



An Overview of Unemployment and the Rise of Drug Abuse Among Muslim Women in Our Contemporary Times: An Islamic Ethical and *Shari'ah* Perspective from Sokoto State

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Abstract

This paper examines the twin social crises of unemployment and drug abuse as they afflict Muslim women in Sokoto State, Northwestern Nigeria. Drawing on classical Islamic scholarship, contemporary social science research, and field-based observations particular to the Sokoto context, the study argues that unemployment is not merely an economic condition but a moral and spiritual vacancy that, when left unaddressed, opens pathways to destructive social behaviours, chief among them the abuse of substances. The paper traces the historical, religious, and socio-economic roots of female marginalisation in Sokoto, interrogates the failure of successive policy frameworks to integrate Muslim women into productive economic life, and examines how this failure has bred conditions fertile for drug abuse. Guided by the principles of Maqasid al-Shariah the overarching objectives of Islamic law the paper concludes with recommendations rooted in both classical wisdom and contemporary institutional reform. The analysis is anchored in the conviction that the welfare of Muslim women is inseparable from the welfare of the Muslim community as a whole, and that genuine rehabilitation must address spiritual, economic, and social dimensions simultaneously.

Keywords: *Unemployment, Drug Abuse, Muslim Women, Economic Policies, Sokoto State.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the most urgent social questions confronting Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria today is the disturbing convergence of two phenomena that classical Islamic scholars never imagined would coincide so grievously: the idleness born of unemployment and the ruin wrought by drug abuse. That both afflictions have come to mark the lives of a growing number of Muslim women in Sokoto State is a development that demands serious scholarly attention, not merely as a sociological curiosity, but as a moral and religious emergency.

Sokoto State, historically renowned as the seat of the Sokoto Caliphate founded by Shehu Usman Dan Fodio in 1804, has long occupied a position of spiritual and intellectual prestige in the Islamic world. The Caliphate was built on a reformation agenda that included, significantly, the liberation and education of Muslim women. Shehu Dan Fodio was himself a fierce advocate of women's right to knowledge and dignified living. Yet today, the state that bears his intellectual and spiritual legacy grapples with one of the highest rates of female unemployment in Nigeria, and the social disintegration that follows in its wake¹.

This study does not treat unemployment and drug abuse as isolated problems. Rather, it approaches them as intertwined social pathologies that reinforce each other in a cycle that is difficult to break without deliberate, multi-dimensional intervention. It situates its analysis within the framework of Islamic social ethics, drawing on the Quran and Sunnah, the writings of classical Muslim scholars, and the findings of contemporary researchers in order to offer a diagnosis that is both contextually grounded and intellectually honest.

¹ A.A. Doi, *Shariah: The Islamic Law*, Ta Ha Publishers, London, 1984, p. 211

Nigeria as a whole faces a drug abuse epidemic of alarming proportions. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Nigeria has one of the highest rates of drug abuse in Africa. Northern states, historically assumed to be insulated by Islamic moral frameworks, have not been spared. In Sokoto specifically, substances such as tramadol, codeine, cannabis, and a growing array of synthetic drugs have found their way into homes, markets, and even schools.

The emergence of female drug users — many of them women who are unemployed, idle, and socially invisible marks a new and deeply troubling chapter in this national crisis².

The significance of this study lies not only in what it reveals about Sokoto State but in what it says about the broader challenge of Muslim communities navigating modernity while holding fast to Islamic values. The paper proceeds from introduction through historical context, conceptual and Quranic analysis, empirical assessment, policy critique, and conclusion, each section building upon the last in a manner that seeks clarity, comprehensiveness, and practical utility.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: SOKOTO, WOMEN, AND THE LEGACY OF THE CALIPHATE

To understand the present condition of Muslim women in Sokoto State, one must first appreciate the historical grandeur from which they have descended and the structural decline that has followed. The Sokoto Caliphate, established in 1804 following the jihad of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, was not merely a political enterprise. It was a comprehensive Islamic reform movement whose vision of society was shaped by Quranic imperatives, prophetic traditions, and the writings of major Islamic scholars from across the Muslim world.

Shehu Usman Dan Fodio was, among other things, an outspoken champion of women's education and dignity. In his celebrated work *Nur al-Albab*, he lamented the state of ignorance into which Muslim women had been cast by the pre-jihad Hausa ruling class, arguing that the denial of knowledge to women was itself a form of oppression incompatible with Islamic teaching. His daughter, Nana Asma'u, emerged as one of the most remarkable Muslim women scholars of the nineteenth century, composing poetry in Arabic, Hausa, and Fulfulde, teaching through the *jaji* network of women teachers, and demonstrating that piety, scholarship, and social engagement were not mutually exclusive for Muslim women³.

The legacy of Nana Asma'u stands in sharp contrast to the contemporary reality. British colonial conquest in 1903, which brought the Caliphate to an end, disrupted the Islamic educational and social institutions that had given women a defined, if circumscribed, space in public life. Colonial rule introduced a secular administrative framework that marginalised Islamic institutions, and with them, the indigenous channels through which women had accessed learning, social mobility, and economic participation.

Post-independence Nigeria inherited and often deepened these structural distortions. The policies of successive federal and state governments prioritised certain forms of modernisation, Western-style schooling, urban industrial development, formal sector employment that systematically excluded or disadvantaged women in the predominantly Muslim North. The cultural conservatism of some segments of Northern society, interpreted through a particular reading of Islamic modesty norms, was sometimes weaponised to justify keeping women out of the formal economy, even as the informal safety nets that had historically sustained them were eroded⁴.

By the time Sokoto State was created in 1976 from the former North-Western State, the foundations for the current crisis were already being laid. The state's economy remained heavily dependent on subsistence agriculture and small-scale trade. Female literacy rates lagged behind national averages. The formal employment sector was narrow and overwhelmingly male-dominated. The oil boom of the 1970s, which brought relative prosperity to some parts of Nigeria, produced few meaningful benefits for women in Sokoto. When the bust came in the 1980s and the Structural Adjustment Programme of 1986 decimated social services, it was women and the poor who suffered most.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: UNEMPLOYMENT, IDLE HANDS, AND THE ISLAMIC ETHICAL AND *SHARI'AH* PERSPECTIVE

3.1 The Islamic Conception of Work and Purposeful Living

Islam regards work not as a necessary burden but as a form of worship, a means of realising one's God-given potential, and a mechanism for contributing to the welfare of the community. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is reported to have said: '

² UNODC, World Drug Report, United Nations Publications, Vienna, 2022, p. 14

³ J. Boyd and B.B. Mack, *Collected Works of Nana Asma'u, Daughter of Usman dan Fodio*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 1997, p. 3

⁴ M.A. Al-Hajj, *The Mahdist Tradition in Northern Nigeria*, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, 1973, p. 74

It is better for one of you to carry a bundle of firewood on his back and sell it than to beg from someone, whether that person gives him something or refuses⁵.'

This hadith, reported by al-Bukhari, encapsulates the Islamic ideal of productive self-sufficiency and the dignity that attaches to honest labour.

The Quran similarly celebrates purposeful activity and warns against idleness. Allah says in Surah al-Jumu'ah (62:10): 'When the prayer is concluded, disperse in the land and seek of the bounty of Allah⁶.'

This verse, understood in its full context, is a divine sanction for economic activity as an expression of piety. The idle person, from an Islamic standpoint, is not merely unproductive; he or she is failing in a duty to God, to self, and to society.

Classical Muslim scholars developed these Quranic and prophetic principles into a rich body of social ethics. Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth-century North African polymath, in his monumental *Muqaddimah*, argued that human society is organised around the necessity of collective labour and that the breakdown of productive cooperation is a primary cause of social disintegration. He observed, with remarkable prescience, that societies in which large numbers of people are rendered economically inactive tend toward violence, moral decay, and the dissolution of the bonds of social solidarity⁷.

3.2 *Maqasid al-Shariah* and the Protection of Human Welfare

The concept of *Maqasid al-Shariah* the objectives or higher purposes of Islamic law provides the most comprehensive Islamic framework for assessing the social crisis under study. Developed systematically by al-Ghazali in the eleventh century and later elaborated by al-Shatibi in the fourteenth century, the *Maqasid* framework identifies five essential human goods that Islamic law is designed to protect: religion (*din*), life (*nafs*), intellect or reason (*aql*), lineage or family (*nasl*), and property or wealth (*mal*)⁸.

Unemployment and drug abuse directly threaten all five of these fundamental goods. Unemployment attacks the preservation of property and wealth, undermines family stability, exposes the intellect to the corrupting effects of despair and idleness, and may ultimately endanger life itself through poverty-related illness, malnutrition, and conflict. Drug abuse compounds each of these harms catastrophically: it destroys reason and clarity of mind, ruinously depletes financial resources, tears apart family bonds, and in its most severe manifestations takes life either directly through overdose or indirectly through the violence and disease associated with substance dependency⁹.

Al-Shatibi, writing in Andalusia in the fourteenth century, further distinguished between necessities (*darurat*), needs (*hajiyyat*), and embellishments (*tahsiniyyat*). His framework makes clear that a Muslim society which fails to secure the necessities of its members food, shelter, productive work, security cannot be said to be operating in accordance with Islamic law, regardless of how scrupulously it observes ritual forms. This insight is profoundly relevant to the situation in Sokoto today, where the formal apparatus of Islamic practice remains intact while the social and economic foundations necessary for dignified Muslim life crumble beneath it.

3.3 Drug Abuse in the Light of Islamic Jurisprudence

The Islamic prohibition of intoxicants is among the most clearly established principles in the Sharia. The Quran addresses the question of intoxicants progressively, culminating in the unequivocal command of Surah al-Ma'idah (5:90):

'O you who believe! Intoxicants, gambling, sacrifices to idols, and divining arrows are an abomination of Satan's handiwork. Avoid them so that you may prosper¹⁰.'

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is reported in numerous authentic hadiths to have cursed not only those who drink intoxicants but those who produce, sell, transport, or in any way facilitate access to them.

Classical Muslim jurists extended this prohibition to all substances that impair the intellect, regardless of whether they were known at the time of revelation. Ibn Taymiyyah, writing in the thirteenth century, argued forcefully that hashish

⁵ M.I. al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. M.M. Khan, Dar us-Salam, Riyadh, 1997, vol. 3, p. 304

⁶ Qur'an, 62: 10

⁷ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. F. Rosenthal, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1967, vol. 1, p. 248

⁸ A. H. al-Ghazali, *Al-Mustasfa min Ilm al-Usul*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1993, vol. 1, p. 287b

⁹ Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi, *Al-Muwafaqat fi Usul al-Shariah*, trans. I. Raisuni, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, 2011, vol. 2, p. 9

¹⁰ Qur'an, 5: 90

then in widespread use in parts of the Muslim world fell unambiguously under the Quranic prohibition. His argument rested on the principle that the *maqsad*, or objective, of the prohibition was the protection of the intellect, and that any substance that compromised this faculty was forbidden regardless of its particular form. This juristic reasoning provides the classical basis for the contemporary Islamic condemnation of all mood-altering drug¹¹s.

What makes the current crisis particularly poignant from an Islamic standpoint is that drug abuse is occurring not among people who are ignorant of its prohibition, but among people who know it to be haram and turn to it nonetheless. This suggests that the problem is not primarily one of religious education but of social despair a condition in which the known prohibitions of the Sharia are overwhelmed by the psychological pain of hopelessness, poverty, and exclusion. It is a condition that the Prophet, peace be upon him, himself warned against when he said:

'Poverty may well lead to disbelief.¹²

4. UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN IN SOKOTO STATE: CAUSES AND DIMENSIONS

4.1 The Scale of the Problem

The unemployment crisis among women in Sokoto State is severe by any measure. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Labour Force Survey of 2020, Sokoto State has one of the highest rates of unemployment and underemployment in the country, with women disproportionately represented among the economically inactive. The formal labour participation rate for women in the Northwest geopolitical zone, of which Sokoto is a part, is among the lowest in the country. A 2022 report by the Nigerian Economic Summit Group estimated that only approximately 14 per cent of women in the Northwest engaged in any form of formal economic activity. The overwhelming majority of women who work do so in the informal sector, typically in petty trade, subsistence farming, and domestic service activities that are poorly remunerated, legally unprotected, and economically precarious¹³.

4.2 Educational Barriers and the Girl-Child Question

Education is the most powerful determinant of economic participation, and it is in education that the disadvantage of Muslim women in Sokoto is most starkly visible. UNICEF data for 2021 shows that Sokoto State has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children in Nigeria, and that girls are disproportionately represented among those not enrolled. The reasons are structural and cultural: early marriage, which remains prevalent in the state despite federal legislation establishing 18 as the minimum marriage age; the geographic distance between homes and schools; the perception among some families that girls' education is either unnecessary or incompatible with Islamic values; and the chronic underfunding of public education in the state¹⁴.

The consequences of this educational deficit compound over generations. A girl who does not complete primary school is unlikely to access secondary or tertiary education, and without these credentials, is effectively barred from formal sector employment. She is likely to marry early, bear children in quick succession, and if her marriage is troubled by poverty or instability find herself without the education or skills to sustain herself or her children. The cycle of poverty, dependency, and vulnerability is thus reproduced with each generation.

Scholars of Islamic education have pointed out the profound irony of this situation. The first word revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was Iqra Read. The Prophet himself declared the seeking of knowledge an obligation upon every Muslim, male and female alike. Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, in Sokoto's own intellectual tradition, wrote in his *Ihya al-Sunnah* that the scholars of his day had sinned grievously by leaving women ignorant. Yet the social practices that actually govern the lives of many women in contemporary Sokoto systematically deny them the very knowledge that Islam commands¹⁵.

4.3 Economic Policies and Their Failure

Nigeria's economic policies over the past three decades have, by and large, failed Muslim women in Sokoto State. The Structural Adjustment Programme of the late 1980s, imposed by the World Bank and IMF, stripped away the already thin social protections available to vulnerable communities. The liberalisation of trade that followed flooded Northern

¹¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu al-Fatawa*, Dar al-Wafa, Cairo, 2005, vol. 34, p. 204

¹² Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, trans. A. Hasan, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1984, vol. 3, p. 943

¹³ National Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Statistics: Unemployment and Underemployment Report*, NBS, Abuja, 2020, p. 17

¹⁴ UNICEF, *Education in Nigeria: Situation Analysis*, UNICEF Nigeria, Abuja, 2021, p. 31

¹⁵ U. Dan Fodio, *Ihya al-Sunnah wa Ikhmad al-Bid'ah*, Gaskiya Corporation, Zaria, 1978, p. 44

markets with cheap imported goods that destroyed the local craft industries weaving, dyeing, leather-work through which many women had historically earned income¹⁶.

Subsequent policy frameworks the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) of the early 2000s, the Transformation Agenda of the Jonathan years, the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan of the Buhari administration all acknowledged the problem of female unemployment in principle but produced few concrete benefits for women in Sokoto. The programmes that were designed to address female poverty the SURE-P maternal health scheme, the N-Power programme, the Conditional Cash Transfer scheme under the Social Investment Programme were chronically underfunded, poorly administered, and susceptible to capture by elite interests. Women in rural Sokoto, far from programme offices and without the literacy required to navigate administrative processes, were largely bypassed¹⁷.

At the state level, successive Sokoto State governments have made periodic pronouncements about women's empowerment but have rarely translated these into sustained, adequately financed programmes. The state's Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development has operated with a budget that represents a tiny fraction of overall state expenditure. Skills acquisition programmes tailoring, soap-making, computer literacy have been launched with fanfare and allowed to wither from neglect. Microcredit schemes have reached only a small proportion of eligible women, and those that were reached often found the loan conditions particularly requirements for collateral that women do not possess impossible to meet.

4.4 Contemporary Challenges: Banditry, Displacement, and Economic Collapse

The security crisis that has engulfed Northwestern Nigeria since the mid-2010s has added a devastating new dimension to the unemployment problem. Sokoto State, alongside Zamfara, Kebbi, and Katsina States, has been ravaged by armed banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence that have displaced hundreds of thousands of people, destroyed agricultural livelihoods, and made vast areas of the state ungovernable and economically inactive. By 2023, UNHCR and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimated that over 200,000 persons were internally displaced within Sokoto State alone.

The economic consequences of this displacement have fallen disproportionately on women. Displaced women lose not only their homes and their farms but the social networks the family connections, the market relationships, the community ties through which they have historically accessed economic opportunities and social support. Concentrated in overcrowded displacement camps or in the margins of urban areas, they find themselves in conditions of acute vulnerability: without income, without assets, without the support of extended family, and in many cases without documentation that would allow them to access government assistance. It is in precisely these conditions of despair and dislocation that drug abuse most readily takes root¹⁸.

5. DRUG ABUSE AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN IN SOKOTO: PATTERNS, PATHWAYS, AND PREVALENCE

5.1 The National Drug Crisis and Its Northern Manifestation

To understand drug abuse among Muslim women in Sokoto, it is necessary first to appreciate the scale of the national drug crisis in which it is embedded. Nigeria faces a drug epidemic that the NDLEA has described as a public health emergency. A 2018 household survey conducted jointly by the UNODC and the Federal Ministry of Health found that approximately 14.3 per cent of Nigerians aged 15 to 64 approximately 14.3 million people had used a psychoactive substance other than alcohol and tobacco in the preceding year. This figure placed Nigeria among the countries with the highest drug use rates in Africa. The survey found that the use of opioids, particularly tramadol and codeine, had grown explosively in the preceding decade¹⁹.

In Northern Nigeria, the drug problem manifested with particular intensity in the form of prescription drug abuse specifically the misuse of tramadol, a synthetic opioid painkiller, and cough syrups containing codeine. These substances became ubiquitous in Northern markets, sold freely by unlicensed traders at prices accessible even to the very poor. Their apparent compatibility with Islamic lifestyle they are not alcohol, they are not smoked, they can be taken discreetly made them particularly easy for users to rationalise and for communities to overlook. By the time the scale of the problem

¹⁶ C. Jega, 'Gender, Poverty and Structural Adjustment in Northern Nigeria', African Development, vol. 20, no. 1, CODESRIA, Dakar, 1995, p. 76

¹⁷ A. Fajola, 'Social Safety Nets and Gender in Northern Nigeria: An Assessment', Nigerian Journal of Social Policy, vol. 7, University of Lagos Press, Lagos, 2019, p. 104

¹⁸ IDMC, Nigeria Internal Displacement Report, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Geneva, 2023, p. 22

¹⁹ Federal Ministry of Health and UNODC, Drug Use in Nigeria 2018: National Drug Use Survey, UNODC, Vienna, 2019, p. 7

became undeniable, hundreds of thousands of people in Northern Nigeria were addicted to opioids, and the social and economic consequences were catastrophic.

5.2 Pathways into Drug Use for Women in Sokoto

Research in the sociology of addiction consistently identifies a cluster of risk factors that predict drug use: poverty, unemployment, trauma, social isolation, exposure to drug-using social networks, and the absence of meaningful alternative sources of pleasure, comfort, or meaning. For Muslim women in Sokoto, all of these factors are present in abundance.

Women who are unemployed and without productive occupation face what psychologists call 'temporal poverty' an excess of time without purpose or structure. This condition, as Ibn Khaldun observed centuries ago, breeds restlessness and vulnerability to destructive behaviours. Without the rhythm and meaning that work provides, days stretch into weeks of idleness in which the temptation of mood-altering substances whether to relieve boredom, to dull the pain of frustrated aspiration, or to escape the psychic weight of poverty grows more powerful²⁰.

Domestic circumstances compound this vulnerability. In a context where women are expected to endure marital difficulties in silence — where divorce carries social stigma, where domestic violence is often treated as a private matter, and where women have few economic resources with which to negotiate better terms within marriage — the psychological burden that women carry is enormous. Studies of drug abuse among women in Nigeria consistently show that emotional pain, domestic stress, and depression are among the primary triggers for female drug use. A study by Akanbi and colleagues at the University of Ilorin found that among female drug users surveyed in Northwestern Nigeria, over 60 per cent cited 'emotional pain' and 'family stress' as primary motivations. (S.A. Akanbi, B.O. Salami and M.I. Ogunlade, 'Gender-Specific Drivers of Drug Abuse in Northwest Nigeria', Nigerian Journal of Psychiatry, vol. 16, Nigerian Association of Psychiatrists, Lagos, 2020, p. 45)

The role of peer networks should not be underestimated. In conditions where women are confined largely to domestic and neighbourhood environments, the social networks of the immediate community become the primary conduit for all kinds of information and influence, including the introduction to drug use. Once a woman begins using substances, she often recruits others — friends, sisters, neighbours — either actively or simply through the visibility of her own behaviour. The clustering of drug use within particular households and communities reflects this network effect.

5.3 Types of Substances Abused

Based on NDLEA reports and field observations from Sokoto State, the substances most commonly abused by women in the state include tramadol tablets (often in doses far exceeding medically prescribed limits), codeine-containing cough syrups, diazepam and other benzodiazepines, cannabis (used in some cases in food preparations), and more recently, methamphetamine locally known as 'mkpuru mmiri' which has spread from the Southeast to other parts of Nigeria with alarming speed. Inhalant abuse glue, petrol, and other household solvents affects the very poorest and youngest among the at-risk population²¹.

5.4 Consequences of Drug Abuse

The consequences of drug abuse for women in Sokoto are catastrophic across all dimensions of wellbeing. Physically, drug abuse results in compromised immune function, nutritional deficiency, increased vulnerability to infectious diseases including HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, and the particular risks associated with drug use during pregnancy, including miscarriage, stillbirth, and neonatal abstinence syndrome. The burden of these physical harms falls not only on the women themselves but on their children and on an already strained public health system.

Psychologically, drug dependence is characterised by a progressive deterioration of cognitive function, emotional regulation, and motivational capacity. The addicted woman becomes increasingly unable to fulfil the responsibilities she once managed caring for children, maintaining a household, participating in community life. The shame and stigma attached to drug use in an Islamic community, though they may reflect genuine moral disapproval, also function to drive addicted women further into isolation, cutting them off from the family and community support that might otherwise help them recover.

Socially, drug abuse among women has consequences that extend well beyond the individual. Children raised in households where a parent is addicted to drugs are at significantly elevated risk of developmental delays, emotional disturbance, educational failure, and in a tragic confirmation of the cyclical nature of social dysfunction drug abuse

²⁰ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. F. Rosenthal, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1967, vol. 2, p. 336

²¹ NDLEA, *Annual Report on Drug Abuse Trends in Nigeria*, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Abuja, 2022, p.

themselves. The social cost of this intergenerational transmission of harm is enormous and largely invisible to policymakers who focus on individual drug users rather than the social systems in which they are embedded.

6. POLICY RESPONSES: ACHIEVEMENTS, LIMITATIONS, AND GAPS

6.1 Government Responses at Federal Level

The federal government's response to the drug abuse crisis has been primarily law enforcement in character. The NDLEA, established in 1990, has been the primary institutional instrument of drug control, with a mandate that focuses on interdiction, prosecution, and incarceration. While the NDLEA's activities have resulted in significant drug seizures and prosecutions, critics from the public health and social work communities have argued consistently that a law enforcement approach alone is incapable of addressing a crisis that is fundamentally social and economic in nature. Arresting drug users many of them vulnerable women driven to substance abuse by poverty and despair does not address the underlying conditions that produce drug use, and may indeed compound the suffering of addicted individuals and their families²².

The National Drug Control Master Plan and subsequent policy frameworks have attempted to incorporate demand reduction and treatment alongside supply control, but in practice the resources allocated to rehabilitation and treatment have been dwarfed by those allocated to enforcement. Treatment centres for drug dependence are sparse across Nigeria and virtually absent in Sokoto State, and those that do exist are poorly equipped to serve women, whose needs particularly in terms of childcare provision, culturally appropriate treatment environments, and gender-specific trauma services differ significantly from those of male drug users.

6.2 State-Level Responses in Sokoto

At the state level, Sokoto State government has implemented occasional targeted programmes addressing female unemployment and drug abuse, but these have generally lacked the institutional coherence, political commitment, and financial resources necessary to make lasting impact. The Sokoto State Agency for the Control of AIDS (SACA), the State Ministry of Women Affairs, and the Sokoto State Zakat and Endowments Board have all undertaken relevant activities, but coordination among these bodies has been poor and sustainability has been a persistent challenge.

It is worth acknowledging, however, that the economic empowerment programmes of the Wamakko and Tambuwal administrations made some progress in reaching women through market-based interventions and vocational training. The introduction of Sharia-compliant microfinance through the Sokoto State Microfinance Development Agency provided some women with access to capital that conventional banking had denied them. These gains, real though they are, have been insufficient in scale to address the magnitude of the problem.

6.3 The Role of Islamic Institutions

Among the most significant untapped resources for addressing both unemployment and drug abuse in Sokoto are the Islamic institutions the mosques, the Islamic schools, the zakat funds, the waqf endowments, and the scholarly community that remain embedded in the social fabric of the state at the community level. The mosque, in particular, is an institution of unparalleled reach and trust in Muslim communities. Every neighbourhood has one; every family attends one; every community crisis is, sooner or later, discussed within one.

Classical Islamic jurisprudence provides robust tools for social welfare that have been systematically underutilised. Zakat the obligatory alms tax is explicitly designated for the relief of the poor and the needy. If properly collected and disbursed, the zakat due from Sokoto State's wealthy residents could fund substantial welfare and employment creation programmes. Waqf the Islamic endowment has historically been the primary mechanism through which Muslim societies funded public goods: schools, hospitals, roads, water facilities. The revival of these instruments in their contemporary form could provide both the resources and the Islamic legitimacy necessary to mount a serious response to the crises under examination²³.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED ISLAMIC AND CONTEMPORARY RESPONSE

7.1 Educational Reform and the Reintegration of Muslim Women into Learning

The most fundamental prerequisite for addressing both unemployment and drug abuse among Muslim women in Sokoto is a serious commitment to female education. This requires, first, the intellectual and theological work of convincing communities through engagement with Quranic evidence, prophetic hadith, and the legacy of scholars like Nana Asma'u

²² O.A. Oyediji, *Drug Control Policy in Nigeria: Balancing Enforcement and Public Health*, Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 2018, p. 88

²³ Y. al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Zakat*, trans. M. Kahf, Dar al-Taqwa, London, 1999, vol. 2, p. 545

that the education of Muslim women is not merely permissible but obligatory. Mosques, Islamic schools, and the Sultanate Council all have a role to play in this intellectual re-orientation.

Practically, it requires the expansion of girl-friendly schools, including boarding schools that can serve students from rural areas; the training and deployment of female teachers; and the integration of vocational and practical skills training into Islamic educational curricula so that Muslim women emerge from school with both religious literacy and economic capability. The State Government should commit to eliminating the gender gap in primary and secondary enrolment within a defined timeframe and should make this commitment a condition of any requests for international development assistance.

7.2 Economic Empowerment Through Islamic Finance

The economic empowerment of Muslim women in Sokoto must be pursued through channels that are both practically accessible and religiously acceptable. Sharia-compliant microfinance operating on the principles of *murabaha*, *musharakah*, and *qard hasan* offers a model that can expand credit access to women who are currently excluded from conventional banking. The Sokoto State government, in partnership with the Sultanate Council and the Islamic banking sector, should develop a large-scale microfinance programme specifically targeting women, with relaxed collateral requirements and graduated loan facilities that grow with the borrower's track record.

The revival of waqf as an economic institution offers another promising avenue. Wealthy individuals and institutions in Sokoto could be encouraged and religiously motivated to establish waqf endowments dedicated to women's vocational training, small business incubation, and cooperative enterprise. The global revival of Islamic social finance, led by institutions such as the Islamic Development Bank and the International Institute of Islamic Thought, has demonstrated the viability of these instruments in contemporary contexts. Sokoto has the religious authority and the community trust to lead this revival at the state level²⁴.

7.3 A Comprehensive Drug Rehabilitation Framework

The response to drug abuse among Muslim women in Sokoto requires a paradigm shift from punishment to compassion a shift that is, it should be noted, entirely consistent with Islamic principles. The Sharia tradition, while firmly prohibiting intoxicants, is equally clear about the obligation of Muslim society to provide for the welfare of the vulnerable and the sick. The addicted woman is, in Islamic legal terms, in a state that requires both accountability and mercy.

Sokoto State should establish women-only drug rehabilitation facilities staffed by female healthcare workers and Islamic counsellors, offering medically supervised detoxification alongside Quranic and spiritual rehabilitation. These facilities should be embedded in a broader continuum of care that includes community-based aftercare, family counselling, economic reintegration support, and regular follow-up. The involvement of Islamic scholars in the design and delivery of rehabilitation programmes is not optional — it is essential if those programmes are to be trusted and utilised by Muslim women and their families.

7.4 Community Mobilisation and the Role of Religious Leadership

No government programme, however well designed, will succeed without the active engagement of community leaders the ulama, the ward heads, the women's associations, the market guilds, and the informal networks through which social norms are maintained and behaviour is shaped. The religious leadership of Sokoto, led by the Sultan of Sokoto as both spiritual and temporal authority, has a unique capacity to mobilise community action on these issues. Friday *khutbas* (sermons), Islamic radio and television programming, and community dialogue events can all be used to shift the culture of silence around drug abuse, encourage women to seek help without shame, and recruit community members into support networks for recovering addicts and unemployed women.

Women's organisations both Islamic and secular have a particularly important role to play. The Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), which has a significant presence in Sokoto, has demonstrated over decades that Muslim women's organisations can be powerful agents of community development when given adequate support and freedom to operate. Strengthening these organisations, including financially, should be a priority for both government and development partners.

8. CONCLUSION: THE MORAL IMPERATIVE OF ACTION

The convergence of unemployment and drug abuse among Muslim women in Sokoto State is not an accident of history or a problem without solutions. It is the predictable consequence of decades of structural neglect, cultural conservatism that has betrayed its own classical roots, and policy failures at every level of government. It is also, and perhaps most

²⁴ M.A. Mannan, *Islamic Economics: Theory and Practice*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1986, p. 256

importantly, a crisis that can be addressed if the will to do so is found through instruments that are available, credible, and rooted in the very Islamic tradition that Sokoto embodies.

Shehu Usman Dan Fodio launched his jihad not with weapons but with words with the insistence that a Muslim society that fails its women, that leaves them ignorant and economically marginalised, has betrayed the commands of God. His daughter Nana Asma'u spent her life demonstrating, in the most practical terms, that Muslim women could be scholars, teachers, and leaders without abandoning a single iota of Islamic propriety. Their legacy is not merely historical. It is a living challenge to every scholar, every official, every community leader in Sokoto today.

The Muslim women of Sokoto who are idle, who are struggling, who have turned to drugs in their desperation, are not moral failures. They are the victims of social and economic arrangements that have denied them the opportunities that Islam itself insists they deserve. Addressing their crisis with the seriousness it demands is not charity. It is justice — the justice that stands at the very heart of what the Sharia is meant to achieve.

This paper has attempted to diagnose the problem with the rigour it deserves, to situate it within the deepest resources of the Islamic intellectual tradition, and to outline pathways toward solutions that are both practically feasible and spiritually grounded. The work that remains is not scholarly. It is political, institutional, and communal. It requires courage, resources, and the refusal to look away from uncomfortable truths. Sokoto has given the Muslim world remarkable gifts over two centuries. Addressing this crisis with the same moral seriousness that defined its founding would be one of the greatest gifts it could give itself.

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