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National Narcotics Policy Influence on Youth Substance Abuse in Yendi, Ghana

Imran Abdel-Rahman Gomdah
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Imran Abdel-Rahman Gomdah

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

National Narcotics Policy Influence on Youth Substance Abuse in Yendi, Ghana

by

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MPhil, Walden University, 2019

MA, American Public University, 2018

BA, University for Development Studies, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2024

Abstract

Possession of small quantities of narcotics for personal use in Ghana could result in years in detention under the Narcotic Drugs Law of 1990, with youth constituting a large number of offenders. The government proposed a drug policy change in 2017 as the prevailing one failed to achieve its goals even with such stringency, resulting in Act 1019's adoption in May 2020 as a new national drug policy to replace the Narcotic Drugs Law of 1990. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to assess public perception of the impact of the new policy on the incidences of youth narcotic drug habits. Act 1019 was examined through multiple streams theoretical framework and analyses centered on the act's impact on youth narcotic activities. Interview data were generated from 11 respondents using (a) purposive sampling to select institutions and (b) convenience and snowball samplings to select the respondents from the institutions. Data were coded on NVivo14 with a description-focused strategy and analyzed using reflexive thematic method. Results indicated youth drug activities rather worsened in the study area since 2020, with no signs of any form of narcotic-related penalty existence. Findings also showed policy illiteracy among respondents, as some of them learned about the act through this study. Recommendation for further research centers on policy stakeholder involvement in the entire policy process leading to Act 1019. The implications for positive social change with this study are that policymakers may include policy education in the policy process, especially policies that necessitate law-abiding with penal consequences.

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Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my wife, Hawa Alhassan, for her patience and endurance and to my children. Hawa, I had the strength to complete my entire graduate education because of your priceless support. To my children, I will forever love you unconditionally.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Narcotic drug activities in Ghana have been a major concern to the Ghanaian government (Cook, 2019; Eligh, 2019; Figueira, 2012). More concerning is the pervasiveness of drug use among the Ghanaian youth, given that the government identified a healthy youth population as necessary for nation-building and development (National Youth Policy of Ghana [NYPG], 2010). Even though there are no official government records to illuminate the frequency of youth substance use (Appiahene-Gyamfi, 2016), multiple studies carried out in different parts of the country indicated the social and public health problems among the youth are conspicuous (Asiseh et al., 2017; Bird, 2019; Elliason et al., 2018; Frimpong et al., 2021; Fuseini et al., 2019; Nkyi, 2014; Oppong Asante, 2019; Osei-Bonsu et al., 2017; Oti-Boateng & Agbleze, 2019). Despite the inclusion of drug abuse consciousness in the Ghana education curricula for pre-tertiary educational institutions, especially in primary and junior high schools, studies indicated that drug use among pre-tertiary students was high (Ayarna-Gagakuma et al., 2020; Tetteh et al., 2020). This situation is worse among the youth in the informal sector employments, who account for a sizable portion of the Ghanaian young labor force (Bah, 2018; Messersmith et al., 2021).

Efforts to control overall narcotic drug activities in Ghana have been the Ghanaian government's ongoing struggle necessitating policy enactments and reforms since the country's independence in 1957 (Akyeampong, 2005; Ane, 2018; Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021; Appiahene-Gyamfi, 2016; Gregg, 1961; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Sagoe, 1966). For this reason, a narcotic drugs policy shift was proposed in 2017 by the

government to move from the contemporary harsh Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) Law 236 of 1990 to a more humane policy—the National Narcotics Control Commission Bill (NACOC Bill 2017), which later became an act in 2020 as NACOC Act 1019. Under this act, the Government of Ghana decriminalized narcotic substance activities and branded them as social and public health problems instead of criminal acts as defined in the previous law (Ane, 2018; Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021). Factors that led to the enactment of Act 1019 comprised provisions in the previous policy that criminalized all forms of narcotic activities, including possession, use, production, and distribution, resulting in the inevitable incarceration of all offenders (Ane, 2018; Kasore et al., 2021; Messersmith et al., 2021; Owusu et al., 2021; Parimah et al., 2021; Quansah Amissah, 2022). Effective and aggressive policy execution by inescapable imprisonment of offenders, regardless of quantity possessed, the purpose for possession, and the age of offenders, resulted in overcrowding in the Ghanaian prisons, compelling the government's substantial budget spending on prisoners (Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021; Bird, 2019).

Although the new policy was intended to curtail all-inclusive narcotic substance activities, how it changed trends of substance use, particularly among the youth, since its inception is yet to be determined. Various public policy analysts indicated that the revised policy would serve as a possible step to a better control strategy prior to its adoption in 2020. For instance, Ane (2018) mentioned that such a policy shift could “catalyze” narcotic drug policy reviews across the West African subregion or the African continent at large from confining the conduct within a criminal act definition boundary (p. 4). Ane

theorized that such reviews might as well produce strategies for the implementation of harm reduction programs. Others denoted the need for public sector participation in ensuring that substantial advocacies were designed around influencing other governments to adopt similar approaches (e.g., Nelson & Obot, 2020). However, there have been few or no scholarly investigations to examine how the policy could effectively reduce overall narcotic activities, particularly among the youth. This lack of literature on the policy's output necessitated the selection of the topic since focusing attempts at the policy's ability to address the problem will bridge the existing gap.

Background

On March 20, 2020, the Ghanaian Parliament passed the NACOC Act (Act 1019), which addressed all forms of illegal narcotic drug activities and their associated penalties. Act 1019 officially became a major Ghanaian drug policy on May 11, 2020, after it received the Ghanaian president's endorsement (Hawkson, 2021). Similar narcotic drug policy enactment attempts transpired during the country's first republic. Those attempts led to the development of a stringent drug policy in 1961 before the country became a member of the United Nations Single Convention of 1969 (Sagoe, 1966). During the military rule of the PNDC era (from 1981 to 1993), the Government of Ghana enacted the Narcotics Drugs (Control, Enforcement, and Sanction) Law—PNDCL 236 of 1990—that criminalized all forms of narcotic activities and handed disproportionate penalties on narcotic offenses. Prison terms for offenses were at least 5 years for consumption and distribution and at least 10 years for production and possession under the policy. However, policy execution caused overcrowding in Ghanaian prisons, placing undue

stress on the country and its economy (Ane, 2018).

In 2017, the government proposed a policy readjustment, the NACOC Bill, to replace the existing PNDCL 236 on the basis that, despite its *flaw* in assigning supposedly-right punitive terms to offenders, the PNDCL 236 also failed to reduce all forms of narcotic activities in the country (Messersmith et al., 2021; Quarshie & Alagidede, 2020). Under the NACOC Act, punitive actions were reduced to fines for quantities of narcotics carried and used; first offenders were cautioned (Owusu et al., 2021). Since its establishment in 2017, however, there has not been any literature on the modified policy's effect in changing the dynamics of narcotic activities, especially in the wake of substance use rampancy among the Ghanaian youth. The implication is that neither the Ghanaian government nor policy-related stakeholders know if the reformed policy is a suitable solution to address relevant questions arising from the public and other interest groups and entities. Based on this gap, I assessed the revised drug policy's influence from the viewpoint of respondents of diverse backgrounds by focusing on the youth substance activity surge in Yendi, Ghana.

Problem Statement

Narcotic substance activities are prevalent in Ghana, notably among the country's younger generation (Danso & Anto, 2021; Fuseini et al., 2019; Peprah et al., 2020). Existing narcotic drug policies crafted since the PNDC era failed to address narcotic substance possession and use, particularly among youth, despite the severe penal ramifications associated with offenses (Tetteh et al., 2020). For example, by 2017, the Ghanaian government's statistics indicated that out of the country's 50,000 drug users,

over 35,000 of them were presumably adolescents (Bulut & Usman, 2020). In the same year, there were over 11,000 drug-related offenders in Ghanaian prisons and up to 8,600 on remand (Ane, 2018). Such a policy lapse to deter narcotic activities provoked the Ghanaian government to consider a strategy shift through policy reforms to address the problem (Ane, 2018; Messersmith et al., 2021). Youth narcotic activities also prompted investigations into various approaches stakeholders could adopt to address the problem (Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021; Asante & Nefale, 2021; Kasore et al., 2021).

Researchers explored strategies to confront the problem, including using cultural and socioeconomic factors (Olurishe, 2019), involving religious and private sector organizations (Bassi et al., 2017; Nwagu et al., 2020), creating social rehabilitative systems to persuade past addicts against recidivism, i.e., reverting to addiction (Parimah et al., 2021; Tegeng & Abadi, 2018), and ensuring the establishment of effective community readiness programs to counteract occurrences (Peña-Purcell et al., 2021).

As its central youth policy goal, the Government of Ghana aspires to “provide social protection ... for the youth ... to ensure the development of a knowledgeable, self-reliant, skilled, disciplined, and healthy population with the capacity to drive and sustain the socioeconomic development of the nation” (NYPG, 2010, p. 10). However, a gap still existed in the literature examining the significance of the revolutionized public policy, especially in addressing Ghanaian youth narcotic drug use situations to achieve the government’s youth development objectives. This study aimed to narrow the gap by contributing knowledge to analyze the Ghana narcotics policy’s potency in altering youth substance use situations in Yendi, Ghana.

Purpose of the Study

In this generic qualitative study, I explored multi-dimensional insights from the people of various social backgrounds in Yendi on how the Ghana national narcotics policy exclusively shapes the dynamics of youth narcotic use. Media reports and other stakeholder narratives implied that youth substance activities remain a priority in Ghana. Stakeholder attention and involvement are necessary for innovative and improved drug information sensitization, especially in pre-tertiary educational institutions and the general community (Olurishe, 2019). Despite the introduction of the Ghana drug policy reforms in 2017, drug reforms have remained a low priority in Ghana and other African countries (Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021). It was, therefore, imperative to solicit multi-dimensional stakeholder perspectives on whether the reformed policy was achieving the government's drug policy objectives to alter the trends of narcotic activities with special reference to youth narcotic substance use.

Research Question

Given the incidence of drug abuse among the youth, what is public opinion regarding Ghana's national narcotics policy's influence in combating the problem to cause a positive social change?

Theoretical Framework

John Kingdon's (1984) multiple streams framework (MSF) was the theoretical background upon which this study was constructed. Researchers use the framework to examine policymaking processes, including policy evolution and change. Although it is predominantly applied to case study approaches, it is used extensively in different

approaches and methodologies due to its “universally applicable” capabilities (Cairney & Jones, 2016, p. 38; Flores, 2017; Hofer, 2022). The MSF is an approach that provides common ground for policies to emerge or change, which reflects the central theme of this study—to analyze Act 1019’s effect on youth narcotic substance activities from the perspectives of study participants with heterogeneous backgrounds. Even though public policymaking involves multiple processes—including agenda setting, solution choice identification and the selection of the best and convincing alternative, and the implementation of the chosen alternatives—existing policies may undergo changes through similar processes, especially when new problems emerge within existing policy environments (Gagnon & Labonté, 2013; Kingdon, 2003; Weiner, 2011).

Nature of the Study

I used a generic qualitative research approach to data collection for this study. Employing this approach addressed the study’s purpose and the theoretical framework employed. Given that the MSF does not limit the respondents’ accounts of their perceptions, experiences, and interpretation of what constitutes reality, it was suitable to select this interpretive (constructivist, generic qualitative) methodology that incorporates all aspects of strictly bounded qualitative methodologies in the study. On the grounds of the purpose of the study—to understand people’s experiences of the effects of Act 1019 and the meaning they attribute to their lived experiences ascribable to the act’s executions, particularly on youth narcotic substance use—I could have used a phenomenological approach (Neubauer et al., 2019). However, the epistemological endeavor to ascertain the *reality* (Jones et al., 2016) of Act 1019’s influence on youth

substance use fits in the generic qualitative methodological context. This approach helped define the appropriateness of the policy to solve the social problem, especially when the distinctiveness of study participants reflected their lived experience responses. I also wanted to obtain all-inclusive data to reflect the diverse respondents' interpretation of policy impact by including all forms of qualitative data collection strategies in the study. Furthermore, my intention also centered on the utilization of an individual interview research design (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019). Interview questions focused on recent drug policy readjustment's influences on combating drug use by limiting the focus to youth narcotic situations in Yendi.

Respondents were drawn from diverse social organizations in Yendi. At least two participants were sampled from the following categories: parents/guardians, local government employees, civic educators, teachers, various law enforcement institutions, and health workers. Respondents were sampled from Yendi and drawn from local schools, the municipal assembly office, the municipal hospital, places of worship, and the police station. In circumstances where respondents fell within two categories (for example, as a parent/guardian and teacher), interview answers reflected both categories in one interview. Still, answers to the respondent's dominant role were recorded. The supplementary responses were only meant to shed some extra light on their main answers. Such associated responses were not considered as standalone ones or separate, they added sheer understanding to their related main responses.

Structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to guide interviews. Such open-endedness of the questions allowed study participants to include pieces of

information that were not incorporated in the interview questions but which respondents considered necessary to address. Each category included a maximum of two respondents to reduce information repetitiveness. Data points consisted of perception of policy influence based on respondents' backgrounds.

Definitions

Drugs: Any substances with an intoxicating or euphoric effect that include illegal substances taken by mouth, inhaling, injection, or other means into the human body to achieve simulated and unnatural ecstasy. These include other legal prescription medications ingested to get similar excitements without a medical expert's directives.

Decking: A vernacular used among narcotic drug users of Yendi to mean consuming different narcotic substances one after the other at some specific time intervals to gain strange euphoric trance

Drug/substance use: Wrongful ingestion of narcotic substances and prescription medications without a medical expert's advice for ecstatic reasons.

Narcotic activities: Engaging in all forms of actions that involve the use, possession, distribution, and production of substances that have the potential to cause euphoric effects in a human being when ingested.

Narcotic policy: An official statutory that outlines legal procedures and processes on the part of the governing body measures to undertake to prevent or address existing non-medical use of narcotics and other substances with psychoactive properties

Policy influence: The ability of a policy to exert changes in key indicators such as people's behaviors or conduct through policy implementation and execution. This

expression also implies the extent to which such changes in the key indicators can be attributed to the given policy. The resultant impact may be positive or negative, depending on how effective such influences are.

Policy entrepreneurs: Individuals, organizations, or groups that take advantage of opportunities based on their interest in the existing public policy problems to influence egocentric policy outcomes

Polydrug use, polysubstance use: This is the same as *decking*; however, polydrug or polysubstance use may be intentional or unintentional.

Psychoactive substance/drug: Any substance that, when ingested or administered in the human system, has the potency to exert influence on the mental process, such as mood or cognition, consciousness, and perception

Stakeholder engagement: The process of involving individuals, groups, organizations, and communities who are directly or indirectly affected by youth drug use problems and who may influence policies and procedures aimed at addressing youth drug use.

Youth: Any individual from ages 15 to 35 years. This age bracket is the official definition and categorization of “youth” by the Ghanaian government (NYPG, 2010). However, this study narrowed the age gap to 15–24 years.

Assumptions

Numerous assumptions arose to highlight this study. Given that the previous law failed to achieve the policy objective that necessitated its assessment and modification, the overarching assumption was that the new act was preemptive enough to achieve the

previously failed objectives, including addressing the increase in youth narcotic substance consumption. It was also assumed that the Ghanaian government strengthened its policy enforcement agency, the Ministry of Interior, to effectively regulate narcotic distribution locations and networks in the country. Subsequent to adopting the reformed policy, I assumed there was a comprehensive engagement with affected stakeholders to guarantee that policy information dissemination and education to the citizenry were effectively carried out. Finally, it was assumed that the government's assertion in the national youth policy document to collaborate with other stakeholders to "provide social protection for the ... youth with the objective of ... stemming the tide of drug and substance use among the youth" to provide "opportunities for a smooth transition from childhood to adulthood" (NYPG, 2010, p. 18) was established and functional.

Another assumption was that respondents were objective about the situation, and responses did not reflect respondents' sociopolitical inclinations. Answers reflecting such proclivities were possible because the data to be collected concentrated on the respondents' outlook on the problem and reflected reviews that represented their independent perspectives. It was assumed that respondents would look at youth substance use as a general community problem that transcended sociocultural and political differences, that a collective effort to address the problem was inevitable, that sampled respondents were heterogenous in their social backgrounds, that respondents within data points had related knowledge of the problem and the policy to qualify for the inclusion in the study, and that findings were trustworthy—credible, dependable, transferable, and confirmable (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019).

Using individual interviews to collect data was due to the sensitivity of the research topic. This technique safeguarded respondents' true assessments of policy performance without undermining their political association reputation. In other words, the choice of methodology was partly due to the deep political compassions of the people of Yendi since other designs (e.g., group interviews) could result in politically centered responses as respondents might deliberately fail to give authentic responses that would seem unsympathetic to their affiliated parties. Blake et al. (2021) implied that social, cultural, or biological differences between researchers and research respondents might lead to respondents' unwillingness to disclose vital information. For these reasons, individual interviews were assumed to be more appropriate in order to get the respondents' accurate perception of Act 1019, especially when responses were assumed not to be directly related to respondents' health and other sensitive personal issues.

Scope and Delimitations

Data were entirely generated from Yendi, Ghana, focusing on some selected groups, including teachers, law enforcement personnel, civic educators, health professionals, and municipal assembly officials. Narcotic substance use remains a social problem inherent in youths and adults. For that matter, the objective of this study was to examine distinctively the national drug policy's influence on Yendi youth substance use situations. This study was not concerned about the medical ramifications of substance use, albeit almost all the study subjects obliquely mentioned the effects of substance use in their responses. The study focused solely on policy influence on the drug activities of individuals of both sexes from ages 15 to 24 years; the study centered attention

exclusively on the situation of Yendi, Ghana. Some respondents revealed, however, that children as young as 10 years were occasionally found consuming drugs.

Limitations

The fundamental challenges were recruiting research respondents, influencing their understanding of the study's importance, and ensuring respondents' anonymity.

(Challenges in ensuring anonymity are discussed comprehensively in Chapter 3.)

Respondents' expectations of the study's immediate impact on youth drug use in Yendi and respondents' concerns about being identified (although narcotic users were exempted from participating) were among my primary concerns. However, no evidence of such concerns was demonstrated in their responses to the invitation as voluntary research participants. Because Yendi is sensitive to politics (see Ladouceur, 1972; Samuel & Halidu, 2018; Staniland, 1973; Tonah, 2012; Yaro et al., 2023), there was a concern that people from different factions could give unrealistic answers to portray government policies differently from reality based on their political affiliations. This situation could create distorting accounts of policy performance. As Laher et al. (2019) observed, such issues threaten research findings' trustworthiness—transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability, resulting in erroneous application of study conclusions in other settings. In other words, applying study conclusions to locations that might have opposing sentiments could become problematic.

To address these concerns, participants' complete anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed based on Walden University IRB's requirements and directives. Copies of the final dissertation project were placed in the libraries of the two senior high schools

and at the municipal assembly for reference. I reasoned with study respondents that policies were designed for the citizens and would stay the same or would hardly ever change as opposed to the alternation of governance of the country by different political parties. Attention was drawn to the fact that the policy existed since 1961, was reviewed and modified in 1992, reconsidered for modification in 2017 by the government, and readjusted to and readopted in its current form in 2020. Policy maintenance, change, or adjustment to address any social problem would start with citizens' honest analyses of the policy effects on the problem such policies are designed to speak to. Finally, because I did not know any of the respondents due to the time-lapse of living in Yendi since 1996 and did not have any political affiliation (but did not miss to see that the problem existed in the community prior to the adoption of Act 1019), my tempering of data to satisfy personal prejudice was absent.

Significance

This research addressed the need for positive social change in youth drug use through intensive analysis of the policy process. To date, there is little or no distinct data on the Yendi youth population and their substance use situations; however, Dadzie et al. (2020) revealed that the general Ghanaian youth population (15–24 age-year group) stood at 36% and likely to surpass the percentage by 2035. Along with these growing trends is the growth of substance use among the Ghanaian youth (Fuseini et al., 2019; Kabore et al., 2019; Peprah et al., 2020), necessitating a more decisive policy intervention. Among the findings from the study included some recommendations necessary for the Ghanaian government's future narcotic policy endeavors. Such study revelations may help in policy

reexamination since some drug users practice decking. That is, they would combine and consume multiple substances with varying euphoric properties disproportionately to derive higher ecstatic gratifications (see Choi et al., 2022; Ojanperä et al., 2022), especially when policy definitions of narcotics failed to designate such psychoactive substances as narcotics. Thus, there was the need to determine whether similar trends existed within the broader spectrum of substance use among the Ghanaian youth, especially in Yendi. Verifying the prospects of such broader drug consumption occurrences would inform policymakers on the need to redesign drug policy objectives, redefine *drugs* in policy narratives, and institute appropriate regulations on accessibility to all forms of psyche-altering substances to realize the sought-after positive social change identified in the NYPG document.

Summary

This chapter delineated Ghana's experience with at least two significant policy changes in its fight against narcotics. From its independence in 1957 to 2017, existing laws and acts within the Ghana national narcotics policy failed to achieve policy objectives on reducing the levels of narcotic possessions, use, and distribution in the communities and schools, affecting high levels of narcotic substance activities among the youth. In Chapter 2, I examine available literature on the history of youth narcotic substance engagements and how previous laws in the policy framework dealt with the situation. Then, I look at the problem in recent times in concomitance with the 2020 NACOC Act 1019. I also synthesize concepts embodied in the MSF theoretical framework, how other researchers applied, supported, or critiqued the framework, and

how the framework gave backing to this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Narcotic drug activities in Ghana remain a major concern to the Ghanaian government (Akyeampong, 2005; Alhassan, 2022; Debrah et al., 2021; Nelson & Obot, 2020). More concerning is the rate of such activities among Ghanaian youth (Amoateng & Bahr, 1986; Cudjoe et al., 2016; Fuseini et al., 2019; Kasore et al., 2021; Parimah et al., 2021; Yangyuru, 1987). The government formulated and executed stringent narcotic policies within the first 5 years of the country's independence in 1957 as an effective instrument to eradicate overall narcotic substance activities in the country (Sagoe, 1966). Even though the executions of the laws and regulations in the immediate policy framework prior to Act 1019 led to sizeable numbers of youth incarcerations, how Act 1019 changed the dynamics in youth substance abuse since its adoption in 2020 was not known. This lack in literature encouraged this generic qualitative study to address the gap by assessing the effects of Act 1019 on youth substance abuse in Yendi, Ghana.

There was little or no scholarly literature that examined the nation's narcotic drug policy and its impact on narcotic substance activities in the Ghanaian population as a whole and among the youth in particular, despite the government's swift advancement to acknowledge these narcotic activities as social and public health problems, especially when search terms were confined with delimiters (i.e., full-text peer-reviewed articles within specified publication dates). Due to this limited related peer-reviewed literature, it was imperative to review editorials that transcended scholarly narratives to include other sources that might be indispensable in relating extensively to this paper. Moreover, there were academic and nonacademic articles and accounts on narcotics in Ghana; however,

some of those articles dated back to the first republic (e.g., Sagoe, 1966). While some of these sources were directed toward the Ghanaian government's efforts at eradicating narcotic activities in the country through policy reforms (e.g., Kuma-Abiwu, 2019), others reported on broader issues such as the overall narcotics circumstances in the country (see Asante & Nefale, 2021; Messersmith et al., 2021; Parimah et al., 2021a). Yet others centered on various forms of youth narcotics activities (such as Kabore et al., 2019; Kasore et al., 2021; Parimah et al., 2021b); factors influencing youth narcotic abuse behaviors (e.g., Ayarna-Gagakuma et al., 2020); and recidivism, preventive and recovery strategies (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2020). It was, therefore, paramount to review related articles that might incorporate nonacademic sources (such as periodicals) that discussed the country's narcotic policy. In this regard, I integrated both scholarly and non-scholarly literature sources on policy transitions from the first republic to the 2020 NACOC Act 1019 to elucidate trends of policy transformations through the years.

For the literature review, I examine the theoretical framework that supported the study and the appropriateness of the theory to the study. I explore the history of narcotics in Ghana since the country's independence in 1957. From there, I proceed to the sources of youth narcotic substance activities in the country. Given that there was no study precisely on the drug situation in Yendi, I used findings from other parts of the northern regions of Ghana to reflect trends of youth narcotic substance engagements in Yendi. I adopted this approach because of the sociocultural indistinguishability of the various ethnicities in the northern regions (see Awedoba, 2006; Lentz, 2006; Simpson Miller, 2022; Prussin, 1969). Then, I look at the narcotic control policy since the country's first

republic, the policy's transition, factors that necessitated the policy's review, and what made the current policy different.

Literature Search Strategy

I began the literature review with an article search in contrasting terms to guarantee adequate availability of scholarly materials to undergird the study. The recency of referenced materials was paramount to ensure the relatedness of referenced scholarly works to the phenomenon under investigation. Search terms were limited to 5 years (2019–2023); however, time limits were sometimes disregarded because of the lack of literature on some special inquiries, such as the possible existence of literature on the Ghana government's attempts to battle youth drug abuse at any point in time. In such situations, the search scope was broadened to include other sources of information outside the scholarly environment in conjunction with the limitlessness of time boundaries. Based on those conditions, I searched considerably in many databases that included Walden University databases, including EBSCO Academic Search Complete/Premier, ERIC Education Research Complete, ProQuest, PubMed, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, and Thoreau Library; American Public University Systems Trefry Library; West African Journal of Pharmacology and Drug Research; Ghana Studies; and Google and Google Scholar search engines.

By using Boolean operators (*and, or, not, around (x), in, whether*) to retrieve articles from the databases, search terms used involved wholly or partly phrases and words, including *Ghana narcotics policy and youth drug abuse, Ghana narcotics control policy influence on substance abuse, narcotics control policy effects on youth drugging,*

policy on youth substance misuse, policy impact on youth drug/narcotics abuse, cross-sectional view on Ghana youth substance misuse, Ghana narcotics control policy on youth drug use, Ghana youth drugs and policy, Ghana narcotic drugs policy overview, drug laws in Ghana, narcotic laws in Ghana, policy regulations, and policies and laws in Ghana on youth narcotic activities. Notifications were created on Google Scholar and Google Alerts for new scholarly publications and other non-scholarly topic-related materials, respectively, to be forwarded to personal email.

Theoretical Foundation

John Wells Kingdon's MSF was the theoretical foundation for this study (Kingdon, 1984/2010). I reviewed the influence the updated Ghanaian national narcotics policy, Act 1019 of 2020, had on youth's narcotic substance activities by examining how the framework's key attributes influenced the act's enactment. Since its passing and given that youth narcotic substance activities remained a national problem, I explored the role of policy players in their possible attempt to influence the status quo of the policy for apparently unattended issues in the policy provisions. I investigated policy players' attempts to influence narcotic policy direction to affect youth narcotic substance use as well.

Kingdon noted in his seminal works (Kingdon, 1984) that the policy process is not linear as previous public policy theories maintained (Jenkins, 1978); a linear process in the sense that problems emerge and governments enact policies to address them. Kingdon indicated that other forces (such as policy interest entities and groups that may not necessarily form part of mainstream politics) influence the policy process as well. It

is through the merger of the problem, the politics (including those external influences), and other existing related policies that new policies emerge.

Seminal Works

In his book *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* that gave birth to the MSF, Kingdon (1984) offered the framework as a revolutionary approach to the policy process from the conventional Cohen et al.'s (1972) garbage can model of organizational choice—which assumes that there are no structural processes for finding solutions to problems and that decision-makers are cut off from problems and solutions (Mortimore & Canan, 2022). Furthermore, Kingdon disagreed with the rational actor approach, which hypothesized that decision-makers select choices that best favor their interests (see Schmidt & Wight, 2023). Rather, Kingdon maintained that there are many solutions to a policy problem that policymakers will have to identify and choose the best one from through policy process engagements—debates, discussions, and deliberations.

The MSF contains five fundamental elements, including problems, politics, policies, policy entrepreneurs, and policy windows (Figure 1). Kingdon (2010) maintained that policies could be generated by the convergence of three of the elements, all considered decision traits in a policy process. These three components—or “streams” in more theoretical lexis—flow on different courses and consist of the problem stream (what public problems do we notice?), the policy stream (what interventions can we introduce to address the problems?), and the political stream (what support can we find for the identified interventions?; Ceatha et al., 2022; Novotný et al., 2016).

Kingdon maintained further that the streams are mostly independent but need to

converge for a policy output to emerge. However, prior to the output, the policy process may be manipulated by influential individuals and entities (called policy entrepreneurs) who have particular interests in the goal of the policy when a policy window (external factors, sometimes called the window of opportunity) opens up. These policy windows that provide a platform for streams' convergence also aid in policy entrepreneurs' infiltration to influence policy decisions (Banha et al., 2022; Béland & Howlett, 2016; Ruvalcaba-Gomez et al., 2023; Zahariadis, 2014; Zohlnhöfer & Rüb, 2016).

According to Banha et al. (2022), Kingdon categorized these policy entrepreneurs into two broader kinds: The first group consists of people holding prominent positions and those in high-profile institutions with resources (power and money) to change policy directions. The second group is made up of people from mundane groups who are more exposed to social problems requiring policy interventions, including lobbyists, researchers, political parties, bureaucrats, and the media. Because the second group is typically community-based and acquainted with community information, Banha and colleagues asserted that ideas on social problems are often generated by this group and end up as alternatives to be proposed by the first group. Kingdon assumed that some necessary structures need to be in place before policies emerge under the framework.

Assumptions

Three fundamental assumptions guide the MSF, including (a) ambiguity in problem definition, (b) time constraints, (c) and streams' independence (Zahariadis, 2014; Ochrana et al., 2022).

Ambiguity

MSF deals with making policies under ambiguous circumstances. Ambiguity describes having multiple ways of contemplating a particular phenomenon or problem, which tends to undermine the selection of a coherent solution to address the problem (Zahariadis, 2014; Zohlhöfer & Rüb, 2016). Problem definition is relative; different actors define problems differently (Hofer, 2022). Further, the diverse problem definitions might be irreconcilable and have a tendency to create vague, confused, and stressful situations (Zahariadis, 2014). However, ambiguity and uncertainty are not the same; uncertainty describes “the inability to accurately predict an event” (Zahariadis, 2014, p. 26). For instance, youth substance use may be a problem of absence of parental care, a policy failure, or morality. Among the core MSF theoretical constructs is that each perception of the causes of a problem has its advocates, and to find a solution to the problem, it is imperative that one perception is not selected over the others but a blend of the perceptions to find common ground is chosen (Herweg et al., 2022).

Ambiguity in the perceptions of Ghanaian youth substance abuse problems was evidenced in various findings, leading to researcher-specific recommendations. While some studies indicated that poor parental control influenced youth substance use and that policy interventions should target parents (e.g., Saapiire et al., 2021), other reports discovered that limitedness of data on drug use was perceived to affect the adoption of evidence-based and problem-specific narcotic drug control policies (see International Narcotics Control Board, 2015). Still, Nelson and Obot (2020) contended that instituting comprehensive narcotic drug education in the elementary curriculum could curtail the

possible influence and longing for drugs in children's later youthful ages. As Hoefler (2022) implied, defining policy objectives to address a problem based on a single definition of the causes of the problem will only deal with a fraction of the problem. Unquestionably, such a situation will result in unending cyclical policy reviews.

Ambiguities exist in governments and in organizations (also referred to as organized anarchies), and how serious these ambiguities are is determined by three indicators, including fluid participation, problematic preferences, and unclear technology (Zahariadis, 2014). Fluid participation is where involvement in governance fluctuates. Politicians as legislators may come and go because existing ones may lose elections, and new ones may assume power. Bureaucrats in high public offices may move to the private sector. And other nongovernmental organizations, such as youth development advocacy groups and entities, may exercise considerable influence on the directions some decisions may take. Fluid participation underscores the time and effort various policy actors *can* engage themselves in with the policy process and lends to the introduction of new proposals or blockades as diverse institutions and individuals are involved in the process.

Problematic preferences refers to how people are often uncertain about their preferences. Because legislators are habitually faced with time constraints because of the enormous amounts of various duty roles they have to attend to, and also because of their pursuit for being reelected, they are sometimes forced to make decisions that may not reflect their preferences if such time constraints were nonexistent. Decisions facilitated by incoherence may be made as the policy process progresses. This situation may lead to the abandonment of an ostensible consensus or the adoption of a problematic choice at

the very final moment before a definitive vote on an approach is taken (Hoefler, 2022). The situation further defines government as organized anarchy characterized by “a collection of ideas than as a coherent structure” (Cohen et al., 1972, p. 1). Even though it is apparent that policymakers know what their ultimate goal is—in this case, to eliminate or at least reduce overall narcotic drug activities in Ghana—time constraints often lead to the problematic preferences of the procedure to adopt to achieve the goal.

When decision-makers have little or no information (unclear technology) on the selected approach’s ability to solve the policy problem, trial-and-error methods become imperative (Hoefler, 2022; Ruvalcaba-Gomez et al., 2023). Besides, they are thought to have problems with deciding on an appropriate policy for a problem when they are faced with numerous policy choices. This condition allows for the penetration of policy entrepreneurs to advance their policy priorities in the course of the policy development. Unclear technology is when members of a government, despite knowing their unique roles, still apply rudimentary skills to fulfill their basic governmental responsibilities (Herweg et al., 2018). Further, in a political system where jurisdictional limitations are not clearly outlined, territorial squabbles are common between different governmental agencies and departments leading to bidirectional grumbles between members of the legislature and agency/departmental officials (Herweg et al., 2018; Ruvalcaba-Gomez et al., 2023; Zahariadis, 2014). While legislators complain about the unaccountable attitudes of governmental agencies’ officials, the latter often express their nuisance by imposing reporting directives and independent-minded attitudes of the former.

Time Constraints

Because policymakers have different responsibilities and work under considerable time constraints, they are short of the luxury of taking time for policy decision-making. As indicated earlier, time constraints arise due to the fact that governmental events can take place in parallel—where multiple circumstances in the government demand government officials and policymakers to take place at the same time—however, individuals’ attentiveness to situations or information processing capabilities is serial (Herweg et al., 2018; Kuhlmann, 2016; Zahariadis, 2014; Zohlnhöfer & Rüb, 2016). Individuals’ biological and cognitive imperfection undermine their ability to attend to multiple issues concomitantly. Only one issue at a time can be attended to owing to this flaw. However, the government can address multiple events concurrently since it consists of different agencies and departments, reflecting the idea of division of roles (labor). The government’s ability to attend to multiple circumstances does not, however, make such abilities infinite. For this reason, policymakers “make hay while the sun shines” by promptly enacting policies while favorable conditions exist, knowing that time constraints will undoubtedly limit the scale and the number of governmental role alternatives they can attend to (Herweg et al., 2022).

Streams Independence

Kingdon assumed that the streams (problem, politics, and policy) flowing through the government system are independent. The assumption of the streams’ independence is supported by the notion of the government’s ability to address many issues concurrently due to the conglomeration of multiple agencies and departments, as noted in the

preceding assumption—the streams may be considered to have their individual and independent lives (Zahariadis, 2014).

The problem stream involves such concerns as youth substance abuse or the general narcotic substance activities the people (like researchers and youth development and narcotic drugs advocates who are outside of the government) may discover and want the government's policy intervention to address. Policy streams or solutions are what experts, including academic scholars or expert organizations with established research credentials, propose to address a problem. That is, policy streams consist of policies or solutions people or advocacy groups usually generate in their narrow policy conditions. These policies or solutions are designed with the intent to address potential questions or concerns that may come up later; these policies or solutions are not designed because the need to answer their related questions arises immediately (Zahariadis, 2017). Politics stream includes political parties, the legislators, and the opinions that reflect the national mood on the problem, among others (Goyal, 2021; Novotný, 2016). It is within this stream that policy agenda settings are created and policy decisions are made (Zohlnhöfer & Rüb, 2016).

Despite Kingdon's critique of the garbage can model, Herweg and colleagues (2022) revealed that some of the important assumptions MSF hinges on come from the model. A case in point is the notion that policymakers are believed to have problems with selecting an appropriate policy for a problem when they are faced with numerous policy choices and only get to develop choices in the course of the policy progression, thereby allowing for infiltration of policy entrepreneurs' worked-out policy suggestions.

Rationale for MSF

Prior to the proposition and enactment of Act 1019 of 2020, previous narcotic drug policy provisions failed to achieve policy goals of eliminating all forms of narcotic drug activities. This failure, coupled with Ghana's commitment to various treaties (as the country is a signatory to the United Nations Single Convention of 1969 [Sagoe, 1966], the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, and the Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic of 1988 [Quansah Amissah, 2022]) led to the review of its narcotic policy. The amalgamation of these traits, such as the existence of the general narcotics activities and youth drug abuse and policy failure feedback, Ghana's commitment to international narcotics conventions, and political will to attract change, created the window of opportunity for the narcotics drug policy agenda.

Based on the feedback from the previous policy's inability to effectively address narcotic drug activities in the country, the agenda-setting for Act 1019 incorporated both the failure issues and the international guidelines to arrive at the new policy framework ("Government committed", 2022). Act 1019 has been in operation since 2020 and hypothetically addressed the less effective policy provisions of the previous PNDCL 236 of 1990. By using Kingdon's (2010) MSF to guide the study, the framework helped me discover how policy interest groups and policy entrepreneurs were able to infuse their perceptions and interests in the contemporary Act 1019 of 2020 policy framework during the policy process. Such interests included concerns on how to achieve the unreach goals of PNDCL 236 of 1990 and reflected as components of the problem stream and incorporated in Act 1019. Given that the emphasis of this study was on the problem of

youth substance use, such perceptions were used to assess the impact of the act on youth narcotic substances activities. Thus, this paper fundamentally focused on the problem stream element of the framework.

Theory Relevance

Zohlhöfer and Rüb (2016) examined MSF closely and how both the framework's and the garbage can's fundamentals related to the American presidential system in their work on policymaking under limited time conditions and uncertainties. Prior to the explosion of MSF, researchers applied the framework solely to the United States government agenda-setting. However, later theory applications went beyond the United States' democracy to include authoritarian regimes, parliamentary, and other systems of government. Kingdon's seminal work resulted in the framework that is currently among the leading contemporary theories of the policy process, even though it was not his intention to postulate a more general theory (Herweg, 2016; Herweg et al., 2022; Zahariadis, 2019).

Zohlhöfer and Rüb (2016) further revealed from Jones et al. (2016) that at the time of Jones and colleagues' study, the framework had been applied considerably in English-language peer-reviewed journal articles since the year 2000 and was more frequently applied to quantitative methodologies than any other policy process theories. Google Scholar recorded more than 10,000 citations of MSF since Kingdon's groundbreaking work in 1984 (Zahariadis, 2014). My sieved and controlled search (with quotation marks) on Google Scholar and the main Google search engines on April 5, 2024, respectfully returned more than 35,500 citations and over 353,000 mentions of the

framework within the first week of April 2024.

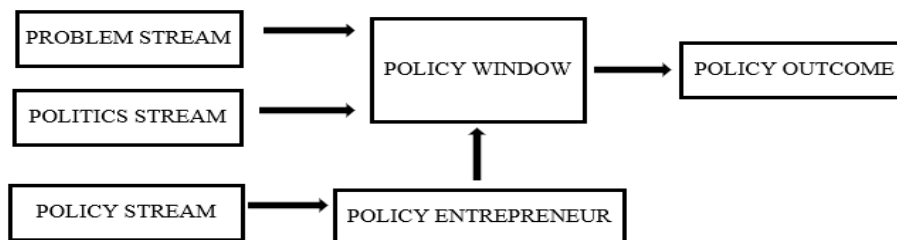
Sotoudeh Foumani and peers (2021) indicated in their qualitative inquiry of a policy change process aimed at banning logging in an Iranian forest how interlinkages of theory streams contributed to the development of a new logging policy. In relating this phenomenon to this present study, the framework provided a platform to assess the effects of Act 1019 of the Ghana narcotics policy on youth substance abuse from all the streams to discover possible policy recommendations. Examining the problem of youth narcotic activities presented comprehensive results for policy recommendations to be fed back into the policy process. For instance, agenda-setting in the politics stream tends to amplify the need for change with less attention to the causes of problems (Christensen, 2022). That is, politicians lean considerably on dealing with the problem of narcotic activities in the social setting by creating deliberate consciousness to expose the accompanying effects of such activities to all aspects of human endeavors and well-being.

However, such deliberate conscientization may be impoverished in exposing some aspects of the problem. Looking at youth narcotic drug activities by engaging public perception of Act 1019 to reveal the act's tendency to solve the problem created an opportunity window for politicians to come to terms with what was working or otherwise in the broader policy contexts. These public narratives revealed factors that constituted components of the problem stream. In the same way, the problem stream that exposed Act 1019's performance on the intended narcotic activities served as learning points for the politics stream to feed public recommendations back into the policy stream.

In addition, the framework's application has been given considerable augmentation as it has now been applied to multiple issue areas that seemingly deviate from the main theory course (Zohlnhöfer & Rüb, 2016). Some of these research areas include Münter's (2005) and Bundgaard and Vrangbæk's (2007) devolution; Ackrill and Kay's (2011) sugar market; Zohlnhöfer and Herweg's (2014) labor-market; and Zahariadis's (1995) privatization. Moreover, despite the original intent of theory to describe the policy agenda-setting process, it has now been extended to the decision-making process as well in Münter's (2005), Zahariadis's (1995), and Zohlnhöfer and Herweg's (2014) distinct studies. Furthermore, the framework's attraction to public policy researchers' attention was not just limited to its application; they enhanced it further. For example, Kingdon did not diagrammatize the concept either in the original (1984) or revised (2010) works; however, other scholars (e.g., Zahariadis, 2007) visualized the interactions of the streams and policy output. Figure 1 below portrays Zahariadis's graphical summarization of the framework to illustrate the interactions of the streams. The diagram also portrays policy entrepreneurs' discovery of policy window or window of opportunity to infuse their policy preferences into the process to structure policy outputs:

Figure 1

Synopsis of Zahariadis' Visual Interpretation of MSF



Zahariadis (2007).

Each stream of the framework comes with a myriad of factors that add up under the broader categories of the stream. Specifically, multiple circumstances combine to define each of the streams—problem, political, and policy. Under the problem stream, for example, indicators (such as high numbers of narcotic activity-related Ghanaian youth incarcerations [Messersmith et al., 2021; Parimah et al., 2021]), focusing events (such as high narcotic ingestion resulting in abysmal Ghanaian youth health [Frimpong et al., 2021; Kasore et al., 2021]), and policy feedback (that includes the PNDCL 236 of 1990's inability to effectively address youth narcotic drug use [Ane, 2018]) were some of the elements that drew public and political attention for policy debate commencement as Knaggård (2016) implied. (More of the framework's sub-elements may be discovered during data collection and discussed comprehensively in Chapter 5.)

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Problem Stream

Kingdon (2010) indicated that the problem stream entails the social issues that

trigger the need for a policy intervention or policy redefinition. The stream consists of the underlying issues that policymakers and the general public aspire to address. These issues—in the form of indicators, focusing events, and feedback—inform communities, organizations, and interest groups about the presence of issues that necessitate policy interventions (Mirzaei et al., 2022). In many instances, an issue is considered a problem if it is able to provoke public and political consciousness (Ruvalcaba-Gomez et al., 2023). However, through these constituents of the problem stream, the public (media, researchers, and social advocates) induces policymakers to learn about the social issues that require policy intervention (Barnett et al., 2021; Zahariadis, 2014).

Indicators

Indicators are used to establish the existence and severity of a public policy-demanding situation—for example, youth narcotic substance use. Zahariadis (2014) mentioned that indicators could be observed consistently or may be investigated exclusively. This paper leans towards this exclusive investigative orientation of youth narcotic substance use, albeit relative to the national narcotic policy. The consistent and special observations are evidenced in the diverse literature on the Ghanaian youth abuse of various forms of narcotic substances. That is, researchers in the Ghanaian scholarly milieu conducted disparate studies on various aspects of substance abuse by drawing attention to youth narcotics activities to indicate the presence of the problem. While some examined factors leading to youth narcotic abuse behaviors (e.g., Kabore et al., 2019; Kasore et al., 2021; Parimah et al., 2021b), others investigated the effects of such behaviors (Ayarna-Gagakuma et al., 2020); as well as recidivism, preventive and

recovery strategies (Hutchinson et al., 2020).

However, there are instances where a social problem is attributable to the occurrence of an extraordinary incident that serves to expose the problem (Ruvalcaba-Gomez et al., 2023). For instance, in their review of the appalling health state of Ghanaian youth in the Ghanaian construction industry, Frimpong et al. (2022) discovered the pervasiveness of narcotic drug consumption among the study group as part of the broader reasons ascribable to their abysmal health conditions. This discovery led Frimpong and colleagues to propose a future study on the group's psychoactive drug activities and youths' overall well-being.

Focusing Events

When significant unforeseen events take place, they bring up public and political discussions on the need to either enact new policies to address similar events in case there are none or change the course of existing policies if these prevailing policies do not address such unplanned situations adequately (Kingdon, 2010; Zahariadis, 2014; Zohlhöfer & Rüb, 2016). In other words, such significant but inadvertent occurrences serve as focusing events for policy enactment or adjustment. Even though there have not been any reports (scholarly or otherwise) on such unique incidences of youth substance abuse in Ghana resulting from youth narcotic drug engagement, the primary focusing event serving as a landmark on youth narcotic drug activities centered on the high numbers of incarcerations on trivial narcotic drug cases. Such incarcerations of all forms of narcotic drug activities led to the overcrowding of Ghanaian prisons and excessive government spending on convicts (Ane, 2018; Kasore et al., 2021; Messersmith et al.,

2021). To a lesser degree, the degrading health conditions of the youth, especially in Frimpong et al.'s (2022) finding—that could be replicated in other parts of the country—equally begged for public attention.

Feedback

Public policies are designed and instituted to bring social order. However, they occasionally do not work as expected, likely due to implementation failure, the emergence of operational bottlenecks, or a focusing event has emerged as a derivative of policy implementation impacts serving as feedback on the policy (Herweg et al., 2022; Kingdon, 2010; Zahariadis, 2014; Zohlnhöfer & Rüb, 2016). Zahariadis implied that feedback from prior interventions is necessary because it draws stakeholders' attention to the effectiveness of the interventions. For example, previous stringent narcotic policies of Ghana resulted in massive imprisonment of offenders but did little to reduce the social problem (Ane, 2018; Eligh, 2019; Kasore et al., 2021; Messersmith et al., 2021; Quarshie & Alagidede, 2020). Even in prisons, drug use was noticed among inmates (Parimah et al., 2021). This feedback on previous policy performance begged the question of whether narcotic policies existed in the first place. This type of situation led Herweg et al. (2022) to argue that problem brokers such as academics, journalists, and interest group delegates will use feedback on policies that fail to yield expected results (and other attention-generating strategies) to curve out potential problematic conditions as problematic especially if the condition was intended to be addressed by failed policy framework.

Politics Stream

Factors such as the national mood, the balance of interest (or support) of existing

pressure groups, the campaigns such groups exert on the government, and the influence of nongovernmental organizations (that either coax or coerce the government on those organizations' opinions on a policy) form the politics stream. Wholistically, a policy's chance to be accepted, enacted, passed or rejected, repealed, and retracted depends on the ideological inclinations of the political party in government and its control (majority) of the legislature (Herweg et al., 2022). Even though this assertion may be true, in the case of the Ghanaian situation that led to the redefinition of the narcotic drug policy, not only the contemporary ruling political party determined the policy's readjustment's appropriateness, but other minority parties and nongovernmental agencies equally saw the need to reduce government spendings (among other reasons) on high numbers of prisoners resulting from the previous policy executions (Ane, 2018; Bird, 2019; Quansah Amissah, 2022; Quarshie & Alagidede, 2020).

National Mood

National mood depicts public opinion about problems (Herweg, 2018; Kingdon, 1995; Zahariadis, 2014). How the public views an issue may be discovered through multiple ways, for example, polls (Angervil, 2021) and research. For instance, prior to the enactment of Act 1019, the opinion of the Ghanaian public on drug addiction prevalence among the youth and general drug activities in the country basically came from research findings (e.g., Adu-Mireku, 2003; Affinnih, 1999, 2005; Bosompra, 1987; Dennis-Antwi et al., 2003; Fuseini et al., 2019; Opong Asante et al., 2014; Owusu & Dwomoh, 2012). Public opinions also revolved around law enforcement's special operations resulting in massive arrests (see Brown-Acquaye, 2001). However, as to whether there was a formal

poll to reveal the extent of drug activities, especially among the youth, to trigger policy reviews, no known research findings have yet established this fact.

Balance of Interests

Balance of interests involves the influence of various pressure groups' campaigns and nongovernmental organizations' influence that either pressurize or persuade the government on their stance on a policy due to their connectedness to the problem for which the policy is designed to address (Flores, 2017). Because of their high level of influence, the balance of interest groups' positions—support or disapproval—of a policy may model policymakers' agendas and the selection of policy alternatives (Kingdon, 1995). Such influence is not limited to the groups exclusively. Pralle (2009) related that electoral turnover, which determines that the political party takes control of the government, often results in rather remarkable agenda changes. New governments push their political promises at the resumption of power and tend to favor some problems and solutions over others to fulfill their campaign pledges. What this means is that the power to influence the enactment of a policy depends on the ideological distributions (political composition and which part is in the majority) within the government. Researchers' accounts of the agenda settings of Act 1019 and the influences that gave shape to the act underscored the notion of balance of interest groups' impact on the policy process (see Ane, 2018; Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021; Kabore et al., 2019; Kyei-Gyamfi, 2023).

Policy Stream

When social problems arise, they necessitate assessments and analyses of a wide range of policy suggestions and ideas aimed at finding solutions to the identified

problems. In the policy stream, problems are analyzed, and solutions are proposed by researchers, advocates, the media, and other problem/solution experts that advise on appropriate solutions to address the problems; numerous possibilities for policy successes and failures are revealed and sieved down to ostensibly reasonable alternatives (Béland & Howlett, 2016; Zahariadis, 1992).

In a 2011 article published by the Ghanaian newspaper *The Chronicle*, the executive director of a youth health and development advocacy group advocated for the institution of legislation that would legalize the sale of intoxicants to young people (Barnett et al., 2021). Ane (2018) related that part of the reasons for the easing of the country's narcotic drug policy was to guarantee the achievement of the first of the 2030 sustainable development goals—to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere”—that somehow seemed like the United Nations advocacy influence. A literature search to verify policy process interference from external players revealed there had not been any significant studies to ascertain the involvement of policy advocacy and policy interest groups (policy entrepreneurs) in the enactment of Act 1019.

Policy Window

Apparently, factors that triggered the introduction of the NACOC bill in 2017 came from two of the streams, namely the problem and the politics streams, but not from the third, i.e., the policy. This observation conforms to Herweg et al.'s (2021) assertion that the policy window can only open in either the problem or the political streams but not in the policy stream. That is, problems such as overcrowded prisons, the need for an increase in government expenditure to run the prisons, and the apparent existence of

various narcotic activities that coincided with the change of government that had a completely different political ideology from its predecessor—who happen to be the remnants of the PNDC government—triggered the policy window to open. When an indicator (narcotic drug situation) worsens, the situation causes the problem window to be open to necessitate policy interventions. Indicators such as the overcrowding in the Ghanaian prisons due to high numbers of narcotic drug-related incarcerations created an opportunity for the Ghanaian government to see the need to revisit its existing narcotic drug policies (Ane, 2018; Kasore et al., 2021; Messersmith et al., 2021; Parimah et al., 2021).

Coincidentally, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) political party that took the administration of the country inclined to question some of the policies of the previous government, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), a product of the PNDC government that enacted the PNDCL 236 of 1990. The coupling of the problem and the political streams paved the way for policy discussions. This circumstance further undergirds Herweg and colleagues' assertion: the problem will have to exist for components of the politics stream to expose it to policymakers the politicians. National mood from research findings and the media reports and balance of interests from social advocacy groups constitute these politics stream components responsible for bringing the existence of the problem to the attention of politicians and policymakers. As indicated earlier, the policy window or window of opportunity created a platform for the introduction of the NACOC bill in 2017 that eventually became the main narcotic drug policy framework when it received the Ghanaian president's endorsement on May 11,

2020, as Act 1019 of 2020 (Hawkson, 2021).

Ghana Narcotic Drug Situation: The Problem Stream

A literature search on narcotic substance activities in Ghana revealed that the social problem existed before the country became independent in 1957 (Sagoe, 1966). However, the *People's Daily Graphic*, a Ghanaian newspaper, reported in one of its 1992 issues that “a negligible percentage of Ghanaians knew anything about heroin, cocaine or other complex synthetic” drugs before the 1980s (Akyeampong, 2005, p. 437). Akyeampong continued that the situation subsequently changed at the turn of the mid-1980s when over 1,740 illegal narcotic deals had been reported in the country between 1984 and 1990. Akyeampong indicated further that the influx of drug traffickers into Ghana around that time was attributable to the stringent narcotic laws in Nigeria that resulted in the execution of some apprehended drug offenders. Nigerian traffickers then found a safe environment to operate in Ghana, which did not have death penalties for narcotic drug commercial activities (Awaah, 2018).

History of the Ghanaian Youth Narcotic Drug Activities

Despite Akyeampong's (2005) and Awaah's (2018) revelations, little is known about the history of drug abuse among the Ghanaian youth; available research is not adequate to firmly establish when the youth started using narcotic drugs. Such inadequacy resulted from the area-specific orientation of most Ghanaian youth drug activity studies that focused heavily on cause and effect rather than history (Nkyi, 2014). Nkyi added that the most comprehensive research on Ghanaian youth substance use was carried out in 2003 by the Ghana Ministry of Health (MOH) together with the WHO.

Notwithstanding, Awaah (2018) related that such influxes of other exotic cultures into the country accounted for the problem. Appiahene-Gyamfi (2016) related similar incidences of exotic cultures, especially with the introduction of Rastafarianism in the 1970s.

However, Sagoe (1966) described a number of youth narcotic substance activities in Ghana in the early 1960s. Statistics on cannabis activities indicated both sexes engaged in some form of narcotic substance conduct even though female participation was negligible; the female almost always trafficked narcotics and served to supply drugs to consumers but did not necessarily use drugs themselves. Around the same time, Sagoe further indicated the confession of middle school male students between the ages of 12 and 16 to have taken some form of narcotic drugs, predominantly cannabis, even though there was no evidence to indicate high school and university students' engagement in drug use habits. This revelation tends to support Appiahene-Gyamfi's (2016) account. Narcotic drug activities were noticed among high school and university students in the 1970s, likely among those students who used drugs in their middle school ages in the 1960s and took the habits along with them to high schools and universities in their later years of the 1970s.

Sources of Youth Substance Use

Youth interactions with groups within their social circles create a social environment as a platform where various forms of behavior are acquired (Brown & Geis, 2015). Social causations—defined as the youth's social relationships, such as family and immediate peers—play a fundamental role in youth substance use delinquency in the broader environmental context. What these social groups cherish, in terms of behaviors

such as their response and approach to substance use, is reflected in the individual members' behaviors (Akers, 2017). According to Akers, how frequently or how much a youth uses substances directly relates to the frequency and extent of use of the youth's closest relations.

Such sources of influences transcend family and immediate peers; public figures, including local musicians and actors, may equally exert similar powers on youth narcotic drug activities. For example, Brown and Geis (2015) studied trends of youth marijuana use among Ghanaian youth. They found that these social groups and others in the youth community had the potential to determine the possible use, quantity, and duration of use of marijuana among young people. Similarly, in examining the rampancy of tramadol use in the Wassa Amenfi West Municipality in the Western Region of Ghana, most of the studied young adults who used tramadol confessed the prescription pain medicine was introduced to them by the social groups within the study participants' neighborhoods who had initially used the drug (Elliason et al., 2018). In another study conducted on Ghanaian construction workers, Frimpong et al. (2021) discovered young Ghanaian construction workers' inclination to rather consult and take recommendations from their peers and forepersons for help on work-related pains and antidotes than consult medical practitioners. In such instances, when members of social groups coordinate to persuade youngsters into using or not using drugs, the young persons' chances of succumbing to such influences are maximized (Akers, 2017). However, adolescents are more likely to adopt similar behaviors of close peers when these persuading forces, i.e., family and peers, conflict. In other words, youth are more likely to adopt what their peers cherish

than the values their family members attempt to bestow on them, according to Akers.

Most often, drugs are first made accessible to the youth through peer group interactions, and opportunities for drug use are presented.

Social Relations. Social relations platform primarily centers on the importance of a person's interactions with people or forces within the individual's circles—peer groups, neighbors, places of worship, colleagues from work or school, and virtual relations such as online social media—that are believed to be the core points a person learns and adopts peculiar behaviors (Piquero, 2015). There is a high chance for an individual to adopt associating deviant behaviors when there is a social connection between the individual and groups that hold cherished attitudes toward those deviant behaviors and strive to justify their actions (Baron, 2010; Kabiri et al., 2020; Vito et al., 2019). Kabiri et al. (2019) indicated the presence of compelling evidence supporting the fundamental responsibility of social relation variables (such as peers) on individuals' drug consumption habits. That is, there is an empirical association between socially unacceptable behavior and peer affiliation. According to Akers, there is an increased probability for individuals to participate in and conform to a deviant act that is universal to the individuals' social connections and to which the social connections give favorable definitions. Akers continued that the possibility to participate in such behaviors also increases when the individual is somewhat more exposed to significant patterns of a typical crime or deviance, which the members of the social connection defend in circumstances that criminalize the behavior. It is also possible for individuals in the social connection to adopt such behaviors when there is little or no anticipation of punishment

for such acts at any point in time but which rather yields some assumed rewards or benefits (Akers, 2017).

Peer groups serve as a bedrock of learning about substance use among the youth (Fuseini et al., 2019; Kasore et al., 2021; Tegeng & Abadi, 2018). However, the motives for learning and addiction depend on peer relationship types. Following the rampancy of prescription painkillers and other drug use in various parts of Ghana, multiple researchers discovered that peers used distinct factors to entice their resisting colleagues into drug consumption. For instance, distinct research teams found a link between sexual ecstasy and drug use. Sexually active female youth would appeal to their male counterparts and would even purchase such supposed aphrodisiacs for their male partners to take to enhance sexual performance (Elliason et al., 2018; Fuseini et al., 2019; Peprah et al., 2020). In Kasore et al.'s (2021) study, some respondents indicated they learned from their peers how to ingest multiple drugs or polydrugs to enhance the presumed ecstasy when one frequently addicted drug appeared not strong enough for sexual enhancement and satisfaction.

Alternatively, such influences take on different dimensions based on the individual's situation. Grounded in the fact that the majority of youth employment in Ghana is labor-intensive (Aryeetey et al., 2021), staying active and indefatigable may be associated with employment security presupposition. In careers such as wood carving and other physically demanding work, including small-scale manual gold mining (or *Galamsey* in local terminology), construction work, and loading and offloading jobs in local markets that are preponderantly carried out by the youth, peers easily influenced

their colleagues into taking drugs that might be thought to boost energy levels and stamina to stay active (Kasore et al., 2021).

In Aryeetey et al.'s (2021) reasons for youth substance use research, study subjects revealed contributory factors to drug use, including loss of energy and stamina at work, as the fundamental reasons peers would combine various substances and offer to colleagues to stay active. Study subjects indicated their decision to continue with the newfound antidote after experiencing increased energy levels from polydrug use of psychoactive substances. As per Aryeetey and colleagues, when the youth inadvertently lose their jobs or stay unemployed for some time, pressure from other family members on them to get jobs eventually pushes the unemployed youth to get solace from neighborhood peers who may influence them into drug misuse to stay worry-free.

Usually, these young adults would gather to comfort one another in instances of family pressure for job seeking, with one common feature of such gatherings being music listening (Dennis-Antwi et al., 2003; Asare, 1999). Very often, lyrics of the type of music and the musicians' lifestyles tend to persuade listening youth into adopting the musicians' conduct (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2020). Also, the lifestyle of the Ghanaian hiplife musicians and their lyrics influence the Ghanaian youth (Amos and Mensah, 2015). Youths adopt most of the socially unacceptable behaviors from the musicians and their musical messages. (Hiplife is a style of music with traditional Ghanaian musical roots but heavily influenced by the Western lyrical style and aspects of profanity.) Amos and Mensah underscored the correlation between students' attitudes and hiplife musicians' lifestyles. Ghanaian high school research respondents reported students learned and adopted

alcoholism, cigarette and hemp smoking, drug use, and profanity from hiplife musicians. A case in point was an article on the GhanaWeb website about drug use among Ghanaian musicians. The article mentioned the whisking away of one young hiplife musician from the stage in a 2006 talent show finale by Nescafe African Revelation. This young and talented musician was reported to have taken doses of illegal drugs to the extent that they appeared on stage dressed shabbily, completely forgot their lyrics, and apparently had no idea about their whereabouts (“Ghanaian entertainers and drug use,” 2008).

Musicians and their musical influence on youth drug use in Ghana did not start with the local musicians’ entertainment attitudes on stage and in music videos (“Ghanaian entertainers and drug use,” 2008). As early as the beginning of the 1970s, when reggae music became popular in Ghana, most Ghanaian high school (then secondary school) students adopted the styles of those foreign musicians (Appiahene-Gyamfi, 2016). These high school youth interpreted Rastafarianism to mean dressing and behaving like reggae musicians and accompanying this outlandishness with Indian hemp smoking. Such behavior copying and adoption saw an increase in various forms of drug use and addiction among the Ghanaian youth (Nkyi, 2014; Nortey & Sennah, 1990).

Adopting the lifestyles of musicians is characterized by a ripple effect. Most Ghanaian hiplife artists are in their youthful ages with an ardent desire to influence their listeners both within and outside Ghana. Their lyrics and graphics are designed to align with foreign artists’ styles of music in their pursuit of public attractiveness. Young women featured in hiplife music videos dress seductively to expose aspects of their nudity to appeal to viewers. According to Amos and Mensah (2015), a number of these

adolescent women predominantly use drugs to perform tirelessly and profanely in video clips. Their use of drugs is also aimed at removing strands of shyness because they would be exposing themselves during video recordings. By copying all aspects of foreign artists' lifestyles and incorporating them into the Ghanaian culture, including substance use as a fashion, a trickle-down effect becomes obvious from foreign artists' behaviors to the local community through Ghanaian artists ("Ghanaian entertainers and drug use," 2008).

Although the passion for Rastafarianism could have influenced pre-1970s high school students into initiating drug consumption (Appiahene-Gyamfi, 2016), subsequent reasons for substance consumption adoption and expansion among pre-tertiary students took a different course. Various research discoveries made similar conclusions on most pre-tertiary students who use different categories of drugs. These drug users had one common answer—a recommendation from peers to stay active and learn for exams (Brown-Acquaye, 2001; Hormenu et al., 2018; Nkyi, 2014; Tetteh et al., 2020). Why students get involved in drug use may transcend mere reason of educational success.

Ayarna-Gagakuma et al.'s (2020) examination of student substance use in some Ghanaian high schools produced a series of reasons: Parents' trivial attention to their adolescent children gave the young adults some aspect of independence, and the absence of parental monitoring suggested the fundamental emanation of the problem. Insufficient supervision led to the absence of communication between parents and their youth, so parents were left in the dark about their young adults' social interactions and behaviors. When parents discover their children's attitude towards drugs, the children are either

shunned (if they are grown enough to be adults) or subjected to erratic and excessively severe retribution (if they are still in their teenage years) (Byoos, 2009). Such parental attitudes towards youth substance use inspire the youth to seek solace in student peers and become soft targets to be lured into drugs (Nkrumah, 2006), especially as a means to become academically successful to regain parents' satisfaction.

Imitation of Close Relations. There is an inclination in individuals to imitate the behaviors of the people within their circles; this inclination is more prominent among the youth (Elliason et al., 2018; Fuseini et al., 2019; Hutchinson et al., 2020; Wu & Farmer, 2022). Here, the difference between social relations and imitation is that while the former indicates coercion on the individual to adopt a negative behavior, the latter underscores the individual's choice to look like the rest of their community members. Such imitations are also possible when the individual's environment is predominantly crime-prone (Li et al., 2021).

Piquero (2015) explained imitation as learning deviance through observing and exhibiting others' negative behaviors and such behaviors' pleasing and distasteful ramifications. In other words, a person is likelier to imitate a deviant act that appears rewarding if offenders escape punishments associated with the act—vicarious reinforcement (Bandura et al., 1963). According to Piquero, a range of factors, including the law, account for deviant behavior imitation. When the law (i.e., policy enforcement instrument) misses punishing a criminal act, individuals with motives to commit similar crimes may be motivated to perpetrate, with the hopes of escaping instituted ramifications as the former.

One fundamental source of Ghanaian youth substance use is peer pressure and influence (Osei-Bonsu et al., 2017). A longing for belongingness and pursuit of recognition persuade youth to voluntarily adopt what the circles they want to be part of appear to appreciate. Denouncing such persuading offers may undermine the individual's comfort in the group they aspire to be a part of. However, in their desperation to still be counted as a group member, the individual succumbs to the group's commonality (Elliason et al., 2018; Fuseini et al., 2019; Hutchinson et al., 2020; Wu & Farmer, 2022). For instance, Osei-Bonsu and colleagues discovered how youth indiscriminate alcohol consumption in most parts of Ghana was caused by their desire for membership in youth social groups. Potential members of those social groups were willing to imitate the groups' behaviors not necessarily to please the group as a whole or face repudiation but to feel at home with the rest of the group members.

Also, where elderly members of a family tend to exhibit drug consumption in the presence of their youth family members, the act of use is decriminalized in the minds of the youth; they entertain the assumption of the acceptability of psychoactive substance use. This situation was quite evident in myriad studies conducted to find out why Ghanaian school-going adolescents use drugs at a young age. Most of the respondents copied the behavior from their parents, who would unintentionally guide their children to imitate substance use (Hormenu et al., 2018; Opong Asante, 2019; Oti-Boateng & Agbleze, 2019). Parents would either send children to purchase substances through which children gain adverse knowledge of drugs. Parents and adults would use drugs in children's presence. In some instances, adults would send children to go and kindle

smoking drugs if and when parents or adult family members do not have immediate access to lighting devices. In this case, the child would have to go for a lump of burning coal or stick from outside the immediate environment and would have to light the substance by smoking it (Asiseh et al., 2017).

Such imitations take various forms. In analyzing family dynamics on the Ghanaian youth's risky behaviors, Asiseh et al. (2017) discovered three factors that expounded Ghanaian young people's imitation of their parents' behaviors towards drugs: (1) Parents are perceived as role models; (2) parents' behaviors are acceptable, and so learning and emulating such behaviors are in themselves unobjectionable; and (3) youth from homes with substance use prevalence may develop emotional distress from parents' attitudes and are more likely than not, to adopt drugs as a way of dealing with such psychological anguish. Parents and elderly family members' viewpoints and deportment on drugs are significant predictors of young family members' probable drug use (Addo et al., 2016; Opong Asante, 2019).

However, youth exposure to drugs could be associated with the assumed rewarding aspects of drugs' psychoactive properties. Matrimonial challenges parents go through present psychological trauma these young people have to endure; the trauma forces them to find comfort in peers (Adu-Okoree et al., 2020; Nkyi, 2014). In their study to establish the risks of substance use among Ghanaian adolescents, Addo et al. (2016) reported on the significance of drug use among children from broken homes. This parental disconnectedness tends to create a void in the child's enculturation (Hormenu et al., 2018). Such a vacuum in children's lives coerces them to take contentment in peers

who may, in turn, introduce them to narcotic drugs because of the assumed rewarding experience linked with its euphoric feelings. They assume the euphoric feelings will induce them to forget the immediate worries of family circumstances (Parimah et al., 2021).

Even though this way of youth substance use initiation may vary slightly from Osei-Bonsu et al.'s (2017) discovery where peers require potential members to imitate the group's fundamentals by assigning conditions of drug use to group membership, it nonetheless buttresses other accounts that children from broken homes find it more convenient to relate extensively with peers on their psychological despondency. This psychological anguish resulting from parents' separations creates a soft spot in the anguishing youth to voluntarily accept what their peers offer them to solve their present predicaments (Adu-Okoree et al., 2020; Nkyi, 2014).

Expected Gratification from Drugs. Actions come with expected benefit/reward or harm/penalty associated with the act (Akers & Jennings, 2019; Kruis et al., 2020). Vito et al. (2019) examined youth alcohol use with their perception of expected benefits and harm. The ecstatic feeling a person gets from substance consumption (benefits or harm) could determine the individual's substance intake escalation or abstinence. For example, the assumed rewarding outcome of psychoactive drugs like amphetamine or cannabis tends to be an attractive means people with a substance use disorder employ to lure peers into using drugs, including previously-indicated factors such as pre-tertiary students' claim of staying focused and active for studies (Brown-Acquaye, 2001; Hormenu et al., 2018; Nkyi, 2014; Tetteh et al., 2020); nonstudent youths' assertion of use for sexual

satisfaction (Elliason et al., 2018; Fuseini et al., 2019; Kasore et al., 2021; Peprah et al., 2020); and working youths' perception of obtaining and maintaining energy and stamina for physical labor requirement (Aryeetey et al., 2021).

Economic Dependency. Among the threats to youth narcotic substance activities is their quest for economic autonomy. However, due to the immense youth unemployment rate among Ghanaian youth aged 15 – 24 years, which stood at 32.8% in 2023 (see Adu et al., 2023), there was a massive supply of youths who were willing and ready to engage in narcotic drug trafficking. Because there was no effective working policy beyond a drafted document that had been in circulation for the past two and a half decades, the risk of youth falling into the traps of the alluring narcotic drug business was feared to worsen (Aning, 2007). Also, the quest for economic independence and high social status remained the Ghanaian youths' priority, and a quick way to attain those goals was the dependence on drug trafficking (see Fortune et al., 2015).

In the wake of the internet explosion across Ghana, the youth not only used the technology tool to advance fraudulent activities (sakaawa in local terminology), but they also incorporated narcotic transactions in such activities. Internet drug traffickers doubling as everyday internet fraudsters are alleged to take advantage of their illegal internet operations to integrate such drug trafficking activities through encrypted emails. In some cases, the primary motive of these superficial fraudsters is to traffic drugs this way in order to divert security agencies' attention from their primary crime (Mohammed et al., 2019). However, because these activities thrive among the youth with their unquenching desire for flamboyant and luxurious lifestyles, more of them, with such a

massive supply of unemployed numbers, tend to find solace in such trafficking activities, according to Mohammed and colleagues.

Such monetary-driven engagements with narcotic transactions in themselves did not mean youth consumed those substances. Rather, their sheer association with such substances and ease of access could lure them into trying to get the experience, thereby leading them into unintended addiction. For example, Affinnih (1999, 2005) conducted a drug trafficking study in some parts of the Ghanaian capital city, Accra, where one female drug addict relayed her story to the researcher. She indicated she was in the business of trafficking narcotic drugs with her boyfriend from Ghana to Europe in the 1980s but did not use drugs at the time. After making considerable money from the trade, she tried some drugs and eventually became so hooked that she could not go back to her parents and daughter; she abandoned all her estate establishment plans and now resided in slums in Accra, Ghana.

Northern Ghana Situation

The youth narcotic drug situation in the northern regions of Ghana is not different from the national trends. Fuseini et al. (2019) enumerated factors their research participants attributed to their addiction. They investigated why the youth in the Northern Region (precisely in the regional capital, Tamale) abused the prescription painkiller tramadol and discovered that in addition to the reasons discussed before, other factors contributed to some forms of drug use. Tramadol and other prescription painkillers are not illegal and are hardly regulated in Ghana; tramadol is the only opioid not under international drug control regulations (see Alhassan, 2022; Thompson & Ofori-Parku,

2021), leading to post-traumatic addiction in high doses in some cases.

According to Fuseini and peers (2019), initial consumption was under prescription, and subsequent and unprescribed consumptions rather resulted from the euphoric experiences addicts had from initial consumption. One striking reason was Saapiire et al.'s (2021) discovery. Their study participants gave similar reasons mentioned before that contributed to the participants' psychoactive substance ingestion and possession. Out of their 152 study respondents, however, over 16 percent said they had no justification for such activities; they could not attribute their drug activities to any substantial reasons.

Adusei (2012) examined the poverty situation in Ghana based on geographical locations. Their findings exposed the seriousness of the economic conditions of the northern regions that made more adolescents and youth vulnerable to all forms of social vices. Adusei showed over 70 percent of the people in the northern regions lived within the souring poverty zones with less than \$1 (one dollar) daily. Such conditions appeared to be worse than those in 2022, as Pugmire (2022) confirmed that those extreme conditions compelled parents to engage children in any available workforce. Pugmire gave a number of adolescents' likely risky labor to include drug trafficking in the northern regions. They indicated that approximately 33 percent of children as young as 6 – 14 work in various nonformal areas in the northern regions of the country due to such prevalent poverty experiences. This anomaly would potentially pave the way for the youth around those areas to get engaged in the enticing trade of narcotics as a source of livelihood.

Overview of the Ghanaian Narcotic Policy

Prior to the enactment of the Pharmacy and Drugs Act of 1961 (amended in 1963), Ghana's fight against narcotic cases was evidenced faintly in its 1960 Criminal Code Act 29. The country rather demonstrated commitment to the narcotic drug battle through its significant participation as a signatory to multiple continental and global struggles against all forms of illegal drug activities. Such struggles (in the form of protocols and conventions) included the country's binding declaration of the 1912 and the 1925 Conventions (amended in 1931), the 1948 Protocol, and the previously mentioned 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (Sagoe, 1966). Although there were later amendments to the Criminal Offences Act of 1960 (Act 29)—mentioned and classified as unspecified drug offenses under Racketeering in the act's amendment of 2012, Act 849 (see Ane, 2018)—the Pharmacy and Drugs Act of 1961 became the country's first drug policy enacted during its first republic.

Pharmacy and Drugs Act, 1961

After the first formal inception of the national act on drugs in 1961, the Pharmacy and Drugs Act of 1961 (PDA of 1961), the country continued with international collaborations as a continuation of its commitment. These collaborations included the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, the 1972 Single Convention Protocol (an amendment of the same protocol originally enacted in 1961), and the Convention Against Illicit Trafficking of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 (Appiahene-Gyamfi, 2016; Bernstein, 1999). However, after the adoption of the 1961 national drug policy, there was not any noticeable change to the sections of the policy's 1963

amendment that detailed narcotic offenses and their related penal actions. For instance, Sections 47 and 48 of the original act and paragraphs (e) and (f) of their amendments stated the offenses without any noticeable changes. For possession of narcotics, both Section 47 of the original act and paragraph (e) of the amended act stated the following:

Section 47—Possession of narcotics

- (1) No person shall have in his possession without lawful excuse, proof of which shall be on him, any opium or Indian hemp of any species or description whatsoever or any residue from the smoking thereof. (“Laws and Regulations,” 1961, p. 12)

Also, for the ingestion (smoking) of opium or Indian hemp, Section 48 of the original act and paragraph (f) of the amended act indicated the following:

Section 48—Smoking of opium or Indian hemp

No person shall:

- (a) smoke opium or Indian hemp or frequent any place used for the smoking thereof; or
- (b) permit premises owned or occupied by him to be used by persons smoking opium or Indian hemp; or
- (c) have in his possession pipes or other utensils for use in connection with the smoking of opium or Indian hemp. (“Laws and Regulations,” 1961, p. 12)

Similarly, the original act and the amended one had no difference in related punishments for offenses in their respective sections 57 and paragraphs (i) and (j). Both

the original and amended acts indicated the following for penal ramifications of offenses:

Section 57—Punishment of offences

- (1) If a person acts in such a way as to contravene a requirement, condition or prohibition imposed by or under this act, he shall be guilty of an offence under this act.
- (2) A person guilty of an offence under this act:
 - (a) where the offence relates to a narcotic drug, shall be liable:
 - i. on conviction or indictment, to a fine not exceeding one thousand pounds (£1,000) or imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years or both;
 - ii. on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding two hundred and fifty pounds (£250) or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or both.
 - (b) where the offence is that of supplying of opium or Indian hemp or of cultivating Indian hemp contrary to section 28 (2) or section 49 of this Act, as the case may be, and in each case the person has been convicted of that offence on two previous occasions, shall be liable to imprisonment for life;
 - (c) where the offence is that of smoking or of having in his possession any opium or Indian hemp contrary to section 48 (a) or to subsection (1) of section 47 of this Act as the case may be and the person has, in each case been convicted of that offence on two previous occasions, shall be liable

to imprisonment not exceeding twenty years.

- (3) A person guilty of an offence under this act relating to Indian hemp shall be sentenced to imprisonment for at least five years. (“Laws and Regulations,” 1961, p. 14)

Despite instigating and enforcing this apparently stringent act to deter all forms of narcotic drug activities, Ghana failed to effectively control all forms of the problem of narcotic substance activities in the country, leading to a later policy review (Awaah, 2018).

Narcotic Drugs Law, 1990 (PNDCL 236)

Because Ghana was a signatory to various international conventions on narcotic drugs, possible pressures from the international organizations on the government to fulfill the country’s obligation as a member of those conventions led the PNDC government to redefine the country’s narcotic policy in 1990. Those requirements led to the creation of the Narcotic Drugs (Control, Enforcement, and Sanctions) Law, 1990 (PNDCL 236) with the goal of providing “realistic and deterrent sanctions” to offenders due to “the rising incidence of narcotic drug abuse in the country and the threatening dimensions that illicit narcotic drug dealing has taken” (Appiahene-Gyamfi, 2016; “PNDCL 236,” 1990 p. 1). The PNDCL 236 of 1990 outlined narcotic substance use under Sections 5 and 6 as follows:

Section 5—Use of Narcotic Drugs Prohibited

- (1) No person shall without lawful authority or excuse, smoke, sniff, consume, inject in his body or otherwise administer narcotic drug on his

body.

- (2) Any person who without lawful authority injects any person with, or in any manner administers narcotic drug to any person commits an offence.
- (3) A person convicted for an offence under subsection (1) or (2) is liable to be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than five years.

Section 6—Offence to Supply or Buy Narcotic Drugs.

- (1) Any person who without lawful authority, proof of which shall be on him, supplies any narcotic drug to any person commits an offence.
- (2) Any person who without lawful excuse buys narcotic drugs commits an offence.
- (3) A person who commits an offence under subsection (1) or (2) of this section shall on conviction be liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than five years. (“PNDCL 236,” 1990 p. 6)

Moreover, the Ghanaian government had no standalone agency to enforce the country’s narcotic policy until the introduction of the PNDCL 236 of 1990. Section 55 of the PNDCL 236 of 1990 established the Narcotic Control Board or NACOB under the supervision and control of the then Secretary for Interior to handle the execution of narcotic cases. Under Section 12.0 (the national drug policy implementation) of the Ghana National Drug Policy (GNDP) document, the NACOB was one of the necessary respective regulatory and professional governmental agencies to be tasked to achieve overall national drug policy objectives (GNDP, 2004).

However, the PNDCL 236 of 1990 delineated austere penalties for narcotic use

offenses similar to the provisions in the PDA of 1961 prior to the PNDCL 236's review in 2017. Both Subsection 57 (2) of the PDA of 1961 and Subsection 6 (2) of the PNDCL 236 of 1990 indicated similar punishments, with the exception of the exclusion of the monetary component in the PDA of 1961 from the PNDCL 236 of 1990. An offender could face up to 10 years in both policy provisions. While the PDA of 1961 indicated "a fine not exceeding one thousand pounds or imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years or both, the PNDCL 236 of 1990 made the offense "liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than five years". Nonetheless, the PNDCL 236 of 1990 gave a comprehensive legal espousal to almost all NACOB's regulatory and enforcement actions necessary to control all forms of narcotic activities. Ane (2018) implied that such harsh and disproportionate penalties the law outlined—such as all forms of narcotic offenses not bailable (see Barnett et al., 2021; see also Owusu et al., 2021)—necessitated policy review that led to the introduction of the Narcotic Control Commission (NACOC) Bill in 2017.

Furthermore, prior to the enactment of Act 1019, media interests in youth narcotic drug activities considerably targeted the dangers; media advocacies did not focus much attention on contributory factors that provoked the habit (Adu-Mireku, 2003; Bosompra, 1987; Dennis-Antwi et al., 2003). Nevertheless, those efforts, coupled with high narcotic-related prisoner numbers for trivial offenses and the evidence of the country's susceptibility to international narcotic traffickers to be used as a pass-through zone, triggered policy agenda setting for the Ghanaian government to consider the review of the country's narcotic policy (Kumah-Abiwu, 2019).

Narcotics Control Commission Act of 2020, Act 1019

The Ghanaian Parliament passed the NACOC Bill into law in 2020, Act 1019, following a policy review because the PNDCL 236 was unable to achieve policy goals (Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021). This policy readjustment marked a significant policy shift in the Government of Ghana's narcotics control approaches as indicated below in Sections 37 and 41 of the act:

Section 37—Unlawful possession or control of narcotic drugs

- (1) A person who, without lawful authority, proof of which lies on that person, has possession or control of a narcotic drug for use or for trafficking commits an offence.
- (2) A person who commits an offence in subsection (1)—
 - (a) for use is liable on summary conviction to a fine imposed in accordance with the penalty specified in the Second Schedule and an additional term of imprisonment specified in that schedule if the fine is not paid;
 - (b) for trafficking is liable on summary conviction to the fine and imprisonment specified in the Second Schedule and an additional term of imprisonment specified in that schedule if the fine is not paid.

Section 41—Unlawful possession or control of narcotic plants

- (1) A person who without lawful authority, proof of which lies on that person, has possession or control of a narcotic plant for use or for trafficking commits an offence.
- (2) A person who commits an offence of unlawful possession or control of a

narcotic plant—

- (a) for use is liable on summary conviction to a fine imposed in accordance with the penalty specified in the Second Schedule or a term of imprisonment specified in the schedule if the fine is not paid; or
- (b) for trafficking is liable on summary conviction to the fine and imprisonment specified in the Second Schedule and an additional term of imprisonment specified in that schedule if the fine is not paid. (5) Without prejudice to subsections (3) and (4), a Court that convicts a person for an offence committed under subsection (2) may make an order directing the person to seek treatment and rehabilitation at a facility approved by the Commission in consultation with the Minister for Health. Below is the snapshot of the Second Schedule referenced under Subsection 37 (2) (a) and 41 (2) (a) outlining the penal ramifications of offences under the sections:

Second Schedule

Section: 37 (2) (a) or 41 (2) (a); Type of offence: Prohibition of possession of narcotic drugs or plant (for use); Fine: Not less than two hundred penalty units and not more than five hundred penalty units; Custodial sentence: Not applicable; Default sentence (if fine is not settled): Not more than fifteen months imprisonment. (“Act 1019,” 2020, p. 52)

However, for trafficking of narcotic drugs, irrespective of quantity, attracts a compulsory prison term and a fine. This fine may be converted to additional prison terms

if, upon serving the mandatory prison terms in the schedule, the fine is not paid as outlined below:

Second schedule (continued)

Section: 37 (2) (b) or 41 (2) (a) and (b); Type of offence: Prohibition of possession of narcotic drugs or plant (for trafficking); Fine: Not less than ten thousand penalty units and not more than twenty-five thousand penalty units; Custodial sentence: Not less than ten years and not more than twenty-five years imprisonment; Default sentence (if the fine is not settled): Three years imprisonment (“Act 1019,” 2020, p. 52)

Under the revised policy regulation, both Sections 37 (2) (a) and 41 (2) (a) of the NACOC Act 1019 of 2020 clarify that both possession and use of narcotic substances would attract a financial penalty of between ₦2,400 – ₦6,000, a conversion of the 200 – 600 penalty units in legal terms (Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021; Bird, 2019). (These fines stood at \$183.20 – \$458.01 converted into dollars on April 8, 2024, for further elaborations of the associated fines.) In addition, the revised policy decriminalized narcotic drug possession and consumption; the policy regarded the act as a critical public health problem. Narcotic substance offenders would be castigated more humanely than decade-long prison terms for possession and consumption, even though prison terms of up to 15 months still hold for defaulting offenders (Owusu et al., 2021).

Narcotics in Act 1019 Era

There have been a considerable number of studies on the NACOC Act 2020 since it was first introduced as a bill in 2017. Such a bold step the government took *vexed*

scholars' inquisitiveness to investigate the potential benefit such a groundbreaking and daring move would have on the dynamics of overall narcotic substance activities in the country. However, since the bill was adopted supposedly as the best alternative to previous policy provisions, scholars were less involved in researching the subsequent dynamics of narcotic situations the readopted policy was able to attract or influence. One logical argument that might vindicate scholars' tardiness for their scanty investigations on the productiveness of the framework could be because of the policy's relative newness. Alternatively, there might not have been any profound event resulting from the implementation of the policy that could have triggered scholars' curiosity.

Nonetheless, Kyei-Gyamfi (2023) investigated the implementation of the act and discovered some emerging bottlenecks that policy execution agencies encountered, especially in their efforts to fight narcotic substance misuse cases in the country. According to Kyei-Gyamfi, one NACOC official disclosed the difficulty the commission intermittently stumbled upon in their attempt to develop solutions to address psychoactive substance engagements and ingestions, particularly among the youth. Such difficulties are not inherent in the operationalization of the policy; rather, the difficulties are embedded in the policy redefinition of narcotic drug use as a public health problem—and not a crime—that resulted in the year-round bulk cases of narcotic-related mental illness in the national capital psychiatric hospital. Policy enforcement officials' concern about this trend was not necessarily on the high numbers of psychiatric cases (because the policy requirement is to ensure victims get related help); their concerns centered on the fact that such facilities failed to admit youth patients because the facilities were designed

to handle adult cases exclusively.

Kasore et al. (2021) encountered similar situations as Kyei-Gyamfi's (2023) in their (Kasore and colleagues') investigation of factors attracting youth to narcotic substance use and the affiliated health problems. Kasore and peers related that the prison terms and financial fines under the country's new narcotic policy framework might not be strict enough to deter people with a substance use disorder from refraining. This discovery led Kasore et al. to see the need for the government to establish adequate rehabilitation facilities to handle cases as promised in the Act 1019 policy document. Section 43 subsection (5) of the document stated that:

“Without prejudice to subsections (3) and (4), a Court that convicts a person for an offence committed under subsection (2) may make an order directing the person to seek treatment and rehabilitation facility approved by the Commission in consultation with the Minister for Health” (“Act 1019,” 2020, p. 20).

They recommended the government's setting up of effective but affordable youth-oriented residential rehabilitation facilities and programs to address their needs, give them counseling, and treat their related narcotic substance addiction.

Additional Evidence

The narcotic drug situation in Ghana is not a new phenomenon. Trends in the country's northern regions do not differ from the national circumstances. Accounts of the introduction of narcotics, especially heroin, into the country went as far back as the Second World War in 1945 when the colonial fighters returned home from the war in East Africa and the Far East (Sagoe, 1966). Such an early introduction of some form of

narcotics into the country did not suggest that narcotic substance activities in Ghana were known to the public. For instance, Du Toit (1974) and Seeds (2021) both cited Sagoe's work on the introduction of heroin into Ghana but revealed different accounts of the initial introduction into the country. While Du Toit indicated that that particular narcotic drug was unknown to the Ghanaian public and that its first illegal cultivation was done in 1960, Seeds maintained that the time of its introduction to the country was not certain, that it could have been introduced earlier, likely in the 1930s. One thing was certain, however: by the mid-1970s, various forms of narcotic substance abuse incidents gained ground among the youth.

Prior to the 1970s, however, some form of substance activities were noticed among middle school male students but not among high school and university students (Sagoe, 1966). Also, there were entries of foreign cultures into Ghana (such as the reggae music that was accompanied by the concept of Rastafarianism characterized by the use of some forms of narcotics, such as the Indian hemp) during the 1970s. Such influxes (in addition to the course of transition from middle school to high schools and universities of those students who used drugs in their middle school ages in the 1960s) resulted in the rise of drug use among the youth, especially high school students (Appiahene-Gyamfi; 2016; Awaah, 2018). Similar trends likely existed among nonstudent youths despite the sparse research that focused on this group in the 1970s. Notwithstanding, Sagoe disclosed from police reports that narcotic drug activities occurred in isolated places, around commercial transport stations, and in shady nightclubs.

Arguably, even though such adoption of foreign cultures could have played the

leading role in initial learning of narcotic substance activities, subsequent learning could not have been blamed solely on the intrusions of those imported cultures. Other factors undeniably played vital roles in the upsurge of such activities among the youth, especially in subsequent years. Following the rise of youth narcotic substance use, abuse, and distribution, the situations fascinated various researchers' desire for knowledge to solicit answers to the inducing causes for the upsurge. Different researchers attributed different circumstances that only reflected the components of the problem stream.

For instance, Piquero (2015) outlined the learning points of adopting vice among young people, including their immediate environment (such as their neighbors), peer groups, virtual relationships (such as online interactions), and colleague students, among others. These groups together make up the social relations of the individual with an elevated level of influence in the individual's life. When these groups hold a particular belief and portray attitudes towards that belief, including substance addiction and distribution, there is a high possibility each member of the group would exhibit and cherish the binding character of the group (see Akers, 2017; Baron, 2010; Kabiri et al., 2020; Vito et al., 2019). Individuals relate better with peers in numerous ways; peers become a source of learning for individuals (Fuseini et al., 2019; Kasore et al., 2021; Tegeng & Abadi, 2018). Studies in Ghana on youth drug problems underscored that group members and individual friends used different approaches to convince distinct resisting colleagues to addiction, with sexual ecstasy being one of the essential causes of prescription painkiller and polydrug use in most cases.

In other cases, youth attributed their willingness to accept proposals from

colleagues of their social groups based on the individual's situation. For example, the consumption of some hard drugs was assumed to be a source of extreme energy levels needed to carry out labor-intensive jobs typical of most Ghanaian youth employment (Aryeetey et al., 2021). Laggings ones easily succumb to colleagues' influence to pump up the needed energy through narcotic consumptions (Kasore et al., 2021). Some forms of non-drug-related pressure from some social relations may lead to drug activities, especially among adolescents. Ghana is characterized by child labor, and in most cases, children comprise the family's economic bedrock (Pugmire, 2022).

In instances where these young adults lose jobs and pressure from the family rises, they are frustrated and tend to rely on peers for comfort. Pressures from the family that have no relationship with children's drug activity involvement coerce children to face coaxing pressures from peers to take all forms of drug activities to address such family-associated pressures (Oppong Asante, 2016; Oppong Asante et al., 2014). Also, the willingness to accept proposals from their comrades in their social groups is common among students. Brown-Acquaye (2001), Hormenu et al. (2018), Nkyi (2014), and Tetteh et al. (2020) found a shared answer to why most students used some forms of narcotics. Respondents to those independent studies indicated their peers recommended those drugs as a solution to the difficulty in staying awake and active for thriving academic accomplishments.

In other instances, the source of learning drug activities may not necessarily be connected with direct contact with physical social relationships. This assertion is reflected in youths' engagement with all sorts of entertainment—music, movies, and

online activities. Some literature on Ghanaian youth drug situations pointed to the introduction of foreign cultures into Ghana in the 1970s; however, this assertion remained true as recently as 2022. Hernandez et al. (2022) investigated factors associated with teenagers in junior high school getting pregnant in some parts of northern Ghana; they established that such entertainment factors not only lead to teenage sexual promiscuity but also served as learning points for all forms of drug activities due to the explicitly provocative contents of their choice of music. Entertainment as a source of learning points for drug activities may only be inclined to use and abuse but not necessarily for possession for distribution purposes. Previously identified pressures emanating from family because of economic reasons, the youths' desire for economic independence, and high unemployment rates among the youth are all factors that led most of the studied youth to possess drugs apparently for distribution as a quick means to address these concerns (Fortune et al., 2015).

However, Ghana's first narcotic drug policy accorded severe punishments to all narcotic drug offenses as the only solution to addressing overall narcotic drug situations; it considered all offenses as criminal irrespective of the quantity used or possessed. This position reflected the commitment to wage war on drugs to conform to the country's international participation as a signatory to a series of conventions. (Sagoe, 1966). By the turn of the 1980s, Ghana could not achieve the expected success in all forms of narcotic substance activities, even within such austere policy environments.

Because of this failure and the need for the country to meet its obligation as a signatory to the numerous international conventions, the PNDC government enacted

PNDCL 236 of 1990 as a readjustment of the PDA of 1961 with even stricter and “realistic and deterrent sanctions” (Appiahene-Gyamfi, 2016; “PNDCL 236,” 1990 p. 1). Such sterner and uncompromising policy provisions resulted in more incarcerations of the citizens, especially the youth, than the PNDCL 236 of 1990’s predecessor. These policy adjustments led to the functioning of prisons beyond their originally designed operational capacities (Ane, 2018; Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021). Besides, both the PDA of 1961 and the PNDCL 236 of 1990 still considered narcotic drug activities as criminal. Nonetheless, there was negligible impact, if at all, of both regulations on all forms of narcotic substance activities.

However, the PNDCL 236 of 1990 remained the country’s operational drug policy until 2017, when the Government of Ghana under the NPP government considered narcotic drug policy change imperative to reflect a more humane yet effective tool to address all forms of narcotic substance engagements. The NACOC bill was proposed in 2017 to replace PNDCL 236, passed by the Parliament of Ghana in March 2020 as Act 1019, and was signed by the president of Ghana as a law on May 11, 2020 (Hawkson, 2021). Under the new policy, narcotic substance activities were considered public and social health problems that needed rehabilitation and counseling for harm reduction instead of punitive measures of prison terms, albeit prison terms are still possible in some instances (Bird, 2019).

Prior to the enactment of Act 1019, researchers indicated in their unique ways the significance and importance of such policy shift and its inevitability in solving the country’s various narcotic drug problems (Ane, 2018; Bird, 2019; Eligh, 2019; Kumah-

Abiwu, 2019). Since its inception, however, available literature on the act directed attention to the operations of NACOC and its affiliates; it paid little to no attention to the possibility of the act achieving the narcotic drugs reduction policy goals (e.g., Kyei-Gyamfi, 2023). Some literature still focused attention on the problem of various narcotic substance use and related health issues without bringing into the picture the possible role the act played in the contemporary narcotic-health relationship despite the underlying argument the government advanced that led to the enactment of the act—to consider narcotic substance engagements as a public and social health problem (e.g., Alhassan, 2022; Messersmith et al., 2021).

Summary

Post Act 1019 of 2020, literature advanced arguments similar to those earlier studies put forward. They continued to conduct situational investigations of various narcotic and psychoactive substance prevalence with faint references to the effect of Act 1019 of 2020 on those situations. Reflecting on this seeming researchers' inattentiveness—toward examining the act's competence in changing the dynamics its predecessors were incapable of achieving—guided this study to reason that multiple important scholarly investigations were yet to be conducted. In other words, the vast literature search on the policy using diverse search terms on a variety of sites and in numerous libraries with limited results on policy-related literature rather exposed the need to turn research attention to all possible aspects of the policy. This way, researchers would produce policy narratives and directions to be fed back into related streams of the policy process to either reinforce policy elements as long as the act was achieving its

goals or readjust such elements for constructive achievements of policy objectives in case the act failed to meet targets.

In this generic qualitative study, I explored multi-dimensional insights from the people of various social backgrounds in Yendi on how the Ghana national narcotic policy exclusively shapes the dynamics of youth narcotic use. Additional knowledge in the literature on Act 1019 of 2020 was imperative, especially when the act attracted scholars' attention immediately after its introduction as a bill in 2017. Still, little was discussed about its impact after it became the mainstream national drug policy framework. The literature also demanded additional knowledge on the act's ability to affect general narcotic situations in Ghana and among the youth, given that the intent of the government was to "provide social protection...for the youth...to ensure the development of a knowledgeable, self-reliant, skilled, disciplined, and healthy population with the capacity to drive and sustain the socioeconomic development of the nation" (NYPG, 2010 p. 10). This study aimed to narrow the literature gap on the policy's ability to address youth substance activities to facilitate the achievements of the government's youth development policy.

In this chapter, I examined the literature on the theoretical framework that supported the study. I looked at the appropriateness of the theory to the study as well. I explored the history of narcotics in Ghana since the country's independence in 1957 and proceeded to the sources of youth narcotic substance activities in the country. Because there were no precise studies on the drug situation in Yendi, I relied on findings from other parts of the northern regions of Ghana to indicate the possible trends of youth

narcotic substance situation in Yendi based on the sociocultural similarities of the regions (see Awedoba, 2006; Lentz, 2006; Simpson Miller, 2022; Prussin, 1969). Then, I examined policy transitions from the country's first republic to the current Act, Act 1019 of 2020, and the literature on the act since its enactment.

In the next chapter, I examined the details of the research plan and approach. I looked at other factors, including the research question, research design and rationale, the approach, my role as a researcher and possible bias, and data collection. Data collection included procedures, instruments, analysis, and ethical concerns. I concluded the chapter by discussing the findings' trustworthiness—credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019).

Chapter 3: Research Method

This generic qualitative study aimed to assess the Ghana national narcotic policy's influence on youth substance abuse. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to assess how Act 1019 of 2020 addressed the occurrences of youth narcotic substance activities in the policy process and the policy output by focusing on the youth narcotic situations in Yendi. Ghana experienced a series of policy modifications on narcotics since its independence in 1957, with the enactment of Act 1019 in 2020 as its major policy shift on narcotics (Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021; Kasore et al., 2021; Messersmith et al., 2021; Parimah et al., 2021). Even though the literature before the act's enactment indicated the importance of such policy change, successive literature leading up to this study did not examine the potency of the act in achieving policy goals. This paper was intended to address this lag by contributing to the literature on the effects of the updated policy precisely on youth narcotic activities in Yendi. Findings from this study are intended to provide information for researchers, Ghanaian policymakers, and other policy interest groups and youth development stakeholders with the understanding of how the updated drug policy addressed the Ghanaian youth narcotic substance activities especially. Policy interest groups (or youth development stakeholders) and politicians may incorporate the findings in their related streams of the policy process for policy alternatives.

In this chapter, I examine the research methodology, plan, and approach in detail. I look at the research question, research design and rationale, the approach, my role as a researcher, possible bias, and data collection. I examine the known researcher bias and

ways to eliminate such biases. I restate the problem statement briefly as well. Data collection included procedures, instruments, analysis, and ethical concerns. I address the ethical concerns to guarantee the reliability of this study. I concluded the chapter by discussing the findings' trustworthiness—credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019).

Research Design and Rationale

Various public service institutions have had relative experiences of youth narcotic drug activities and defined concepts of youth drug issues relative to their lived experience. Individuals within such institutions had their respective lived experiences as well; their perceptions of the policy's role in shaping the problem of youth narcotic activities centered on those experiences. That is, how individuals within the institutions ascribed meaning to Act 1019 of 2020's potency to deal with the problem of youth drug activities was based on their day-to-day handling of narcotic-related cases among the youth. For example, parents had a dissimilar experience with their children's narcotic drug engagements from teachers. These factors underscored the importance of including a wide range of sections of the public in the study to solicit their assessments of the act on the problem. For this reason, the research question for this study was "Given the incidence of drug abuse among the youth, what is public opinion regarding Ghana's national narcotic policy's influence in combating the problem to cause a positive social change?"

How Act 1019 of 2020 influenced the incidences of narcotic drug activities among the youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years was the central phenomenon of this

study. This study focused on the act relative to youth drug engagements even though the youth were not included in the study participant pool. Moreover, English-speaking participants were sampled and interviewed. Interviews were conducted on individuals from five groups—the local government employees, teachers, health workers, the police, and the courts—to compare group responses to understand their perspectives on policy. The goal was to examine their assessment of the act on the problem to provide information for the public, politicians, and policymakers on policy discussions.

Design

I used a qualitative research approach with a generic methodology for this study. I considered the epistemological attempt to discover the *reality* of Act 1019's influence on youth substance activities (see Jones et al., 2016). The generic qualitative methodological approach reveals the true definitions individuals and groups attach to phenomena (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2011); in this case, the approach allowed me to assess the policy's ability to solve the social problem through the viewpoints of study participants and their lived experiences. This qualitative methodology aids researchers with limited knowledge seeking to thoroughly investigate a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The methodology also enables researchers to organize research findings into themes to describe study respondents' lived experiences (Patton, 2015). I employed the methodology because of its flexibility to accommodate all of the distinct methodologies of the qualitative design. It helps novice researchers because it does not limit itself to the boundaries of the various standalone qualitative methodologies and helps mitigate the complexities inherent in

those individual methodologies. Collecting information on respondents' diverse perceptions relative to the act's influence required constructing interview questions that were open-ended by design, but this was possible only under a generic qualitative methodology. As indicated, various distinct approaches do not allow for incorporating other forms of data outside their distinct boundaries (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Adopting a quantitative approach would have not captured some indispensable situations that came up unplanned during the one-on-one interviews. (Quantitative data collection involves the use of closed-ended questionnaires that do not allow flexibility like respondents' additional viewpoints (which respondents are sure to be indispensable to the research) as qualitative interviews do.) Such limitedness of freedom to express respondents' sentiments on the issue implied that important pieces of information that could have helped direct policy debates and influence policy outcomes to align with the public's view of "what works" would have been missing. The study would have failed to decipher the public's true and honest interpretation of policy effectiveness they expressed tacitly (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Role of the Researcher

Data collection involves detailed engagement with the study respondents to relate their subjective experiences of their interaction with the youth with narcotic drug activities. This comprehensive and detailed task was not expected to be simple. On the one hand, some respondents found it painful to relate their experiences, especially because they happened to have some primary relations with youth with narcotic drug issues. Respondents' experience on the explored subject may still be fresh on some

occurrences, or relieving prior experiences may be challenging for them (Sutton & Austin, 2015). However difficult the situation may be, the role of the researcher is to conduct the needed studies to establish findings on the problem under investigation. This assertion leads to the researcher's obligation to protect respondents' privacy and the security of the data collected. On the other hand, the researcher may be tempted to persuade responses in a particular direction to satisfy their presumptions. These are some of the challenges inherent in qualitative research. It was important, therefore, that I (as a researcher) articulated clear mechanisms for safeguarding participants and their responses.

Researcher's Role

My role as the researcher was to observe, listen, and record responses exactly as respondents narrated them to me to ensure study objectivity and the findings' accuracy. I did not engage narcotic drug users in the study directly. My goal was to ensure that some considerable portions of the various groups of society were included in the study, that the interview questions I created and the interviews I conducted and transcribed were relevant to the subject, and that the results reflected participants' true experiences of youth narcotic substance activities. My goal was also to reveal how the participants perceived Act 1019 of 2020's provisions in line with current trends of the problem in Yendi, Ghana. As indicated, my role as a researcher was to articulate clear mechanisms to safeguard study participants' privacy and the security of their responses.

Researcher's Biases

Several factors may induce the tempering of respondents' answers to sensitive

questions, including my relationship with the respondents and the youth who engaged in narcotic drug activities; my political affiliation because drug policies went through changes under different political governments with different ideologies; and the area of study is my birthplace. Identifying these threats to the validity of research findings was necessary to help design mechanisms to obstruct such influences. To provide context and understanding of findings for readers, qualitative research requires researchers to be reflexive by acknowledging their own unintended and unlikely biases but at the same time try to reduce such biases (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Despite being born in Yendi and living there actively until 1997, most of the study respondents were unfamiliar to me. Most of my contemporaries were not included in the study, and possibly a sizable number of them no longer lived in Yendi. Also, given that the focused age group (which was not directly involved in this study) was from ages 15 to 24 years equally implied that my sentiments were negligible because they were born after I left the study area permanently. Rather, the only alignment between this population and me as a researcher concentrated on our mutual geographical orientation and ethnic identity. However, these considerations were still important. Personal perceptions of youth that engaged in narcotic drug activities were possible. Perceptions were also possible on how the drug policy could have been implemented to address such behaviors. My previous experience of student colleagues' various narcotic substance consumption during my high school days could have triggered those perceptions.

One important strategy adopted to subjugate these potential researcher biases was the application of bracketing, described as “refraining from judgment or staying away

from the everyday, commonplace way of seeing things” (Weatherford & Maitra, 2019, p. 91). In practice, bracketing directs qualitative researchers to separate their individual experiences from the phenomenon they are investigating, even though Ravitch and Carl (2019) indicated the practical difficulties in achieving such objectivities. Furthermore, even when the researcher assumes they are being objective, there is bound to be some researcher’s unconscious subjective intrusion in the study. I adhered to Ravitch and Carl’s recommendation amid such difficulties in observing strict objectivities. Ravitch and Carl advised that qualitative researchers enforce efforts such as constant reminders to the self to detach oneself from influencing responses and incorporating one’s viewpoints in the data and to be more mindful of such subjectivities and consider them carefully.

There was another potential prejudice that was not researcher-generated. This predisposition revolved around the political affiliation of respondents, as the inhabitants of the study area had the tendency to assign political alignment with family lineage (see Kelly & Bening, 2013; MacGaffey, 2006). This aspect potentially created two scenarios: In the first instance, the political affiliation possibly generated responses that did not reflect the true image of the situation as Act 1019 of 2020 enacted by the NPP government replaced the previous pro-opposition NDC’s PNDCL 236 of 1990. This instance could have hypothetically led to answers that reflected respondents’ political sentiments. As indicated in Chapter 1, it was the role of the researcher to draw respondents’ attention to the fact that policies transcended political lines; policies would continue to affect all citizens. It was the role of the citizen to give honest responses to researchers to draw politicians’ attention to the strengths and possible weaknesses of

policies. Such revelations through the citizens' efforts in producing honest responses would create a platform for policy discussions and possibly needful adoption of appropriate policy alternatives or policy readjustments to effectively address the problem.

The other scenario was the assignment of family lineage with political identification. The latter scenario of ethno-partisan assignment of individuals was diminishing in recent years following the resolution of factors that irradiated the habit (see Owusu-Mensah, 2022 for those factors). However, it was still important to acknowledge that respondents might as well be biased in giving potentially unrealistic responses based on such political branding of family lineage and actual political belongingness. Knowing these issues beforehand helped me design interview questions that were free from personal proclivities. Questions were deliberately designed to encourage respondents to give accurate responses by rather reflecting on the possible narcotic drug policy enhancement. Another strategy I used to address the possible biases was using purposive sampling as the primary sampling method to select the population (various institutions). Then, I applied a convenience sampling technique on the selected population to select specific respondents based on respondents' availability at a time that was suitable for them and me. Their willingness to take part in the research also influenced sampling method selection. I had to adopt a third sampling method, snowball sampling, later during the data collection phase due to time constraints and other unexpected family emergencies I encountered while in Yendi.

Methodology

One structural reason that undergirded my choice of methodology was the ethno-

partisan sentiments respondents exhibited. Yendi citizens have immense political compassion and so the data collection tools selected needed to be considered carefully. To put it into perspective, for instance, a data collection tool such as group interviews could have led study participants to respond to questions to reflect collective compassion, which might not have necessarily represented respondents' isolated viewpoint. That is, group interviews lead to a collective agreement based on the group's homogeneity and individual group members' fear of being different from the mainstream, especially when beliefs are designed around ethno-partisan ideological orientation (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). This initial vigorous scrutiny of possible tools helped to select more profound and appropriate ones.

Participant Selection

This study combined multiple components to understand the issue under investigation. In particular, it focused on an intervention the Ghanaian government established to address a general problem but narrowed the focus on the intervention's effect on a specific section of the broader problem. Specifically, the enactment of Act 1019 of 2020 was meant to address all-inclusive narcotic substance issues in Ghana; however, this study narrowed the focus of the provisions of the act exclusively on youth narcotic substance activities. It offered a platform for the public to share their perceptions of Act 1019's tendency to address youth narcotic drug activities based on their experiences and analyses of policy contents on this social and public health problem.

In addition, despite the fact that the study's intention was prompted by the pervasiveness of youth narcotic substance activities, one of the implied reasons why the

act was enacted, the population from which this study pooled its respondents did not include the youth. In other words, the youth population did not constitute part of the population from which data were generated. In this sense, the study focused on the policy (Act 1019), the problem (youth narcotic drug activities), and the politics (study participants' policy interpretation) to analyze an intervention. For the study methodology, the focus here centered on the population from which research respondents were drawn.

Study Population

Multiple ethical considerations governed the selection and exclusion of study respondents. The excluded population consisted of the youth because of the likely inclusion of narcotic users and distributors who might have given distorted accounts of the problem or misleading accounts of the act's potency. I also considered that, under the northern Ghanaian culture, a considerable number of the youth still lived under their parents/guardians (Appiah, 2022). Incorporating this group would have necessitated seeking parental consent. Regardless of the outcome of seeking parental consent, incorporating the youth group would have still undermined the data's true representation of the situation. In this regard, study participants consisted of respondents who were rather affected in one way or another by the problem of youth narcotic behaviors. Study participants consisted of schoolteachers, parents, health workers, law enforcement agents, and the police. This sample gave a broader perspective on the act from diverse respondents; each group related their unique experiences of youth narcotic behaviors.

Sample Size

Unquestionably, in qualitative research, conducting a thorough interview with a

reasonable number of quality respondents yields robust data to offer an in-depth understanding of an investigated phenomenon (Stenfors et al., 2020). However, at a point where no new marginal information is gained from the introduction of new interviewees—that is, regardless of the usefulness of the knowledge the additional person to be interviewed possesses—a saturation point is attained (Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Therefore the sample size expected did not exceed 11 respondents combined. No new information emerged after that number; new respondents began to repeat information already taken from prior respondents. However, the recruitment of additional study volunteers relative to possible new and emerging concepts was considered owing to the inherent methodological flexibility (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Sampling Method

Data validity preservation was crucial. I initially determined the importance of incorporating two distinct sampling methods to ensure that selected respondents reflect a true heterogeneous representation. However, I incorporated a third in the course of data collection owing to the inherent challenges I encountered in the timely recruitment of respondents. The first two methods included purposive and convenience sampling, and the third was snowball sampling. My focus was on some selected groups of the public, so I used the nonprobability purposive sampling method to create the population from which the respondents were drawn. The purposive sampling method was used with the goal of increasing the depth of understanding of policy consideration of youth substance activities (Palinkas et al., 2015). Using the method produced appropriate and suitable

information and was a way to identify and select correct cases with limited research resources (Campbell et al., 2020).

Following the purposive sampling procedure was the convenience sampling method, another nonprobability sampling technique. This second technique was applied to the various homogenous groups to choose participants from each group to form the refined collection. I used the method in intra-group respondent selection to ensure that the selection of individual members within their homogenous groups was based on convenience for both the researcher and the respondents. Multiple factors constituted convenience, including ease of access to respondents, respondents' willingness to take part in the study, and their availability to participate at a time suitable for them and the researcher (see Bhardwaj, 2019; Sexton, 2022).

Conversely, Mweshi and Sakyi (2020) indicated the inability of convenience sampling to generate generalizable results; their reason for such a conclusion was based on the use of convenience sampling as a primary method to generate data in a heterogeneous population. Their conclusion was based on an instance where the researcher might be generating data from a wide population uncharacteristic of a definitive feature (e.g., "students" instead of "Dagbani PhD. students working on their dissertation"). This issue did not pose a threat in this study because the purposive sampling technique was used to select institutions that directly dealt with policy execution in their unique ways before convenience sampling was carried out to select respondents.

However, I introduced a third sampling method, snowball, due to the difficulty

inherent in the swift recruitment of respondents using the previously mentioned methods. The use of the purposive sampling method to select the institutions and their employees did not serve the ultimate purpose of getting an adequate number of respondents on time; adopting an additional strategy became indispensable. As a result, the first participants were invited to relay the research intent to other potential respondents who were resourceful and willing to respond to the request to be interviewed. The second group of respondents then relayed the intent to the next level of respondents (see Parker et al., 2019). Data was then collected from them using one-on-one and over-the-phone interviews.

Participants Recruitment Approach

Before I determined how to recruit study participants I went to Walden University IRB's website to gain information on ethics governing international research. I searched for "international research" on the site. Then, under "Do other countries have research regulations/policies?", I followed the "USA federal Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP)" link to download and read the Ghanaian government's standards on human research. I followed a link under "Relevant Standards" to Act 851, Public Health Act, 2012. Act 851 laid out requirements relating to social and behavioral research. However, such requirements pertained to medicinal and clinical trial provisions; there were no specific requirements for informational research that merely sought to understand how a policy impacted a population.

Nonetheless, I sent emails to some individuals in various institutions in Yendi that I recognized would be useful to this study to get them involved. These institutions

included the Ghana Police Service, the court, the hospital, and the Yendi Municipal Assembly. Sharing my Walden University email address with those individuals authenticated my request. The email address also made it easy for the respondents to send post-interview pieces of information they considered necessary for the study. Due to the difficulties involved in contacting the ordinary public, I determined that questions designed to be administered to them could also be administered to the individuals in those institutions; they form a subset of the public and exhibit all the necessary traits of the ordinary community inhabitants.

These institutions were selected using purposive sampling methods for two reasons: In the first place, all the institutions had a connection with youth narcotic substance activities in their unique ways. There was a NACOC unit, or Drug Law Enforcement Unit (DLEU) of the Ghana Police Service, responsible for enforcing the act by arresting offenders (Douvris et al., 2022). The court prosecuted offenders and passed jail terms when monetary penalties associated with offenses were defaulted (Bird, 2019). Recent policy updates denoted narcotic substance activities as a public health issue that required counseling from qualified entities and treatment from health experts (Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021); health workers were sampled for this reason. Youth drug habits are predominant in most Ghanaian high schools (Nkyi, 2014; Parimah et al., 2021; Yakubu et al., 2019), so teachers needed to be part of the research respondents.

In the second instance, the institutions, especially the police force and the courts, understood the provisions of the act. Undeniably, the DLEU in the police force was established as a policy directive (see Section 31 of Act 1019 of 2020). Also, under

Section 45 Subsection 5 of the act, the courts were empowered to determine the fate of offenders by either referring them to treatment and rehabilitation facilities or penalizing them with monetary fines. Defaulting financial settlements and failure to take treatment and rehabilitation would result in prison terms. Given that the policy identified and approved health institutions to give such treatments and rehabilitations to people with narcotic substance habits inspired the purposeful selection of the Yendi Municipal Hospital health workers as possible respondents. Thus, the purposive sampling method enabled me to select respondents who genuinely represented the administrators of diverse solutions to the problem.

Simply conducting purposive sampling to select institutions was not enough because, even though each of the institutions had a high number of employees, it was not a guarantee that each of the numerous employees would be willing to take part in the study. Addressing the issue of selecting a manageable number of respondents required selecting a few respondents from each institution willing and able to participate. The convenience sampling method was employed within the homogenous institutions. In other words, incorporating the convenience sampling technique within the groups was based on the ease of access of respondents willing to participate in the study within the timeframe appropriate for study respondents and me. Another possible reason for convenience sampling incorporation was scaling down to the required number of respondents to avoid spending needless time recruiting more members who would eventually be dropped because of saturation; their ideas would fundamentally contain what is already common to their connected groups. It was not until during data collection

it became necessary to include the snowball sampling technique as an easier and much faster way to get to the required number of respondents.

Instrumentation

As the researcher, I played the role of the primary research instrument. I employed an individual interview research design, as indicated earlier in Chapter 1 (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019). By design, this study was based on a generic qualitative approach to implore diverse discernments of policy efforts in addressing youth narcotic drug habits. How profound the analysis was and how reflective the findings were of the actual situation in the real world depended on how rich the data for such analysis was. Attaining this expensive data depended on how freely participants relayed their insights without confining their observations and the meanings they attributed to such observations. These reasons informed the employment of individual interviews. Another reason for such a move was the assurance of respondents' privacy to share important information they would have found uncomfortable to reveal in others' presence (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I used interview guides (or conversational guides as Rubin and Rubin [2011] framed them) to help prepare for my interview process and to help ensure that I was equipped with the proper tools to guide the course of the interview in the intended direction (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

One of the ways to help me as a researcher (interviewer) lower the anxiety inherent in the interviews was to prepare a conversational guide beforehand. The process was occasionally extremely stressful and exhausting because there was a lot to think about concurrently in the process, as Rubin & Rubin (2011) noted. However, guides such

as jottings and memos, protocols, and checklists or outlines, guided me to stay on track. The guide reminded me of what key questions to ask and to whom, irrespective of the generic nature of actual interview questions; the institutional association was rather reflected in individual answers. For example, the inclusion of respondents from specific institutions in the study through purposeful sampling did not imply questions designed to ask them necessarily reflected their institutional orientation. Rather, their answers to the generic interview questions reveal their institutional lineages. Respondents from policy enforcement agencies like the police force, whose role is to enforce social order, were asked the same interview questions as health-related workers, with distinct answers reflecting institutional belongingness. Contrary to the interview questions, however, the guides were rather institution-specific since they were designed specifically for individual institutions.

Using a conversational guide also helped ensure that interviewees knew in advance what to expect in the course of the interview. Interviewees were offered the opportunity to see the main research question and the complete interview questions, albeit follow-up questions came up as the interviews progressed. It was not always the case that follow-up questions were asked despite the conversational guide's instruction to do so, especially when follow-up questions were covered somehow differently in the respondent's responses to the main questions. Alternatively, the use of a written conversational guide did not compel its strict adherence because conversations would sometimes spring up in the initial formalities between the researcher and the respondent, leading to respondents' unconscious provision of answers to the questions during such

conversations. Also, follow-up questions occasionally became unnecessary because they were answered in prior questions. Follow-up questions were rephrased (differently from the one in the guide) to align with the respondents' responses to prior questions when the need to administer them arose (see Rubin & Rubin's, 2011 explanation).

For this study, I used a fully written-out protocol as a conversational guide because it could be shared with research participants to know what to be interviewed on and submitted to IRB for reviews on ethical standards. I ensured the interview protocol felt conversational but remained on track to obtain the needed information (see Roberts, 2020). This strategy ensured creating a "balance between inquiry and conversation" (Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 813). According to Jacob and Furgerson (2012), the protocol is perceived as a guide for the interview. It includes the self and topic introduction to the respondents at the beginning of the interview, collection of participants' consent, the actual interview questions, and concluding statements and remarks at the end of the interview.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect in-depth information. This data collection method was necessary for two reasons: (1) It gave the interview process a direction so that data-enriched conversation stayed on track, and (2) it incorporated some flexibility in the interview process so that respondents had some freedom to relay important information that was not captured in the questions on the interview guide (Alam, 2021; Burkholder et al., 2016; Roberts, 2020). Also, the method's flexibility allowed for the exploration of relevant themes that emerged during the interviews. Also, I conducted the interviews at respondents' choice locations and times to maximize their

comfort and engagement levels. There were instances where a dire need would arise to conduct interviews via audio or video calls; otherwise, interviews were conducted in person. Although Rubin and Rubin (2011) indicated the advantages of conducting over-the-phone interviews to include time and resources, especially when respondents are scattered over a wide area, I preferred the face-to-face interview strategy over over-the-phone one because of the potential reactions of respondents that such technological methods of collecting data might have missed to capture—body language for instance (see Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). Also, all respondents were recruited from Yendi, where all the institutions were located and in close proximity to one another.

Primarily, my role as the researcher was to collect, transcribe, and analyze the data needed to assess the influence of Act 1019 of 2020 on youth narcotic substance activities by focusing on trends in Yendi. This reason defined my function as the fundamental instrument for this study. I went to Yendi to recruit respondents and conduct interviews personally, even though I had to conduct a good number of interviews over the phone. I did not conduct interviews in the ethnic language, Dagbanli, since the purposefully sampled organizations had a diverse workforce, and the potential respondents were not necessarily Dagbmba, Yendi's primary ethnic group. Even the possible inclusion of the Yendi traditional council members did not justify the use of Dagbanli in interviews since members of the council conducted formal business for traditional rulers in English. Using English for the interviews and making interview questions accessible to interviewees helped eliminate preventable time spent on both the data collection phase and translation of audio for transcription and possible information

loss in translation (Laher et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The average time spent on an interview did not exceed the expected time range of between 45 and 90 minutes. I conducted about two interviews a day. I interviewed 11 respondents for this study. I reached a saturation point at that number because no new and relevant themes emerged during the interviews that warranted their inclusion in the study.

Interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents. Recordings were necessary due to their numerous benefits. For instance, writing down participants' responses could be time-consuming because I had to constantly ask them to pause for me to capture what they said or to catch up before they could continue. This method eventually proved to be time-wasting and stressful to the respondents. Also, Saarijärvi and Bratt (2021) underscored that instant online backup of password-protected audio recordings on a secure database implies the files will always be available for future reference when the need arises to go back to them; the same cannot be guaranteed for hard-copy documents. In addition, organizing the audio files was more effective than written ones both in comfort and convenience since no cluster of papers was carried to every interview scene. Likewise, recordings also helped me produce accurate interview transcripts as the interviewees' unadulterated submissions were listened to over and again "in its entirety, verbatim, before beginning data analysis" (Ravitch & Carl, 2019, p. 519). Transcription of the recordings helped to synthesize participants' responses to interview questions.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this generic qualitative research was to assess the influence of Act

1019 of 2020 on youth substance abuse by limiting the focus to the occurrences in Yendi, Ghana. Multiple institutions were assigned various roles implicitly or explicitly in the policy document for the Ghanaian government to achieve the objective of meaningful subjugation of overall narcotic activities in the country. These institutions and some other local ones that mattered to this study were sampled purposefully to give their assessment of Act 1019 on youth narcotic substance engagement habits. This paper paid attention to the youth because of a substantial amount of different research topics on youth psychoactive substance use habits and the diverse effects such habits cause (Asante & Nefale, 2021; Bulut & Usman, 2020; Danso & Anto, 2021; Fuseini et al., 2019; Kasore et al., 2021; Peprah et al., 2020).

Another reason for the paper's attention to the youth centered on the government of Ghana's submission in its youth development policy that the government's goal was to "provide social protection...for the youth...to ensure the development of a knowledgeable, self-reliant, skilled, disciplined, and healthy population with the capacity to drive and sustain the socioeconomic development of the nation" (NYPG, 2010 p. 10). For this reason, this study assumed that the design of Act 1019 of 2020 was not only meant to reduce the pressure on the Ghanaian government's spending on prisoners for minor crimes, such as smaller quantities of drugs possessed for consumption and distribution but the design was also meant to ensure that the country's future owners were nudged out of such acts through the narcotic policy.

Both the data collected and their analysis showed a close relationship in qualitative studies. In this sense, the data and the analysis reflected the assumptions

because the assumptions form the central premise of the government's quest to achieve both narcotic reduction and youth development policy targets. Data analysis was executed in conjunction with data collection to allow for possible adjustments as the study progressed. Merriam and Grenier (2019) denoted a number of factors that the synchronized process induces, including the researcher's ability to make modifications along the way or change the entire direction of the data collection process and to compare evolving themes and concepts with new data as the research advances.

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and saved with a password in my Walden Cloud accounts. Transcribed interviews were coded to reveal themes; theme development was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2016) reflexive thematic analysis or RTA. (I reviewed RTA briefly in Chapter 4 prior to the application of the design.) CAQDAS's Qualitative data analysis (QDA) tool, NVivo14 software, was used to import, organize, and collaborate data (Allsop et al., 2022). It was still necessary to maintain field notes in spite of the audio recordings; audio files only captured voice recordings and not the bodily actions of respondents. Field notes were meant to capture participants' physical actions to questions.

Using NVivo software was necessary because it defied some researchers' arguments against the potency of QDA software to capture all aspects inherent in qualitative research (see Bassett, 2004). It is an established notion that QDA software cannot conduct analysis to reveal a research phenomenon since code processing, theme generation, and sensemaking are carried out by the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). However, its essentialness in obtaining an in-depth analysis must be emphasized. For

example, coding is a crucial part of data analysis. A researcher can logically organize data generated from interviews to reveal themes through coding. Gibbs (2014) looked at coding as “a process of attaching a name or tag to a passage of text, or an area of an image, or a section of a video or audio recording” (p. 283). Computer-assisted QDA software programs are instrumental in qualitative inquiries. Particularly, by utilizing the NVivo14 software, coding the data to reveal themes, archiving the data, ease of retrieving the archived data, and management of large amounts of interview-generated data for analysis are some important features built into the software, albeit Ravitch and Carl (2019) still relayed the inability of QDA software to read, interpret, or analyze texts.

Codes for this study were generated in two-cycle coding—first and second. In the first coding cycle, I broke down the data into isolated parts in order to examine and compare the data further. I used NVivo14 coding in the first cycle as this type of coding reflects the summary and keywords of respondents’ submissions verbatim. Words or brief phrases from respondents’ actual language found in their responses (data) were used to create codes and categories. The codes and categories reflected participants’ answers and information on the policy document. In the second round of coding, I refined the codes and the categories to create themes so that data would be aligned with the research topic and the theoretical foundation—Kingdon’s MSF. Under the second-round coding, I used focused coding to search for the most frequent codes/categories to align with the MSF theoretical themes—problems, policy, and politics. My choice of those coding types, instead of the others, was influenced by the research topic, design, and research question. No prior concepts from the research question and theory were developed as signals to

categorize participants' responses; all responses were coded and categorized based on actual and original responses of participants (cf. Galhardo & De Souza, 2020; Koebele, 2021; see also Mauti et al., 2019).

Trustworthiness

Multiple measures were taken to ensure research trustworthiness—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Developing a complete understanding of the influence of Act 1019 on youth narcotic habits required obtaining data from multiple sources and the use of multiple methods to obtain the data, a strategy known as triangulation (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019). Carter et al. (2014) asserted that adopting triangulation in qualitative research is a means to test research validity, as the strategy underscores the convergence of data from different sources. Carter and colleagues further enumerated different forms of triangulation qualitative researchers use to establish their study trustworthiness, including methodologic, investigator, theory, and data source triangulation.

Flick (2004) identified methodologic triangulation's applicability in two scenarios: (1) a between-method approach where two broader methods—qualitative and quantitative—are incorporated in one research and (2) a within-method approach where multiple data collection strategies are used within a single method to reinforce the validity of conclusions drawn from the data. However, there are instances where two or more researchers conducting the same study and simultaneously observing respondents give a bifocal or multifocal perspective of the phenomenon under investigation; this strategy exemplifies investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Sometimes, researchers

may see the necessity of strengthening their studies' conclusions by incorporating multiple theories to achieve their intent. This strategy demonstrates theory triangulation, as Santos et al. (2020 and Schwarzenegger (2017) separately indicated. Also, data could be collected on a phenomenon from different sources that have diverse perspectives based on their unique engagements with the phenomenon, helping qualitative researchers to fully understand how a particular situation is interpreted by different groups; this strategy illustrates data source triangulation (Burkholder et al., 2016).

This study used both the methodological and the data source triangulations to establish trustworthiness. For the methodological aspect, I adopted the second approach during the data collection stage by using interviews, field notes, and direct observation of respondents' reactions to questions. With the help of the field notepad, I was able to document such observations during responses to follow up with additional questions. Those follow-up questions were meant to get a better explanation for their reactions to the main questions that triggered such reactions (e.g., see Polit & Beck, 2012). On the data triangulation side, the makeup of the respondent base that incorporated respondents from different institutions helped to ensure that the conclusions I made reflected all aspects of the strategies adopted in the policy to address narcotic problems of the country.

Steps to Achieve Trustworthiness

Achieving the four qualities of trustworthiness—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—depends on multiple strategies a qualitative researcher can incorporate in their study. Burkholder et al. (2016) underscored the importance of these strategies to undergird a study's trustworthiness strongly. I examined

the strategies Burkholder and colleagues presented and how each was incorporated into this research to intensify its trustworthiness.

Credibility

Interview questions were designed to center on the research question—Given the incidence of drug abuse among the youth, what is the public opinion regarding Ghana’s national narcotic policy’s influence in combating the problem to cause a positive social change? Interview questions were designed by constantly reflecting on the research question to guide the procedure. Additional strategies such as persistent observation, prolonged engagement, negative case analysis, and triangulation were also adopted. The two approaches were amalgamated in the data collection and analysis process to guarantee internal validity. Internal validity in this regard centered on the degree to which the final results reflect the reality of Act 1019’s consideration of and influence on youth narcotic substance engagements to guarantee that the results were free from methodological errors.

Negative case analysis—a methodological approach that involves finding and discussing emerging data that go against the explanations arising from the research—was crucial to ensuring this paper’s trustworthiness in general. In particular, negative case analysis enhanced the study’s dependability (discussed below) because I employed methodological adjustments to address such contradictions as Burkholder et al. (2016) implied. Reflexivity was also necessary for establishing credibility. I examined my personal beliefs, convictions, and actions during the research process and made sure such aspects did not influence the research. Such potential intrusion of personal biases was

discussed earlier in this chapter and Chapter 1.

Another way I achieved credibility was through peer debriefing. This approach was indispensable in establishing the paper's credibility because of its fundamental idea of engaging an independent but qualified colleague in all stages of the research to query study discussions and progress, concepts I employed, how data were analyzed, and discoveries emerging from the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I engaged a former colleague (from my undergraduate study group who was now a fully-fledged lecturer at the University for Development Studies in Ghana and well-versed in qualitative research and the phenomenon under investigation) in ongoing study advancements and data analysis. Such engagements allowed my colleague to ask questions to clarify conclusions and eliminate all forms of researcher bias.

Additionally, Guba and Lincoln (1989) argued that a researcher might only record sufficient information needed for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by observing study subjects persistently and engaging them long enough. However, Burkholder and colleagues (2016) disagreed with this notion even in ethnographical research orientation; they countered that sufficiency was a matter of the researcher's judgment. Burkholder et al.'s stand was applicable in my situation since I did not need to employ Guba and Lincoln's suggestion to source accurate and sufficient data for analysis.

Finally, my presence at the research site for a considerable amount of time helped build rapport and trust with participants. This step aided in gaining sufficient and accurate information to lessen misunderstandings. The step also helped me to understand the dos

and don'ts of the community they are studying (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As a native of Yendi and acquainted with the culture and customs, no prolonged engagement with the community and inhabitants was necessary to win their trust and give accurate and sensitive but useful information on the phenomenon.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) associated the transferability of findings in quantitative research with the concept of external validity. However, this connection did not imply that the research project was generalizable to all forms of narcotic studies. Rather, subsequent researchers conducting similar studies might glean and incorporate some useful knowledge from this paper in their respective studies. Notably, transferability underscores the usefulness of the findings in different contexts and the extent to which such findings can inform a profound decision (Laher et al., 2019). I considered the issue of transferability by choosing the overall sample size to include between 12 and 16 respondents to achieve a saturation point to ensure no important information on the phenomenon would be missing. I initially determined to interview 12 respondents; however, no new information emerged when I interviewed the 9th and 10th respondents. I still saw the need to interview the 11th respondent because of the potential emergence of some new pieces of information. Conversely, even though the 11th respondent did not offer any information different from the 9th and 10th respondents' answers to compel the inclusion of the 11th response in the study, I still included data from the 11th respondent to strengthen the reason to stop further interviews. I determined at the point of the 11th interviewee that data sourced from those respondents were inclusive enough to ascertain

the transferability of the research findings.

Also, based on Burkholder et al.'s (2016) recommendation, I gave an intense description of the settings so that readers of the report would reflect on comparable settings and determine the applicability of the study's findings on those similar environments. This study considered research works in the other parts of Northern Ghana to make inferences on youth drug activities in Yendi. Such suppositions were necessary based on two reasons: (1) There was a dearth in literature specifically on Yendi youth narcotic drug habits despite the obvious presence of the problem in the community, and (2) the physical environment and cultural resemblances in all aspects of the lives of various Northern Ghana ethnic groups supported Lincoln and Guba's (1985) assertion of transferability based on contextual similarities of environmental settings.

Dependability

Similar to reliability in quantitative research, the dependability of a qualitative study underscores the consistency of study results produced across multiple environments when a particular qualitative data collection instrument is applied to similar studies in those distinct environments. That is, instruments adopted to source data must generate consistent results in all data collection circumstances (Burkholder et al., 2016). For this reason, I ensured there was consistency in the data collection process, analysis, and reporting. For instance, I made sure that all the respondents were from Yendi and were employed in the public institutions in Yendi. Also, I used trusted software for data analysis to generate reports based on the analyzed data. Such consistent observation was to confirm that the study was dependable. The use of open-ended interview questions to

find Act 1019's influence on youth narcotic activities was explicit, repeatable, and notable as much as possible (Laher et al., 2019). This assertion meant that despite the anticipation of employing a pre-established methodology for the study, potential methodological shifts or adjustments were recorded and explained to offer readers accessibility to such adjustments. Compelling situations that necessitate modifications (such as the incorporation of over-the-phone interviews) were equally noted to enhance the study's dependability.

Audit trails were available to adequately illustrate the methodological shift process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Audit trails are the detailed description of the study process of data collection, the derivation of categories, and in what ways decisions are made during the research (Burkholder et al., 2016). Dependability is also reflected in the study's overall consistency through data steadiness and alignment with the study plan. I ensured dependability by reporting data verbatim without assumptive interpretation of participants' responses, as Burkholder and colleagues advised. Depending on not only one but the amalgamation of two types of triangulations (including method and data source) also bolstered this study's dependability. Audit trails involved the steps engaged in the collection of data, derivation of categories, and how decisions were made during the research. Audit trails accounted for how the entire study was carried out and the procedures I employed to analyze the data (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Particularly, I used field notes and memos to elaborate on data collection and analysis procedures. I made them accessible for other researchers and analysts to evaluate the study's confirmability and dependability.

As indicated earlier, this study used the method and the data source triangulations to establish trustworthiness. Method triangulation consisted of the use of interviews, researcher observation of respondents, and field notes (Polit & Beck, 2012). Data source triangulation involves collecting data on a phenomenon from different sources with diverse perspectives based on their unique engagements with the phenomenon or event. These approaches enabled me to fully understand how a particular situation (drug policy on youth drug activities) was interpreted by different groups of people (of Yendi). The use of more than one source and strategy to solicit perceptions of Act 1019's process to influence youth narcotic habits gave solid backing to this study's conclusion on the situation, as Burkholder et al. (2016) denoted.

Confirmability

Unlike quantitative research, where the goal of the researcher is objectivity achieved by isolating the researcher from the research as much as possible, qualitative research allows some subjectivity of the researcher with the condition that methods used to carry out the study must revolve around verifiable processes. The qualitative researcher guarantees through the observation of these fundamentals that other researchers conducting similar studies will arrive at the same conclusions (Burkholder et al., 2016) or that other readers who are separate from the research will reach the same suppositions based on the facts presented in the study (Laher et al., 2019). Qualitative data for this study were generated through one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with public workers from specific organizations that dealt with policy executions in their institutional rights. Data reflected how those organizations handled narcotic substance

cases. They also reflected respondents' perceived interpretation of effective mechanisms required in the policy narratives to achieve policy goals.

This study's confirmability was ensured by avoiding the selective use of data from interviews, irrespective of how connected I (as the researcher) was to the data source (Laher & colleagues, 2019). Not including all the data equally implied that the conclusion arrived at could not have been generalizable if some individual organizations' responses were excluded from the analysis. With this in mind, I guaranteed confirmability by avoiding the discriminatory use of data in my analysis so that independent readers would make similar conclusions as those presented in the study.

Ethical Considerations

It was important to consider how this study would affect the experiences of study respondents regardless of the study's exclusion of the youth population from the research participant pool. Individual respondents representing the various institutions (that engaged in their unique policy execution responsibilities) undoubtedly dealt with multiple youth narcotic drug cases in their exclusive ways. Even though the necessity arose to specify such public institutions in the study owing to their connectedness to policy execution, such references were generic (e.g., the "city's health institution" replaced the actual municipal health institution of Yendi). Research respondents sourced from those organizations ought to be clouded based on the IRB's and the Human Subjects Review Board's (HSRB) mandated ethical standards, which laid emphasis on research respondents' welfare. I considered the Ghanaian government's ethical requirements on human research as well and reviewed the government's human research policy document.

There were no established standards governing social and behavioral information-soliciting research (see “Relevant Standards” under Act 851, Public Health Act, 2012 of the Republic of Ghana).

Nonetheless, participants’ privacy was protected by assigning pseudonyms to their original identities; participants were told of their pseudonyms to raise their confidence level and eliminate their fear of being identified in the future. Other steps on ethical issues included the protection of respondents’ personal identifiers such as names, addresses, phone numbers, and any additional information that could lead to respondents’ identification. Other pieces of information, like audio recordings of interviews and transcribed data files of audio, were stored in my cloud accounts, secured with passwords, and safeguarded with information-loss protection. Research respondents were guaranteed that such information storage would only be for future study references and historical reasons. I made interviews less stressful and more comfortable for respondents. Part of such intention was that respondents selected their preferred time and location for interviews.

Prior to the start of the interviews, however, I made it clear to respondents about their absolute control of the interview on whether to accept to take it, agree to answer undocumented questions emerging in the process, or choose to stop the entire interview during the process, especially if they felt uncomfortable with its continuation. On the other hand, such assurances did not negate the requirement that they sign a consent form accepting to be interviewed and to be audio-recorded. Rather, the audio recordings gave respondents confidence that their responses would be well presented in the study and not

distorted because I could play the audio over and over again to ensure a true depiction of respondents' accounts.

As Laher and colleagues (2019) noted, study participants want to see that their lived experiences have been fairly and properly presented in the report. Signing the consent form was not binding on participants' later decision to reject being interviewed or have their responses not incorporated into the study after the interview. Observing all these factors was not only a step to ensure compliance with the IRB's and the HSRB's ethical guidelines, but as Creswell and Creswell (2018) declared, such adherence also guaranteed that the rights of research volunteers were respected and revered.

Summary

This generic qualitative study assessed how the Ghana national narcotic policy impacted youth substance abuse through the policy process and outcome. The specific purpose of the study was to assess the influence of Act 1019 on the occurrences of youth narcotic substance activities based on the factors that the government presented to necessitate policy change from the PNDCL 236 of 1990 to Act 1019 of 2020 by limiting attention to youth narcotic activities in Yendi, Ghana. Study objectives centered on how policy-executing institutions and the general public perceive the policy's role in youth narcotic drug habits. In this chapter, I established the rationale and validity for the research methodology, process, and instruments adopted to understand how the narcotic drug policy affected the problem of youth narcotic drug behaviors. Potential researcher bias was also discussed relative to my background and connection with the culture, the studied area, and the people involved in the study. Measures to incorporate in the study to

handle ethical concerns and the study's trustworthiness were also addressed in this chapter. Chapter 4 focused on the study results—data generated from interviews and the emerging themes from those interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

This generic qualitative study aimed to assess the Ghana national narcotic policy's influence on youth substance abuse. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to assess how Act 1019 of 2020 addressed the occurrences of youth narcotic substance activities, including consumption, possession, and distribution, by limiting the focus to the occurrences in Yendi, Ghana. Multiple factors prompted the necessity and significance of this study. First, the Ghanaian government's attempt to address narcotic activities in the country included a series of national narcotic policy transformations in both the pre-colonial and post-colonial eras (Kumah-Abiwu, 2019; Prempeh, 2016; Sagoe, 1966). Second, continual research has revealed youth narcotic substance engagements did not appear to be declining (e.g., Danso & Anto, 2021; Fuseini et al., 2019; Peprah et al., 2020). Third, there is a gap in the literature to inform other policy interest scholars. Fourth, there had not been any individual study that distinctly examined youth drug situations in Yendi despite this social and public health problem among the youth.

Based on these factors, this generic qualitative study was designed to ensure that information sourced during data collection was incorporated into the study and directed at answering the research question: Given the incidence of drug abuse among the youth, what is a public opinion regarding Ghana's national narcotic policy's influence in combating the problem to cause a positive social change? The generic technique is appropriate in helping scholars gain detailed knowledge on a phenomenon affecting a people (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019). The analysis does not exclude any

aspect of the knowledge obtained in the data collection process relative to the phenomenon owing to the technique's universality. All-inclusive data reflecting diverse interpretations of the policy effects was vital and achievable through the inclusion of all forms of qualitative data collection strategies in the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

In this chapter, I give a description of the study setting, examine the research question, and discuss the demographics. I also discuss data collection and analysis, codes, and themes that emerged from the analysis. Additionally, I discuss trustworthiness and the results. I conclude the chapter by summarizing the research findings in relation to the main research question.

Research Setting

Following the approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board to conduct my research (approval number 10-03-23-1020504), I started recruiting potential respondents by initially sending them WhatsApp text messages and later emails. I was on a Yendi WhatsApp platform with an administrator who assured me of talking to some potential respondents. Prospective respondents were glad that a research study was being conducted on the situation in Yendi because of the seriousness of the problem. They were willing to participate in the study and talk to other resourceful individuals to get involved. All were willing to get interviewed without the planned \$10.00 call credit compensation; they indicated the research was equally their individual social and ethnic responsibilities. Rather, they felt relieved that at least a lead was being taken to investigate the social problem in the community.

Some of the interviews were conducted over the phone, so no formal requests were necessary to be made to respondents' affiliated institutions to use institutional space to conduct interviews. In-person interviews were held outside respondents' working hours at their chosen locations. The noninvolvement of the institutions directly meant there were not any institutional requirements governing the interviews and respondents. In other words, respondents gave their experiential and professional perspectives that did not represent their broader institutional standpoints. Thus, they were not required to solicit employers' permission to respond to my interview requests.

Moreover, I made it known to the respondents prior to the commencement of their engagements about their freedom to take the interview or halt it at any time if they did not feel the need to continue. Still, none of them had any concerns whatsoever about executing those privileges. Additionally, they had no concerns they needed to address with Walden University's Research Participant Advocates either before or after the interviews.

Demographics

Youth narcotic drug activities generate a wave of other social and health issues, including violent crimes (Asante & Nefale, 2021), mental and psychological conditions (Frimpong et al., 2021), promiscuity (Oppong Asante et al., 2014), and a myriad of other issues that could lead to homicide and suicide (Kasore et al., 2021). With this in mind, it was necessary to develop a response base that was heterogeneous enough to ensure that all aspects of responses corresponding to the countless effects drug activities had on youth and how the drug policy was perceived in relation to those effects were

incorporated into the study. These factors led to the integration of a variety of respondents into the research respondent pool, including related health workers, prison officers, the narcotic unit officers of the Ghana Police Service, civic education workers, court clerks, and teachers. Interviewing teachers was necessary based on the experiences teachers had with student narcotic users and distributors (Ofori-Atta et al., 2010). The high rates of narcotic drug activities among pre-tertiary students were evidenced in previous studies (Ayarna-Gagakuma et al., 2020; Tetteh et al., 2020).

To ensure that responses reflected the true image of the situation of both narcotics and policy's impression on the youth drug habits in Yendi and to circumvent the possible corruption of reality, I saw the need to exclude respondents who fell within the age group of the study population. This way, there would not be a likelihood of including a possible drug user who would give a contradictory response to suggest the policy's ineffectiveness or otherwise. None of the participants in this study were under 30 years old; the youngest of the respondents was 33 years old. Such heterogeneousness of the pool also aided in integrating a reasonable number of respondents in the research before the data saturation point was reached. The study reached a data saturation point after I interviewed the 10th respondent.

Moreover, all respondents had to be formally and actively employed to be included in the research since data from other parts of northern Ghana indicated that most of the youth that engaged in various forms of narcotic substance activities were either in senior high school or under, employed in the nonformal sector, or were not employed at all (e.g., Fuseini et al., 2019; Saapiire, 2021). (Later findings from this research

substantiated Fuseini and colleagues' and Saapiire's independent findings on unemployment being one of the causes of youth narcotic substance engagements.) Data on participants' demographics are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Interview Respondents' Demographics

Respondent	Age	Gender	Career
FC	47	Male	Police
QS	42	Male	Teacher
TM	33	Female	Teacher
YV	47	Male	Civic Educator
ZX	48	Male	Prison Warden
BD	50	Female	Social Worker
JN	37	Female	Health Worker
AO	39	Male	Health Worker
CE	53	Female	Social Worker
GK	51	Male	Court Registrar
IA	52	Female	Police

Data Collection

This study addresses the Ghanaian national narcotic policy's tendency to address youth narcotic substance activities from the perspectives of the citizens of Yendi. Respondents were drawn from Yendi because the focus was on the youth narcotic substance habits of the community. It was necessary to collect data from respondents from different institutions whose roles included some aspects of dealing with narcotic users within policy provisions. All the data I gathered from the 11 participants were collected qualitatively through one-on-one in-person or over-the-phone interviews. My initial intention was to conduct all interviews physically to observe respondents' reactions to questions; however, I had to incorporate an over-the-phone approach because I had to leave Yendi earlier than planned to take care of unexpected family issues. The

data collection instruments I intended to employ also had to change because of those exigencies. Snowball sampling was used to recruit respondents until I reached the required data saturation. I asked those I had the opportunity to interview in person to talk to other colleagues about the study and the intent. I spent 1 day in Yendi and was able to meet and conduct interviews with some of the respondents—four were interviewed physically, and the rest of the 11 were interviewed over the phone.

Prior to the commencement of each interview, I confirmed with the respondents that they reviewed the interview questions days before the interviews and understood the information they needed to share with me. This verification followed their agreement to take the interview and the affirmation that they had no concerns whatsoever that could potentially undermine their participation, data analysis, and reporting. In all, the interview questions contained 15 semistructured questions with four major sections, including respondents' demographics and the three streams—problem, policy, and politics (see Appendix B). Notwithstanding the heterogeneous professional backgrounds of respondents, I administered the same questions to all participants; their responses reflected their occupational backgrounds (e.g., Reflecting on your institution's role in dealing with narcotic substance activities, what possible shape should the policy have taken to effectively address the issue of youth narcotic substance activities?)

All the individual interviews lasted within a 45–90-minute timeframe. None of the participants requested special accommodation during the interviews, and no breaks were requested either. I asked for permission to audio-record the interviews by assuring them that was the most appropriate strategy in ensuring I did not report their observations

erroneously. I also used a field notebook to jot down follow-up questions and new themes emerging from responses that needed additional explanations. One concern I expressed in Chapter 3 was the respondents' inclination to give responses that would reflect their political affiliations; however, none of the responses contained such political connectedness.

The success of Act 1019 depends largely on the appropriateness of policy execution of the related policy enforcement agencies' personnel. In other words, the success of the policy to achieve policy goals rests on policy execution agencies' interests to dispense outlined adjudications based on policy guidelines. Based on this line of reasoning, it was necessary to enquire from participants how the law enforcement agencies meted out policy directives to address the problem. My initial consideration centered solely on one agency as the central government's body for policy implementation; however, during the data collection process, it became compelling to include another agency as a policy administrator based on its role. These agencies—including the Ghana Police Service as the primary, which conducts arrests; and the Ghana Prisons Service, the secondary, which is the custodian of all prisoners, including narcotic drug offenders, and controls the reformatory penal system operated within the laws of the country—together form the fundamental resource for Act 1019's success within the community. A third institution was the court that prosecutes offenders.

Data Analysis

I started data analysis by transferring audio interview data to audio-to-text transcription software Otter.ai. My initial attempt was to transcribe the raw data

manually, but I realized the process would take some time to complete, so I chose to use transcription software. I gave respondents pseudonyms rather than their actual identities to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. From the pseudonyms, I derived the initials used to represent the respondents. These initials do not in any way identify the respondents, and no persons with similar initials existed in the selected institutions, as confirmed by the respondents prior to the use of such pseudo identifiers. I labeled the transcribed data with the same pseudonyms used to identify the respondents to match up respondents and their responses. Then, I transported all the software-generated transcripts onto Microsoft Word for proper editing. I edited all data line by line by repeatedly playing the audio-recorded raw data. This process was necessary because of the inherent inaccuracies in almost all the software-produced transcripts.

Falling back on the transcription software was to make conversion of the raw data from audio to text more convenient. Also, using the software did not stop me from immersing deeply in listening to the audio over and over again to ensure transcripts reflected participants' exact responses. All the participants shared their WhatsApp phone numbers with me so that I could send transcribed interviews to them to confirm the contents and make necessary corrections. Two fundamental reasons accounted for participants' choice of this method of communication: (a) The end-to-end encryption security feature built into the WhatsApp application platform and (b) the convenience and ease of access to messages with little internet data consumption. Participants confirmed the transcripts truly reflected their interview responses; participants did not see any inconsistencies between the transcribed and original audio versions of their responses, so

no further editing was necessary.

Both sets of raw data—audio and texts—were saved online in my Walden University OneDrive account and password protected. Using the password-protected instant online backup audio recordings on the OneDrive secure database was necessary. This action was to guarantee the availability and security of the files for future reference when the need arises to go back to them. Files will be retained for 5 years in accordance with Walden University IRB raw data retention requirements (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021).

Data Analytic Design: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

I analyzed the interview transcripts using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Specifically, I determined the use of the reflexive thematic approach (RTA) to be more appropriate after an in-depth exploration of various analytical approaches (see Braun et al. 2019). According to McCoy and Lynam (2022, p. 573), RTA is “a theoretically flexible method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset.” Researchers using the design immerse themselves recursively and reflexively in the dataset to generate a vigorous analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Also, RTA draws upon the researcher’s preexisting knowledge and experiences, the researcher’s social status (ethnicity, gender, etc.), and how these characteristics potentially influence the likely insights into qualitative data and the entire research process (Campbell et al., 2021). A number of factors influenced such determination. The primary reason was the focus of this paper—public perception of Act 1019’s tendency to solve particularly youth narcotic problems based on public experience of youth narcotic activities in an active policy environment. RTA is exclusively useful in analyzing data on

research that focuses on a people’s lived experiences because the design “is often understood as belonging to the phenomenological or experiential qualitative research tradition...” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 3).

Secondly, just as a generic qualitative research approach allows for methodological and theoretical flexibility to investigate and ascertain the *reality* (of Act 1019’s potency to reduce youth narcotic activities) (Jones et al., 2016), RTA as a rigorous analytical method similarly takes into consideration the theoretical flexibility—it is applied in various research methodologies. It can be driven by concepts arising from diverse disciplines (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a “one size fits all” approach (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 328). In other words, RTA does not depend on specific theoretical or epistemological lineage as other designs do. Rather, the design’s nonalignment with any specific theoretical or epistemological framework empowers its broader applicability across diverse epistemologies and paradigms (Campbell et al., 2021).

Additionally, the design is characterized by a six-phase process of data analysis. These phases include (a) dataset familiarization, (b) initial codes generation, (c) searching for themes, (d) themes development and review, (e) themes refinement, definition, and naming, and (f) report production (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). Figure 2 below depicts a pictorial illustration of the RTA analytic design.

Figure 2

Thematic Data Analysis Process



However, despite the sequential portrayal of the six steps in the RTA, Braun and Clarke (2016) indicated that analysis with the design is not necessarily linear, one-way, forward-advancing, and predetermined fashion from phase 1 to phase 6. Rather, it involves an iterative, more fluid back-and-forth flow between the stages of analysis to modify and accommodate possible emerging insights as the analysis progresses. Table 2 below illustrates the design's six phases, the processes involved in each phase, and the actions taken at each phase of the analysis.

Table 2*Phases of Thematic Analysis*

Phase	Process	Action
1. Dataset familiarization	Data transcription (if necessary), a rereading of transcribed data, and picking up initial ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcribed and cleaned audio dataset • Read and reread the dataset • Took notes • Generated initial ideas for data contents
2. Initial codes generation	Systematically coding data and collating emerging codes across the dataset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorized and coordinated data items into meaningful groups • Developed initial codes
3. Searching for themes	Collating emerged codes into potential themes; arranging all data across the dataset relating to each of those themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generated initial themes • Mapped to reveal theme relationship • Wrote themes and their defining properties
4. Reviewing themes	Confirming whether the emerged themes correspond to the coded extracts and the whole dataset, creating a thematic 'map' of the analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensured the sufficiency of data to support individual themes • Shortened overlapping themes • Enhanced codes and themes
5. Defining and naming themes	Continuing with analysis to generate specifics for each theme, generating clear definitions and names for individual themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revolved between data and themes to organize theme essence • Organized data extracts to produce a story
6. Producing the report	Selecting compelling excerpts as examples from data, analyzing selected excerpts by relating back to the research question, presenting a concise and appealing account of the story conveyed by the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrote a convincing argument that answered the research questions • Gone beyond the simple description of themes to relate public stories on policy

 Braun & Clarke (2006)
Coding Strategy: Description-Focused

Description-focus coding underscores the generation of codes that summarize transcribed data contents into descriptions. That is, a generated code—a noun word or phrase—condenses the contents of the text data (Saldaña, 2021). I used the concept as a first cycle (phase 1) method to read the transcripts and coded the data to reflect the research question before reloading the transcript onto NVivo. My initial attempt involved loading interview transcripts directly onto NVivo for auto-coding with the hope of eliminating the potential researcher bias in manual code generation. However, the codes generated did not resonate with the theme of the research, necessitating the employment of manual coding (as explained further in the next section). As Saldaña implied,

descriptive codes help categorize responses around the topic but do not develop comprehensive meaning out of the data. They do not produce much understanding of what a research participant is implying. This condition compels the use of alternative coding methods, in this case, NVivo, to derive meaning from the interview data. Using descriptive coding resulted in a categorized index of data structured by topic to aid in further analysis and interpretation in the second and subsequent rounds of coding in NVivo.

NVivo Coding

Reflexive thematic analysis highlights the significance and resourcefulness of the researcher's subjectivity to data analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020, 2021; Campbell et al., 2021). To mitigate the researcher's predetermined codes and themes in the data analysis process inherent in the RTA approach, I loaded the dataset onto NVivo14 software as part of phase 1 to obtain software-generated codes and themes. That is, initial codes and themes emerged from the data using the NVivo software. Notwithstanding, I had to review and revise the NVivo-generated codes and themes copied onto Microsoft Word to examine their validity, reliability, and usability. Ultimately, I discarded the entire software-generated codes and themes because they did not reflect the research question. I developed new codes manually by continuously keeping an eye on my emotions and sentiments to avoid such predispositions from slipping into the process.

Two fundamental perspectives influenced the orientation the reassessment of the produced codes and themes took—realism and relativism. According to Willig (2012, p.

8), realists tend to direct their investigations towards shedding light “to reflect reality as it is,” while relativists occupy themselves with, and their focus on providing “a space within which to engage with and reflect on a particular experiential phenomenon”. This paper incorporated both paradigms by revealing the definition society attributed to the reality of escalating youth substance activities within an apparently strong narcotic policy environment. Such experiential definitions of reality would enlighten policy stakeholders on further steps to adopt, if any, to accomplish policy targets.

Emerged Themes

Codes and themes were generated to reflect the research question: Given the incidence of drug abuse among the youth, what is public opinion regarding Ghana’s national narcotic policy’s influence in combating the problem to cause a positive social change? The attempt to use NVivo auto coding to reduce subjectivity returned unrelated codes and themes, as indicated earlier in the preceding section, compelling the use of NVivo manual coding to generate codes and themes. Table 3 below demonstrates the themes and associated subthemes that emerged from the interviews.

Table 3*Themes, Theme Descriptions, and Frequencies*

Themes	Theme Description	Subthemes	Theme Frequency*
Drug Activity Prevalence due to Policy Leniency	Dominance of various forms of substances because of policy relaxed form; narcotic drug consumptions; and behaviors presumed to be arising from consuming such substances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emergence of New Forms of Narcotic Drugs - Rise of Drug Incidents - Ease of Access to Drug 	53
Absence of Policy Awareness Creation	Public consciousness of policy from its introduction to its adoption and post-adoption implementation; such consciousness gained through central government, media, and local organizations public awareness creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No Direct Engagement of Policy Executing Institutions - Absence of Policy Sensitization at the Community Level - Community-Initiated Efforts 	9
Inadequate Knowledge of Policy Existence	Public discernment of consequences associated with misconduct; understanding that policy provisions decriminalizing some narcotic drug activities do not necessarily endorse the behavior and such actions are punishable in most cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy Consciousness not Enough in Community Content Familiarity - Deficiency in Policy Content Familiarity 	15
Problematic Implementation of Policy	Activities public hold, or structures public leaders establish to ensure that youth and broader public conduct align with policy stipulations; community leaders' approach to reinforce formal agencies' efforts at executing policy directives		10
Adverse Overall Impact of Policy on Drug Activities	Policy's ability to bring positive social change on youth drug habits based on policy penal provisions; policy tendency to attract positive social change based on public experiences of how policy execution agencies handle youth narcotic drug cases; instances of how other communities handle drug cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flippant Penalty Design - Contemporary Incidences Suggesting Policy Ineffectiveness 	12

*Respondents' knowledge and awareness of the existence of themes' components

incidents of youth narcotic drug activities (see Table 1). Table 1 also demonstrates the masking of respondents' true identities. This methodological selection of participants was carried out to guarantee the heterogeneity of returned data. Also, participants voluntarily provided forms of identification to validate their institutional affiliation to bolster credibility. I ensured that such sources of identification were of good standing. I interviewed 11 respondents even though the 10th and 11th respondents did not contribute any new pieces of information from the previous ones. Transcriptions of the interviews were shared with their respective participants through WhatsApp to confirm the texts were true representations of their verbal submissions. My prejudices were equally restrained throughout the analysis process. My background as a native of Yendi gave the respondents confidence with honesty in their responses because they understood the struggle to address youth narcotic substance activity in the community was a collective responsibility.

Transferability

I took a conscious step to widen the response base within a confined pool— involving an assortment of institutions solely in Yendi—so that a considerable number of respondents was included in the study before reaching the data saturation point. Responses from the police, the prison warden, and the court registrar had some similarities in them. I determined not to include more respondents from those institutions because that could have potentially saturated the data prematurely. However, the other respondents revealed some dissimilar evidence that triggered the expansion of the response base in their respective institutions. Also, I provided a detailed description of

the settings and the steps adopted for the entire research (Burkholder et al., 2016). Such a deliberate but important step was necessary to undergird this study's transferability in terms of its applicability to other similar settings (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability

I took multiple measures to ensure dependability—findings' stability over time. Given that all the participants drawn lived and worked in Yendi, that I used an interview guide designed to reflect the research question, and that a trusted data analysis software NVivo-14 was employed to analyze the data collectively, enhanced the consistency of data collection, analysis, and reporting. The study's dependability was reflected in the consistency of the process. A standard open-ended interview question guide was used for all respondents regardless of their institutional connectedness; respondents' institutional affiliations and other pieces of data unique to them emerged in their responses to the interview questions instead. The use of Open-ended interview questions as a means to understand how Act 1019 manipulated youth narcotic activities also demonstrated the study's clarity, repeatability, and notability as much as possible (Laher et al., 2019). Participants' responses, their understanding and interpretation of the policy on youth narcotic substance activities, and the recommendations they proposed backed by the data generated from the interviews constituted the main theme and findings of this study.

Confirmability

Data for this paper were sourced from public workers from specific institutions that had aspects of policy executions in their rights. Data were generated using one-to-one, semi-structured interviews. Also, data reflected how the institutions handled narcotic

substance cases and respondents' perception of policy design based on their relations with individuals with narcotic substance engagements. Themes were developed manually and were determined to reflect the interview data through data triangulation.

However, because qualitative research accommodates and requires justification of subjectivity (Burkholder et al., 2016; Laher et al., 2019) and because a study's trustworthiness is prioritized in lieu of objectivity and subjectivity (Patton, 2015), I evaluated all the developed themes and determined that some of their qualities could not compel for their inclusion in the findings. Themes that had strong data support were included in the results. Those with less strong data backing were given further analyses to prove their usefulness in answering the research question. Themes that did not have much data to support their inclusion were equally discarded.

Study Results

In this generic qualitative study, I explored multidimensional public insights from Yendi on how the NACOC Act 1019 of 2020 exclusively affects the dynamics of youth narcotic substance activities by limiting attention to youth narcotic substance activities in the community. One fundamental research question prompted this study: Given the incidence of drug abuse among the youth, what is public opinion regarding Ghana's national narcotic policy's influence in combating the problem to cause a positive social change? Research respondents related their experiences of aspects of youth narcotic substance engagements through one-on-one interviews. I explored those narratives to discover elements that underscored their policy interpretations and the meanings they assign to their lived experiences. Their answers pointed to one common answer: The

policy was not effective enough to address youth narcotic substance activities based on its current form, especially when the stringent component of the previous policy that served as a deterrent to committing offenses was replaced with monetary penalties. Multiple themes emerged from the interviews to explain the inefficiency of the act to address the problem. I discussed these themes comprehensively in this section with direct quotes from the interviews to afford the theme clarity.

Theme 1: Drug Activity Prevalence due to Policy Leniency

The first theme that emerged in this study was the continued prevalence of drug activity owing to the policy leniency in place. Respondents compared situations before the introduction of Act 1019 as a bill in 2017 to the time this study engaged them in interviews. None of the respondents gave a different account to indicate a reduction of youth narcotic substance activities; all the respondents agreed the situation rather rose exponentially. To buttress this point, participants described the drugs that were most prevalent in use. These are explained as subthemes in the findings. Hence, three subthemes emerged to categorize participants' responses: (1) the emergence of new forms of narcotic drugs, (2) the rise of drug incidents, (3) and the ease of access to drugs. Respondents' perceptions of the prevalence of narcotic drugs and activities among the youth constituted the most frequent theme as they continuously referred back to such activities in the interview process.

Subtheme 1: Emergence of New Forms of Narcotic Drugs

In addition to the known narcotic substances classified under Schedule 5 of Act 1019, respondents named other substances that had the potency to change the psyche but

which were not included in the list under the schedule. Among the substances participants classified as drugs included Indian hemp (locally called “wee”, distorted from “weed”), cannabis, and heroin. “They are cannabis, cocaine, fentanyl, morphine, Tramadol, methamphetamine. Most of these drugs are in the group of drugs called opiates, which are primarily used for pain management. The others are central nervous stimulants and depressants” (Respondent AO). However, respondents believed there were new forms of substances the youth abused; this claim followed the strange and emerging behavioral patterns from the youth at the time of this research. It was also discovered from the interviews that the youth would combine different psyche-changing substances with other similar substances to get high. For example, Respondent YV indicated that some youth would combine prohibited painkillers such as codeine and morphine with cough syrups or “hemp tea” and imbibe them simultaneously or one after another to increase the level of intoxication, an act the drug users refer to as “decking,” according to Respondent CE. This assertion aligned with Thompson and Ofori-Parku’s (2021) discovery of media reports on students, commercial vehicle drivers and their assistants, and market women progressively misusing those two substances.

Subtheme 2: Rise in Drug Incidents

Regardless of how individual respondents portrayed the seriousness of the narcotic drug situation among the youth of Yendi, respondents’ separate submissions pointed to the fact that the social and public health problem was gaining unhealthy ground in the community. Respondents described the incidents in the following ways. Respondent TM noted,

It's really, really bad here in Yendi. There are so many things happening here. The narcotic drug users don't even care where to go and do or not do drugs anymore. My home when I just come out of my house, I see them doing it. They feel it's no one's business. At school, you will realize the students engage in narcotics, usually during break time. When they get back from break, they have strange odors coming from them. This situation is really turning Yendi into something else, as we cannot understand why. It breaks the education system down and leads to poor health. Basically, there is a lot to talk about drugs in Yendi.

Respondent GK expressed,

Oh! The situation is very, very bad in the sense that most of the youth crimes are narcotic-related. Narcotic drug activities usually result in theft, public disturbance, and a lot of conduct not permissible by law. Anytime the youth drug users are arrested and brought to court, upon investigation and physical search, some of them were found to have drugs in their pockets. Tramadol is the one drug that is commonly found in them.

Respondent FC also mentioned,

Oh! The little said about the situation in Yendi, the better. The youth go about publicly with it and do not feel any remorse or shy about it. They do not seem to care about the law and the consequences of such actions.

Respondent QS said,

In terms of the individual actions or the usage, in my perspective, I will say I am

not particularly happy about the current condition. It is not encouraging at all based on the usage, the understanding, and the law. The use of narcotics by the youth of Yendi is increasing day by day. The enforcement to curb the situation is not there. Gone are the days when police and other law enforcement agencies used to arrest and then prosecute those who were using narcotics. These days, we don't see it, and the way they used to hide to take narcotics like Tramadol and others is no more. They do the drugs in the open, and the situation is getting serious. Another factor that is causing the rise is the perception that higher doses of drugs will increase libido and make the male last longer in sex before ejaculating. As time goes on, they increase the dosage, which eventually leads to seizures: both males and females overdose, especially Tramadol, for this particular reason of sexual satisfaction.

Subtheme 3: Ease of Access to Drug

It is important to emphasize that the substances the public classified as narcotic drugs in their responses were actually prohibited in the national narcotic drug policy document. These narcotics are easy to access in some reported communities in Northern Ghana, according to Elliason et al. (2018). Regarding accessibility, Respondent TM indicated that

The lack of any economic activities makes the youth engage in narcotic transactions since drugs have a continuous demand among the youth and adult drug users. These substances are easier to acquire when these youth gather at their places of meeting they call “ghettos.” We have witnessed a lot of such drug-

distributing incidences at those “ghettos” among the youth. These incidences are exposed when misunderstandings erupt among them regarding the exchange of those substances and payments.

Respondent TM’s allegation demonstrated how such substances had become easy to access in a supposedly effective policy environment. Respondent IA also noted,

One fundamental problem is the lack of youth engagement in employment and social activities. Because they are idle, they are easily influenced into drug activities by their peers. Such idleness makes them take up any opportunity that will yield them some money. For this reason, the youth would rather connect with friends more often than with family. Opinion leaders, chiefs, and politicians also play a role in this problem because they are the rule makers of the city and can come out with strategies that will engage the youth productively. They can engage the youth to solicit their concerns and see how best the leadership can collaborate to solve the problem of youth narcotic drug engagements.

Theme 2: Absence of Policy Awareness Creation

The non-existence of any form of policy awareness constituted the second theme of the study. Respondents attributed their doubt about the policy’s ability to address youth narcotic activities to the fact that there was not any form of policy awareness creation from the government or other related stakeholders. Policy awareness creation underscores a deliberate process of engaging in direct or indirect actions and strategies to induce government decisions and regulations (Guo, 2023). “Policy advocacy is the process by which individuals, NGOs, other civil society organizations, networks, and

coalitions seek to build social...justice...by influencing policies, policy implementation, and policy-making processes of governments” (Unsicker, 2013, p. 4). Unsicker indicated further that policy advocacy typically involves two primary methods: Lobbying and activism. Lobbying involves direct but private engagements of policy-interest individuals or groups with policymakers with the interest of influencing policy output to align with the lobbyists’ interests. Activism (or social action) entails public campaigns with the aim of creating consciousness and understanding of policy from its introduction to its adoption and post-adoption implementation. This method is mostly the approach the central or local government, media, and other organizations employ to conduct policy education for public awareness creation.

Study respondents concluded from their institutional experiences that there were no direct engagements of the government with the respondents’ institutions aimed at any form of policy education or sensitization. Respondents indicated further that there was not any form of advocacy from policy interest groups to indicate those groups’ interactions with policy makers to create awareness. Even after policy adoption and implementation, no subsequent sensitization occurred at the community level. Two significant subthemes emerged from these assertions, including (1) no direct engagement of policy executing institutions and (2) absence of policy sensitization at the community level.

Subtheme 1: No Direct Engagement of Policy Executing Institutions

This subtheme highlights the absence of direct engagements of policymakers with policy execution agencies, as the study respondents’ answers indicated. To support the

importance of such engagements, Abdullahi and Othman (2020) believed engagements between policymakers and policy-executing agencies as one of the fundamental ingredients for the success of any public policy. They maintained that the collaborations of policymakers and bodies that implement policies are necessary because the latter is on the ground and has firsthand experience and information of what the grassroots needs. These pieces of information are then fed to the policymakers to be considered in the policy process and integrated into the policy output. This assertion conforms to Kingdon's (1984) assertion these implementers are versed in the components of the problem stream—indicators, focusing events, and feedback.

In addition to these groups, McConnell (2010) added that the interest of social institutions in the policy process highlights aspects of the success of the policy in achieving targets. However, there was no known engagement of the government with academics and other policy experts and stakeholders to solicit policy advice during policy discussions leading to policy adoption and execution. Respondents were asked about their institutions' involvement in the process leading to Act 1019 adoption, given that the act's success involved the likely engagement of those institutions in the execution stage.

Respondent QS stated,

It was the Foods and Drugs Board of the Ghana government that also showed some interest. However, such involvement was restricted to the national level; they never came down to the grassroots to get them involved. And after implementation, no performance follow-up was witnessed. They don't come to the ground to see that their recommendations are implemented. But as for Civil

Service Organizations, I cannot point to that. But if I had time, I could have mentioned specific Civil Service Organizations. However, my institution was not involved in the policy process.

Respondent YV responded,

My institution was not involved in the policy process. There is no direct institutional involvement in the execution either; however, it is part of our civic responsibilities that we talk about the issues of youth drug activities in our civic educational platforms. There is no standalone program for drug activities. Talking about youth drug situations on our platforms comes under the broader sensitization from the Ministry of Interior on violent extremism that says, “If you see something, say something.” We believe, and it is so, that such violent behaviors and extremisms result from consuming narcotic drugs.

Respondent AO mentioned,

The under-listed agencies/organizations have done significantly recognizable jobs in terms of curbing narcotic drug abuse and trade, addicts’ support, and reintegration of sober people into society: National Institute on Drug Abuse, Recovery Africa, media houses, the Northern Regional House of Chiefs, Narcotic Control Commission. They have contributed in diverse ways to seeing this menace put to an end. My institution probably provided data on narcotic drug abuse-related services to the Ministry of Health and the government. This data, often collected over some time, highlights the number of cases seen on an Outpatient basis, admissions and durations, recoveries, and deaths aside from

biographic data of the patients. These details guide the government and policymakers to identify age groups, sex, and hotspots of narcotic drug abuse and trade, consequently guiding policymakers on where to particularly focus attention on and budget planning and distribution.

Respondent GK expressed,

I do not know of any entities that were interested in the policy. The European Union funds some of my agency's projects, but I do not think the union is interested in drug policy. The courts were not involved in the policy process. Prosecution of narcotics is already indicated in the Criminal Offences Act of 29 1960s.

In addition to respondents' assertions of the absence of policymakers' engagement with policy enforcement institutions in the policy process, it was also apparent that other policy stakeholders and advocacy groups did not participate in the entire policy process, contributing to the absence of policy sensitization at the community level, as elaborated below.

Subtheme 2: Absence of Policy Sensitization at the Community Level

The absence of policy sensitization at the community level implies a lack of knowledge of the consequences of committing narcotic-related crimes. As noted in the policy document, the institution of Act 1019 was not meant to solely deal with high-volume drug activities affecting the country; the act was also meant to address community-level cases as well. However, there was not any form of local community engagement to disseminate information on policy. The Ghanaian policymakers double as

members of parliament (MPs) elected by the local communities. Respondents indicated the MPs could have carried out such policy sensitizations by using similar strategies the MPs use to reach constituents during rallies. In addition to this, I looked at the possibility of policy sensitization of any kind in the community through civic education: Respondent QS mentioned,

There was no ordinary public engagement. The only engagement was conducted by some concerned organizations who prearranged a workshop for the judges on the policy, not even the government. Those Civil Service Organizations organized workshops for the judges. That is, the Civil Service Organizations, about three or four of them, came together and funded the workshop. However, I did not see Ghana Education Services come out as a ministry or an agency to talk about the new policy and direct stakeholders in Ghana Education Service to do A or B. Moreover, the police should have shown some interest as well. The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) should have been used to do policy sensitization, but we did not see anything of that sort.

Respondent CE also indicated,

I did not hear any sensitization on the policy; it was only in 2020 I saw a caption of it on one radio station's website. Even though the staff of the NCCE would periodically come to my school and talk to the students about the medical consequences of drugs, they never said anything about the policy.

One of the respondents (BD) equally acknowledged the responsibility and instrumentality of the NCCE in giving civic education on broader government policies.

Respondent BD continued by indicating they believed the government would have used the NCCE to conduct such policy announcements across the nation. Another participant indicated their conception of the government's dependence on the NCCE for the policy's advocacy: Respondent JN noted,

I'm not sure but I believe the government might have involved the National Commission on Civic Education to sensitize the public on the policy processes. The government probably involved the Food and Drugs Board (FDA). Definitely, there will be more, but these are the few I know.

However, Respondent YV, a participant from NCCE, confirmed that

The government should have conducted enough civic education through its civic education agency to ensure that the citizens understood the policy and the ramifications of offenses and to educate the public to report any narcotic-related cases to the right authorities. However, there have not been any such efforts from the government on the policy, even though we, the civic educators, try our best to conscientize the public about the need to report such narcotic substance cases to the right channels. To me, education is the key to resilience. If the people, especially the youth, have enough drug education on the dangers, that will help achieve policy objectives. As a civic engagement educator, it is my institution the government relies on to sensitize the public on policies; however, there was no funding allocated to my institution for such sensitization. My institution is responsible for civic education for the entire Yendi Municipality. Currently, we do not even have a motorbike, let alone a car, for transportation to public areas to

conduct such sensitizations.

Another respondent suggested the need to reincorporate narcotic drug sensitization efforts in the curricula to get students to become conscious of potential influences at early stages. Respondent TM noted,

To me, I was thinking that the government would have strengthened some programs at the youthful stage. So, it could have been like a drug prevention program. So, I was looking at drug prevention programs to be incorporated into the Ghana basic education curriculum to sensitize children on self-esteem, empowerment, and the ability to reduce stress on their own. So if the children learn how to control their temptations, possibly reduce some anxiety in them, and mostly empower themselves to be able to be problem solvers on their own, that, I think, would have equipped them to dive in when they grow up to their youthful and adult ages and are facing challenges. That way, they are fully knowledgeable about how to deal with various problems and will not feel stressed to even think of drugs as a way to deal with their problems. That would have prevented future waste of money in looking for solutions to youth drug problems. Fines derived from narcotics could have been used to establish narcotic prevention clubs from primary up to senior schools that the youth advocates will solely handle. Those youths who are vocal will champion the publicity and will be responsible for educating students about the dangers of narcotic drug usage. The vocal ones can equally go out into the Yendi community and educate the public. Since the youth learn faster from their peers, this would have been one of the effective strategies

the government could have integrated into the policy to prevent future narcotic drug activities.

Assertions from the respondents above suggested the absence of ordinary public engagement in policy sensitizations and civic education to create public awareness of necessary policy changes. Such a lag led to the public's insufficient knowledge of policy existence.

Theme 3: Inadequate Knowledge of Policy Existence

Theme 3 emerged in this study as a result of respondents' assertion that there were no established measures to create policy awareness among the public. Although an absolute absence of policy knowledge could not be established because a very insignificant number of the respondents had some knowledge about the policy's details, it was safe to assert that such awareness was infinitesimal, given the colossal number of respondents with trifling knowledge of policy existence in any form. My goal in the knowledge of policy existence was to ascertain participants' in-depth understanding of the provisions of the policy, including expectations and consequences of committing narcotic drug crimes. Study respondents related their basic understanding of the general consequences associated with narcotic offenses—prison terms for some specified period. However, their understanding of policy provisions decriminalizing some narcotic drug activities was inexistent due to the insufficiency of policy advocacy.

Nonetheless, this study targeted respondents whose professional duties were related somehow to policy execution. Despite the absence of such policy advocacy efforts in the community, respondents revealed some pieces of information that confirmed their

consciousness and some understanding of the policy. This revelation exposed two additional subthemes, including (1) inadequate policy consciousness in the community and (2) deficiency in policy content familiarity.

Subtheme 1: Policy Consciousness not Enough in Community

Consciousness of policy existence here varies from awareness of policy advocacy creation. With consciousness, I implied having the actual knowledge of the policy and its existence regardless of whether advocacy did take place in the community or not since familiarization of the policy could have potentially been attained without necessarily through in-community advocacy efforts. This assertion further implies that there is a stark difference between awareness of advocacy presence in the community and consciousness of Act 1019. Differentiating awareness of policy advocacy and policy consciousness is necessary due to the responses obtained on advocacy earlier. Some respondents (e.g., Respondent GK) indicated they neither witnessed any advocacy efforts nor had any idea about Act 1019. However, not witnessing policy advocacy in the community was not a sufficient condition to conclude a lack of knowledge of policy existence since knowledge could have been attained through different avenues.

Because it was apparent that knowledge of policy existence was inadequate, it became necessary to delve deep to understand the magnitude of the inadequacy. My intent was not to enquire about respondents' knowledge of the existence of some form of punishment for drug offenses; the existence of established punishments for crimes is common knowledge. My intent was to enquire from participants about their knowledge of Act 1019 of 2020 in particular. As indicated earlier, it was obvious that a negligible

number of the participants had some fundamental knowledge of the act and its purpose, as shown in the following responses.

According to Responder FC,

The government introduced Act 2020 to replace the PNDC law that was in place. Even though this PNDC law seemed tough, it could not solve the problems of narcotics in the country so the government saw the need to modify the existing one to a more practical one. Provisions within the PNDC law caused a lot of petty drug offenders to go to prison, so the government had to find a solution to the over-imprisonment for such small offenses. It was also important that the narcotic control board was granted autonomy; the board did not have such autonomy under the old policy.

Respondent QS also indicated,

The PNDC Act 236 of 1990 set up the Narcotic Drug Board. The fact of the matter is that punishment regarding the possession, importation, exportation, or dealing of the drugs sought to sentence or punish those in possession or the use or the exportation or importation of narcotic drugs. If a person were convicted, they could be sentenced to 10 years or more or less, depending on the situation. But so it is like criminalizing the whole use of narcotics or the trading of narcotics. If one were dealing with narcotics as a business and then were caught, proceeds coming from the narcotics trade and other properties would be seized and handed over to the government. That was the PNDC law. But fast-forward to 2020 it was repealed and reviewed. That was Act 1019 of 2020, and that moved the Narcotic

Drug Board to the Narcotic Commission. The aim was to decongest the prisons and decriminalize the habit, and through that, the government would generate funds through fines for policy breaches.

Also, Respondent YV said,

Because of the incidences of narcotics, including cultivation and distribution of cannabis, the country adopted the Narcotic Control Commission Act, Act 1019 of 2020, to address such incidences. It was introduced to replace the PNDC narcotic law. Under the PNDC law, there was a narcotic control board that was not autonomous. The government saw that to make the fight against drugs achievable, there was the need to make the board autonomous and so the need to change the board to a commission. The mass cannabis production by cannabis farmers was not properly controlled, so the government felt the need to introduce a new policy that would ensure that the production of such substances was regulated properly. The long-term objective of the policy was to ensure that there would not be easy access to such substances.

In addition, Respondent ZX observed,

In 2020, the government of Ghana passed a new law, the Narcotic Control Commission Act 1019 Act 2020, which talks about how to curtail narcotic drugs. The change was to make the Narcotics Control Commission autonomous to prosecute persons found with drugs without the required permission. It was also changed to give power to the Interior Ministry to issue licenses for the cultivation of cannabis.

Respondent AO concluded,

The narcotic policy says that it is criminal to be in possession of narcotics without any proper documentation or be involved in history. Offense can result in, from fine to imprisonment depending on the nature or type of offense. Initially, the law stated that if a person is in possession of even as much as just two roles of marijuana illegally, they could be jailed. However, the new law has lessened the punishment to payment of fines and possibly community service. The government adopted the current policy to make the government body in charge of narcotics an independent one. However, I'm not sure what factors necessitated the change, but I believe it is the extremely strict nature of the previous law. As stated above, a person could be jailed for just possession of a simple roll or 2 of marijuana. Besides, The new law gives The narcotics control board or commission full independence or authority, thus giving the body law enforcement powers in relation to narcotics seeking to address loopholes in interagency coordination to envision reduction of the harm caused by law enforcement protocols and find an alternative to improving the state of affairs.

Apart from the insignificance of the knowledge of Act 1019, I still wanted to find out from respondents, especially those who knew about the act in particular, about the details of the act and what such contents meant and intended; there was a deficiency in policy content familiarity.

Subtheme 2: Deficiency in Policy Content Familiarity

Respondents' sheer knowledge that some policy exists to address the narcotic

drug problem as a social issue may not necessarily translate into knowing the details of such policy. This assertion was evidenced in this study's participants' responses.

Respondents were asked about the act's expectations, given their consciousness of its existence. The aim was to establish participants' understanding of various narcotic crimes in the act and the associated ramifications. The following answers came up regarding policy content familiarity. For instance, Respondent CE admitted,

I heard about (the act) on a radio station when the Ghanaian Parliament was discussing it. I heard it was going to replace the PNDC law which was the old drugs law of Ghana. I do not know anything about what brought about the change. All I know about the policy is that narcotic drug cases were increasing, and people were discussing the issue of narcotic drug prevalence on social media almost all the time. This concern probably pushed the government to come up with this law.

Respondent GK also revealed,

Because my institution is responsible for prosecution, we only enforce the law by ensuring that those who violate the law by engaging in narcotics are punished. But as to whether the courts were involved or engaged in the policy process, there was nothing like that. As I mentioned earlier, the courts were not involved in the policy process, so I do not know much about the policy. However, I will say there is a problem with the policy because the narcotic situation among the youth of Yendi does not show there is any national policy in place to address narcotic substance problems.

Also, Respondent JN said,

I am not sure if I heard about the policy or know anything that has to do with it.

All I know is the existence of punishment for violation, but I do not exactly know what kind of narcotic offense deserves what kind of punishment. I did not even know that there was a policy change from the previous one since the level of drug activities among the youth does not show any sign that a new policy to address narcotic cases is in place.

Theme 4: Problematic Implementation of Policy

Theme 4 (problematic implementation of Act 1019) emerged because respondents asserted how policy implementation agencies' personnel handled narcotic drug criminals. The essentialness to probe into the implementation process of Act 1019 arose in reference to Abdullahi and Othman's (2020) assertion that policy implementation determines a policy's success. Implementation includes the activities of law enforcement agencies, particularly the police and the prison services. The police are responsible for the apprehension of offenders, and the prison service provides the supervision of convicts under policy provisions. However, respondents indicated the relaxed approach these enforcement agencies' personnel enforced the policy.

Study respondents examined the act's tendency to achieve policy goals within the operations of two institutions under the Ministry of the Interior, namely the Police Service and the Prison Service. The Drug Law Enforcement Unit – Narcotics (DLEU) of the Ghana Police Service handles narcotic cases. Under the policy, the Narcotic Control Commission was made autonomous to ensure that it could take activities without

necessarily getting orders from other agencies. Respondents indicated the act's inability to stop the social problem by drawing on circumstances that took place around the time of the interviews.

Respondent JN claimed that,

Law enforcement agencies have also fallen short in their duty to society in this perspective by allowing bail to those who are profiting from this destructive habit when they are arrested and prosecuted. What's even more? Suppose such people undergo citizen arrests and are handed to the appropriate authorities with all evidence, they are often released without trial for whatever reasons only known to the enforcement agency. As a result, they often perceive those who instigated their arrests as enemies. Those who spearheaded these arrests stand a significant chance of being harmed later.

Respondent FC disclosed that,

Such unexplained reasons for the release of narcotic drug offenders most likely caused the people of Tamale to choose to handle incidences of narcotics in their own way. They look for hints, and based on these hints, they go after those distributors and destroy all narcotic-associated products in the distributors' possession. Fortunately, the local leadership in Tamale endorsed the volunteers' acts.

Respondent IA suggested a stakeholder forum. They said that,

Many people, many parents, do not know the effects, so there has to be a stakeholders forum. While the leadership of Yendi organizes stakeholder forums,

they also have to do public education, like the use of FM stations. They can also organize conferences, or they can also organize parents. They have meetings at the Chief Palace or conferences, and those stakeholders or resource persons can educate the people or the parents about the effects of those things. So, every parent should try and do well and talk to their children if their children are into narcotic drugs. Apart from educating them, they should also let them know they are now going to form a task force or a volunteer group, including police and soldiers. They will ensure that any person who is arrested on those things, no one or no individual or group of people when I say no one, no individual or group of people. I mean, opinion leaders, chiefs, and politicians will come and free them when these drug addicts and peddlers are arrested. Opinion leaders, chiefs, and politicians are the same people who come to the security force and say, "Please, he's my son, he's my nephew, he's my cousin, he's my this, he's my that. So I'm pleading for leniency, and I will ensure he will not do that again". The moment the person is released, and because they did not get punished for such crimes, they go right back into doing those activities again. So with this situation, if indeed those task forces and volunteers are there, drug offenders know the punishments are established. Those opinion leaders, chiefs, politicians, and senior leaders should also come out and tell the youth who engage in drugs that whoever is arrested on those things should not rely on leaders. If leaders cultivate this habit, the problem will go away. Apart from that, they should also try as well as possible to engage those people and discover their talents and what they think they can do.

Either get them some jobs or engage them with, for instance, tricycles for them to use so that they will be busy because the minute they engage them to do something, I don't think they'll have the time to engage in drug activities. Even if they engage in drugs, it will be minimal because they know they will have to look for money.

Respondent QS also revealed,

Another issue is that when the prison wardens take prisoners out to work in the fields, the prison wardens themselves get the prisoners some drugs that will boost the prisoners' energy levels to get the work done on time and tirelessly. These prisoners were imprisoned because of factors like engaging in various forms of narcotic drug activities. It is overwhelming that those who were supposed to somehow enforce the law are the same as breaching the law.

Respondent FC affirmed,

It has no effect at all, for instance, by considering what the elders of the city do when someone is arrested for possession of narcotics. These elders, including the politicians and chiefs, will come and tell law enforcement that "this is my ward. I will make sure that they do not go back into repeating such acts". If the leadership in Yendi were to leave the law to handle cases without their interference, the policy would have achieved great success; however, when the youth who engage in drugs are arrested, these leaders come and plead for the offenders and get them out. This practice makes the government lose the funds it would have raised from fining the offenders. If the chiefs and the politicians come and get these offenders

out, then the government cannot fight the problem effectively.

Respondent QS connected the situation in Yendi to other communities:

Tamale, for instance, the inhabitants had to leave even the police out. The local chiefs formed watchdog groups from the indigenes of the Tamale Metropolis. They gave their full support to the groups to go around and confiscate narcotics from the narcotic sellers. And the amount of Tramadol and “wee” they seized, no one could believe that those quantities were found within Tamale as if there were manufacturing agencies within the Tamale metropolis. It is a big business that people are into, the Tramadol business. It’s a big business. Yes, you cannot just believe that some are selling drugs through windows.

Respondent TM rather indicated,

Okay, so as I said about the parents, a considerable number of adults do drugs in Yendi. Can you imagine most of the adults in Yendi playing the role of drug abusers? Can you tell the kind of community Yendi is going to be like? In the case of Tramadol, even the pharmacies play a role in worsening the situation. The pharmacies do not care about the age of the one buying the drugs. Once the buyer presents money, the one behind the counter is ready to sell the substance to them. Also, they sell prescription substances without a prescription. The Yendi community leaders and other stakeholders could have established local rules and regulations to govern the sales and consumption of such substances. Still, there are no checks on those activities. So, the community itself does not care about youth drug situations. As to the other drugs, distribution takes place among the

youth. They create meeting places they call “ghetto” where they meet and engage in narcotic activities, yet no opinion leader came out to get those meeting areas dismantled. There are equally some sellers in the marketplace, yet no one is making any efforts to stop the act.

Respondent YV felt,

Bad governance, in the sense that the local leadership, including opinion leaders, politicians, and other leadership in Yendi, interfere with the activities of the security agency personnel. When someone is arrested for narcotic offenses, the local leaders and politicians go to the detention centers and plead that the culprits are their relatives and that the culprits should be freed. They, the opinion leaders and politicians, would handle the situation and make sure that the culprits refrain from such crimes of drugs. The only way the policy can be successful in Yendi is if opinion leaders, chiefs, and politicians distance themselves from interceding on the culprits' behalf when the security agency's personnel arrest the perpetrators. These leaders should allow the law to take care of the culprits; the leaders should rather help the security agencies by assisting in their ways to enforce the policy instead of helping the perpetrators escape convictions. We do not see the youth undergoing any punishments for such narcotic drug activities; this gives them permission to do even more drugs. We try very much to incorporate civic education in junior high schools by forming civic clubs among students. It is through these students we disseminate information to all students. Selling of drugs and prescription painkillers is very common in the junior high schools. Children

as young as 10 to 15 years consume drugs in Yendi. Unfortunately, the new educational policy incriminates corporal punishment, so teachers cannot threaten students with flogging. Also, when these incidents are reported to parents of the children involved in narcotic drug activities, the parents would deny that. When there is evidence to support that the children were indeed caught with narcotics, the parents would rebuff by saying everyone's child is doing drugs. Also, the youth established camps outside Yendi where serious drug trade and consumption take place. Such camps are everywhere in Yendi. But when the security forces conducted a sweep and arrested the youth with narcotics at those camps, the opinion leaders, chiefs, and politicians would go and get them out of detention without any charges.

Respondents' accounts of law enforcement agency personnel's approach to the community youth narcotic habits led me to enquire about the general impact of the act on the problem without drawing conclusions from respondents' narratives of the approach. This consideration led to Theme 5, the overall impact of the policy on social change.

Theme 5: Adverse Overall Impact of Policy on Social Change

The overall impact of a policy on the issue it is intended to address depends on the policy's effective implementation (Abdullahi & Othman, 2020). Act 1019's impact on youth narcotic activities takes no exception to that notion. Two factors constituted the basis respondents examined the impact; I looked at them separately as subthemes. On the one hand, study participants estimated the act's impact on the situation in Yendi based on the noticeable youth narcotic cases and the incidences that were presumed to result from

such activities in the community. On the other hand, their views focused on the punishment for offenses. Their assertions indicated a negative effect rather, especially when the stringent aspect that served as a significant deterrent to offending had been replaced with fines. The two subthemes include (1) ongoing incidences suggesting policy ineffectiveness and (2) the trivial nature of the associated penalties.

Subtheme 1: Contemporary Incidences Suggesting Policy Ineffectiveness

Act 1019 of 2020 became the underlying Ghanaian national narcotic policy immediately after it received the President of Ghana's approval on May 11, 2020 (Hawkson, 2021). According to one of this study's respondents from the Drug Law Enforcement Unit – Narcotics (DLEU) of the Ghana Police Service, the DLEU was tasked to handle narcotic cases under the act. The act also made the Narcotic Control Commission autonomous to handle narcotic drug activities without necessarily getting orders from other agencies and has a nationwide presence and jurisdiction. Respondents were asked about the contemporary drug situation in Yendi by focusing on the agency's autonomy. They drew on the fact that other communities felt the government policy would not be able to solve the problem of narcotics; they chose their way to handle narcotic activities in those communities. Respondent FC indicated,

The way the policy is designed to pay fines instead of prison terms means the youth who are able to pay fines can commit narcotic crimes over and over again without any serious punishment. So, the policy does not have any impact on the situation in Yendi. That is probably why the people of Tamale choose to deal with narcotics in their own way by going after distributors and destroying all their

narcotic products.

Respondent QS also indicated,

Based on the current situation, the answer is no because the act is left on paper and no action. But if actions were to be taken by the right institutions, that would have been good news. But the policy is left on paper. All I can say is that I have a problem with the policy being able to solve narcotics problems, given that those engaged in narcotic businesses and consumption will not have any difficulties paying the fines. I have another problem with the part of the policy saying power will be given to the minister of interior to give out licenses to those interested in cultivating cannabis. I do not think there will be adequate supervision of the cultivation. The proper procedure should have been empowering the local chiefs and local government to monitor such activities. Once the ministry issues the license without indicating the quantity to be produced and how activities will be supervised, then such a move still defeats the purpose of reducing narcotic substance activities.

Respondent JN also indicated,

Based on observation of the trending of events, there is a significantly low chance that we will ever be rid of this narcotic menace because, unfortunately, many people are engaged in these narcotic drug activities primarily as an avenue for money-making; they are not willing to stop anytime soon, no matter how hard the government and other organizations may crack the whip.

Respondent QS proclaimed,

Ei! Serious! I don't think the policy can really solve the problem in Yendi. I don't think the people of Yendi even know about any narcotic drug policy. What I think may solve the problem of youth narcotic drug issues in Yendi is the replication of what is going on in Tamale now. Some concerned local groups of Tamale have formed some task forces and have been successful in weeding out narcotic sellers. The task force had learned that the drugs come to Tamale through Yendi instead of through the big cities, and because of that, the task force intended to extend their operations to Yendi. The law may somehow work in Yendi when narcotic drug vendors are seen selling narcotics in the open so that they will be arrested. Otherwise, the policy has no impact at all in Yendi. Those arrested may end up back in the community selling the drugs again once they are able to pay the fines upon conviction. The issue of youth narcotic drug activities is now becoming dangerous in Yendi. In less than a year, there were three narcotic-related gun murders in the city, and all of them were between 20 and 25 years old. Also, there are a lot of at-gunpoint robberies in Yendi that are purported to be carried out by those engaged in drugs. Victims confirmed the robbers were engaged in narcotics due to how the robbers behaved when they were committing robberies. In my school, there is one boy who is clearly a narcotic user, but his parents will argue that the teachers only want to tarnish the image of their son. Now, I believe the boy has been able to influence some two other boys into narcotics. So, the policy is not something that can solve the problem of narcotics in Yendi, especially among the youth.

In addition, Respondent IA related,

It is quite difficult to make a conclusion that the policy is making a positive impact. People I could confirm were involved in narcotics were released when the new law came into existence. There were pending cases, but because the change of policy took effect these people were granted some form of bail or pardon, I am not sure. But one thing is certain: it will be difficult to reduce narcotic activities if prison terms are going to be substituted with fines that will be easy for true criminals to pay and walk free, leading to more crimes and ways to avoid arrest. At the same time, it will be difficult for those with minor crimes like possession for personal use in smaller quantities but who may not have the ability to pay fines and cannot devise strategies to avoid subsequent arrests.

Theme 2: Superficial Nature of Penalty

Under the policy directives, the NACOC would enforce and control all forms of drug activities with the aim of “reducing narcotic drugs in the society at large, by arrests and prosecution of cultivators, traffickers, peddlers, and users and thus control the supply of narcotic drugs to the minimum” (Ministry of the Interior website, February 14, 2024). Such prosecutions would primarily take the form of financial fines and finally lead to prison terms in case offenders default (“Act 1019,” 2020, p. 52). In reaction to these provisions, respondents with policy content knowledge had various perception about the act’s penal strategy. According to Respondent QS,

It was just last year that some nonprofit organizations organized magistrates and judges to educate them on the new law so that they would turn from penalizing

them in terms of sending them to prison to fining them. Fining them like 6,000 Ghana cedis (approximately \$425 at the time of this research) and 10,000 Ghana cedis (\$715) without going to prison, my brother, it's like "chop money" (pennies) to those dealing in narcotic drugs. This is a joke for those who are dealing with narcotics. The convict will pay the money and walk away.

Respondent TM also maintained,

Instead of sending a drug convict to prison as punishment, the convict is rather fined. That is what I think is wrong with this policy. So if the culprit is able to pay the fine and avoid going to jail, what then becomes of them if they are able to develop strategies to avoid law enforcement? If the culprit is a distributor of narcotics and continues to distribute them to the youth, this implies the government only made money out of the culprit but did not solve the problem a bit. So, I don't see anything good about that policy. Those arrested may end up back in the community selling the drugs again once they are able to pay the fines upon conviction. All I can say is that I have a problem with the policy being able to solve narcotic problems, given that those engaged in narcotic businesses and consumption will not have any difficulties paying the fines.

Respondent BD also added,

So, that's where I still have a concern to raise about that policy. I don't see it to be a preventive measure, considering the youth's mental health, because I just thought that it gives way to continuous use of these drugs. That is my view on that policy. Instead of sending a drug convict to prison as punishment, the convict is

rather fined. That is what I think is wrong with this policy. So if the culprit is able to pay the fine and avoid going to jail, what then becomes of them if they are able to develop strategies to avoid law enforcement? If the culprit is a distributor of narcotics and continues to distribute them to the youth, this implies the government only made money out of the culprit but did not solve the problem a bit. So, I don't see anything good about that policy.

Data Outliers

Under the study limitations in Chapter 1, I pointed out the possible distortion of data that could arise because of the respondents' heterogeneousness. Firstly, participants' political affiliation could reflect political sentiments in their responses. Ghana's narcotic policy changed over time, with the longest one being the PNDCL 236, running from 1990 to 2020. This law was enacted by the PNDC, the core political institution that gave birth to one of the two main political parties of the country, the NDC. The policy remained active until 2017 when the other opposing political party, the NPP (that assumed governance of the country in 2016 after national elections), considered policy modifications and was subsequently readjusted and adopted in 2020 as Act 1019. There was then a possibility that respondents might give answers on the act to reflect their political belongingness. To address this, I made the study participants understand from the interview questions that giving answers to deflect the present situation from reality would misinform policymakers of policy performance—strength or otherwise.

Secondly, the accidental inclusion of youth involved in narcotic activities in the

respondent pool could potentially create outliers in the data to misrepresent policy successes and failures. For this reason, I ensured that all the respondents were engaged formally and were pooled from various professional institutions since research confirmed that those engaged in narcotic activities are either unemployed or are in menial and nonformal jobs (e.g., Aryeetey et al., 2021; Fortune et al., 2015; Fuseini et al., 2019; Saapiire, 2021). Also, I confirmed that none of the respondents fell within the 15 – 24 years age category. This approach was necessary to address the unexpected inclusion of potential narcotic drug peddlers or users who would give inconsistent perspectives on the policy. The approach was also important to ensure that respondents were free from any psychological commitment to their political association that could affect their responses. In all, no discrepant cases were observed. The data were consistent, and none of the answers reflected a negative case from the rest of the data.

Summary

This generic qualitative study aimed to assess how Act 1019 of 2020 addressed the occurrences of Ghana youth narcotic substance activities by using the situation in Yendi as a reference point. English-speaking participants were sampled, and interviews were conducted with individuals from a variety of institutions—local government employees, health workers, the police, and teachers, among others. Interviews were conducted to compare group responses to understand their perspectives on the policy. Responses were targeted to answer the research question: Given the incidence of drug abuse among the youth, what is public opinion regarding Ghana’s national narcotic policy’s influence in combating the problem to cause a positive social change?

Participants' selection was deliberate. The selection was carried out to ensure that participants' professional engagements had some form of relationship with policy executions.

In this chapter, I discussed the research setting by commenting on the procedure for recruiting study respondents and their responses to my interview requests. No potential concerns that would have undermined respondents' involvement came up. Respondents did not have any concerns they would have needed to address with Walden University's Research Participant Advocates either. Interview questions were personally designed to reflect the research question, and interviews were conducted both in person and over the phone. Respondents' demographics were also discussed in this chapter. The reasons for the selection of those participants, the NVivo qualitative data analysis software used to do the analysis, how the analysis was done, evidence of trustworthiness, and codes and themes that emerged from the data were equally reviewed. Five themes emerged and were supported by direct quotes of respondents from the interview data. I specified the likelihood of discrepancies that could have surfaced from the data and reiterated how my initial study design and interview approach to participants helped mitigate those potential outliers.

In Chapter 5, I provide a comprehensive compilation of aspects of the previous chapters, an in-depth interpretation of this study's findings, a summary of the interviews, and suggestions for future research discerned from research participants' direct or implied assertions. Chapter 5 also includes the research limitations, application of Kingdon's multiple streams framework of policy analysis on Act 1019, recommendations

for policymakers, and the potential impact of this study on positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to assess the Ghana national narcotic policy's consideration of youth substance abuse. Specifically, the research centered on how Act 1019 of 2020 addressed the circumstances of the Ghanaian youth narcotic substance activities relating to consumption, possession, and distribution in Yendi. Attempts to fight narcotic drug use in Ghana date back to the pre-independence era (Akyeampong, 2005; Kumah-Abiwu, 2019; Sagoe, 1966). Ghana streamlined its narcotic drug policies to address various narcotic activities across time, but those were continuously amended to suit the dynamics of drug activities. Such policy landscape was characterized by a major transition from a long-running stringent PNDCL 236 (that was itself a slight transformation from its predecessor, the Pharmacy and Drugs Act of 1961) to a more humane one, with the enactment and adoption of Act 1019 in 2020 (Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021; Kasore et al., 2021; Messersmith et al., 2021; Parimah et al., 2021).

Despite scholars' commitment to investigating both narcotic drug- and policy-related issues (e.g., Kumah-Biwu, 2023), literature is still lacking, or is insignificant on how narcotic policies shape the dynamics of narcotic activities they are designed to address. For instance, prior to the enactment of Act 1019, both intellectual and media attention considerably concentrated on youth drug use by targeting the dangers of substance use (Adu-Mireku, 2003; Bosompra, 1987; Dennis-Antwi et al., 2003; Thompson & Ofori-Parku, 2021). Nevertheless, those efforts, coupled with high narcotic-related prisoner numbers for trivial offenses and the evidence of the country's susceptibility to international narcotic traffickers to use as a pass-through zone, triggered

policy agenda setting for the Ghanaian government to consider the review of the country's narcotic policy (Kumah-Abiwu, 2019). However, scholars do not know how the new policy impacted the overall narcotic activities, particularly among the youth. Due to this gap, this present study explored the public view of Act 1019's tendency to meaningfully address youth narcotic substance activities. The exploration focused on the current trends of the problem, factors considered during the policy process, the narratives contained in the final policy document, and how these aspects hypothetically address youth substance activities.

This paper was guided by the following research question to gain insight into the policy's effect on the problem: Given the incidence of drug abuse among the youth, what is public opinion regarding Ghana's national narcotic policy's influence in combating the problem to cause a positive social change? Participants were purposefully sampled from public and health institutions to ensure that responses reflected participants' distinct policy engagements in their various institutional responsibilities. Such deliberate sampling technique also helped avoid the accidental inclusion of youth—who might be engaged in narcotic substance activities—as respondents. There was unanimity in participants' responses regarding the pervasiveness of narcotic substance activities among the youth of Yendi at the time of the research. The harmony characterized in the responses also revealed policy implications on achieving policy goals based on contemporary policy provisions, execution, and the intensity of the social and public health problem.

Interpretation of the Findings

Five themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data: (a) drug activity prevalence due to policy leniency, (b) absence of policy awareness creation, (c) inadequate knowledge of policy existence, (d) problematic implementation of policy, and (e) adverse overall impact of policy on drug activities. In Chapter 2, I presented a detailed review of the literature on the situation of youth narcotic substance activities across the country. I narrowed the focus to the northern part of the country. Even though there was no standalone literature on Yendi youth narcotic situations, studies from other parts of northern Ghana were used as reference points to describe the situation in Yendi due to the underlying resemblances in almost all forms of lifestyles of the northern communities (Prussin, 1969; Simpson Miller, 2022). In addition, there have been extensive studies on the general narcotic situations of Ghana (Cook, 2019; Eligh, 2019; Figueira, 2012) and among the youth in almost all parts of the country (Asiseh et al., 2017; Frimpong et al., 2021; Fuseini et al., 2019; Oti-Boateng & Agbleze, 2019) despite the lack of government records to illuminate the frequency of youth narcotic substance habits (Appiahene-Gyamfi, 2016).

Equally, multiple studies have been devoted to the Government of Ghana's efforts at regulating all-inclusive narcotic drug activities in Ghana through policy enactments and reforms since the country's independence in 1957 (Akyeampong, 2005; Ane, 2018; Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021; Gregg, 1961; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Sagoe, 1966). However, there had not been an exclusive study to examine the effect of any of the policies on the intended social problem. This study thus extended knowledge in the

discipline to critically examine Act 1019 of 2020's influence exclusively on all forms of youth narcotic substance activities to narrow the existing literature gap through the emerged themes.

Theme 1: Drug Activity Prevalence due to Policy Leniency

Respondents indicated there had been a rise in narcotic activities among the youth in Yendi within the past 5 years, with no sign to suggest the government's determination to fight the menace. Apart from the lack of knowledge of policy existence in the community, the relaxed nature of the policy implies that even if narcotic drug offenders were apprehended, the possibility of releasing them back into the community outweighed the offenders' likelihood of serving prison terms, contributing to the rise of narcotic drug activities in the community. The increase of drug activities was not limited to the boundaries of Yendi (Tagziria et al., 2023, p. 33).

Unlike the earlier policy where offenders were detained until they were processed to serve prison terms, no such pronouncements are made in Act 1019. This development implies offenders are discharged back into the community even after being convicted and charged to pay the associated fines. Conviction to pay fines does not imply offenders would be detained until fines are settled before they are released. Even those who were detained under the PNDCL 236 pending prison terms were released back into society when Act 1019 was assented to. These situations caused respondents to witness the rise of narcotic activities in the community. In their consultation with the members of the judiciary on Act 1019's impact, Tagziria and de Lugo (2023) related from the courts that the act "had an immediate impact on the total numbers of people who use drugs facing

jail terms, with prosecutors reportedly withdrawing a large proportion of cases of drug use pending under the previous legislation” and releasing the offenders back into the community (p. 32). However, no facilities were established to help the offenders after their release from recidivating. Also, no policy awareness creation or policy education was instituted to prevent fresh offenses.

Theme 2: Absence of Policy Awareness Creation

Findings on policy awareness creation showed that policy implementers at the community level did not know much about the policy. The involvement of institutions (with the responsibility of implementing various policy directives at the grassroots level) in the policy process determines the success of the policy ((Abdullahi & Othman, 2020, p. 8). However, there was no indication that any organizations were engaged in policy discussions with various policymakers to influence policy outcomes. For activism, the Ministry of the Interior—the agency authorized under the policy to administer policy regulations—proclaimed on its website that the goal of NACOC was to educate the public, especially the youth, parents, workers, and those in law enforcement, on the dangers and effects inherent in drug abuse and on the need to lead a life free of all forms of drugs. Despite this assertion and the seriousness of the activities of narcotic drugs situation among the Yendi youth, it was apparent from this study’s interview data that no known policy education in any form was present in the community. This answer was unanimous among respondents and confirmed earlier research finding that policy content knowledge was inadequate in the entire country (e.g., Ahinkorah et al., 2023; Odoom et al., 2024; Tagziria et al., 2023). Such a lag in what the policy is about and what it seeks to

achieve drove Tagziria et al. (2023) to suggest that “education and awareness of the provisions of Act 1019 must be scaled up” (p. 22). Similarly, Ahinkorah et al. (2023) recommended that meaningful future policy development needs to increase policy awareness and knowledge creation.

Data from the interviews also revealed the inexistence of any form of engagement, either with policymakers to influence policy outcomes, the government, or any groups or individuals with the grassroots on policy education, despite Du Toit’s (1974) assertion that most of the problems of narcotics originate from these local places. Participants were asked about any knowledge of policy awareness creation through policy publicizations. Even though Respondent GK was very blatant with their answer that “I did not hear about any sensitization of the policy and I do not know anything about it,” Respondent ZX was uncertain and indicated that “I believe the government would have used the National Commission for Civic Education or NCCE to go around and do the announcements at the national, regional, district, and municipal levels.” Nonetheless, other respondents gave apparently random responses, which all led to the same conclusion—limited policy advocacy.

To demonstrate the intensity of this deficiency, some respondents only got to hear about Act 1019 for the first time when they were invited to take part in this study and after they reviewed the interview questions a few days prior to the interviews (see McCarthy, 2020). This assertion also conformed to findings that such policymaking processes were devoid of related policy stakeholder engagement at the community level and that “greater engagement of stakeholders in future policy development” is necessary

to enhance awareness of policy existence (Ahinkorah et al., 2023, p. 2).

Theme 3: Inadequate Knowledge of Policy Existence

It was apparent from the responses that some of the participants had some fundamental knowledge of the policy's existence. They enumerated a string of factors the government conveyed that necessitated policy readjustment. On the contrary, however, their consciousness of policy existence did not translate into an absolute knowledge of precise policy contents. A considerable number of them did actually know the legal implications of offending beyond the sheer knowledge of the existence of punishment of some sort (e.g., Respondent R1 from the Ghana Police Service Narcotic Unit and Respondent TM from Ghana Education Service). By supposition, communitywide knowledge of policy provisions, especially among the youth whose understanding of the consequences of offenses, would have translated into a reduction of such activities.

It was apparent from this revelation that there were not any policy engagements of the government—both local and central—with the public for policy education. This finding conformed to earlier findings on the government's lag in policy sensitization efforts resulting in the lack of knowledge and awareness of policies on similar social problems in the country. For instance, in their study to establish a particular youth health policy knowledge and awareness among Ghanaian health professionals, Ahinkorah et al. (2023) discovered that almost 50 percent of their respondents had no knowledge of the existence of such policies despite the respondents' institutional involvement with aspects of policy execution. This lag led Ahinkorah and colleagues to call on policymakers' attentiveness to include policy education as an integral part of the policymaking process.

Odoom et al. (2024, p. 6221) also agreed that the “government should re-examine its communication strategies on [policies] and put in place a more effective communication policy framework which involves grassroots populations and local communities”.

Ahinkorah and their contemporaries further asserted that such dissemination of policy knowledge was part of the ingredients for a successful implementation of public policies.

Theme 4: Problematic Implementation of Policy

Findings on policy implementation centered primarily on how the police handle narcotic cases. Respondents indicated an aspect where narcotic distributors could easily be granted bail or set free based on the dealers’ ability to settle fines and how those found with smaller quantities of narcotics could spend some time in cells and end up going to jail because of their inability to pay fines. Findings also indicated how the police could take bribes from actual distributors of narcotics and make the perpetrators’ cases seem trivial. The opposite is true for offenders with very little amount of narcotics for consumption. Because the latter may not be able to pay bribes for their release, their cases end up being escalated. Tagziria and de Lugo (2023) shared a similar concern; they indicated that the lack of clarity in differentiating quantities possessed for personal use and quantities possessed for distribution creates a potential abuse of the law by law enforcement agency personnel when conducting the initial arrests. The possibility of this circumstance occurring stems from the lack of functional regulation when determining the magnitude of the offense. The “police reportedly regularly lean towards charging the offenders with possession for supply (sometimes as a punishment in cases in which the individuals arrested refuse to pay bribes solicited by police officers) (p.32.)”

This paper also discovered the tendency for released offenders to recidivate because no functional structures proposed within the policy document to address all forms of narcotic activities actually existed. No operational counseling or treatment facilities dedicated to persons with narcotic use problems existed at the time of this research, neither in the prisons nor outside the broader community. The finding supported Parimah et al.'s (2021) discoveries on the lack of rehabilitation facilities, especially in Ghanaian prisons, despite Act 1019 having already been adopted and in full operation at the time of Parimah and colleagues' study. In addition, Parimah et al.'s assertion that such a lag created high records of recidivists with aggressive criminal behaviors among convicts was reflected in respondents FC's declaration that those offenders not only had the tendency for recidivism but also posed possible threats to individuals who aided in such arrests. This development persuaded the respondents to query the potency of the policy to impact not only youth narcotic activities but also the complete situation of narcotic problems across the nation.

Theme 5: Adverse Overall Impact of Policy on Social Change

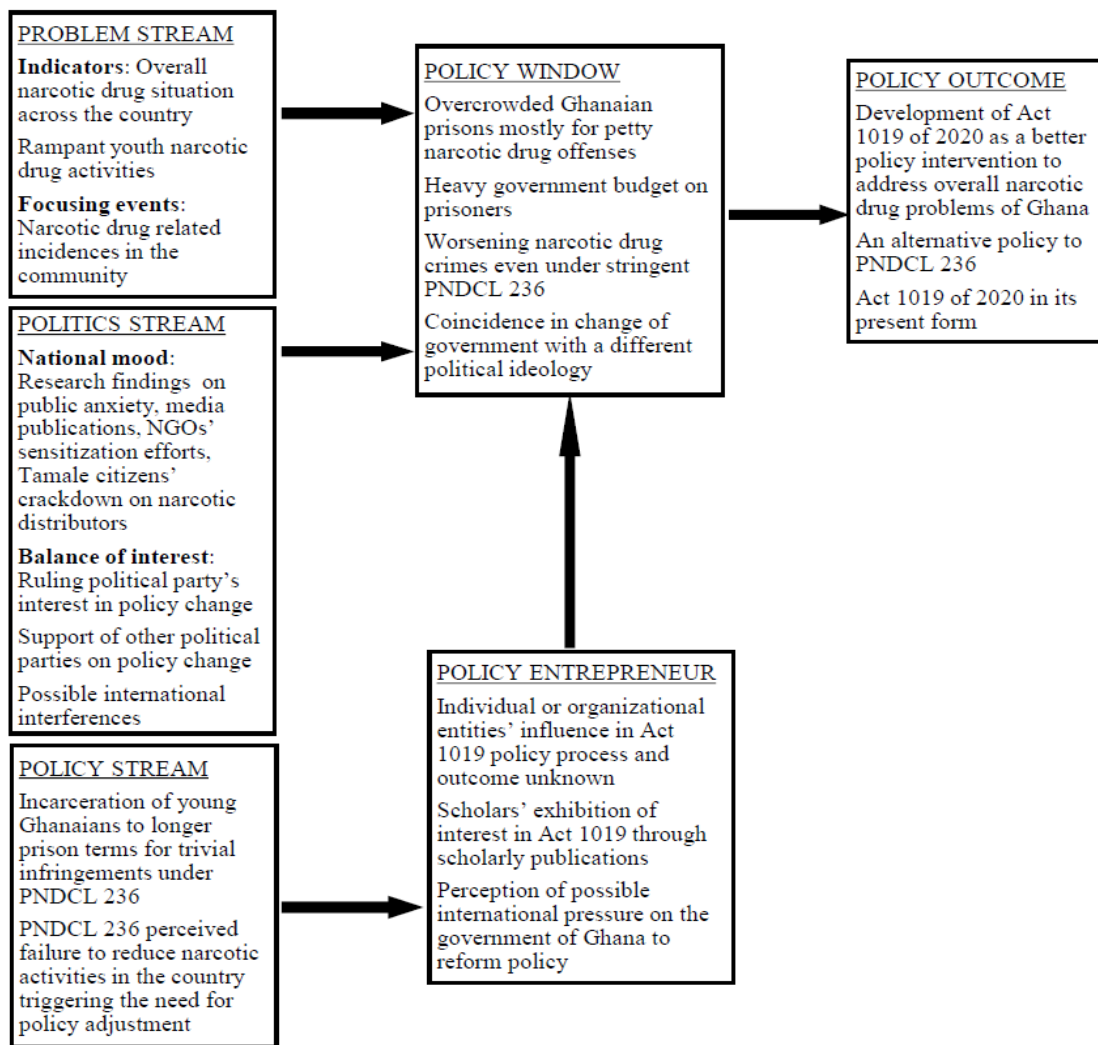
Contrary to PNDCL 236, Act 1019 placed emphasis on adopting interventions to help narcotic drug culprits overcome their related drug activities rather than correction through harsh and inhumane strategies. For example, the act considers narcotic activities as a public health problem that needs treatment and prevention interventions, even though detention is the ultimate punishment if the more compassionate punishments are not adhered to by offenders. This study's findings that this approach is ineffective in addressing the problem confirmed Tagziria and de Lugo's (2023) study conclusion on the

act. Tagziria and de Lugo (2023, p. 30) indicated the act's ambiguity and deviation from the best practice of achieving policy objectives because replacing prison terms with fines "places disproportionate harms on the most vulnerable, with fines incurred largely beyond the reach of many of the most marginalised people who use drugs."

Unquestionably, the act's approach to step away from the complete criminalization of narcotic drug activities in Ghana, "an approach widely recognised to perpetuate harm", rather "make no material impact on drug markets" and the general narcotic activities in the country (Tagziria et al., 2023, p. 22).

Multiple Streams Framework

This study was guided by John Kingdon's (1984) MSF. I examined interview responses in accordance with the theory's streams and its assumptions. Figure 4 depicts Zahariadis' (2007) concept of MSF and incorporates the emerged information of related streams from the interviews.

Figure 4*Act 1019 Policy Process per Kingdon's MSF**Elements of MSF*

Kingdon's MSF is characterized by five elements that interact to result in policy outcomes. These elements were considered during the data collection stage to ensure data reflection of theory; they include problems, politics, policies, policy entrepreneurs, and policy windows (Figures 1 and 4). As part of the mainstream narcotic problem of the

country, the problem of youth narcotic substance activities in Yendi was evident in the data, as depicted by the unanimous agreement of research participants. These respondents gave various accounts of incidences that occurred in Yendi; they wholistically attributed to the apparent influence of psychoactive substance consumption of the actors involved. For instance, Respondent QS's assertion that there were up to three narcotic-related gun murders, a series of reports on at-gunpoint robberies, and other public safety incidents all happening in the city did not only add knowledge to literature but also confirmed earlier findings in other parts of the country (e.g., Barnett et al., 2021; Bernstein, 1999; Mohammed et al., 2019; Parimah et al., 2021; Sulley & Quansah, 2021). Kingdon asserted that situations such as apparent evidence of youth narcotic substance engagements *indicate* the existence of a problem that requires policy enactment or review; incidences such as those Respondent QS recounted serve as focusing events to trigger policy discussions on the need for a review of PNDCL 236.

Coincidentally, these events (and other international narcotics trade that utilized the Ghana ports as transits for intercontinental drug trafficking [see Kumah-Abiwu, 2019]) were happening at the time the NPP government just took the administration of the country from the NDC government, a product of the PNDC régime that established PNDCL 236 (Ane, 2018; Ane-Loglo & Monareng, 2021). Factors including the *national mood* emanating from research findings on public anxiety and media publications (Adu-Mireku, 2003; Affinnih, 1999; Bosompra, 1987; Dennis-Antwi et al., 2003; Fuseini et al., 2019; Oppong Asante et al., 2014; Owusu & Dwomoh, 2012; Thompson & Ofori-Parku, 2021), NGOs' sensitization efforts (Ane, 2018; Bird, 2019; Quansah Amissah, 2022;

Quarshie & Alagidede, 2020), and citizens' crackdown on narcotic distributors in some parts of the country (study respondents, 2023), and *balance of interest* where the ruling political party had the interest in policy change with the support of other political parties and a possible international interference further stressed the need to consider a policy review.

At the same time, when those problems stemming from youth narcotic substance activities and other nationwide struggles against narcotics drew the national mood and the balance of interest from all the sections of the government of Ghana, other factors caused a policy window to open up, including the overcrowding of the Ghanaian prisons mostly for petty narcotic drug offenses, the substantial government expenditure on prisoners and prisons' administration, the worsening of narcotic drug crimes even under stringent PNDCL 236, and the coincidence in the takeover of the administration of the country by the NPP government with a different political ideology from the (P)NDC government. Even though there was no known literature in the scholarly milieu that established the involvement of individual or organizational entities to influence the policy process and outcome of Act 1019, entrepreneurship of the policy reflected in scholars' exhibition of interest in the act and its potential impact since its introduction to its adoption, and the perception of possible international pressure on the Government of Ghana to reform the country's narcotic policy. These factors eventually led to the readjustment of the Ghanaian national narcotic drug policy from PNDCL 236 to Act 1019 on May 11, 2020.

Policy Reflections on Theory Assumptions

This section focuses on the three fundamental assumptions of the MSF. The

section centers on the assumptions to offer additional insight into factors that led to the adoption of Act 1019 and to offer further understanding of how constituents of the act address youth narcotic activities. These assumptions include (a) ambiguity in problem definition, (b) time constraints, (c) and streams' independence (Zahariadis, 2014; Ochrana et al., 2022).

Ambiguity

Ambiguity in the problem definition denotes the difficulty inherent in identifying the root causes of a problem, thus making the selection of a coherent solution to address the problem challenging because multiple factors may be attributed as the causes; however, ambiguity in problem definition can result in futile policy outcomes. Three indicators, including policymakers' fluid participation in policy-making, problematic preferences, and unclear expertise on how best to deal with the problem, further exacerbate ambiguity, which may result in the adoption of less deliberated solution choices (Zahariadis, 2014; Zohlnhöfer & Rüb, 2016).

Two factors could cause fluid participation in the Ghanaian Parliament: (1) the assignment of additional ruling government ministerial roles to party parliamentarians and (2) the government's possible loss of parliamentary seats through by-elections. For example, Ghana witnessed three known parliamentary by-elections from 2017 to 2023: one in 2019 (Ijon, 2020), two in 2023 (Aikins, 2023), and a potential one in the wake of the death of the deputy finance minister in March 2024 who doubled as an MP (Nyabor, 2024). Also, the murder of Mfantseman's MP in 2020 when he was returning home from political rallies could have equally resulted in another by-election; however, because the

incident occurred within three months prior to the 2020 Ghana Presidential and Parliamentary elections, the country's constitution prohibits holding by-elections in such instances.

Nonetheless, these unexpected changes could have resulted in the ruling party's loss of legislative majority, affecting the government's new policy support. Also, because some of the legislators serve other government roles that require a considerable amount of their time, their participation in policy discussions is not always guaranteed. These factors could result in making problematic preferences in policy choices. Following this study's respondents' sharp analysis of both Act 1019 and PNDCL 236 and the legal ramifications of various narcotic substance infringements in both policy provisions, respondents indicated that preferences for solving the problem of narcotic activities could be challenging given that culprits' possible ability to settle infraction-associated financial penalties in the current policy could open the door for recidivism.

In the case of unclear expertise on how best to deal with the problem (Kingdon, 1984), this study found that there was not any scholarly engagement at any point of the policy process to incorporate practical approaches to problems despite scholars' interest in the act since its introduction in 2017. Both scholarly literature search and online general information quest on possible policy expert engagement during policy discussions returned null results. It was also apparent from the study respondents concerning the lack of policymakers' engagement with related policy implementation institutions to incorporate their expertise (on how to best handle narcotic problems) in the policy framework. According to Tagziria et al. (2023), the act contains shallow

definitions of concepts and vague descriptions of approaches identified to be adopted to reduce drug crimes. This vagueness in the description of concepts and approaches can lead to policy executing agencies' abuse of policy under the pretext of reforms. The lag in expertise engagement in the early stages of the policy discussion possibly led to Tagziria and colleagues' later discovery of policy flaws; the lag could also be due to the time constraints Zahariadis (2014) and Zohlnhöfer and Rüb (2016) indicated as one of the problem definition indicators.

Time Constraints

As indicated earlier in the preceding section, time constraints may affect policymakers in engaging meaningfully in policy discussions and that could lead to less deliberated-upon outcomes. It was obvious the discussion on the act (from its introduction as a bill in 2017 to its adoption as the country's mainstream narcotic drug policy in 2020) took a considerable timespan; however, that time could not have been exclusively dedicated to the bill (Tagziria et al., 2023). Factors such as parliamentarians who double as government ministers' commitment to other government responsibilities, their engagement in other policy debates in the Parliament, their responsibilities in carrying out constituency-level activities that require their engagement with the public at the grassroots level, and their likely unplanned relinquish of parliamentary office together exhibit the insufficiency of time for parliamentarians to drag long on a single issue. This lag implied that Ghanaian lawmakers needed to seize the opportunity of time to get policies enacted. Study respondents identified those factors, including the need for parliamentarians to engage in ongoing campaigns to maintain their political offices, as

possible reasons there was no adequate policy engagement with policy expertise during the Act 1019 policy course. Rather, by intuiting from the report on its website, the Ministry of Interior identified the importance of policy education and conducted a series of workshops for policy stakeholders after policy endorsement (see NACOC organizes training, April 26, 2022).

Herweg et al. (2022) indicated that the existence of different agencies and departments in the government portrays the idea of division of roles (labor), enabling the government to deal with many issues simultaneously. On the contrary, however, this study discovered that in the case of getting bills passed in the legislative council, the ruling party would rather have all MPs from the party take part in discussions to safeguard the interest of the government. MPs who double as government ministers need to make time to be present in the Parliament during such discussions. This situation further limits the time for policymakers and requires their swift actions in passing bills for presidential endorsements.

Streams Independence

Kingdon assumed that the problem, politics, and policy streams are independent of one another. This study's findings confirmed this assumption. Study respondents reiterated that politicians are busy running the affairs of the country and do not have the pleasure and time to incorporate problem investigations in their public service duties; private citizens and organizations usually bring those issues that need policy reforms to the attention of the politicians. Study participants also mentioned that it is through those engagements with politicians that the idea of policy strengths and weaknesses become

clear to politicians, and suggestions for better approaches to the problems emerge for the government's consideration. Oftentimes, such communications of policy performance rarely come up during those engagements when the policy is achieving its objectives. Rather, it is when the problem that the policy is intended to address continues to linger or worsen in society that the public and concerned organizations quickly bring up instances and proposals to inform politicians during such citizen engagements. Also, respondents indicated that the announcement to politicians about policy failures may not necessarily be through physical engagements with politicians. Respondents drew the case in June 2023 of Tamale citizens' crackdown on narcotic drug distributors as an example. Because the clampdown was so overwhelming to go unnoticed, it literally served as an obvious indicator of the political stream of the intensity of cases of narcotics and other strong prescription medications within active policy environments.

Limitations of the Study

In Chapter 1, I talked about the limitations I encountered in this study. Respondents' recruitment, their anonymity, and their insight into the study's significance were some of the concerns I had. For instance, because I had not resided actively and continuously in Yendi since 1997, getting to recruit respondents was challenging. I had to do a detailed self-introduction and actively speak the local language, Dagbanli, before I could gain the trust of respondents, even though actual interviews for data gathering were conducted in English. In some instances, I had to mention names of people and how I related with them or activities that I was actively engaged in before I could get respondents to feel comfortable enough to accept to take part in the study. I denounced

political affiliation and associating the research with a political motive, resulting in the non-existence of data outliers.

Also, my initial intention was to use purposive sampling exclusively to recruit respondents; however, due to the experience of getting them owing to the fact that most of them did not know who I was, I had to include a snowball sampling technique to get to the number of respondents I needed. It was less challenging and less demanding for those who had already accepted to be interviewed to get the rest of the recruits than for me to go through the same challenges for each of the potential respondents. However, I could not conduct all the interviews physically as I planned earlier. Rather, I conducted most of the interviews on the phone without any technical difficulties, which even turned out to be the most effective and convenient method for the respondents since they did not need to spend time commuting to interview meeting locations.

Respondents' anonymity was also a factor to consider. I followed Walden University's IRB requirements and directives closely to ensure that respondents' identities were concealed, as shown in Table 1. It was relieving for respondents to realize that their identities were shrouded completely. As well it was also a relief to them to see Walden University's requirements for student researchers and that they (the respondents) could contact the Institution to report any breach of confidentiality even after the publication of the study. Copies of the dissertation were promised to be made available to the community's two senior high school libraries, and softcopies were sent to them individually on WhatsApp so that they could confirm that the issue of their identities was not taken lightly. Also, respondents were made to understand that the study was for

information gathering and not to impact youth narcotic drug activities in Yendi in any way, even though future additions to the policy may be drawn from the study's recommendations. They also understood that their honest responses could be a game changer in narcotic activities not only in Yendi but also across the country through policy innovations.

Recommendations Further Research

Recommendations for further research were grounded in this study's findings, strengths and limitations, and literature review. From the literature, it was apparent that researchers developed a keen interest in Act 1019 since its introduction as a bill in 2017; however, this interest was not reflected in post-policy adoption literature. A search in the literature in March 2024 with delimiters and dates ranging from 2020 returned only eight articles on Google Scholar, implying more research was needed to establish the act's tendency to address the overall narcotic issues in Ghana and among the youth in particular.

Research is also needed on the formation of the act. Through the knowledge acquired on the policy from this study, the respondents questioned the policy process and how the government arrived at the policy's present form, given that local implementors knew little about it. This proclamation necessitates the employment of the Elite Theory to establish a detailed formation of Act 1019 on whether the policy serves the masses' expectation of the government's narcotic drug elimination approach.

Social Change Implications

This paper added knowledge to the literature by examining how the Ghanaian

narcotic drugs policy exclusively impacted youth narcotic substance activities. The paper also generated evidence on issues that hinder the achievement of narcotic policy objectives at the local community level. Making the policy effective requires a multidimensional approach. Community leaders may incorporate a collaborative strategy to help the policy succeed by working closely with Act 1019 policy administrators at the community level to develop local policy initiatives. Such initiative will help to ensure that when persons are arrested for narcotic drug infringements, local policy guidelines are adhered to so that no influential persons may use their power to get culprits out of detention without appropriate legal proceedings. This way, legal procedures would be adhered to before the release of culprits.

Evidence from this study exposed the lack of policy awareness among ordinary citizens. Even the scanty knowledge some respondents demonstrated on policy awareness was devoid of policy content familiarity; knowledge was characterized by mere mindfulness of consequences of some kind for drug crimes. Coincidentally, this paper served as a diverse learning source of Act 1019 for individuals I engaged in this research; it served as an initial learning point of the policy for some and an expanded and updated source for others. Findings will also inform policymakers of the need to engage the grassroots in policy education. Politicians may use this paper's findings and recommendations to establish strategies at the constituency levels that focus not only on Act 1019 policy education but also on other future policies that need the understanding and compliance of the grassroots for policy success (see Abdullahi & Othman, 2020).

The idea of the viability of such policy engagement interventions at the local level

was based on study respondents' additional information that politicians had various strategies they employed to reach even the remotest areas of their various constituencies to rally for political votes. Also, the discoveries of this study serve to tell policymakers that policies need to take a bottom-up orientation because the grassroots form the platform for the cultivation of some narcotics and breeding grounds of narcotic activities. By engaging local volunteer committees experienced in the terrain, there is a tendency to approach all forms of narcotic activities more effectively, as in the case of the approach the locals of the Northern Regional Capital, Tamale, adopted.

Conclusion

The Ghanaian government sought to address the prevalence of the overall narcotic drug situations effectively and meaningfully in the country by introducing a policy shift in 2017 from the prevailing PNDCL 236 of 1990 to the NACOC law Act 1019, which was adopted in 2020 and became the country's mainstream narcotic policy (Ane, 2018; Messersmith et al., 2021). One of the reasons that necessitated the new policy idea included the PNDCL 236's indiscriminate harsh penalties for all narcotic offenses. Narcotic drug offenses relating to the possession of small quantities for personal use could incur up to 5 years in prison for the offense; distributors could spend up to 10 years (Ane, 2018; Bird, 2019; Quansah Amissah, 2022; Quarshie & Alagidede, 2020). Some scholarly literature continually addressed incidences of youth narcotic drug activities around the time policy discussions were taking place; other literature followed soon after policy adoption (e.g., Danso & Anto, 2021; Fuseini et al., 2019; Peprah et al., 2020). However, none of them examined the likely impact of the policy on the problem since its

adoption. This situation prompted the question of public perception of the policy's influence on narcotic substance activities to draw a positive social change, particularly among the youth of the country.

This paper narrowed this gap by investigating the impact Act 1019 had on the situation of youth narcotic substance activities in Yendi. The effects of the policy were examined on the youth because of the convincing assertions the government gave to necessitate a narcotic drug policy change—that youths' high numbers of drug-related incarcerations were putting undue pressure on the country. Also, youth drug activities in Yendi were obvious despite the inexistence of scholarly literature to substantiate this fact. Personal experience and confirmation from inhabitants of Yendi (not involved in this study) of youths' open drug use in the community vexed my inquisitiveness to search the literature for any scholarly research that investigated the policy on youth drug habits; there was none. This factor prompted the purpose of the study by limiting the focus on the situation in Yendi.

The paper examined the Act 1019 policy process using Kingdon's (1984) MSF as a theoretical foundation. It focused on how concepts in the policy process and the contents of the final policy could help address youth narcotic problems specific to Yendi. Multiple assumptions were considered, given that the reasons the Government of Ghana presented to demonstrate the need for policy change revolved around the incapability of the existing law to meaningfully address all forms of narcotic substance activities in the country. PNDCL 236 not only failed in achieving policy objectives, but it also ended up imprisoning a considerable number of the country's active youth for years for

insubstantial narcotic misconduct.

These assumptions—including Act 1019’s competence to address youth narcotic substance activities as a subset of the overall narcotic substance situations in the country, the strengthening of policy enforcement agencies, and the engagement of policy stakeholders in the policy process—were both examined before and after data collection and analysis. Data confirmed some of the assumptions, such as the strengthening of policy enforcement agencies by establishing NACOC as a sovereign agency and policy stakeholder engagement. However, reports indicated that the engagement of the responsible government ministry with stakeholders was meant solely to give policy education to the latter after Act 1019 was enacted and adopted. The engagement was not meant to take policy inputs. Data from interviews rather gave a converse picture of policy effectiveness relative to its predecessor. Respondents indicated that the current policy narrative would rather create a conducive environment for drug activities to flourish.

Multiple suggestions evolved from the findings. Further research was recommended to examine a possible connection between policy mildness and other social vices that narcotic drug activities could induce. Social interventions were also encouraged because such interventions were spelled out in the Act 1019 policy document as part of policy implementation but were yet to be witnessed in the community.

In all, respondents indicated their concerns about Act 1019’s effective applicability to the general national narcotic situations. They wondered if there would be a dent in the situations of youth substance activities to draw a positive social change or bring about youth development. Clearly, the features of policy execution guidelines

impacted combating youth drug activities, making the policy a less effective approach to addressing youth narcotic activities. This assertion is supported by reports emerging in late 2023. By the time of their report in August 2023, Konadu-Boakye and Mensah (2023) indicated that the youth constituted about 85% of the Ghanaian prison inmates, which undoubtedly included narcotic cases as well. One answer was made clear from this research to answer the question: Act 1019 makes sense and sounds perfect on paper to address the local problem of narcotics in the country, but the apparent indifference the Ghanaian government exhibited in the non-establishment of effective policy implementation infrastructure at the local level begs the question of the government's alleged commitment to fighting the problem to attract a positive social change.

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Appendix A: Invitation Template for Email, Social Media, and Flyers

There is a new study about how the Ghana narcotic drugs policy addresses youth drug abuse and distribution that could help policymakers better understand the policy's influence in combating the problem to attract a positive social change. For this study, you are invited to relate your perception of the policy's ability to address the problem based on your work-related experience with narcotic activities.

About the study:

One 45–90-minute one-on-one interview that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)

You would receive a \$10 worth of mobile phone call credit as a thank you.

In order to protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

Reside in Yendi, Ghana

Work in the local government, the courts, the police service, senior high and junior high school teachers, and health services.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Imran Gomdah, a doctoral student at Walden University. Interviews will take place between October 4, 2023, and October 20, 2023.

Please reach out to Imran Gomdah at his Walden University official email address at

████████████████████ and his private phone number at ████████████████████ to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Main research question: Given the incidence of drug abuse among the youth, what is public opinion regarding Ghana's national narcotics policy's influence in combating the problem to cause a positive social change?

1. Demographics

Despite the importance of institutional ethical consideration by asking generic gender questions, in some settings such as Yendi, sex identification outside the naturally assigned ones is frowned upon and considered unethical. Demographical questions will be asked to guarantee that youth are not accidentally included in the respondents.

- a. How old are you?*
- b. What is your gender?*
- c. What is your institutional affiliation?*

The Problem Stream

2. In your perception, what are narcotic drugs? Give examples.
3. What do you say about the situation of youth narcotic drug activities in Yendi?
4. What factors drive the youth into narcotic drug activities?
5. How does society and the environment contribute to the problem?

The Policy Stream

6. Tell me about the narcotic policy of Ghana.
7. In 2020, the government replaced the PNDC drug law 236 with the Narcotic Control Commission Act 2020. What factors necessitated this change?
8. How does the policy play into the situation of youth narcotic substance activities?

9. What other government activities (other policies) contributed to the 2020 narcotic drug policy idea?
10. Reflecting on your institution's role in dealing with narcotic substance activities, what possible shape should the policy have taken to effectively address the issue of youth narcotic substance activities?

The Politics Stream

11. What strategies did the government adopt to sensitize the general public about the policy process (from bill introduction to policy adoption)?
12. Tell me about entities/organizations and individuals you know that had an interest in the policy relative to youth substance use (policy entrepreneurs).
 - a. How do these entities or individuals contribute to the current status of the policy?
13. How were you or your institution involved (directly or indirectly) in the design of the current policy?
14. Based on current trends of the problem in Yendi and how the policy is formulated, what is your perception of the policy's tendency to solve the problem of youth substance use?
15. Thank you very much, but before we conclude, what other topic-related information would you like to share with me that was not covered in the interview?