

# **A STUDY ON THE NEXUS BETWEEN DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA**

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## **Preamble**

A crime-free society is an important ideal that could foster stability, growth, and development for a society and its citizenry. A safe society is an important consideration and expectation of good governance. Like most other societies around the world, Nigeria is in pursuit of an ideal crime-free society. Success at this will inadvertently promote the economy, good health, physical infrastructure, and a general sense of safety.

When a person is found to submit repeatedly to a life of criminality, besides other root causes, it might be that they are fostered and emboldened through the use of substances, which go on to alter their sense of judgment towards generally acceptable value system, choices and an innate desire for self-preservation. As a result, they find themselves engaging in activities that sometimes pose lethal risks to themselves and the people around them.

In pursuit of a safe society, it has become important to explore the socioeconomic determinants of insecurity and the connection between illicit drug use and sustenance abuse that bring insecurity activities in Nigeria.

## 1. Introduction

According to Statista (2022), there was a significant increase in the number of drug crimes across the 6 geopolitical zones between 2018 and 2019, especially within North-central Nigeria. But behind this staggering statistic lies a deeper truth: the intricate web connecting drug abuse and violence.

Nigeria is a nation with a fast-growing population. The six geopolitical zones (North-West, North-East, North-Central, South-South, South-East, and South-West) are characterized by prominent cultural, socioeconomic, and religious diversity. In the various regions, the predominant precipitator of criminal tendency and violence are similar sometimes, and different at other times. While socioeconomic determinants can lay some grounds for people engaging in crime and violence, developing the boldness to stay the course of repeated engagement, despite law enforcement, the judicial system, and other forms of deterrents, sparks a need to take a closer look at the motives and the types of influence that may be playing critical roles at sustaining addiction, violence and crime in Nigeria.

The supply and availability of illicit drugs and substances in the various regions depend on different dynamics and mechanisms. The connection between drugs, substance use, and abuse, and violence, and crime seems to exist. Investigating the connections through retrospective events, reports, and studies stands a chance of revealing valuable information and points where interventions can be useful.

The 2018 Drug Use Survey conducted in Nigeria by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Center for Research and Information on Substance Abuse (CRISA) estimated that 14.4% of the Nigerian population aged 15 - 64 years old had used drugs the previous year, with 1-in-5 of such users being dependent on the drugs (UNODC, 2018). This statistic is almost three times the global drug use prevalence, which was reported to be 5.5% of the global population for persons aged 15 - 64 years.

Important drugs of concern identified by the survey to be in predominant use include cannabis (with 1-in-3 persons dependent on the drug), non-medical prescription opioids (with 1-in-5 persons dependent on the drug), cough syrup, stimulants, sedatives, inhalants etc.

## 1.1 Context and Justification

The connection between drug use, violence, insecurity, and other related crimes is multifaceted and underscores the urgency and significance of understanding this relationship. Here are some key points to consider:

Public Health Concern: Drug abuse is an important public health issue with far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, and communities. Understanding the association between drug use and violent behavior is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies to address both the health and social implications of substance abuse.

Impact on Society: Drug-related violence, including drug trafficking, possession, and associated offenses, contributes to significant social and economic costs. These include strain on law enforcement resources, overcrowded prisons, and the perpetuation of cycles of poverty and inequality. By studying the connection between drug use and crime, we are likely to discover insights into the underlying factors driving criminal behavior and inform policies aimed at reducing its prevalence.

Vulnerability of Certain Populations: Certain demographic groups, such as individuals living in disadvantaged neighborhoods or those struggling with substance use disorders, are disproportionately affected by both drug abuse and involvement in violent activity. Investigating the links between drug use and insecurity can shed light on the systemic factors that contribute to these disparities and guide efforts to address them effectively.

Complex Interplay of Factors: The relationship between drug use and insecurity is not linear but rather complex and multifaceted. Factors such as addiction, socioeconomic status, mental health disorders, and social environment all play a role in shaping individuals' likelihood of engaging in violent behavior related to drug use. A comprehensive study can help disentangle these factors and provide an understanding of the pathways linking drug abuse and insecurity.

Policy Implications: Research on the connection between drug use and insecurity has direct implications for policy development and implementation. Evidence-based findings can inform the design of interventions that target root causes of substance abuse and violent behavior, such as access to treatment and rehabilitation programs, harm reduction initiatives, and community-based prevention efforts.

In all, studying the connection between drug use and insecurity is essential for addressing the complex interplay of factors that contribute to both public health and societal challenges. By gaining a deeper understanding of this relationship, government agencies and its parastatals, Non-Governmental Organizations, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders can contribute to the development of more effective strategies to prevent drug-related crime and promote the well-being of individuals and communities.

## 1.2 Statement of Problems

This study seeks to explore the critical catalyst for the perpetration of insecurity. We recognize that various other co-occurring challenges arise as a result of the connections between drug use and violence. Against this knowledge, we seek to explore and analyze the following ideas.

Causal Directionality: In the Nigerian context, one significant problem in understanding the relationship between drug use and insecurity is determining the direction of causality. While drug use can lead to violent behavior (e.g., drug trafficking, theft to support addiction), involvement in criminal activities can also increase the likelihood of drug use (e.g., drug dealing within criminal networks). Untangling this causal relationship is crucial for developing targeted interventions and policies.

Health and Public Safety Concerns: Drug-related violence poses significant public health and safety risks, including crime, mental health challenges, overdose deaths, and the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis. Addressing these interconnected challenges requires a comprehensive understanding of the social, economic, and health-related factors driving drug-related violence and harm.

Underlying Socioeconomic Factors: Drug abuse and involvement in violent activity often occur within contexts of socioeconomic disadvantage, poverty, and marginalization. Understanding how these structural factors contribute to the connection between drug use and insecurity is essential for addressing root causes and implementing effective prevention and intervention strategies that address broader social inequalities.

Access to Treatment and Support Services: Limited access to evidence-based treatment and support services for individuals struggling with substance abuse and addiction can exacerbate their involvement in violence and criminal activities. Identifying barriers to treatment access, such as stigma, lack of resources, and gaps in service provision, is critical for improving outcomes and reducing the cycle of drug-related violence and incarceration.

By addressing these problems and conducting rigorous research, policymakers, practitioners, and communities can develop more effective strategies to prevent drug-related violence, promote public

health, and support individuals affected by substance abuse and addiction.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

As a foundation, we observed that the report of violence around elections is a situation that continues to happen during each election event (Prior, during and shortly after). This observation got us curious about understanding what might be serving as a persuasive factor sustaining violence, in spite of the natural inclination for self-preservation, as well as the different forms of deterrent set up by government and respective agencies. We thereby sought to highlight the critical catalyst that may be interacting with other important factors to facilitate violence and criminality in Nigeria, especially during elections.

Bearing in mind the impact and burden of drug use and abuse to violence and crime, the objectives of this study include:

A. Highlighting the critical catalyst that may be interacting with other important factors to facilitate violence and criminality.

B. Understanding Risk Factors: By examining the relationship between drug use, violence, and criminality, it can be easier to identify key risk factors that contribute to both phenomena. This understanding helps inform prevention efforts by targeting underlying factors such as substance abuse, mental health issues, and social disadvantage.

C. Preventing Harm: Promoting the ongoing discussions and interventions around reducing the harm associated with drug-related violence and crime. This may include re-invigorating what is already on-ground, curating more insightful approaches towards promoting access to substance abuse treatment, implementing community policing initiatives, and addressing social determinants of health and crime.

D. Promoting Public Safety: Further knowledge of the connections between drug use, violence, and criminality helps law enforcement agencies and community organizations develop strategies to enhance public safety. This includes efforts to disrupt drug trafficking networks, reduce drug-related violence in communities, and prevent drug-related crime.

E. Informing Policy Development: Research on the connection between drug use and insecurity will provide policymakers valuable insight into the effectiveness of various approaches to drug control and violent reduction. This information can guide the development

of more targeted and impactful policies, including those related to drug enforcement, treatment, and harm reduction.

Overall, understanding the connection between drug use and insecurity serves the broader objectives of promoting public health, enhancing public safety, and addressing social inequities. By gaining a deeper understanding of this relationship, researchers and policymakers can develop more effective strategies to prevent drug-related harm and improve outcomes for individuals and communities affected by substance abuse and violence.

## **2.0 Research Design:**

This research was conducted by reviewing and analyzing historical data on insecurity and crimes by adults associated with drug use, review of the literature (secondary data), interview and recruitment of confidential informants on the volume of drugs retailed per time-frame around the 6 geopolitical areas in Nigeria.

Sampling Strategy: Members from key populations were randomly recruited for the inquiry. Specific locations identified as hot spots in the sale and distribution of illicit drugs and substances were randomly chosen, and confidential informants were recruited. From around the geopolitical zones, a total of 56 key population members and 23 confidential informants were recruited in all.

### Sources of data:

- (a.) Historical data on insecurity and crimes by adults associated with drug use (Secondary data)
- (b.) Review of reports on crime, criminality and violence (secondary data)
- (c.) 2018 Drug use Survey in Nigeria (UNODC) and
- (d.) Recruitment and interview of confidential informants around the 6 geopolitical zones in Nigeria (One state per zone: Edo, Kaduna, Niger, Borno, Anambra, Lagos, and FCT )

### Data Collection Methods:

Secondary data on insecurity, crimes, and other related offenses were obtained online, concentrating on data from 2003 and above. Primary data were obtained through the deployment of a questionnaire, the analysis of existing data on drug prevalence, violence, insecurity, and crime, and online reports of insecurity,

crimes, and other drug-related offenses like driving under the influence of drugs, etc.

Data Analysis Plan: From the data observed, we explored the likelihood that drug use and abuse is a critical catalyst in the perpetration of insecurity and crime in Nigeria. Specific scenarios that were included are the trends of insecurity, violence, and crime during elections and a report on drug-associated crimes and offenses nationwide.

Ethical Considerations:

The research was conducted upholding ethical requirements such as: guarding against risk to respondents, gaining informed consent, and observing confidentiality, among other criteria during data collection.

**2.1 Scope of the Research**

1. Types of Drugs and Their Impact

The data collection was conducted in one state each from the Six Geo-political zones of Nigeria: South-South (Edo), South-West (Lagos), South-East (Anambra), North-East (Borno), North-West (Kaduna), North-Central (Niger). The information collected was on ‘the volume of each of the specific drugs sold’ at specific hot spots within the time-frame covered. The types of drugs reported on include: Cannabis, Rephnol, Codeine, Cocaine, Methamphetamine, Heroin, SK, Solution, Glue, Tramadol, Skuskus, Fentanyl, and Amphetamine (verbal report, 2022).

Hierarchy for Most Drug Sold/Consumption 2022 - 2023													
2022	Cannabis	Rephnol	Tramadol	Codeine	Heroin	Glue	Cocaine	SK	Meth	Fentanyl	Amph	Solution	Skuskus
2023	Cannabis	Tramadol	Codeine	Rephnol	Cocaine	Heroin	Sk	Meth	Fentanyl	Glue	Amph	Solution	Skuskus

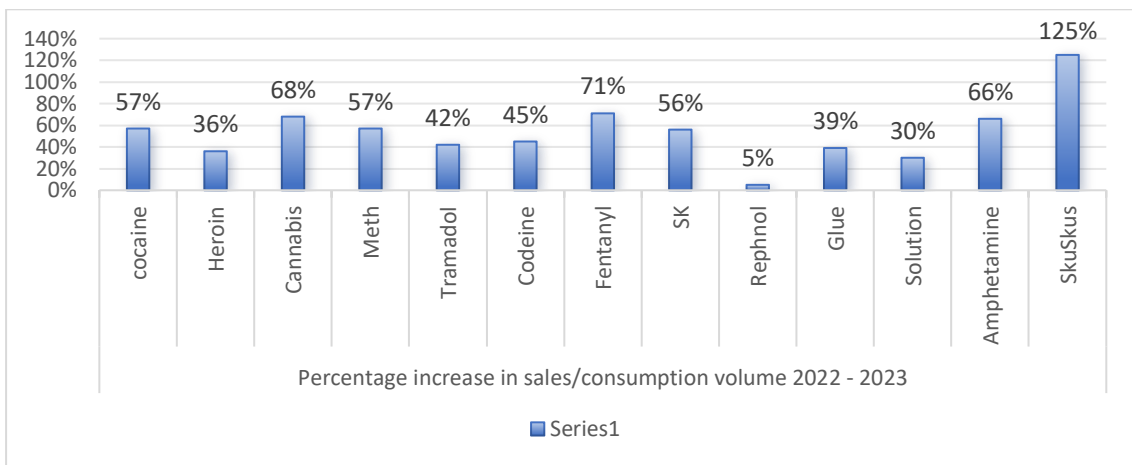
**Table 1.1 2022, 2023 Regional Drug Sales Data Collection**

Nigeria 2022	cocaine	heroin	cannabis	Meth	Tramadol	Codeine	Fentanyl	SK	Refnol	Glue	Solution	Ampheta mine	Sku-Skus
South south Edo	155582	138764	155100	110897	122452	163790	128635	140456	135257	97337	124458	138011	101802
North West Kd	215861	234688	0	219568	232791	206289	223097	211812	200339	233267	211394	228525	0
North Central	175457	154906	178515	140767	148301	165470	115000	136309	508358	146922	143864	165166	0
North East Brn	108976	99048	125005	115204	95055	105623	82577	106770	84592	111912	84318	104010	0
Sout west LAG	238175	413805	2476321	256366	365130	394554	191049	280290	293516	344679	0	153997	0
Sout east AN	174075	189301	187508	165532	182489	185449	159875	154136	161597	174604	159106	0	0
FCT	14600		238162		744600	235790			576700				
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,082,726</b>	<b>1,230,512</b>	<b>3,360,611</b>	<b>1,008,334</b>	<b>1,890,818</b>	<b>1,456,965</b>	<b>900,233</b>	<b>1,029,773</b>	<b>1,960,359</b>	<b>1,108,721</b>	<b>723,140</b>	<b>789,709</b>	<b>101,802</b>

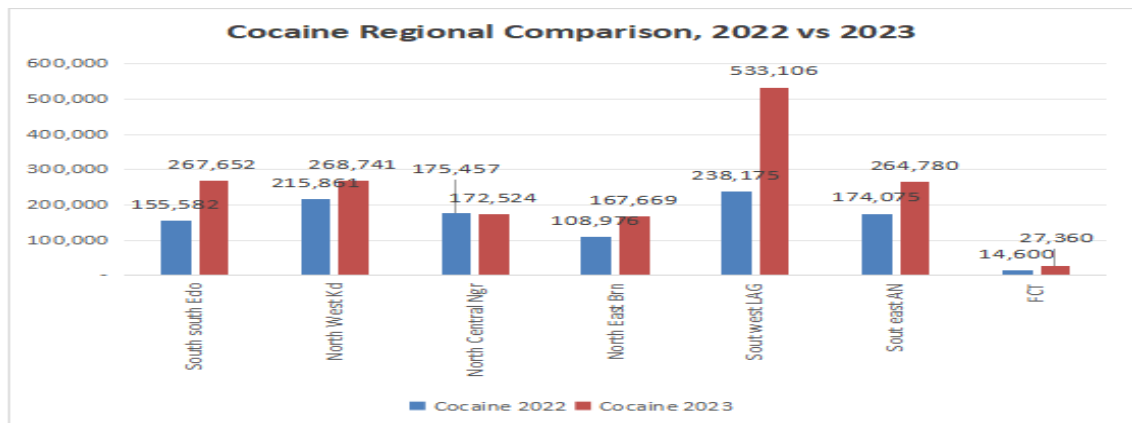
  

Nigeria 2023	cocaine	heroin	cannabis	Meth	Tramadol	Codeine	Fentanyl	SK	Refnol	Glue	Solution	Ampheta mine	Sku-Skus
South south Edo	267652	272334	266810	217576	208756	269249	223955	218834	210613	200965	194608	194459	229327
North West Kd	268741	270481	0	276540	281117	258848	275036	249286	238782	294954	265093	264405	0
North Central	172524	174900	0	173371	179034	156562	164082	133062	163378	163232	162796	192763	0
North East Brn	167669	153703	157745	133261	161035	172788	147093	152227	148740	144211	152853	134601	0
South west LAG	533106	565843	4379857	519449	525615	525059	502471	512607	511265	472511	0	524241	0
South east AN	264780	242285	392912	264671	322189	284449	228854	336060	257540	262812	264754	0	0
FCT	27,360.00		442,836.00		1,008,360.00	450,324.00			530,424.00				
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,701,832</b>	<b>1,679,546</b>	<b>5,640,160</b>	<b>1,584,868</b>	<b>2,686,106</b>	<b>2,117,279</b>	<b>1,541,491</b>	<b>1,602,076</b>	<b>2,060,742</b>	<b>1,538,685</b>	<b>1,040,104</b>	<b>1,310,469</b>	<b>229,327</b>

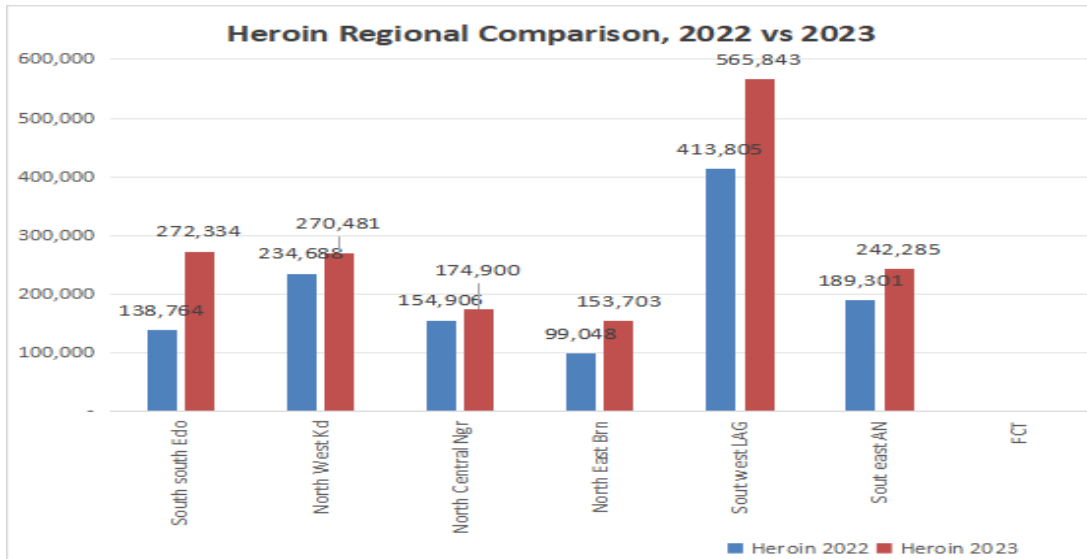
**Dramatic increase in volume of drugs sold between 2022 and 2023 (over 50% increase)**



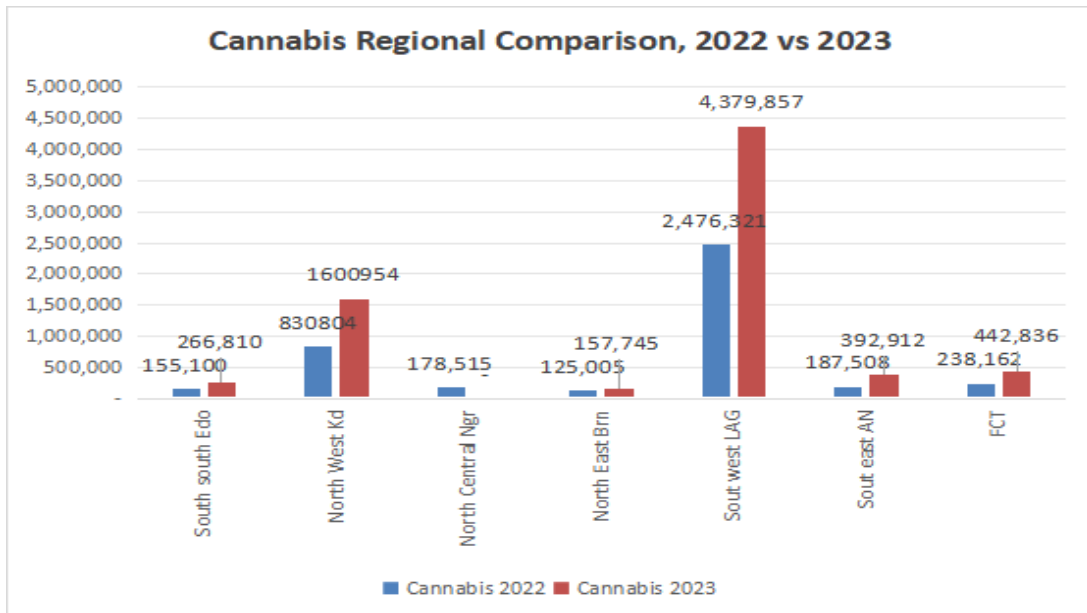
**Figure 1.1 Collated data for Year-on-Year Sales Volume Between Identified Drugs (2022 vs 2023)**



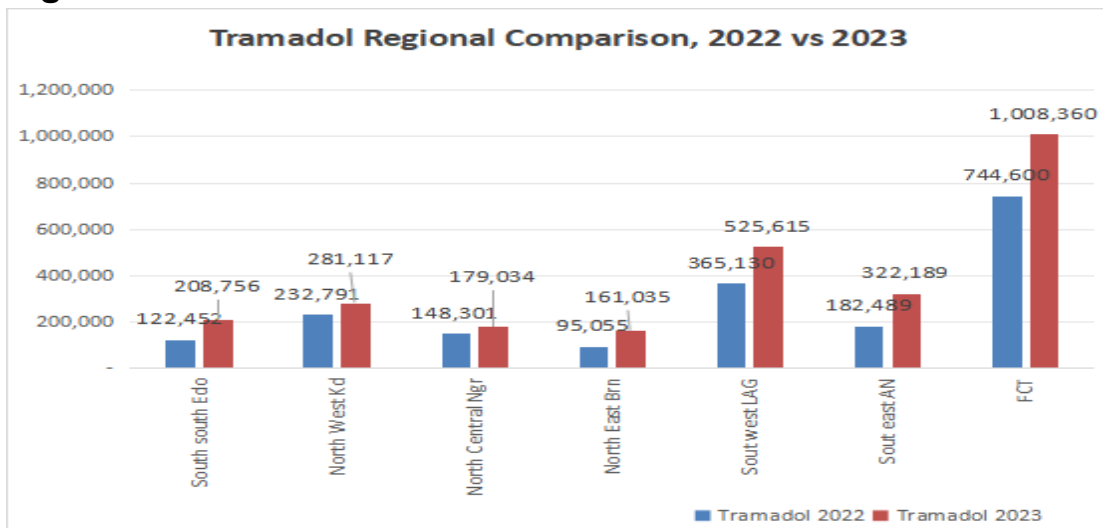
**Figure 1.2**



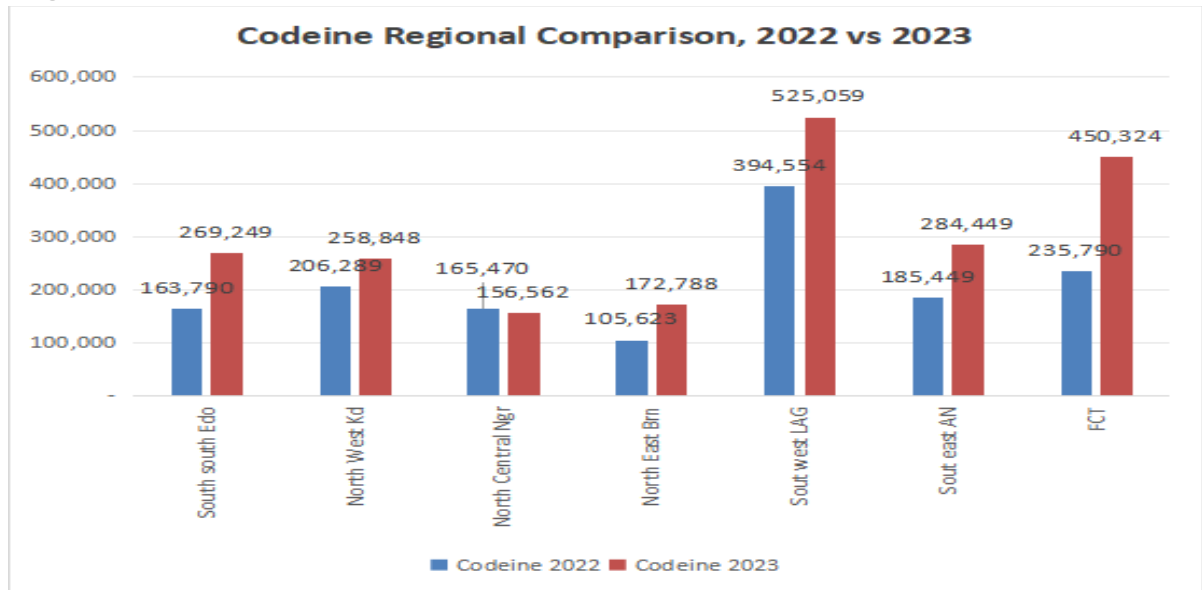
**Figure 1.3**



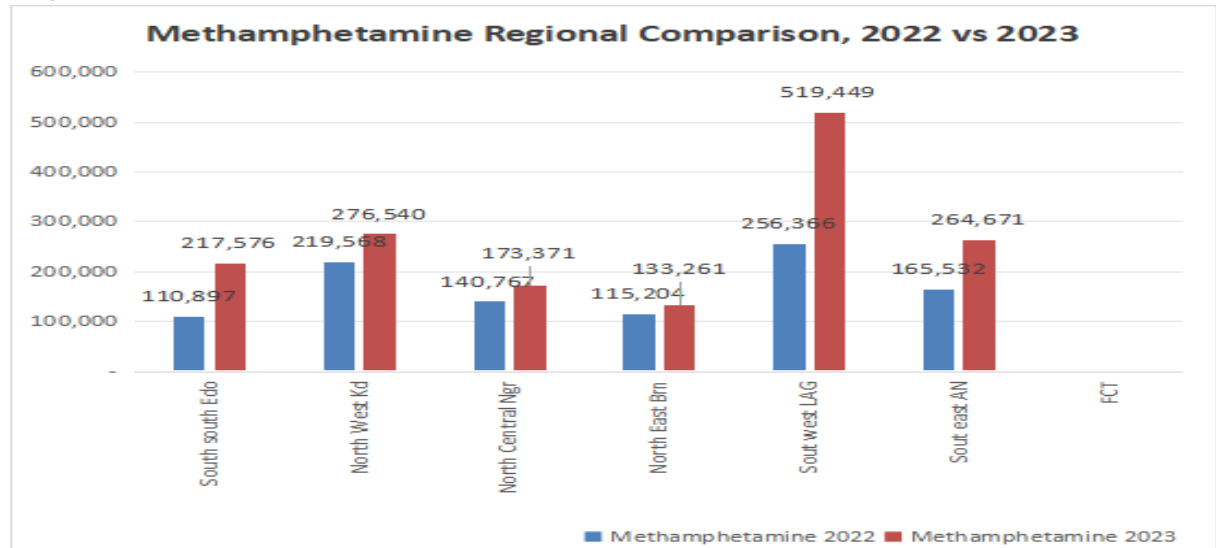
**Figure 1.4**



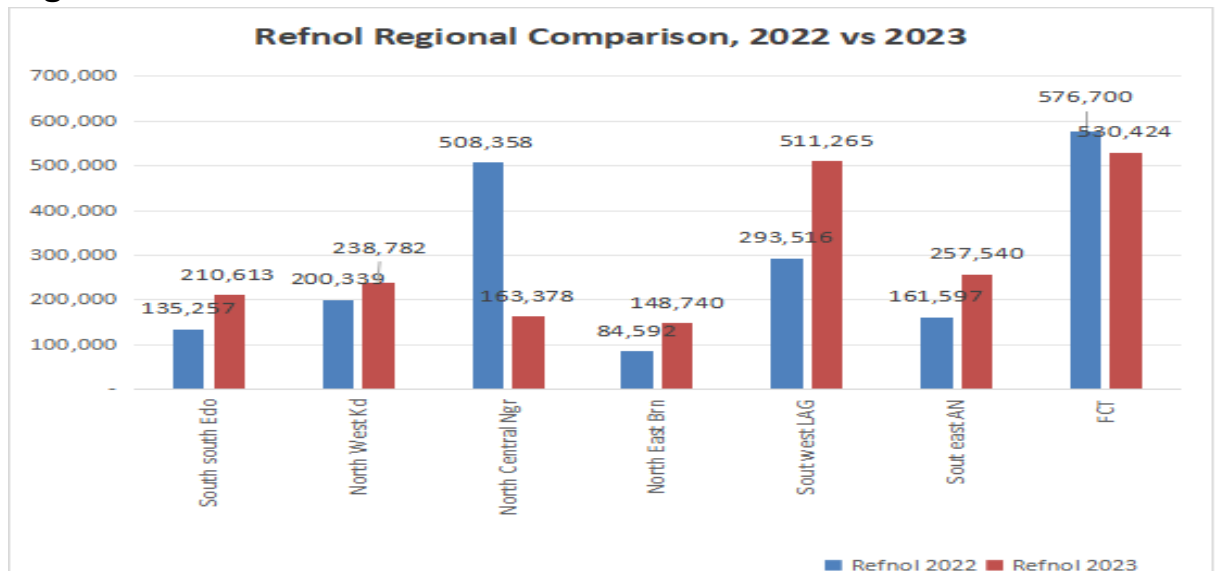
**Figure 1.5**



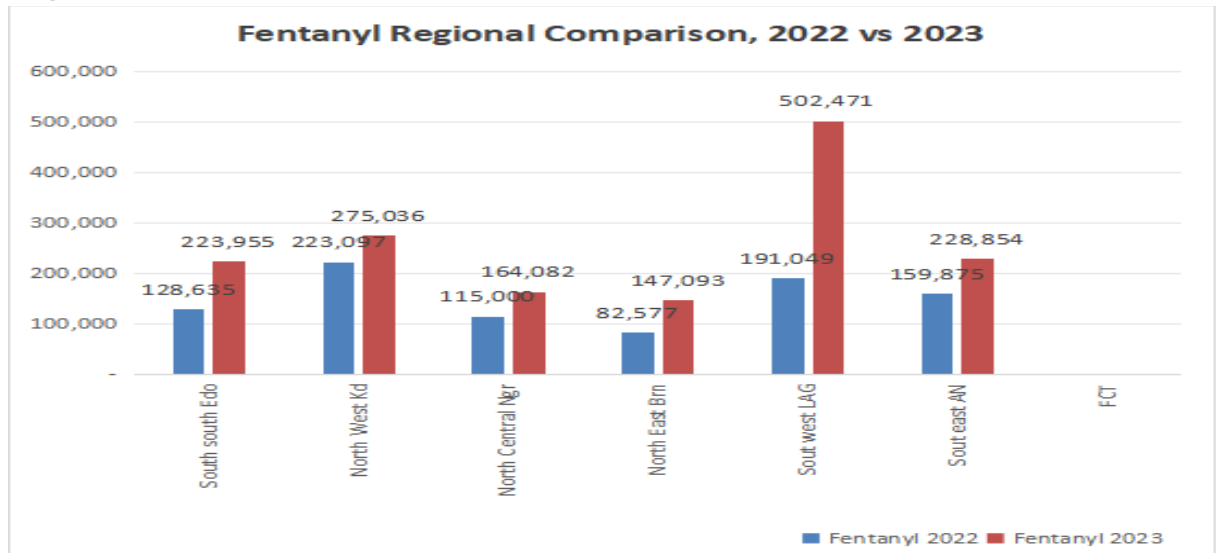
**Figure 1.6**



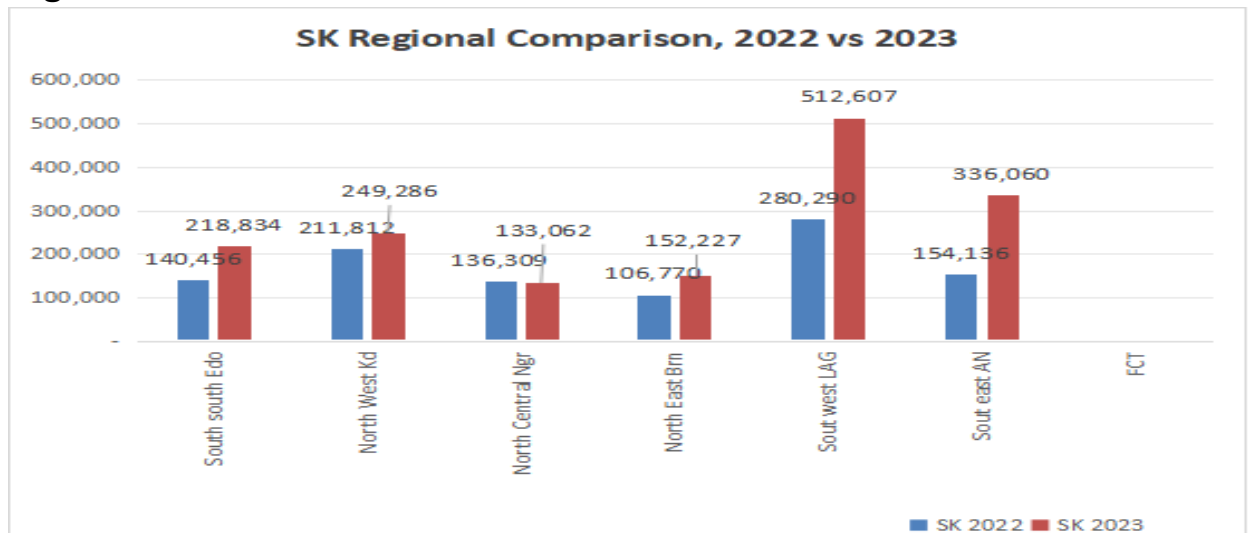
**Figure 1.7**



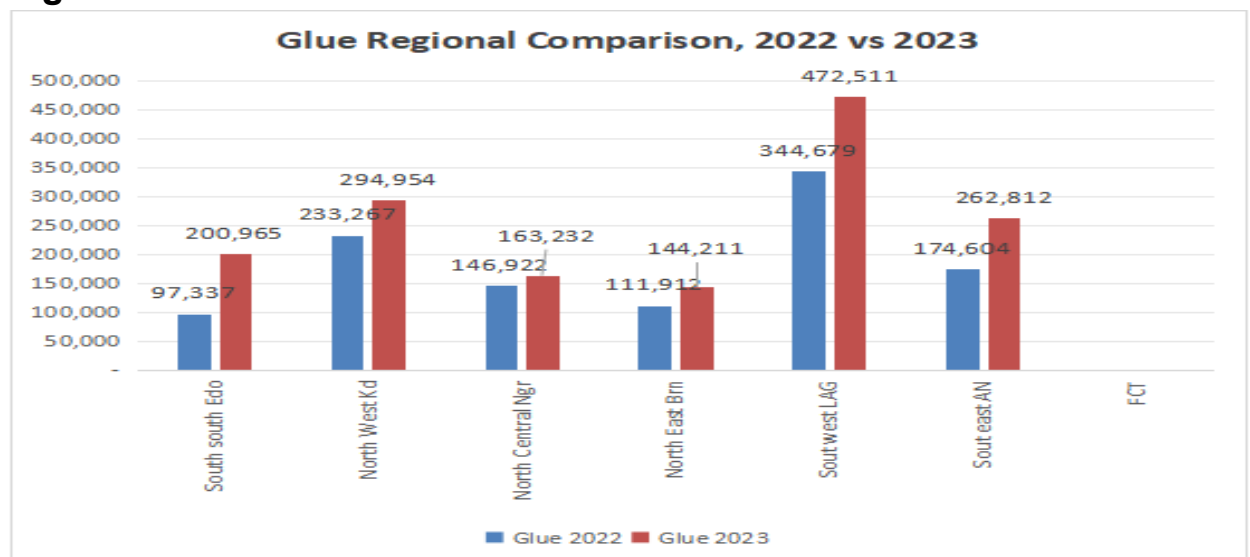
**Figure 1.8**



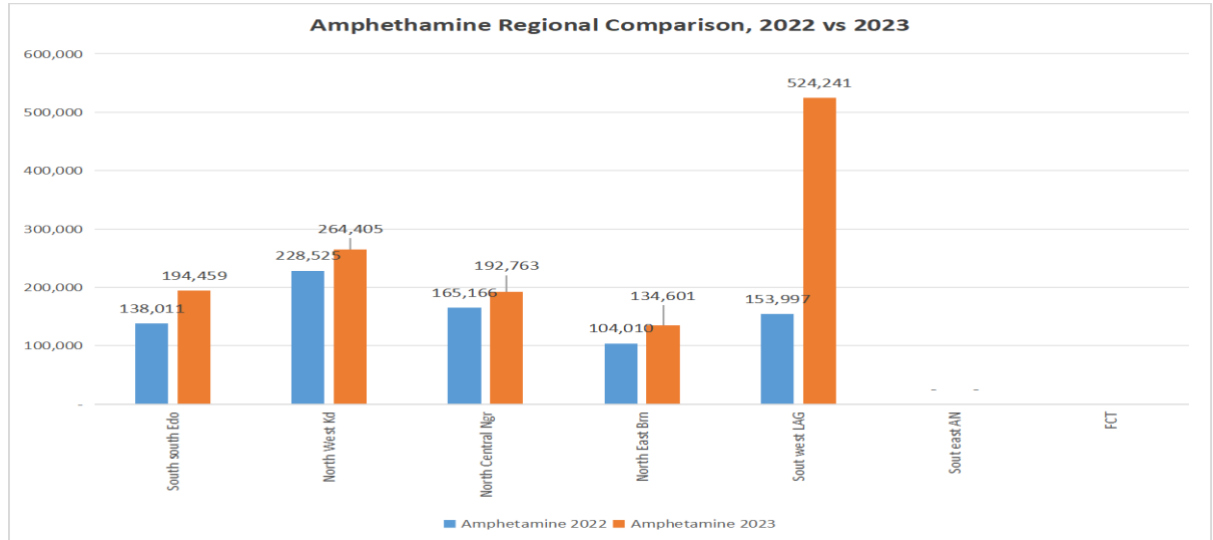
**Figure 1.9**



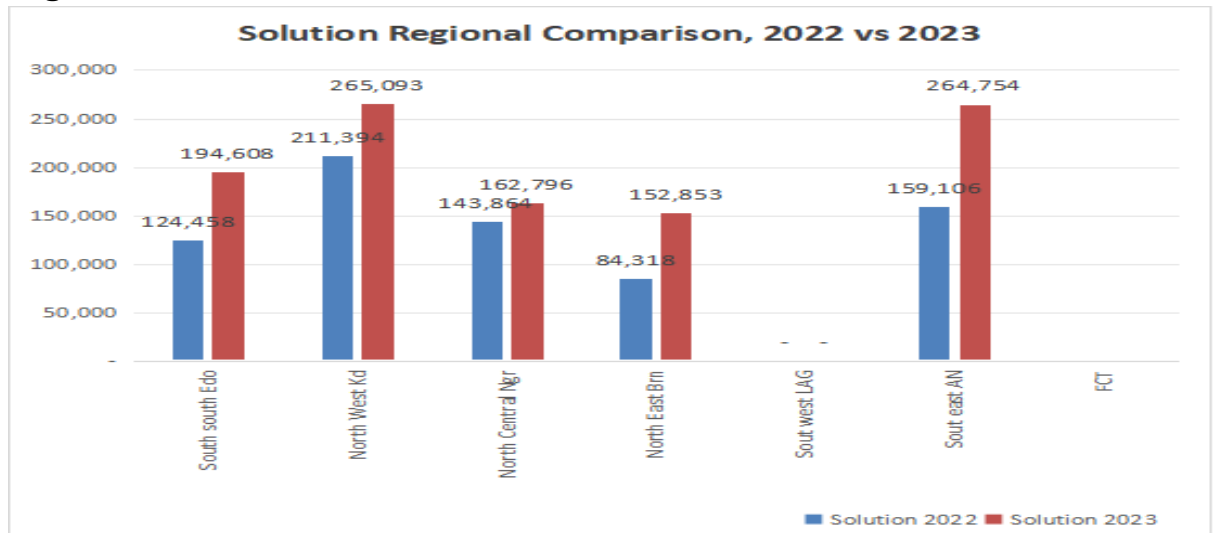
**Figure 1.10**



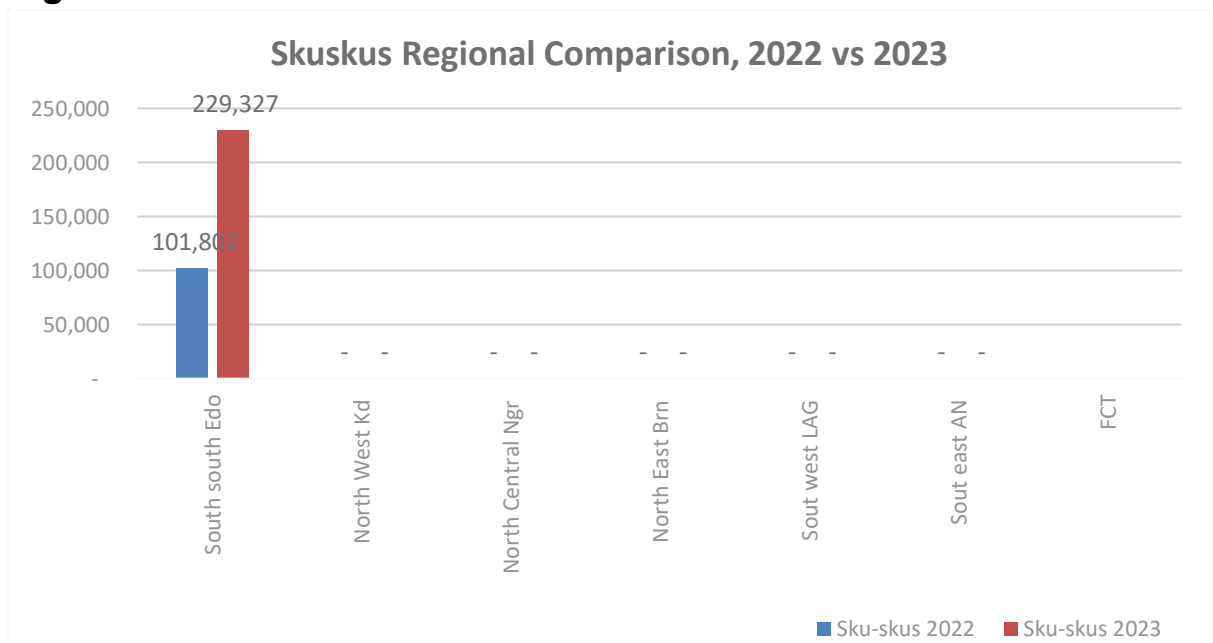
**Figure 1.11**



**Figure 1.12**

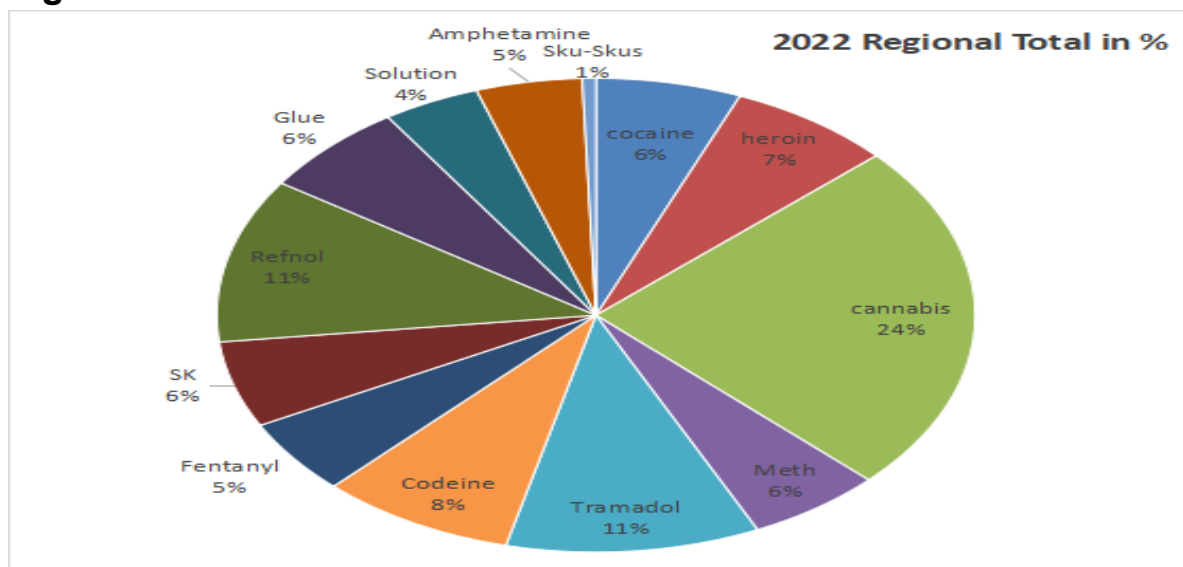


**Figure 1.13**

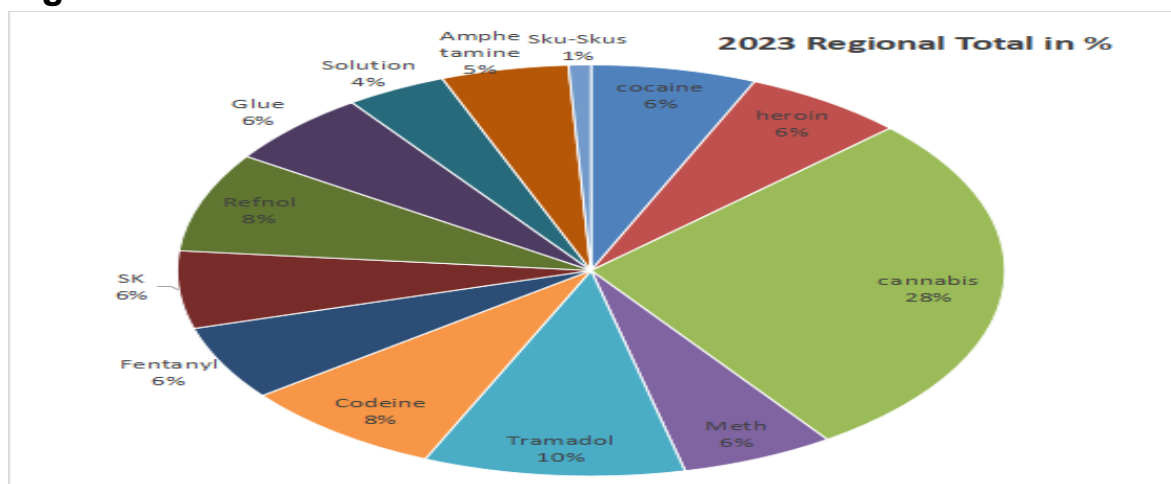


Collated data for Year-on-Year Sales Volume Between Identified Drugs (2022 vs 2023) reflects a dramatic increase in the volume of drugs reported to have been retailed at certain locations in the six geo-political regions of Nigeria. In most scenarios, the report reflects a dramatic increase in volume of drugs sold between 2022 and 2023 (over 50% increase)

**Figure 1.14**



**Figure 1.15**



### 1. Nature and Types of Violence

Some of the crimes committed under the influence of drugs and substance abuse include domestic violence, civil unrest, violent crimes, property crimes, election-associated violence, sex, and drug trafficking (verbal report, 2022). According to several participants, some of the crimes and offenses that are drug-related are also non-drug-related. Except that, the frequency and tendency for harm to

others from such crimes and offenses become heightened (verbal report, 2022).

The impact of drug use and the likelihood that offenses or violent activity will happen is not exactly a straightforward thing. Various factors such as biological, environmental, social, and even economic dynamics can influence the outcomes between drug use and violence.

Stimulant-type drugs like **cocaine and amphetamines** tend to increase impulsive behavior and aggression. The side effects of using cocaine (restlessness, paranoia, panic), as well as the burst of energy it yields often increase the risk of violence (Stamm, J. B., 2020). Some crimes associated with cocaine use include burglary and robbery, especially when the cost of the habit becomes more expensive than can be self-funded. Other crimes can arise from activities around the peddling and trafficking of cocaine. **Cannabis:** According to Stamm, J. B. (2020), a study that considered the density of marijuana dispensaries around Denver, Colorado (United States of America) showed that the density of marijuana dispensaries is associated with 85% more property crimes in a year, than areas free of marijuana dispensaries.

**Heroin:** Heroin is associated with crimes like further trafficking of the drug and other economic crimes.

## 2. Geographic Variations

To explore the geographic variation of drug use, violence, and regional variability, it would be important to also explore 'how the prevalence of drug use and associated violence vary across different regions of Nigeria.'

**Table 2.1 Drugs Associated Violence**

S/N	Geo-Political Zones	Drugs Associated Crimes						
		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2018	2019
1	North-Central	1,230.00	1,323.00	1,416.00	1,605.00	1,494.00	1,311.00	517,711.69
2	North-East	606.00	765.00	1,017.00	824.00	1,017.00	1,608.00	4,490.81
3	North-West	2,185.00	2,288.00	2,261.00	2,205.00	2,353.00	2,809.00	11,968.50
4	South-East	960.00	1,155.00	1,136.00	979.00	802.00	1,022.00	13,234.48
5	South-South	1,480.00	1,371.00	1,314.00	1,380.00	1,303.00	1,821.00	28,885.85
6	South-West	1,591.00	1,941.00	1,682.00	1,785.00	1,288.00	1,260.00	44,744.13

## Drugs Associated Crimes 2012 - 2019 per Geo-Political Zones

According to Statista (2022), between 2018 and 2019, drug-associated crimes took a dramatic increase across the 6 Geo-Political zones in Nigeria.

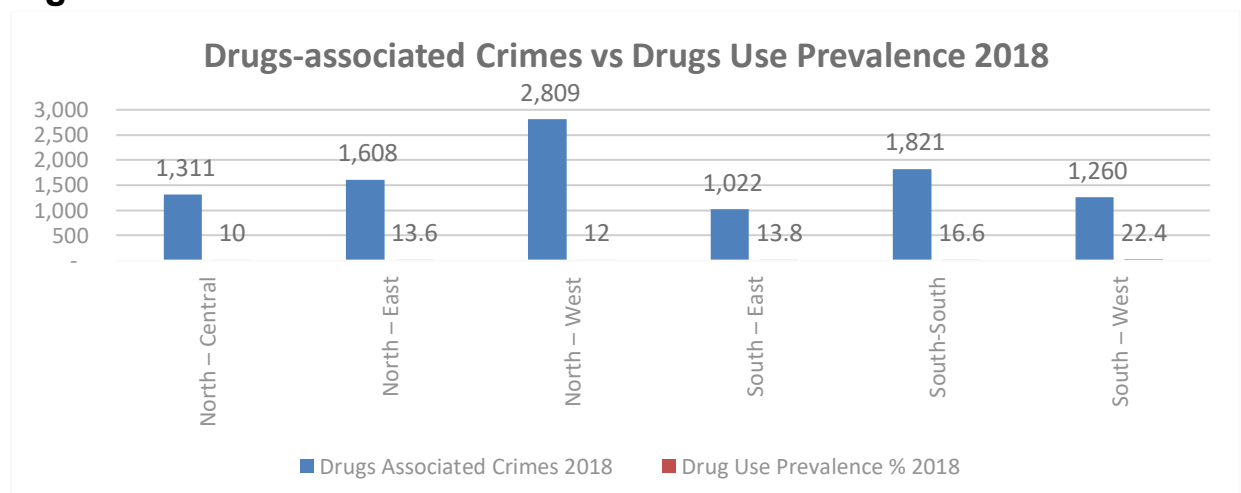
Crimes against properties (for example: theft, cheating, fraud) and crimes against persons (for example: assault and grievous harm injuries) is reported to be on the increase. Reports of abductions and mass killings are also on the increase (Sasu, D. D., 2024). Assault on the citizenry by state agents is not left out; for example, complaints and reports from young people about their experiences at the hands of The Nigerian Police and the then “Special Anti-Robbery Squad” (SARS). These complaints increased and eventually climaxed into the EndSARS protest of October 2020.

**Table 2.2 Drug Use Prevalence (%) versus Drugs Associated Crimes Per Region.**

Geo-Political Zones	Drugs Associated Crimes 2018	Drug Use Prevalence % 2018
North – Central	1,311	10
North – East	1,608	13.6
North – West	2,809	12
South – East	1,022	13.8
South-South	1,821	16.6
South – West	1,260	22.4

Source: NBS and UNODC, 2019

**Figure 1.16**



The link between drug use prevalence and criminal behavior is complex, shaped by various mediating factors that influence both drug consumption and crime patterns. These dynamics reflect forward or reverse causality, where drug use can either lead to or result from criminal activities, while factors such as peer influence, age, and socioeconomic conditions also play significant roles (Ritter et al., 2020; Bennett & Holloway, 2019).

The chart highlights intriguing regional contrasts. In northern Nigeria, despite moderate drug use prevalence, crime rates appear disproportionately higher compared to the south, suggesting that other factors—possibly including economic hardship, unemployment, or cultural dynamics—may be driving these adverse outcomes. This observation calls for nuanced interventions tailored to the unique realities of each region.

**Table 3.1 2019 General Election Violent Incidents and Resultant Casualties vs Drug Use Prevalence.**

S/N	Geo-Political Zone	Drug Use Prevalence 2018 (%)	No. of Incidents 2019	Casualties 2019 (killed)
1	North – Central	10	23	111.00
2	North – East	13.6	16	146.00
3	North – West	12	20	172.00
4	South – East	13.8	7	14.00
5	South-South	16.6	59	120.00
6	South – West	22.4	36	63.00

**Drug Use Prevalence vs. Election Incidents and Casualties across Geographical Regions during the 2019 General Elections.**

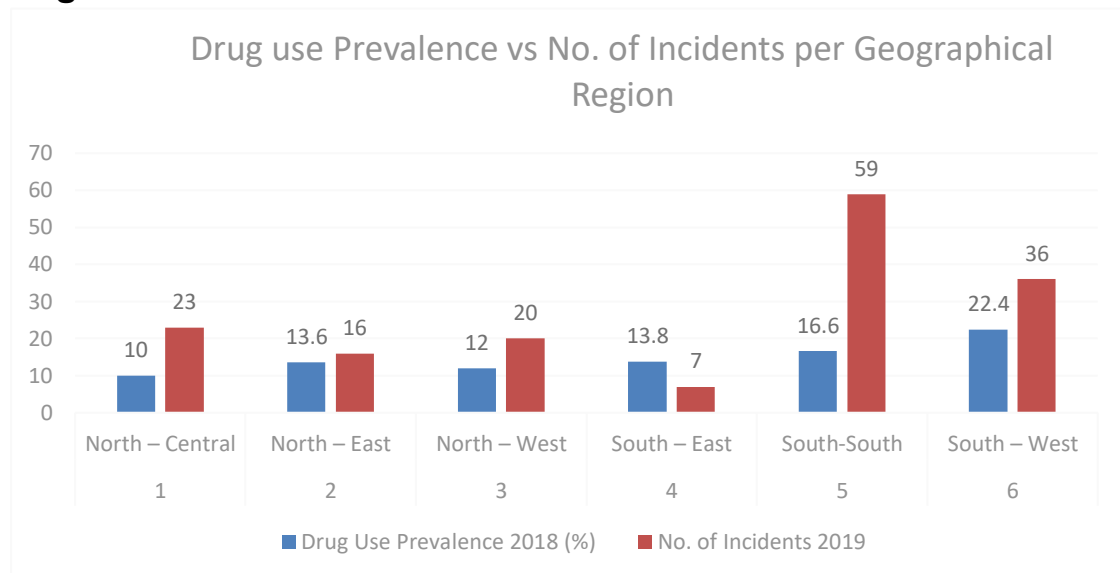
This table provides a thought-provoking glimpse into the interplay between drug use prevalence and electoral violence across different regions during Nigeria’s 2019 general elections. It raises essential questions about the extent to which substance use may amplify social unrest, particularly during politically sensitive periods.

Notably, some regions with higher drug prevalence experienced heightened election-related incidents and casualties, suggesting that drug use might exacerbate tensions. Meanwhile, in other regions, high casualty rates occurred despite lower drug use, hinting at the influence of other structural or political factors, such as voter suppression, ethnic rivalries, or socio-political grievances.

These insights call for region-specific interventions, balancing law enforcement, mental health services, and community engagement to address the underlying causes of election violence while mitigating the potential role of drug use.

**Figure**

**1.17**



### **Drug Use Prevalence versus Number of Incidents per Geographical Region**

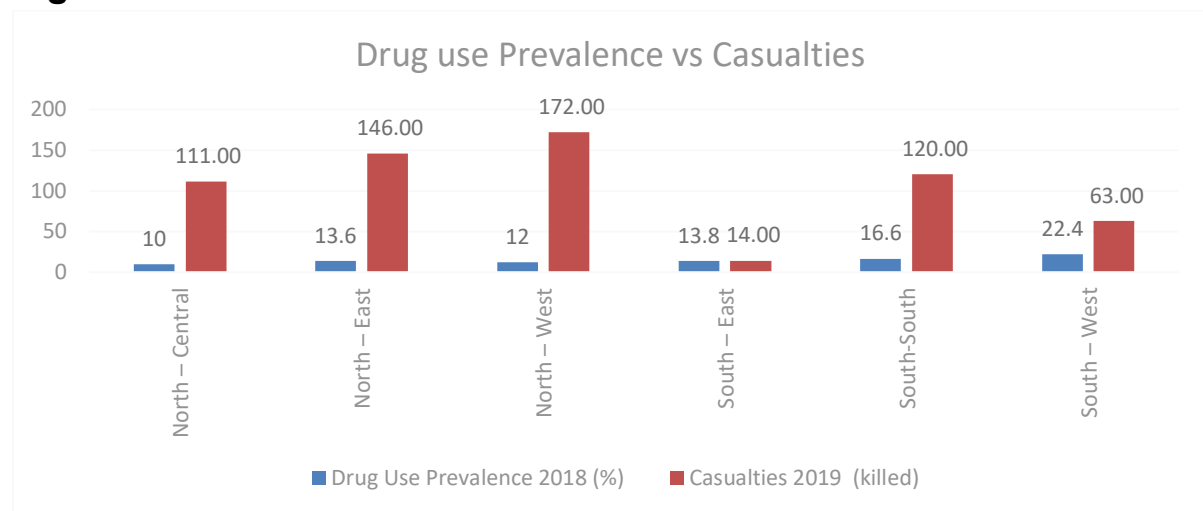
The chart reveals an intriguing pattern: Southern Nigeria, with its higher rates of drug use, also shows a marked increase in election-related violence. This correlation suggests that substance abuse may fuel heightened tensions, potentially intensifying conflicts during politically sensitive periods.

In contrast, despite comparable or even lower levels of drug prevalence, the northern regions report fewer violent incidents. This disparity raises critical questions about the role of other underlying factors—such as political dynamics, cultural differences, or even law

enforcement practices between the regions — in shaping the frequency of electoral violence across regions.

These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions that address both substance abuse and the unique socio-political landscapes of each region to mitigate future election-related conflicts, and violence in general.

**Figure 1.18**



### **Drug use prevalence 2018 versus Casualties (fatalities) during the 2019 elections**

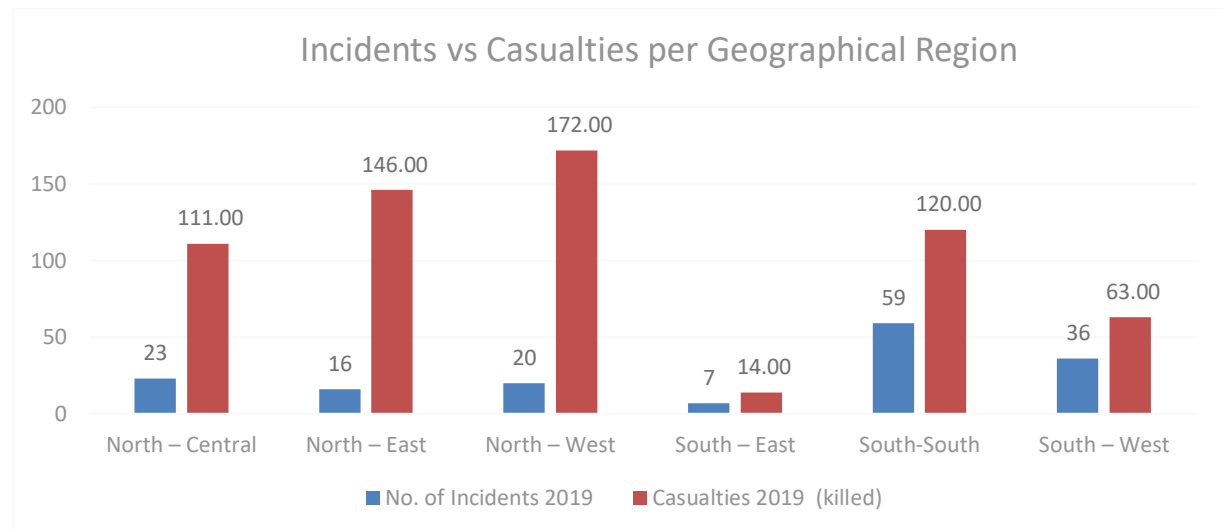
The chart reveals a striking pattern: regions with higher drug use prevalence experienced elevated casualties during the 2019 elections. However, the Northern regions present a chilling paradox—despite fewer outbreaks of violence, these areas recorded disproportionately higher fatalities.

This suggests that the dynamics of electoral violence differ sharply across regions. In the North, fewer but deadlier incidents may indicate the presence of more intense conflict triggers or inadequate emergency response systems. Meanwhile, the South, though marked by higher drug use and more frequent violence, saw comparatively fewer fatalities.

These insights point to the possibility of compounding factors—such as economic hardship, political unrest, or structural inequalities—exerting a heavier toll in the North, highlighting the need for targeted

interventions that address both substance use and the socio-political roots of violence.

**Figure 1.19 2019 Election-based Violence versus Resultant Casualties.**



**Number of violent incidents versus Casualties (fatalities) during the 2019 elections**

Despite recording fewer incidents of electoral violence than the South—and despite the South exhibiting higher drug use prevalence—the Northern regions suffered significantly higher casualty rates, particularly in terms of fatalities. This unsettling contrast suggests the presence of powerful, underlying factors in the North that amplify the severity of violence, independent of incident frequency or drug use alone.

The data hints at a deeper, more complex relationship between drug use, violence, and fatal outcomes, especially in the Northern regions. This dynamic could reflect the impact of other confounding variables—such as systemic inequalities, weak infrastructure, ethnic tensions, or gaps in law enforcement—intensifying violence during elections and driving up fatality rates. These insights underscore the urgent need for targeted strategies that address not only substance abuse but also the unique socio-political challenges that shape electoral violence across regions.

Electoral violence is fueled by a powerful mix of prominent and underlying motives, transforming political contests into battlegrounds of fierce rivalry and conflict. Understanding these

motives helps shed light on the chaotic forces that ignite violence during elections.

### **1. Prominent Motive:**

At the heart of electoral violence lies the belief that “winner takes all.” Victors gain control over state resources, wielding power to allocate wealth and influence as they please. This high-stakes prize makes winning incredibly lucrative, driving politicians and supporters to resort to any means—often violent—just to secure victory.

### **2. Underlying Motives:**

Beneath the surface, several deeper factors intensify electoral tensions:

#### **(i) Ethnic or Tribal Ambitions:**

Campaigns often exploit tribal or ethnic sentiments, promising preferential treatment to one group at the expense of others. These tactics fuel divisions, stoking animosity and escalating competition into violent confrontation.

#### **(ii) Religious Exploitation:**

Religion becomes a weapon in the political arena, where candidates stir religious sentiments to gain favor or polarize communities. This manipulation fosters exclusion and creates dangerous fault lines that can easily erupt into conflict.

#### **(iii) Exploitation of Vulnerable Populations:**

The large pool of poor, uneducated, and unemployed individuals becomes a ready resource for exploitation. These individuals are lured into violence with promises of quick money, favors, or political rewards, becoming tools for electoral disruption.

#### **(iv) Emotional Surges and Fierce Rivalry:**

As election activities intensify, political competition evolves into emotional warfare. The excitement and tension of the moment transform simple opposition into bitter rivalry, eroding any chance of rational discourse.

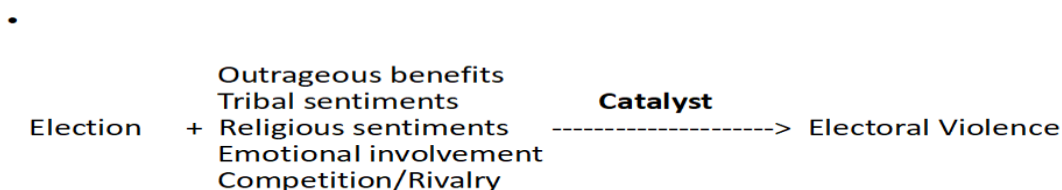
#### **(v) Influence of Drugs and Substance Abuse:**

Drugs and substance abuse act as catalysts, impairing judgment and unleashing reckless behavior. Political actors and supporters

under the influence are more prone to abandon caution, igniting chaos and plunging elections into violence.

These motives reveal that electoral violence is far more than a struggle for political power—it is a volatile mix of personal ambition, ethnic or religious interests, and social vulnerabilities. To curb this menace, multi-layered interventions are essential, addressing not only political ambition but also the deep-seated social, economic, and psychological triggers that fuel these conflicts.

### The Relationship



This is the dynamic associated with electoral violence. Under the influence of a **catalyst**, certain ingredients interact to produce electoral violence. The catalyst in this case is: **Drug use and Substance Abuse**

Elections are more than just democratic exercises—they become explosive events when underlying forces collide. **Outrageous benefits, tribal sentiments, religious influences, emotional involvement, and fierce rivalry** are volatile ingredients, lying in wait. But these elements alone don't guarantee violence.

#### Enter the Catalyst.

When a **catalyst**—in this case, **drug use and substance abuse**—is introduced, it transforms political competition into chaos. This catalyst impairs judgment, lowers inhibitions, and turns rivalry into violent outbursts. Under its influence, ambitions spiral out of control, loyalties become weapons, and emotional spikes escalate to conflict.

**This is the dynamic of electoral violence.** With each factor feeding the next, the presence of drugs accelerates the process, creating a perfect storm where reason is abandoned, and mayhem takes over.

Without addressing both the **root causes** and this **catalyst**, peaceful elections remain a distant dream. The solution lies not only in curbing drug use but also in dismantling the toxic mix of sentiments and competition that ignite violence.

## 2.3 Limitations of the Research

To a large extent, we did not interface directly with persons who purchased or used drugs. As such, we did not aim to compare “crime rates per person before drug-use initiation” versus “crime rates per person post-drug-use initiation”. This might have provided us with a higher level of correlation (viz-a-viz other important influences), and a stronger causal relationship between drug use and crime. “Crime rates per person before drug-use initiation” versus “crime rates per person post-drug-use initiation” can be an area of data gathering that if done, would help in furthering the understanding of the associations between drug use and crime.

We were also not able to obtain the ages of persons patronizing drug sale outlets. Our confidential informants noted that sometimes, the purchaser may not be the user.

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework:

Drug use violence and crime have some form of connection between them. However, this relationship may not be as straightforward as it might seem. For example, according to Pierce M., Hayhurst K., Bird S.M., Hickman M., Seddon T., Dunn G., Millar T. (2017), three basic explanatory models highlighting the relationship between drug use violence and crime include the following: (a) **Forward causality**: Substance use leads to crime (b) **Reverse causality**: Crime leads to substance use (c) **Confounding relationship**: Substance use and crime co-exist amidst common sets of influences. As observed in scenarios involving election violence in Nigeria, the pursuit of victory laced with financial, tribal, ethnic, or religious undertones can attract the use of drugs as an influence to numb the natural inclination for self-preservation and sound judgment. Political influence and financial proceeds from victory can then become an enabling source of access and funding for the continued use of drugs and illicit substances.

Forward causality on its own has been explained further using three different models as follows: (a) the Psycho-pharmacological Model (b) the Economic Motivation Model and (c) The Systemic Model (O’Sullivan and O’Donnell (n.d.)).

### Psycho-Pharmacological Model:

According to the **psycho-pharmacological model**, the intoxicating effects of certain substances can cause changes in a person's behavior, awareness, and mood. This can go on to increase the potential of engaging in crime. In this model, there is emphasis on the direct impact of drugs on the brain and behavior, and how substances can lower inhibitions, impair judgment (Boles & Miotto, 2003), and raise aggression (Goldstein, 1985) or impulsive action. For example, Parker and Auerhahn (1998) stated that alcohol is one of the most studied substances in crime. Research indicates a strong correlation between alcohol consumption and violent crime, due to its dis-inhibiting effects.

#### Economic Motivation Model:

According to this model, people engage in crime as a way to fund their drug addiction. The need for money to buy drugs and substances can drive users to get involved in various types of crimes, such as prostitution, theft, drug trafficking, and burglary. In this model, emphasis lies on the financial pressures faced by the user, as a result of the habit and addiction, and how these pressures precipitate criminal activity. For example, when the legitimate source of income of a person dependent on drugs is insufficient to maintain the lifestyle, crime may be considered (Bennett, Holloway, and Farrington, 2008).

#### The Systemic Model

This model considers that the structure and functioning of illegal drug markets are intricately associated with criminal activity. For instance, the need to establish and maintain drug territories, pursue and enforce transactions, and resolve disputes, can create violence and criminal behavior within and around a drug trade ecosystem (O'Sullivan and O'Donnell (n.d.)).

#### **Mediating factors linking drugs and crime**

Some factors tend to mediate the relationship between drug use and crime. These factors can include:

##### A. Socioeconomic status:

Individuals from lower SES backgrounds may have limited access to resources, education, and employment opportunities, which can

increase the likelihood of both drug use and criminal behavior. According to Alliant International University (2023), poverty itself is typically not the root cause of crime. It can however lead to substance dependence, abuse, and other situations that may increase the chances of such persons engaging in crime.

B. Peer influence:

When individuals associate with peers who often engage in substance use violence and crime, through social pressure and modeling, their chances of adopting those practices become heightened. Several studies have linked 'herd mentality' as a legitimate source of influence over individuals in a group.

C. Age:

According to reports from the United Kingdom, the rate of committing offenses tends to peak during the late teens, and this incidentally coincides with the ages at which drug use has been seen to be initiated (Pierce M. et. al., 2017). The convergence of these two indices increases the likelihood that substance use and abuse will result in criminal activity.

D. Access to treatment and support services:

In Nigeria, nearly 40 percent of high-risk drug users reported that though they had sought help or treatment for their drug problems, they were not able to get it (UNODC, 2018). The most common reasons for not accessing drug treatment cited were the cost of the treatment, the stigma attached to drug use, that drug treatment services were not available, or that there was no information available about the local drug treatment service.

## **Contextual Factors shaping the connection between drug use and crime in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the relationship between drugs, violence and crime is shaped by some contextual factors such as:

A. Social and Cultural Influences

Norms and cultural practices can shape attitudes towards drug use and crime in Nigeria. For example, societal expectations, family influences, and peer pressures can play significant roles in influencing individual behaviors (Olawole-Isaac, A., Ogundipe, A., Amoo, E. O., and Adeloye, D., 2018).

#### B. Poor Political Assertiveness and Corruption

Non-assertive governance, poor political will, and corrupt practices within law enforcement agencies undermine efforts to tackle drug trafficking and related crimes (Ogundipe, S., 2018).

#### C. Availability and Accessibility of Drugs

The availability and accessibility of drugs in Nigeria are major factors contributing to the drug-crime relationship. The borders are said to be porous. This seems to add to the difficulty in regulating access and availability of illicit drugs and substances. A way forward can include revamping effective regulation of pharmaceutical products to stifle influx and redistribution.

Addressing these contextual factors through well-thought-out policies and targeted interventions is likely to do well in managing the drug violence and crime problem in Nigeria.

### **3. National Study on Drug use and the impact on security**

Crimes associated with drugs are a concern in Nigeria and globally. Nigeria is an important trade route for illicit drugs and psychoactive substances. According to the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crimes, as stated by Jatau, Sha'aban, Gulma, Shitu, Khalid, Isa, Wada, and Mustapha (2021), the burden of drug usage, abuse, and trafficking is often related to four areas of international concern. These are organized crime, illicit financial flows, corruption, and terrorism/insurgency. In Nigeria, drug crimes as well as drug-related offenses seem to trend alongside the existence of heightened illicit drug promotion and use. According to the UNODC (2018), among high-risk drug users who had been arrested in Nigeria, nearly 14 percent of them had been arrested for theft and shoplifting. The majority of those arrested for drug offenses were under the influence of cannabis and codeine-containing syrups (UNODC, 2018). The demography of people found to mostly use codeine-containing syrups and tramadol were younger people (15 - 29 years old), and who were mostly still in school. Cannabis users were found to mostly

be older in age and had more stable jobs. Sex work has been seen to almost exclusively be practiced by women, and users among them mostly Inject Drugs (PWIDs). Other locally concocted psychoactive substances are often seen to be popular among populations with a low economic standing.

The use of multiple variety of drugs at the same time is seen to be prevalent among high-risk drug users (Poly-drug use), even though some users alternate between drugs, or use concurrently.

In some parts of Nigeria, especially around the southwestern, north-central, and south-southern states, cannabis is elaborately cultivated due to a climate that favors its growth.

Manufacturers of some illicit psychoactive substances have become domiciled in-country. This activity is seen to be fueled through the use of imported precursor materials such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. With Nigeria's over 200 million population, and the latest drug prevalence rate of 14.4% (among persons 15 - 64 years of age), the existence of a viable supply chain has the potential to perpetuate illicit drugs in-country, and even sustain the problem of Nigeria being a trade route

### **3.1 Legally binding laws and regulations applicable in Nigeria**

On the background of the 1935 Dangerous Drugs Act, Nigeria has been a party to all UN international conventions on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (Inter-Ministerial Committee, 2021). In addition to being party to other international drug conventions, locally applicable legislation on narcotics and illicit drugs include:

1. **National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) Act No. 48 of 1989 (as amended)** which established the NDLEA to be responsible for preventing illicit cultivation, production, manufacture, trafficking in, and abuse of drugs.

2. **National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control Act No. 15 of 1993** established the NAFDAC, a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Health to authorize, and control the importation and exportation of narcotic drugs, psychotropic and other controlled substances, and to ensure that their uses are limited to medical and scientific purposes. NAFDAC is also mandated to collaborate with NDLEA in measures to control drug abuse in the country.

3. **The Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act, 2011** (as amended), works to explore, track, and mitigate the problem of drug money laundering.

4. Other relevant legislation includes the **Indian Hemp Decree, 1966** (as amended); **Food and Drugs Act, 1976** (as amended); and the **Counterfeit and Fake Drugs and Unwholesome Processed Foods (miscellaneous provisions) Act, 1999**.

### 3.2 Statistics and data disaggregation of illicit drugs

Nigeria 2022	cocaine	heroin	cannabis	Meth	Tramadol	Codeine	Fentanyl	SK	Refinol	Glue	Solution	Ampheta mine	Sku-Skus
South south Edo	155582	138764	155100	110897	122452	163790	128635	140456	135257	97337	124458	138011	101802
North West Kd	215861	234688	0	219568	232791	206289	223097	211812	200339	233267	211394	228525	0
North Central	175457	154906	178515	140767	148301	165470	115000	136309	508358	146922	143864	165166	0
North East Brn	108976	99048	125005	115204	95055	105623	82577	106770	84592	111912	84318	104010	0
Sout west LAG	238175	413805	2476321	256366	365130	394554	191049	280290	293516	344679	0	153997	0
Sout east AN	174075	189301	187508	165532	182489	185449	159875	154136	161597	174604	159106	0	0
FCT	14600		238162		744600	235790			576700				
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,082,726</b>	<b>1,230,512</b>	<b>3,360,611</b>	<b>1,008,334</b>	<b>1,890,818</b>	<b>1,456,965</b>	<b>900,233</b>	<b>1,029,773</b>	<b>1,960,359</b>	<b>1,108,721</b>	<b>723,140</b>	<b>789,709</b>	<b>101,802</b>

Nigeria 2023	cocaine	heroin	cannabis	Meth	Tramadol	Codeine	Fentanyl	SK	Refinol	Glue	Solution	Ampheta mine	Sku-Skus
South south Edo	267652	272334	266810	217576	208756	269249	223955	218834	210613	200965	194608	194459	229327
North West Kd	268741	270481	0	276540	281117	258848	275036	249286	238782	294954	265093	264405	0
North Central	172524	174900	0	173371	179034	156562	164082	133062	163378	163232	162796	192763	0
North East Brn	167669	153703	157745	133261	161035	172788	147093	152227	148740	144211	152853	134601	0
South west LAG	533106	565843	4379857	519449	525615	525059	502471	512607	511265	472511	0	524241	0
South east AN	264780	242285	392912	264671	322189	284449	228854	336060	257540	262812	264754	0	0
FCT	27,360.00		442,836.00		1,008,360.00	450,324.00			530,424.00				
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,701,832</b>	<b>1,679,546</b>	<b>5,640,160</b>	<b>1,584,868</b>	<b>2,686,106</b>	<b>2,117,279</b>	<b>1,541,491</b>	<b>1,602,076</b>	<b>2,060,742</b>	<b>1,538,685</b>	<b>1,040,104</b>	<b>1,310,469</b>	<b>229,327</b>

Source: Confidential informants, 2022/23

### 3.3 The plight of children, women and youth in Nigeria

Drug abuse is a scourge that contributes to worsening existing social, economic, and health challenges within Nigeria. This plight particularly affects women, children, and the youth in ways that pose immense risks to the fabric of Nigerian society.

The impact on children can be viewed in terms of **Neglect and Abuse** - Parents embroiled in drug use and addiction can start to prioritize drugs over the welfare of the children. Affected households can experience absent parents or inadequately present parents. This in turn can leave the children exposed to physical and emotional abuse and trauma, some even ending on the street as 'street children!'. A whole myriad of outcomes can go on to happen thereafter, including physical and mental health issues sooner or later in life (UNODC, 2018; Human Rights Watch, n.d.).

The impacts on women who indulge in drug use and abuse can be viewed in terms of **Increased vulnerability**: This can include: vulnerability to a wide variety of exploitation, social (unplanned for or unwanted pregnancies), and health risks (STIs & HIV/AIDS).

**Health risks**: This can include risks to themselves and potential risks to their unborn children (like miscarriage, birth defects, and other neonatal conditions) (WHO, 2014).

**Violence**: In households where drugs are used and abused, women can become exposed to domestic violence, subjugation, and even risk to life.

In Nigeria, the youths have been seen to increasingly indulge in using cannabis, opioids, and amphetamines till they get to states of addiction and social dysfunction. In such states, education and vocational prospects can become a thing of struggle. When educational and vocational pursuits become a struggle, securing a high-value income can become a problem. Even when that is achieved, the need to fund the habit can put unhealthy pressure on sources of income, thereby inciting alternate ways of augmenting income, which can include crime.

Tackling the drug abuse problem in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach, involving government intervention, community support, education, and rehabilitation programs to mitigate its impact on children, women, and youth.

### **3.4 Compliance of states with the laws and regulations**

The availability of resources and governance capabilities between states can impact the quality and extent of compliance with regulatory obligations regarding drug use and abuse. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) is a spearheading body regarding drug enforcement and control. According to the International Crisis Group, there's been a serious uptick in violence by terrorist groups, bandits, and separatist groups across Nigeria (International Crisis Watch, 2024).

Public awareness campaigns at the state level is crucial in preventing drug abuse and ensuring the public understands the dangers of illicit drugs. Complementing this with easily accessible

rehabilitation services with the capacity to run comprehensive rehabilitative programs would be entirely helpful (UNODC, 2018). Currently, drug treatment services are mainly provided at tertiary hospitals.

In the administration of drug regulation and control, corruption within law enforcement and regulatory bodies poses significant impacts on the effectiveness of regulatory compliance (UNHCR, 2023).

### **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS that arose from the multi-institution validation exercise on the study.**

Following the review of the study by experts during an in-person session, and in line with international best practices, this study was adequately validated and adopted by experts representing the following institutions; Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), Office of the National Security Adviser, Office of the Chief of Defense Staff, The DSS, NSCDC, Representatives of the states under study, Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, and NEMA. Following the validation, some recommendations were proffered. The recommendations are categorized into three broad areas: Security, Socioeconomic implications, and the effect on Health. Experts advise that a brute force approach should be applied across these categories within a 5-10-year strategic plan that will address significant changes in drug and substance abuse in Nigeria and the ECOWAS Region.

### **SECURITY**

1. Inter-Agency Collaboration: There should be collaboration and synergy across all uniform personnel in combating the issue of drug use and abuse, and at the different points of impact. As such, the NDLEA should organize training for other government security agents, as well as private sector stakeholders and Civil Society Organizations. This training could focus on helping stakeholders develop capacity on certain roles in the management of drug use and abuse. The NDLEA could also set up a multi-disciplinary drug task-force unit to fight against cropping, manufacturing, distribution, and sales of illicit drugs in Nigeria and the ECOWAS Region.

2. The “Keep Them Away Principle”: The Catch Them Young program should be established and championed by NDLEA, IPCR, SSADASA, PACA Africa, and other CSOs, to set up clubs in schools, motor parks, and other related institutions. More educational

programs against drugs and substance abuse be encouraged especially in both government and private secondary schools across Nigeria and the ECOWAS Region.

3. Nationwide Survey to be conducted: The experts recommended that a more inclusive nationwide survey is needed at this material time to understand the real nature of the drug-associated problems to come up with a more lasting solution.

4. Capacity Building: A comprehensive approach is required to strengthen the capacity of the security agencies and key CSOs like SSADASA and PACA Africa among others, that work in the area of drugs and substance abuse reduction. This will advance their capacity in engaging the public through advocacy and sensitization programs.

## **HEALTH**

5. Prevention: A more holistic approach of Advocacy in Government and private institutions, hospitals and other health institutions, religious stakeholders, traditional stakeholders, academia, and owners of schools, should be carried out in other to ensure that the younger generation are encouraged to adopt more helpful health-seeking behaviors away from drug-related coping choices in communities.

6. To strengthen primary health care centers by providing access to counseling at the grassroots level, training more personnel, and posting them to primary health care facilities across the country. These will improve access to mental health services and support, and as such add to a preventative approach.

## **SOCIOECONOMIC**

7. The Federal and state governments through the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Women's Affairs, related government agencies, international development partners, and donor agencies should partner with SSADASA and PACA Africa to organize national campaign on drug and substance abuse prevention, and provide support and incentives to families affected by drugs.

8. A national policy should be established for social media censorship of all contents, parents regulating what children watch, a penalty for parents leaving children recklessly, and also establishing a professional caregiver institution charged with

professional care-giving in order to prevent children from engaging in drug-associated crime and violence.

9. Establishment of Vocational Skill Development Centers in all 6 geo-political zones, to train the less educated members of society and empower them with skills that will enable them improve their well-being and contribute to GDP.

## **Summary**

A crime-free society is essential for fostering stability and development, and Nigeria is striving towards this ideal. However, a significant rise in drug-related crimes, particularly between 2018 and 2019, underscores the complex relationship between drug abuse and violence across Nigeria's diverse geopolitical zones. Socioeconomic factors contribute to criminal behavior, and the

presence of drugs exacerbates violence by impairing judgment and escalating conflicts.

The study explored the catalysts of insecurity, particularly the interplay between drug use and violence. Understanding the causal direction—whether drug use leads to violence or vice versa—is crucial for effective intervention. Drug-related violence poses public health risks and is often linked to poverty and marginalization, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies that address these socioeconomic issues.

Furthermore, the prevalence of various drugs, including cannabis and codeine, is alarming, particularly among younger populations. Illicit drug manufacturing and trafficking are significant concerns, as Nigeria serves as a major trade route. The existence of laws such as the NDLEA Act and NAFDAC regulations aims to combat drug abuse and trafficking, but challenges remain. Overall, addressing drug use and its underlying causes is vital for achieving peace and attaining a healthy sense of safety for individuals and the Nigerian society.

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