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UNDERGRADUATES PERCEPTION OF APPROPRIATE STAKEHOLDER FOR ADVOCACY AGAINST SUBSTANCE ABUSE

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ABSTRACT

Substance abuse is on the increase among youths in Nigeria presently. The reason for substance abuse might not be unrelated to addiction and the need for a laxative for dispersing complex pressures youths might be exposed to. The present study intends to decipher the perspectives of undergraduates regarding individuals at risk of substance abuse and stakeholders most competent for advocacy. One hundred and ten undergraduates participated in this study by completing an online questionnaire. The online questionnaire was posted to the social media handles of the undergraduates. The responses to the questions were collated and their frequencies expressed in percentages while chi-square and likelihood ratio was used to determine associations between data. The significant level was placed at P<0.05. The findings showed that Students (50.9%) and Musicians (33.3%) are the most predominant segment of the society at risk of substance abuse (x^2 =189.731; P<0.05). Amongst the stakeholders the NDLEA (39.8%), Health professionals (29.6%) and Parents (16.7%) were considered the most appropriate stakeholders that should embark on advocacy against substance abuse (X^2 =111.200; P<005). The age group most susceptible for substance abuse was 21-30years. The age range most susceptible to substance abuse are those expected within the Tertiary Educational system and performance industries. The NDLEA, Health professionals and Parents should gear up as the most appropriate stakeholders for advocacy if the menace of substance abuse is to be curtailed.

Keywords: Advocacy, Substance Abuse, Undergraduates

Introduction

Substance use and abuse has been labelled a global epidemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) with far reaching adverse effects not only on the individual but also on society (Oshodi et al., 2010; Duru et al., 2017). Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances which when ingested, affect mental functions. Such substances may include alcohol, tobacco, hallucinogens and illicit drugs (heroin, cocaine, marijuana, rohypnol) (WHO, 2014; Duru et al., 2017; Idowu et al., 2018)

In Nigeria, studies have shown that a lot of youths depend on one form of substance or the other for various daily activities. These activities include social, educational, political, economic and moral (Majeed et al., 2018; Nwaka, 2018; Nyameh et al., 2013) Substance abuse is presently on the increase in Nigeria especially among youths. The reason for this increase may not be unconnected with several complex pressures youths are exposed to and possible peer pressure. Earlier we had reported that the most commonly abused substance among Nigerian youths were Indian hemp (29.6%), Methamphetamine (25.9%), Cocaine (15.7%) and Marijuana (11.1%) (Onyenekwe & Onyenekwe, 2024).

Nigerian youths consist students, musicians, nollywood actors, social media influencers, healthcare professionals, skilled and unskilled artisans. The pressures that youths that are students face, are different from the pressures that youths that have graduated from school face. Earlier we had reported that there is need to develop a curriculum to curb the menace of substance abuse (Onyenekwe & Onyenekwe, 2024). However, developing a curriculum is a micro aspect of the challenge while the responsibility of disseminating the information is another micro aspect. Substance abuse advocacy should be the job of every responsible citizen of the nation. Players in the field of advocacy may include: Non-Governmental Organizations, Law Enforcement Agencies, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Teachers, Parents, Media and Health Professionals. These players are considered stakeholders.

At its simplest, advocacy may be defined in terms of the activities it encompasses. This would include the representation of under-privileged groups, such as those who are disadvantaged or sick, with the aim of promoting their rights and/or redressing imbalances in power. This has been characterized as 'case' advocacy (Rees, 1991). Advocacy is also seen as a lobbying activity within public health and as such has a long history. In recent years this usage has become increasingly common within health promotion literature. This approach acknowledges that barriers to health can lie beyond the control of individuals, and that structural factors need to be addressed if health inequalities are to be reduced. This has been characterized as 'cause' advocacy (Rees, 1991). Both types can be categorized as representational advocacy.

Without outlined coordination of the stakeholder's participation in substance abuse advocacy, the efforts exerted may not yield the expected outcome. Therefore, the present study is designed to highlight the individuals at risk of substance abuse exposure and the most appropriate stakeholder to lead in the advocacy from the perspective of undergraduates in a University setting.

Theoretical Framework

This study has been anchored on the social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura. Albert Bandura (1901–1994) was a psychologist who developed social learning theory. He studied children in order to understand how children learn from peers. His studies showed that children imitate each other because they observe the actions of others and copy them. This process is called observational learning. His most famous work is Social Learning Theory published in 1977.

Social learning theory explains human behaviour through observation and imitation. The theory states that humans learn not just intellectually but socially too. This means we learn from our peers, parents, teachers, coaches, etc., rather than solely from books. Bandura's theory is widely used in educational settings like classrooms, colleges, universities, and businesses. It has also been applied to parenting, sports, politics, religion, and many other areas of human endeavour Observational learning is a method of social cognition learning that includes knowledge acquisition through observing and modeling others' emotional expressions, attitudes or behaviour in human society. It is largely believed that the observer will copy the model. However, Bandura emphasized that rather than

imitating, people may explicitly learn from the reinforcement behaviours of others.

Observational learning which is a key concept in behavioral theories focuses on how people learn through their interactions with the environment. According to these theories, behavior is shaped by the consequences that follow it. If a behavior is reinforced, it is more likely to be repeated in the future. Bandura's emphasis on the role of reinforcement in observational learning highlights the importance of positive feedback in shaping behaviour.

By paying attention to the models around us and reproducing their behaviour, we can learn new skills and adopt new attitudes and beliefs. This stance was mirrored by the undergraduates who are the study subjects. Their perception being that advocacy should not be the sole preserve of the NDLEA or health professionals but parents by virtue of the intimate space they occupy in their children's lives should be important players in advocacy. Could it be they are expressing the belief that they model what their parents do, not necessarily what they say should be done?

Another pertinent theory to this study is the family theory. Murray Bowen (1913–1990) was an American psychiatrist who conceived the family systems theory which he developed throughout his many years of professional practice with families (Thompson et al., 2019). According to Swartbooi (2013), Bowen's family theory proposes that one cannot be fully understood in isolation from one's surroundings. This means that a family forms a system which consists of independent individuals who can only be understood in relation to their broader system. Adelson (2010) asserts that Bowen's family theory relates to the adjustments and accommodations, which families put in place in order to keep a sense of normality in the face of substance abuse. Furthermore, this theory also highlights the importance of functional roles and emotional relationships between families. According to Swartbooi (2013), 'each family member fulfils a specific role such as "father or brother". In addition to the mentioned roles, each member within this system also takes on additional roles as a peacekeeper or the emotional one'. Bowen's theory has been useful in this study, as it assisted in understanding the family as an emotional unit. The theory has demonstrated how families have a profound effect on their family member's thoughts, feelings, understanding and the perception of issues.

Research Method

An online questionnaire was designed and sent to various platforms of university students in various faculties to facilitate participation in the advocacy against the menace of substance abuse in the society. The purpose of the advocacy survey instrument was explained to each of the students' platforms. The social media platforms which the students use for communication were used to invite the students to participate in the advocacy. A total of 108 university students participated in the study for advocacy against substance abuse. The participants who gave informed consent were the ones that responded to the online questionnaire.

The sections of the questionnaire include responses to questions such as; how often do you hear about advocacy against illegal substance abuse in the media? Which of these media is the one that mostly promotes awareness of substance abuse? In your thinking, amongst the following, who is the most important person to advocate against

illegal substance abuse? These questions were used to assess and document their perception of the most appropriate authority to advocate against substance abuse among the youth in Nigeria. The University Students were used for the study not only because of the proximity of space they share on campus with individuals under the influence of substance abuse but also because some attend lectures from their family houses at home. It is therefore certain that both categories of students have knowledgeable exposure to respond to the questionnaire.

Findings

According to the perspectives of the undergraduate students, the segment of the Nigerian Society at most risk of substance abuse in decreasing preponderance are: Students (50.9%), Musicians (33.3%), Nollywood Actors(3.7%), Unskilled Artisans (3.7%), Skilled Artisans (2.8%), Influencers and Health Professionals (0.9% each), (Chi-square = 189.731; P<0.05). Table 1. The undergraduates predominantly responded that the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (39.8%), Health Professionals (29.6%) and Parents (16.7%) are the most critical stakeholders to lead in substance abuse advocacy. Others presumed to likely play a role in advocacy were Media (4.6%), Teachers (3.7%), Law Enforcement 2(1.9%) and Non-Governmental Organisations (0.9%). (Chi-square = 111.200; P<0.05).

Table 2. The predominant age group exposed to substance abuse according to the perspectives of the undergraduates are 21 to 30years (59.6%), 13 to 20 years (36.5%) and >30years (3.8%). (X^2 = 5.952; P<0.05). Table 3.

Table 1. Segments of the society at risk of exposure to substance abuse

Segment of Society	Frequency	Percentage	Test Statistic
Students	55	50.9(%)	
Musicians	36	33.3(%)	
Nollywood (Actors)	4	3.7(%)	X^2 =189.731
Influencers	1	0.9(%)	P<0.05
Health Professionals	1	0.9(%)	
Skilled Artisans	3	2.8(%)	
Unskilled artisans	4	3.7(%)	
Total	104	100(%)	

Table 2: Responses regarding the most critical stakeholders to lead in substance abuse advocacy

Stakeholders	Frequency	Percentage	Test Statistic
Health Professionals	32	29.6%	
Law Enforcement	2	1.9%	
NDLEA	43	39.8%	X^2 = 111.200
Teachers	4	3.7%	P<0.05
Parents	18	16.7%	
Media	5	4.6%	
NGO	1	0.9%	

Table 3: Age group of youths most susceptible to substance abuse

Age group	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Test Statistic**
13-20 years	38	36.5%	X^2 = 5.952
21-30 years	65	59.6%	P<0.05
>30years	4	3.8%	

Discussion

There is a surge in exposure to substance abuse among Nigerian youths. Some of the identified substances abused among the youths are Indian hemp (29.6%), Methamphetamine (25.9%), Cocaine (15.7%) and Marijuana (11.1%) (Onyenekwe & Onyenekwe, 2024). The reason for the surge in substance dependency may not be unconnected with peer pressure among the youths and complex pressures regarding finances and emotional imbalance. Apart from peer pressure, other contributory factors would include curiosity and a desire to find out the effectiveness of a drug, environment, promotion of the substance and its availability, lack of parental supervision, socio-economic status of the parents, pathological family background (Nwaka, 2018). It is reckoned that under the influence of the substance, the youth might be propelled to do what normally s/he may be shy to do, particularly in pursuit of financial prowess going by current economic realities in the country.

In a bid to curtail the menace and spread of substance abuse among youths, advocacy seems to be one of the key assets. However, who fits better into this advocacy? The Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria established the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency to combat the trafficking of recreational drugs. Secondly the Nigeria Police as the Law Enforcement Agency of the government is also saddled with maintenance of law and order. However, apprehending those dealing on sales of recreational drugs will not be curtailed effectively as far as there is demand for it (Nwaka, 2018).

Most of the individuals that make demand on recreational drugs do that for temporary relief not minding the biochemical addictions associated with it and long term effects of such recreational drugs on the quality of health of the individuals exposed to it. It is expected that the stakeholders should not only be the NDLEA and Police but every segment of the society. In this study, considering the perspective of the undergraduates, they felt that the NDLEA should also be saddled with the responsibility of substance abuse advocacy not only just arresting offenders.

The undergraduates also reasoned that Health Professionals should also be a critical stakeholder in substance abuse advocacy. This might probably and understandably be because they think that Health Professionals are knowledgeable about the consequences of substance abuse. However, the fact still remains that knowledge may not be a strong stand alone tool for advocacy against substance abuse among the youths. Even the Health Professionals are not spared from substance abuse (Butler Centre for Research, 2015; Shadakshari et al., 2022; Arble et al., 2023).

Other stakeholders considered to likely play a role in substance abuse advocacy are the parents. The parents are believed to share intimate space and relationship with their children or wards. It is believed that the intimacy that exists may be used for persuasive advocacy. This might be the reasoning of the undergraduates in this study validated by the social learning theory and family theory. Because intimate space is shared between the parents and their children, if the advantage is taken, it may be an effective advocacy tool because of the perceived level of confidence, trust and respect expected in such close relationships. Carlisle suggests that advocacy has the capacity to bridge different political–philosophical positions as well as the gap between the world of

policy makers and the lives and experiences of health promotion's 'clients' (Carlisle, 1998).

Norm education is creating the perception that drugs are not used by most adolescents. It has been found to be effective in containing drug use among middle school students (Botvin, 1995a). Parents can use this in allaying the fears of teenagers and other category of youths who are pressured to think they are abnormal if they are not 'doing drugs'. This is especially when they are given the impression that every other person is doing it.

Why did the undergraduates not consider Teachers as critical stakeholders for substance abuse advocacy? This might not be unconnected with the type of space that teachers share with the students. Teachers share the personal space individually with their students and the social space with them in classrooms. They rarely share intimate space with them except for those that are spouses, intended to marry or given in marriage or in same parent-child/children relationship. It is only teachers who share this intimate space bubble of the undergraduates in any of the above stated relationships or in a supervisor/supervisee relationship which mirrors the mentor/mentee scenario that qualifies teachers sliding into that space. However factors that inhibit such a relationship with teachers are myriad and might be the focus of other research papers.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that advocacy against substance abuse should be more pre-emptive by involving other stakeholders like parents. It should not only be reactive by drug agencies or law enforcement agencies getting even with offenders. Parents can catch the children young by mirroring the type of lifestyle they expect the youngsters to grow up and exhibit. The importance of norm education for children that are grown teenagers is very important.

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