

## CND Thematic Discussions on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration

**18.10.2019:** *That synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of prescription drugs pose increasing risks to public health and safety, as well as scientific, legal and regulatory challenges, including with regard to the scheduling of substances.*

### **TITLE: Trends in Opioid Use, Harms, Regulation and Treatment and the Health Implications of Prescription Drug Abuse.**

Presenter: Kayode Adedoye ,Executive Director, Society for Development & Community Empowerment(*SDCE-UN ECOSOC 2011*).

## OUTLINES OF THE PRESENTATION

- **1.Introduction**
- **2.Risk Factors For Opioid-Related Harms.**
- **3.Impact Of Use Of Opioids, Particularly Tramadol And Codeine, On Society And The Economy.**
- **4.The Recent Increase In Use Of Tramadol and Illicitly Manufactured Synthetic Opioids And Its Relation To The Prescription Opioid Epidemic.**
- **5.Impact Of Prescription Opioids On Illicit Markets.**
- **6.Current State Of Surveillance Systems, Regulatory Challenges And Recent Trends**
- **7.Treatment Of OUD (Opioid Use Disorder) And Use Of Naloxone To Prevent Overdose Deaths In Nigeria And Africa.**
- **Conclusion.**

### **1. Introduction**

*My presentation will discuss the use and misuse of prescription opioids, identifies risk factors for opioid-related harms, describes the recent increase in use of tramadol, heroin and illicitly manufactured synthetic opioids and its relation to the prescription opioid epidemic, describes the impact of prescription opioids on illicit markets, reviews the current state of surveillance systems, regulatory challenges and summarizes recent trends in treatment of OUD and use of naloxone to prevent overdose deaths in Nigeria and Africa.*

*Using **prescription drugs** for the wrong reasons has serious **risks** for a person's **health**. **Opioids** like tramadol, Oxycodone, morphine and codeine, heroin, fentanyl is highly addictive, can lead to vomiting, mood changes, decrease in ability to think (cognitive function), and even decreased respiratory function, overdoses, coma and death are common. The shift towards opioids for pain management led to a dramatic increase in prescription opioid production.*

### What is drug use and misuse?

**Misuse** occurs when someone uses a **drug** for something other than its intended reason. Abuse is when prescriptions are used for the purpose of getting high. **Drug misuse** refers to the **use** of a substance for a purpose that is not consistent with legal or medical guidelines, most often with prescription medications. This could mean taking more than what is prescribed, or taking a **medication** that was not prescribed to you.

### What is prescription misuse?

**Misuse** of **prescription** drugs means taking a **medication** in a manner or dose other than **prescribed**; taking someone else's **prescription**, even if for a legitimate medical complaint such as pain; or taking a **medication** to feel euphoria (i.e., to get high). In most cases of abuse or misuse, opioid painkillers like tramadol and codeine syrup were never prescribed.

## **2. RISK FACTORS FOR OPIOID-RELATED HARMS**

Characteristics of opioid medication and how they are prescribed can affect the risk of nonmedical use and other harms. Three key characteristics of opioid medications that have been found to influence the risk of harms include the chemical compound, the formulation, and the intended route of administration. Also salient are the number of pills prescribed and dosage, as well as other prescribing and non-prescribing patterns.

Opioid painkillers are supposed to provide pain relief, but there is now a plethora of injuries and deaths because they have been heavily marketed and inappropriately prescribed. **Long-term tramadol use** is associated with liver and kidney damage. In particular, high doses of tramadol may cause liver failure. Tramadol addiction, like other forms of addiction, can produce significant behavioral changes due to compulsive drug seeking and preoccupation with using it. Opioid abuse can lead to vomiting, mood changes, decrease in ability to think (cognitive function), and even decreased respiratory function, coma, or death. **Opioids can be highly addictive, and** overdoses and death are common.

Even though tramadol is primarily a pain relief drug, non-medical use can produce similar effects to the high caused by heroin. Like heroin, Tramadol binds to opioid receptors in the brain and spinal cord and produces euphoric effects when the drug is taken at higher doses than medically prescribed. An epidemiological study ([Google Scholar](#)) showed long-term opioid use is associated with dependence, addiction, poor self-rated health, inactivity, unemployment, higher health care utilization, and poor self-rated quality of life.

### **3. IMPACT OF USE OF OPIOIDS, PARTICULARLY TRAMADOL AND CODEINE, ON SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY.**

Tramadol, legally and legitimately prescribed by doctors for pain relief, are also being taken in life-threatening doses by millions in search of a fix or a release from poverty, unemployment and lack of opportunity. The shift towards opioids for pain management led to a dramatic increase in prescription opioid production.

A typical occurrences in Nigeria is that of Oluwole, he had gone out for the night at a local hotel and decided to indulge in the potent mix of codeine, tramadol, rohypnol, cannabis and water or juice. While the mixture enhances the enjoyable high of each drug ingredient, their side effects are also increased leading to a very risky outcome. Reports say after taking his **gutter water mix** he had a seizure, and was rushed to a local hospital, where he was declared dead a few hours later.

Past-year users of opioids were more likely to report chronic health conditions and poorer health status as compared with other drug users or the general population. Access to services to reduce the adverse consequences of drug use was also limited. (DRUG USE IN NIGERIA 2018). Past-year users of OPIOIDS reported higher rates of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and chronic pain.

With expensive illicit drugs like cocaine and heroin out of reach for many unemployed young people, they're turning to a range of cheap options—and concoctions—to get high. The spreading addiction among Africa youth to cheap synthetic opioids brought in from China and India has had much impact recently in Africa. Book haram fighters in Nigeria heavily use tramadol, factory workers, taxi and long distance drivers (truck and bus drivers) abuse tramadol to stay strong and active. Also, IDPs who fled attacks *use* drug imported illegally from India to cope with post-traumatic stress and challenges in camps.

#### **4. THE RECENT INCREASE IN USE OF TRAMADOL AND ILLICITLY MANUFACTURED SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS AND ITS RELATION TO THE PRESCRIPTION OPIOID EPIDEMIC.**

Cheap Synthetic opioid like tramadol and fentanyl use is on the increase. Synthetic opioid use is booming, the United Nations, in a drug report that shows rising deaths from overdoses and a "crisis" of Tramadol use emerging in parts of Africa. The use of opioids - an umbrella term for drugs ranging from opium and derivatives such as heroin to synthetics like Fentanyl and Tramadol - was up 56 percent from 2016 with 53 million users worldwide (UNODC).

There is another opioid crisis unfolding in African countries like Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Libya and South Africa, where abuse of the pain medication Tramadol has emerged as a problem. Drug use and its adverse health consequences **is worse** in prison settings, where those jailed were "especially vulnerable to drug use and face higher risks of HIV and hepatitis C transmission". (UNODC 2018)

It is now abundantly clear that tramadol and codeine-based cough syrups, use and trends in *illicit drug markets* have a substantial influence on the public health *impact of prescription opioid* use.

#### **5. IMPACT OF PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS ON ILLICIT MARKETS**

Unlike several other opioids, Tramadol is not internationally regulated and available for cheap (less than \$1) at Nigerian pharmacies, which do not require prescriptions. The lack of international regulation also means Tramadol production and distribution has gone on unperturbed in countries like China and India, which have become leading global exporters. The pain relief drug is also flooding other African cities including Cairo and Accra. Indeed, the US State Department declared Benin the world's second largest destination for Indian Tramadol in 2016. But Tramadol is not Nigeria's only worrisome opioid. Codeine-based cough syrups, sold locally for as cheap as \$3, are also being widely consumed and are available largely due to corruption at major pharmaceutical companies.

## **6. CURRENT STATE OF SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS, REGULATORY CHALLENGES AND RECENT TRENDS**

**Monitoring** and evaluation of drug use patterns, **emerging trends**, and prescription **opioids** (mainly tramadol, and to lesser extent codeine) is non-existent. Nigerian authorities seized shipments of about 2 billion tablets of tramadol painkillers via the ports in 2018, showing the huge scale of the country's opioid crisis. Recent evidence suggests that Nigeria's drug abuse problem is not going away anytime soon. The high number of tablets suggests Nigeria has become a transit hub through which the tablets are smuggled into neighboring countries—and it also highlights the scale of Nigeria's opioid abuse problem. Indeed, there's a willing Nigerian market of young people increasingly experimenting with and getting hooked on opioids and unconventional mixtures to get high.

Nigeria's government took a public stand in May 2018 with a ban on importing and producing codeine-based cough syrups but search finds show that the ban has not been effective: thousand of packets of codeine are still being seized in random searches. These seizures aren't likely to put a major dent in Nigeria's supply of illegal opioids, but they do show up how enormous the market for such drugs has become.

## **7. TREATMENT OF OUD (OPIOID USE DISORDER) AND USE OF NALOXONE TO PREVENT OVERDOSE DEATHS IN NIGERIA AND AFRICA.**

A five-point comprehensive strategy for **treatment of OUD**: includes (1) better data, (2) better pain treatment, (3) more addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery services, (4) more overdose reversers, and (5) better research.

Treatment of OUD (use of naloxone to reverse opioid overdose) is almost non-existent in Nigeria and several countries in Africa. The care that people receive is often inadequate, and poor-quality care is common across conditions and countries, with the most vulnerable populations faring the worst.

Characteristics of opioid medication and how they are prescribed can affect the risk of nonmedical use and other harms. Three key characteristics of opioid medications that have been found to influence the risk of harms include the chemical compound, the formulation, and the intended route of administration; also salient are the number of pills prescribed and dosage, as well as other prescribing patterns.

## 8.CONCLUSION

Opioids like codeine, tramadol, rohypnol are generally cheap and widely available due to unregulated production: Tramadol pills cost less than a dollar and codeine syrups sell for \$3 in Nigeria. As a result, young adults are increasingly reaching extreme measures in search of a cheap high. There is a thriving black market trade involving insiders at some of the country's biggest pharmaceutical companies. The drug combinations indulged in by youths may differ from country to country, but the symptoms are the same: a lack of opportunities for the so-called youth bulge. African governments are struggling to find a cure to both the cause and the epidemic. Few have adequately staffed and equipped public rehabilitation centers or a coordinated public health response, never mind how to create jobs for Africa's youth. **Gutter water** (potent mix of codeine, tramadol, rohypnol, cannabis and water or juice) is a dangerous cocktail of drugs which a generation of young Africans use to get high or fix for relatively cheap; it is a sad tale for a generation of poor, disenfranchised young urban Africans who feel there are few options for a better life.

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**THANK YOU.**

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