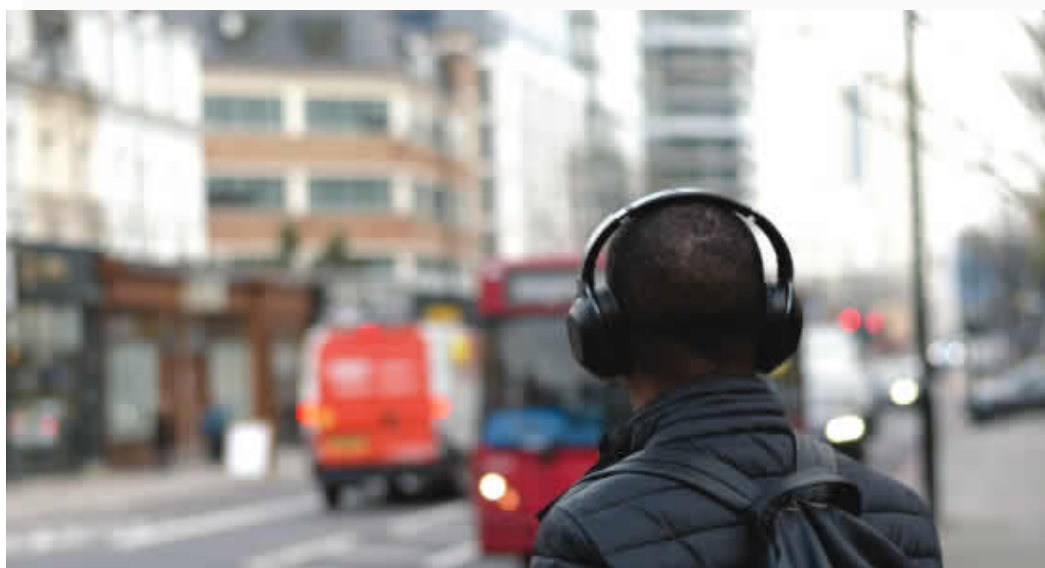


# Deadly addictions claiming Nigerians' lives

Published March 17, 2018



Addiction to headphones is a problem among many young Nigerians

***Eric Dumo***

Jamiu Adjare shrugs each time his eyes come in contact with his right leg. Though long healed, the scar left behind by the wound above his ankle has refused to go away. With patches of white and brown covering the spot – it is a painful reminder of that fateful September evening in 2017 when a speeding

commercial motorcycle swept him off the ground in the Oluyole area of Ibadan, Oyo State's capital, as he attempted to cross a road.

"It was like an elephant throwing me up with its trunk and then slamming me to the ground," Adijare, 27, said. "Everything happened so fast; there was nothing I could do to rescue myself. I still feel pain from time to time in my right leg," he added.

Walking home excitedly from a football viewing centre where he had gone to watch a match involving his favourite team – Arsenal Football Club of London – that fateful day, the electrical engineer had no inkling of what awaited him in the minutes ahead as he sauntered out of the place. Enjoying some good music from a headphone fitted tightly into his ears as he navigated through the streets of Oluyole, his excitement indeed reached another level especially seeing the way fellow Arsenal supporters in the area celebrated their latest win. But just before he could join in the merriment that victory brought, tragedy struck. Adijare found himself battling for his leg and in fact life.

"I was later told that several people tried to warn me of the danger I was putting myself in but failed to listen because I couldn't hear them," the Ilorin, Kwara State native, who has since relocated to the Ogudu area of Lagos in search of a better life, said. "I had my headphones on and was listening to music as I rushed home to celebrate Arsenal's victory that day with friends after the match. I never knew I would experience such tragedy. The commercial motorcycle damaged my bone and caused a big wound above my ankle. It was a very terrifying experience for me because I could have lost my life. Till date, the nightmare of that experience has not even made me to try headphones again even when in the house. The trauma is still there for me," he added.

The 27-year-old spent almost three months on the sickbed before he was able to gradually get back on his feet. Even though now several kilometres away from the city where the incident happened, Adijare still expresses fear each time he is about to cross a road and sights a motorcycle or even a vehicle.

"Crossing a road has almost become a problem for me as a result of my experience in Ibadan," he told our correspondent earlier in the week. "Even though I don't wear headphones anymore, I feel the same fate could befall me each time I try to cross road, and that's why I take extra caution before doing so. I don't mind standing at a particular spot the whole day before crossing if that is what it would take for me to avoid another accident. That is how much I fear these days," he said.

But while the Ilorin native still has his life to hold on to despite his lamentations and regrets, there are dozens others, who after failing to hear the warning cries of other road users after blocking their ears with headphones, found themselves six feet beneath the earth's surface.



Nwughala. Photos: Facebook.com, metromonitor.com, naijagist.com, chinadaily.com

For example, friends and family members of Okedili Ebube are still reeling in pains, wondering how their promising son left them on the afternoon of January

12, 2018. An apprentice at a barber's shop in Owerri, Imo State, the 24-year-old was killed by a truck carrying yams as he tried crossing a highway. Also wearing headphones like Adijare and not able to hear the warnings of others around the place at the time, who tried to save him from the impending danger, Ebube died shortly after being rushed to a hospital.

A close friend to the deceased, Peter Edet, told our correspondent that the young man was warned on several occasions to abandon his addiction of always blocking his ears with headphones while walking on the road but refused; claiming that listening to music gave him inspiration.

“As a close friend, I always warned Okedili of his obsession with wearing headphones all the time but he would tell me that listening to music was his biggest inspiration in life.

“I was in front of our house when one of our friends came to break the news of his death to me. I couldn't believe it; it was very hard for me considering how close we were. By the time we got to the hospital he was rushed to, he had died already.

“His death is not only painful but also devastating for us and his family members. Each time I visit their house and his mother sights me, she'll start crying. I have stopped going there for a while just not to make her break down in tears again. It is a very painful loss for us,” the young man added.

While the dust raised by the death of the 24-year-old was yet to fully settle, Nigeria again witnessed another tragedy relating to this sad and rising phenomenon. Though authorities of the National Youth Service Corp in Lagos have debunked the insinuation, several eyewitnesses accounts said a member of the scheme, Nneka Odili, who was hit by a train around the Ikeja axis of the rail line last week and later died from injuries sustained, had headphones on and failed to hear people's warnings before the sad incident. The young woman was said to be on her way to her place of primary assignment after completing her clearance at the Ikeja Local Government Secretariat when the tragedy occurred.



“Nneka’s death is something I still don’t believe is real. How can she just die like that, somebody I still related with not too long before then?”

“I really cannot say much, her death is one of the most painful things to have happened around me,” a close friend, Oma, told *Saturday PUNCH* shortly after her demise.

Like Ebube and Odili, friends and family members of Benson Nwughala, a 31-year-old man based in Montopoli, Italy, until September

•*While in China and most parts of Europe there are dedicated lanes for smartphone users, in Nigeria there are non*

2017 when he was killed by a train while wearing headphones and trying to cross the rail track, are still wondering how death snatched him away from their grip. Described as amiable and very friendly, the University of Benin graduate was said to be returning home after a night out with friends when the tragedy occurred.

“I still don’t believe this. I am still in shock. I really don’t know how to say this but rest in peace my love. I miss you so much,” a female friend of the deceased, Zazy Maryann, wrote on his Facebook wall after the incident.

While also reacting to the news, another friend, Oby Onuoha, in a post said, “This can’t be true. We chatted two months ago, now they say you are dead. How come? I can’t believe this.”

In April 2015, a middle-aged man wearing headphones was crushed by a train around the Oshodi area of Lagos. According to eyewitnesses, the victim was walking along the rail track while wearing

headphones and listening to music. He did not hear calls for him to vacate the lane when a speeding train approached.

“Obviously the man was not aware of the approaching train even as it blasted its horn, perhaps because of the headphones. Before he knew it, he was already hit by the train and was not given any chance to escape.

“Immediately he was hit, the body was mangled as the train dragged it underneath. People standing by the rail track that saw the incident raised their hands over their heads in a show of pity for the deceased.

“The man lost his life to sheer carelessness,” an eyewitness said shortly after the incident.

Even though the more popular, the blocking of ears with headphones while walking or crossing the road is not the only cause of deaths in this category, more than a few persons across the country have died or sustained grievous injuries while fiddling with their smartphones or other handy gadgets on the road. The extreme attention they pay to such devices while ignoring the threat of vehicles, motorcycles and other dangerous elements, has oftentimes led to fatalities.



•Many people have lost their lives in Nigeria while indulging in these dangerous acts

Though no reliable statistics exist, there are several reports of many Nigerians losing their lives or sustaining life-changing injuries while fiddling with their smartphones on the road.

For instance, in January 2013, a 28-year-old youth corps member in Ogun State, Egbe Ogbu, was reportedly killed by a car while chatting with friends on his Blackberry mobile device. The young man was said to be heading for an appointment when the incident happened around the Oke-Mosan area of Abeokuta, the capital. His death left friends and family members deeply devastated.

“Ogbu was busy pinging on the road; I did not know when he got in front of my car. This is just sad,” the 52-year-old driver of the vehicle involved, Kehinde Olubanke, said while appearing in court.

A staff of an emergency agency, who asked not to be named, told *Saturday PUNCH*, that in 2018 alone, they have responded to at least 50 cases of road accidents in different parts of the country caused by victims fiddling with their smartphones while walking or driving. While some lost their lives following such incidents, according to the official, several more will continue to live with the injuries sustained from such encounters.

“On our own, we have been doing a lot of sensitisation and education campaign in different parts of the country to make people understand the need to stay safe all the time while on the road, whether they are driving or walking.

“This year alone, we have responded to several emergencies and sadly, most of them are caused by victims engrossed with their mobile phones while on the road.

“While we shall continue to do our best to discourage people from engaging in these dangerous acts by sustaining our sensitisation campaigns, we hope that someday government can come up with a law to criminalise these types of behaviour. Maybe that would help reduce the level of fatalities that we are recording now,” he said.

But while engaging in these dangerous acts is not an offence in any way in Nigeria except at the University of Benin where after the death of a student in 2015, the use of headphones outside hostels was banned by the school management, in other parts of the world, authorities are beginning to frown at individuals, who risk their lives unnecessarily through this bizarre addiction.

For example, in Hawaii, United States of America, smartphone users caught texting on the road are stopped and made to pay a fine of \$35. Known as the ‘smartphone zombie’ law, the move has helped curb the city’s pedestrian deaths by a significant proportion.



The rising risk of injury and deaths has also prompted local authorities around the world to address public smartphone use. The town of Bodegraven in the Netherlands embedded Light Emitting Diode strips at crosswalks near smartphone users' toes to let them know when traffic lights change. In the Russian city of Moscow and German town of Augsburg, similar inventions have been witnessed while in the Chinese city of Chongqing, "cell phone lanes" that separated smartphone-using pedestrians from their faster-moving peers were introduced in 2014. The adjustments caused by this social problem is not limited to Europe and America – in India, "no selfie zones" has been introduced in an effort to curb stampedes and prevent accidental deaths, which are a big problem in the country.

According to the *Washington Post*, a US-based publication, at least 10 other states across the country are considering enacting laws that would compel smartphone users who endanger their lives unnecessarily to pay fines of around \$50 or serve possible jail time.

Describing the use of headphones and smartphones while driving or walking and even trying to cross the road as dangerous, a psychologist, Funsho Akinbo, said efforts must be made to rid the society of this strange addiction.

"You know you are addicted when you check your phone hourly, become highly obsessed when you can't find your phone near you or find yourself battling the urge to use them even when you are engaged in important work that involves your complete attention such as the time in school or at work.

"These habits do cause major life risk. Due to such a haphazard behaviour exhibited by young people, there are plenty fights between them and anyone trying to stop them.

"Unfortunately, it is not just young people who battle this addiction; in fact parents are guilty too. A study showed that about 27 per cent of parents face cell phone addiction because of their constant urge to post something on social media or respond to a text message.

"This is a dangerous behaviour that must be checked to avert more tragedies in our society," he said.

Sociologist, Grace Pateshe, while calling for urgent intervention in this regard, said parents must teach children how to behave properly and not just cater for their welfare needs.

"A lot of our young people need to be educated on the dangers associated with this disturbing trend. Ordinarily, headphones are supposed to aid hearing in a noisy environment but when the device is now endangering the lives of our youths because of abuse, then society needs to rise to the occasion by making them see reason.



•*Many people have lost their lives in Nigeria while indulging in these dangerous acts*

“I believe it is time we begin to check how we raise our children in this society. It is not enough to provide for the needs of children, they must be taught how to behave as well. If this training method is checked properly, I am sure there’ll be changes in this regard,” she said.

A Lagos-based pastor, Tunde Odesina, told *Saturday PUNCH* that

besides physical efforts, the issue would require some spiritual inputs as well, as according to him, the number of deaths resulting from this deadly addiction cannot be overlooked anymore.

“A device which ought to be a blessing is now robbing people of their blessings.

“Some youths now come to church with their ears covered with headphones plugged to their phones. The annoying thing is that some of them stay all through the service with their ears still covered. So, how do they hear what is being preached or said in church? Why come to service if you are not prepared to hear the sermon or other things that God, through His vessels, would be saying?

“As spiritual leaders, we would not sit down on the fence and wait on government to do everything, we will take the matter to God in prayers and trust that things would change for good,” he said.

Ear, Nose and Throat specialist, Dr. Ifeanyi Nkem, said regular headphones usage and especially listening to loud music while on the road or driving could be very damaging.