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PUBLICITY AND ADVOCACY ENGAGEMENTS BY MEDIA, EDUCATION, NGOS AND GOVERNMENT IN COMBATING SUBSTANCE ABUSE: AN UNDERGRADUATE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Challenges associated with substance abuse are witnessed in both developed and developing countries of the world. Hence there should be concerted efforts among nations to stem the evolving challenges of substance abuse or misuse. Such platforms as the media, educational institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and government agencies amongst others are the vehicles used to disseminate the knowledge about substance abuse. This study was designed to ascertain the perception of undergraduate students regarding the involvement of media, education sector, NGOs and government agencies in substance abuse publicity. An online survey pertaining to the possible roles of the media, educational institutions, NGOs and government agencies in substance abuse publicity was developed and circulated on platforms of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. One hundred and nine completed questionnaire copies were returned online. The responses were analysed and the data collated. The pattern of data was evaluated using Chi-square for any significant difference. The findings showed that regarding substance abuse publicity: the media score was poor (6.5%), fair (16.7%), good (37%), very good (24.1%) and excellent (12%) {X^2 =31.481; P<0.001}; Education score was poor (5.6%), fair (13.9%), good (32.4%), very good (27.8%) and excellent (16.7%) {X^2 =28.019; P<0.001}; NGOs score was poor (0.9%), fair (13%), good (32.4%), very good (37%) and excellent (13%) {X^2 =50.712; P<0.001} and Government agencies score was poor (31.5%), fair (27.8%), good (19.4%), very good (12%) and excellent (4.6%) {X^2 =27.631; P<0.001}. Among the poor rating (31.5%; X^2 = 58.020; P<0.001) and fair rating (27.8%; X^2 = 23.764; P<0.001) the government agencies had the highest score. Among the very good rating, the NGOs had the highest rating (37%; X^2 =13.752; P<0.001). There was no significant difference in the rating of good (X^2 =6.130; P=0.105) and excellent (X^2 =7.120; P=0.068) among the different agencies. However, in terms of sponsorship of substance abuse publicity in the public domain, the performance was not significantly different amongst government, NGOs, Individuals and Media (X^2 = 7.000; P>0.05). This study showed that the government is perceived by undergraduates to be a non-starter in the substance abuse publicity despite their sponsorship of publicity in the public domain. However, the media, education sector and the NGOs were perceived to play significant roles in substance abuse publicity though the NGOs seem to be the front runners.

Keywords: Substance Abuse; Organisations; Publicity; Undergraduates

Introduction

People appear to be more aware of the need to improve their health status and prevent health problems as a result of the recent spike in interest in graceful human body motions, holistic health care, physical fitness and natural nutrition. Although individual and government efforts in promoting health and preventing diseases are becoming more of a daily message, people choose personal life-style choices within society on how best to live. This is coupled with education, commercials, social and the mass media glamorising numerous harmful behaviours (Udofia, 2014). The use of drugs, in and of itself, poses no risk because drugs, when used correctly, have proven to be beneficial. The greatest strategy in this battle is prevention, which can be accomplished through a range of strategies tailored to each community's unique characteristics, cultural diversity, and structure.

Adolescent drug use and abuse has become one of the most concerning health-related issues in Nigeria and other countries of the world (NDLEA, 1997). Findings from epidemiological studies, reports and drug laws in Nigeria (Pela & Ebie, 1982; NDLEA, 1997) have shown that the burden of drug abuse is growing despite several drug laws, policies and strategic plans to prevent it. The prevalence is higher among the younger population, males, undergraduates and secondary school students and commercial vehicle drivers.

Fawa, (2003) defines a drug as "any substance utilised for the treatment or prevention of disease in humans or animals." The substance affects biological functions in either a favourable or negative way, depending on the user's body composition, the type of drug taken, the dosage, and whether it is used alone or in combination with other drugs. According to NAFDAC (2004), drug abuse is the excessive and persistent self-administration of a substance without regard to medically or culturally accepted patterns. It can also be characterised as taking a drug to the point where it interferes with a person's health and social functioning. Studies (Udofia, 2014; Winpenny, Marteau & Nolte, 2013; Seaman & Ikegwuonu, 2010; Fawa, 2003) have shown that drug abuse commonly arises from ignorance. This could come in the form of use of drugs without medical doctor's prescription, use of alcohol in order to remove fear from the mind during performances or the use of sedative and tranquilizing chemicals.

People sometimes confuse substance abuse with drug abuse. However, drugs refer to prescriptions prescribed by a doctor, whereas substance abuse can involve substances other than drugs, such as gasoline, cocaine and glue. If a substance was intentionally employed to create physiological or psychological impact for a reason other than therapeutic purposes, it was termed abused (Okoye, Agbim, Ohaji, Etumnu, Okodogbe & Odionyenma, 2022). A substance is considered abused when it is deliberately used to induce physiological or psychological effects or both for purposes other than therapeutic ones and when the use contributed to health risks or some combinations of these (Njeru & Ngesu, 2014).

In Nigeria, the burden of drug abuse is on the rise and becoming a public health concern. Nigeria, which is the most populous country in Africa, has developed a reputation as a center for drug trafficking and usage mostly among the youth population (Abiodun, 1991; Pela & Ebie, 1982). The statistics are worrisome because the more the youths engage in drug abuse, the more crimes are bound to happen. Nigeria is an enormously diverse country with over 400 ethnicities and many religious groups (Tyndall, 2020). Drug abuse is therefore viewed within a broader context in Nigeria, due to its multicultural nature. Most societies do not consider the use of some drugs which do not produce overt behavioural changes as drug abuse. However, despite this multicultural nature of the Nigerian population, there is a consistent outcry from both the public, police, preachers, health professionals, teachers, regulatory agencies and parents on the growing burden of drug abuse (abuse of drugs which affect behaviour) in the country.

Given the severity of drug addiction, the mass media have a moral responsibility to educate the public about drugs, their use and abuse, de-addiction facility methods and strategies and so on, by focusing on the disease as well as other issues. It has the potential to set the tone and be the driving force behind national drug awareness and education. The press has an impact on public opinion all across the world. The media bears a significant amount of responsibility for combating drug abuse through its content and making society a better place to live. The impact of drug abuse among adolescents has eaten deep into the fabric of our society. However, asides media efforts, the government and other relevant authorities/agencies can tackle the problems through drug abuse campaigns, social marketing and other effective counselling programmes and strategies (Imam, 2019; Eze, 2023). It is against this background that this study sought undergraduates' perspective on the level of publicity and advocacy engagements of media, educational institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations and government in the battle against substance abuse.

Theoretical Justification

Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda setting theory was founded in 1972 by Mc combs and Shaw (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The theory describes the very powerful influences of the media, which is the media's ability to tell us what issues are important and what persons are important in the society. These issues and individuals who the media choose to publicize become the issues and individuals we think and talk about. According to Mc combs and Shaw, the media audience judge as important what the media judge as important. By implication, media help people to determine what is important in the public discourse. The theory and the study both emphasize the influence of media on the audience, which is the media's ability to tell us what issues are important. Such issues may be drug abuse and substance abuse that affect the society, most especially our youths and students. The media therefore proffers solutions to such issues by organizing programmes related to drug abuse in order to reduce such illegal acts as it sets agenda through its

advocacy campaign programme on issues related to the consequences of drug abuse. Moreover, media especially social media through its agenda setting has a powerful effect on the audience as it can easily influence their attitude or perception in respect of any social issue. Therefore, agenda setting theory is best fitted into this study based on the fact that (social) media will be able to reshape the attitude of undergraduates toward drug abuse especially as bloggers and social media influencers project more media content both in comedy skits and campaign programmes on the consequences of drug abuse in the society.

The framing theory complements the agenda setting idea and "emphasizes the power of the media to draw attention to certain issues and generate frameworks for the interpretation of social events" (D´Adamo, Garcia & Freidenberg, 2007). Furthermore, according to Gerbner and Gross's theory of cultivation (1976), the mass media (especially television) "form the social universe of their consumers from a systematic and prolonged exposure in time to repetitive and stable messages that will allow to maintain the dominant structures, values, beliefs and social orientations" (Macedo, 2017) present in any society.

The second theory underpinning this study is the social control theory. According to the social control theory, what causes drug use, like most or all deviant behaviour, is the absence of social controls that encourage conformity to social norms. The theory posits that most people do not engage in deviant or criminal acts because they have strong bonds with or ties to conventional, mainstream persons, beliefs, activities, and social institutions. Deviation from normal, accepted behaviours surfaces when these bonds are weak or broken. According to this theory, drug users are attracted to drugs because of the absence of ties to the conforming, mainstream sectors of society. It is the absence of these bonds that explains illicit, recreational drug use. The theory further expresses that the more stakes or investment someone holds in the society with respect to time, emotion, energy and money, the more conventional such a person's behaviour is likely to be. A "stake" could be anything of value, such as a loving relationship, good relations with parents, a family, children, an education, a satisfying job and/or a care giver. Someone who has "invested" in these positively valued, reward-laden enterprises is less likely to engage in behaviour such as drug abuse that threatens or undermines them than will another person who does not have such investments. The theory also holds that the more attachment, commitment, involvement or belief people have in the norms of conventional institutions such as family, school, religion and occupation, the less likely they are to break society's rules and use drugs. Drug use is "contained" by bonds with or adherence to conventional people, institutions, activities, and beliefs. If they are strong, recreational drug use is unlikely. Most students of tertiary institutions who use drugs have links to either peer pressure influence, ailing family relationships or dwindling academic fortunes. Their involvement in drug use can thus be explained in the light of this theory; as arising from the absence of societal ties or

stakes which can restrain them from deviant behaviour such as the use of drugs.

Research Method

The study employed an online survey. This method was employed due to the fact that it allows respondents' opinions to be sampled regarding issues of media, educational, NGO and government publicity and advocacy strategies against substance abuse. The area of study is Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. One hundred and nine undergraduate students participated in the online survey. The questionnaire was structured to obtain information on how aware the students were of drug/substance abuse or misuse. The agencies considered were, educational Institutions, Media, Non-governmental organisations and government agencies presumed to be responsible for control of recreational drugs.

Exclusion criteria

Those that did not completely respond to the questions were excluded from the study.

Statistical analysis

The data collected were expressed in proportions and percentages. Chi-Square was used to determine if any association existed between the performances of the agencies. The significant level was placed as $P<0.05$.

Presentation of Results

The predominant performance rating of the media on substance abuse publicity on a five scale rating was on 3 and 4. More than half of the responded are crowded within the scale of 3 and 4 ($X^2=31.481$; $P<0.001$). The predominant performance rating of Educational Institutions on substance abuse publicity on a five point scale was 3 and 4 ($X^2=28.019$; $P<0.001$). On a scale of five points the predominant performance rating of Non-Governmental organisations for substance abuse publicity was on a scale of 3 and 4 ($X^2=50.712$; $P<0.001$). However, the performance rating of Government on substance abuse publicity on a five point scale was 1 and 2 ($X^2=27.631$; $P<0.001$). Table 1.

Ranking of the performance rating based on poor performance regarding substance abuse publicity showed that the government was rated the least ($X^2=58.020$; $P<0.001$). Similarly ranking of performance rating based on fair performance regarding substance abuse publicity showed that the government was rated least also in this category. Ranking of performance rating based on good regarding substance abuse publicity showed uneven performance among the categories of agencies studied though not significantly different ($X^2=6.130$; $P>0.05$). Furthermore, the performance ranking on the scale of 4 indicated that the government is the least rated ($X^2=13.752$; $P<0.001$). Finally the performance ranking of the agencies on substance abuse publicity on the scale of 5 was uneven ($X^2=7.120$: $P>0.05$). Table 1.

The Non-governmental organisations were perceived to be the front burners in substance abuse publicity in the public domain. This was followed by government then social media platforms. Individuals were perceived least in sponsorship of substance abuse publicity. Table 2.

Discussion of Findings

This study was designed to extract the perception of undergraduate students regarding the performance/ involvement of the Media, Educational Institutions, Non-governmental Organisations and Government on substance abuse publicity. The participation of the media in substance abuse publicity is regarded as one of the expectations of the citizens. The citizens' perception was that the media is the watch dog and should be able to feed the populace with useful information about goings-on in any community. However, expectation and performance at times may run parallel particularly if the agenda setting function of the media is not in tandem with the expectation of the populace. In this study the media were rated third in terms of substance abuse publicity unlike the assertions of (Adeyefa & Awofadeju, 2023). They stated that in 2021, some NGOs organized an online talk show on Youtube where the organisation's project reported that majority of insanity cases in the society is as a result of drug abuse. The recorded programme was projected for almost six months on Youtube and recorded over 17 million viewers with 11 million comments. It is worth noting however that the authors are talking about social media and not the conventional media.

Over time due to the role of media as watch dog they have often busted behind the scene activities of which drug peddling and misuse is one of such activities which is an act against the law (NAFDAC, 2004). Most behind the scene activities of young persons are often scared of the public domain probably because of uncertainty of acceptance among the majority or because it runs afoul of the law (Udofia, 2014). In the present study about 3 out of 4 of the respondents rated the media performance/involvement in substance abuse publicity between the scale of 3&5 for a 5 point scale. Thus it could be said that the perception of the undergraduate students was that the media has a role and are playing a significant role in substance abuse publicity. Since the media has taken such an agenda setting role, it most likely will help reform the view of the youths regarding indulgence in recreational drugs.

In our earlier report we have identified students and musicians as the people most prone to substance abuse or misuse (Onyenekwe & Onyenekwe, 2024b). Hence the involvement of the media in substance abuse publicity may have far reaching beneficial effects on the youths because the youths are known to spend much time glued unto the media space (Adeyefa & Awofadeju, 2023). Studies have shown that there exists a relationship between social media use and substance abuse among young people (Costello & Ramo, 2017; Nesi, Rothenberg, Husoong & Jackson, 2017; Crosier & Marsch, 2016)

Educational institutions are builders of human reasoning. They develop the reasoning power of the citizens enabling such citizens to have capacity to make choices which are probably the right choices despite the circumstances. Since most of the citizens presently at risk of substance abuse are the youths (Onyenekwe & Onyenekwe, 2024; Fawa, 2003) and most are expected to be within the premises of educational institutions particularly tertiary institutions or they are expected to be under apprenticeship for learning a trade or skill (Onyenekwe &

Onyenekwe, 2024b; Adeyefa & Awofadeju, 2023). The undergraduates that participated in this study equally scored the educational institutions high in substance abuse publicity. About 75% of the respondents scored the performance / involvement of educational institutions in substance abuse publicity in the range of 3 to 5 points on a scale of 5 points.

Tertiary education system has shown zeal overtime in trying to curb the menace of substance misuse or abuse among youths by organising workshops and advocacy on the hazards of recreational drugs (Okoye, Agbim, Ohaji, Etumnu, Okodogba & Odionyenma, 2022). In our earlier report (Onyenekwe & Onyenekwe, 2024a) we have posited some of the ills of indulgence in substance abuse such as depression, disordered emotions, loss of appetite, loss of consciousness and in the extreme, death. It is also a well-known fact that students that indulge in substance abuse are also involved in social vices that may eventually result in criminal offences punishable by law (Onyenekwe & Onyenekwe, 2024; Udofia, 2014; Seaman & Ikegwuonu, 2010). It is the view of the authors that educational institutions should roll out robust advocacy on substance abuse or misuse at all strata of education. This is because it costs less to prevent indulgence than to rehabilitate one with strong craving for substance abuse. It is our opinion that a curriculum be developed to create strong awareness among the citizens on the benefits if any and hazards of substance abuse.

The Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) seem to be rated the best agency in substance abuse publicity in this study. This is the perception of the undergraduate students. Most of the NGOs in Nigeria are funded by foreign agencies and/ or foreign governments (Dhillon & Singh, 2024). Most foreign agencies or governments that support substance abuse publicity do so due to moral obligations or to indirectly protect their citizens by enhancing the ability of host or third world countries to control narcotics. Secondly, the world is now a global village with high rate of migrations for greener pastures which is currently in the developed economy. Hence for the well-being of their citizens, the developed world tends to help promote advocacy and strengthen cooperation between nations knowing that substance abuse or narcotics are activities that are carried on behind the scenes (Dhillon & Singh, 2024). This is because in the developed world the government have been able to put on check the farming and transportation of recreational drugs through appropriate legislations and watch dogs. This is not the case in most developing countries due to financial burdens resulting from unstable economy.

It is however surprising that the respondents perceived that the government aren't doing enough in substance abuse publicity. The rating of the respondents showed that unlike their perception concerning the involvement of the media, educational institutions and NGOs in substance abuse publicity being good, to very good and excellent, they think that government performance was within the scale of 1&2 for a scale of 5 points. This is a poor performance perception. It is important to know why the respondents were of this opinion. Much is expected from the government particularly where

enforcement is solely the responsibility of the federal agencies. This perception is worrisome because the respondents rated the government second to NGOs in sponsorship of substance abuse publicity in the public domain.

The NGOs were perceived to have the highest sponsorship of substance abuse publicity in the public domain. The success of NGOs in sponsorship of substance abuse publicity should be studied. The reasons why they scored a high rating should be documented and see the possibility of translation into the work plan of the federal agencies. According to the respondents, the social media seems to be playing a significant role in creating awareness among the youths regarding the challenges of indulgence in substance abuse. To reach the Gen Zs, the social media is an important tool (Onyenekwe & Onyenekwe, 2024a) because they are glued to the media 24/7. Developing contents on substance abuse and disseminating such as commercial breaks in the new media may be a better way to reach out to the targeted audience.

The media, educational institutions, NGOs and government have concerted roles to play in substance abuse publicity. It is the finding of this study that the NGOs are leading in the substance abuse publicity in Nigeria, followed by the Educational Institutions, Media and lastly the government. Could the expected outcome be significantly attained if the involvement is rated in reverse order is a puzzle to be solved.

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Table 1: Performance rating of substance abuse publicity by media, educational, NGOs and Government agencies

Agencies	Media (%)	Educational (%)	NGOs (%)	Government (%)	Chi-square	p-value
Poor	7 (6.5%)	6 (5.6%)	1 (0.9%)	34 (31.5%)	58.020	<0.001
Fair	18 (16.7%)	15 (13.9%)	14 (13.0%)	30 (27.8%)	23.764	<0.001
Good	40 (37.0%)	35 (32.4%)	35 (32.4%)	21 (19.4%)	6.130	0.105
Very good	26 (24.1%)	30 (27.8%)	40 37.0%)	13 12.0%	13.752	<0.001
Excellent	13 (12.0%)	18 (16.7%)	14 (13.0%)	5 (4.6%)	7.120	0.068
Chi-square	31.481	28.019	50.712	27.631		
p-value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001		

Table 2: Perception on Sponsorship of substance abuse publicity in the public domain

Sponsors	Rating (%)
Government	27 (25.0%)
Individuals	17 (15.7%)
NGOs	35 (32.4%)
Social Media	22 (20.4%)
Chi-square	7.000
p-value	>0.05