

# Identity formation in Proverbs 22 and the *Mkpuru Mmiri* drug crisis in Igbo communities

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Although progress, no matter how small, has been made by scholars who examined different aspects of the *Mkpuru Mmiri* [methamphetamine or crystal meth] drug crisis in Nigerian Igbo communities, literature is yet to approach the study from the perspective of Proverbs 22 of the Old Testament. In this study, literature was extended to examining the *Mkpuru Mmiri* crisis from the lens of Proverbs 22. Today, many youths in Igbo communities are addicted to *Mkpuru Mmiri*, a stimulant drug. As part of the findings, it was discovered that the effects of *Mkpuru Mmiri* include paranoia, hallucinations, delinquency and other behaviours inimical to social well-being and even death. Addiction to *Mkpuru Mmiri* is seen in the increasing number of unstable young people on the streets of the various states in Igbo communities. The author of the book of Proverbs teaches how youths are to live responsible and happy lives. According to Proverbs, evil conduct will always result in divine vengeance and punishment during a person's earthly life. The themes include 'home and personal training (vv. 1–6)', 'consequences of one's actions (vv. 4–23)' and the 'reasons to avoid bad company (vv. 24–29)'.

**Contribution:** Addiction to *Mkpuru Mmiri* has no recognised cure. This may be seen in the growing number of unruly young people on the streets of Nigeria's south-east states. Practical theology is one of the disciplines implicated.

**Keywords:** Proverbs; youth; peer pressure; *Mkpuru Mmiri*; drug abuse; drug addiction; Igbo; Nigeria; identity formation.

## Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, drug abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs (Idowu et al. 2018:776). Drug abuse has serious impact on the lives of youths in Nigeria, and in south-east Nigeria in particular (Adeyemo et al. 2016; Ngwu, Osmond & Sunday 2020; Nwagu, Dibia & Odo 2020; Okafor 2020). One would have expected that the impacts of drug abuse on the victims would have served as a warning signal to those who may be nursing the ambition of taking the drug. But the reverse has been the case. Formerly, it was cocaine. Presently, new drugs are being abused on a daily basis. They include alcohol, tramadol, superglue, cannabis, crack, codeine, Rohypnol, aphrodisiacs, skunk and faeces. However, a very new drug has taken dominance among the youths of Eastern Nigeria. It is known as *Mkpuru Mmiri*.

Today, the influence and acceptance of *Mkpuru Mmiri* drug cannot be overemphasised. The *Mkpuru Mmiri* concept is an Igbo aphorism. In medical research, *Mkpuru Mmiri* is known as methamphetamine hydrochloride. In the ordinary language of Nigerians, *Mkpuru Mmiri* is called crystal meth. In the Igbo language, *Mkpuru* means 'seed', and *Mmiri* means 'water', so the combination of the two words gives the new social lexicon, *Mkpuru Mmiri*, literally translating to 'seed of water' (The Nation 2021). This slang comes both from the physical appearance of the deadly drug, which often appears as pieces of crystal or ice cubes (The Nation 2021). Inquiries have revealed that *Mkpuru Mmiri* is a drug that speeds up communication between the brain and other body parts. Victims of the drug may grind it into a powdered form. It can be eaten through the mouth or inhaled through the nose. This substance can also be injected into the body when it is mixed with any liquid substance. According to Eshemokha (2021), *Mkpuru Mmiri* can 'be smoked into a small glass pipe. Meth at first causes a rush of good feelings, but then users feel edgy, overly excited, angry, or afraid'.

Addiction to *Mkpuru Mmiri* has no known cure. This has in no way discouraged youths from taking it. Thus, the more the number of abusers of *Mkpuru Mmiri*, the more the increasing number of insane people in Igbo communities. Unfortunately, deaths and crime rates have increased, with

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some families devastated by the effects on them and their children. Also, the very few psychiatrists are reporting a phenomenal increase in youthful patients, especially students of all tiers of education – primary, secondary and tertiary institutions (The Nation 2021). It is also sad to note that the intake of *Mkpuru Mmiri* has (Okoli et al. 2021):

Assumed a notorious dimension and is fast destroying the youth. This destructive substance has in fact become so popular among Igbo youths that it is now nick-named *Mkpuru Mmiri*, literally translated as blocked water or ice block. Its negative effect is such that after its consumption, users engage in criminal and immoral acts detrimental to society at large. (n.p.)

Stakeholders, the government and concerned citizens are confused about the necessary action to take. This is the reason why the researcher considers Proverbs 22 a contribution to the solution of the crisis. As Igbo people (Habtu 2006a):

We can make a contribution to an enhanced understanding of the message of the book of Proverbs, for we still maintain a semblance of traditional community and there is much proverbial lore in the Igbo language. (p. 773)

Proverbs in conversation are like axioms in philosophy, maxims in law and postulates in the mathematics, which nobody disputes, but everyone endeavours to expound so as to have them on his side (Henry 1950:954). Proverbs 22 contains behavioural therapy because it 'seeks to identify and help change potentially self-destructive or unhealthy behaviours. It functions on the idea that all behaviours are learned and that unhealthy behaviours can be changed' (Legg 2018:1). The author of the book of Proverbs teaches how youths are to live responsible and happy lives. It contains practical ways of avoiding foolishness and immorality. Proverbs maintains that 'wicked deeds will invariably lead to divine retribution and punishment during a person's earthly life' (Sparknotes 2021:1). The recommendations of this research, it is believed, will speak anew to the increasing problem of *Mkpuru Mmiri* abuse in Igboland.

Literature has approached the issue of *Mkpuru Mmiri* from a political, social, economic and psychological point of view. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no research has approached this crisis from the perspective of wisdom literature. This is the gap in this research. This article uses the philosophical axioms in Proverbs 22 in analysing the rising challenge of *Mkpuru Mmiri* in south-east Nigeria. Firstly, this study gives the philosophical axioms in Proverbs 22. Secondly, axioms in Proverbs 22 relevant to addressing *Mkpuru Mmiri* addiction are brought out. Thirdly, a sketch is made of *Mkpuru Mmiri*, the causes of its addiction and its impacts. Thereafter, the context and the text are synthesised and recommendations are drawn from it.

## The philosophical axioms in Proverbs 22

### Proverbs 22: An analysis

Proverbs is entitled *Misle Shelomoh* from its first words, meaning the 'proverbs of Solomon'. It shows its indebtedness

to Egyptian wisdom literature from the very beginning by using the literary fiction of a father addressing instructions to his son – 'Hear, my son, your father's instruction' (1:8ff.) – and later on in a series of proverbs modelled upon the maxims of Amenemope (22:19ff.). Proverbs belongs to the wisdom corpus. Many of the proverbs are attributed to Solomon, but it is better to conceive of the book of Proverbs as a treasury of Israelite wisdom. The book of Proverbs is believed to be written between 1015 and 975 BC, which is seen in the book's style and theology (ed. Zuck 2003). Furthermore, '[i]t is likely that many of the proverbs came from oral traditions that existed before Solomon's time' (Church of Jesus Christ 2021:1). The audience feels at home and yet distant when they read the book of Proverbs: at home because proverbs are a universal phenomenon in various cultures and societies – and particularly in traditional societies; distant, because we live in completely different times and cultures (Habtu 2006:773).

Proverbs contains wisdom, which is part of the traditional practices of the people of Israel. According to some scholars (Rylaarsdam 1982):

Israel borrowed its wisdom tradition from other nations. This view must have derived from the discovery of proverbs from 'Sumeria and Babylon that date before 2000 BCE,' many of which share similarities with 'their counterparts in the Book of Proverbs'. (p. 386)

Shedding more light, Sproul (2019) maintains that the book of Proverbs is equipped to give practical guidelines for daily experience and activities. He (2019:n.p.) further adds that '[i]t is a neglected treasure of the Old Testament, with untold riches lying in wait in its pages to guide our lives'.

Throughout this wisdom corpus, the issues of frustration, irritability, annoyance, impatience, hypocrisy, shouting at the young and the old unnecessarily, intimidating others, insensitivity, worrying and troubling others, tale-bearing and depression, among others, are completely condemned (Davidson 2013). Shedding more light, Ademiluka (2018) confirmed that the book of Proverbs belongs to the wisdom literature of the OT. He observes that wisdom literature contains wisdom teaching which focuses on the ideals of life, expected behaviours and precepts on how to live responsibly in society (Ademiluka 2018). According to scholarly analysis (Fox 2007):

Proverbs grew by a long process of composition and collection, in which the editors wrote and gathered proverbs that served their goals. In this way, the book achieved a fair degree of ideological unity. (p. 669)

Proverbs 22 contains wisdom literature. Also (Zack 1991):

This rich vocabulary for wisdom – skill, understanding, discernment, insight, knowledge, discipline, prudence, shrewdness, planning, guidance – points to the practical nature of Old Testament wisdom ... Certainly the uses of *hokmah* in relation to skills would suggest that biblical wisdom includes the art of being skilful and successful in one's relationships and responsibilities in life. (p. 212)

A look at ancient Israelite society reveals that older members of the family, community or group were occupied systematically with 'socializing the young into a set of assumptions, attitudes and behaviours' (Birch et al. 2005 in Ademiluka 2018).

## Axioms in Proverbs 22

The following themes are found in Proverbs 22. They include home and personal training (vv. 1–3, v. 6), consequences of one's actions (vv. 4–24) and reasons to avoid bad company (vv. 25–29). The benefits to be gained by this study are the attainment of wisdom and discipline. Ellis (2021:701) explains that Proverbs 22 belongs to the first collection of Solomonic Proverbs (10:1–22:16) and a collection entitled 'Saying of the wise' (24:23–34).

## Home and personal training (vv. 1–3, v. 6)

The pericope calls on the youth to imbibe the training they receive from their homes and also develop personal training in ethics. Only a good name and reputation ensure one's remembrance after death. In verse 1, Hebrew שֵׁם means name and famous (Kelley 1992). A good name (שֵׁם) is *summum bonum*. It defines human behaviour and attitude. Also (Bruckner 2003):

The ideal goal of human character and actions in classical ethics is called *summum bonum* ('highest good'). The search for this ideal has led in three directions: happiness, perfectionism (or self-realization and relationship to someone (God) or something (e.g., the universe). (p. 225)

It could make one famous in a positive or negative light. Home training brings respect to the individual and to society at large (v. 3a). In home training, members of the family are taught how to run from evil and the consequences of indulging in crime. If parents train their children in the way of godliness, they can reasonably expect them not to turn from it as long as they live (Hale 2007). It is expected that parents play important roles in their children's moral and ethical development because parents are the first moral teachers and role models children have (Oladipo 2009).

Any person who refuses to follow the path of wisdom faces the consequences (v. 3b). Personal training is a way of complementing home training which enables the individual to escape undue consequences and repercussions for crimes committed (v. 6). Also, in verse 6, parents are called upon to train the child in the ways of righteousness and morality, so that when the child grows, he will not join evil doers or be pressurised into wrong actions. In verse 6, Hebrew תִּנְחֵם means 'train', 'consecrate', 'to dedicate' (Davidson 1970:267). Thus, training is the dedication of a child to the service of God. Training in wisdom helps one stay on the right path (McCreesh 2000:459). In verse 6, there are 'only two "ways" a child can go, the way of the wise and the righteous or the way of the fool and the wicked' (Habu 2006:803).

## Consequences of one's actions (vv. 4–23)

When one decides to follow the good path, it brings long life and glory (v. 4). Hebrew תְּהָרָה means 'glory', 'honour', 'splendor', 'majesty', 'abundance' and the wealth of the mind, heart and soul (Davidson 1970:368). In verse 5a, anyone who follows the wrong path will be wounded to a great extent. But anyone who is wise sees evil and runs away from it (v. 5b). The obedient man lives in wisdom and fear of God (Kohlenberger III 1987:549). In verse 5b, it is emphasised that anyone who loves to live a long life should run away from evil or anything or anyone related to evil. In verse 8, anyone who decides to do evil, join bad gangs or perpetuate bad things will surely reap disaster. This disaster could be in the form of a tragedy, catastrophe or calamity befalling the person. Thus, verse 8 has both warning and encouragement for those who suffer because the wicked person will reap trouble and the rod of his fury, which brought suffering to others, and will be destroyed (Habu 2006:803). In verse 8, ill-gotten gains will not prosper and anyone who does iniquity (זִנְיָה), who does an unjust thing in hopes to get by it, shall reap vanity; what he gets will never do him any good nor give him any satisfaction. He will meet nothing but disappointment. Those who create trouble for others have indirectly prepared trouble for themselves. It also shows that men should reap as they sow (Henry 1950:1004). In verse 8, this mixing of metaphors (from the harvest to the shepherd's rod, (וְשֹׁבֵט עֶבְרִיתוֹ) is probably with the idea that in the season when the sinner reaps his harvest from the seeds of iniquity, he will have no defence against it (Guzik 2020). In verse 15, it is in the nature of youth to misbehave. However, the rector noted that when the child is disciplined, sense and a sense of morality get into the child. A child, left on his own, will incline to folly because of his sinful nature, and this sinful nature must be subdued and overcome (Hale 2007:955). In verse 17, the rector calls on the youth to listen to his advice by shunning immorality and also at all times remembering these instructions and injunction (v. 18). It further shows that shame is the result of antisocial behaviour, violations of the religious code and physical laws of morality (Matthews 2003:292).

## Reasons to avoid bad company (vv. 24–29)

In verse 24, אַף תִּתְּרַעַל בְּעֵלְאָתָהּ [do not make friends with a hot-tempered man] does not relate specifically to a 'hot-tempered' person; it can be applied to any kind of wrongdoer. This is because any evil someone indulges in shows that the person does not exhibit self-control, which is synonymous with one who is hot tempered. We may not realise it, but bad friends can subtly lead us to become like them (Hale 2007:956). In verses 24–25, the author appeals to his son not to follow someone who is given to bad behaviour, because soon the son will learn the ways of the stubborn person. The tone of the rhetor in this structure represents the statement of a mentor to a mentee (Rylaarsdam 1976:454). An eminently fair



character prepossesses everybody in favour of him who bears it, engages friendly treatment, begets trust and confidence and gives credit and weight (Exell 2021:1). A person who frequently loses control of his or her rage can be a dangerous companion. Wisdom chooses its friends carefully and should not associate with an angry man (Guzik 2020). In verses 28–29, the rhetor mentions to his son that if he wants to be successful, have good work, have a good relationship or be blessed and loved by the mighty and well-to-do in society, he should learn a skill that will keep him busy rather than keep himself busy with crimes. In biblical times, people who were skilled in their work were considered wise and even godly because a skilled worker would gain recognition and be given greater and greater responsibility (Hale 2006:956). Furthermore, the morals in this pericope are not like the commands that the master gives his servant, which are all intended for the benefit of the master, but like those that the master gives his scholar, which are intended for the benefit of the scholar (Henry 1950:1005). The gospels contain many sayings of Jesus that are similar to the Old Testament instruction of the wise (e.g. Mt 5:13–15; Mk 9:50). Proverbs are also quoted in some of the New Testament letters (e.g. Rm 12:20, quoting Pr 25:21–22; Heb 12:5–6, quoting Pr 3:11–12) (Verbrugge 2000:440). These verses show the strong need for people to avoid bad company.

It is at this juncture that the context of the study will be explored. The crisis of *Mkpuru Mmiri*, its impacts and causes, as well as how the axioms in Proverbs 22 could shed light on these will be sketched.

## The crisis of *Mkpuru Mmiri*

*Mkpuru Mmiri*, otherwise known as methamphetamine or crystal meth, was developed in Japan in 1919 and grossly abused during the Second World War when it was issued to pilots on suicidal missions then called *kamikaze* (Nwabughioqu 2021:1). Furthermore, '[a]fter the world war, it was used briefly as a medication for depression and for controlling obesity, but it was quickly abandoned and banned thereafter, especially in the 1970s'. *Mkpuru Mmiri* falls:

Under the drug called *Speed* which is a street name for various stimulant drugs that teens, young adults, and others use to feel more alert and focused, and in some cases, to feel high. (Okoli et al. 2021)

Further revelation shows that as a stimulant, *Mkpuru Mmiri* has a powerful euphoric effect similar to that of cocaine (Nwabughioqu 2021:1).

There are multiple trending videos on social media platforms of young men (and in some cases, women and children) being tied to beams and trees in public places and beaten cruelly for trading in and removing *Mkpuru Mmiri* from various communities in Igboland. According to information coming out of the zone, many Igbo youngsters are behaving wildly, with others absolutely insane as a result of drug use. There have also been reports that 11-year-old children are also getting involved in this drug addiction (Seyi 2021).

## Reasons why Igbo youths take *Mkpuru Mmiri*

There are many reasons as to why youth engage in the intake of *Mkpuru Mmiri*. (For more details on the youth informants, see Appendix 1.) They are discussed next.

### In order to stay awake to perpetuate evil

People who take *Mkpuru Mmiri* explain that the drug enables them to stay awake all night. According to Ujumadu (2021:1), the crystal form of the drug looks like glass fragments and is chemically similar to amphetamine, a drug used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy, a sleep disorder. (See Figure 1 for what the drug looks like.) Chidimma in a personal communication noted that 'the Yahoo fraudsters take the drug so that they can stay awake in the odd hours of the night to commit cyber crimes and other electronic fraud'. Even if the person is not using a lot, *Mkpuru Mmiri* users do not sleep, which is a general characteristic of methamphetamine hydrochloride (Eshemokha 2021). Also, people who engage in armed robbery take the drug to stay awake before, during and after the operation.

### To lose appetite to have six packs

Some youth take *Mkpuru Mmiri* to lose appetite. The loss of appetite is alleged to give them a leaner body shape, such as 'six-pack' abdominal muscles. Chinonso, in a personal communication, mentioned that '[a]ddicts can consume methamphetamine through smoking, ingesting, snorting or injecting the powdered form, which has been dissolved in water or alcohol'. Because the drug's 'high' comes on quickly and fades quickly, users frequently take many doses in a 'binge and crash' cycle. Some people use methamphetamine as a 'run', skipping meals and sleeping for up to several days while taking the drug every few hours (Ujumadu 2021:1). It is also explained that these six packs make them attractive to the opposite sex.

### To be bold

*Mkpuru Mmiri* is believed to make their victims bold. The abusers of *Mkpuru Mmiri* maintain that it makes them able to



Source: The Nation, 2021, *Mkpuru-Mmiri*, viewed from <https://thenationonline.net/mkpuru-mmiri/>.

FIGURE 1: *Mkpuru Mmiri*.

face anyone in any circumstance. It is also mentioned that it enables them not to be intimidated by anyone. In fact, Chidi, in a personal interview, lamented that '*Mkpuru Mmiri* makes one feared by people in the community, and the person achieves his aim and anything he says becomes final in any environment he or she finds themselves in'.

### To fit in with the 'big boys'

*Mkpuru Mmiri* is alleged to make youths feel that they belong among the 'big boys' in society. Peer pressure forces some youths to take *Mkpuru Mmiri* so as not to be perceived as small boys by their friends. Chima, in a personal communication, mentioned that '[t]he clique of big boys is believed to be respected by people in the society and even in the church and also feared by community people'.

### Frustration and idleness

Youths often feel that their dreams are not coming through. This makes them feel frustrated, and they seek ways of making themselves forget their sorrows. Furthermore, idleness makes youth seek ways of making themselves busy. Thus, they find solace in the intake of *Mkpuru Mmiri*. Amaka, in a personal interview, claimed that 'it is because the youths are unemployed; that is why they have time to engaged in drugs'. Okoli et al. (2021) corroborated that youths go into hard drugs as a result of depression because of economic hardship, caused by the growing corruption in Nigeria. The government is rarely interested in the welfare of the citizens. Nigerian students are at home for many months because of the ongoing strike by lecturers in Nigerian universities.

### Impact of the crisis

The impact of taking *Mkpuru Mmiri* cannot be underestimated. Some of them are stated as follows:

#### Creates a world of fantasy

*Mkpuru Mmiri* is a very addictive drug and has a negative impact on the central nervous system of those who use it. It induces a high-intensity state of bliss that is very addictive and makes the user want to soar. This makes them look at other human beings as small animals. Njoku, Sunday and Thomas-Odia (2021) noted that '[i]t makes them look down on anyone that comes their way. They do not think that anyone can contend with them after taking the drugs'. Jude, in a personal communication, noted that '[i]t makes the addicts to display behaviour of excitement'.

#### Abnormal behaviours

Abnormal behaviours comprise torn clothing and untidy appearances, constant picking at hair or skin, loss of appetite and weight loss, the inability to move, angry outbursts or mood swings, unusual sleeping patterns – staying up for days or even weeks at a time, continuously talking, borrowing money, selling goods or stealing.

### Mental illness

People who take this drug become violent. It may them run into madness. Amarachi, in a personal communication, revealed that 'those who take *Mkpuru Mmiri* do talk to themselves when walking, and be laughing, a sign of madness'. They look tattered and show overgrown hairs and nails, which demonstrate a high state of mental problems. Unfortunately, women who indulge in the taking of this drug become mad faster than men (Ujumadu 2021:1).

### Health implications

People who take this drug find it difficult to sleep, which makes them look older than their actual age. Furthermore, the intake of this drug causes acute headaches, damage to the lungs and liver, increased chronic cough, memory impairment, amnesia, dizziness, nightmares, tremors, irregular heartbeat, bad sight, hyperstimulation, paranoia and psychosis, as well as decreasing the body's resistance power. Okoli et al. (2021) lamented that '[t]hey feel those things they sip give them energy, but it is gradually eating them up. That is why youth develop kidney stones, heart diseases, and even strokes'.

### Immorality

People who use *Mkpuru Mmiri* engage in robbery, rape, drug trafficking, prostitution and terrorism, among others. In the communities where *Mkpuru Mmiri* is popular, there are increased rape cases. Reports indicated that this drug increases libido among youths (Ujumadu 2021:1). Most of these armed robbers and prostitutes are propelled by the drugs they take. It makes them high and bold to undertake their mission.

### Suicide

The users of *Mkpuru Mmiri* usually develop high temperatures. It is a highly addictive stimulant that makes the user hyperactive and prone to destructive inclinations, such as suicide or killing without remorse at the smallest provocation (Okoli et al. 2021). Also, it is sad to note that the withdrawal from this drug poses a challenge to the user. Unfortunately, even when methamphetamine usage has been stopped, psychotic symptoms continue for a longer time. They can spontaneously recur. It is highly addictive and is placed on schedule II in the Federal Drug Agency's (FDA) list of drugs in the United States of America (USA). Withdrawal symptoms include depression and anxiety, drug cravings, etc. This can eventually lead to homicide or suicidal thoughts (Naija 2021). It sometimes leads to the death of the user. Because the user of this drug is in a fantasy, he or she may see a fast-moving vehicle and jump into the road. The user may also jump into the river thinking it is a swimming pool.

## Proverbs 22 and the *Mkpuru Mmiri* crisis in Igbo communities

Experimental curiosity, peer pressure, low socio-economic conditions at home and the need for extraordinary energy are

major sustaining factors of the intake of drug such as *Mkpuru Mmiri*. The good thing about this is that there is an Old Testament response to this sad development.

### Experimental curiosity

Proverbs 22 warns that those who choose to follow the wrong path, of which they do not know what the end should be, should desist. Making this error has consequences. It is a warning to one who sows evil, because he or she will suffer by reaping much trouble (Habtu 2006:803). Error is defined as disobedience that blinds, as well as deviating from Yahweh's will (Radermackers 2004:144). Most Igbo youth who go into the sniffing of *Mkpuru Mmiri* do not know what they are doing. They do this to have an experience of what it means to take a drug like *Mkpuru Mmiri*. The end result is mental illness. In a personal communication with Abigail, it is revealed that 'youths suffer for their errors caused by the lack of not paying heed to warnings from stakeholders in the society'. The wise person sees evil and runs away, but proverbs term anyone who takes *Mkpuru Mmiri* a fool (Habtu 2006:570).

### Peer pressure

Youth are easily influenced by peers, especially those with poor impulse control. Proverbs 22 cautions youth to beware of their peers and not join them in evil deeds. It encourages youth to take charge of their lives and not allow others to control them. If you spend time with someone who is dishonest, you learn their ways. If you associate with a liar, you will become one too (Hulsey 2014:1). Proverbs 22 encourages youth to develop high esteem and not allow people to deceive them, making them easy prey for invaders. Igbo youth begin intake of *Mkpuru Mmiri* because of peer pressure from street friends, school associates, compound mates, family friends and work mates. In a personal communication with Onyedikachi, it was noted that '[y]outh who abuse *Mkpuru Mmiri* are motivated by what they hear from their peers, without considering the long-term consequences, which include insanity, instability, and even death'. They spend time with people who want them to do unhealthy things, and thus they live with the constant temptation to give in to their negative peer pressure (Britton 2021).

### Socio-economic conditions

In Proverbs 22, the rhetor advises his audience to be content with what they have and are, and not be enticed by the body shapes of those who are using fraudulent approaches to get what they have. The rhetor warns against this friendship because of social status or economic gain. People who take *Mkpuru Mmiri* do that because of the situation they are in. They feel that life has not been fair to them. Some of them have tried for university admission but failed. Some have searched for jobs for years but have found none. A personal communication with Chuks revealed that:

Some of the parents are suffering, and it seems like everyone has abandoned them. Thus, the only way to take themselves out of the trauma is to take in *Mkpuru Mmiri*.

Proverbs makes it clear that no reason is strong enough to engage in the wrong action. Igbo youths should instead know that their addiction to *Mkpuru Mmiri* leads to an escalation of the socio-economic crisis they are going through.

### Lack of family values

Traditionally, the family social structure is supposed to provide security and support for family members. According to Proverbs 22, the family is very important in the proper upbringing of the child so that he or she will avoid the immoral way of life (Drane 2000:494). In fact, 'anyone who lacks proper upbringing and guidance will miss direction in life' (Okoli et al. 2021). In Igbo communities, the increasing wave of *Mkpuru Mmiri* is a clear revelation of the failure of the family to uphold family values. In a personal communication with Michael, he lamented that 'parents are more interested in business and other money-making ventures, and the child or youth is left to fathom ways of survival'. This makes them easy prey for promoters of *Mkpuru Mmiri* in Igbo communities. As a succinct reminder, Arthur (2003:50,) citing the Vatican Council II resolution, noted that:

Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a solemn obligation to educate their offspring and must be acknowledged as the first and the foremost educators of their children. (p. 17)

Training a child must begin in the earliest years. It is often said that parents have six years to help form a child's character and complete his or her moral training; after that, it may be too late, and the child must be trained in the way of wisdom and the way of godliness (Hale 2007:955).

### Moral application of Proverbs 22 to the crisis

The following recommendations were thought to provide a defined roadmap towards tackling *Mkpuru Mmiri* addiction in Igbo communities:

1. Youths in Igbo communities should know that the intake of *Mkpuru Mmiri* tarnishes their name and that of their family. This will make them not to find a helper or help when the time comes. It can also make them to develop mental illness, which will eventually lead to a waste of their lives. This is what youth in Igbo communities should be thinking before venturing into the intake of the drug.
2. Parents, teachers and guardians should educate youths about the dangers of drug abuse. This orientation should be done early enough. This will serve as a proactive measure.
3. Religious leaders should encourage teachings from wisdom literature (Pr. 22) that would place Igbo youths on the right path and prevent them from being distracted.
4. Stakeholders such as faith-based organisations, nongovernmental organisations and community-based organisations should embark on a rural campaign to sensitise Igbo communities about the dangers of *Mkpuru Mmiri* drug addiction, citing the danger of going into evil actions as embedded in the axioms in Proverbs 22.



5. It is also important that legal units in Igbo communities such as Houses of Assembly, local government chairmen and even the state governors should enact laws that will lead to the apprehension and prosecution of sellers and promoters of *Mkpuru Mmiri*.
6. Youths in Igbo communities should see themselves as the leaders of tomorrow. They should also note that for any evil they do, there are consequences involved (Pr 22). Thus, it is important for Igbo youths to shun drugs and their peddling.

## Conclusion

The increasing level of violence such as robbery, rape and other violent activities in Igboland is connected to the intake of *Mkpuru Mmiri*. Unfortunately, everyone is suffering from its consequences in one way or the other. This shows that parents and the church have failed in their responsibilities to children and youths. The various approaches taken by concerned leaders in Igbo communities have not yielded positive results; instead, they have escalated the crisis. For instance, Uzoaru (2021:1) reported that a mob from Anara in Isiala-Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State beat a 27-year-old man, Darlington Ugboaja, to death for being in possession of methamphetamine, also known as *Mkpuru Mmiri*, at Anara market. Proverbs 22 provides a veritable platform towards solving this crisis. Part of its axioms includes the need for parents to teach their children early enough on the need to shun evil. Also, there is a need for the youth to run from evil, so as not to jeopardise their future in the name of wanting to belong.

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### Author's contributions

F.C.U. is the sole author of this research article.

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### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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Appendix starts on the next page→



## Appendix 1: List of informants

**TABLE 1-A1:** Participant demographics.

S/N	Names	Sex	Age	Year
1.	Chuks	M	Youth	2022
2	Abigail	F	Youth	2022
3	Onyedikachi	M	Youth	2022
4	Michael	M	Youth	2022
5	Amarachi	F	Youth	2022
6	Jude	M	Youth	2022
7	Chidimma	F	Youth	2022
8	Chinonso	M	Youth	2022
9	Chidi	M	Youth	2022
10	Chima	M	Youth	2022
11	Amaka	F	Youth	2022