

# Religiosity and Spirituality as Agents of Change in Hard Drugs Usage in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Drug usage is a global phenomenon that has been seen throughout human history, whether it is done for therapeutic, spiritual, or recreational reasons. Hard drug use and misuse have become a severe concern, especially for those living in Nigeria's Niger Delta, where Christianity is the predominant faith. One can wonder if such a phenomenon should be attributed to the churches' lack of dedication to their religion or if their members have not taken spirituality seriously. In order to explore how religion and spirituality might affect drug use, the current study looks at the usage and abuse of hard and illegal substances in the Niger Delta. The study uses a survey research design and the quantitative research methodology. Responses to closed ended, structured, electronic and paper based questionnaires dispersed throughout the study region make up the primary data. The information was gathered both manually and electronically (through email). The study shows that the use of hard drugs is very common in the area and that religious organizations are not doing enough to rehabilitate and treat local drug users on a religious and spiritual level. As the keeper of public morals, the report advises the church to focus its efforts on preaching against the use and misuse of illegal and hard substances.

**Keywords:** Spirituality; Drug use, Drug abuse, Drug addiction

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of drug abuse has been prevalent for over a hundred decades. According to Ondieki and Mokuu, the concern dates back to the very beginning of humankind and has been observed as an integral phenomenon across societies. The concepts of drug use, substance abuse and addiction/dependence are already established as evils combated within each economy. According to Udama, a drug refers to any substance that brings about a change in an individual's physiological and biological functions through chemical actions [1,2]. Fareo provides an elaborate description of drugs, as follows: As any material used for treatment or prevention of disease in man and animals. The drug alters the body functions either positively or otherwise depending on the body composition of the user, the type of drug used, the amount used, and whether used real sic or with other drugs at the same time. Drug use, drug abuse, and drug addiction are terms typically associated with "the manner in which an individual is handling sic a particular drug or set of

drugs". Drug use specifically refers to "the act of taking a limited quantity of medication to get rid of a disease or help cure an ailment" as prescribed by a physician, safely [3,4]. The use of the drug leads to major concerns with several adverse implications if it transforms into substance abuse, addiction, or dependence. Drug addiction, as defined by Oshikoya and Alli, the physical need of the body for drugs, compulsive craving for drugs, or reliance on a particular drug "that persists even in the face of negative consequences." Substance abuse relates to the deliberate overuse of a drug-a "pattern of harmful use of any drug for mood-altering purposes"; the term also refers to the act of consuming a "psychoactive drug or performance enhancing drug for a non-therapeutic or non-medical" effect [5,6]. Many researchers and clinicians believe that the use of illegal drugs (hard and illicit) constitutes an abuse of narcotics. It is in line with this thinking that Kobiowu views abuse as the application of any "drug more destructive than constructive for society or the individual." This suggests that the use of hard and illicit narcotics is recognised as the abuse of drugs. Drug use, abuse,

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and addiction are universal phenomena that cut across geographical, ethnic, cultural, economic, and religious boundaries. Despite the deliberate and conscious efforts by many governments and organizations to stem the tide, the last few decades have demonstrated a phenomenal increase in drug use, abuse, and addiction [7-10]. Corroborating the same, Oshikoya and Alli aver, “substance abuse is prevalent with an estimated 120 million users of illegal drugs” globally. The world drug report states that more than 200 million people, who make up about 5 percent of the global population, within the age bracket of 15 years-64 years have used hard or illicit drugs at least once in the last 12 months. This was also supported by Ekpenyong.

The word “drug” frequently differs in its semantics, based on the contexts it is used in. For instance, when used in the context of “abuse”, the meaning of the word becomes “social” rather than “scientific”. Drugs that are abused may be categorized according to their origin substances, such as “opiates” or “opium”, or by their effects on the human nervous system, such as “stimulants”, “hallucinogenic drugs” or “psychotropic drugs” [11]. Furthermore, there are other typologies or classes of medications that are not based on the physical qualities or effects of drugs. Four of the most widely used terms are “hard or soft drugs”, “illicit drugs”, “designer drugs”, and “club drugs”. The term “hard drug” refers to significantly hazardous drugs, potentially leading to physical dependence (e.g., heroin and cocaine) while “soft drugs” are those that do not result in a severe degree of physical dependence and may appear less dangerous in terms of their use (e.g., cannabis, alcohol, and nicotine).

The term “illicit drug” is used to grant an illegal status to drugs whose consumption is otherwise legally acceptable. It refers to “drugs used for recreation, fun, and pleasure instead of their medically designed purpose”. Degenhardt and Hall further define illicit drugs as “drugs for which non-medical use has been prohibited by international drug control treaties for half a century because they are believed to present unacceptable risks.” “Club drug” is a generic term for drugs used in clubs or bars, abandoned warehouses, or at parties known as “raves”, primarily by adolescents or young adults. These drugs, also called “party drugs”, are most commonly taken orally in tablet forms, and include but are not limited to Ecstasy, Rohypnol, GHB, Ketamine, LSD, Tramadol and Fentanyl. Describing the use of party drugs, Wilson writes: “At young people’s parties it is relatively easy to appreciate how to use drugs, reduce central inhibitions, become educated to appreciate the pleasure of escape from reality and intellectual stress which their pharmacological action produces, and so to achieve a desired supernormal state” [12]. Narcotics that are abused for their psychotropic effects rather than medical purposes include “opiates (opium, morphine, and heroin), hallucinogens (LSD, mescaline, psilocybin), barbiturates, cocaine, amphetamines, tranquillizers and cannabis”. Page 4/25 Drug abuse and addiction have characterised a critical subject of discussion among governments, law enforcement agencies, drug addicts, rehabilitation centres, and caregivers across the world. Although Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and healthcare providers have raised several questions regarding this context but are yet to receive adequate answers or concrete evidence about

the causes, implications, and efficient rehabilitation. The focus of studies observed in Nigeria has largely remained on hospitals, schools, and communities, with a special emphasis on secondary/high school students and the youth [13]. Imo discusses the issue of drug abuse in Nigeria, concluding that religion must be ascribed a prime position in terms of its contribution to combating the issue.

In a study on the growing menace of mental cases occasioned by hard and illicit drug abuse in Bayelsa State, Niger Delta, Abikoye highlights the need to secure adequate substance abuse management facilities and professionals to attend to them. He explains that most individuals with mental illnesses suffer due to the lack of professional care providers such as psychiatrists and clinical psychologists. Yet, he failed to highlight the need to introduce religiosity and spirituality in attending to these patients [14].

Another study on the factors responsible for the increase in cult activities in Bayelsa State demonstrates a correlation between the increase in the use and abuse of Tramadol and other hard drugs and cult violence in the Metropolis. Similarly, these authors did not consider the role of religion in abating the menace of cultism in the area studied. A report published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which details the prevalence of hard drugs and crime in Nigeria, shows that 16.6 percent of individuals residing in South Nigeria have used or abused drugs in 2017. This amounts to around 2.1 million people, who are of the ages between 15 and 64. According to this record, the national average of drug use and abuse in Nigeria is 14.4 percent. This implies that the Niger Delta, which is in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria, consumes drugs above the national average. This phenomenon occurs despite the increase in Christian activities in the area. It is disheartening to note that even this global institution failed to consider the involvement of religion in the prevalence of drug use and abuse.

Furthermore, Nche explores the role of faith-based organizations in the fight against cultism in rivers state, Niger Delta region, and the factors that impede their efforts. Yet, this study failed to examine the menace of hard drugs as a major variable leading to an increase in cult violence. Regardless, it concluded that the unwillingness of youths to work, compounded by the lack of employment, are considered the major factors responsible for the increase in cult activity in the area. While it further emphasized that faith-based organizations tackle these issues through prayer and occasional enlightenment, the author did not regard religiosity and spirituality to have any significant role in the context.

The Niger Delta region presents a unique case: while it produces the largest quantities of crude oil and natural gas to sustain the economy, it suffers from various types of violence, armed robbery, the kidnapping of Nigerians and expatriates, crude oil theft and bunkering. This is besides the seizure of a page 5/25 large quantity of various hard and illicit drugs at airports and seaports. This prompts an investigation to determine whether a relationship exists between the influx of hard drugs into this region and the social vices that have become the order of the day.

On the religious front, a significant number of people have shifted from this area to several of the new Pentecostal movements, one of which is represented by Salvation ministries located in Port Harcourt, rivers state. This denomination runs seven services every Sunday. It hosts the second-largest church auditoriums in Nigeria, seating about 80,000 individuals. This denomination has established more than 1000 satellite churches and over 20,000 home cell centers across the globe. In Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom state, another Pentecostal ministry named Abel Damina Ministries is known to have a significantly large local and global following. Several other churches in this area seem to be flourishing numerically and financially, leading to monumental religious worship centres, with founders living a life of luxury and affluence. With a strong economic and financial output, they boast thousands of adherents, with some even offering multiple services every Sunday. There have been multiple queries regarding the efforts of the church toward stemming the tide of criminal activities that ravage the region. The youth involved in these heinous crimes appear to be propelled by the abuse of hard and illicit drugs, while the church either appears to be looking on with utter perplexity or simply does not consider the risk of reaching out to these addicts to be worth the trouble.

This work adopts the CAP control theory of drug abuse, which argues that drug abuse begins with the conflict within the individual that emerges as a result of anxiety, feelings of weakness, inadequacy, and failure to accomplish a goal that society or an individual sets for themselves. Therefore, CAP theory posits that for an abuser to be treated, they must be informed about the tumultuous and joyous diversions in life, which must be faced with courage, rather than wishing them away using a temporary escape facilitated by drugs. This is the role of Christian preachers; religiosity and spirituality will help the abusers to cope with the challenges of life.

Despite the amount of literature on the social impact of drug use and the associated risks, particularly among adolescents and youths, scholars tend to turn a blind eye to the religious and ethical implications of hard drug use in Nigeria. Furthermore, scholars have not paid sufficient attention to the effects of hard drug usage among religious individuals as well as the effect of religion on the use of these drugs. Generally, most scholars focus on the fact that religiosity (regular church attendance, regular reading of the Bible, and prayer) helps to minimize or reduce the use of hard and illicit drugs among Christians. However, the ethical implications of hard drug usage on spiritual experiences in Nigeria are yet to attract the attention of scholars. The current study explores such pertinent issues, among others.

### Aims and the objectives of the research

The main aim of this work is to examine how religiosity and spirituality could serve as agents of change in the transformation of lives in the context of hard drug usage in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria.

Specifically, the objectives are to:

- Examine the roles of religions and religious leaders in the fight against hard drug usage.
- Identify the impact and effect of hard drug usage on the individuals, families and society.

### Research questions

This research intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the roles of religion (Christianity) and religious leaders in the fight against hard drug usage in the Niger Delta?
2. What are the impacts and effects of hard drug usage on the individual, family and society at large?

### Statement of the problem

Presently, the world suffers from an epidemic of the highest proportions that has affected millions of people residing in different parts of the world drug abuse. This epidemic has resulted in mental sickness, accidents, various types of crimes, domestic violence, low productivity, lack of normative functioning in familial and social contexts, lost opportunities and death. In Nigeria, drug abuse has ruined several lives. Governments have made efforts to control this menace using various approaches that involve rehabilitation of the addicts, treatment, and arrest of the traffickers, with little or no success. The menace continues to fester, destroying and debilitating its victims. This study is a call to adopt religiosity and spirituality as agents of change, as the area under study has a notably high concentration of Christian churches with a Pentecostal verve.

### Research method

The present study adopts the quantitative research method and employs a survey research design. The primary data consists of closed-ended, structured, electronic and paper-based questionnaires that were distributed and collected in the area under study, both manually and electronically (*via* email). The study population consists of youths (18 years-40 years) in Uyo-Akwa Ibom state, Yenegoa-Bayelsa state, Calabar-Cross river state, Asaba-Delta state, and Port Harcourt-rivers state, in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques have been adopted. A total of 2000 questionnaires were distributed in the cities, in the following order: Uyo, 400; Yenegoa, 400; Calabar, 400; Asaba, 400; and Port Harcourt, 400. A total of 1940 questionnaires were returned with responses. The descriptive statistics and percentage frequency distribution methods were employed to analyze the data collected, while a simple ranking of statistical values was used for the analysis.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The role of religion and religious leaders in the fight against hard drug usage

Empirical observations have highlighted the significance of religion in reducing the usage of hard and illicit drugs among youths and adolescents. Gorsuch, in his works, "psychology of religion" and "religious aspects of substance abuse and recovery", as well as Johnson, Tomkins, and Webb corroborated

that religion reduces the tendency of the usage of hard drugs among adherents. According to John M. Wallace Jr., Tony N. Brown, Jerald G. Bachman and Thomas A. LaVeist, "young people who are highly religious consistently report lower levels of drug use than young people who are less religious". Johnson, et al. corroborate this view, stating: "Research examining the role of religiosity in crime and delinquency found that the literature documents that religious commitment is generally linked to reductions in crime and delinquency". Furthering their argument, Johnson, et al. explain that faith-based organizations "appear to have advantages over comparable secular institutions in helping individuals overcome difficult circumstances (e.g., imprisonment and drug abuse)".

Walsh and Grob contend that the entrance of psychedelics within the sphere of religiosity startled, and to a great extent, shook the Western world. It was all the more surprising to note that psychedelics produced a spiritual experience similar to the experiences of religious individuals. Even atheists and staunch marxists claimed to have discovered kensho ('an initial insight or awakening, not full Buddha-hood'), which is generally practised in buddhism. They also professed to have discovered moksha ('emancipation, liberation or release'; in the soteriological and eschatological sense, it connotes freedom from samsara, the cycle of death and rebirth), practiced in Hinduism and Indian philosophy; and safari ('a Japanese Buddhist term for awakening, comprehension, and understanding. The term is derived from the Japanese verb Satoru. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, safari refers to the experience of kensho, or "seeing into one's true nature"). These contentions of Walsh and Grob proved to be very consistent over the subsequent years, prompting certain researchers to rename psychedelics as "entheogens", which means "substances that facilitate the awareness of god within".

The argument presented by these atheistic and marxist scholars led to a rigid divide among scholars of religious studies in terms of the very definition of spirituality. Those on the side of tradition argued that the use of psychedelics and other types of hard and illicit drugs to induce sensations associated with spirituality was nothing more than pseudo-spirituality at best and delusional at worst. In exasperation, they argued that ordinary and mere micrograms of a curious chemical could not produce or replicate heightened human experiences, which were traditionally hard won over centuries.

**On the other hand, there were the following scholars:** Dass, Shachter-Shalomi, and Smith, who developed their position, taking a cue from the famous harvard research, titled "good friday study", in conjunction with another outstanding theory-the "principle of causal indifference", which stated that if states were experientially identical, the difference in their causes would be completely irrelevant. Hence, they argued for the experiential equivalence between contemplative and chemical mysticism. In his online review of Stace Walter Page 8/25 Torrance's *Mysticism and Philosophy* on amazon, greg argues that "while Stace has somewhat underated the complexity of mystical thought within Christianity and also other religions, and some of his ideas have been superseded by more up-to-date scholarship (such as Bernard McGinn's *The Presence of God: History of Western Christian Mysticism: Foundations of*

*Mysticism Vol. I*, which happens to be a far more accurate study of Christian mysticism, for example), for philosophers of religion, this remains a useful text for exploring the claims of religion which are based on so-called mystical experience."

Walsh explains that this debate on whether psychedelic drugs can induce states of spirituality has long been in the offing and will not abate anytime soon, given that the war on hard and illicit drugs continues to persist. He believes that drugs can indeed induce such states, explaining that in theory and practice, drugs, particularly "psychedelic ones can induce genuine spiritual and mystical experiences but only on some occasions in some people, under some circumstances" [1-6]. One of the earliest researchers in the psychology of religion, William James, concluded in his research on religion and drugs-induced spirituality that, "drugs provided a window of forms of consciousness", which he argues has a significant "implication for religious experience".

Zaechner, a critic of drug-induced spirituality, argues that a "pale shadow of true religious experience" occurs when individuals attempt to induce true states of spirituality using any form of psychedelic drug. This argument was based on his personal experience. In Nigeria, many Pentecostal preachers tend to use various forms of psychedelic drugs to induce spirituality. Over the course of this study, I was reliably informed of a senior pentecostal preacher with a young minister who regarded him as a role model and accompanied him on crusades and revival meetings. Each day before they travelled, the young minister saw his "'daddy" drink a "special tea". One day, the senior pastor told his young assistant to pour the tea from the kettle into the mug for him. As the young assistant opened the top of the kettle, he noticed that it was not tea but marijuana that his "daddy" had been consuming to preach in great confidence and authority.

Imo narrates the story of another pentecostal preacher in Nigeria, who manifested great and charismatic powers: He was invited to another congregation as a guest speaker at sic the occasion of their indoor revival. The guest speaker did sic many miracles, a younger Pentecostal minister of the host church was impressed by the powers the speaker manifested and approached him privately to ask for the secret of such abilities. In confidence, the guest speaker told him about the price he needed to pay. Upon the insistence of the younger minister, the guest speaker told him that he used to go to a special temple to consume a special drug before coming out to preach. This was later made public and the guest speaker absconded from the scene. The above extract shows the extent to which drugs have infiltrated the religious sphere in Nigeria. This does not in any way suggest that every Pentecostal preacher uses a hard drug to enhance their spirituality. However, this demonstrates how drugs impact the religiosity of people in Nigeria by various means.

### Religiosity, spirituality, and substance abuse

Globally, the meaning of religiosity and spirituality have become so intertwined that the distinctions appear to blur completely.

Considering this, the present study represents an attempt to differentiate between the two concepts and demonstrates the extent to which each relates to substance abuse. In this research, substance abuse is weighed against the spirituality and religiosity of religious people. Wallace, John M., Myers, Valeric L and Osai, Esohe R. argue that spirituality refers to specific characteristics of an individual: "It is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about the meaning and about the relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to, or arise from, the development of religious rituals and the formation of community". Corroborating Wallace, et al. Alien argues that spirituality relates to an individual's connectivity or relationship to god. It also refers to the individual's observance of beliefs and practices that accompany this relationship or connectivity. This individual may belong to any religious organization or may not have any particular religious affiliation. Furthermore, Stephen Ellingson, elucidates, "spirituality carries a more positive valuation seen as deeply subjective, grounded in an individual's experiences of the sacred, and often is cultivated apart from religious organizations". By this statement, Ellingson essentially intends to posit that organized religion may or may not lead an individual to spirituality; hence, man must not pursue spirituality through religious doctrine embedded in a religious organization. He stresses that several individuals within organized religion are not even associated with spirituality in the least, insisting that they only camouflage themselves with religious doctrine despite having no idea about spirituality. Ellingson makes this statement to buttress his argument that spirituality may not necessarily be associated with an organized religious body. Miller articulates the view that spirituality can only be viewed from the perspective of the individual's relationship and/or feelings toward god or other higher powers they are connected to while struggling in the self-search for purpose and meaning. On the contrary, religiosity is regarded as a completely different concept. Miller explains that "religiosity is a complex, multidimensional construct and refers to the degree to which a person is religious from a primarily social and doctrinal perspective and is thus more easily quantifiable than abstract terms such as religion". This implies that while spirituality may not be quantified or measured using any instrument, religiosity may be measured as it is a social construct. In support of Miller, Mann, et al. argue that "religiosity pertains to one's involvement in a system of worship and doctrine that is shared within a group". This means that religiosity can be measured based on the following variables, namely: The regularity of attendance at religious meetings, the regularity of Bible or religious sacred text readings, and the regularity of prayer either in a religious gathering or at home. This implies that an individual's religiosity is associated not with their character towards their neighbour or other individuals in society, but with the number of times they pray, read the scriptures, and attend religious gatherings.

Miller further argues that religiosity, as a social phenomenon, dwells within organized religion, with the major purpose of achieving spirituality. This is where the ideas tend to overlap between spirituality and religiosity. However, it must be clearly understood, that while religiosity is nested in organized religion,

spirituality may not dwell in the same context. This means that one can be religious without being spiritual, but one who is spiritual must necessarily be religious. Some scholars, however, do not agree with this thesis.

Having now understood the difference between a religious and a spiritual person, what can be adduced from the relationship between them and hard drug usage? Can religiosity and spirituality, in any way, influence the use or non-use of hard and illicit drugs? Does the religious community contribute to minimizing the use of hard and illicit drugs? Many other questions such as this have become the subject of research in recent times. It has been observed that, by and large, most addicts who abuse hard and illicit drugs are individuals who are neither religious nor spiritual.

### **The impact and effect of hard drug usage on individuals, family and society**

It has been approximated that between 153 million and 300 million people across the world, aged 15-64 (which represents about 3.5 percent-6.6 percent of the world's population in this age bracket), have used hard or illicit drugs at least once in 2010. The above-estimated statistic is inclusive of those who are dependent on the drugs, which comprises nearly 12 percent of the total number of illegal drug users. It is further estimated that between 99,000 deaths and 253,000 deaths globally can be attributed to the use of hard and illicit drugs, accounting for 0.5 percent-1.3 percent of all case-related mortality. In support, "the National Centre on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA) highlighted the seriousness of costs associated with the use of hard and illicit drugs." The World Drug Report argues that "in 2005, federal, state and local government spending as a result of substance abuse and addiction was at least \$467.7 billion; almost half (47.3 percent) of public expenditure and of the spending that can be disaggregated by content, an estimated 18.7 billion is spent on hard and illicit drugs".

Narcotics abuse has led to various concerns regarding its effects and implications. As revealed by social research findings, the abuse of hard and illicit drugs constitutes a societal predicament that has broadened swiftly over the years across varied sections of societies; it remains a sustained and continual threat to the maintenance and harmony of communities. For instance, in an instrumental variable design study conducted by DeSimone, employment prospects are revealed to have been significantly curtailed by the abuse of "marijuana and cocaine". The World Drug Report indicates that the use of hard and illicit drugs is not limited to the lack of earnings, but also that these drug abusers are likely to delay marriage; those who end up getting married experience unhappy relationships. Moreover, the abuse of hard and illicit drugs has been connected with suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Furthermore, the abuse of hard and illicit drugs such as heroin, marijuana, cocaine, and methamphetamine are found to inflict severe damage upon individuals every year. Accidents, crimes, domestic violence, low productivity, damage to normative functioning, and lost opportunities are direct consequences of the use and abuse of these illicit drugs. The dreadful use of

illegal drugs erodes human potential, resulting in homelessness, the spread of infectious diseases, and low levels of productivity in the workplace. In a report submitted to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “illegal drugs cost societies approximately \$110 billion each year.” The greater costs are those of human life itself, either due to overdose, intolerance to use or "through substance abuse-related diseases such as Tuberculosis, Hepatitis, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Acquire Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).”

In all the reviewed literature, the authors failed to regard the need or potential for incorporating religiosity and spirituality as agents of change in people’s behaviour toward hard drug usage. This is the specific lacunae that the present study aims to address (Table 1).

In order to illustrate the role of religion and religious leaders in the fight against drug abuse and its implications on the individual, family, and society of the people of South-South Nigeria, I interviewed some individuals with the support of a questionnaire. The following questions were asked to nearly 2000 respondents.

- Has your family been affected by hard drug use in the past 10 years?
- Have hard drugs killed any of the people in your state over the past 10 years?

- Has criminality increased in your state due to the use of hard drugs?
- Does your society abhor the use of hard and illicit drugs?
- Does your religious organization (church, mosque, or shrine) place restrictions on the use of hard and illicit drugs?
- Does your religious organization (church denomination) punish or discipline any member found to be publicly using alcohol or any hard drug?
- How do you feel while consuming drugs?
- Is your behaviour unpredictable when you consume alcohol or some hard drug?
- Is consuming hard drugs against the ethics of your church?
- Do you think your religious leader (Pastor, Imam, or Priest) consumes alcohol or any other hard or illicit drug that makes them appear to be bold/aggressive while preaching? The results are as follows.

An analysis of Table 1 shows that of the 1940 respondents who participated in the survey, 930 (representing 49.6 percent of the respondents) agree that their family has been affected by hard drug use in the past 10 years, while 575 of the respondents (representing 28.7 percent) disagree. Furthermore, 429 respondents (21.4 percent) strongly agrees while only 6 persons (0.3 percent) strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that the majority of families have been seriously affected by hard drug usage (Table 2)

**Table 1:** Report of the respondents on how drugs affected their family.

My family has been affected by hard drug use in the past 10 years			
Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Agree	930	49.6	69.6
Disagree	575	28.7	28,7
Strongly Agree	429	21.4	21.4
Strongly Disagree	6	0.3	0.3
Total	1940	100	100

The data in Table 2 shows that out of the 1940 respondents who participated in the survey, 930 (49.6 percent of the total respondents) agreed that their family had been affected by hard drug use in the past 10 years, while 575 (28.7 percent) of the respondents disagreed.

Furthermore, 429 respondents (21.4%) strongly agreed while only 6 persons (0.3%) strongly disagreed. This suggests that families were seriously affected by deaths due to hard drug usage.

**Table 2:** Report of the respondents on how hard drugs kills people.

Hard drugs have killed many people in my state in the past 10 years			
Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Agree	989	52.5	52.5
Disagree	537	26.8	26.8

Strongly Agree	375	18.7	18.7
Strongly Disagree	39	1.9	1.9
Total	1940	100	100

As given in the above Table 3, out of the 1940 respondents who took part in the survey, 702 (representing 38.2 percent of the total respondents) respondents agreed that criminality has increased in their state due to the use of hard and illicit drugs, while 333 (16.6%) disagreed.

Furthermore, while 525 respondents (26.2%) strongly agreed, 380 respondents (19%) strongly disagreed. This suggests that a total of 68.4% confirmed that criminality had increased in the various states of the Niger Delta region ever since the prevalence of hard and illicit drug usage.

**Table 3:** Report of respondents on the increase of criminality due to the use of hard drugs.

Criminality has increased in my state because of the use of hard drugs			
Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Agree	702	38.2	38.2
Disagree	333	16.6	16.6
Strongly agree	525	26.2	26.2
Strongly disagree	380	19	19
Total	1940	100	100

The data illustrated in Table 4 shows that out of the 1940 respondents who took part in the survey, 1071 (56.6%) agreed that society abhors the use of hard and illicit drugs, while 62 respondents (3.1%) disagreed with this notion. Moreover, the Table 5 shows that 542 respondents (27.1%) strongly agreed with this idea while 265 respondents (13.2%) strongly disagreed. The researcher, therefore, concludes that a total of 83.7 percent

confirmed that the Niger Delta region abhors the use of hard and illicit drugs, page 14/25 implying that while individuals in the region do engage with hard and illicit drugs, the general population of the region detests its use and abuse.

**Table 4:** Report of the respondents on the influence of hard drug use on society.

Society abhors the use of hard and illicit drugs			
Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Agree	1071	56.6	56.6
Disagree	62	3.1	3.1
Strongly Agree	542	27.1	27.1
Strongly Disagree	265	13.2	13.2
Total	1940	100	100

A careful study of Table 5 shows that out of the 1940 respondents who participated in the survey, 858 (representing 45.9 percent) respondents agreed that their religious institution (church, mosque, or shrine) has imposed restrictions on the use of hard and illicit drugs, while 174 (8.7%) of the respondents disagreed. Furthermore, 510 respondents (25.4 percent) strongly agreed, while 398 respondents (19.9 percent) strongly disagreed.

From the results of this survey, it is concluded that a total of 71.3 percent confirmed that religious institutions in the Niger Delta cities (such as churches, mosques, or shrines) have imposed restrictions on the use of hard and illicit drugs. This highlights that while some gospel ministers in the region may use hard and illicit drugs, the institutions, in general, do not condone such behavior.

**Table 5:** Report of the respondents regarding restrictions imposed on the use of hard drugs by religious organizations.

My religious organization (church, mosque, or shrine) has restrictions on the use of hard drugs			
Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Agree	858	45.9	41.3
Disagree	174	8.7	5.1
Strongly Agree	510	25.4	25.3
Strongly Disagree	398	19.9	19.9
Total	1940	100	100

Table 6 above shows that out of the 1940 respondents who took part in the survey, 659, representing 36.0 percent of the respondents, agree that their religious institutions (church, mosque, or shrine) punish or discipline anyone in possession of hard drugs/alcohol. Meanwhile, 219 respondents, representing 10.9 percent of the total participant population, disagreed with this notion. Furthermore, the table reveals that 746

respondents, representing 37.2 percent, strongly agreed while 316 respondents (15.8 percent) strongly disagreed. Hence, it is concluded that a total of 71.3 percent confirmed that in the Niger Delta cities, religious institutions (churches, mosques, or shrines) have imposed restrictions on the use of hard and illicit drugs, despite the involvement of certain gospel ministers in the region in such activities (Table 7).

**Table 6:** Respondents' report on the punishment/discipline imposed by religious organizations on users of hard drugs/alcohol.

As illustrated in Table 7, out of the 1940 respondents who took part in the survey, 664, representing 36.3 percent of the respondents, agreed that individuals tend to feel superior when they consume hard drugs, while 281, representing 14.0 percent of the respondents, disagreed. The table also shows that 719 respondents, representing 35.9 percent, strongly agreed while

276 respondents, representing 13.8 percent, strongly disagreed. From the results of the survey, it may be concluded that a total of 72.2 percent confirmed that in the Niger Delta cities, people often feel superior whenever they take hard and illicit drugs. This may explain the true reason why drug addicts consume hard drugs.

**Table 7:** Respondents' report on drug addicts feeling a sense of superiority.

People's behavior can be unpredictable when they consume alcohol or any hard drug			
Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Agree	679	37.1	37.1
Disagree	484	24.2	24.2
Strongly agree	759	37.9	37.9
Strongly disagree	18	0.9	0.9
Total	1940	100	100



of 72.2 percent confirmed that in the Niger Delta cities, people often feel superior whenever they take hard and illicit drugs. This may explain the true reason why drug addicts consume hard drugs (Table 8).

**Table 8:** Respondents' report on peoples' general behavior when under the influence of alcohol/hard drugs.

People's behavior can be unpredictable when they consume alcohol or any hard drug			
Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Agree	679	37.1	37.1
Disagree	484	24.2	24.2
Strongly agree	759	37.9	37.9
Strongly disagree	18	0.9	0.9
Total	1940	100	100

Table 8 indicates that among the 1940 respondents who took part in the survey, 679 (37.1 percent) respondents agreed that people's behaviour can be unpredictable when they consume alcohol or any hard drug while 484 respondents (24.4%) disagreed. The table further shows that 759 respondents, representing 37.9 percent, strongly agree while 18 respondents (0.9 percent) strongly disagreed with the notion. From the results of the survey, it is concluded that a total of 75% agreed with the fact that people's behaviour can be unpredictable when

they consume alcohol/hard drugs. This reveals the potential for severe negative implications that may emerge as a result of such unpredictable behaviour. A careful examination of the tables above discloses people's viewpoints concerning matters related to illicit hard drug use and its influence on society as a whole (Table 9).

**Table 9:** Respondents' report on the ethics of their church on hard drugs.

Taking hard drugs is against the ethics of my church			
Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Agree	762	42.3	42.3
Disagree	642	26.5	26.5
Strongly agree	361	18.9	18.9
Strongly disagree	175	12.3	12.3
Total	1940	100	100

A careful examination of Table 9 shows that out of the 1940 respondents who participated in the survey, 762 (42.3 percent of the respondents) agreed that consuming hard drugs is against the ethics of their page 17/25 Church while 642 respondents (26.5%) disagreed with the same. The table further reveals that 361 respondents, representing 18.9 percent of the total participants, strongly agree, while 175 respondents (12.3%) strongly disagreed. From the results of the survey, it can be

concluded that a total of 61.2 percent confirmed that in the Niger Delta cities, consuming hard drugs is against the ethics of their church. See Tables 4, 5, and 6 for other reports of the respondents (Table 10).

A careful study of the above table shows that out of the 1940 respondents who participated in the survey, 1105 of them (58.3 percent) agreed that their religious leader may consume alcohol or hard drugs to make themselves feel bold, while 619 respondents (30.9 percent) strongly agreed with it. Only 210 respondents (10.5 percent) disagree with the notion while 6 persons, representing 0.3 percent, strongly disagree. Hence, it is generally believed that some religious leaders do use alcohol or some hard and illicit drugs to help themselves preach better.

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**I think my religious leader (pastor, Imam, or priest) consumes alcohol/hard drugs to make themselves feel bold while preaching**


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Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Agree	1105	58.3	58.3
Disagree	210	10.5	10.5
Strongly agree	619	30.9	30.9
Strongly disagree	6	0.3	0.3
Total	1940	100	100

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## DISCUSSION

### The role of religion and religious leaders and the impact of drug use

Earlier in this study, it was established that some religious leaders have been addicted to drugs and that they do not climb the rostrum to preach without consuming alcohol or some drugs. There have also been instances where preachers consumed hard drugs before preaching. This section of the research, however, aims to examine the data elicited from respondents to explain how some religious leaders deal with issues related to the use of hard and illicit drugs. In this context, two main areas have been considered: First, hard drug usage among religious leaders and how it supposedly facilitates the religious experience; and second, the views of the religious leader on the contribution of religion to the minimizing of drug use and abuse in the society.

Today, a few Christian religious leaders argue that to attain a state of spirituality, one requires some form of extra power to facilitate it not the Holy Spirit. This shift in thinking has given rise to preachers with questionable characters; yet, they are said to perform what are perceived as "miracles" that cannot be fully substantiated from the biblical perspective. A couple of questions about religious leaders and drug abuse were put forward to police Officers in the zone 6 Police Station, Calabar: Have you had cases of pastors or religious leaders involved in drug trafficking and drug usage? If yes, how was the person treated? In response to these questions, Inspector Simeon Nwaguru said, "Several of them have been arrested for using drugs in Calabar and Port Harcourt." In response to the same questions, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Chukwuma Ihebom, confirmed that in Port Harcourt, some of these individuals have also been arrested and prosecuted for the possession and trafficking of hard and illicit drugs. ACP Ihebom was quick to add that some pastors had even confided in him that they could not preach without consuming cannabis, as it made them feel "bold". He observed that he could not consider them to be true preachers of the gospel. When a similar question was asked, respondents answered in the affirmative (Table 10).

Many religious leaders have followed the suggestions of scholars such as Huxley, who advocated that some psychedelic drugs

may encourage particular forms of creativity that may emulate a "religious experience". Based on his personal experience with hard and illicit drugs, Huxley outlined some of what may be regarded as the driving force that propelled religious leaders to use hard and illicit drugs as a regular practice:

- The ability to remember to "think straight" is slight, if at all, impaired.
- Visual impressions are greatly intensified. The eyes recover some of the perceptual innocence of childhood when their sensum was not immediately and automatically subordinated to the concept.
- They will suffer a profound change for the worse. The individual has no reason to do anything and finds most causes for which they may ordinarily act or suffer to be profoundly uninteresting.
- Increased access to memories, including preconscious and unconscious material.
- More fluent, free association, imagery, fantasy, and symbolic thought. Furthermore, there is an increased ability to experiment spontaneously with hypotheses, metaphors, paradoxes, transformations, and relationships.

These conceptual views of Huxley have led many religious leaders into thinking that psychedelic drugs could be beneficial in providing them with a heightened spiritual experience. Upon developing an addiction to the same, these religious leaders find it difficult to function without the consumption of these drugs—a dependency that affects the individual, family and society in a significantly adverse manner.

On the other hand, there has emerged a second group of religious leaders who consider the teachings of religions such as Christianity to be equipped with the potency to dissuade individuals from the use and abuse of hard and illicit drugs. In conversation with traditional and religious leaders in Gombe, Nigeria, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) entreated these leaders "to preach against drug abuse and cocaine intake among their people." Aliyu Adole, who serves as the commandant of NDLEA in the Gombe State as of May 2015, believed that these leaders should double their efforts to sensitize the members of the public, especially the youth, who were expected to be the leaders of the future. He emphasized the destructive nature of hard and illicit drug use among the youths, which "placed them out of control and sometimes made them

cause problems in the society." He shared his desire of wanting "traditional and religious leaders to also help in sensitizing their followers in their Mosques and Churches," and explained further that those suspected to be dealing in substances such as cocaine, cannabis, and other psychotropic drugs, were arrested in Gombe, thereby turning Gombe State into the breeding grounds for the marketing and sale of these substances.

The reason behind such an appeal was the perceived role of religious leaders in joining the combat against the use of hard drugs. It also implies that the members of their fold were believed to be involved in the use of hard and illicit drugs. However, empirical study has demonstrated for multiple centuries that religious practice increases the well-being of people, families, and the community. Religious attendance is associated with a healthy, stable home environment, strong marriages, and well-behaved kids. The prevalence of domestic violence, crime, substance misuse, and addiction decrease as a result of religious activity. Fagan asserts that religious practices have the potential to have a profoundly good impact, especially on the most disadvantaged members of society, who are more prone to hurt both themselves and society due to their susceptibility to certain occurrences. Speaking on the indispensability of religion in building public morality and minimizing crime in society, George Washington, the first American president, articulated his view that religion and morality are essential pillars of political prosperity among all other dispositions and practices. That person would be unable to legitimately claim patriotism if he worked to undermine these important pillars of human happiness the strongest supports for civic obligations. They should be respected and valued by both the average politician and the religious man. All of their ties to happiness in private and public could not be traced in one volume. If the sense of religious obligation deserts the oaths, which are the tools of investigation in Courts of Justice, where is the security for property, for reputation, and for life? And let's embrace the idea that morality may be upheld without religion with caution. Whatever the effect of sophisticated education on minds with peculiar structures may be, reason and experience both forbid us from expecting that national morality will triumph over religious principles.

A careful analysis of the above demonstrates that religion, particularly Christianity, has a significant moral and transformative role in society when disseminated appropriately. Some scholars may disagree with this notion by stressing how morality can exist in the absence of religion. In this context, the question that begs an answer would be: what sort of morality is it that exists without a religious foundation to it? It is a well-known fact that it is a religion that transforms the moral landscape of society; hence, faith is what should drive religious leaders to rather than falling headlong into the opiate business use the teachings of morality and instructions on leading a good life found within the page 20/25 sacred text of their religion, and persuade others to avoid all forms of temptations, such as those represented by hard and illicit drugs.

Although religious organizations have played a significant role in the fight against hard and illegal drugs, there exist certain religious bodies that have posited no particular statement

against hard drugs (Table 5). There are also those bodies that have outlined doctrinal statements against hard drugs but lack disciplinary policies against erring members of their organization who are found to be drug addicts (Table 9). Moreover, their preaching tends not to have any strong messages against hard drug users. At times, the latter are even accommodated by the system and given a place of pride without being removed from the midst of their families in order to persuade them to repent for their actions. This is where religion lacks the courage to act against hard drug users, indirectly and potentially causing several religious individuals to experience hard drugs due to their perceived acceptability within their religious denomination.

## CONCLUSIONS

The issue of hard and illicit drug use and abuse is a hydra-headed monster that destroys and debilitates society through a variety of means. This problem adversely affects the individual, the church, the family, relationships with friends, societal harmony, the economy, the health system, and the educational system as well. Many reasons have been proposed as to why people choose to abuse hard drugs, including but not limited to peer pressure, the desire to be bold, the pleasure one derives from the abuse, and biological propensity for the abuse. Drug abuse is a problem that has defied many well-intentioned attempts at reducing it to the barest minimum. It is a problem that is on the rise across various regions in the world, resulting in the loss of many lives and much property.

In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the menace is terribly and monumentally increasing, compounding the horrendous rate of diseases, kidnapping, vehicle accidents, crime, cultic activities, broken families, dropouts of the education system, low productivity, serious workplace accidents and even deaths. All these phenomena collectively result in serious economic costs to the government, in its bid to fight crimes and criminality associated with it. This has further impacted society by bringing the progress of abusers' life to a halt, leading to rising unemployment, poverty and endemic violence.

This study stressed that religiosity and spirituality in the Niger Delta can serve as a veritable instrument to curb this menace. It also shows that, presently, the church is not doing enough in this region to minimize the scourge of drug abuse, despite having the sufficient armamentarium at its disposal to fight its resurgence the word of God preached under the power of the holy spirit, prayer, evangelism, and church attendance.

### **This work, therefore, recommends the following**

- The church, as custodians of public morality, should channel its efforts toward preaching and dissuading individuals from the use of hard and illegal drugs.
- The church must develop special ministries that will collaborate with the national drug law enforcement agency to treat and rehabilitate addicts rather than simply regarding them as sinners who are condemned forever.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares there is no known conflicts of interest existing in this paper.

The University of Calabar, Calabar's policy that doctoral theses be stored in a repository and not made available to the public prevents the datasets created during and/or analysed during the current study from being made publicly available. The datasets for this study, which is a component of my doctoral thesis, are not currently accessible, however they can be obtained upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT

There was no need for participant consent in this research, so the approving committee waived it. Competing interests: The author declares no competing interests.

## ETHICAL STATEMENT

I, Dr Emeka C. Ekeke, hereby consciously declare that the manuscript titled: Religiosity and spirituality as agents of change in hard drugs usage in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria;

- Is the author's own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere?
- The paper is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere.
- The paper reflects the author's research and analysis truthfully and completely.
- The paper does not have a co-author(s). Dr Ekeke is the sole author of the paper.

- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly cited. Verbatim citations have been properly and correctly documented and referenced.
- I will personally take public responsibility for its content.

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