AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE OF UNDERGRADUATES TO DRUG ABUSE AND ADDICTION IN ANAMBRA STATE

EZEAKA, NONYE BENEDETH PhD♦; NWODU, EBERECHUKWU GLORIA PhD♥ & AGBANU, VENATUS NOSIKE PhD♠

Abstract

The study examined the awareness and attitude of undergraduates to drug abuse and addiction in Anambra State. The rationale behind the study was to ascertain the awareness level of undergraduates to drug abuse and addiction; their perception and factors that are responsible for drug abuse and addiction. It is premised against the background that youths are the most vulnerable to drug abuse and addiction. Anchored on Social Cognitive theory, the study was delimited to undergraduates of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Igbariam campus and adopted a survey research method with questionnaire as instrument for data collection. It also used Krejcie and Morgan formular table to determine the sample size of 375 from the population of 15, 664 undergraduates from the study area. Findings show that the respondents awareness level of drug misuse and addiction is high; had mostly negative attitudes to the issue, while factors like early exposure to drugs, peer pressure and absence of parental guidance contributed to drug abuse and addiction. Thus, the researchers concluded that drug abuse and addiction have diverse and devastating effects in the society and there is an urgent need to involve all the stakeholders in combatting drug misuse and addiction. To address the situation, the study recommends further campaign against drug misuse and addiction by all stakeholders.

Keywords: *Awareness, Attitude, Drug abuse and addiction, Undergraduates*

Introduction

Drug abuse is a prevailing global public health concern which has been identified to have diverse and devastating effects in the society. It commands a compelling and thriving threat to national security with critical implications for public protection, health and economic establishment. Apart from reports of frightful health conditions of drug abusers, specialists have also secured a locus connecting the dangers and rising occurrence of vicious misdemeanors. United Nations

♦ Department of Mass Communication Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

♥ Department of Mass Communication Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

♠ Department of Mass Communication Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) says 14.3 million Nigerians between the ages of 15 and 64 years are drug users.

Drug abuse can be referred to as the excessive use of drugs or taking drugs without doctor's prescription while drug addiction exposes drug abuser to habitual use of drugs notwithstanding the trauma they bring about. Drugs can be seen as any substance that influences the system or functioning of a living organism. Many youths are languishing in jails across the globe especially in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, India, Pakistan, Malta, and Spain for ingesting packaged heroin or cocaine and other illicit drugs. There are cases of mental illness as a result of increased obsession on hard drugs and the drug addicts becoming useless as they habitually end up as social wrecks or hardened criminals. The main illicit drugs are the opiates (mostly heroin), cocaine, cannabis, and ATS (Amphetamines-Type Stimulants) such as amphetamines, methamphetamine and ecstasy. Nwannennaya (2017) writes that, the major misused and locally peddled illegal narcotics in Nigeria and even West Africa is cannabis, in its vegetative form since it is fully economical and readily obtainable since it is planted and bred locally.

Okon (2013) states that drug market commands the powerful appeal for young ones whose hope of successful life have been cut short by political greed and ineffectual government policies. The UN projects that about 200 million persons (4.8% of the world's inhabitants aged 15-64) use illicit drugs yearly with 25 million being categorized as problem users (0.6%). Recently, trending videos of different towns in Anambra State showing young men and women mercilessly beaten for dealing on drugs went viral. Kazeem (2019) explains that the maximum degrees of drug misuse are listed among people aged 25-39 years, with cannabis being the most used.

In line with the measures put in place to check drug misuse and dependency, the Nigerian government has established some anti-drug abuse agencies like the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC). These agencies, coupled with the help of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), have embarked on various campaigns to minimize the rate of use of illicit drugs in Nigeria. The National Drug Laws Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) took the campaigns on drug abuse and drug trafficking to tertiary institutions to ensure the youths know the dangers inherent in drug trafficking. The aim of the campaign is to minimize the abuse of drugs among youths by raising awareness of the dangers associated with drug abuse and addiction.

Nigerian government has engaged many legal, economic and social approaches towards eradication of drug abuse, addiction and trafficking. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) was established by Decree

Number 48 of January 1990. The Agency is charged with the duties of eliminating the growing, processing, manufacturing, selling, exporting and peddling of abused substances with the presence of NDLEA offices across the thirty-six states of the nation and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. The agency has the mandate to prescribe long jail terms for drug barons, drug abusers and traffickers depending on the gravity of the offence. Costello, & Rama (2017) reports that a 2011 study by the National Center on addiction and substance abuse at Columbia University showed that teens who use social media were more likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana than teens who do not use social media. Okon (2013) posits that drug business holds the strongest appeal for the youths whose expectations of making it in life have been truncated by political greed and failed government policies.

It is against the aforementioned circumstances that the study sought to investigate the awareness and attitude of undergraduates to drug misuse and addiction in Anambra State.

The Nigerian media reports are awash with cases of drug misuse and addiction exploits of its citizens within the country. The rising wave of drug abuse and addiction has serious implications for national development and negative influence to the image of the country. The Nigeria's survival and growth can be negatively affected by factors among which is an escalating and uncontrolled crime due to drug misuse and addiction. The alarming rate at which young people are being arrested, prosecuted, jailed and executed for drug related offences has become worrisome. Crosier and Marsch (2016) indicate that drug use has turn to a crucial issue at different levels: personal, national and indeed global levels and lack of investigation has delayed advancement in trying to address this public health concern.

There are worries about the degree of consumption of hard drugs by young men and women in recent times. Many youths are mentally retarded as a result of drug abuse and addiction while there are many whose organs are damaged due to prolonged drug use. Damilola (2022) noted the rising rate of drug abuse among youths to peer pressure.

In the light of the worsening situation, the study seeks to examine the awareness and attitude of undergraduates to drug abuse and addiction in the study area. To the researchers, this is a major gap in knowledge that calls for empirical examination. This in essence is the major problem this study is set to investigate.

The main purpose of the study is to assess the awareness and attitude of undergraduates to drug abuse and addiction in Anambra State. However, the specific objectives are to:

1. Ascertain the level of awareness of respondents to drug abuse in the study area;

2. Examine the respondents' perception of drug addiction; and
3. Assess the factors that are responsible for drug abuse.

This study is anchored on the Social Cognitive theory. The theory started initially as the Social Learning Theory in the 1960s by Albert Bandura but was later developed into the Social Cognitive Theory in 1986. The theory offers an explanation of the relationship that exists among concepts. The theory believes that behaviour is learned by observation, identification and imitation. The theory asserts that environment, people and behaviour are factors that are constantly influencing one another. This theory is in line with attitude which could be as a result of observation of certain anomalies from the society as it relates to drug abuse and addiction in the society. The relevance of the theory to the study aptly applies to societal influence to drug abuse, with a flexible and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment and behaviour.

The study was delimited to the awareness and attitude of undergraduates to drug abuse and addiction in Anambra State. The study specifically studied the undergraduates of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam campus.

Drug Abuse and Addiction among youths in the society

Nwafor, Ezema and Igwebuike (2021) explain that drugs are expected to be taken as a curative measure or diagnosing any type of illness or disease in the hospitals, clinics, medical laboratories and pharmacy shops, but in the contrary, many young people use them as stimulants. There are both short and long terms side effects of drug abuse and addiction. Nwosu (2008) writes that intensive, well-organised and implemented advocacy campaigns are needed for the expected results to be achieved.

The behaviour induced by drug misuse and addiction are the causes of suicide and depression among youngsters across the world. To abuse substance means to use harmful or hazardous psycho-active substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs (Fareo, 2012).

Many youths use drugs to help them forget about their problems, relax and sometimes to deal with depression and anxiety. People who use drugs may like the feelings of excitement, confidence and connection despite the risks associated with drug abuse. Studies from Winpenny, Marteau & Nolte (2013); Seaman and Ikegwuonu (2010) observed that substance abuse commonly arises from ignorance. Some of them lack adequate information and communication with which to live a healthy lifestyle. Ezeaka and Nwodu (2022) noted that communication pervades virtually all aspects of human interactions and no doubt central to the process of change that brings development. Many young Nigerians

have also use prescriptive drugs such as tramadol and codeine for nonmedical purposes (Dumbili, 2020). Drug abuse and addiction can be harmful, and chronic use of substances may result to serious and irreversible damage to one's health.

Consumption of hard drugs like crystal meth or methamphetamine can be addictive leading to abuse especially among young people who find them enjoyable (Nwammuo, Ezeaka, Anunobi, Ozumba & Aghaebe 2023).

Casa (2019) listed some health issues that can be caused by drug use to include:

- High heart rate and high blood pressure
- Loss of appetite
- Disrupted sleep patterns
- Increased risk of heart attack or stroke
- Organ damage
- Lung or heart diseases

Similarly Casa (2019) also outlined some emotional and mental costs that can result from drug addiction to include:

- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Anger
- Delusions or hallucinations
- The inability to focus or make addiction
- Paranoia
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Violent tendencies depending on the substance being abused.

Studies have shown that there exists a relationship between drug abuse and young people in the society. The use of hard drugs is on the increase among youths. Chronic drug use can result to cognitive disabilities as well as obstacles in attention, recollection and problem solving skills.

Method of study

The survey research method was utilized for this study with the use of questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The population of study comprises of undergraduates of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam campus with the population of 15,664 according to Students Affairs Unit. The study employed Krejcie and Morgan formular table to select a sample size of 375 respondents. Simple random sampling technique was adopted to select

three faculties from Igbariam Campus of the University namely: Social Sciences, Arts and Management Sciences, while Purposive Sampling technique was used to select final year students from three selected departments namely: Mass Communication; Business Administration and English Department.

The study made use of Proportionate Allocation to distribute copies of the questionnaire according to the population strength of each department. The details include:

Mass Communication $\frac{287}{517} \times \frac{375}{1} = 208$

Business Administration $\frac{163}{517} \times \frac{375}{1} = 118$

English $\frac{67}{517} \times \frac{375}{1} = 49$

An eight (8) item questionnaire was drawn and administered to 375 respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part one dealt with the demographic characteristics of the respondents while part two dealt with information sought to answer the research questions of the study. The questionnaire was administered on a face to-face basis with research assistants.
Simple percentages were employed to determine the frequency of occurrence of responses in line with the research study.

Results and Discussion

Out of the 375 copies of the questionnaire administered, only 364 copies were returned and found useable. This represented 96 % return rate which was higher than the 14 copies (3.7%) not returned. Details of the data obtained from the survey are presented below:

Table 1: Respondents level of awareness of drug abuse

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high	250	67
High	102	28
Undecided	08	02
Low	04	01
Very low	00	00
Total	364	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the table two above, shows that 67% of the respondents attested to have a very high awareness of drug abuse. This shows that majority of the respondents have a good knowledge of the meaning of drug abuse in the society while 01 % of the respondents are ignorant of the meaning of drug abuse in the society. The table shows that awareness level of the respondents to drug abuse is on the very high side.

Table 2: Respondents Perception of drug addiction

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Drug addiction can cause mental illness to the users	123	34
Drug addiction has contributed to crime rates in the society	109	30
Drug addiction has resulted to many deaths in the society	132	36
Total	364	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

As shown from the result presented in table 2 above, of the 364 respondents, 123 of them representing 34% believed that drug abuse and addiction can cause mental illness to the users; 109 respondents representing 30% admitted that drug addiction has contributed to crime rates in the society while 132 respondents representing 36% agreed that drug addiction has resulted to many deaths in the society. From the foregoing, it is very clear from the table above that drug addiction has negative impact in the society.

Table 3: Respondents response to factors responsible for drug abuse

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Early exposure to drugs	114	31
Peer group pressure	159	44
Absence of parental guidance	91	25
None of the above	00	00
Total	364	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 3 indicates that 114 respondents representing 31% agreed that early exposure to drugs is one of the factors leading to drug abuse and addiction; 159 respondents (44%) attributed drug abuse to peer group pressure while 91 respondents (25%) believed absence of parental guidance as one of the contributing factors to drug abuse. From the table above, it is obvious that these factors have contributed heavily to drug abuse in the society.

Discussion of Findings

The aim of this research was to examine the awareness and attitude of undergraduates to drug abuse and addiction in Anambra State. Consequent upon this. The first research question examined the respondents level of awareness of drug abuse in the study area. Based on the findings, it was found that respondents have a very high level of awareness of drug abuse. This finding is in line with Fareo (2012) that substance abuse has gradually become a major public health concern of which all hands must be on deck towards nipping on the bud.

Another aim of this study was the perception of the respondents to drug addiction in the study area. As discovered from the findings of this study, of the 364 respondents, 123 of them representing 34% believed that drug addiction can cause mental illness to the users; 109 respondents representing 30% admitted that drug addiction has contributed to crime rates in the society while 132 respondents representing 36% agreed that drug addiction has resulted to many deaths in the society. From the foregoing, it is very clear from the table above that drug addiction has negative impact in the society.

The research interest in understanding the factors that contribute to drug abuse indicated that peer group pressure, early exposure to drugs and lack of parental guidance are factors promoting drug abuse in the society. This finding is in line with the Social Cognitive theory which indicates that behaviour is learned by observation, identification and imitation by albert Bandura in 1986. This is to say that other intervening variables in addiction to observation and imitation from peer groups can contribute in influencing drug abuse and addiction among young people. This also is in agreement with Damilola (2022) that peer group pressure has negative impact to drug abuse and addiction.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that drug abuse and addiction have diverse and devastating effects in the society. Also, the respondents are knowledgeable about drug abuse and addiction and factors such as early exposure to drugs, peer group pressure and absence of parental guidance are contributing to the abuse of drugs and addiction

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

1. Advocacy campaigns should be sustained to achieve the desired objectives and to further increase the awareness of the negative effects of drug abuse and addiction since majority of the respondents have knowledge of drug abuse and addiction. Advocacy campaigns normally use multi-media and varied communication, persuasion and strategies to achieve desired objectives. The advocacy should endeavour to win the sympathy of influential individuals like the religious, traditional and political leaders who can help and convince others to adopt the behavioural change message.
2. There is also an urgent need to involve all the stakeholders in the fight against drug abuse and addiction to further explain the negative effects of drug abuse and addiction. This is in line with the findings of research question two that drug abuse and addiction have negative effects among the users.
3. It is also recommended that parents and caregivers should put proper machinery in place to checkmate early exposure to drugs and addiction as well as peer group pressure among young people.

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