on families due to addiction call for collective action in supporting affected individuals and their loved ones. The ethical significance of social cohesion lies in our shared responsibility to promote values of solidarity and empathy and to actively engage in acts of social responsibility to address the root causes of addiction (Beauchamp and Childress, 2019).

Economically, substance abuse places significant burdens on individuals, families, and society at large, resulting in substantial costs related to healthcare, treatment, and lost productivity. This raises ethical questions regarding resource allocation, justice, and fairness in distributing resources equitably to support those affected. These considerations are linked to the moral duty to create a more just and equitable society (Daniels, 2001: 32). Furthermore, the ethical implications extend to issues of distributive justice and access to

treatment, emphasizing the moral responsibility to ensure equitable access to treatment and resources, especially for vulnerable populations facing systemic barriers to healthcare (Daniels, 2001: 21). The impact of substance abuse on families highlights the ethical significance of support, empathy, and cultivating a culture of non-judgmental care. Families of affected youths often face emotional and financial strain, emphasizing our ethical responsibility to offer assistance and understanding to navigate these challenges (Beauchamp and Childress, 2019: 117). Supporting these families aligns with the principles of compassion and empathy and acknowledges the interconnectedness of our moral duties to individuals and communities. The ethical implications of drug and substance use on the health, social, and economic well-being of affected youths and their families demand a comprehensive ethical framework rooted in principles of non-maleficence, empathy, social responsibility, justice, and fairness.

Conclusion

The ethical assessment of the use of drugs and substances among youths in the Benue North-East Senatorial District of Benue State has highlighted the critical dimensions of this issue. Key findings underscore the profound implications for the affected individuals, their families, and the broader community. The ethical framework examined in this evaluation emphasized principles such as non-maleficence, respect for human dignity, social responsibility, justice, and fairness. It is evident that substance abuse is not solely an individual concern but a matter of significant ethical import, demanding collective attention and action. Reiterating the ethical evaluation, the study emphasizes the moral imperative to protect and enhance the well-being of those impacted by substance abuse. This ethical duty calls for the recognition of individual autonomy, the provision of equitable access to support services, and the cultivation of empathy and compassion in our response to addiction. The collective obligation extends to individuals, who must offer support, communities, which must establish networks of assistance, and governments, tasked with implementing policies and initiatives aimed at prevention, treatment, and recovery support. By adhering to these principles and taking concerted action, a more ethical, inclusive, and compassionate approach can be realized to address the use of drugs and substances among youths in the Benue North-East Senatorial District and beyond.

Recommendations

- i. This study recommends that comprehensive educational initiatives be developed and implemented to raise awareness among youths in the Benue North-East Senatorial District about the ethical, social, and health implications of drug and substance abuse. These programs should be integrated into school curriculums, community outreach efforts, and media campaigns to ensure broad outreach.
- ii. This study recommends the establishment and promotion of community-based support systems, including youth clubs, counseling services, and peer support groups. These initiatives will provide a safe and non-judgmental environment for

- youths dealing with substance abuse issues. Furthermore, community leaders, parents, and educators should actively participate in these support networks.
- iii. This study recommends the reinforcement of existing legislation related to drug and substance abuse, coupled with effective law enforcement measures. This involves implementing stricter penalties for drug trafficking and sales to minors and taking actions to reduce the availability of illegal substances. Ethical policing practices should be encouraged to prevent the wrongful targeting of youths.
 - iv. This study recommends enhancing the accessibility of mental health and addiction treatment services within the region. This includes increasing the number of treatment centers, providing training to healthcare professionals, and reducing the stigma associated with seeking help for substance abuse and mental health concerns.
 - v. This study recommends promoting parental and family involvement in the prevention of substance abuse among youths. Parents should be provided with the resources and knowledge required to identify early signs of substance abuse and engage in open and non-confrontational dialogues with their children. Additionally, family-centered support systems should be encouraged to strengthen familial bonds.

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