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Morality and the use of nyaope amongst the youth in Soweto

Abstract

Keywords: South Africa, Soweto, Nyaope, Morality, Phenomenology, Body.

The goal of this research report is directed towards expanding our understanding of the use of an illicit cocktail street drug called nyaope beyond the common discourse about it in the South African society, to show the complexity that lies in the behaviour of its users. I do so by paying a close consideration to the phenomenological experiences of people who use the drug, specifically the youth from a Soweto Township I call Valleydale. Under the circumstances where nyaope use is a condition of moral panic in South Africa, condemned through moral public opinions and judgments, and by the law, I argue that there is a need to suspend the influence of these if we are to understand nyaope use better, beyond classifying it as wrong, illegal or immoral, as according to the norms or rules set by informal and formal institutions, including public discourse. The situation of people who use nyaope is far more complex to be classified or understood according to predominant ideas of morality. This report uncovers this complexity by sharing the personal stories of my research participants that include those about struggling to quit a drug they do not want to use anymore, and stealing for money to buy nyaope, even though they shamelessly know that by doing so they are breaking the law. Through such reveals, the report further shares insights about what a life of person who uses the drug nyaope entails, from the position of my participants, and how they are physically impacted and socially affected by their use of an addictive drug such as nyaope, which happens to also be associated with so much deviancy and delinquency in South Africa.