



Nigeria Drugs Crisis

Meth (*Mkpuru Mmiri*): The New Scourge in South-East Nigeria

Policy Recommendations

- 1** Drug control and enforcement institutions should embrace the strategy of collaboration with governmental public information institutions.
- 2** Engaging in deep and sustained community engagements with relevant stakeholders.
- 3** The five governors of the South-East states should ensure that their declarations to fight hard drugs do not end as mere platitudes.
- 4** Development partners like UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNODC should pay attention to this emerging trend in South-East Nigeria.

Recent newspaper reports and images circulating in social media indicate increasing and abusive consumption of a psychotropic substance called methamphetamine, locally known as *mkpuru mmiri* (hailstones), in South-East Nigeria. The increased use of this drug is mostly among youths and for recreational purposes. Recent violent crimes in parts of the South-East have been linked to the use of *mkpuru mmiri*. On October 19, 2021, [a young man had killed his father in Adazi Ani](#), Anambra state and stole his fifty thousand Naira to purchase this highly addictive substance. Also, [in Umudioka](#), Anambra state, two siblings addicted to the substance had chased their mother with machetes after consuming the drug and prevented her from coming home for three days. A Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital Enugu medical staff indicated that drug-induced mental health sickness cases are rising, and one substance that is increasingly being abused is methamphetamine (Personal Communication, December 1, 2021).

In reaction to the damaging impacts of *mkpuru mmiri*, several communities in the South-East have resorted to self-help measures in solving the problem. Unfortunately, the common approach is tying arrested drug users on the stake for severe flogging. Thus, a few issues arise from this menace of abuse of *mkpuru mmiri*, namely, gaps in the control of access to certain drugs, gaps in awareness about drug use and issues of human rights and governance. This edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly focuses on the rising abuse of methamphetamine in the South-East, the current responses and their setbacks, and the general challenges of drug use control and governance.

Methamphetamine, Rising Consumption and Consequences

[Methamphetamine](#), also called crystal meth, is a powerful, highly addictive stimulant that affects the central nervous system. It is white, odourless, bitter-tasting and dissolves easily in alcohol. It developed from its parent drug,

amphetamine, in the early 20th Century and was originally used in nasal decongestants and bronchial inhalers. Methamphetamine causes increased activity and talkativeness, decreased appetite, and a pleasurable sense of well-being or euphoria. It may be used to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Due to its characteristics, it becomes a stimulant when consumed up to a certain amount. The [long-term effects](#) of its abuse include addiction, paranoia, hallucinations, changes in brain structure and activity, deficits in thinking and motor skills, memory loss, aggressive and violent behaviour. While there are no comprehensive data on deaths caused by hard drugs in Nigeria, [in some cities in California](#), the United States of America, Meth is a leading killer, accounting for more than a quarter of deaths by such drugs.

Locally in Nigeria, the production of *mkpuru mmiri* had been taken over by [Mexican](#) drug dealers since 2016. It was also found recently that the substance is being produced secretly and in commercial quantity within a residential building in [Enugu](#). Perhaps its local production, availability, and less stringent enforcement of access makes the drug readily available to most young consumers. Hence, the increasing consumption, especially in the South-East of Nigeria.

There is no clear history of these drugs' rise and popularity among youths in Nigeria, particularly the South-East. Nonetheless, rising consumption is a recent phenomenon. The use of *mkpuru mmiri* is like other hard drugs blamed on Nigeria's unemployment, hardship, and economic frustrations. This view may gain traction considering that the kind of abusers usually caught and flogged in different communities are those without any significant source of livelihood. Equally, increasing use of *mkpuru mmiri* is coming when there is an escalation of violence by unknown gunmen and rising agitation for secession by aggrieved groups suggests that the climate of violence is conducive to the use of hard drugs.

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

For further discussion of pragmatic implementation of the recommendations, please contact



www.nextierspd.com
info@nextierspd.com
+234 701 002 7301

Furthermore, scientific research has established a direct link between the use of [methamphetamine and violent behaviour](#). Hence, in this era of forceful outbursts against the government to make demands on the state and mounting criminal activities like kidnapping, easy access to illicit drugs is a veritable source of the bravado of the violent actors. This suggests a possible link between the growth of violence and the need for psychoactive drugs.

In addition, the laxity of drug use control is also a factor for the rising consumption. However, the ease with which this particular substance is procured does suggest that less than enough is done to ensure that harmful drugs do not easily enter the wrong hands. Therefore, a seamless supply chain enables the continued consumption of addictive and harmful drugs.

To summarise the consequences of the use of *mkpuru mmiri*, its [escalation rate is destroying young people](#) and turning them into zombies, given its likely deprivations on mental health. The drug not only has far-reaching mental health consequences but can also lead to madness. The only management for its addiction is behavioural therapy which is equally difficult. Hence, its spread is as dangerous as the invasion of an army of marauders.

Matters Arising

Some of the points of interest that arise from the growth in the abuse of illicit drugs are who is responsible for controlling the use of such substances. Also, how adequately the state has prepared these regulators to perform the task in terms of technology, motivation and reward system. The core regulatory institutions like the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency ((NDLEA), National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the Police and more, have similar experiences of inadequate resourcing and motivation. Consequently, there is a general laissez-faire behaviour of regulatory institutions. The extant approach to the drug regulation regime is merely reactive, and this refers to combating a problem when it has fully spread. Although NDLEA and NAFDAC do a level of drug control enforcement, their synergies with potentially relevant partners are less than robust. Such partners include public awareness institutions like the National Orientation Agency (NOA), relevant platforms of stakeholders like youth and community organisations. But it is fitting to know that NDLEA is beginning to work with a few such partners in Anambra state as a strategy to combat the scourge of *mkpuru mmiri*. The point is that the country has a weak drug access control governance.

Another important point is that concerns among affected Igbo communities where youths abuse methamphetamine have led to an equally troubling response: solving the problem with flogging. Incidentally, physical torture has consequences for the human rights of drug consumers. Indeed, a boy is claimed to have [died](#) in Anambra state out of intense flogging as punishment for using *mkpuru mmiri*. But local communities have remained firm in using corporal punishment since it is the only form of restraint that the local people can muster. Indeed, town unions like Umudioka Improvement Union and several others have issued statements banning the consumption of the substance. While the extreme measure of communities is disturbing, their proactive step is prompted by the absence of proper drug control offers an opportunity for a collaboration that would immensely support governmental institutions in drug control.

While regulatory inadequacies are one form of lacuna in drug control governance, another such gap is the failure of government to meaningfully promote the capacity development of the citizens through educational and vocational training so that they could be gainfully employed. Being neglected by the state and unable to fend for themselves, some young people take to drugs searching for solace from poverty. They also become prone to joining chaotic groups whose activities encourage the abuse of hard drugs. [Youth unemployment in Nigeria presently stands at 53.4 per cent](#). South-East would have a substantial chunk of this figure because the government (both Federal and state

governments) neglects investment in projects that could create employment or even support the private sector.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the South-Eastern, like [Imo state, leads in the national youth unemployment statistics](#). Even the other South-Eastern states that do not feature as badly as Imo state have high levels of both unemployment and under-employment. This type of governance failure shares substantial liability in youth resorting to hard and illicit drugs. Thus, the recent declaration of [the five governors of the South-East states](#) that they are committed to the eradication of the use of illicit drugs in the region should warrant policies and actions. This is the manner to reduce the state of unemployment, under-employment and poverty, which are major predisposing conditions for the use of illicit drugs.

The Way Out

The drug abuse problem is not confined to the users. It affects both government and society. Its consequences extend to the economy, politics and other realms of society. Therefore, it cannot be controlled adequately without an integrated strategy for different stakeholders like government drug control institutions, communities, civil society organisations, youth and student organisations. Thus, we recommend in the case of *mkpuru mmiri* that:

1. Drug control and enforcement institutions should embrace the strategy of collaboration with governmental public information institutions like the NOA, state ministries of information and the media to engage in sustained awareness creation about the use of hard drugs and the consequences. The collaboration should equally target town unions and community leadership which are strong institutions in Igboland, neighbourhood groups especially in urban areas, market and student associations to support public awareness. They should also create modalities for information sharing with these groups on *mkpuru mmiri* and other hard drugs.
2. Other important partners in this collaboration would be Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) or relevant consulting firms for deep and sustained community level engagements to eradicate drug use within a framework that is free of human rights abuses. In addition, community vigilantes should be given more training on human rights issues.
3. The five governors of the South-East states should ensure that their declarations to fight hard drugs do not end as mere platitudes. Their central role lies in good governance to substantially reduce poverty and unemployment to eliminate part of the situations that prompt young people to take drugs. In addition, the five state governors should consider setting up a public and technology-driven information system that maintains the anonymity of informants about drug supply chains and a robust information sharing system among the five states.
4. Development partners like UNICEF, UNESCO and UNODC should pay attention to this emerging trend in South-East Nigeria, especially in the involvement of children in the hawking of these drugs. Some of the pictures from the region show that young people are part of the distribution chain. A good study on the chain from production to consumption will help fight this menace.

Conclusion

The abuse of a certain variety of psychoactive drugs, *mkpuru mmiri* is spreading fast in the South-East of Nigeria. Its health, social, economic and political consequences are dire and multiplying. At the core, the future of the youth is under threat. But concerned stakeholders from local communities have taken to a self-help solution, and youth groups are beginning to spread awareness while the government makes declarations. One important promise of these efforts is harnessing them for a successful war against hard drugs. More importantly, the government has a role in ensuring that this emerging synergy is sustained.

Authors:

Dr Ben Nwosu is an Associate Consultant at Nextier SPD and a Senior Lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Dr Ndu Nwokolo is a Managing Partner and Chief Executive at Nextier SPD.