

## PUBLIC AWARENESS OF NDLEA MEDIA MESSAGES AGAINST ILLICIT DRUG USE: A CASE FOR ROBUST MEDIA CAMPAIGN



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### **Abstract**

*The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) was established in 1989 with a mandate to curtail the menace of illicit drug activities. One of the strategies used by the Agency in realizing its mandate is the dissemination of media messages in the form of press conferences, press releases, opinion editorials, radio talk shows, TV talk shows, media roundtable, social media campaigns, media events, SMS campaigns, and paid advertisements. Despite the dissemination of these media messages, illicit drug use is on the increase. This gives rise to the question: Are the public actually aware of NDLEA media messages against illicit drug use? The present research sought answers to this question. Thus, the objectives of the study centred on ascertaining public awareness of NDLEA media messages on warnings, empowerment and support against illicit drug use. It adopted survey method with a sample of 385 subjects drawn from a population of 463,000 residents of Minna town. The sample was drawn through disproportionate sampling technique. A 17-item questionnaire, which successfully passed validity and reliability tests, was used to obtain data for the study. Findings revealed low awareness of NDLEA media messages against illicit drug use. To increase awareness levels of its media messages against illicit drug use, it was recommended that NDLEA should adopt a more robust media campaign which emphasizes intentional message design on illicit drug use, use effective/correct platforms, adopt calculated timing in message delivery, ensure effective audience selection and analysis and measure desired impact.*

**Keywords:** *Illicit Drug Use, Media Campaign, Media-disseminated Messages, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Public Awareness.*

### **Introduction**

Evidence of drug abuse was first noticed in Nigeria about the 1940s and drugs abused around this period included amphetamine, phenobarbitone, pethidine,

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Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD) and Cannabis (Adamson, Ogunlesi, Morakinyo, Akinhanmi, & Onifade, 2015). The practice continued in the 1960s (Opela & Ebie, 1982) and witnessed a sharp rise within 1980s and 1990s (Adamson *et al.*, 2015), with cannabis, stimulants, sedative-hypnotics, and alcohol abused at a very high rate among adults, young adults and children of school age. Obot (1990) observed further that the period (1980-1990) witnessed unprecedented levels of drug trafficking, a situation that was responsible for growing rates of abuse of illicit substances including cocaine and heroin.

As a response to the rising levels of illicit drug activities, The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) was established by Decree 48 of 1989 (now cap N30 LFN 2004) with the mandate of enforcing and coordinating all drug laws and policies in the country. This mandate requires NDLEA to among others curtail illicit drug use. One of the approaches used in curtailing illicit drug use is public awareness creation, which commenced soon after the Agency began operation in 1990. Not minding the awareness creation, illicit drug activities in the country continued unabated in a decline and rise trend (Adebowale, Olatona, Abiola, Oridota, Goodman, & Onajole, 2013); Adamson, *et al.*, 2015; Akoja, 2019; Ogunsola, Fajemisin, Aiyenuro, & Tunde, 2020; UNODC, 2018).

The implication of the foregoing is that public awareness efforts of NDLEA were not enough to attract the desired awareness that would lead to behavioural change. Hence, in 2021, the Agency under the leadership of Brig. Gen. Mohamed Buba Marwa (Rtd), who was appointed the 11th Chairman/Chief Executive Officer of NDLEA on 15th January 2021, reinvigorated the Agency's efforts in eradicating illicit drug activities in the country. One of such efforts was the creation of additional directorates in the Agency, one of which is the Directorate of Media and Advocacy, created to coordinate communication and advocacy tasks of the Agency. Thus, it is to, among other things, facilitate public enlightenment through media and other public platforms (NDLEA, 2023a). Since its establishment, the Directorate has been involved in dissemination of media messages on virtually all aspects of the mandate of the Agency in the form of press conferences, press releases, opinion editorials, radio talk shows, TV talk shows, media roundtable, social media campaigns, media events, SMS campaigns, and paid advertisements. One intention of NDLEA media messages is to raise public awareness on illicit drug use.

An important programme of the Directorate of Media and Advocacy is the "War Against Drug Abuse (WADA)" which was launched by former President Muhammadu Buhari on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2021. The aim of WADA is to create the desired awareness to the Nigerian society against anti-drug culture, part of which is illicit drug use (NDLEA, 2023b). With the renewed efforts of the Agency in raising awareness on illicit drug activities in the country, the pertinent question

arises: how aware are the public of illicit drug use? In other words, has the media and advocacy activities of NDLEA raised the desirable awareness to influence desirable behavioural change towards illicit drug use?

There is paucity of studies on public awareness of NDLEA mediated communication. The only study found online as at the time of this research is Ude-Akpeh (2017) which reveals that NDLEA radio campaign had no influence on drug abuse reduction among youths in Onitsha metropolis. Apart from studies conducted directly on NDLEA, there are a few other studies on the influence of mass media on illicit drug use in Nigeria. Many of the studies revealed the media have not done enough in creating the desired awareness on illicit drug use. Bhadani and Balamurgan (2018) found that the media were a factor in promoting illicit drug use. Adejoh, Adisa, Onome, Anyimukwu, and Olorunlana (2020) found that social media, notably Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, facilitate the marketing of illicit drugs among students of tertiary educational institutions in Lagos. Okoye, Agbim, Ohaji, Etumnu, Okodogbe, and Odionyenma (2022) studied the influence of mass media in addressing the menace of drug abuse among undergraduate students of Imo state University and found that the mass media was responsible for a moderate level of awareness of drug abuse among the students, and that media efforts were not effective in addressing the menace. Eze (2023) found a relationship between consumption of local substances and use of social media advertising and marketing among youths in Nigeria. Similarly, Odojin and Igabari (2023) found that secondary school children in Calabar exposed to social media were more likely to be involved in substance abuse than those without exposure to social media. Thus, the media in Nigeria have only contributed in exacerbating the menace

Even though the tendency for social media to negatively influence illicit drug use exists, it could also be used in a planned manner to discourage illicit drug use. This was the finding by Ahmed, Joel, Talabi, Okeibunor, Aiyesimoju, Adefemi, and Gever (2022) that deliberate interventions using social media have the tendency to reduce drug abuse among youths in Nigeria. Similarly, Gboyega (2023) observed that, if well planned, social media can effectively sensitize secondary school students on the dangers of substance use and raise their awareness on health implications of substance use.

Thus, media messages designed to provide information that would raise the desired awareness to contribute in preventing illicit drug use should possess certain characteristics. This idea is further buttressed by Palmgreen and Donohew (2006) that "the media are the primary or leading component in a variety of public health campaigns and frequently are the only component (p.27)." The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2018) suggested the kind of mass media campaign that would produce effective outcome in addressing the

menace of illicit drug use. The suggested campaign should take the forms of information campaign and social marketing campaign. The present study adopted the media information campaign approach to assess public awareness of NDLEA media messages against illicit drug use. The public studied are residents of Minna, Niger State. The focus of the media information campaign is to disseminate appropriate warning, empowerment and support messages to the public. Warning messages are those that provide information on the dangers and risks of illicit drug use and behaviours which would contribute to the prevention of illicit drug use. Empowerment messages provide information on where and how parents and victims of illicit drug users will obtain support, counselling and treatment. Support messages impart information on available intervention initiatives or programmes which reinforce community involvement and support for those vulnerable to illicit drug use.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study is to investigate the level to which residents of Minna are aware of NDLEA media messages against illicit drug use. The objectives are as follows:

1. To ascertain the level to which residents of Minna are aware of NDLEA media warning messages against illicit drug use.
2. To determine the level to which residents of Minna are aware of NDLEA media empowerment messages against illicit drug use.
3. To identify the level to which residents of Minna are aware of NDLEA media support messages against illicit drug use.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study finds explanation in the Health Belief Model (HBM) which was propounded in the 1950s by U.S. psychologists working in the public health sector (Champion & Skinner, 2008). The model is premised on six concepts (assumptions) which guide an individual in taking action towards a health problem. These concepts are perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cues of action and self-efficacy. Perceived susceptibility explains a situation whereby individuals' belief about their chances of experiencing a health challenge compels them to take action against the health challenge. In perceived severity, belief about the seriousness of the health challenge places an obligation on the individuals to take action. Perceived benefits explain individuals' belief on the value or reward they will obtain in taking action against a health challenge. In the case of perceived barriers, the individuals consider the obstacles that may come their way in an attempt to take action against a health challenge. Cues of action have to do with internal or

external factors that trigger action by individuals against a health challenge. Self-efficacy explains the confidence and belief individuals have in themselves to take successful action against a health challenge (Daniati, Widjaja, Olalla, Chaudhary, Nader, Chupradit, & Yasser, 2022).

The HBM explains the setting of the present study considering that all the three objectives of the study are intended to ascertain awareness level of NDLEA media messages on respondents' beliefs regarding all the six concepts of the model. Specifically, the first objective is on respondents' awareness of NDLEA media warning messages against illicit drug use, which satisfies the concepts of susceptibility and severity. The second objective is on respondents' awareness of NDLEA media empowerment messages against illicit drug use. This addresses the concepts of perceived benefits and self-efficacy. The third objective is on respondents' awareness of NDLEA media support messages against illicit drug use, which is in agrees with the concepts of perceived barriers and cues of action of the model. The present study is thereby testing the six assumptions of the HBM in the context of awareness of NDLEA media messages against illicit drug use.

## **Method**

The study adopted descriptive survey design, which is appropriate in gathering data at a point in time and used in describing the nature of existing condition (Mauldin, 2020). The existing condition in the case of this study is public awareness of NDLEA media messages against illicit drug use. The adopted design gathered data from residents of Minna metropolis on their opinion, attitude and behaviour which reflected their level of awareness of NDLEA media messages against illicit drug use.

The study used a sample of 385 drawn from a population of 463,000 residents of Minna, which is the metro area population of Minna town which is 3.35% increase from 2020 (Macrotrends, 2021). The sample was drawn using Macorr Sample Size Calculator (Macorr.com, 2003-2023). The study relied on disproportionate stratified sampling technique in drawing up the sample because the technique allows a high degree of representativeness of all the various groups in the population, thereby enabling generalization with high confidence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Wu & Thompson, 2020). Thus, in line with Idowu, Bako and Aduloju's (2020) division of Minna town into core neighbourhoods, Minna town was stratified into 11 neighbourhoods: Minna Central, Angwan Deji, F-Layout, GRA, Limawa, Makera, Nassarawa, Sabon Gari, Tudun Wada South, Tudun Wada North and Tunga. For each core neighbourhood, a sample of 35 residents was taken from it. Accidental and convenience sampling techniques were used to arrive at the 35 residents for each core neighbourhood. Thus, the first 35 residents

in each core neighbourhood who agreed to participate in the study were administered with the instrument of data collection.

The average age of the sample was 35.5 years which varied from 25 to 65 and above. Male members of the sample dominated their female counterpart in a ratio of 6:4. In terms of educational qualification, those with First Degree dominated by 32.4 percent. They were followed by those with Masters Degree and Higher National Diploma (29.2 %), Ordinary National Diploma/National Certificate of Education (23%), Doctor of Philosophy (12.8%), and secondary school certificate (2.6%) in that order. Most of the respondents were yet to marry (43%). Those married were 36 percent. The divorced/separated and widowed were 11 percent and 10 percent respectively. For their educational backgrounds, there were civil servants (19%), artisans (16%), business persons/traders (26%), farmers (8%), students (24%), and the unemployed (7%).

A 17-item questionnaire titled *Awareness of NDLEA Media Messages against Illicit Drug Use Questionnaire* (ANMMIDUQ) and adapted from European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2018) was used to obtain data. The items of the questionnaire are placed into four sections. Section A is concerned with demographic information and has five items (1-5). Section B is on level of awareness of NDLEA media warning messages against illicit drug use and has four items (6-9). Section C is on level of awareness of NDLEA media empowerment messages against illicit drug use and also has four items (10-13). The concern of Section D level of awareness of NDLEA media support messages against illicit drug use and also has four items (14-17). All items in Section A are constructed in open and close-ended multiple choice questions. Items in section B-D are statements made to elicit responses on awareness of NDLEA media messages on a 5-point scale with options and assigned values ranging from “Not at all Aware = 1” to “Extremely Aware = 5.”

To measure level of awareness of NDLEA media warning messages against illicit drug use, respondents were provided with four statements as follows: (1) NDLEA media messages warn that illicit drug use leads to mental health problems. (2) NDLEA media messages warn that illicit drug use has negative impact on work and income. (3) NDLEA media messages warn that illicit drug use leads criminal activities. (4) NDLEA media messages warn that illicit drug use leads to poor academic performance and eventual drop out of school.

For the measurement of awareness level of NDLEA media empowerment messages against illicit drug use, respondents were provided with the following four statements: (1) NDLEA media messages direct illicit drug abuse victims and their parents where to seek support. (2) NDLEA media messages direct illicit drug abuse victims and their parents where to seek counselling. (3) NDLEA media messages offer information on where and how illicit drug abuse victims

could get treatment. (4) NDLEA media messages empower young people and communities to prevent illicit drug use.

In measuring the level of awareness NDLEA media support messages against illicit drug use, four statements were made. The statements are: (1) NDLEA media messages advocate and provide for alternatives to imprisonment for illicit drug-related crimes. (2) NDLEA media messages advocate against stigma and discrimination of illicit drug use victims. (3) NDLEA media messages strengthen community involvement and support for illicit drug use victims. (4) NDLEA media messages offer rehabilitation opportunities for illicit drug use victims. For each of the above statements on NDLEA media messages on warning, empowerment and support, respondents were to select an option from the range of options (not at all aware, slightly aware, somewhat aware, moderately aware, and extremely aware).

The questionnaire (ANMMIDUQ) was subjected to validity and reliability tests and successfully scaled through. For validity, the test was based on content validity. For reliability, the test re-test approach was used, and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.96, suggesting a reliable instrument. To guarantee timely collection of data, the questionnaire was administered manually on a face-to-face basis. All the 385 copies of the questionnaire administered were returned and found usable, yielding 100 percent response rate.

Data obtained were analysed based on descriptive statistics. The demographic data of the respondents were subjected to percentages. Data on the key study variables that addressed the objectives of the study were subjected to percentages and mean. Based on the statistical rule in the use of mean to address objectives or provide answers to research questions (de Smith, 2021; Illowsky & Dean, 2018), a mean value of 2.50 on a 5-point scale instrument indicated acceptance of the tested statement and a mean value of less than 2.5 indicated rejection of a tested statement.

**Results and Discussion**

***Level of Awareness of NDLEA Media Warning Messages against Illicit Drug Use***

**Table 1: Respondents’ level of awareness of NDLEA media warning messages against illicit drug use**

Warning Messages	N	S	S	M	E	T	N	Remar
ot at	light	ome	oder	xtre	otal	ean		k
all	ly	what	ately	mely	F			
Awa	Awa	Awa	Awa	Awa	Awa	(%)		
re F	re F	re	re	re F				
(%)	(%)	F	F	(%)				
		(%)	(%)					

NDLEA media messages warn that illicit drug use leads to mental health problems.	1	1	5	4	3	385	2	Rejected
	48	06	8	1	2	(100	.23	
	(38.	(27.	(15.	(10.	(8.3)	)		
	4)	5)	1)	6)				
NDLEA media messages warn that illicit drug use has negative impact on work and income.	1	1	5	3	2	385	2	Rejected
	63	10	1	6	5	(100	.10	
	(42.	(28.	(13.	(9.4)	(6.5)	)		
	3)	6)	2)					
NDLEA media messages warn that illicit drug use leads to criminal activities.	1	1	4	3	3	385	2	Rejected
	56	14	4	8	3	(100	.16	
	(40.	(29.	(11.	(9.9)	(8.6)	)		
	5)	6)	4)					
NDLEA media messages warn that illicit drug use leads to poor academic performance and school dropout.	1	1	7	2	3	385	2	Rejected
	40	13	4	8	0	(100	.21	
	(36.	(29.	(19.	(7.3)	(7.8)	)		
	4)	3)	2)					
<b>GRAND MEAN = 2.18</b>								

**F** = Frequency

Data in Table 2 reveals either unawareness or low awareness levels for all the four statements testing NDLEA media warning messages against illicit drug use. On the statement “NDLEA media messages warn that illicit drug use leads to mental health problems,” more than one third of the respondents indicated they were not at all aware of the messages, slightly more than one-fourth said they were only slightly aware of the messages, and close to one-seventh were somewhat aware. Only slightly above one-tenth respondents said they were moderately aware and less than one-tenth said they were extremely aware. Thus, responses to this statement indicated unawareness and a significantly low level of awareness with a mean value of 2.23 which is below the threshold of acceptance. Almost the same trend of responses is the case with the statement NDLEA messages show warnings of the negative impact of illicit drug use on work and income. According to the responses, less than one-third respondents were not at all aware of the statement, slightly above one-fourth were slightly aware, slightly above one-tenth were somewhat aware, less than one-tenth were moderately aware, and only one-fifteenth said they were extremely aware. Responses to this statement too indicated unawareness and a low level of awareness with a mean value of 2.10, also below the threshold of acceptance. On the level of respondents who were aware of NDLEA warning messages that illicit drug use leads to criminal activities, less than one-third respondents said they were not at all aware, about one-third said they were slightly aware, slightly above one-tenth said they were somewhat aware, and only less than one-tenth said they were moderately

aware and extremely aware. The mean value for this statement is 2.16, which is below the threshold of acceptance indicating that the awareness level for the statement is also insignificantly low. The pattern of responses is almost similar with the statement "NDLEA media messages warn that illicit drug use leads to poor academic performance and school dropout," where less than one-third respondents said they were not at all aware, about one-third said they were slightly aware, about one-fifth said they were somewhat aware, and only less than one-tenth said they were moderately aware and extremely aware. The mean value for this statement is 2.21, indicating an insignificant low awareness for this statement. The grand mean value is 2.18, which is a clear suggestion that respondents' level of awareness of NDLEA media warning messages against illicit drug use is generally insignificant low.

***Level of Awareness of NDLEA Media Empowerment Messages against Illicit Drug Use***

Data in Table 2, also reveals that a large number of the respondents were either unaware or slightly aware of NDLEA media empowerment messages against illicit drug use. This is the case in all the four NDLEA media empowerment messages tested. On the empowerment message "NDLEA media messages direct illicit drug abuse victims and their parents where to seek support, " as many as 43.4 percent respondents indicated they were not aware, 31.9 percent said they were slightly aware, 8.3 percent somewhat aware, 7.0 percent moderately aware and only 9.4 percent said they were extremely aware. These responses garnered a mean value of 2.07 which is below the acceptance threshold of 2.50, signifying insignificantly low awareness. Almost the same trend of responses is the case with the NDLEA media empowerment messages that portent to direct illicit drug abuse victims and their parents where to find counseling services. For this category of empowerment message, 44.9 percent respondents said they not aware, 32.7 percent said they were slightly aware, 6.2 percent said they were somewhat aware, 8.3 percent said they were moderately aware and only 7.8 percent said they were extremely aware. These levels of responses gave a mean value of 2.01, indicating an insignificantly low awareness level since it is below the acceptance threshold of 2.50.

**Table 2: Respondents' level of awareness of NDLEA media empowerment messages against illicit drug use**

Empowerment Messages	N	S	S	M	E	To	N	Re
	ot at	lightl	ome	oder	xtre	tal	ean	mark
	all	y	what	ately	mely	F		
	Awa	Awa	Awa	Awa	Awa	(%)		
	re F	re F	re F	re F	re F			

		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)			
NDLEA	media	1	1	3	2	3	385	2	Rejected
messages	direct illicit	67	23	2	7	6	(100)	.07	
drug abuse victims and their parents where to seek support.		(43.4)	(31.9)	(8.3)	(7.0)	(9.4)			
NDLEA	media	1	1	2	3	3	385	2	Rejected
messages	direct illicit	73	26	4	2	0	(100)	.01	
drug abuse victims and their parents where to seek counselling.		(44.9)	(32.7)	(6.2)	(8.3)	(7.8)			
NDLEA	media	1	1	3	3	2	385	1	Rejected
messages	direct where	76	20	2	0	7	(100)	.99	
and how illicit drug abuse victims could get treatment.		(45.7)	(31.2)	(8.3)	(7.8)	(7.0)			
NDLEA	media	1	1	4	2	1	385	1	Rejected
messages	empower	70	24	6	6	9	(100)	.96	
young people and communities to prevent illicit drug use.		(44.2)	(32.2)	(11.9)	(6.8)	(4.9)			
<b>GRAND MEAN = 2.00</b>									

F = Frequency

The statement “NDLEA media messages direct where and how illicit drug abuse victims could get treatment” produced the following responses: Not at all aware, 45.7%; slightly aware, 31.2%; somewhat aware, 8.3%; moderately aware, 7.8%, and extremely aware, 7.0%. The mean value for these responses is 1.99, which suggests a low awareness. The statement “NDLEA media messages empower young people and communities to prevent illicit drug use” produced almost similar responses: As many as 44.2 percent said they were not aware, 32.2 percent were slightly aware, 11.9 percent were somewhat aware, 6.8 percent were moderately aware, and only 4.9 percent were extremely aware. These responses gave a mean value of 1.96, which indicates a rejection, implying low awareness. Responses for all the four statements on NDLEA media empowerment messages against illicit drug use produced an average mean value of 2.00, suggesting absence of awareness and low awareness.

### *Level of Awareness of NDLEA Media Support Messages against Illicit Drug Use*

**Table 3: Respondents' level of awareness of NDLEA media support messages against illicit drug use**

Empowerment Messages	N	S	S	M	E	T	M	Rema
	ot at all Aware F (%)	lightly Aware F (%)	somewhat Aware F (%)	moderately Aware F (%)	extremely Aware F (%)	total F (%)	mean	rk
NDLEA media messages advocate and provide for alternatives to imprisonment for illicit drug-related crimes.	153 (39.7)	131 (34.0)	44 (11.4)	36 (9.4)	21 (5.5)	385 (100)	2.07	Rejected
NDLEA media messages advocate against stigma and discrimination of illicit drug use victims.	139 (36.1)	118 (30.6)	72 (18.7)	30 (7.8)	26 (6.8)	385 (100)	2.18	Rejected
NDLEA media messages strengthen community involvement and support for illicit drug use victims.	125 (32.5)	105 (27.3)	80 (20.8)	44 (11.4)	31 (8.0)	385 (100)	2.35	Rejected
NDLEA media messages offer rehabilitation opportunities for illicit drug use victims.	160 (41.6)	137 (35.6)	99 (25.8)	39 (10.1)	20 (5.2)	385 (100)	2.19	Rejected
<b>GRAND MEAN = 2.14</b>								

F = Frequency

The pattern of data in Table 3 is not significantly different from those in Tables 1 and 2. According to the data, the trend of unawareness and low awareness of NDLEA media messages continue. The statement "NDLEA media messages advocate and provide for alternatives to imprisonment for illicit drug-related crimes" had the following responses: as many as 39.7 percent respondents were not at all aware, 34 percent were slightly aware, 11.4 percent were somewhat aware, 9.4 percent were moderately aware, and only 5.5 percent were extremely aware. This yielded a mean value of 2.07, indicating a rejection of the statement, which implies low awareness. Are the respondents aware that NDLEA media messages advocate against stigma and discrimination of illicit drug use victims? As many as 36.1 percent said they were not at all aware, 30.6 percent said they were slightly aware, 18.7 percent said they were somewhat aware, 7.8 percent

said they were moderately aware, and only 6.8 percent said they were extremely aware. This pattern of responses yielded a mean value of 2.18, suggesting rejection and invariably low awareness. On whether NDLEA media messages strengthen community involvement and support for illicit drug use victims, 32.5 percent respondents said they were not at all aware, 27.3 percent said they were slightly aware, 20.8 percent said they were somewhat aware, 11.4 percent said they were moderately aware, and only 8.0 percent said they were extremely aware. These responses yielded a mean value of 2.35, below the acceptance threshold, indicating low awareness. As many as 41.6 percent indicated they were not at all aware that NDLEA media messages offer rehabilitation opportunities for illicit drug use victims. As many as 35.6 percent indicated slight awareness, 10.1 percent said they were somewhat aware, 7.5 percent were moderately aware, and only 5.2 percent were extremely aware. This yielded a mean value of 1.99, indicating rejection and by implication low awareness. Overall, responses of awareness of NDLEA media support messages against illicit drug use produced average mean value of 2.14, suggesting low awareness.

The findings of this study have shown that NDLEA media messages have not contributed in raising the desired awareness that could contribute to addressing the menace of illicit drug use. This finding has substantially corroborated those of previous studies in Nigeria. Okoye, *et al.* (2022) found that undergraduate students of tertiary educational institutions in Imo State did not have high awareness of mass media campaigns against drug abuse, and that the campaigns did not contribute in curtailing the menace among the undergraduate students. Similarly, Akande *et al.* (2023) found that commercial bus drivers in Umuahia, Abia State had low knowledge and poor perception of psychoactive substance abuse.

Outside Nigeria, studies on effects of mass media campaigns in preventing drug abuse in USA, Canada and Australia have produced mixed findings as shown in a systematic review embarked upon by Allara, Ferri, Bo, Gasparrini, and Faggiano (2015) and Ferri, Allara, Bo, Gasparrini, and Faggiano (2013). A few of the studies reviewed reported low awareness and majority reported high awareness. In Malaysia, Jamri, Ismail, and Ahmad (2022) found that broadcast media were effective in informing the public about drug abuse issues. In all the above studies on successes of mass media in the management of drug abuse cases, the use of the media has been deployed using the campaign approach, not just dishing out fragmented information on drug abuse. Media campaigns are organized and well planned with specific goals set out to achieve. Evaluation is done to ascertain the extent the goals have been achieved. One wonders if NDLEA media messages are a campaign in the strict sense of the word.

The findings of the present study have failed to give support to the assumptions of the HBM used as the theoretical framework of the study. Since the findings indicated insignificantly low awareness of NDLEA media messages against illicit drug use, it is inferred that perceived susceptibility, severity, benefits, barriers, cues of action and self-efficacy are not the case as determining factors in taking action against illicit drug use. These concepts could only be determining factors if there is significant awareness of measures against illicit drug use by individuals seeking action or change. The findings thus suggest a modification of the model to include the assumption that the functionality of the six concepts of the model is based on awareness level of the health challenge or issue and measures against the health challenge by the individuals seeking action towards the health challenge. This suggested modification requires further thorough testing so as to draw valid and reliable conclusions.

The implication of the findings of the present study therefore is that NDLEA is yet to get it right in its media campaigns against illicit drug use. While this study did not interact with NDLEA's Directorate of Media and Advocacy to understand their approach to dissemination of media messages against illicit drug use, the findings that public awareness level of the messages is low buttresses that the approach, whatever it may be, is not as effective as it should be. Awareness creation is the first stage in a behavioural change campaign. Without awareness, there cannot be attitudinal and behavioural change. Low awareness on illicit drug use, as found in this study, explains the rising cases of illicit drug use in Nigeria. Efforts to curtail the menace will have to begin with awareness creation, and mass media are a key to this.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Beginning from 2021, a re-invigorated NDLEA established the Directorate of Media and Advocacy with a view to engage in more effective media communication of illicit drug matters with the aim of effectively managing the menace of illicit drug use. Not minding the efforts of the Directorate, cases of illicit drug use in Nigeria continue to increase. This study therefore investigated the level of public awareness of NDLEA media messages with a focus on messages that provide warnings, empowerment and support on illicit drug use. The study adopted descriptive survey design with a sample of 385 drawn from a population of 463,000 residents of Minna, the study area. Findings revealed that public awareness levels of NDLEA media messages on all three measures of awareness in the study (warning messages, empowerment messages and support messages) were low. The conclusion drawn from this finding therefore is that the public is largely unaware of NDLEA media warning, empowerment and support

messages on illicit drug use. This unawareness may have serious negative impact on attitude and behavioural change towards illicit drug use.

On the basis of the findings, it is imperative to recommend that NDLEA Directorate of Media and Advocacy should consider embarking on media campaigns (from the true meaning of the word) against illicit drug use. A successful media campaign against illicit drugs is one that uses effective/correct platforms, adopts calculated timing in message delivery, ensures effective audience selection and analysis, has high intensity of media content, media diversification, and measures desired impact. There are various models and elements of media campaigns depending on the objectives of the campaign. However, the one suggested in this study is adopted from the Global Road Safety Partnership (n.d), and has the following elements: (1) Media mapping, (2) developing a media contact registry, (3) selecting the target audience, (4) developing messages for various target audiences, (5) selecting media advocacy tactics, (6) selecting traditional media channels, (7) selecting social media channels, (8) selecting and designing messages, (9) effective partnership coordination, (10) monitoring and responding to the media, and (11) evaluating the campaign.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study, like any other study, has a few limitations. First, it would have been worthwhile to complement the quantitative primary data generated in this study with qualitative data (from in-depth interviews or focus group discussions) for more revealing trends. Future studies of this nature should consider this form of triangulation. Second, a pre-requisite for a study of this nature should be the findings of studies on media coverage of NDLEA activities or events, especially the ones concerning illicit drug use. This is to first and foremost establish a more exact basis to test public awareness of NDLEA media messages against illicit drugs. In the absence of studies on coverage of NDLEA activities, the present study relied on the elements of media information campaign on drug abuse expatiated the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2018). The elements include dissemination of warning, empowerment and support messages on drug abuse, which the present study assumed were the case with NDLEA media messages. It is therefore suggested for NDLEA or any other stakeholder to commission a comprehensive study on media coverage of NDLEA activities so as to provide baseline data for research and policy purposes. Additionally, this study focused on the general public in Minna metropolis without knowledge of their experience with illicit drug use. A study of this nature should concentrate on members of the public who have experience with illicit drug use either as victims or parents/family members and friends of victims.

Future studies of this nature should focus on members of the public or study areas that are vulnerable to illicit drug use. It is also suggested that future studies should go further to ascertain the influence of public unawareness of NDLEA messages (as found in the present study) on attitude and behavioural change towards illicit drug use

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