

Diverse roles of heterogenous drugs in facilitating crime in East London. The input of East London community.

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Abstract

Drug problem continues to escalate and facilitate crime in South Africa. This study explored the role of eclectic drugs in facilitating crime in East London environs. Qualitative paradigm was applied to collect data through a case study design. Focus groups and one-on-one interviews were conducted among thirty-two (32) participants. The findings revealed a significant role of new drugs and increase of ungovernable lawlessness; Nyaope/whoonga drug continues to produce bizarre crimes; methamphetamine (tik) remained the major influence of criminal behaviour; and East London business entities remained victims of crimes associated with drugs abuse. The study recommends a collaborative and synergistic interventions between the government and private sector to address the drug problem.

Introduction And Background

Despite global measures against drug abuse and connected crimes, the quagmire continues to increase ceaselessly. Eclectic literature supports the above opening gambit by heralding that despite international conventions, commissions and unprecedented measures made by researchers and governments to address substance abuse, global trends of substance abuse still increased from 5.3–5.5% between 2015 and 2017 [1], with African countries bearing the brunt edge of this scourge. Currently, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that COVID-19 induced increase of drug abuse together with associated violence [2]. Ornell et al. [3] add that since the outbreak of COVID-19 most parts of the world include United States of America experienced increase of substance use and drug overdose. This has necessitated the need to always engage in concerted efforts to fight the war against drug abuse [4; 5]. The extent to which this war is won remains doubtful as the 2016 UN world drug report substantiated that the prevalence of substance abuse in Africa is much higher than the global average of between 5.2–13.5% [1].

The conundrum has proved to be more dire in South Africa making the country to earn the title “the drug capital of the world” [6]. Corroboratively, drug problem in South Africa has undermined all national polices, acts, legislations, and commissions [7]. Into the same bargain, The National Drug Master Plan (NDMP) has been revised four times with an objective of building a drug free community [8]. For decades, cannabis (dagga/marijuana), cocaine, mandrax and ecstasy have wreaked havoc in South Africa and stimulating cruel criminal activities. Currently, atypical heroin known as Nyaope/Whoonga and Crystal meth (referred to as tik) have proved to be more potent and encouraging different bizarre crimes in South Africa [9].

Inopportunately since 2010, nyaopoe/whoonga has become an extensive and lethal heroin drug that has confronted South Africa dangerously [10]. It is a unique South African street cocktail drug concocted by a mixture of several ingredients like heroin, Anti-retro-viral drugs, painkillers, rat poison, bicarbonate soda, pool cleaner and other acids [11]. Perhaps its popularity has been driven by its affordability in that a sachet portion costs between R 20 – R 30. The drug is consumed through injection or mixing it with dagga (cannabis) and rolled in a form of cigarette paper roll (zoll). Users have also discovered a new

method called “bluetooth” method which is a transfusion or sharing of blood of the users already drugged [12].

On the other hand, stimulant drugs like Methamphetamine (in South Africa known as “tik”) has distressed the country exponentially [13]. This is another commonly abused drug in the country which is also known as “tik” due to the ticking sound produced when smoked [14]. This drug use is alarmingly high in the Cape provinces, especially among the coloured people [15]. It is made up of a number of several ingredients that includes inter alia brake cleaner fluid, engine starter fluid, salt meth, gun cleaner fluid, acetone, cat litter, Hydrochloric acid (swimming pool acid), methanol, lithium (from batteries), and red phosphorus (from matches) [15]. The drug is an addictive psychostimulant fine powder sold in plastic straws with a price of between R15 and R30 [16]. “Tik” is injected or smoked with bulbs, where users place the powder inside the bulb and heat it with a lighter, then inhale the fumes [15]. Furthermore, tik highly stimulates euphoria and energy to an extent that users can spend weeks without sleeping [16]. This has made the users to earn the title of “ghosts”. The demand and production of these drugs increased outrageously during COVID-19 period.

Notably, nyaope and tik have been found to be the dominating and highly addictive drugs than mandrax, cannabis and other drugs in South Africa. In addition, both these drugs have facilitated heterogenous dangerous crimes in South Africa, which includes rape, murder, theft and many other crimes. Furthermore, users of nyaope and tik have been outlawed by the communities and their families because of their criminal behaviour. This is because approximately 65% of the crimes in townships, informal settlements, and rural communities have been associated with nyaope and tik [17]. Dintwe [18] support the above input with that nyaope has increased level of crime in South Africa. Because of their high addiction users resort for crimes in order to obtain money for multiple daily fixes [19]. These drugs have penetrated inside school and users are forming criminal clubs [20]. This evidence spells the need for more research on drug abuse to amend its regulatory public policies. This paper, therefore, is an attempt to stimulate debate on the role of eclectic drugs in facilitating crime in East London environs. Furthermore, the paper contributes to the production of literature on substance abuse in the country as well as interventions to surmount the drug abuse problem.

Problem statement and rationale.

Globally in eclectic contexts, there is an extricable link between drug consumption and crime [7]. Specifically, the rapid and uncontrollable increase of drug abuse in South Africa has been the mainspring of crime. Inopportunately, heterogenous drugs, more especially nyaope and tik, have accelerated crime in South Africa. Evidently, immense drug use can be linked to crime, especially when the users want money to buy the drugs or must look for ingredients to make the drugs. For example, cases of users trying to attack shops selling TV sets to get some white powder ingredients used to make drugs have not been uncommon [12]. Pragmatically, nyaope and tik use have been identified as a serious threat to the communities because of the users record of engaging in crime [10]. Users steal literally everything and sell it out to get money to buy the drug to satisfy their addiction. Episodes of users breaking car lights

only to remove globes to make homemade smoking pipes have been reported in South Africa. Therefore, this study assesses the role of eclectic drugs in facilitating crime in East London.

Methods And Study Settings

The aim of this paper is to assess the role of eclectic drugs in facilitating crime in East London environ. This paper will further provide evidence which justifies the need for proactive intervention against the drug problem in South Africa.

Research approach, design, participants and interviews

The modus operandi of this study followed a qualitative approach and was conducted in East London located in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. East London is the second largest industrial centre in the Eastern Cape with poverty-stricken informal settlements and townships that are overwhelmed by drug use. Twenty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted and enhanced by one focus group discussion (FGD). The interviewees comprised of participants from selected East London business entities, governmental institutions, NGOs, and surrounding community members. All the included participants were above the age of 18 years. Through a qualitative approach tenet, the interviews explored subjectively the role of different drugs in facilitating crime [21].

The recruitment was facilitated by purposive and snowball sampling method. The recruited organisations were local implementers of substance abuse policies in East London while six community members were ex-users and peddlers of drugs. South African Police Service (SAPS) member referred the researchers to the mentioned community members. Specifically, ten (10) were from business entities; sixteen (16) were from government and non-governmental organisations, while six (6) were community members from the selected East London communities. Therefore, Business Entity Participant 1 was identified as BEP1, and corresponding numbers were assigned to all the participants up to BEP10; while participants from government and non-governmental organisations were code named, KIP (Key Informant Participants). Further, participants from the selected communities were code named, CMP (Community Member Participant) and they range from CMP1 to CMP6.

There were 20 male and 12 female participants, and the higher number of males was because female counterparts were difficult to locate. Racially, twenty-nine participants were black, one was a coloured while two were white.

The interviews and FGD ranged between 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted by the first author. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded by tape recorder. The study observed constructive paradigm where interviewees produced knowledge through their different experiences and views about the crimes associated with drugs [22].

Data collection process and procedure as significant conventions and measures were followed to obtain permission for data collection. The above procedures endorse the integrity of the study [23]. The quality

assurance of this study was provided by the Department of Social Work/ Social Development and the University of Fort Hare Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Higher Degrees Committee. Furthermore, the instruments of data collection and highlights of the study were submitted to the Govan Mbeki's University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Fort Hare. Subsequently, an ethical clearance certificate number KAN041SBAL01 was received. In light of the above, the data collection process of this study was cross-sectional. This is because the principal researcher collected data within a short time frame or is a once-off data collection process. Lichtman [24] states that cross-sectional studies offer several advantages to a study, namely that they are cheaper and can be carried out faster. The process also allows the researchers to examine multiple factors and multiple outcomes in one study.

Data analysis

The qualitative data collected was analysed through thematic analysis. The adopted analysis style entailed breaking down of basic information to patterns or categories through coding to arrive at themes and subthemes [25]. Pragmatically, mountains of basic data were structured, arranged and re arranged into thematic categories and subcategories. Simply put, thematic analysis is a process of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns and themes within the data. Subsequently, the thematic analysis was strengthened through listening to audiotapes and transcribing them to sieve the appropriate data. The themes were arranged to correspond to the study's research objectives. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke's [26] six steps were followed in the formulation of the themes that were derived manually from the content and sentiments expressed by the participants. In doing so, the views and the opinions of the participants were interpreted by the principal researcher. The process of data coding and the analysis were done manually.

Ethical consideration

The principal researcher ensured that the study complied with all the requisite ethos and protocols pertaining to ethical consideration. This, he considered was a sure and a litmus test of an ethically executed research study [27]. Therefore, this study was guided by the following ethical considerations: confidentiality, privacy and anonymity. The purpose was to protect participants from harm and victimisation [25]. To obtain informed consent from all those involved is crucial in preventing adverse consequences. It is also important for the research informants and participants to understand adequately the nuances of the research they are being involved in [28]. Wherever possible, principal researcher respected, treated and engaged the research participants as equal partners. The participants were informed of how the data was to be stored and used [29; 25]. Furthermore, the research questions that were used in this study were submitted to ethical committee to validate prior data collection with the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC's) approval number, KAN041SBAL01.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Thematic findings

New drugs and increase of ungovernable lawlessness.
Nyaope/whoonga drug continues to produce bizarre crimes
Methamphetamine (tik) remained the major influence of criminal behaviour.
East London business entities remained victims of crimes associated with drugs abuse

New drugs and increase of ungovernable lawlessness.

The findings revealed that new drugs have intensified ungovernable crimes in the city. Some participants noted that, the streets are not safe anytime of the day because drug abuse related crimes. Participants reported cruelty brought by new drugs such as nyaope and tik among users. One participant noted, “these new drugs consume humanness of users because they are always ready to commit violent crimes”. For most participants, there was no hope to address the increase of drug abuse associated criminal activities. The participants fervently believed that if drug problem can be addressed, crime rate would also decrease. The following sentiments were made by participants to support the above findings:

“Undoubtedly, these new drugs have increased crime rate in East London environs. The drug users are usually not employed, and they engage in criminal activities to fund their drug problem”

“Our communities are no longer safe ever since these drugs penetrated everywhere. We live in fear of rape and burglary everyday”.

“Definitely, if government can introduce strong interventions to fight drugs, the crime rate could also decrease”.

The participants observed that SAPS is struggling to conquer the problem. They questioned failing approaches of SAPS on ensuring safety and security of communities against drug related crimes. Some participants indicated that drug peddlers are paying SAPS officials to turn blind eye on the drug crimes. One participant noted, “drug dealers are the facilitators of drug related crimes and untouchable by the law”. Several participants indicated that even political leaders are neglecting the chaos produced by drugs in communities.

Nyaope/whoonga drug continues to produce bizarre crimes.

The analysis reveals how nyaope drug produces ramified criminal activities in East London and its environs. In emphasising disturbance, participants indicated that before nyaope, HIV/AIDS facilities and ARV patients were not robbed of their anti-retro-viral drugs which is common now to concoct nyaope. One participant noted that, “robbing needy people of their medical treatments is an immoral and strange criminal act”. The following comments support the finding:

“Nyaope has caused havoc in the society because its users rob ARVs from patients and health facilities which they use to concoct the drug”.

“Since 2007, the increased use of nyaope has led to many crimes such as assault and house robberies”.

“Many violent reported cases have been associated with nyaope because when users abuse it, they crave for this drug, lose sympathy and runs wild”.

The above sentiments suggest uncontrollability of nyaope drug and its concomitant criminal association since its 2007 existence in among South African communities when the drug was founded. Participants indicated that drug users can use all mechanisms to ensure that there is money to buy them. This drug breeds a culture of criminal behaviour.

Methamphetamine (*tik*) remained the major influence of criminal behaviour.

Regarding, methamphetamine (*tik*), participants detailed that communities are calling for rescue from criminal activities associated with *tik*. Regardless of gender, *tik* users become uncontrollable crime machines. The participants confirmed that *tik* users are called “ghosts” because they don’t sleep roaming around the streets day and night engaging in devious criminal activities. They also look for money through hook and crooks to buy the drug to satisfy their addiction. For example, incidents of those who abuse *tik* breaking car lights only to remove globes to make homemade smoking pipes have been reported in South Africa. Nevertheless, “*tik*” users are outlawed by the communities and their families. The verbatims below support these findings:

“Amapaharaphara (tik users) are roaming around communities literally stealing everything, even spoons”.

“Seemingly, tik makes its users to crave heavily for meat after its abuse, which makes them steal and slaughter livestock in the surrounding communities in vain”.

“Tik users often snatch bags and phones on the streets. Sometimes they stand on the robots to target passing cars”.

Majority of the participants stated that *tik* users start stealing from their homes and graduate to entire community. Users of this drug are unable to restrain themselves from stealing and literally pilfer anything. In other household they burgle groceries, either to sell or eat them since this drug starves users. One participant shared, “these young *tik* smokers are used by kingpins to commit other crimes”. The participants confirmed that the culture of substance abuse largely contributes to the South Africa culture of crime and violence

East London business entities remained victims of crimes associated with drugs abuse.

The data revealed that business entities have become the targets and victims of crimes associated with drug consumption. Nyaope users have made retail businesses their centres to steal some of the ingredients to concoct nyaope. Despite security surveillances, business entities have been victims of

burglary. *Tik* users are paid by criminal masterminds to rob businesses. Several participants stated that “number of supermarket storage sites in East London have suffered from uncontrollable crimes by *tik* users”. These findings are supported by the below excerpts:

“Many of the businesses here can attest they have been victims of theft and burglary by nyaope and tik users”

They are stealing detergents in stores to concoct nyaope. Others have been found in furniture shops’ storerooms stealing products which they sell at cheap price to get money for drugs”.

The above findings indicate how drug abuse perfidiously and perniciously affects business community and economy. Inopportunately, the phenomenon paints a bleak picture to the international community who contribute significantly to foreign direct investment (FDI) in the country.

Discussions

The findings of this study strongly revealed an inextricable link between drug abuse and crime. The findings of the study conducted by Ngcobo [30] corroborate the above findings by pointing out that there is a huge escalation of criminal activities which are related to addicts’ need to raise money for drug procurement. The study conducted by Masiko and Xinwa [31] validate these findings from their study that showed a strong correlation between drug addiction and criminal activities.

Most participants indicated that most criminal activities are associated with the consumption of nyaope. Although nyaope is the cheapest potent drugs in the country, users consume it more than once a day, which influences their indulgence in criminal activities to get money for it. It is then common for the addicts of this drug to be spotted robbing patients and health facilities of their Antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) to aid in the concoction of nyaope. Ngcobo [30] notes that nyaope -related criminal activities are perhaps the most in the country. Similarly, the eclectic research on nyaope also warns that aggressive behaviour produced by nyaope prompt uncontrollable violent crimes. Bala and Kang’ethe [8] registered that nyaope users become defiant and belligerent and therefore prone to engaging in criminal behaviour. Further research has recorded that nyaope and its associated crimes has wreaked havoc the cities of Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town [30]. Perhaps the most affected areas with high rate of nyaope prevalence includes the South African squatter camps [32]. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported a huge link between nyaope and homicide incidences [1].

The study findings revealed that the use of *tik* is highly associated with criminal behaviours among its consumers. *Tik* has been found to cause a sense of euphoria and serenity, heightened energy, insomnia and restlessness, which makes users to roam around the streets even at night engaging in devious criminal activities [33]. The Sout African Police Service (SAPS) Annual Report (2018) conveyed numerous cases of shoplifting crimes by *tik* users. On the same account, many users have been breaking cars to steal the rear brake light bulbs [34]. Asante and Lentoor [35] highlight that the parents of the adolescents who are consuming *tik* are weeping because of their children’s stealing behaviour. *Tik* users generally live

by the stereotypical slogan of “if you are on tik, you have to steal”. They have been ousted by their families because of their impulsive pilferage behaviour. The study conducted by Bala and Kang’ethe [7] revealed that tik users steal even groceries from their families to re-sell and finance their addiction. Similar to nyaope, tik also produces aggressive and psychotic behaviour driving the users to sporadic violent crimes [32].

The participants revealed that business entities were the targets and victims of crimes associated with drug problem. Extensive ad hoc data sources highlight episodes where nyaope/whoonga addicts have gone to the extent of stealing plasma Televisions parts in furniture shops in the hope of getting some ingredients to concoct the drug [36]. In addition, other addicts have been spotted stealing in wholesale retails to get ingredients to concoct nyaope.

Conclusions And The Way Forward.

The current regulatory policies don’t seem to be winning the war against drug problem which directly facilitate crime in South Africa. Nyaope and tik have proved to be dangerous drugs which have wreaked havoc in South Africa. Opportunely, reduction of drug demand has the potential of indirectly reducing crime statistics in South Africa. This quagmire justifies a need for social work education programme to train more specialist on substance abuse. It is imperative that the government includes and priorities inputs from social workers in the process of policy making process. This is because social workers on the ground understands better the practicalities and impracticalities of the policies. Therefore, bottom-up approach should be used more specially to improve the National Drug master Plan which is coordinated by the Department of Social Development.

Recommendations

The crime facilitated by drugs compels a need to employ proactive and preventive approaches against substance abuse. Specifically, the government should actively address the drug demand and supply. It is also critical that the government mobilise support from business entities to partake against drug problem.

Importantly, substance abuse education needs to be mainstreamed into the educational curriculum in various levels of the institutions. Even in biological studies, substance consumption should be used as an example to explain factors affecting health of individuals. Similarly, economic studies should highlight the impact of substance abuse in the economy. On the same note, there is a need to energise the campaign against substance abuse through the allocation of adequate financial and human resources. Further, media platforms need to assist in the campaign against substance equally with other health challenges. There is a huge need to introduce more NGOs and rehabilitations centres as the literature suggest that there is shortage of rehabilitation organisation in most parts of South Africa. Business entities should include substance abuse programmes in their corporate social investment (CSI) activities and work together with NGOs and rehabilitation centres.

Abbreviations

CSI: Corporate Social Investment

DSD: Department of Social Development

NGOs: Non-Government Organisations

NDMP: National Drug Master Plan.

SAPS: South African Police Service

Declarations

Human Ethics and Declarations Sections, including Consent to Participate.

The authors adhered to human ethics to protect and avoid harm of the participants. All participants were provided individual consent form to consent the participation after reading information sheet. The managers of the involved organisation permitted to conduct of the study.

Availability of data and material

The data and material of this study is in the secure safe deposit box of the department of social work at University of Fort Hare. It can be available anytime upon request.

Competing interests

We hereby declare that there is no financial or other interest, direct in any matter that may raise a conflict.

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Authors' contributions

The authors contributed equally to all themes.

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Consent to publication

Both authors consent the publication of this article. In addition, participants were informed gave consent to the publication of the data through articles in accredited journals.

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