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Adolescents Information Behaviour of Substance Use Risks in Nigeria

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Abstract

Adolescence is a transitory period in every human developmental process. The adolescent age is characterised by changes in the world view as such are exposed to making experiments. This could be as a result of peer influence that leads to a delinquent act of substance use. Substance use among adolescents in Nigeria is increasing on the alarming rate with risks on health which has become a global issue of concern. Despite the efforts by government and non-government agencies to create awareness on the risks of substance use there still exists evidence of its widespread in all the geographical areas of the country. This can be attributed to factors such as parental upbringing, peer influence and personality. This paper will discuss the challenges and possible measure to inform adolescents on the effect of the use of substances to human wellbeing.

Keywords: Adolescent, information behaviour, substance use

Word count: 139 words

Introduction

Adolescence is a transitory period in every human developmental process. World Health Organization [WHO] (2013) defined adolescence as a developmental stage and transition from childhood into adulthood. The age characterized by this group of people according to WHO is 10 to 19 years. Adolescence has been categorized into three phases according to Melgossa (2002), as early adolescence ranging from 11-15 years, middle adolescence from 16-18 years, while 18-22 years represent late adolescence. The age seems to be an expansion to the WHO age range with three categories of adolescence involved. Adolescence is characterized by different physiological and psychological changes ranging from physical body changes in which adolescents grow at 5m per year and also experience emotional instability, also known as mood swings (Melgossa, 2002). Besides, adolescents seem to have fixed ideals they consider

very important, questioning of authority, suspicion of the adult world, creativity, and joy, energy, conformity to group, self-esteem, and insecurity. During this period maturity begins to set in while childish behaviours are set aside and experimentation of adult life becomes prominent.

Adolescents tend to detach from parents and enjoy the presence of peers and the influence of the others. Thus, adolescents have faced age affiliated challenges like an identity crisis, autonomy, sexuality, academic functioning, and peer relationships (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002). Consequently, they take different kinds of risk and experiment with different types of substances due to the crises that result from this age transition. Adolescents are present in secondary schools and tertiary institutions going by the age specified by WHO. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the perceived risks associated with the different substance use by adolescents and the information behaviour of adolescents towards seeking and utilizing the right information. The information behaviour is expected to be the conscious attempt of the adolescents to refrain from the incessant use of harmful substances by showing the risk involved with possible measures for prevention. The paper will discuss the different substances use by adolescents, the perceived risk, and the information behaviour based on the seeking pattern and the use of right information for timely decision making.

Substances

Substances in this context are a group of psychoactive drugs used to stimulate human mental activity in a bid to stay alert or active as the case may be. Uchendu and Ukonu (2016) referred to substances as drugs which when ingested, inhaled, or injected into the body have the potential to alter mood, behavior, and perception or mental functioning of an individual. These substances, when used with or without prescription by adolescents, is possibly linked with implications on health and academic performance. The prevalence of psychoactive substances is increasing among students and this has become a major public health and social issue of great concern (Silva, Malbergier, Stemliuk, and Andrade, 2006). It has been observed that school administrators in Nigeria in recent times suspend students who have been found to test positive to drugs. Sometimes, the affected students are sent for rehabilitation program before reintegration to school but in extreme cases of violence, vandalism, and other atrocities, expulsion occurs. Adolescents involved in substances possibly cut short their academic pursuit coupled with psychological imbalances.

There are different substances at the reach of adolescents some of them are alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, cocaine, and opioids. Some of the substances such as alcohol and tobacco are publicly accepted but does not reduce its hazard to human wellbeing. Alcohol is a substance regarded

as a depressant in the sense that it slows down certain functions of vital organs in human beings like the brain and other sensory organs. However, Bello and Owoaje (2010) discovered that the most common substances used by students were alcohol and tobacco (p.40). The excessive use of alcohol will possibly lead to slurred speech, unsteady movement, poor perception and redundancy in the brain functions. Also, the abuse of alcohol can predispose the users to health issues such as severe depressant effects like the inability to feel pain, toxicity where the body vomits the poison, unconsciousness, coma or death (Foundation for a Drug-Free World, 2006-2017). For students in schools and tertiary institutions, alcohol consumption can be regarded as one of the leading cause of violence because acute intoxication with alcohol can lead to aggressive and violent behaviour.

WHO (2017) referred to tobacco as products made entirely or partly as raw material, which are intended to be smoked, sucked, chewed or snuffed and contain the highly addictive psychoactive ingredient called nicotine. Tobacco is one the commonly identified substance used by students because it is attractive, affordable and accessible for easy purchase (Yusuf, 2010). It is one of the prominent substance that any adolescent experiment on since it is regarded as legal in Nigeria before migrating to the more health-threatening substance. The act of smoking tobacco could be as a result of peer, environment, parent, personal conviction about smoking and other reasons farfetched from human imagination. Smoking tobacco exposes users to health complications such as heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, chronic obstructive airways disease, cancer of different types, premature aging and wrinkling of the skin, bad breath and unpleasant odour (Henry-Edwards, Humenluk, Ali, Monteiro, Poznyak, 2003).

Cannabis, cocaine, and opioids are legally restricted for public consumption because of the harmful effect on the mental health and total wellbeing of human. Cannabis is also known as marijuana. Marijuana according to Shaul, Bernard, Kwame, Tony, and George (2013) is the highest widely used illicit substances globally. Concerning Nigeria, marijuana is one of the proliferated substances present and it could be as a result of its cultivation within the country. Marijuana in the herbal form in West Africa is the most abused substance because marijuana is locally cultivated all over the region, therefore, making it affordable (United Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2011). There are about 205 million people from global estimation who make use of one illicit substance or another with marijuana being the most commonly used (WHO, 2004). These substances are consumed by the large population of the world and are widely abused. Cannabis is one of the illicit drugs adolescents' use since it is perceived to be of little harm by many (Awosusi & Adegboyega, 2013). These substances are harmful to

human health but adolescents use at their detriment not minding the lifetime consequences that could result from its use.

Cocaine is another substance abused by many adolescents in America and the Caribbean with the highest consumers while in all parts of the world it is used but in reduced quantity. Cocaine is made from the plant called coca bush (*Erythroxylum coca*) and is grown mainly in Peru and Bolivia. It is processed to yield cocaine hydrochloride which is highly smuggled to all parts of the world. Variety of coca plant is prepared into sulfate salt in the form of basuco with a greater rate of absorption when sniffed (90-95%) makes it a more dangerous substance than hydrochloride. There are wide ranges of physical and mental health problems are associated with cocaine use (WHO, 1987). Chewing of coca leaf can lead to permanent functional brain damage resulting in a cognitive deficit (WHO, 1987). Some of the physical problems are heart racing, headache, weight loss, numbness, clammy skin, repeated scratching or picking of skin, increased risk of accidents and injury, exhaustion and reduced immunity of infection. The mental health problem includes: difficulty in sleeping, intense craving, anxiety, paranoia, depression, exhilaration and mania, aggression, difficulty remembering things, severe stress resulting from the lifestyle with significant risk of toxic complication and sudden death resulting from cardiovascular effects (Henry-Edward, Humenluk, Ali, Monteiro, & Poznyak, 2003).

Opiate is synonyms to opioids. Opiate is an analgesic used in the clinical treatment of moderate to severe pain and derived from the opium poppy plant. Opioids are a class of drug that includes the illicit drug heroin as well as the licit prescription pain relievers oxycodone, codeine, morphine, fentanyl, tramadol and others (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2015). Besides, opioids are chemically related and interact with opioid receptors on nerve cells in the brain and nervous system to produce pleasurable effects and relieve pain. The excessive use of the prescribed drug can lead to abuse and cause the same deadly effect as a drug not prescribed. One of the major cause of brain damage and untimely death of adolescents is the addiction to prescribed (legal) and non-prescribed (illegal) drugs. Addiction is a primary, chronic and relapsing brain disease characterized by an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviours (American Society of Addiction Medicine, 2011). It was discovered that 23% of individuals who use heroin develop to opioid addiction (National Institute of Drug -Abuse, 2014). Substances are drugs that have the potentials of affecting the development of the reasoning of the individual involved.

Substance Use

substance use is the inappropriate consumption of medicines, drugs, or other materials including prescription drugs, or over the counter drugs, street drugs, alcohol and tobacco (Saunders, 2003). Substance use is one of the major causes of death by young people in the twenty-first century. Also, adolescents engage in substance use to experiment, which is one of the characteristics of adolescents. Substance use is a public health issue affecting youth around the world as such as establishing an antisocial behavior. It has been discovered that approximately 5% of the world population is afflicted with some sort of illicit substance use (UNODC, 2010). The use of substances seems to be on the increase among developing nations in which Nigeria is not an exception. Despite the relative decrease in substance use in developed countries, this problem is rapidly increasing in developing countries (Bakhshani, Dahmardei, Shahraki-Sanavi, Hosseinbor, and Ansari-Moghaddam, 2014). The African countries including Nigeria which is one of the developing nations have adolescents in the country involved in substance use which is detrimental to human health and their academic performance in school.

Okoza and Aluede (2009) find out that there are "much of the substance use among youth takes place in schools" (p.87). Although substance use is harmful for human consumption, it is quite unfortunate that adolescents use the substances in school without the awareness of most parents in the dreaded act. According to Alhyas, Al Ozaibi, Elarabi, El-Kashef, Wanigarantne,...., Ghaferi (2015), teenagers were found to be involved in substance use at an early age of 11 and 14 years. This could be that the teenagers are exposed to substances at a tender age in their family and the environment of upbringing. Substance use is associated with risk that could lead to health risk, addiction risk and harm to oneself and others.

Risk

Risk is a condition that exposes one to danger. Risk can also be seen as the circumstances that exposes one to harm, danger or loss. Different types of risk range from financial, health, addiction, physical risk, and environmental risk but this paper will discuss the perceived risk of substance use among adolescents. Perceived risk is defined by Salzbergers and Cano (2017) as a complex and multidimensional and hypothetical construct that captures the individual assessment of the potential consequences of product use. Perceived risk varies from one person to the other. Perceived risk is the individual judgment of harm and potential consequences that might result from substance use among adolescents. Youths who perceived high risk of harm are less likely to use drugs than youths who perceive a low risk of harm (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman & Schulenberg, 2012). The perception of risk in substance use differs from the

person, the one who perceives high risk in a substance is possibly going to abstain from its use compared to the one who perceives a low risk of substance use.

The youths involved in substances put up changes that are maladaptive and inappropriate to the social or environmental settings that might lead the person involved to be at risk of harm. Substance use has been reported to predispose adolescents to physical and sexual victimization (Reed, Amaro, Matsumoto & Kaysen, 2009). Furthermore, students who use substances are exposed to risky behaviours such as unprotected sex that leads to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), violence, cultism, and stealing. It was discovered that apart from violence, adolescents who use psychoactive substance predispose themselves to risky behaviours (Pillon, O'Brien and Piedra, 2005). As such there is need to be informed of the consequences of taking substances before attempting is used. Information is essential in every facet of human life and with the trend in the substance use among adolescents has become an issue of utmost priority to be treated with great attention by the government and other stakeholders.

Information Behaviour

Aina (2013) defines information as the accumulation of knowledge by human beings in all areas of endeavour that is used to solve problems and reduce uncertainty. Information well-articulated and understood that be of advantage in limiting uncertainty of the consequences of substance use among adolescents. The sensitive period of adolescents requires concrete information from parents and other spheres of the economy adolescents are entrusted to their care. Adolescents information behaviour is expected to sensitize the adolescents on the relevant of being informed as well as to develop a good attitude towards acquiring the right information from the right sources to solve a pressing need. Information behaviour is "the totality of human behaviour with sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information seeking and information use" (Wilson's, 1999, p. 249). Furthermore, information behaviour encompasses intentional information seeking as well as unintentional information encounter. Adolescents information behaviour is the encompassing adolescent behaviour to intentionally identify relevant information from the right sources applicable to reducing uncertainty. Adolescents information behaviour on the perceived risk of substance use to stay healthy by abstaining from the illicit use of different substances that can hinder the health and academic performance of adolescent students.

Adolescents information behaviour can be regarded as a complex human activity consisting of purposive and non-purposive actions that can be described as an individual's instinct that is affected by external factors such as the environment of upbringing (Spink, & Cole, 2006;

Spink, 2010). Adolescents information behaviour consist of the adolescents' recognition of information need, the information sources consulted by adolescents and the utilization of the information accessed from the right sources and well-articulated to make informed decisions. The recognition of information need by adolescents explained the progress of modern societies as well as individuals to be dependent to a great deal on the provision of the right kind of information, in the right form, at the right time to the right person (Yusuf, 2012). The recognition of information need exposes the adolescents to the gap in knowledge that need to be filled with the appropriate information to eliminate doubt. Wilson (2000) also established that information need is "recognition that (one's) knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal. The recognition of information need is the conscious identification of a gap by an adolescent on the consequence and health implications associated with use substance.

Adolescents need information for several reasons such as on weight and height, followed by dietary and health advice, academic stress was emphasized more than behavioural issue (Tsai, Chou, Lin, & Lin, 2013). There are other reasons adolescents need the information to keep abreast of trends and fashion, to communicate with their friends to be informed of happenings in their environment especially on different types of substance widely used among adolescents. According to Baheiraei, Foroushani, Ahmadi and Ybarra (2014) adolescents are developmentally normatively interested in information about sexuality and other health-related issues. The perceived risk of substance use will be considered as some of the information adolescents are interested in seeking because it encompasses the health-related issues. The gap in knowledge if not harnessed properly could make adolescents involve in substance use be exposed to the perceived risk of health, addiction and harm to others. There are other risks associated with substance use such as exposure to early sexual involvement, campus violence, exposure to deadly diseases and unfortunately eventual drop out of school and untimely death. Information sources are the "resources/materials from which people receive ideas, meaningful messages, enlightenment and direction that will enable them to accomplish tasks, make decisions and solve problems" (Adomi, 2012). Information sources can also be described as any means through which adolescents acquire relevant information from the information-bearing materials which could be primary, secondary or tertiary sources. The primary sources of information provide first-hand information from sources such as parents, teachers in sensitive issues, mass media, peer and internet (Tsai, Chou, Lin, & Lin, 2013). Also, primary sources include the adolescent friends, media that is made up of print and non-print materials which include magazines, television, and advertisement while the non-print secondary sources are leaflets, books and websites (Fauzi & Abd Kadir, 2015). The aforementioned sources, when

underutilised by adolescents, could result in complications on the health and safety of the adolescents.

Information use is the application of relevant information sources to ensure timely decision making and to reduce uncertainty. According to Wilson (2000), information use involve physical and mental capabilities to be able to integrate newly acquired information into the person's already existing knowledge database. Information use is the act of applying articulated information in making relevant decisions. Information use outcome is expected to satisfy the information needed to solve the existing problem. Information use deal with the application of relevant information by adolescents in abstaining from substance and preventing risk involved in substance use. Information use will fill the gap in knowledge, and reduce uncertainty. According to Opeke (2017), information utilization is defined as what people do with the information they sought out or given to them. Adolescents who apply relevant information are sure to refrain from high-risk activities such as smoking, drinking, inhaling and injecting of illicit that could injurious to the health.

Challenges of Substance Use among Adolescents

Adolescents are exposed to substance use at a tender age which could result in psychiatric issues as such retarding the reasoning process which at the end could result in dropout from school. This occurs when the adolescent become addicted in the particular substance to the extent that the adolescent cannot do without it lead to chronic illness such as having cancer at a tender age due to early substance use. Adolescents injure the mouth and the digestive tracts due to substance use such as alcohol and tobacco. A persons' vision could be distorted due to the incessant use of substances. The adolescent is exposed to health risk when involved in the abuse of substances to the body.

The adolescent is exposed to the risk of addiction when exposed to uninterrupted smoking, drinking, inhaling and injecting a particular substance either those regarded as licit or those regarded as illicit. The early use of these substances could expose adolescents to the risk of addiction to alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, opioids, and cannabis, when used excessively, could lead to addiction and abuse. The environment of upbringing could be the leading causes of substance use among adolescents around the world. A child born into an environment where substance use is not prohibited might end up becoming a substance addict except through intervention and rehabilitation programme.

Parental influence of adolescents can go a long way to promote substance use. Parents who are addicted to one substance or the other will influence their children into substance use at a tender age which can as well be harmful to the growing child health with lifelong consequences. Also,

parents who are addicted to a substance do not find the harm substance use may cause on the immediate family not to mention the society at large. The parents who are into one substance or the other serve as a mentor to their children which is a great challenge that could hinder the productivity of youth in any economic society. The adolescents involved in substance use will possibly during serious work activity be absent either from class as a student due to the effect of the substances on the mental functioning on the child. The absenteeism syndrome is prominent among adolescents who take substances like water and end up either uncoordinated to carry out plans, they either oversleep as students or sometimes stay awake for a long time which could as well affect their attendance in either school or work.

Economically buoyant parents lavish their wealth on their children and in some cases, the wealth is abused and misused in the wrong manner. Some of the affluent children are the ones who purchase cocaine for use because it is one of the very expensive substance and will be difficult for a poor person to buy except through stealing. Furthermore, parents who are not affluent use cigarette, gin, marijuana which is very affordable to all categories without considering the long term effect on the nervous system. Adolescents involved in the early use of the substance can bring about diseases such as cancer, tuberculosis, psychiatric related issues, brain damage and even early detection of stroke. The adolescent involved in substance use will not be economically productive because of the productive time invested on either smoking, drinking, inhaling and injecting harmful substance in the body. The adolescents addicted to substance use will likely be poor because he or she will not be able to retain money since the urge for substance use is difficult to suppress. The aforementioned challenges can impact negatively of the economic development of a nation in the case where the environment is dictating the substance use it is only through grace that adolescents will live in such environment without being influenced negatively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government and non-government agencies should educate parents on the health implications of early involvement of adolescents in substance use and look for a strategy to resolve the problem for addicted adolescents by providing affordable facilities for rehabilitation. Parents with growing children involved in substance use should stop completely or refrain from taking substances in the presence of their children. Also, parents should monitor the activities of their growing children to ensure they are not involved in drugs at a tender age. The programmes adolescents view on a television screen could affect every sphere of their life, therefore, it is important that parental guardian is installed on the decoder to reduce the risk involved.

Parents are to train their children to develop self-esteem at a tender age to avoid the problem of being influenced negatively by peers. Parents of adolescents in boarding facilities should ensure the update of their ward performance and participation in academic activities. This will give a child a sense of care knowing the parents care for their progressive. Affluent parents should avoid abusing their children by giving excessively just to gratify self. A child should be given money commensurate to their academic demand and upkeep. Adolescents should grow with the mind of working hard to achieve academic success and earn money for oneself not to be dependent on parent asset.

The government should ban the sales of illicit substances in the environment thereby causing scarcity as such adolescent attention is diverted from substance use. Adolescents who had been involved in substance use should be taken care of immediately before it accumulates over time to affect the brain of the users. Adolescents who abstain from substance use enjoys the benefits of longevity and keeping healthy with the absence of substance use-related diseases like cancers of different types, tuberculosis, brain injury, and other life-threatening conditions. Adolescents should be taught that abstinence is the best especially as it relates to substance use therefore, it is good not to touch, taste or handle.

CONCLUSION

The parents, institutions, government, and non-government organization have a great role to play by ensuring the total eradication of illicit substance use among adolescents. Also, the public use of substances should be banned in any academic environment ranging from the use of alcohol to cigarette they are all perceived to be harmful to human health by affecting the users and those around. Legal consequences should be involved to anyone caught in substance use either to face legal charges, arrest and prosecuted to curtail the menace of substance use in the environment we live. Adolescents who are well informed will either abstain from substance and stay health or use and die prematurely. Adolescents will be exposed to the health risk, addiction risk and harm to others that can fall victim resulting from substance use. It is germane to utilize the right information from the right sources for the right decisions at the right time.

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