



# The Role of Religious Ethical Values in Stemming the Tides of Cybercrime among Youths in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Cybercrime has become a household phenomenon in Nigeria, particularly among young people who are mostly actively involved in the crime. Cyber shenanigans are perpetuated in different forms, such as credit card or bank account hacking and unsolicited emails and text messages to unsuspecting persons by fraudsters through the aid of the internet accessible with computers or mobile phones. Cybercrime is ethically and morally wrong because they cause pain to victims or destroy the lives of those involved, which is completely against moral codes in a humane society. The study aimed to investigate the reality of cyber fraud among youths in Nigeria and highlight the role of religious ethical values in stemming this evil tide, with the understanding that humans, including cybercriminals, are religiously conscious beings living among people. The study adopts a historical research methodology to systematically recapture the complex nature of cybercrime and youth participation in Nigeria through a critical review of relevant literature. The study revealed that the quest for wealth and fame among youth in Nigeria and the rush to measure up with their peers in the society could be attributed to the reason why many youths engage in the illicit venture of cybercrime, even though it is against their faith and falls short of religious, moral, or ethical values. The study therefore, argued that if properly engaged, religious moral values could serve as transformative tools towards right values among young people. The study concludes and recommends that the fight against criminality, especially cybercrime, is the sole responsibility of every member of society, but that the religious community must play a vital role in teaching adherents that going against or breaking existing laws is both punishable by God and society.

**Keywords:** Cybercrime, Youth, Unemployment, Religion, Ethical Values, Nigeria.



## **Introduction**

The tendency to use religion for positive or negative gains, whether relating to character or virtue, has been an age-long argument among scholars of religions globally. This debate is even more complicated, particularly in Africa, where religion has assumed a dangerous ‘weapon’ in society, because it now serves as a means of political recognition to the detriment of the electorates or to improve economic and charismatic relevance among clergies, instead of using it in the services of God and humanity. Although, we cannot equivocally conclude that religion remains the major reason while the African continent as a whole cannot measure up in areas of technological advancement as compared to Europe and America. Although African country like South Africa have tried to break the shackle of religious bigotry to some extents and in their effort to embraced secularism. Whereas Nigeria has been labelled consistently with derogatory nomenclatures like ‘notorious’ and ‘overtly religious’ people by Western scholars. According to African countries are rich in culture and values that continue to shape the African cosmology and philosophy due to its accommodating nature (Marloes 647). There are over 250 ethnic nationalities in Africa that has served as a guiding light for countless generations, molding the moral and ethical foundation of societies across the continent (Falola par. 2). These are some of the reasons why it was literally easy for Europeans missionaries and the Arabian merchants to penetrate in the southern and northern protectorates of Nigeria where they spread Christianity and Islamic message to the people without any form of hindrances.

It is interesting to note that the immoral act of cybercrime did not originate from the African continent, rather it first surfaced in the European state of France in 1834, where the first cyber-attack took place and cybercriminals stole financial market information by gaining access into the French telegraph system (Wolf par.1). Since then, cybercrime has become the compound name for rule-breaking behaviours, such as cyber-fraud, cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking and cyber espionage in the cyber spaces (Hutchings and Chua 169; Lazarus, 65). As Africans began to be aware of the illicit trade of cybercrime, it is unfortunate that Nigerian youths have taken the centre stage with the bulk of cybercriminals emanating from our space, where they represent ninety percent of the active population (Adeniran 20; Ojedokun & Eraye 1002). Cybercrime involves defrauding victims of monetary values, and many young people in Nigeria most especially job seekers and university undergraduates, have taken the trade as a means of employment with the hope that through it they will become rich one day



(Lazarus 67). Osuntuyi, Ireymi and Aluko express their worries about the increasing number of youths joining cybercrime in Nigeria when they opine that:

Many people, especially the youth, are getting involved day by day. They are participating actively in one form of Internet fraud or the other, majorly known in cyberspace as cybercrime, but known in the Nigerian parlance as *Yahoo Yahoo*..., cybercrime is a fast-growing expanse of crime, and this crime has continued unabated with the day-to-day involvement of many youths who are infused with the get-rich-quick syndrome (51).

The quest for quick wealth and the corrupt lifestyle often displayed by politicians has unequivocally forced many young people into illegal means of making money at all costs, including cybercrime and other forms of shenanigans that readily come to mind. This challenge of rich quick tendency is dramatised in our music industries today and on social media, including music stars who occasionally flaunt expensive jewellery, displacing and talking about the necessity of making wealth at any cost, in their songs, has paved the way for more crimes in society. This kind of lifestyle has become part of us because we have gradually built societies that no longer give credence to hard work, rather one that celebrates criminality instead of virtue, even among Christians and Muslims. For instance, social media was flooded in 2023 with the untimely demise of a Nigerian popular musician and Afrobeats star Ilerioluwa Oladimeji Aloba, popularly known as ‘Mohbad’, who we alleged to have “died why trying to get rich” in the music industry because today new generational record labels are co-founded by Yahoo-boys (Lazarus, 69).

The cybercrime phenomenon remains one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century and has escalated to what Osuntuyi, Ireymi and Aluko et al described as *Yahoo Plus*, that is, the blending of spiritual elements with internet surfing (51). Many have identified the influence and roles of religious leaders as promoters of cybercrime activity in Nigeria as negative. According to Osuntuyi, Ireymi and Aluko, Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion glamorised cybercrimes because “*Yahoo boys and girls* make use of spiritual ingredients that can help them successfully scam their victims by hypnotising them, even though their victims might be aware of the prevalence of cybercrime in the scheme (62-63).

This paper explores the role of religious ethical values in moderating negative criminal behaviours and other forms of youthful delinquency, and promoting positive values and conduct in the society can transform society. Therefore, the first section conceptualises and theorises cybercrime and



youth, providing relevant examples. The next section deals with Nigerian youth and the cybercrime phenomenon, next is the role of religious ethical values in mitigating the menace of cybercrime and then conclusions and recommendations.

## **Conceptualisation and Theoretical Clarification of Concepts:**

### **Religious Ethical Values**

Religious ethical values are the product of sacred religious texts, which usually resonate with major world religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and African Traditional Religion, etc. In the context of this study, however, the sacred religious text of Christianity is the focus, although with a comparative analysis of other sacred scriptures that are believed to have a significant place in the life of adherents due to the valid cultural and moral teachings of its founders. Although the purpose of this study is not to compare the moral values of both religious experiences, rather to stress the rich morals inherent in both religions and how they can engender sound ethical principles, particularly among the youth, so as to build trust and a meaningful, humane society.

Furthermore, religious ethical values can be understood within the framework of religious beliefs and practices, texts, sacred spaces, symbols, piety, and the life and influence of a particular founder, that became a stander for followers as they get acquainted with certain values, due to the positive roles they play in shaping such religious cultures and traditions in the society (Bobyreva et al 2). The development of religious ethical values is usually a complex process, because religion itself signifies the ‘most good’ which can be expected or hoped for from this world. Hence, religious values are the “stable belief that a certain model of human behaviour or the ultimate goal of a person’s existence is the only preferable one from a social and personal point of view, rather than a different manner of behaviour or some other ultimate goal of existence” (Bobyreva et al, 2-3). For the purpose of clarity religious ethical values are decorated with terms such as norms, morals, traits, and attitudes, which are different from one religious consciousness to another. In the Christian worldview, for instance, its own system of values lays the basic foundation of faith, expecting adherents to follow accordingly for the promotion of it religious norms and for societal acceptance. Although, virtually every religion in the world uphold high standard of morality, either as a written code, or as a moral disposition, that admonished followers to leave an acceptable lives as they engaged in human society, keeping to the ideas that immoral and unethical ways of life are absurd and causes pain to humanity



and further devalued such faith in the eyes of the public. Therefore, no world religion, be it Asianic, Jewish or African, will out rightly defend the immoral and unrighteous acts of criminality in any form and in whatsoever society because the attempt to swindle a gullible person, through any form of fraudulent means, is will be evil, and has the capability of causing moral and psychological pains (Ihuah and Ojoma 1379).

### **Youth and the challenges of unemployment in Nigeria**

There are different descriptions and definitions of youth by different states, organisations and scholars alike. This is because it is a difficult task to categorically assert the meaning of the word ‘youth’ to a certain age or group, as the case may be. However, there is a consensus among scholars, which says that youths, are future leaders; an understanding that has propelled countries across the world to pay unresolved attentions to young people through development and skill acquisition initiative in other to keep them out of crime (Obomese 246; Mbachu and Alake par. 1-2; Gonyok par. 3). Furthermore, Kalagbor and Deinibiteim in an attempt to define the term youth, quoted the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and assert that the term “Is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood - independence and the awareness of our interdependence as member of a community (4).” Therefore, the youthful age can also be conceptualised as the transition period from dependence to independence, which is from childhood to adulthood in the life journey of a human being.

The United Nations Organisation (UNO par.1), for statistical consistency across regions, defined ‘youth’ as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, and this view is without prejudice to other definitions by member states. Akande corroborated the United Nations Organisation when he opined that ‘youth’ or young adult is any person between the ages of 18 and 24 years (2). Furthermore, Kalagbor and Deinibiteim expatriated by employing some characteristics to define the term youth, thus:

Persons who normally would have completed secondary education, and would either be in tertiary institutions such as the university, striving to secure employment, or already employed. This group of persons would need post-secondary education, employment and reproductive health information and services (2-3).



Interestingly, as the youth population grows, so does the unemployment rate increase beyond proportion in Nigeria. The youth unemployment rate in Nigeria in 2022, for instance, was estimated at 13.44 percent according to source data available with the International Labour Organisation (Statista par.1). However, the African Youth Charter (AYC) differs completely in their definition of a youth. According to AYC, the “youth is any person between the ages of 15 and 35 years old” (20). In the same vein, the second National Youth Policy Document of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2009 describes youths as “persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years of age. Kalagbor and Deinibiteim, adopting what they called the ‘transition from dependence to independence Schema’, outline certain distinct features that are characterised by the youth as follows:

- (a) Leaving the parental home and establishing a new living arrangement for themselves;
- (b) Completing full-time education in most cases, tertiary;
- (c) Forming close, stable personal relationships outside of the family, often resulting in marriage and procreation, and finally;
- (d) Testing the labour market, finding work and possibly settling into a career, and achieving a more or less sustainable livelihood (3).

The above indicates that the youthful period is the age when an individual is most active in life, seeking education, functional skills and employment opportunities, etc. Indeed, at that age, young people are very energetic and are in search of where they would deploy such energy into and when they are not guided towards gainfully using it, is usually expended into crimes and all forms of shenanigans that are common with the youths. The youth, at times, are usually full of anxiety of not having the knowledge of what the future holds for them; hence, they are agitated and ask questions such as What does the future hold? What roles and positions can I fit into in society? These are the daily thoughts of most Nigerian youth, especially when they have completely lost hope in the government of the day.

### **Theorizing Cybercrime**

Several scholarly literatures deal with the concept and theories of cybercrime. A significant amount of this literature has emanated from the social sciences disciplines, while very little has emanated from the humanities as a social phenomenon. Although researchers from the arts and humanities across the world and in the global south have made resounding attempts towards bridging



this gap by opening the field through extensive research in digital humanities and other areas of interest. Consequently, the distending threat of cybercrime became influential in interdisciplinary research aimed at discovering correlates and predictors of online crime and victimisation, pioneering researchers in the field theorising and conceptualising cybercrime, especially from the social sciences fields of enquiry, such as sociology and psychology, but with very few scholars in religious studies and moral philosophers lately. Meanwhile, pioneering scholars in the field of cybercrime include Russell Smith, Michael L. Pittaro, Cathering D. Marcum, Kasun Jayawardena, Roderick Broadhurst and Jaishankar Karuppanan, just to mention a few that have made significant contributions to the study of cybercrime globally. However, over time, researchers have emerged who explore various studies in cybercrime and the *Yahoo Yahoo* phenomenon from other disciplines, which have brought about the thousands of literatures that exist today in the study.

Nevertheless, one thing that has taken precedence lately is the fact that since the new millennium, there has been a continuous attempt to apply traditional criminological theories to the study of cybercrime, which has been decolonised by scholars from other fields of study, especially from Africa. Hitherto, most articles or studies investigating the cybercrime phenomenon were marginalised by top-tier academic journals, which focus on more traditional topics; as a result, cybercrime researchers still represent a very small minority in the overall criminologist community today (Holt and Bossler 20). The implication, therefore, is that most cybercrime theories evolved from a criminological background, which is not healthy enough for global scholarship because it prevents a broader spectrum of wider academic debates that would have impacted other fields of study that attempt to proffer solutions to the challenges of cyber-criminality, which poses a great threat to human society at large.

According to Holt and Bossler three cybercrime theories have been successfully and extensively tested, and they have produced mixed results over time about the phenomenon. These theories include “self-control theory, social learning theory, and lifestyles-routine activities theory” (Holt and Bossler 21). The self-control theory and social learning theories have both discovered some empirical support explaining the underlying motivations of some types of cybercrimes. Although most criminologists focus on the aspect of criminal behaviours explained by self-control theory,



which includes acts such as deviant, sinful, and reckless. The term ‘self-control’ is defined as the propensity to refrain from acts whose long-term costs outweigh their immediate advantages (Holt and Bossler 21). It postulates that individuals who lack self-control will pursue acts that immediately gratify their impulses, such as substance abuse from smoking, gambling, speeding in automobiles, and imprudent sexual conduct (Valasik 1). Furthermore, Burruss, & Bossler (38), and Choi (40) all advocated for the self-control theory (SCT), emphasizing that it is the most appropriate theory to be applied in the study of cybercrime, because it addresses essential and important known delinquencies that are youth related such as smoking, gambling, immoral sexual conducts and other social vices often perpetuated in the society. However, SCT was first proposed by Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi in their book “A General Theory of Crime” in 1990. Since then, the theory has been a subject of discussion and serves as several empirical studies which test the theory and compare it with other criminological theories (Karl-Dieter, 45).

### **Nigerian Youth and the Cybercrime Phenomenon**

A newspaper report published online by Daily Post on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, 2023, according to the rider “Cybercrime: Police nab six, shutdown Abuja ‘Yahoo Academy’” describe how the Nigerian police uncovered a recruitment centre for young people between the ages of 19 to 27 who showed interest in acquiring skills in cyber-fraud (Ochogwu par. 2). In the report, some of the youth confessed to teaching skills ranging from identity theft, hacking, and trading hacked Facebook accounts, romance scams, and other computer fraud and forgery. This immoral situation is almost getting out of hand, and many have attributed the cause to the high rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics report published online by Macrotrent.net (2024) indicate that unemployment rates has escalate from year to year, for example in 2018 and 2022 the number of unemployed persons constituted a 0.43% in 2018; in 12.59% in 2019; 1.76% in 2019; 14.35% in 2020; a decline from 07% in 2020; 13.65% in 2021; with a further decline 0.21% in 2021; 13.44% in 2022.

In the case of age group, the report shows that as at March 2009, persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, representing 41.6% were unemployed, and those between the ages of 25 and 44 years old, (17%) were under-employed. This alarming rate of unemployment has led to an increase in cyber and other crimes in Nigeria, perpetuated by young people. Therefore, one of the ways by which this can be prevented is for the government to create jobs for youths involved in the so-called Yahoo Yahoo



business (Osuntuyi, Ireymi & Aluko 51). Every year, several people are victims of cyber-attack in Nigeria, and it is in the public that young adult male Nigerians (youths), mainly university students/graduates, constitute the bulk of cyber-fraudsters in the country (Tade & Aliyu, 861).

Unemployment has been attributed as the major factor responsible for cybercrime and other forms of crime among the youth in Nigeria. Greater number of Nigerian graduates is unemployed (Oko, 2020:194). Many secondary school leavers and university graduates, frustrated due to the inability to secure a job or maybe a good pay job, often, believe that it is better to plough their talents into crimes and other vices since it is another way of making money without necessarily having to sweat under the sun, rather what it required is just a computer or smart mobile phone and the skill to operate them.

Cybercrime is usually perpetrated through electronic communication networks, particularly through the internet connected to either a laptop or smartphones. The menace is rampant among youths who are graduates or undergraduates and has done incalculable damage to the image of Nigeria globally. Cybercrime is in types which include internet calls, sending of scam emails containing "get rich quick" proposals to entice unsuspecting victims in a bid to defraud them, cyber bullying and etc. In the case of email, sometimes it comes in the form of marriage proposals, purported unclaimed fund, donation, lottery, help, bonanza, bank transaction notification/credit alert and other kinds of scheming. Some of the youths send as many as 10,000 of such scam emails every day, while others send more to increase their chances of getting victims that will fall to their prey (Onadipe, 10).

The economic motive that links across the types of cybercrimes, as already alluded to above, is the connection between unemployment and cybercrime in Nigeria. Suffice it to say here that it is not only the unemployed that engage in cybercrime; however, it is generally believed as argued by Ademola & Olajubutu, that "a critical cause of social vices in the society is unemployment and it manifests itself in the form of kidnapping, armed robbery, political mercenaries, destitution and cybercrime" (82). Similarly, Anderson submitted that "the failure of the state's macro-economy will lead to youths' recklessness given that the majority who are unemployed are the most affected, and if not contained, will degenerate into social vices such as cybercrime in the society" (85). The actions of the youths will be hinged on the fact that the governmental institutions have failed them and the best way to get back at the state is to seize and engage in nefarious acts to survive. Little wonder, in Nigeria, the youths who are educated but unable to secure decent employment are the ones at the forefront of



crimes in the country, not to mention cyber-crimes, which is becoming more or less a haven for them. (Obaro 36). This situation is made worse by the fact that the social-cultural norms in Nigeria despise poverty but magnify material wealth, giving little or no room for hard work. Hence, many Nigerian youths just want to appear successful no matter how they made it, and society celebrates success regardless of how it is attained.

### **The Role of Religious Ethical Values in Mitigating the Menace of Cybercrime**

Since cybercrime is a shameful deviant criminal activity capable of destroying not just the image of the perpetrators but that of their nation, it became imperative to suggest some means it can be mitigated. Therefore, religious values have played a significant role in shaping ethical and moral values in society, and cybercrimes are a societal phenomenon. The fundamental beliefs and teachings of religious ethical values have been used as a foundation for moral principles and codes in many societies throughout history to determine behaviours and moral formation from time to time.

Therefore, religious ethical values are essential moral principles that guide one's behaviour and decision making and are inherent in religious traditions, texts and beliefs, which involve the teaching of values, norms, morals and practices that can influence the lives of people in everyday experience (Obomese and Mande 123). Elsayed, Lestari and Brougham argued that elements of religious ethical values, such as morality, codes of practice, codes of conduct, and other punitive measures, are some of the rules that have been used to control numerous kinds of social traits in society over time (16). The aforementioned can be adjudged to be correct because religious spiritual values have a positive influence on one's perception, choices, actions, and relationships with others, and spiritually conscious people act in godly ways, displaying spirituality as a control measure for unethical behaviour. This can be explored in relation to the unethical practices of cybercrime among youths in Nigeria.

Consequently, religion has often been seen as a unifying factor that is able to help in situations like the case of cybercrime and all its other shades among young people. Therefore, since religion plays important roles in human society at large, it can thus be said that religious ethical values may act as a controlling or bonding force to prevent crimes. It is interesting to note that one of the functions of religion is to influence people's inner feelings, causes a kind of self-control and social function, religion favours systems and organisations that are exposed to changes and also provides social solidarity



through people's participation in religious ceremonies and respect for sacred things (Nevisi and Sharafi 2). Religious ethical values try to prevent the roots of crime, its motivation and the formation of criminal thoughts, and as a result stop their occurrence or the means by which crimes are perpetuated. Generally, religion can be said to play a major role in controlling people in dangerous and crime-causing situations, and although it uses all its efforts for prevention, it is also used to reform the criminal and prevent repeated crimes from happening (Nevisi and Sharafi 3).

Religious crime and sin have always existed together since mankind stepped into the material world and the realm of existence, as pictured in the creation account in the book of Genesis. Therefore, since then, mankind has always tasted deviations, deviance from the proper standard, destructions and crimes with their bitter taste. A critical look at religious teachings reveals that what is referred to today as crime prevention was a combination of heavenly messages and the guidance of prophets and divine saints. In other words, the mission of religion is to liberate man from corruption and misguidance; hence, religious leaders did not spare any efforts to realize it and before fighting the disability, they fought the cause and background of sin and crime, and on this basis, prevention of deviation and crookedness is one of the duties of religious leaders who are expected to through their messages transform sinners into saints (Nevisi and Sharafi 3).

Unfortunately, several government efforts towards enforcing and reinforcing punitive laws to dissuade citizens, especially the young people, from committing or engaging in cybercrime and other social delinquencies in society have proved abortive, and this crime persists with no end in sight. Instead, they kept discovering different and innovative ways of committing it. Therefore, the failure of all these human solutions, obviously proves the fact that absolutely relying on the wisdom and intellect, with no use of religious teachings, human beings are not able to pursue their felicity and struggle misguide and deviation because religious teachings has the power to lower the paths towards and drastically reduce crime rates in the society (Vaezi and Kashkoli 508).

The fast erosion in morality or the absence of religious moral values has been identified as one of the greatest reasons why many young promising youths get involved in crimes without evaluating the social and moral consequences of their actions (Anderson 88; Ademola & Olajubutu 80; Obomese & Mande 125). In the past, religious values have contributed to good moral behaviour among young



people in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, but today the case is completely different. For instance, the teachings in Christianity were regarded as the tools for conveying the message of peace and holy living among the people in society. This is because it exposes evil and outlines punishments meant for those engaging in the various evils; therefore, moral values were transmitted through the accumulation of the knowledge of good moral conduct in the society (Ogueche et al, 2021). Although there is a widely held notion and perception among religious psychologists that those who believe in the Devil and the hereafter (death) are as likely to commit delinquency as people who do not believe in a supernatural world (Adamczyk et al, 2017). This speculation aligns with most of the studies that have been conducted by researchers in religion and criminology, even though much work has not been done on the relationship between religion and crime, because religion can be employed to manage criminal tendencies such as cybercrime and other related shenanigans prevalent among young people in society. According to Adamczyk, Freilich, & Chunrye, citing Johnson et al, and Baier & Write, observed that “adhering to religious association and tenets produces less crime in society” (10). To substantiate this fact, a meta-analysis of 60 studies published between 1969 and 1998 found that religious beliefs and behaviour exert a moderate negative effect on individuals’ criminal behaviour in society” (3).

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

I have argued in this work that the tendency to use religion for positive or negative purposes abounds in society abound even though the overall aim of religion is to produce in adherents some sense of virtues and acceptable characters. However, the reverse has been the case, and this is even more complicated, particularly in Africa, where religion is severely used as a weapon of manipulation and marginalisation.

Furthermore, religious ethical values are the product of sacred religious texts and spirituality, which mainly resonate with major world religions such Christianity, Islam and Judaism, to name just a few. In the context of this study, however, I focused on the sacred religious text of Christianity, although with a comparative analysis of other sacred scriptures that are significant, like Islam, due to its validity and existential value for its cultural and moral teachings on ethical principles and standards in society.



Furthermore, in this study, I conceptualized religious ethical values from the frameworks of religious beliefs and practices, texts, codes, sacred spaces, symbols, piety, and the influence of religious leaders and founders for shaping life and how it will help in curbing deviant and other forms of anti-social practices, such as cybercrime, particularly among the youth in Nigeria. I here recommend that the fight against criminality, especially cybercrime, is the responsibility of all, but the religious community has the following roles to play:

1. To teach members of their congregation that breaking extent law is punishable by God and
2. Take the teaching of morality seriously and inculcate values in their member, especially the youth who form the majority of their population.
3. Teach the value of hard work and respect for authority and senior citizens, who are sometimes mostly the victims of cybercrime in society
4. Government and stakeholders should engage the youth and the positive use of their talents instead of trying to kill them
5. Introduce a youth empowerment program that will drive policy change and bring back the confidence of the youth in government and society.

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## **THE ROLE OF MOUNT ZION MISSION INCORPORATED IN RECLAIMING DRUG USERS AND REDUCING STIGMA IN ORO NATION, AKWA IBOM STATE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Stigmatization is commonly attributed to people who use drugs by other members of society who are supposed to provide reliable information to drug users about the dangers of drug use to the body. Stigmatizations of drug users in various ways serve as a hindrance to effective treatment and reintegration of drug users into the society. As this notion of stigmatization of drug users continues to drive in our society, people of various religious backgrounds and scholars of different fields have begun to ask on the role of the church in reclaiming drug users and reducing stigmatization of drug users. Consequently, the study examined the role of Mount Zion Mission Incorporated, Oro Nation, Akwa Ibom State, in reclaiming drug users, identified strategies for reducing stigma, and investigated the impact of the church's interventions. The study adopted descriptive survey method that is interviews of 10 church leaders and administration of questionnaires to church members and selected community stakeholders in selected areas of Oro Nation. The study revealed that Mount Zion Mission Incorporated, Oro Nation preaches against drug abuse and provides counseling services to people in the host communities struggling with addiction. The study further shows that the church carries out community outreach programmes in various communities in Oro Nation in order to create awareness of the dangers of drug use. The study also revealed that, in order for the church to address stigma that it has embraced drug addicts and supports individuals struggling with addiction. The study recommends that the Government of Akwa Ibom State as well as Traditional Institutions of Oro Nation should partner with the Church- Mount Zion Mission Incorporated, in order to enable the church live up to her social responsibility and create more impact by establishing rehabilitation centres for drug treatment to be carried out. The study concludes that the church efforts in preaching, counseling and educating drug users on the dangers of drug abuse have served as instrument of promoting rehabilitation and reintegration. The findings of this research underscore the relevance of faith-based organizations in addressing stigma and drug abuse.

**Keyword:** Church, Reclaiming, Drug users, Stigma, Mount Zion Mission Incorporated, Oro Nation, Akwa Ibom State



## **Introduction**

Drug abuse is indeed one of the pervasive social issues challenging the world of today. The occurrences in drug abuse among young and old members of our society have drawn public attentions on the role played by the church in curbing this menace. In recent years, drug abuse has become a perennial problem in our society that short and long term effects have been experienced by the individuals taking it, families of the persons taking it as well as the societies (Ekenene, *et al* 2024:68). In Nigeria as a whole, the prevalence of drug use is alarming; with an estimated 14.3 million people using drugs (Oweibia, *et al* 2025:3).

Regrettably, drug use is associated with stigma as drug users and their family members face stigmatization from members of the society. Stigma in the order hand is often been identified as primary barriers to effective drug misuse prevention, as well as the provision of treatment, care and support. Such viewpoints tend to employ stigma as a catch-all for the multiplicity of negative beliefs, attitudes and actions related to the abuse of any substance. There is, however, a need to be cautious. As Bond (2002:17) reveals that ‘it is easy to fall into a trap of labeling attitudes or acts as an example of stigma without examining other possible motives’, there is a need to ‘look at the wider context... Stigma is not the whole picture, but one important part of the wider picture’. The weighting given to stigma as primary and ultimate barriers impeding drug misuse response is problematic as such weighting often implies that stigma is pervasive throughout society. This has the effect of stigmatizing many communities as being uncaring and inhumane – a process that can perpetuate existing marginalization. Stigma therefore needs to be carefully defined, cautiously analyzed and critically reviewed if we are to understand impacts and develop appropriate responses.

Reviewing drug use as social problem perplexing our society and drug users being stigmatized, the church as an important social institution has a crucial role to play in addressing this long lasting



problem. The study hinges on examining the role of Mount Zion Mission Incorporated, Oro Nation, Akwa Ibom State, in reclaiming drug users and reducing stigma.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Church**

The word 'Church' is derived from the Greek word 'ekklesia' meaning 'called out'. It is used almost a hundred times by Septuagint in the Old Testament according to Minear, (cited in Ikot 2024:14).

It is used of,

- i. Israel called out from each tribe (Gen. 12:3, RSV)
- ii. A council called out to worship (Gen. 49:6, RSV)
- iii. Israel called out to worship (Deut. 18:16, RSV)
- iv. Any congregation of worshippers (Psalm 22:22-25, RSV)

The Church is also viewed in three broad perspectives namely;

- i. A local Church (Rev. 2:13, Rom. 1:8, Acts 8:4-8, RSV)
- ii. A denomination (Acts 6:1-6; I Cor. 5:7, RSV)
- iii. Church Universal (Heb. 12:33, Rev. 19:6-7, RSV) (Ikot, 2004:14)

From the foregoing 'Church' is the people of God, the body of Christ, a band of pilgrims, a leavened yeast, salt of the earth, light on a hill, a crowd of people of all races, colours, tribes and tongues, gathered at the throne, joining in singing a new song to the lamb who was slain and brought the crowd as a gift to God. Obot (cited in Ikot 2024:14) reveals that:

The church is never a place, but always a people, never a fold, but a flock never a sacred building but always a believing assembly. The church is you who pray not where you pray in order words the church is people, and how people flow, relate, serve, share, worship and love as the issues that matter most.

Obot is right in his assertion, for Greek derivative cannot imply calling out a place or a building. Church therefore is derived from the Greek *ekklesia* meaning "called out" or assembly of the people and cannot mean a building. However, the understanding of the word church ought to be all embracing; it should



cut across creed, ethnicity, colour and cultural learning. It is therefore the richest view which defines the church a community of the people of God, comprising all the people from all parts of the world and united to a common bond of love through the covenant blood of Jesus Christ. The church can best be understood when seen as a new community of God which in the New Testament gradually separated from Judaism of the Old Testament. The church in this way is seen as a unifying factor and contributor of peace and also as a bridge that closes the gap between people and their leaders (Oko, 2018:31). In the process it acquired its own structure, which was sequel to the ratification of the New and ultimate covenant with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Ikot, 2024:7). Church in this study means a denomination which is Mount Zion Mission Incorporated which was founded in Oron of Akwa Ibom State in 1946.

### **Drug use, Causes and Effects**

Drug use is taking of both licit and illicit drug by human persons for health and other benefits while drug misuse or abuse is improper way of taking both licit and illicit drugs which is harmful to the body. This study is more concern with drug misuse that can also be referred to substance abuse which to this study is primarily illicit drugs namely; cannabis, tramadol, cocaine, heroin, and benzodiazepines. It can be said that the causes of drug abuse vary from social, interpersonal, cultural, environmental, and family factors. People abuse drugs due to pleasure derived from it. Drug abuse can be socially learned through drug use by peer group members, exposure to offers to use, and easy access to drugs. Pressure from friends that abuse drugs including their frequent escalation of drug experience may appeal others to start the use of drugs and other reasons (John, Otene and Antenyi, 2023:263).

Research has showed that harmful effects of drug abuse could be physical, emotional, family dynamics, school behaviours, and social problems. They include cardiovascular disease; abnormalities in brain structure and function; respiratory problems; weakened immune system; insomnia; reduction in libido or sexual dysfunction; anxiety and irritability; loss or increase in appetite; and poor judgment. Different crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and rape have been identified with young people under the influence of drugs. Family dynamics will reflect in the form of secretiveness, withdrawing from family, starting arguments, and breaking rules. For the school behaviours, the teenager will begin to play truancy, display discipline problems, decline in



grades, decreased interest, many absences, and subsequently withdrawal from school and many other effects including social problems (John, Otene and Antenyi, 2023:264).

This study addresses issues of drug users and stigma associated with drug users. The study referred to drug users as people who take illicit drugs which is considered harmful to their bodies and equally led them to go against standing laws of the society. Their involvement in drug use has caused them wrong labeling which is referred to in this study as stigma.

## **Stigma**

Individual identity is the product of how we think of ourselves and of others. This includes our attitudes, beliefs and values about our commonalities and differences in relation to others. Woodward (cited in Makhubele, Ntiabati and Parker 2016:153) maintains:

Identity gives us a location in the world and presents the link between us and the society in which we live... [it] gives us an idea of who we are and how we relate to others and to the world in which we live... [it] is most clearly defined by difference, that is, by what it is not.

This subjective sense of identity incorporates positive and negative, rational and irrational thoughts and emotions that define how we see ourselves in relation to others. Our sense of identity is intertwined with social and cultural ideas that allow us to understand ourselves in relation to others, including social differences linked to gender, age, class, religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation and physical attributes. Stigma is that part of identity that has to do with prejudice – the setting apart from individuals or groups through the attachment of heightened negative perceptions and values.

Stigma is a process that may occur at the individual level, but it is also influenced by social processes related to assumptions, stereotypes, and generalizations and labeling of people as falling into a particular category on the basis of association. Stigma involves the social expression of negative attitudes and beliefs that contribute to processes of rejection, isolation, marginalization and harm of others (Phelan, 2001). It is useful to distinguish between stigma and discrimination. Stigma is largely related to ideas about others, whilst discrimination involves some form of direct enactment of stigma which may be verbal or physical, and which is likely to be hurtful and/or harmful to the person to



whom it is addressed. Many authors, however, refer to stigma as encompassing both ideas and actions. Most countries and societies have recognized that forms of stigma and discrimination as antagonistic to concepts of human rights and equality.

Whilst discrimination involves overt practices (some of which may be considered illegal), stigma is more subtle and less readily defined. Processes of enshrining non-stigmatising and non-discriminatory practices are therefore complex and gradual. Many inequalities are perpetuated in social practices that are well established and embedded such as in the use of language. In the case of Drug users for example, the naming of people as ‘victims’ and ‘sufferers’ contributes to their stigmatization, and extended discourse processes are necessary to address these constructions.

#### **A Brief History of the Mount Zion Mission Incorporated in Oro Nation, Akwa Ibom State**

The birth of the Mount Zion Mission Incorporated in Oro Nation is not farfetched. Ekenene and Okere (2024:72) traced the Origin of Mount Zion Mission Incorporated in Oro Nation to the Apostolic Church Nigeria. Ekenene and Okere (2024) maintain that it is believed that Late Bishop Joshua Uloh Edumoh who lived from 1905 to 1991 was a pastor with The Apostolic Church Nigeria and in 1945, he was affected in a downsizing exercise carried out in the church to reduce number of ministers so that one minister can take care of many assemblies to boost their remunerations.

Ekenene and Okere (2024) further maintain that The Apostolic Church at this time neglected the operations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and went secular than a spiritual church. This articulation coincides with the assertion of Ayegboyin (cited in Ekenene and Okere, 2024:73) who maintains that “some African prophetic leaders seceded from the mainline churches because of what they perceived to be the failures of ministers in the established churches to live up to the call of the Bible and the alienation of the church hierarchy from the spiritual needs of the common people.” But unfortunately, the same cold spiritually witnessed by African prophetic leaders in Mainline churches found its way into some African indigenous churches many years later and the Apostolic Church, Nigeria was a victim.



Furthermore, Bishop E. H. Ukpabio who is the only living pioneer member of the church in an interview with *Zion Mirror* (2018:13), reveals that “the Apostolic Church had no schools to educate the members children, so those children had to undergo difficulties and suffer shame in their attempt to be admitted into schools belonging to other denominations. Therefore, the Nigerian front leaders appealed to Pastor Philip (the Field Superintendent in the British colonial days) for permission to establish schools in the name of The Apostolic Mission; he was seriously annoyed saying “there is no money”, and turned his back against those ministers. He purposefully refused to re-employ the redundant ministers as decided in the High Council Meeting of 1946. The articulated factors culminated into a split. Bishop Ukpabio in *Zion Mirror* (2018: 13) explains the scenario as follows:

...so we split from the Apostolic Church with some Efik speaking people under the leadership of Apostle J. U. Edumoh, with some Yoruba’s too, under the leadership of Pastor Odubanjo We started with the name “African Apostolic” so it’s to embrace universal interest. The name was well accepted, but through the prompting of the Holy Spirit was changed later to the Mount Zion Mission Incorporated

Amana cited in Ekenene (2021:10) giving a crystal clear explanation of what transpired after the split states thus:

A few of us in Oron Town resolved to avoid the confusion and we therefore gathered ourselves together in the veranda of a watchman by name John Akwaha, and there we started our morning and evening prayer meeting and Full Gospel Teaching. True Faith was fully practiced and creative ability came within the new creation. As in the days of apostles when God directed representatives who took the place of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and were given authority over evils (sic) spirit, so it was with the new creation.

Few months later, more than a hundred souls were converted; beginners were now praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The construction of the church building starts immediately. A large number of converts were won through open air campaign (Ekenene, 2021:10). Ekenene (2021) further adds that:

The new born church came to be named Mount Zion Mission through the vision given to one of the founders who was led by the Holy Spirit to the top of the mountain where the present Mount Zion Road is. It was there that he (the prophet) pronounced the name of the church as the Mount Zion Mission (*Obot Zion*). This name theologically symbolizes the city that God dwells and it is also known as the city of refuge... the hill that was known by men and women of



earliest days is now the present No, 17 Mount Zion Road where the cathedral is situated.

The birth of the Mount Zion Mission Incorporated in Oro Nation consolidates Christianity in Oro Nation, and it empirical that the church known and addressed as the Mount Zion Mission Incorporated today was officially established in 1946 at Oron, Uyo Province, and Eastern Nigeria. The church has spread to almost every part of Oro Nation and across the shore of Nigeria, The church maintains Episcopal Administrative structure and its impact is felt in politics, culture, religious, social, education and in economic streams. The church since it was founded is known for a strong doctrine of teachings and affirming the sovereignty of God, Jesus Christ, the son, Holy Spirit, man as creation of God, the fall of man, Redemption, Judgment, church, heaven, hell, divine healing, baptism, the lord's supper, tithing and offering (Ekenene and Okere, 2024:73).

### **Oro Nation**

Ekenene (2021:8) states that Oro people comprising of the Idua, Okobo, Efiat-Mbo, Ebughu, Enwangand Oron Ukpabang groups, inhabit the western bank of the estuary of the Cross River now Akwa Ibom State. It is said to share boundaries with the Etebi and Ubium in the Eket region and the Uruan groups of Ibibio in the Uyo region. Politically, Oro became a division in August 1970s and in 1976, was made a local government area. However, following the local government creation in 1989, Oron was split into 3 local government areas Mbo, Oron and Okobo. Again in September 1991, Urue-Offong/Oruko Local Government Area was carved out of Oron Local Government Area. Finally in December 1996, Udung Uko Local Government Area was further carved out of Oron. Oro Nation therefore can be said to be the indigenes of the five Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State, namely: Okobo, Mbo, Udung –Uko, Urue/Offong –Oruko and Oron with the total land mass of 400 square miles or 1040 square kilometers and said to speak the following dialects: Oro, Okobo, Ewang etc. Oro is linguistically viewed as a language spoken in the area. However, in the work, Oro is used when referring to the five Local Government Areas in Oron. It is not to be confused with Oron which is one of the Local Government Areas in Oro Nation.



## **Methodology**

The Research adopted descriptive survey method, the use of primary and secondary sources of information to examine the role of Mount Zion Mission Incorporated, Oro Nation, Akwa Ibom State, in reclaiming drug users and reducing stigma. The secondary method attracted information from published books, journals, manuals, etc while the primary source which is quantitative made use of interview and questionnaire. 10 leaders of the church were interviewed while 200 questionnaires were administered to members and host communities in Oro Nation. 40 questionnaires each were distributed in selected areas across the 5 local government areas in Oro Nation. The study focused on the riverine areas like Ibaka, Oron beach, East-West Road, Okobo beach and other places in Oro Nation that are known for drug abuse and the church has been engaging the people of these areas as regard the dangers of drug abuse and reasons why drug users should not be stigmatized. The study made use of purposive sampling technique to select church leaders, community stakeholders, drug users, and former drug users consisting of male and female in the selected areas of Oro Nation to provide information for the study. Purposive sampling technique in the study is in line with the rule according to Robinson (cited in Ekenene *et al* 2024:69) who maintains that purposive sampling is intentional selection of informants based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept or phenomenon. This gave room for the researcher to select key formants in the selected areas across 5 local government areas in Oro Nation in order to provide information for the study and information gotten from these people in the areas represent the 5 local government areas of Oro Nation.

Professionals in the area of drug addiction, religion and social works within and outside the area of research have validated the research items. 200 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by the researchers and 195 retrieved. The total of 195 received from the field was analyzed using 4 point Likert Scales. The responses to the questionnaires were first weighed and coded based on a four point scale thus: Agree (A) Strongly Agree (SA) Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree (SD). The study made use of simple percentage method to analyze the questionnaires administered.

## **Data Presentation**

**Question 1:** There is a significant prevalence of drug addiction among diverse demographics in Oro Nation



<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed (A)	106	54.3
Strongly Agreed (SA)	27	13.8
Disagreed (D)	44	22.5
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	18	9.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above shows that 106 of respondents representing 54.3% agreed, 27 respondents representing 13.8% strongly agreed, 44 respondents representing 22.5% disagreed, and 18 respondents strongly disagreed. Based on the fact that 54.3% of the respondents are of the majority, it therefore means that individuals of various age groups, men and women from Oro Nation in Akwa Ibom State are also addicted to drug abuse.

**Question 2:** A range of substances, including cannabis, tramadol, cocaine, alcohol, heroin, and benzodiazepines, are commonly abused by individuals across diverse demographics in Oro Nation

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed (A)	98	50.3
Strongly Agreed (SA)	60	30.7
Disagreed (D)	12	6.2
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	25	12.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>



From the above table, it quite clear that 50.3% of the respondents agreed on the above question, 30.7% strongly agreed to it, 6.2% of respondents disagreed, and strongly disagreed are 12.8%. It means that the respondents who agreed to the question are the majority. It therefore means that various substances, including cannabis, tramadol, cocaine, alcohol, heroin, and benzodiazepines, are abused by individuals of different age groups and gender in Oro Nation.

**Question 3:** Drug abuse is associated with diverse physical and mental health outcomes, financial difficulties, strained familial relationships, emotional trauma, and increased community crime rates.

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed (A)	40	20.5
Strongly Agreed (SA)	110	56.4
Disagreed (D)	25	12.8
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	20	10.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above indicates that 20.5% of the respondents agreed on question above, 56.4% strongly agreed, 12.8% of the respondent disagreed and 10.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This means that the respondents who strongly agreed to the question are the majority. It further entails that drug abuse has diverse effects on drug users ranging from physical health problems like organ damage, infections, mental health issues –depression, addiction as well as cognitive impairment and loss of productivity. The diverse effects of drug abuse are also faced by families and community of the drug users as it strained relationships and breakdown family bonds. Increased risk of domestic violence, caused emotional distress and trauma for family members as well as increased crime rates in the community.



**Question 4:** The NDLEA, Drug-Free Club, NAFDAC, and Akwa Ibom State Primary Healthcare Development Agency (AKSPHCDA) have actively engaged in awareness initiatives on drug abuse prevention and reducing stigmatization in Oro Nation

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed (A)	50	25.6
Strongly Agreed (SA)	40	20.6
Disagreed (D)	100	51.3
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	5	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table, it quite clear that 25.6% of respondents agreed on the above question, 20.6% strongly agreed to it, 51.3% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed are 2.5%. It means that the respondents who disagreed to the question are the majority. Its therefore means that NDLEA, Drug-Free Club founded by Oron Zone Corp Members, NAFDAC, and Akwa Ibom State Primary Healthcare Development Agency (AKSPHCDA) have not been actively engaged in awareness initiatives on drug abuse prevention and reducing stigmatization in Oro Nation, despite the fact that these agencies are found within Oro Nation. The inactiveness of these agencies to carry out awareness creations on the danger of drug abuse and stigmatization of drug users made it imperative for Mount Zion Incorporation, Oro Nation to initiate different programmes in order to curb drug abuse and reduce stigmatization of drug users in Oro Nation.

**Question 5:** Mount Zion Mission Incorporated, Oro Nation uses counseling and spiritual guidance, community outreach, support groups, awareness creation and mentorship as strategies to reclaim drug users and reduce stigmatization of drug users in Oro Nation



<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed (A)	41	21.03
Strongly Agreed (SA)	120	61.54
Disagreed (D)	14	7.18
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	20	10.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table, it is quite clear that 21% of the respondents agreed on the above question 61.54% strongly agreed to it, 7.18% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed are 10.26%. It means that the respondents who strongly agreed to the question above are the majority; it therefore means Mount Zion Mission Incorporated, Oro Nation uses counseling, spiritual guidance, community outreach, support groups awareness creation and mentorship as strategies to reclaim drug users and reduce stigmatization of drug users in Oro Nation.

**Question 6:** Mount Zion Mission Incorporated’s approach to rehabilitation and reintegration had a great impact on the lives of reclaimed drug users in Oro Nation through spiritual transformation, sense of community, emotional healing, restored relationship, and new identity

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed (A)	79	40.51
Strongly Agreed (SA)	98	50.26
Disagreed (D)	10	5
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	8	4.10



<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>
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The table above shows that 79 respondents representing 40.51 % agreed, 98 respondents representing 50.26% strongly agreed, 10 respondents representing 5% disagreed, and 8 respondents representing 4.10% strongly disagreed. With the highest percentage being strongly agreed with 50.26%, the question is answered. It therefore means Mount Zion Mission Incorporated’s approach to rehabilitation and reintegration has had great impact on the lives of reclaimed drug users in Oro Nation through spiritual transformation, sense of community, emotional healing, restored relationship, and new identity.

**Question 7:** Oro Nation plays a significant role in promoting awareness and education, providing support and encouragement, participating in outreach programmes providing resources and services, and partnering with the church in order to support the church’s efforts to reduce stigma and reclaim drug users.

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed (A)	116	59.49
Strongly Agreed (SA)	14	7.1
Disagreed (D)	62	31.7
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	3	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above shows that 116 respondents representing 59.49% agreed, 14 respondents representing 7.1% strongly agreed, 62 respondents representing 31.7% disagreed and 3 respondents representing 1.5% strongly disagreed. Based on the fact that 59.4% of the respondents are of the majority, it therefore connotes that Oro Nation plays significant role in promoting awareness and education,



providing support and encouragement, participating in outreach programmes providing resources and services, partnering with the church in order to support the church’s efforts to reduce stigma and reclaim drug users.

**Question 8:** Mount Zion Mission Incorporated’s counseling programmes are effective in addressing the psychological and spiritual needs of drug users

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed (A)	69	35.3
Strongly Agreed (SA)	103	52.8
Disagreed (D)	8	4.1
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	16	8.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table shows that 69 respondents representing 35.3% agreed, 103 respondents representing 52.8% strongly agreed, 8 respondents representing 4.1% disagreed, 16 respondents representing 8.2% strongly disagreed. With the highest percentage being strongly agreed with 52.8%, the research hypothesis is affirmed. It therefore means that counseling programs initiated by Mount Zion Mission Incorporated are effective in addressing the psychological and spiritual needs of drug users.

**Question 9:** Fear of rejection, lack of trust, past experiences, and lack of awareness of the church’s counseling services are perceived barriers to seeking help from the church among drug users.

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed (A)	41	21
Strongly Agreed (SA)	120	61.5



Disagreed (D)	14	7.1
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	20	10.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table, it is quite clear that 21% of the respondents agreed on the above question 61.5% strongly agreed to it, 7.1% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed are 10.2%. It means that, fear of rejection, lack of trust, past experiences of drug users, lack of awareness on the church's counseling services are perceived barriers to seeking help from the church among drug users.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings have shown that there is a significant prevalence of drug addiction among diverse demographics in Oro Nation, table 1 affirmed this. According to Akadu John (Personal Communication, 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2025) the prevalence of addiction especially in riverine areas like Ibaka, Oron beach, East West Road, Esuk-inwang and other places in Oro Nation is high and this is linked to various factors like socio-economic challenges, peer pressure etc. James and Ekenene (2021:45) maintained that school children within the age bracket of 15-20, 25-30, and 35 and above are mostly associated with drug abuse and their reasons vary. But many take it to fit in, to feel good, to feel better, to do better and also to experiment with it. Chief Edet Willie (Personal Communication, 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2025) maintained that outside of students who abuse drugs of various types, truck drivers who use the East- West Road, boat drivers in Oron Rivers, and their associates abuse all kinds of illicit drugs. Chief Edet Willie (Personal Communication, 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2025) further maintained that not all parts of Oro Nation experience drug abuse, and the church has been involved in curbing drug abuse and reducing the stigmatization of drug users. However, areas like Ibaka, Oron Beach, East-West Road, Okobo beach, and other selected places in Oro Nation have a high prevalence of drug abuse. The study discovered that alcohol, marijuana and tramadol are most abused substance in these areas, with some people stating that it gives them the energy to work.