

Participatory Communication as a Viable Tool for Communicating the Negative Impacts of Drug Abuse in Lafia Local Government of Nasarawa State

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Abstract

The Nigerian nation has been faced by avalanches of social issues over the years. Some of these social menace includes drug abuse and trafficking. By extension, the aforementioned problems have in the recent years fuelled other problems like abnormal and criminal behaviours such as armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism and formation of local gangs and cultist groups, which have become a threat to a healthy and peaceful society. Thus, the need to solve the problem of drug abuse and trafficking has been one of the major concerns of the Nigerian nation in the recent times. Hence, many agencies including Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency among others have been established to control the issues of drug abuse and trafficking across the country. The media agencies such as radio, television and newspapers have equally been used as attempts to address the problems. However, in face of all these means, the problem of drug abuse and trafficking seems to be on the increase across the country. Many studies have argued that participatory communication has the potential to mitigate different forms of social issues. Hence, this work, through the use of evaluative approach of the qualitative methodology, is undertaken to interrogate the potential of participatory communication in addressing the issues of drug abuse and its related consequences upon the youths of Lafia Local Government Area, Nassarawa State. Among other things, the findings have revealed that drug abuse and its related consequences have serious negative impacts on the youths of Lafia Local Government Area of Nassarawa State, and participatory communication is a viable approach that can be used to mitigate the problems. Therefore, valuable recommendations were made accordingly.

Key words: Participatory; Communication; Drug; Abuse; Impact

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INTRODUCTION

This study is set to investigate the problem of drug abuse among youths in Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State through participatory communication approach. Apparently, drug is meant to cure sickness and make life healthy. In other words, drug is meant for beneficent therapeutic purposes, but when it is abused, it becomes harmful to human health. Drug abuse is the excessive, maladaptive or addictive use of drugs for no medical purpose. This menace is emerging as a global public health issue, with every part of the world having a fair share of it. It has been a major threat that cut across almost all spheres of life. It has been argued that, in recent times:

Cultural differences has gotten almost nothing to do with drug abuse, likewise gender hadn't been a factor as both males and females engage in this anti-social behaviour. The recent world drug report-2021 of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that around 275 million people, 5.5 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 64 years, had used drugs in the previous year, while over 36.3 million people or 13 per cent of the total number of persons who use drugs, suffer from drug use disorders. (Akinfeleye, A.,1989)

Indeed, the problem of drug abuse has become a prevailing phenomenon around the world, and more disturbing is the rate of involvement of the youth population in this damaging behaviour which poses a

great threat to the entire society. For many studies have revealed that drug abuse has a number of negative effects on both human being and the society in general. Apart from the tragic personal implications of its global scourge, illicit drug pandemic has been observed to have huge impact on health and social services of the modern society. While the advanced countries claimed to have conquered hunger and put diseases under control, it is on record that they have not been able to overcome the threat and evil consequences of illicit drug menace. In the modern world, there is no nation or society where illicit drug is not a threat. The global illicit drug phenomenon has grouped the world into three apparent categories. According to Bacon, A. and Dawson, A. (2010):

These groups are the illicit drug producing nations, illicit drug transit nations and illicit drugs consuming nations. Each country in the world inevitably finds itself in one of the classifications and the consequences of belonging to any of the groups are grave. Consequently, what the modern world does not have is the convenience of drug free nations or societies.

According to Udo, C. O. and Suleiman, M. B. (2015), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2005) reports that 'a total of 170 million people around the world are addicted to cannabis smoking alone, while another 15 million people are into heroin consumption.' More alarming was another report from the United Nations indicating that the relationship between illicit drugs and HIV/AIDS produces more deaths in Africa annually than the perennial wars on the continent put together could do in ten years. According to www.webmd.com, substance abuse differs from addiction, where many people have problems quitting that may change their unhealthy life. In addition, both legal and illegal drugs have chemicals that can alter the workings of the body and mind. Abusers, based on their feelings and/or beliefs, are prone to having a pleasurable 'high,' ease their stress, or feel that they can avoid problems in their lives. Therefore, all this forms part of especially that drug abuse is when one takes drugs that are not legal. It is also when one uses alcohol, prescription medicine, or another legal substance too much or in the wrong way.

Reports have it that Nigeria was a relatively drug-safe country until the explosion of the cocaine regime that happened in Europe and the United States of America in the 1980s. Prior to that period, there were cases of drugs in the class of 'Zakami' (the hair-like thorny plant) whose seeds were soaked in drinks during occasions to cause intoxication among the youths as a form of fun. Now, the youth have regressed to using poisonous gases, liquids, and substances, including overdosing themselves with cough syrups like Benelyn with Codeine, Neofline, and others that contain codeine. According to www.rehabspot.com, 'teenager drug abuse is one of the most serious substance abuse problems.' This presupposes that it is a real-life depiction of anti-social behavior, which has turned negative effects into a source of harm to the health

of the users and attendant violence made to themselves and innocent people around. Those involved typically start a dangerous life with alcohol as an escapist route, then cigarettes, which will make them graduate to marijuana, commonly called Indian hemp. Additionally, there is another trend in the illicit use of a pain reliever, which is a prescription drug, popularly called Tramadol, in the wrong way. In the world of drug abusers, Tramadol has become a pill serving different purposes for different users. For example, some abusers take it to get high (having an illusionary excitement that creates false confidence), while others get addicted to it to have a hallucinating effect, as some use it with a belief that it works for them as a sexual performance enhancer. In buttressing this assertion, studies have revealed that drug abuse has become very common among the youth due to some socioeconomic and political factors, as well as the breakdown of family discipline.

However, for whatever reasons drugs are abused, the fact remains that drug abuse has serious effects on human health and society in general. Hence, the need to curb the situation is sacrosanct. Worldwide, participatory communication has been used as a viable tool for many years. It has been argued that, "it engages people in the process from community research, through drama formation to rehearsals, performance, and discussion. Through these processes, community members become abreast of the knowledge and skills to tackle their challenges without relying on the government..." (Jerry Odeh and Akura Jacob, 14). This is done through the help of catalysts who visit the community, stay with them, and gather data that would be analyzed and dissected for viable results to the identified problems of the community. Thus, this work strives to examine the potentials of participatory communication in mobilizing the youth, particularly the youth of Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, against the problems of drug abuse and trafficking in the area.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is underpinned by Reason Action Theory. The theory of reasoned action explains the nexus between attitudes, behaviours and activities that may influence an individual and by extension, the society negatively. It is therefore, used as an approach to predict and evaluate attitudes and intentions to exhibit certain behaviours. This is directly connected to individuals' decision to engage in deviant behaviours or avert damnable practices. The outcome however, is evident in the perception of an individual especially when individual perspectives are negatively influence.

The theory is hinged on the suggestions that individual behaviour is determined by personal intentions to exhibit certain behaviour that turns out to affect their attitude which is critically analysed under the lens of societal

subjective norms. These norms justify or frown at behaviours i.e. in the case of drug abuse; societal norms and values frown at illicit consumption and addiction to substances. In this context, the theory explains that involvement in drug trafficking and abuse are actions that are personal and the results are evident in the deviant actions and reactions of drug paddlers and abusers.

CONCEPT OF DRUG ABUSE

Drug has been defined according to Merriam Webster dictionary as a substance used as medication or in the preparation of medication. It is a substance intended for use in the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment, or prevention of disease. It is also understood as a substance other than food intended to affect the structure or function of the body. Okoye (2001) as cited by Fareo (2012) defines drug as a substance that could bring about a change in the biological function through its chemical actions. Fawa (2003) defines drug as a substance which is used in the treatment or prevention of disease in man or animal. It alters the body function either positively or otherwise depending on the body composition of the consumer, the type of drug used, the amount used and weather used singly or with other drugs at the same time. Thus understood, drug is meant to alter the body system with the view of restoring bodily equilibrium. Drug in itself therefore does not constitute any danger because when drug is correctly administered is a blessing in restoring normalcy to man's health. Drugs could be identified in its natural form as in herbs, leaves and plants or in its synthetic form as manufactured substance that brings relief to health.

On the flip side drug abuse comes in the misapplication of drugs or deliberate use of drugs to elicit certain feelings and sensation that usher in a plethora of effects and consequences. Fareo (2012) has stated various definitions of drug abuse thus; NAFDAC (2000) as cited by Haladu (2003) explained the term drug abuse as excessive and persistent self-administration of a drug without regard to the medically or culturally accepted patterns. It could also be viewed as the use of a drug to the extent that it interferes with the health and social function of an individual. National Institute of Drug Abuse (2010). defined drug abuse as the non-medical use of a drug that interferes with a healthy and productive life. National Drug Law Enforcement Agency. (2010) defined drug abuse as the excessive, maladaptive or addictive use of drugs for non-medical purpose. Abdulahi (2009) viewed drug abuse as the use of drugs to the extent that interferes with the health and social function of an individual. Summarily the author states that; In essence, drug abuse may be defined as the arbitrary overdependence or misuse of one particular drug with or without a prior medical diagnosis from qualified health practitioners. It can also be viewed as the unlawful overdose in the use of drug(s).

There is no best accepted definition of drug abuse rather all the definitions serve their various intentions.

However, Muslim Rights Concern. (2018), stresses a note of importance that substance and drug abuse are used interchangeably. Substance can be conceptualized from one of the following perspectives; legal, social, medical or pharmacology respectively. In law a drug or a substance is referred to as a chemical substance whose possession is against the law of the land. In sociology drugs are collectively defined as substances prescribed by the medical profession which includes other drugs, the production and use of are sanctioned by custom or law. In pharmacology, a drug is any substance, other than food, that by its chemical and physical nature alter structure and function of any living organism. What is clear from the various definitions of drug abuse and the concepts of drug and substance is that drug abuse or substance abuse does great harm to the psyche and functionality of the user and consequently the effects go beyond users, spiraling over into larger society, imposing social and economic consequences.

ISSUES OF DRUG ABUSE IN NASARAWA STATE AND THE POTENTIAL OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN MITIGATING THE MENACE

Apparently, drug abuse is one of the major burning social issues facing the globe today. Experts are, however, of the view that every country in the world has one drug-related issue or another. There are three problems about drugs: it is either a country is a producer, a consumer, or a transit nation. Nigeria today is regarded as a transit nation for cocaine and heroin, even though there is a very large percentage of marijuana production and consumption, Udo and Suleiman (2015). Like other parts of the Nigerian nation, Lafia Local Government Area of Nassarawa State has been bedevilled by the issues of drug abuse. According to (Ethan, 2017),

Lafia Metropolis has a serious drug abuse problem, reported by the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA; 2010) to include stimulant and depressant drugs. The pattern and trend report of drug abuse in the Metropolis in 2016 showed an increase in the number of youths arrested on account of drug use. Drugs that were commonly abused include trama dol, opiate, cannabis, amphetamines, barbiturate, benzodiaz epines (Valium), and bromazepam (Lexotan).

In the same vein, it has been argued that, "drug consumption pattern in the Metropolis differs. While smoking, drinking, and injection are common, depending on the type of drugs involved (Ibrahim, 2016), the West African Commission on Drugs (WACD; 2014) indicated that many consumers take a mixture of cannabis with alcohol (known in ingroup language as combined). Others

drink a mixture of codeine and tramadol (known in ingroup language as Reliefine). Other combinations which are popular among street boys include a mixture of lizard dung with lacasera and inhaling of paint and latrine. The smoking of PawPaw leaves and the seeds of “Zakami” (*Datura metel*) also serves as a stimulant. It is debatable which of these drugs is mostly used by the youths, but the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC; 2012) has argued that cannabis smokers are likely to take any other drugs, especially when their chosen drug is scarce (G. M. Smith, 1977).

However, it is important to note that several factors contribute to the issues of drug abuse in the area. In addition to ignorance, there are numerous possible explanations for the increasing drug use among the youths in the Metropolis. These factors include poor parental control, the availability of drugs in the Metropolis, and easy access to drugs. Each of these factors tends to reinforce the others, creating several negative impacts on the people of the area. Among other things, drug abuse creates serious distortions in the users’ consciousness. The UNODC (2014) estimated 183,000 drug-related deaths worldwide in 2012. Apart from the increase in the number of patients hospitalized due to drug abuse, addiction, and dependence, drug use is associated with impaired coordination and the loss of capacity for self-control (WACD, 2014).

Drugs can damage brain cells and lead to the brain shrinking, resulting in organic brain damage (Ejikeme, 2010). Stimulants such as drugs that activate the central nervous system can cause restlessness, nervousness, increased aggressiveness, and anxiety beyond the control of the user (Lahey, 2004). Many researchers have also agreed that emotional breakdown and the inability to control oneself due to drug abuse are associated with inner peace crises, crime, and youth violence (Klantschnig, 2013; Origer, 1999; Origer & Cloos, 2003). This is because drugs are not only taken for the purpose of getting high, happy, or relaxed but also to be bold, fearless, and for strength, as well as self-confidence (Moses U. et al., 2019). The authors further elaborated that:

These illusions drive drug use and abuse. When eventually addiction sets in, some youths have to resort to stealing like pickpocketing, armed robbery, burglary, and property theft and other illegal sources to acquire money to sustain their drug habits. In Lafia Metropolis, violent activities of youths suspected to be greatly enhanced by illicit drugs have increased in recent times. Availability and the ease with which drugs are accessible in the Metropolis have made the drug culture to gain wide grounds despite incessant spot check embarked upon by officials of the NDLEA. When youths influenced by drugs become hindrances to peace and security in the society, the impact of drug use and abuse goes beyond health distortion to affect even the economy and security of the people.

It is therefore important to remphasise that the abuse of illicit drugs has been attributed a number of factors such as ignorance, poor parental control, availability of drugs in the Metropolis, and easy access to drugs. Hence, an attempt to mitigate the problem must centre directly on how to influence the aforementioned factors. In this context, behavioural change approach like participatory communication method seems to be very important. Participatory communication can be seen as a method based on dialogue that allows information, perceptions, and opinions to be shared between different actors, thus promoting empowerment among community members. Participatory communication is not just about sharing the information, it further helps us to explore the new knowledge and application of this new and past knowledge to address the problem they face (Porio, 1990; Tufte and Mefalopoulos, 2009). Many works of literature described the participatory communication in the development activity or the program/project cycle by embracing the participation. As the development activity wasn’t gain success (to fulfill their objective) in the 1970/ the 80s, the concept of participatory arose as discussed above (Huesca, 2003). Different scholars believed that proper application of the communication tools and techniques along with the contextual environment, and engagement of all the stakeholders should be considered while planning or developing the activity. Engagement of all stakeholders from the beginning to the end of the project not only helps to achieve a better result but also helps to empower them by fulfilling the social function and by giving a voice and feasible alternative to existing problems.

Based on the above potentials and nature of participatory communication pointed, it is sacrosanct to say that the approach could be a viable tool can be used to mitigate the issues of drug abuse in Lafia Local Government Area of Nassarawa State. It is clear from the above discussion that the factors responsible for the problems are attitudinal, hence, enlightenment of the people through participatory communication can bring about the needed change of attitudes that can reduce or eradicate the problem. In other words, attitudinal change seems be one of the major ways to address the aforementioned problems. The people’ such as ignorance, poor parental control, availability of drugs in the Metropolis, and easy access to drugs have been identified as some of the major causes of their problems. Hence, the need for them to change in this regard is sacrosanct. Participatory communication can play a very significant role in this context. Participatory communication both in theory and practice usually involves a number of steps- data collection, drama formation, scenario development, performance and post-performance engagements as well as follow up exercises. Apart from these, the practitioners normally make the people to be involved in the entire processes; they equally make use of the people’s

language, song, and costumes among other things to communicate to them for socio-economic and political transformation. According to Jamila and Victor in Jerry and Jacob ,”as a tool that can be adaptable to facilitate diverse community based issues, the approach lends itself as a “thermostat” of change. As thermostat, it is capable of initiating sustainable change while its methods can be changed themselves in the process of initiating development” (98). In the same vein, Daniel posits that participatory communication is, “an avenue where community members get the opportunity to identify their own problems and issues that concern them and through discussions lay down strategies to overcome them”(56). Thus, this study strives to suggest urgent needs for participatory communication practitioners to engage the people of Lafia Local Government Area in participatory communication activities for possible and collective fight against the issues of drug abuse in the area.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

The study to some extent has delved into the menace of drug abuse and its implications on life, health, economy as well as security and crimes in Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. Using participatory communication to address this issue is apt to bring about changes in perception, responsible communication and developing choices of responses or communication in a given situation. It presupposes that participatory communication works on the principle that everyone has all the resources they need to make positive changes in their own lives. The study has, as a result, come to a conclusion that sensitisation/advocacy, establishment of Anti-Drug Clubs, special Anti-Drug Agency will help to curb or minimise the effects of the pangs of drug menace in Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations seems important:

- Since poor parental upbringing is seen as one of the major factors responsible for issues of drug abuse in Lafia Local Government Area of Nassarawa State, parents/guidance should take their responsibility of bringing up their children more seriously.
- Availability and accessibility of drug has also be identified as another factor responsible for the issues of drug abuse in the area. Hence, government, stakeholders and concern agencies should intensify their efforts in the fight against drug supply, consumption and abuse in the area.
- Similarly, ignorance has been pointed out as another factors responsible for the problem of drug abuse in the area. In this regard, the media and all levels of education

have serious roles to play in educating the people about the dangers of drug abuse.

- The last but not the least, participatory communication has been viewed as a potent instrument that can be employed to address the issues of drug abuse in the area. Thus, government and non-government agencies should use the approach in communicating the problem.

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