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IS DRIED PAW-PAW LEAF A PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCE?

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Abstract

While many studies have looked at the prevalence and pattern as well as effects of drug abuse and dependence among Nigerians, the use of dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance has not been investigated. This study examines the attitude and perception towards dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance among purposive sampled drug users who were all students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. A cross-sectional design involving both a qualitative and quantitative approach was used to elicit information from five hundred (500) purposive respondents. There were two hundred and ninety-six (59.2%) males and two hundred and four (40.8%) females. Males age ranges from 16 - 28 years (24.6 ± 5.4), while female age ranges from 19 - 24 years (21.6 ± 4.2). Mean years of education for males was 15.3, ± 3.8 , while mean years of education for females was 14.9, ± 2.1 . Results indicated that 65.6% of the sample agreed that paw-paw leaf is a commonly used stimulant while 50.6% agreed that it could be used and have the same effect of a psychoactive substance. About forty-four percent (43.4%) of the respondents agreed that dried paw-paw leaf could produce the same effects as cannabis, while 32.4% of the respondents agreed that dried paw-paw leaf could produce the same effects as cocaine or heroin. Forty-eight percent (48.4%) believed that dried paw-paw leaf is a commonly used drug among youths in Nigeria while 39.5% acknowledge one of their friends that had used dried paw-paw leaf. 55.8% believed that dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance is not strange in Nigeria while 53.3% agreed that dried paw-paw leaf could be dangerous to ones health. Forty-seven percent of the respondents indicated to have ever used dried paw-paw leaf while 44.8% believed that one could be physically dependent on the drug. 45.6% equally believed that one could be psychologically dependent on dried paw-paw leaf.

The findings were discussed within the social consequence point of view and a need for further investigation in that regard.

Introduction

Nigerian drug abuse scene has witnessed a tremendous and remarkable progress in the past four decades. With over two hundred published works to date (CRISA, 1996), contemporary Nigerian researchers have consistently documented high rate of cannabis, cocaine, heroin and alcohol as drugs with high risk of abuse among Nigerians (Odejide, 2000; PIMRAT, 2000). Their usage and dependence cut across ethnic, social class, gender as well as age, with substantial reported health consequences (Odejide, 2000; Olley & Ajiteru, 2001).

Apart from these major reported psychoactive substances, drugs such as amphetamines, and some other psychotropic drugs, which include benzodiazepine and the barbiturate, have also received documented evidence as drugs of abuse (Odejide, 1982; ICAA, 1988; Gureje & Obikoya, 1991; Gureje & Olley, 1992; Ohaeri & Odejide, 1993).

A potential drug of abuse in Nigeria, which is dearth in its documentation and perhaps empirically underreported, is the dried paw-paw leaf. Findings from a recent study (PIMRAT, 2000) revealed dried paw-paw leaf as a probable and possibly a drug of abuse. For example, 25% of secondary school pupils and 17.9% of area boys (Street urchins) were found to have commonly used dried paw-paw leaf in Ibadan. Similarly in a community based study of patterns of psychoactive substance use among street children, it was indicated that a majority (56%) of the youths are aware of the existence of paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance, 23% know about its availability and 2% had ever used it or are currently using it (Morakinyo & Odejide, 2003). In a recently documented report, it was suggested that dry paw-paw leaf could have a stimulating effects when smoked and may emerged as a substitute or alternative substance of abuse in place of cannabis (Odejide, 2000).

The fresh paw-paw leaf is a commonly used medicinal substance in traditional African societies as an herb for curing numerous ailments. It contains a watery-white sap in which is a proteolytic ferment of distinct enzymes. In southern Senegal, a part of dry paw-paw leaves is used for young girls suffering from ailment of fatigue experienced from menstrual cycle. The bark of the paw-paw tree is also used as an antidote for venoms of snake bite and rabies from dogs (Gibbs, 1965). In Ivory Coast, it is used as infusion in case of difficult child-birth and also effective in treating hernia and infection of the urino-genital system. In Nigeria, water from the paw-paw leaf can be expressed by crushing in herbal form cooked,

or uncooked for the treatment of diabetes and malaria (Gibbs, 1965). In Gabon, the leaves may sometimes be mixed with other leaves in preparation of fish-poison. Also, it is used as soap-substitute for laundering purposes. In Guinea, it is used to preserve a newly killed animal. In Sierra Leone, the leaves are known to form effective bleach when soaked with clothe for some hours. Similar usage is recorded in Ghana and some part of East Africa (Gibbs, 1965).

As drug of abuse in Nigeria, the paw-paw leaf is dried under the sun, and crushed, rapped and then smoked. It is believed that it gives a stimulant effect as that of cannabis leaves and can be prepared in pepper soup, porridge or tea. Cannabis dependent patients admitted for treatment in some psychiatric facilities in Nigeria have been observed to sneak out of the ward to smoke dried paw-paw leaf (Odejide, 2000). The question that has aroused the intellects of contemporary researchers in Nigeria is the extent of use and abuse of dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance. How is paw-paw leaf perceived among young adults? Is it a widely known psychoactive substance? Is the dried leaf capable of instituting dependence? What is the place of gender in this perception?

The goal of this study is to describe the perception and attitude of participants towards a rather relatively speculative dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance among current drug users in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. We approached this task by rigorously defining the concept and thereafter examining opinions and beliefs associated with the usage of the substance.

Methods

Subject and Setting

This study adopted a purposive target group of students found at the various relaxation joints available within the University of Ibadan, (UI) Ibadan Oyo-State, Nigeria. These joints are places where alcohol and sometimes cannabis are freely used; they are likened to a typical city bar, and serve as a meeting point for gangsters and sub-cultural groups on the campus. Structurally, the joints are basically made up of makeshift cut down bamboo trees where food or pepper soup may also be served. More than ten of such places are all over the campus. The adoption of this method was to reduce a no response posture by some students who may not have heard about paw-paw leaf and therefore may not be in a position to give a true picture of the substance. This method also helps in reducing high attrition rate often common in such sensitive

social concerns. The assumption for this method is further anchored by the belief that the use of paw-paw leaf may be popular among tobacco and cannabis users who may at times use paw-paw leaf as a drug of initiation to higher stimulating drugs or as an alternative to other substances which may not be readily available due to lack of funds to purchase them. Paw-paw leaf is available almost everywhere in Nigeria and there is no restriction either legally or culturally against its cultivation and use. It is therefore a cheap and readily available substance.

Study Design and Questionnaire

A cross-sectional design involving both a qualitative and quantitative approach was adopted for this study. The study was conducted in three phases.

Phase I: Focus Group Discussions

Through a snowballing strategy of identifying individual students who are current users of tobacco or cannabis, a ten-group member, all male, was constituted for the Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The FGD guide contained questions to explore beliefs about paw-paw leaf; its medicinal or herbal usage, its nutritional value as well as its perceived usage among drug abusers. It was basically a fact-finding exercise, which involved clarifications on issues surrounding the use of drugs generally and paw-paw leaf in particular.

The discussion which lasted for about 120 minutes was stimulating and lead by a research assistant who himself is a tobacco user and the other researcher served as facilitator/secretary and observer. The content and theme analysis of the group discussions informed the subsequent structured questionnaire used for the second phase of the study.

Phase II: Pre-Testing of Questionnaire

From the FGD findings, we generated twenty-one item questions. The 21-items were developed into a 5-Likert-type format, knowledge and attitudinal scale. Individual subjects were to respond to the items in relation to his/her degree of agreement, which ranges from Strongly Agree with a score of 5, Agree, a score of 4, Undecided, a score of 3, Disagree, a score of 2 and Strongly Disagree a score of 1. The scoring was done in such a manner that highest numbers indicated greater knowledge, with a favorable disposition to the use of dried paw-paw leaf.

The 21-item scale was pre-tested among fifty accidental sampled respondents met at the joints. Efforts were made not to include the participants of the FGD sessions. This was simply made possible by asking them if they had filled any and similar questionnaire in a previous survey. The questionnaires were filled on the spot and collected back. Group influence on the filling of the questionnaire was prevented by simple counseling and by highlighting the importance and usefulness of the study. Individual respondents who were perceived to be under heavy intoxication of alcohol and/ or cannabis were excluded. The entire fifty questionnaires were returned and analyzed.

An item-total correlation statistical analysis to reduce redundant items variable was adopted. It was possible to come up with an 11-item questionnaire, which constituted the survey instrument. The instrument had a split half reliability of ($r = 0.69$ $p < 0.05$) and a Cronbach Alpha of ($r = 0.65$ $p < 0.05$). Some of the items included are: "Paw-paw leaf is a commonly used stimulant", paw-paw leaf has the same effect as cocaine or heroin. "The use of paw-paw leaf can be dangerous to ones health".

Phase III: Survey

A quantitative survey of 500 individual respondents was undertaken. They were approached at the five major drinking/relaxation locations on the campus of the U.I. They were consecutively recruited based on an informed consent. Almost all the approached respondents agreed to participate in the study with few potential respondents declining. Additional information concerning basic demographic data such as age, gender, years of education and religion and faculty of study was incorporated in the questionnaire. Questionnaire were filled and collected on the spot. Efforts were made to exclude those that were involved in the other phases of the study and those that were approached earlier in the survey were not allowed to fill twice. This procedure continued for several weeks until five hundred respondents were surveyed.

Data Analysis

Content analyses of the 11 items attitudinal to paw-paw leaf were carried out. Mean, standard deviations, bivariate analysis using the Pearson product moment correlation was also made. The statistical package for the social sciences SPSS version 6.1 was used for the entire analysis.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the subjects by gender. There were two hundred and ninety-six (59.2%) males and two hundred and four (40.8%) females. The age range for male is from 16 – 28 years (24.6 ± 5.4), while female age ranged from 19 – 24 years ($x 21.6 \pm 4.2$). Mean years of education for males was 15.3, SD 3.8, while mean years of education for females was 14.9, ± 2.1 . Eighty-three (28%) males are Muslims, while one hundred and eighty (60.8%) are Christians. Twenty-one (7.1%) males are traditional worshippers while twelve males (4.1%) are atheist. Forty-nine (24%) of females are Muslims, one hundred and seventy (67.2%) are Christians and fourteen (6.9%) embrace the traditional mode of worship. Four (2%) females are atheist. Ninety-eight (33.1%) of the males at the time of study were pursuing various courses within the core sciences faculty, while one hundred and twenty (40.5%) males are from the social sciences/humanities. Nineteen (6.4%) of the males are in the medical faculty, while thirty-four (11.5%) males are from the Faculty of Technology. Twenty-five (8.4%) males are from the Faculty of Agriculture. For the females, seventy-two (35.3%) are from the core Sciences Faculty. Sixty-nine (33.8%) are from the Social Sciences/Humanities while twenty-six (12.7%) are from the College of Medicine. Seventeen (8.3%) females are from the Faculty of Technology, while twenty (9.8%) are from the Faculty of Agriculture.

Perception and Usage of Dried Paw-paw Leaf

Table 2 shows the perception and usage of dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance among male and female drug users.

A substantial cumulative percentage of both genders agree that dried paw-paw leaf is a commonly used drug of abuse among students' drug users. Approximately equal number of males (66.5%) and females agreed that dried paw-paw leaf is a commonly used stimulant. 55.7% of males and 43.2% of females respectively agree that paw-paw is used as a psychoactive substance. 43.9% of males and 42.7% of the females agree that dried paw-paw leaf produce the same stimulating effects like cannabis. A lesser percentage (30.4%) of males and 35.3% of females however agreed that dried leaf produce a stimulating effect as cocaine and heroine. 50.4% of males and 45.6% of females respectively agreed that dried paw-paw leaf is a commonly used psychoactive drug in Nigeria. 40.9% of males and

35.8% of females indicated knowledge of one of their friends who use dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance. 58.4% of males and 41.9% females believed that usage of dried paw-paw leaf, as a psychoactive substance is not strange in Nigeria. 58.4% of the males and 45.6% of the females respectively agreed that dried paw-paw leaf is dangerous to one's health. 47.3% of males and 46.6% of females indicated a life-time use of dried paw-paw leaf. 48.4% of males and 39.7% of females agreed that users of dried paw-paw leaf could be physically dependent on the drug. 46.7% of males and 42.6% of females agreed that users of dried paw-paw leaf could be psychologically dependent on the drug.

Table 3 showed the combined male and female subjects perception and usage of dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance in Nigeria. An overall 65.6% agreed that paw-paw leaf is a commonly used stimulant while 50.6% agreed that it could be used as a psychoactive substance. 43.4% of the respondents agreed that dried paw-paw leaf could produce the same effects as cannabis while 32.4% of the respondents agreed that dried paw-paw leaf could produce the same effects as cocaine or heroine. 48.4% believed that dried paw-paw leaf is a commonly used drug among youths in Nigeria while 39.5% acknowledge one of their friends that had used dried paw-paw leaf. 55.8% believed that dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance is not strange in Nigeria while 53.3% agreed that dried paw-paw leaf could be dangerous to ones health. Forty-seven percent of the respondents indicated a life use of dried paw-paw leaf i.e. they have used it at least once in their life time, while 44.8% believed that one could physically be dependent on the drug. 45.6% equally believed that one could psychologically be dependent on dried paw-paw leaf.

Discussion

From the various reported findings, it is obvious that dried paw-paw leaf is indeed a drug of abuse in Nigeria and should therefore be further investigated. These investigations should attempt to determine the tolerant effects as well as the extent of usage and abuse in a larger cross-sectional survey. A substantial number of the respondents (65.6%) agreed that dried paw-paw leaf is a commonly used drug in Nigeria. It therefore further irritates empirical investigation regarding the nature of the use of dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance among contemporary researchers and health policy makers. Furthermore a substantial part of the respondents (44.8%) affirmed a life-time usage of the drug

and (43.4%) agreed that, it produces the same effects as Indian hemp/cannabis when used. Some (32.4%) even affirmed that it could produce the same effect as in cocaine or heroin. Whether these assertions from the respondents are actual feelings or are just a psychological feeling of the effects of dried paw-paw leaf remains unclear. It is envisaged that an empirical scientific investigation would rationalize the true effects.

Drug study has come along way in Nigeria. This study in support of an existing and enriched drug literature confirmed that the youth population particularly the males are at risk group for drug related dependents. More males reported a more favorable attitude towards the use of the drugs. It further confirms what appears to be a trace but an unclear report of the prevalence of dried paw-paw leaf in a recently documented epidemiological survey of the current trend of drug dependence in Ibadan, Nigeria (Pimrat, 2000).

In addition, this study confirmed the increasing number of females particularly in higher institutions of learning who use psychoactive substances (Ohaeri & Odejide 1993; Odejide 2000; Pimrat, 2000; Olley & Ajiteru, 2001).

Though, age at onset of abuse was not sought, it was obvious that most of the respondents may have started the use of dried paw-paw leaf earlier in age. This contention is supported when one compares the mean age of both gender to be 24.6 and 21.6 respectively and the reported number of 44.8% of lifetime use. One is therefore made to believe that the age of commencement of the use of dried paw-paw leaf should have been earlier. The implication for this finding is that dried paw-paw leaf may have been used at the initiation phase of the respondent's drug history. Suffice it to say that the respondents may have used dried paw-paw leaf as an alternative to other drugs or as a brief stray from the real drug of abuse. This contention is supported, as it is obvious from the sampling procedure that the respondents are multiple drug users and therefore dried paw-paw leaf may have been used as part of their drug behaviors.

Another finding of great concern in this study is the substantial number of respondents (53.3%) who believed that dried-paw-paw leaf is dangerous to health. This contradicts the medicinal as well as the herbal efficacy paw-paw leaf is known for in the African health delivery system. Could there be a pharmacological difference between dried, processed and smoked paw-paw leaf and the raw leaf of paw-paw when used either singularly or in combination with other leaves in the herbal preparation? A further

confirmation of this finding is required by anthropologist who may tend to examine the cultural origin of the use of the drugs. By and large, there are important limitations to the present endeavor. First, the respondents were recruited accidentally and at different times during the period of data collection. This recruitment procedure could confound the time of sampling leading to familiarity among prospective respondents. Secondly, since some of the respondents were approached in groups, the effects of social facilitation in responding to the questionnaire cannot be totally ruled out. This study is also limited in the number of social variables available for analysis. Future research should consider more number of variables.

Nevertheless, an important strength to this work is that, it provides an insight into a rather unfamiliar drug of abuse among young drug users in Nigeria and therefore among the very few studies that might have been attempted in documenting prevalence and pattern of dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance used in Nigeria.

Exploring further through in-depth interviews with current substance abusers may shed more light on the true psychoactive effect of Paw-paw leaf. Efforts will be concentrated among cannabis users who may have alternated dried paw-paw leaf with cannabis or with other drugs or who might have use it as a single drug of abuse. Phenomena such as euphoric feelings after usage, tolerance level, and withdrawal symptoms if not in use will be explored.

Presently, usage of dried paw-paw leaf could be at best an empirical artifact where attitudinal opinion about it has just been expressed and documented.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Population

	MALES (N = 296)	FEMALES (N = 204)
Mean Age (Years)	24.6 ± 5.4*	21.6 ± 4.2
Mean Years of Education (Years)	15.3 ± 3.8	14.9 ± 2.1
Religion	83 (28%)	49 (24%)
Islam	180 (60.8%)	107 (67.2%)
Christianity	21 (7.1%)	14 (6.9%)
Traditional	12 (4.1%)	4 (2%)
Atheism		
Faculty	98 (33.1%)	72 (35.3%)
Sciences	120 (40.5%)	69 (33.8%)
Social Sciences/Humanities	19 (6.4%)	26 (12.7%)
Medicine	34 (11.5%)	17 (8.3%)
Technology	25 (8.4%)	20 (9.8%)
Agriculture		

* $P \leq 0.05$, by X^2 - test

Table 2: Perception and Usage of Dried Paw-paw Leaf as Psychoactive Substances by Gender

	STATEMENT	MALES (N - 296)					FEMALES (N = 204)				
		SD	D	U	A	SA	SD	D	U	A	SA
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1.	Dried paw-paw leaf is a commonly used stimulant	9.1	9.8	14.5	36.8	29.7	6.4	10.3	19.1	43.1	21.1
2.	Dried paw-paw leaf is used as a psychoactive substance	7.8	13.9	22.6	40.2	15.5	10.8	15.7	30.4	30.9	12.3
3.	Dried paw-paw leaf produces same effect as India hemp/cannabis	12.5	18.2	25.3	25	18.9	8.8	18.6	29.9	27.5	15.2
4.	Dried paw-paw leaf has same effect as cocaine or heroin	17.9	23.3	28.4	20.3	10.1	14.2	22.5	27.9	24.5	10.8
5.	The use of dried paw-paw leaf as a stimulant drug is common among youth in Nigeria	9.8	17.9	22	36.5	13.9	9.8	19.1	25.5	29.9	15.7
6.	I know someone who uses dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive	13.5	17.2	28.4	27.7	13.2	12.7	20.1	31.4	26	9.8

substance										
Hearing the use of dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance is not strange	7.8	15.2	18.6	39.5	18.9	6.9	22.5	18.6	38.2	13.7
The use of dried paw-paw leaf as a stimulant could be dangerous to ones health	10.8	13.9	16.9	35.8	22.6	10.3	19.6	24.5	24	21.6
I have used dried paw-paw at least ones in my life-time.	11.8	12.8	28.0	26.4	20.9	9.8	15.7	27.9	31.4	15.2
Someone could get hooked and physically dependent on dried paw-paw leaf	9.1	20.3	22.3	34.8	13.5	11.3	21.6	27.5	24.5	15.2
Someone could get hooked and psychologically dependent on dried paw-paw leaf	13.5	14.9	24	31.8	15.9	12.3	17.6	27.5	24	18.6

* $P < .02$, $df 4 X^2$

SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; U = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree in parenthesis

Table 3: Perception and Usage of Dried Paw-paw Leaf as Psychoactive Substance (N = 500)

	STATEMENT	M	SD	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %
1.	Dried paw-paw leaf is a commonly used stimulant	3.65	1.19	8	10	16.4	39.4	26.2
2.	Dried paw-paw leaf is used as a psychoactive substance	3.32	1.15	9	14.6	25.8	36.4	14.2
3.	Dried paw-paw leaf produces same effect as Indian hemp/cannabis	3.20	1.24	11	18.4	27.2	26	17.4
4.	Dried paw-paw leaf has same effect as cocaine or heroin	2.87	1.22	16.4	23	28.2	22	10.4
5.	The use of dried paw-paw leaf as a stimulant drug is common among youth in Nigeria	3.25	1.19	9.8	18.4	23.4	33.8	14.6
6.	I know someone who uses dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance	3.05	1.20	13.2	18.4	29.6	27	11.8
7.	Hearing the use of dried paw-paw leaf as a psychoactive substance is	3.39	1.17	7.4	18.2	18.6	39	16.8

	not strange							
8.	The use of dried paw-paw leaf as a stimulant could be dangerous to ones health	3.38	1.2	10.6	16.2	20	31	22.2
9.	I have used dried paw-paw at least ones in my life-time.	3.29	1.23	11	14	28	28.4	18.6
10.	Someone could get hooked and physically dependent on dried paw-paw leaf	3.18	1.20	10	20.8	24.4	30.6	14.2
11.	Someone could get hooked and psychologically dependent on dried paw-paw leaf	3.20	1.26	13	16	25.4	28.6	17.0

* Legend: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; U = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree in parenthesis.

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