

The Tenth Biennial Conference on Alcohol, Drugs and Society in Africa

Organised by the African Center for Research and Information on Substance Abuse (CRISA)

Held at the Rockview Classic Hotel on 11th-12th July 2012

A two day conference meeting was organised by the African Centre for Research and Information on Substance Abuse from the 11th to 12th July 2012, at the Rockview Classic Hotel in Abuja, Nigeria. The Conference's theme focused on **Social Determinants of Substance Abuse in Africa** and was attended by participants from six countries – Austria, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the USA.



The opening ceremony was presided by the Chairman/Chief Executive Officer of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Dr. Daniel Shaga Ismaila. Also present was the representative of the Nigerian Minister of Health, Country representative of WHO and UNODC, and former Director General of the NDLEA, Otunba Lanre Opinsho.

In his welcome address, the conference host, Prof. Obot Isidore, stated that while some trends have remained the same in Africa in the past two years in terms of drug use, many things have changed. Cannabis remains the most used drug in the region, while alcohol is judged as the most problematic drug. One key new issue is the growing use of amphetamines, especially methylamphetamine, which has become a drug of choice among young people in Nigeria. A couple of clandestine amphetamine laboratories were discovered in the country with increased usage. In the midst of this change, drug policy in Nigeria and most African countries has remained the same with a neglect of drug users' health and a strong focus on drug control.

A keynote lecture was then delivered by Dr. Rahamaan Lawal, Chief Medical Director of Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Yaba- Lagos on “treatment of psychoactive substance abuse: Nigeria in focus”. In his lecture, he appraised current drug dependence treatment approaches in Nigeria and observed that there is a dearth of treatment facilities and drug experts in the country. He pointed out that most admissions in treatment and rehabilitation centres in Nigeria still happen by coercion, while and total abstinence remains the goal of all treatment programmes. One of the key highlights of the presentation was the conclusion that treatment centres in the country are clearly inadequate. According to UNODC (2004), there are **72 treatment centres in Nigeria, most of them consisting of psychiatric hospitals & units in university and general hospitals but not necessarily offering drug dependence treatment units**. Yaba-Lagos therefore advocated for increased funding for treatment and rehabilitation for drug dependence in Nigeria.

The opening ceremony was followed by nine sessions chaired by eminent scholars. Participants attended paper presentations and discussed a wide range of topics related to alcohol and drug use in Africa and how it affects different population groups. The participants identified the social determinants of substance use, among them conflicts, increased availability of drugs, unemployment, peer pressure, young age, weak social institutions, glamorisation of substance use and negative mass media influence, etc.

Research reports revealed that the major drugs used in Nigeria are alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, opioids, cocaine and inhalants. An emerging trend of methamphetamine use, cough syrup, herbal concoctions and other non-classified substances that have psychoactive properties are now causing serious health risks for users, especially young people.



A special session on harm reduction looked at the Tanzanian methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) programme. A presentation was made by Dr. Frank Masao from the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences in Dar es Salaam and Aidan Mmari of Yovaribe, Tanzania. The last presentation of this special session was done by Adeolu Ogunrombi of Youth RISE, Nigeria.

Following comprehensive discussions, several recommendations were made towards the framing of effective intervention strategies to address the myriad of substance use challenges in Nigeria. More specifically, it was recommended that:

- The Government needs to take proactive steps to address the root causes of drug use and related social problems, such as crime and violence in the country; especially by guaranteeing the basic needs of the citizens through an adequate social security system.
- The government should develop national guidelines on drug dependence treatment and rehabilitation
- The government should establish a separate agency to coordinate drug demand reduction activities
- The government should establish model centres for drug dependence treatment and rehabilitation in the six geo-political zones of the country to increase access to care, treatment and support
- Existing treatment and rehabilitation programmes should be strengthened to improve capacity for service delivery
- A special fund should be established to provide grants to universities and other research organisations to investigate different aspects of drug use in the country
- There should be increased collaboration between law enforcement agencies and treatment facilities in order to better control drug use in the country
- Drug demand reduction activities which include sensitisation, education, and counselling should be evidence-based to increase effectiveness
- A multi-disciplinary approach should be adopted by existing treatment and rehabilitation centres for better intervention outcomes
- There is an urgent need for the Federal Government to approve a national drug policy for Nigeria.

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