

FIGHTING DRUG ABUSE WITH INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION – THE PRE-REQUISITES

PROF. ANGELA NKIRU NWAMMUO

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University,
Igbariam Campus, Anambra State.

GSM: +2348036769099 Email: angelanwammuo59@gmail.com

FRANCA EBELE ONONUJU

Anambra Broadcasting Service
Onitsha, Anambra State

GSM: +2348034902965, Email: ebeleononuju30@gmail.com

Abstract

In contemporary Nigerian society, drug abuse among has assumed an alarming dimension, especially among the youth. Although the phenomenon is a global issue, yet the recently discovered chemical substance, methamphetamine, and the rate at which Nigerian youth indulge in taking it has placed Nigeria at a high risk. It therefore becomes imperative to wage war against this deadly social vice, hence the need for the application of interpersonal communication approach. This is premised against the background that drug abuse is an environmental and community related issue and therefore needs a personal approach. The study is anchored on the Behavioural Change Communication Model (BCCM) and the theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)/Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB); aimed at finding out the interpersonal factors responsible for drug abuse among youth and the condition sine quo none for addressing the issue with interpersonal communication, this study adopted a phenomenological approach of semi-structured in-depth interviews, using the people of Ozubulu, in Ekwusigo Local Government Area in Anambra State. Result showed that there is significant relationship between interpersonal communication and health education.

KEY WORDS: Abuse, Communication, Drug Fighting, Interpersonal.

Background

The United Nations Office on Crimes and Drugs, UNODC (2019) recognizes drug abuse as a global phenomenon, and pointed out that the drug abuse is more prevalent among the youth. According to UNODC (2020), some 285million people or 50 percent of the total world's population age between 15 and 64 years have used drugs. The report further says that no nation has been immuned to the devastating effects of the drug abuse. In sub-Sahara Africa, 4.6% of the people abuse drug/substance with West and Central Africa having the highest percentage of 55.5% (UNODC, 2022). The report adds that cannabis, Amphetamin-type stimulants (ATS), and benzodiazepines are the most widely used illicit drugs in African region. In Nigeria, the report by the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crimes, UNODC (2022) reveals that 14.4% (14.3million) of people aged 15-64 years abuse drugs. While corroborating the foregoing statistics, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, NDLEA, (2022) adds that the recent statistics have revealed that 40% of Nigeria youth within the age bracket of 18 and 35 years are deeply involved in the abuse of drugs (substance). In view of the forgoing development, there is an intensified intervention to mitigate the scourge, hence the need to evaluate the relevance of interpersonal communication

Effective Interpersonal Communication (IPC) between health educators and clients (victims of drug abuse) is one of the most important elements for generating acceptable compliance and expected behavioural change. The understanding between the health educator and the victims of substance abuse is the necessary expected compliance therapeutic measures. The need for interpersonal communication approach for health intervention programmes followed the frantic efforts of the World Health Organization and other international donor agencies to enhance access to basic health services in developing countries (WHO,

2020). This was propelled by the study which revealed that the quality of care research that has been done shows that health counseling and provider-client communication are consistently weak across countries, regions, and health services (WHO, 2020). There is therefore empirical evidence that patients' satisfaction, recall of information, compliance with therapeutic regimens, and appointment keeping, as well as improvements in psychological markers and functional status measures have all been linked to provider-client communication.

Without doubts, better communication leads to expected dialogue, which enables patients to disclose critical information about themselves, to make more accurate diagnosis and prescription. Good communication enhances health care education and counseling, resulting in more appropriate treatment regimes and better patient compliance. For these reasons therefore interpersonal communication, as tool for improving health care outcome, is imperative in the anti-drug abuse wars in rural communities in Nigeria. This is with particular recourse to the fact that victims of drug abuse are vulnerable to healthy-related ailments. The forgoing background therefore gave rise to this present study.

Statement of the Problem

Proper health education is a sine qua non in public health interventions. This is because for compliance with therapeutic regimens to be achieved, there must be sufficient awareness of the perceived problem. Such general public awareness must be followed by strategic didactic approaches aimed at equipping the target clients with full knowledge about the particular case. This is much so because health education is not a one-off issue that only media campaign can achieve. Therefore, in order to elicit the expected buy-in from the clients, a communication strategy that ensures provider-client interaction is germane. It is for this reason that the interpersonal communication approach is considered very important in the fight against drug abuse. The significant relationship between interpersonal communication and development of positive attitude for health intervention is yet not known, hence this study.

Objective of the Paper

The general objective of this paper is to assess the pre-requisites of the use of interpersonal communication in fighting drug abuse. The specific objectives of the paper are:

- (1) To find out the relationship between interpersonal communication and health education.
- (2) To find out if interpersonal communication will add premium to the campaign against drug abuse.
- (3) To ascertain the pre-requisites of interpersonal communication in the campaign against drug abuse.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)/Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Social and Behaviour Change Communication Model.

Behavior Change Communication Model (BCCM)/Social and Communication Change Model (SCCM): BCC is an interactive process of any intervention with individuals, groups or community to develop communication strategy to promote positive health behaviours which are appropriate to a current social condition and thereby help the society to mitigate their pressing health challenges (Nancy and Dongre 2021). This is achieved through the effective communication strategies and systematic information dissemination through interpersonal communication as well as with the help of print-visual-audio and the social media. According to Nancy et al (2021), BCC is traced to 1792 when the concept of Health Education was developed and used extensively in the 1980s as a cost-effective intervention for disseminating information for disease prevention. In 1990, Information for Education and Communication (IEC) came into the force in order to plug the existing gap in Health Education (Nancy, et al 2021).

The World Health Organization WHO (2020), avers that IEC is an approval while attempts to change or reinforce a set of behaviours in a target audience regarding a specific problem in a predefined period of time. UNODC (2020) reveals that IEC gradually evolved to Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and became an Integral part of the BCC. At this point, IEC is substantially concerned with awareness generation while BCC goes one step forward and its action-oriented. The National Health Mission NHM (2020) informs that BCC is based on an analog which symbolizes emotional side, as the elephant, rational/analytical side,

as path as the path. In that analog, the BCC is primarily concerned with creating a conducive environment which will enable people to change their behaviour, from the negative to the positive side. Thus BCC is a communication strategy which encourages individuals/community to change their behaviour; it is a strategy that triggers people/society/communities to adopt healthy, beneficial and positive behavioural practices; BCC is an effective communication approach, which helps to promote changes in knowledge, attitudes, norms, beliefs and behaviour.

As an interactive process with communities (as incorporated with the general programme), to create custom-fitted messages and methodologies, utilizing an assortment of correspondence channels to create positive practices, BCC is considered suitable for the war against drug abuse using the interpersonal communication approach. It is for its wide application in healthy risk communication that it later changed to social and change communication (SCC).

Theory of Reasoned Action, TRA/Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB): The TRA was developed by Fishbein Ajzen in 1975 and later introduced the TPA in 1994 to accommodate the perceived behavioural control. Mackenzie (2015) informs the TRA/TPB suggest that a person's health behaviour is determined by the intervention to perform behaviour, and that the intention to perform a behaviour is predicted by: (1) a person's attitude toward the behaviour, and (2) subjective norms regarding the behaviour. Mackenzie (2025) adds that subjective norms are the results social and environmental, surroundings and a person's perceived control over the behaviour. The TRA/TPB provides useful information for predicting health behaviour and for planning and implementing health promotion and disease prevention programmes. This explains their useful application to this study.

A General Overview of Drug Abuse

Drug abuse/misuse is defined by the World Health Organization WHO (2006), as the use of substance for a purpose not consistent with legal or medical guidelines. A similar definition, by the Encyclopedia Britannica (2023), states that the excessive, maladaptive or addictive use of drugs for non-medical purposes, despite social, psychological, and physical problems that may arise from such use is referred to as drug abuse. The National Cancer Institute NCI (2015) explains that the use of illegal drugs or the use of prescription or over-the-counter drugs for purposes other than those for which they are meant to be used or in excessive amount. **Substance abuse**, also known as **drug abuse**, is the use of a drug in amounts or by methods that are harmful to the individual or others. It is a form of substance-related disorder.

A universally agreed definition of the term, drug abuse is a utopia. For instance, Edward and Arof (1980), cited in UNODC (2020) defined it as use of drug, which is viewed as posing a problem by the society concerned as the unspecified use of a drug other than for legitimate purposes. Differing definitions of drug abuse are used in public health, medical, and criminal justice contexts. In some cases, criminal or anti-social behavior occurs when the person is under the influence of a drug, and long-term personality changes in individuals may also occur. In addition to possible physical, social, and psychological harm, the use of some drugs may also lead to criminal penalties, although these vary widely depending on the local jurisdiction. However, the common factors among the varied definitions of drug abuse are: illegality, over-used, socially not acceptable; harmful to the body.

In 1966, the American Medical Association's Committee on Alcoholism and Addiction defined abuse of stimulants (amphetamines), primarily in terms of 'Medical Supervision':

...'use' refers to the proper place of stimulants in medical practice; 'misuse' applies to the physician's role in initiating a potentially dangerous course of therapy; and 'abuse' refers to self-administration of these drugs without medical supervision and particularly in large doses that may lead to psychological dependency, tolerance and abnormal behavior.

In 1972, the American Psychiatric Association created a definition that used legality, social acceptability, and cultural familiarity as qualifying factors:

...as a general rule, we reserve the term drug abuse to apply to the illegal, nonmedical use of a limited number of substances, most of them drugs, which have properties of altering the mental state in ways that are considered by social norms and defined by statute to be inappropriate, undesirable, harmful, threatening, or, at minimum, culture-alien.

In 1973, the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse stated:

...drug abuse may refer to any type of drug or chemical without regard to its pharmacologic actions. It is an eclectic concept having only one uniform connotation: societal disapproval.

... The Commission believes that the term drug abuse must be deleted from official pronouncements and public policy dialogue. The term has no functional utility and has become no more than an arbitrary codeword for that drug use which is presently considered wrong.

But generally speaking, when people talk about drug/substance abuse, they are referring to the use of illegal drugs, which do more than alter mood but closed judgement, distort perceptions, and alter reaction sometimes. Thus drug abuse is associated with death risks, which include: Drugs most often associated with alcohol, amphetamines, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens (although there is no known *psychedelic*, one of the three categories of hallucinogens, that has been found to have any addictive potential), methaqualone, and opioids. The exact cause of substance abuse is not clear, but there are two predominant theories: either a genetic predisposition or a habit learned from others, which, if addiction develops, manifests itself as a chronic debilitating disease. Drug abuse, including alcohol and prescription drugs, can induce symptomatology which resembles mental illness. This can occur both in the intoxicated state and also during withdrawal. In some cases, substance-induced psychiatric disorders can persist long after detoxification, such as prolonged psychosis or depression after amphetamine or cocaine abuse. A protracted withdrawal syndrome can also occur with symptoms persisting for months after cessation of use. Benzodiazepines are the most notable drug for inducing prolonged withdrawal effects with symptoms sometimes persisting for years after cessation of use. Both alcohol, barbiturate as well as benzodiazepine withdrawal can potentially be fatal. Abuse of hallucinogens, although extremely unlikely, may in some individuals trigger delusional and other psychotic phenomena long after cessation of use. This is mainly a risk with deliriants, and most unlikely with psychedelics and dissociatives. The health risks and social deviant associated with drug abuse are the reasons for concerted campaigns against the scourge. There were global media campaigns, moderated by the WHO, UNICEF, USAID, UNFPA, UNODC and other international donor agencies. These global media campaigns are replicated both regionally and nationally. However, given that public health education and sensitization of this nature is not a one-off affair, it becomes necessary to adopt an integrated inter-personal communication approach. This explains the need understand what interpersonal communication is.

Understanding interpersonal Communication

Okunna (2013) states that interpersonal Communication is the process by which two or more individuals exchange thoughts, feelings, and information, adding that the use of verbal and nonverbal clues, including body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions, is essential to this dynamic and complex process. According to Okunna (2013), Interpersonal Communication can occur in a variety of situations, including in-person interactions, phone calls, emails, and text messages. The success of Interpersonal Communication depends on several variables, including the capacity for active listening, comprehension of the viewpoints and feelings of others, and effective communication. Individual differences like personality and communication style, cultural norms, values, and expectations also impact Interpersonal Communication. The use of Interpersonal Communication will lead to building strong relationships, resolving conflicts, increasing job satisfaction, improved teamwork, Persuasion, and negotiation, managing stress, achieving personal goals, among others.

Effective Interpersonal Communication requires a combination of verbal, nonverbal, and written skills, and an understanding of the context in which communication occurs. Each type of Interpersonal Communication serves a different purpose and is used in various situations. Understanding the different types and using them effectively is important for building and maintaining relationships, both personal and professional.

Below are the various types of Interpersonal Communication:

- Verbal communication- In this form of communication, messages are communicated verbally. It can be further classified into direct and indirect communication.
- Nonverbal communication- In nonverbal communication, messages and emotions are expressed through body language, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact.
- Written communication- Written words are used to communicate messages in this sort of communication. Letters, emails, and text messages are a few examples of written communication.
- Interpersonal relationships- This category of communication refers to ongoing interactions between people, such as friendships, romantic relationships, and family relations.
- Public speaking- Speaking in front of a crowd, as during a speech or presentation, is referred to as public speaking.

Principles of Interpersonal Communication

Effective Interpersonal Communication and the development of strong relationships depend on understanding and following its principles. It takes paying attention to the language we use, being in the moment, and understanding how context and nonverbal clues affect communication. The under-listed are the guiding principles:

- Perceptual differences- People have different perspectives, experiences, and biases that shape how they perceive and interpret messages. This means that two people can experience the same situation differently and it is important to be aware of these differences when communicating. This can help in avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts.
- Mutual influence- Communication can shape and reshape interactions, ideas, and actions. This implies that how and what we say can have a significant influence on the people with whom we interact. This highlights how crucial it is to communicate effectively by paying attention to both our words and nonverbal signs.
- Contextual factors- Contextual factors also play a significant role in interpersonal communication. The physical environment, cultural norms, and social context can all influence how messages are received and interpreted. Understanding these contextual factors can help us to adjust our communication style and tailor our messages to the specific situation.
- Verbal and nonverbal communication- When delivering messages and forming connections, both verbal and nonverbal communication is crucial. In comparison to nonverbal communication, which includes body language, facial expressions, and voice tone, verbal communication refers to the use of words. Effective Interpersonal Communication depends on having a solid understanding of nonverbal cues.
- Active listening- Another main principle of Interpersonal Communication is active listening. It includes paying attention, understanding, and reacting to messages, which is necessary for effective communication. This involves being in the present, trying to put down other things, and paying close attention to the speaker.
- Clarity and conciseness- Another crucial principles of Interpersonal Communication include being concise and clear. It takes simple, easy-to-understand concepts that are clear and straightforward to effectively communicate. This demands using clear language, avoiding slang and technical phrases, and being respectful of the other person's understanding capacity.
- Empathy- This principle of empathy includes understanding the feelings, thoughts, and viewpoints of another person by placing oneself in their position. Relationships can be strengthened and trust can be developed by doing this.
- Feedback- Since communication is a two-way process, it is crucial to receive and analyze feedback appropriately.

Elements of Interpersonal Communication

The significant components that make up the communication process are generally referred to as Interpersonal Communication elements. Some of the critical elements of Interpersonal Communication include:

- Message- The message is the information being communicated, which can be verbal or nonverbal.
- Sender- The sender is the person who originates the message and is responsible for conveying it to the receiver.
- Receiver- The receiver is the person who receives the message from the sender.
- Context- Context refers to the physical, social, and cultural factors that influence the communication process, such as time, place, and audience.
- Channel- The channel refers to the medium through which the message is transmitted, such as face-to-face conversation, phone, email, or text.
- Feedback- Feedback is the response to a message, which can be verbal or nonverbal, and helps to confirm that the message has been received and understood.
- Interpersonal relationship- The relationship between the sender and receiver can influence the communication process and impact the way messages are interpreted.
- Noise- Noise refers to any interference or disruption in the communication process that can cause a message to be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

Knowing the basic principles of Interpersonal Communication, such as clarity and conciseness, active listening, empathy, and mutual influence, is crucial for effective communication. Moreover, knowledge of the Interpersonal Communication elements- sender, receiver, channel, context, feedback, noise, and interpersonal relationship- can help improve communication skills and develop healthy interpersonal relationships. Effective Interpersonal Communication is more crucial than ever in our connected world. And, these principles and elements in mind can help you successfully deal with the difficulties and challenges of communication. Moreover, it will establish successful relationships in both your personal and professional lives.

Methodology

Qualitative research approach was adopted for this paper. The area of study is Ozubulu, in Ekwusigo Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of the study is the ten-man executive members of the Ozubulu Development Union, under the leadership of Chief Chris Ononuju. In-depth interviews were conducted with the President-General and the Secretary General on Friday 9th and Saturday 10th June, 2023 at the Ozubulu Civic Centre. The explanation building technique was used to present the garnered data, as chronicled below.

Results/findings

What are your positions on the activities of the Local Government's Health Educators and Public Enlightenment Agencies? All the respondents affirmed that the activities of these persons were noticeable and well-appreciated in the host communities

What explanations can you offer about the activities of these health workers on the incidences of drug abuse among adolescents in rural communities? The respondents explained that the health workers were really doing great work in carrying out sensitization campaign against drug abuse in the area. The respondents also explained that the health educators were educating the general populace on the danger of drug abuse, as well as discouraging indulgence in the practice.

What strategies do these health personnel adopt in their activities: *In their separate responses, the interviewee mentioned community dialogue, open space campaign, motorized street campaigns, public space campaigns, advocacy campaign, town hall meetings, community theatre, focus group discussion, key life events, etc as the adopted strategies.*

What are your perceptions that proper personal engagement with the victims can yield a better result: All the respondents said that one-on-one interaction with the victims was a better solution to the menace of drug abuse. They revealed that holding group discussion with them periodically would suffice

Do you see any linkage between the campaign against drug abuse and communication? The respondents agreed to this statement.

How would you describe the relationship between the above identified strategies and anti-drug campaigns? The respondents were unanimous in positing that the relationship was inextricable and indispensable. They argued that no attitude change programme that had defied the applications of these communication strategies.

The findings of the study clearly demonstrated that:

- i. There is significant relationship between interpersonal communication and health education.
- ii. Interpersonal communication added noteworthy premium to the campaign against drug abuse.
- iii. That interpersonal communication remained absolutely important in reaching people and fighting drug abuse.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper evaluated the influence of interpersonal communication in the campaign against drug abuse. The study is borne out of the idea that drug abuse is a societal and environmental quagmire. This paper is premised against the background that communication is the magic wand for effective health education. Findings of the study revealed that interpersonal communication approaches remain very effective in the anti-drug campaigns.

It is based on the foregoing that the researchers recommend that:

- Communication and campaign managers pay attention to the importance of employing interpersonal communication in reaching the youth of communities, towards the eradicating the problem of drug addiction.
- Furthermore, the researchers also recommend health communication and campaign officers find a way to reach on one-on-one bases, the youth of communities, especially rural communities, and educate them of the destructive nature of drug consumption.
- In addition, it is also the view of the researchers that while health campaign managers employ multi-communication strategies in reaching different youths of communities on the importance of running away from the destructive hands of drugs, interpersonal communication should be given priority, especially in rural communities, as this form of communication has been proven to be immensely effective.

References

- Nancy, S. and Dongry, A. R. (2021). Behaviour Change Communication (BCC): Past, present and future. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*, 46(2): 186-190. Doi:10.4103/ijim.IJCM.441-20
- World Health Organization WHO (2020). Emerging Infectious Diseases. <https://www.who.int/doistores/world-health-clay/en/document/1997>
- Mackenzie, K. R. (2015). Theories of Group Behaviours, *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 39(2): 271-273
- Thomas, J. (2017). Scholarly View on Theory: Its Nature, Practical Application and Relation to World views in Business Research. *International Journal of Behavioural Medicine*, 12(3): 231-240.
- National Health Mission, (2020), Health and Family Welfare: Importance of healthcare in communities. Retrieved from: EC/BCC <https://www.nhm.gujarat.gov.in/jec>.
- Park, K. (2019). *Importance of preventive and social medicine* (25th Ed). Jabal-Pur: Bonarasidas Bhanot publishing company.
- World Health Organisation (2020). Education for Health. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/tropis/health.education/en>.
- Duman, T. (2023). What is Drug Addiction? Retrieved from: Webmed <https://www.webmed.com>.
- National Cancer Institute NCI (2015). The challenges of drug abuse Retrieved from: https://www.google.com/search?q=National+Cancer+Institute+&sca_esv=589f26d910f43319&sxf
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (2020). Drug abuse in Nigeria – A review of epidemiological studies Retrieved from: <https://www.unodc.org/>