

Strategies to Address Drug and Substance Abuse among Youths. A Cross-Sectional Study of Mbare, Harare

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the strategies that can be adopted to curb the problem of drug abuse among youths in Mbare. The increasing exposure to the Zimbabwean environment, both as a manufacturer and market of hard-core drugs and substances, has changed the trend of drug abuse among youths in Mbare. The manufacture of drugs such as musombodia, meth, and mutoriro (local drugs made using various concoctions), as well as the entry of new drugs such as bronclée and codeine into Zimbabwe, has intensified the accessibility of drugs to youths, with the preceding result being a high rise in crime rates. Bronfenbrenner's 1944 Ecological Systems Theory guided the research. The research used qualitative research, using Mbare, Matapi Flats as a case study. Snowballing and purposive sampling techniques were employed to meet the demands of the qualitative study, with a sample size of 20 participants consisting of police, community organisations and youths being selected. The findings showed that educational campaigns, counselling and rehabilitation, and empowerment programs are the major strategies used in the Mbare community to curb drug abuse among youths. The findings also showed that the successful implementation of evidence-based drug abuse prevention programs in communities depends on several factors, including community readiness, stakeholder collaboration, funding and resources, program adaptation and fidelity, program evaluation, and political and social support. The study findings indicate that youths face several hindrances while attempting to obtain substance use services and information. These hindrances include a deficiency in knowledge regarding the availability of services and supports, uncertainty regarding the suitability of services, and insufficiency of accessible data, necessitating comprehensive investigation. In conclusion, the research findings highlight the need for a multi-faceted approach to curbing drug abuse among youths. The approach should address the stigma surrounding substance use disorder and mental health issues, provide more relevant and persuasive public health messaging, enhance knowledge of the neurobiological aspects of addiction, and encourage peer support while addressing the normalization of substance use among youths.

INTRODUCTION

The study aims to examine the strategies that can be adopted to curb the problem of drug abuse among youths in Mbare, as well as the factors influencing the implementation of these strategies and those influencing treatment. This study's findings can inform the development of effective interventions to address drug abuse among youths in Mbare and other similar communities in Zimbabwe and beyond.

This chapter sets the tone of the study by introducing the topic and highlighting how drug and substance abuse has affected communities. In doing so, this chapter discusses the background of the study, the statement of the problem, as well as the research objectives and questions guiding the study. The chapter also discusses the policy and practical implications of the study to regulate drugs across communities. The chapter also presents the study's significance to various stakeholders, including the youth, communities in

Mbare and the university. Research delimitations and limitations of the study are also presented. The chapter ends with an outline of the organisation of the dissertation.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) has highlighted that drug abuse among youths is a significant problem worldwide, with increasing drug abuse rates. The 2018 World Drug Report estimated that 200 million people aged between 15 and 64 had used illicit drugs between 2005 and 2015 (United Nations, 2018). In the United States, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2018) reported that 50% of American high school students used illicit drugs by Grade 12, and 14% of that percentage were involved in various crimes. In Brazil, a study showed that 22.5% of youths aged 10-12 years used drugs, with 12.7% having committed a crime of various sorts (Eide and Acuda, 2017).

The problem of drug abuse among youths is pervasive in many African countries, but it is often hidden due to poor aggregate information (Acuda and Crome, 2021). For example, in a sample of 20,765 students aged 13-15 years from six African countries, the prevalence of illicit drug use was 10.5%, with 22% of the total population involved in crime (Brook and Cohen, 2015). The deterioration of law and order in neighbourhoods where drug-related crime and violence sway means that the public's willingness to identify those involved is held in check by a culture of fear and distrust of the police (Boys et al., 2017). Furthermore, drug markets often provide economic relief for local communities, and there is little effort to curb drug-motivated crime in those communities. In Zimbabwe, drug abuse among youths is a bigger problem than previously reported (Chimhete, 2016), with over one-fifth of urban crime among the youth being motivated by drug abuse (Gono, 2019).

In Mbare, drug abuse among the youth is highly damaging to the local community, as members of that community have to live in illicit drug markets where the threat of crime and violence is ever-present. Due to Zimbabwe's new status as a manufacturer and transit zone for drugs, the trend of the predominant abuse of only glue and marijuana is constantly changing, which has also seen communities becoming dysfunctional (Chirinda, 2018). While various strategies have been used to combat drug abuse, it seems the current campaigns are not enough to address this situation. The lack of coordination among drug actors and poor implementation of drug and substance abuse strategies are also hindering the effectiveness of such campaigns. Additionally, under-resourced rehabilitation centres have failed to take in youths impacted by drug abuse.

Drug abuse treatment is recognized as an essential component of a comprehensive demand reduction strategy (Perry, 2019). If treatment is readily available and a high percentage of drug abusers receive it, it can have measurable effects on the overall demand for illicit drugs. However, in Mbare, some factors are impacting the rehabilitation of drug abusers using treatment strategies. This study examines the strategies that can be adopted to curb drug abuse among youths in Mbare, as well as the factors influencing the implementation of these strategies and those influencing treatment.

The prevalence of drug abuse among young people in Mbare, Zimbabwe, has been on the rise due to increased accessibility of drugs such as musombodia, crystal meth, mutoriro, bronclee, and codeine. These drugs are either locally manufactured or imported. This increase in drug use has contributed to a rise in crime rates, with drug-related crimes estimated to be as high as 78%. The lack of basic infrastructure and services, along with high poverty, unemployment, and depression rates in urban areas, has contributed to drug use among youth to cope with these challenges. The national government has developed policies to address drug abuse, but there is a need for tailored strategies for different age groups in different communities. Community-based prevention programs have been supported, but there are concerns about the effectiveness of the implemented strategies and the challenges of treating drug abusers. This study aims to investigate the strategies used to address drug abuse, the factors that influence their implementation, and the challenges of treatment in reducing drug abuse in Mbare.

Drug abuse has not only negative physical, emotional, spiritual, financial and social impacts on the abuser but also on their families, communities and countries as a whole. Therefore, it is essential to investigate strategies to address drug and substance abuse to promote safer and healthier communities cost-effectively and practically. The findings of this research could help the Mbare community and other communities affected by drug and substance abuse to identify effective strategies to address the problem. The study may also help identify the factors contributing to drug use among young people, leading to implementing preventative measures to curb drug abuse and related crime. Additionally, a better understanding of drug and substance abuse could aid policymakers, government officials, regulatory bodies and other stakeholders in designing effective drug prevention programs to reduce drug abuse among youth. The study may provide contextual information for other researchers and intellectuals interested in further research. Finally, this study may help other academics identify gaps in the present research and conduct research in those areas, ultimately leading to more comprehensive conclusions and ideas regarding drug and substance abuse among youths. The study aims to examine the strategies to address drug abuse, focusing on a cross-section of youths in Mbare, Harare.

Research Approach

The present study employed a qualitative research approach, which Neuman (2016) defines as a research method that seeks to describe or explain a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives and experiences. A qualitative research approach in this study is based on the understanding that participants assign different meanings to events that shape their lives and provide different interpretations of the research topic. This helps to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic from multiple perspectives (Neuman, 2016). Additionally, the qualitative research facilitated a more transparent understanding of the research setting and participants' activities, enabling the researcher to obtain sensitive insight into the diverse realities, experiences, and interconnections of groups and individuals (Holloway, 2012). The primary participants were youth in Mbare who have used or used drugs. Key informants were drawn from the police and Kurerwa community against drugs organisation, a community group in Mbare. This group of individuals possessed information sought by the researcher and on which conclusions about the research topic were made. The researcher used snowball sampling, a non-probability method, to select youth in Mbare for the study. The snowball sampling technique had no predetermined sample size (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the researcher stopped recruiting participants when the data reached a point of saturation, and no new themes emerged from the study. The initial sample size consisted of nine key informants, including three police officers, three religious leaders, and three members of the Kurerwa community against drugs. Additionally, the study included fifteen youths from Matapi flats in Mbare (Zimbabwe). The researcher used focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to collect participant data. The researcher utilized thematic analysis to examine and interpret the data collected from the study. The study results were presented using various data visualisations such as charts, graphs, tables and narratives. Ethical considerations were given significant attention when conducting the study, especially regarding participants' rights and welfare.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

A total of 20 participants were identified and recruited for the study, constituting five informants and 15 youths in Mbare.

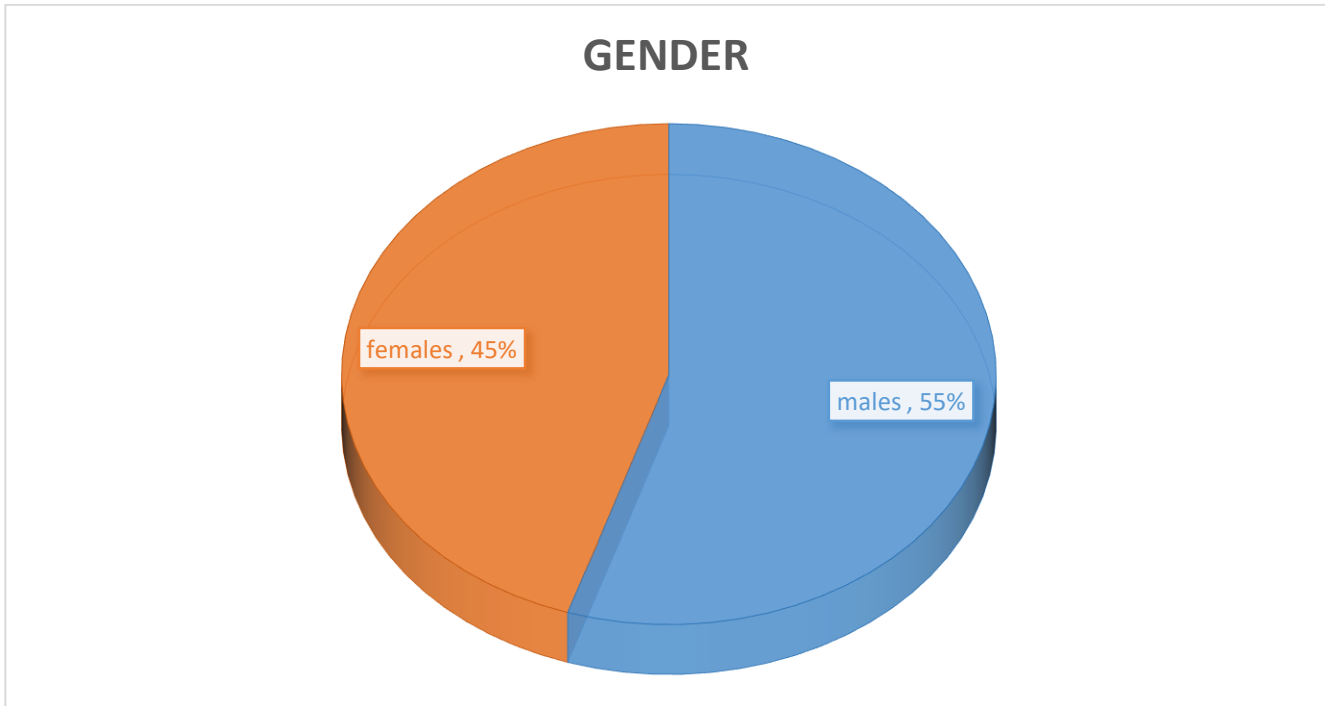
Demographics of Participants

Gender of Participants

Of the 15 youths participating in the study, 9 were male, and 6 were female. There were three females and

two males for key informants. In total, there were 11 males against nine females in the study, which ensured that the differences in opinions between males and females on how they relate to drug abuse among youths in Mbare were taken into account, as shown in the figure below.

Fig 4.1: Gender of respondents



Source: Researcher

Age Composition of Participants

Bandason & Rusakaniko (2010) mention that opinions and views usually differ based on respondents' age. These differences are essential in understanding how people's opinions are shaped, particularly on topics that shape social organisation. The age composition of the participants showed that the age ranges from 18-21 had 3 participants, while the 22-25 age range had 7 participants. Those in the 26-28 age range were 6, and those above 28 were 4. The general composition of the participants shows that the opinions of participants that may arise due to age differences were taken into account. Thus, the findings reflected participants' different perspectives based on these age differences.

Table 4.2: Age composition of participants

Age range	Composition	Percentage %
18-21	3	15
22-25	7	35
26-28	6	30
Above 28 years	4	20

Source: Researcher

Strategies to curb drug abuse among youths in Mbare, Harare

The following themes emerged on the strategies used to curb drug abuse in Mbare.

Educational campaigns

The participants stated that educational campaigns are carried out repeatedly through various media platforms, with WhatsApp being the most popular delivery medium.

One key informant from Kurerwa Community against Crime organisation remarked:

“time and again, we send out educational documents warning parents and youths about the impact of drug abuse.....however, due to Covid, we have not been able to conduct door-to-door campaigns....we are not sure how effective our current approach to educational campaigns.” (K11)

Another key informant from the Police stated:

“We are currently going in streets warning the youths about the effects of drug abuse.....these campaigns are conducted every month....and at the national level, the government is also carrying out educational campaigns at schools and communities about drug abuse.” (K13)

Counselling and Rehabilitation

Kurerwa Community Against Drug Organisation also stated that they were providing counselling services to youths who want to stop taking drugs or those who are reducing addiction.

One respondent stated:

“Our current approach is not only focusing on those who want to stop, but we were also providing rehabilitation services for those severely addicted and helping them reduce their intake to prevent illnesses that come with substance/ drugs withdrawal disorders.”(p3)

Key informants also acknowledge the role of community organising groups in providing counselling:

“several organisations are helping in that regard...offering counselling services.....as police ...we are under-resourced to be providing such services, as well as the fear of being arrested that drug abusers have of seeking help from the police (P12)

Empowerment programs

Empowerment programs also emerged as a central theme in strategies to curb drug abuse. Kurerwa Community against crime organisation’s key informant stated that:

“Most of the youths doing drugs do not have anything meaningful to do, and they resort to doing drugs as a way of killing time....as such, we are continuously engaging these youths and helping them with skills that can improve their livelihoods.....to date, we have managed to train 40 youths in various activities from welding, carpentry and agriculture.”(K11)

Another response from the youths added:

“We have seen several community-based empowerment programs from various stakeholders menta to capacitate youth.....the problem of drug abuse is partly caused by lack of employment opportunities and some youth take drugs as a coping mechanism to drown their sorrow.....these community empowerment programs have provided some relief to some youths and with these employment opportunities some youths have stopped taking drugs and concentrating on their businesses”.(P14)

Key factors influencing evidence-based implementation of drug abuse prevention programs in the Mbare community.

The study also sought to establish the key factors influencing evidence-based implementations of drug abuse prevention programs, and the findings are discussed in the following sections.

Community Readiness:

Findings showed that the readiness of the community to accept and adopt evidence-based drug abuse prevention programs is a critical factor in successful implementation. Participants highlighted that a community's readiness involves factors such as awareness, knowledge, and attitudes towards drug abuse prevention and supportive policies and resources. Some of the responses provided by key informants include;

"I can attest to the fact that the factors mentioned earlier greatly influence the successful delivery of prevention services in communities." (KI 4)

"Community readiness, for example, is critical for effective service delivery. In my experience, engaging community members and stakeholders early on in the planning process and assessing readiness before implementation is essential. This allows for a better understanding of the community's unique challenges and resources and to tailor prevention services accordingly." (KI4)

"Community readiness can also affect the willingness of community members to participate in prevention efforts and the level of support they provide to program staff." (KI2)

Youth also corroborate the above response, stating that community readiness influences a wide range of services that determine the effectiveness of treatment programs. Some of the responses provided include;

"If the community is not ready to address the issue of drug abuse, it can be difficult to find resources and support for prevention services." (P4)

"In my experience, I have found that some communities are more willing and equipped to address drug abuse prevention than others, and this can affect the availability and quality of services." (P8)

Stakeholder Collaboration:

Findings also showed that collaboration and coordination between stakeholders are essential for effective drug abuse prevention program implementation. Participants stated that these stakeholders may include community members, policymakers, healthcare professionals, educators, law enforcement officials, and other organizations involved in drug prevention activities. Key informants stated that effective stakeholder collaboration could facilitate program adoption, implementation, and sustainability. Some of the responses provided include;

"Stakeholder collaboration is another critical factor in successful service delivery. I have found that engaging stakeholders such as parents, schools, healthcare providers, law enforcement officials, and other community organizations help build a strong support network to aid prevention efforts. Collaboration with stakeholders can also facilitate the identification of community resources that can be leveraged to support prevention efforts." (KI1)

"Stakeholder collaboration has also played a role in my access to services. When stakeholders, such as schools or healthcare providers, are not engaged in prevention efforts, finding resources and support for addressing drug abuse can be challenging. On the other hand, when stakeholders are involved and working

together, it can increase awareness and support for prevention efforts, making it easier for youths like me to access services.” (P12)

Funding and Resources:

The findings also showed that funding and resources are essential for successfully implementing and sustaining drug abuse prevention programs. Participants stated that adequate funding and resources can support the training of program staff, program implementation, evaluation, and sustainability. Key informants stated that resources could lead to program failure or reduced effectiveness.

“I have experienced first-hand how the availability of resources can affect the quality and effectiveness of prevention services.” (KI2)

“Funding and resources have also impacted my ability to access prevention services. In communities where there is limited funding or resources, it can be challenging to find prevention services that are accessible and of good quality.” (P7)

“When resources are limited, it may be necessary to travel long distances or wait for long periods to receive services, which can be a barrier to accessing care.” (P12)

Program Adaptation and Fidelity:

Another theme that emerged from the study is that evidence-based programs must be adapted to fit the specific needs of the community and its cultural context. Participants, however, cautioned that adaptation should not compromise the fidelity of the program. Participants stated that programs must be adapted to fit the community’s unique needs and cultural context while maintaining program fidelity.

“In my experience, a program that is not appropriately adapted to fit the community’s context may not resonate with the target population, leading to reduced program engagement and effectiveness.” (KI6)

“In some cases, I have found that prevention programs may not be adapted to fit the unique needs of my community or cultural context, making it difficult to engage with the program and receive the support I need. In addition, when programs are not implemented with fidelity, it can impact the effectiveness of the intervention and reduce the likelihood of positive outcomes.” (P1)

Political and Social Support:

Another theme that emerged from the study was to do with political and social support. Participants highlighted that political and social support is essential for successfully implementing and sustaining drug abuse prevention programs. Key informants highlighted that strong political and social support could increase funding, public awareness, and community involvement in prevention efforts. This is captured in the extract from the study.

“political and social support is essential in the delivery of prevention services. In my experience, strong political and social support can lead to increased funding, public awareness, and community involvement in prevention efforts. This support can help to sustain prevention services over time, ensuring their long-term effectiveness”. (KI5)

“When there is strong political and social support for prevention efforts, it can increase awareness and resources for addressing drug abuse, making it easier for me and other youths to access care. In contrast, when there is limited political or social support, it can be challenging to find resources and support for prevention efforts.” (P6)

Challenges to effective implementation of treatment strategies in Mbare.

Poor Identification and Relatability of service users

The research revealed that many youths regarded themselves as undeserving of healthcare and welfare provisions, especially if they did not self-identify as having a substance use disorder (SUD). The participants frequently linked Substance Use Disorder (SUD) with the consumption of more potent substances and emergency scenarios, resulting in the notion that most services were not tailored to their needs. Findings showed that young individuals refrained from seeking assistance due to their apprehension of being judged, stereotyped, or failing to meet the expectations of others. Additionally, some were not prepared to modify their substance use patterns. In addition, the adolescent demographic perceived substance use advertisements and public health messaging as frequently lacking relevance, divisive, and lacking persuasive power, failing to acknowledge the addictive nature of marijuana/cannabis and stimulant use. Consequently, youths frequently seek assistance only during a crisis, finding it challenging to comprehend when their substance consumption crosses a threshold of severity that warrants attention from public health services.

One key informant stated that *“the challenge is that most of these youths do not see themselves as having a drug abuse problem. It is only when the problem gets worse that their parents come looking for assistance”* (KI4)

Key informants also stated that the adolescent population conveyed a need for enhanced knowledge of addiction’s neurobiological aspects. Additionally, they have expressed the importance of distinguishing between substance use, abuse, and disorder to mitigate any associated feelings of shame and to increase the probability of seeking support. The discovery that people exhibit varying responses to substances was deemed significant by the participants, as it served to authenticate their encounters and mitigate feelings of seclusion. Youths tend to seek peer support when faced with substance use issues. However, they often encounter a lack of seriousness from their friends, which can be attributed to youths’ normalisation of substance use. This can worsen their self-doubt and delay their access to appropriate care.

Access to Treatment

Findings also showed that youths faced several hindrances while attempting to obtain substance use services and information. The individuals exhibited a deficiency in knowledge regarding the availability of services and supports and expressed uncertainty regarding the suitability of services that would cater to their specific requirements. From key informants, the circumstance mentioned above can be attributed to an insufficiency of accessible data, necessitating comprehensive investigation, frequently resulting in exasperation and additional impediments in obtaining medical attention. Key informants stated that youths have suggested augmenting the accessibility of information about substance use and related services in various locations, including educational institutions, cafes, drinking establishments, and social networking platforms.

As one key informant highlighted: *“The reduction of stigma surrounding substance use and the increase in awareness about available supports would be facilitated by this measure. In addition, providing knowledge about the enduring impacts of various substances, the practice of harm reduction, and the correlation between lifestyle choices and emotional regulation with substance use behaviours would be advantageous.”* (KI3)

Adolescence in the study also reported encountering various hindrances while endeavouring to avail themselves of services, including but not limited to protracted waiting periods, logistical challenges in attending appointments, restricted operational hours, and a dearth of reasonably priced services, particularly

those that are specialised in nature. The inadequacy of referral systems was observed, resulting in youths recounting their experiences to multiple service providers. Moreover, it was observed that service providers tended to withhold information on service alternatives depending on their subjective assessment of the client's level of necessity, which was frequently erroneous, resulting in inadequate care provision.

Lack of Resources

The findings also showed that not all facilities possess the necessary resources to provide such interventions. The absence of adequate resources within rehabilitation centres may compel youths to seek services outside their communities, which may become expensive. Participants also highlighted that the lack of resources also affects after-care services, with many youths experiencing relapses due to the shortage of these services in the community. Some of the responses provided include:

“ the rehabilitation centres are under-resourced, and this has affected our ability to offer high-quality service delivery that addresses the needs of service users.” (K1)

“There is no after-service support, and this has affected our integration in society” (P3)

“There are few rehabilitation centres in the community, and the few that offer such services are underfunded and fail to serve their purpose” (K14)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Strategies to curb drug abuse

The findings showed that educational campaigns, counselling and rehabilitation, and empowerment programs are the major strategies used in the Mbare community to curb drug abuse among youths. From the evidence gathered, educational campaigns are being conducted to sensitise the youths about the effects of drug abuse. However, their effectiveness is not yet known, given that an evaluation of the strategy has not been possible due to Covid 19. It should also be noted that the government is also involved in drug prevention campaigns through awareness activities typically carried out in schools. The government has also played its part in initiating preventive programs meant to curb the drug abuse problem. Every year it commemorates the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. The different forms of media also play pivotal roles in educating the public on the severe effects of drug abuse. However, the current campaigns might gain traction if used in collaboration with other stakeholders like artists, who are regarded as societal role models, as Johnson (2014) and Makkai & Payne (2013) recommended.

The evidence shows that counselling and rehabilitation are being used as strategies to mitigate the problem of drug abuse. Community organisations such as Kurerwa Community Against Drug Organisation assist youths in becoming better-informed citizens through guidance, counselling, dialogues, and sports and recreational activities for rehabilitation. This is also supported by the findings of Dobinson & Ward (2015), who established the role of counselling and community-based skills training programs in reducing the problem of drug abuse.

The Findings also showed how community empowerment programs are helping youths turn away from drugs towards doing meaningful things in life. As has been revealed, part of the reasons why youths are using drugs is due to the unavailability of income generating projects, and drugs have become a coping mechanism for those seeking temporary reprieve from their challenging life. However, income-generating activities have reduced drug dependency, as those taking drugs to forget their sorrows can now live an everyday life through community empowerment programs. These findings support the observations of Johnson (2014), who also established the effectiveness of empowerment programs in reducing drug abuse

among youths.

Key factors influencing evidence-based implementation of drug abuse prevention programs

The findings also showed that the successful implementation of evidence-based drug abuse prevention programs in communities depends on several factors, including community readiness, stakeholder collaboration, funding and resources, program adaptation and fidelity, program evaluation, and political and social support. Considering these factors, a comprehensive and integrated approach can increase the likelihood of successful program implementation and sustainability. The above findings also corroborate the studies of Hamid (2021); Kumpfer and Alvarado (2020), who observed that drug abuse prevention programs are designed to reduce or prevent drug use and its associated negative consequences in communities. Hong et al. (2021) also showed that evidence-based implementation of drug abuse programs involves utilizing strategies and interventions proven to be effective based on scientific evidence.

Challenges to effective implementation of treatment strategies in Mbare.

The research findings highlight several important implications in curbing drug abuse among youths. Firstly, addressing the stigma surrounding substance use disorder and mental health issues is crucial. Youths are hesitant to seek assistance due to the fear of being judged, stereotyped, or failing to meet the expectations of others. Therefore, creating a safe and non-judgmental environment that encourages seeking help is essential in addressing drug abuse among youths. Secondly, the research emphasizes the need for public health messaging to be more relevant, persuasive, and relatable to young individuals. The participants perceived substance use advertisements and public health messaging as frequently lacking relevance, divisive, and persuasive power. Therefore, there is a need for more targeted messaging that acknowledges the addictive nature of drugs, including marijuana/cannabis and stimulants. This is also corroborated by the studies of Masten et al. (2019); Hong et al. (2021) on the need for targeting in improving service delivery to youths abusing drugs. Thirdly, the research highlights the need for enhanced knowledge of the neurobiological aspects of addiction, distinguishing between substance use, abuse, and disorder. Consistent with Oberwittler's (2014) findings, this knowledge is essential in mitigating feelings of shame and increasing the probability of seeking support. The findings demonstrate the significance of peer support. Komro and Toomey (2022) also observed that youths seek peer support when faced with substance use issues. However, they often encounter a lack of seriousness from their friends, which can worsen their self-doubt and delay their access to appropriate care. Therefore, it is necessary to create an environment where peer support is encouraged and the normalization of substance use among youths is addressed.

The study findings indicate that youths face several hindrances while attempting to obtain substance use services and information. In tandem with the observations of Hong et al. (2021), these hindrances include a deficiency in knowledge regarding the availability of services and supports, uncertainty regarding the suitability of services, and insufficiency of accessible data, necessitating comprehensive investigation. The study highlights the need to augment the accessibility of information on substance use and related services in various locations, including educational institutions, cafes, drinking establishments, and social networking platforms. In the study of Hirschi (2019), it was observed that this measure would reduce the stigma surrounding substance use and increase awareness about available supports. Additionally, providing knowledge about the enduring impacts of various substances, the practice of harm reduction, and the correlation between lifestyle choices and emotional regulation with substance use behaviours would be advantageous.

The study also found that adolescence encountered various hindrances while endeavouring to avail themselves of services, including protracted waiting periods, logistical challenges in attending appointments, restricted operational hours, and a dearth of reasonably priced services, particularly those that are specialized in nature. Chaiken and Chaiken's (2019) findings found that the inadequacy of referral

systems was observed, resulting in youths having to recount their experiences to multiple service providers. Moreover, it was observed that service providers tended to withhold information on service alternatives depending on their subjective assessment of the client's level of necessity, which was frequently erroneous, resulting in inadequate care provision.

These findings suggest that there is a need for a comprehensive approach to address the hindrances that youth face while attempting to obtain substance use services and information. Based on the observations made by Castro et al. (2021), this approach should involve providing accessible and comprehensive information to youths and the availability of reasonably priced services that cater to their specific requirements. Furthermore, it is crucial to address the inadequacy of referral systems, ensure that service providers provide accurate information, and improve the overall quality of care. Consistent with the observations of Jessor and Jessor (2017), the findings highlight the importance of addressing the hindrances that youth face while attempting to obtain substance use services and information to ensure that they receive the care and support they need to overcome their substance use disorders.

Another challenge noted by participants was the lack of after-care services, which has resulted in many youths experiencing relapses. After-care services are essential in supporting youths during their transition back to their community, and the lack of these services can be detrimental to their recovery. Additionally, there is a shortage of rehabilitation centres in the community, and the few that offer such services are underfunded and fail to serve their purpose. This shortage can result in long waiting periods for individuals seeking services, exacerbating their substance use disorder and delaying their recovery. Consistent with the studies of Eide and Acuda (2017); Chimhete (2016), these findings suggest that there is a need for more resources and funding to be directed towards rehabilitation centres and after-care services in the community. There is also a need for more rehabilitation centres to be established to cater to the growing demand for substance use services among youths. In conclusion, addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort from policymakers, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders to ensure that youths receive adequate and accessible substance use services and support.

CONCLUSIONS

Current endeavours to mitigate drug abuse have predominantly relied on educational initiatives and counselling interventions. However, the efficacy of these approaches may be limited due to inadequate evaluation metrics and insufficient engagement of other relevant stakeholders, including musicians in Mbare. A collaborative effort must be made by parents, community leaders, health professionals, and non-governmental organisations to combat drug abuse. The findings discussed in this analysis highlight the challenges youths face seeking substance use services and support. One of the main challenges is the lack of resources within rehabilitation centres. Participants noted that the under-resourced rehabilitation centres could not offer high-quality service delivery that addresses the needs of service users. This lack of resources may lead youths to seek services outside their communities, which can be expensive and may cause difficulties in integrating back into their community after receiving treatment. In conclusion, the research findings highlight the need for a multi-faceted approach to curbing drug abuse among youths. The approach should address the stigma surrounding substance use disorder and mental health issues, provide more relevant and persuasive public health messaging, enhance knowledge of the neurobiological aspects of addiction, and encourage peer support while addressing the normalization of substance use among youths.

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