

EFFICACY OF COMMUNITY-BASED COUNSELLING APPROACH ON SUBSTANCE USE BEHAVIOUR AND ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT OF YOUTHS IN OHAJI/EGBEMA AND OGUTA LGAs, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the efficacy of community-based counselling approach on substance use behaviour and academic adjustment of youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs, Imo State, Nigeria. Anchored on Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the study adopted a quasi-experimental, pre-test post-test non-equivalent group design. A sample of 300 youths aged 15-25 years was drawn using multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using the "Community-Based Counselling, Substance Use and Academic Adjustment Questionnaire - CBCSUAQA" which had a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.84. Four research questions were answered using Mean and Standard Deviation while four null hypotheses were tested using ANCOVA and Independent t-test at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that community-based counselling approach significantly reduced substance use behaviour and improved academic adjustment of youths. There was a significant gender difference in favour of females. It was concluded that community-based counselling is an efficacious intervention for reducing substance use and enhancing academic adjustment. It was recommended that government, NGOs and community leaders should institutionalize community counselling centres and integrate counselling into youth empowerment programs.

Keywords: Community-based counselling, Substance use behaviour, Academic adjustment, Youths, Educational Psychology.

Introduction

Substance use behaviour among youths has become a global public health and educational concern. Substance use refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs (WHO, 2021). In Nigeria, the prevalence of substance use among youths has continued to rise despite various intervention efforts. Factors such as peer pressure, unemployment, family breakdown, and easy accessibility have contributed to this

menace. The consequences of substance use are far-reaching and include mental health disorders, criminal behaviour, school dropout, and poor academic performance. In the Niger Delta region, the problem is further compounded by environmental degradation and economic marginalization which leave many youths vulnerable and idle.

In Imo State, particularly in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs, youth substance use has assumed an alarming dimension. The oil-rich nature of these communities has attracted both legitimate and illegitimate economic activities, exposing youths to disposable income and deviant subcultures. Reports indicate increased cases of cannabis, codeine, tramadol, and alcohol abuse among youths in these areas. This behaviour not only threatens the health and productivity of the youths but also undermines educational goals and community development. If left unchecked, substance use behaviour will continue to erode the human capital base of these communities and the state at large.

Community-based counselling which is the crux of this study is a preventive and remedial intervention strategy that involves the delivery of counselling services within the context of the community, utilizing community structures, resources and personnel (Gladding, 2020). It is rooted in the ecological perspective which posits that human behaviour is influenced by multiple systems including family, school, peer group and the larger community (Bronfenbrenner, 2019). Community-based counselling leverages on indigenous institutions such as traditional rulers, religious bodies, youth groups and NGOs to provide psychoeducation, group counselling, peer counselling and referral services. The approach is collaborative, culturally relevant, and sustainable because it builds local capacity and ownership. Community-based counselling directly targets the behavioural patterns and environmental reinforcers that sustain substance use among youths. This is achieved by directly addressing and tackling substance use within the community context.

The relevance of community-based counselling to substance use behaviour lies in its capacity to modify maladaptive behaviours through modeling, reinforcement and social support as proposed by Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986). When youths are exposed to positive role models and pro-social community norms through counselling, they are likely to unlearn substance use behaviour. Furthermore, community involvement ensures continuous monitoring and support, which are critical for behaviour change. Therefore, community-based counselling approach is expected to influence not only substance use behaviour but also other outcomes such as academic adjustment.

Academic adjustment refers to the degree to which a student is able to cope with the educational demands of school and achieve satisfactory academic performance (Baker & Siryk, 1999). It encompasses study habits, motivation, class attendance, relationship with teachers and peers, and overall satisfaction with school life. In Educational Psychology, academic adjustment is seen as a key indicator of school success and psychological well-being. Youths who are well-adjusted academically demonstrate better concentration, time management, and engagement in learning activities. Conversely, poor academic adjustment manifests in truancy, low grades, and eventual dropout.

Substance use has been found to have a deleterious effect on academic adjustment. Psychoactive substances impair cognitive functions such as memory, attention and decision-making which are essential for learning (NIDA, 2020). Youths who engage in substance use often miss classes, fail to complete assignments, and experience conflict with school authorities. In the context of Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta, where many youths combine schooling with oil-related menial jobs, substance use further disrupts their academic engagement. Therefore, any intervention aimed at reducing substance use must also consider its impact on academic adjustment to ensure holistic development of youths.

Several efforts have been made by government and non-governmental organizations to curb substance use among Nigerian youths. These include the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) school sensitization campaigns, mass media anti-drug jingles, and arrest and prosecution of drug dealers (NDLEA, 2022). Schools have also introduced guidance and counselling units and drug-free clubs. Religious organizations conduct sermons and deliverance programs against drug abuse. However, these top-down and institution-based approaches have recorded limited success in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs. Substance use behaviour has persisted and in some cases increased, suggesting that the strategies have not adequately addressed the socio-cultural and environmental factors sustaining the behaviour in these communities.

The failure of existing techniques can be attributed to their lack of community ownership and cultural relevance. Most interventions are designed and implemented without the input of community stakeholders, leading to poor acceptance and sustainability (Okoye, 2020). Moreover, arrest-based approaches tend to stigmatize users rather than rehabilitate them, pushing the behaviour further underground. In communities where unemployment and idleness are high, punitive measures alone cannot address the root causes of substance use. There is therefore a need for an approach that is participatory, preventive, and embedded within the community fabric to effectively tackle the problem.

Given the limitations of current strategies, community-based counselling approach presents a more fitting intervention for the phenomenon of youth substance use in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta. This approach recognizes that behaviour is learned and maintained within social contexts and therefore change must also occur within those contexts. Community-based counselling can challenge pro-drug norms and promote pro-social values by engaging community goalkeepers and using indigenous communication channels (Corey, 2017). The approach also provides an opportunity for early identification and referral of at-risk youths before the behaviour becomes entrenched.

Furthermore, community-based counselling aligns with the principles of Educational Psychology which emphasize holistic development and the role of environment in learning and behaviour. When counselling is delivered in collaboration with families and schools, it can directly address factors that affect both substance use and academic adjustment. Studies have shown that community-based interventions that combine education, skills training and counselling are more effective in reducing substance use and improving school outcomes than stand-alone programs (Igwe & Omeje, 2022). Thus, adopting this approach in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta is theoretically and practically justified.

Despite the potential of community-based counselling, there is paucity of empirical evidence on its efficacy in reducing substance use behaviour and improving academic adjustment among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs. Most available studies have focused on urban centers or on school-based counselling alone, neglecting the community dimension (Igwe & Omeje, 2021). There is also limited research examining the gender dynamics in the effectiveness of community interventions in this context. This gap in knowledge makes it difficult for policymakers and practitioners to design evidence-based programs for these LGAs. It is against this background that this study seeks to empirically investigate the efficacy of community-based counselling approach on substance use behaviour and academic adjustment of youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs, Imo State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Substance use behaviour among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs has reached a critical level, with attendant consequences on health, education and community security. Many youths in these areas are engaged in the use of cannabis, tramadol, codeine and alcohol, often as a coping mechanism for unemployment and peer pressure. This behaviour has led to increased school dropout, poor academic performance and involvement in cultism and other crimes. The situation calls for urgent intervention to salvage the future of these youths.

While government agencies and NGOs have implemented various anti-drug programs, these interventions have not yielded the desired results in the study area. Existing programs are largely punitive and lack community participation, making them unsustainable. There is therefore a need to explore alternative approaches that are preventive, participatory and culturally appropriate. Community-based counselling approach offers such an alternative, but its efficacy has not been empirically tested in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta.

Consequently, the following questions arise: To what extent does community-based counselling reduce substance use behaviour among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta? To what extent does it improve academic adjustment? Is there a gender difference in the efficacy of the approach? Answering these questions will provide empirical basis for adopting community-based counselling as a strategy for youth development in the area.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to determine the efficacy of community-based counselling approach on substance use behaviour and academic adjustment of youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs, Imo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the level of substance use behaviour among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs.
2. Determine the level of academic adjustment among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs.
3. Examine the efficacy of community-based counselling approach in reducing substance use behaviour of youths.
4. Examine the efficacy of community-based counselling approach in improving academic adjustment of youths.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent is the level of substance use behaviour among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs?
2. To what extent is the level of academic adjustment among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs?
3. To what extent is community-based counselling approach efficacious in reducing substance use behaviour of youths?
4. To what extent is community-based counselling approach efficacious in improving academic adjustment of youths?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- HO1: There is no significant effect of community-based counselling approach on substance use behaviour of youths.
- HO2: There is no significant effect of community-based counselling approach on academic adjustment of youths.
- HO3: There is no significant gender difference in the effect of community-based counselling approach on substance use behaviour.
- HO4: There is no significant gender difference in the effect of community-based counselling approach on academic adjustment.

Method

The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design, specifically the pre-test, post-test, non-equivalent control group design. This design was considered appropriate because it allows for the determination of cause-effect relationship between community-based counselling and the dependent variables. The population of the study comprised 18,420 youths aged 15-25 years in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs according to NPC (2019) projections. A sample of 300 youths was selected using multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, two communities were randomly selected from each LGA. In the second stage, 150 youths were assigned to experimental group and 150 to control group.

The instrument for data collection was the "Community-Based Counselling, Substance Use and Academic Adjustment Questionnaire - CBCSUAAQ" developed by the researchers. The questionnaire consisted of 42 items divided into four sections. Section A elicited demographic information. Section B had 15 items on substance use behaviour. Section C had 15 items on academic adjustment. Section D had 12 items on community-based counselling activities. The instrument used a 4-point modified Likert scale: Very High Extent= 4, High Extent = 3, Low Extent = 2, Very Low Extent= 1. The instrument was face-validated by three experts in Educational Psychology and Guidance and Counselling. The reliability was determined using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a coefficient of 0.84, indicating that the instrument was reliable.

Data were collected over a period of 10 weeks. The experimental group received 8 weeks of community-based counselling intervention covering topics such as dangers of drug abuse, refusal skills, academic goal setting and stress management. The control group received no

treatment. Pre-test was administered before intervention and post-test after intervention. Data were analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation to answer research questions. ANCOVA was used to test HO1 and HO2 while Independent t-test was used to test HO3 and HO4, all at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent is the level of substance use behaviour among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs?

Table 1: Mean and SD of Substance Use Behaviour Among Youths (n=300)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
	SD Decision					
1	I use alcohol to cope with stress 0.97 High	110	95	65	30	2.95
2	I have used cannabis in the last 3 months 1.01 High	98	88	72	42	2.81
3	I use tramadol/codeine without prescription 0.99 High	105	90	68	37	2.88
4	Substance use affects my class attendance 0.98 High	102	92	70	36	2.87
5	My friends encourage me to use substances 1.03 High	115	85	60	40	2.92
	Grand Mean 0.99 High					2.89

Table 1 shows that all 5 items on substance use behaviour had mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50 and standard deviation of 0.99. Grand mean 2.89 indicates high level of substance use behaviour among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs. Specifically, peer influence had the highest mean of 2.92, followed by use of alcohol to cope with stress at 2.95. The high mean on substance use affects my class attendance 2.87 confirms that substance use is already impacting education. The low standard deviations show homogeneity in responses. Research Question 2: To what extent is the level of academic adjustment among youths?

Table 2: Mean and SD of Academic Adjustment Among Youths (n=300)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
	SD Decision					
6	I regularly attend classes 1.02 Low	75	80	90	55	2.58
7	I complete my assignments on time Low	70	78	95	57	2.54
8	I have good relationship with teachers 0.98 Moderate	82	85	88	45	2.68
9	I am motivated to study 1.01 Low	68	75	100	57	2.51
10	Substance use affects my academic performance 0.96 High	120	90	55	35	3.00

Grand Mean	2.66
0.99 Low	
Grand mean	2.66

Table 2 reveals that the grand mean for academic adjustment is 2.66, which is just slightly above the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicates a low to moderate level of academic adjustment among youths. Items on class attendance 2.58, assignment completion 2.54, and motivation 2.51 were all low, while substance use affects my academic performance had the highest mean of 3.00. This implies that while some students maintain teacher relationships, their overall engagement with school work is poor.

Research Question 3: To what extent is community-based counselling efficacious in reducing substance use?

Table 3: Pre-test and Post-test Mean of Substance Use for Experimental Group (n=150)

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Pre SD	Post-test Mean	Post SD	Mean Gain
Experimental	150	2.91	0.98	1.98	0.72	0.93
Control	150	2.87	1.00	2.79	0.95	0.08

Table 3 presents the pre-test and post-test scores on substance use behaviour. The experimental group had a pre-test mean of 2.91 which reduced drastically to 1.98 after the 8-week community based counselling intervention, giving a mean gain of 0.93. In contrast, the the control group had a negligible gain of 0.08. The large decrease in the experimental group indicates that community based counselling was highly efficacious in reducing substance use behaviour. The drop below 2.50 post intervention shows that the level moved from High to Low, implying that exposure to peer counselling, family involvement and community sensitization helped youths to unlearn substance use.

Research Question 4: To what extent is community-based counselling efficacious in improving academic adjustment?

Table 4: Pre-test and Post-test Mean of Academic Adjustment for Experimental Group (n=150)

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Pre SD	Post-test Mean	Post SD	Mean Gain
Experimental	150	2.64	0.99	3.42	0.68	0.78
Control	150	2.68	.01	2.70	0.97	0.02

Table 4 shows that the experimental group improved from a pre-test mean of 2.64 to a post-test mean of 3.42, with a mean gain of 0.78. The control group remained almost static with a gain of 0.02. The post-test mean of 3.42 for the experimental group indicates a high level of academic adjustment after intervention. This implies that community based counselling not only reduced substance use but also helped youths to refocus on academics through goal setting and stress management sessions.

Hypothesis 1: No significant effect of community-based counselling on substance use

Table 5: ANCOVA on Effect of Treatment on Substance Use

Source	Type III Sum	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	68.420	2	34.210	52.18	.000
Treatment	61.350	1	61.350	93.56	.000

Error	194.580	297	0.655
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Table 5 shows the ANCOVA result for the effect of treatment on substance use. With $F(1,297)=93.56$, and $p=.000$ which is $<.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means there is a significant effect of community based counselling approach on substance use behaviour of youths. The large F-value indicates that the difference between experimental and control groups is not due to chance.

Hypothesis 2: No significant effect on academic adjustment

Table 6: ANCOVA on Effect of Treatment on Academic Adjustment

Source	Type III Sum	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	51.220	2	25.610	48.32	.000
Treatment	45.900	1	45.900	86.65	.000
Error	157.380	297	0.530		

Table 6 presents ANCOVA results for academic adjustment. The result shows $F(1,297)=86.65$, $p=.000<.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis 2 is rejected. This implies that community based counselling approach had a significant effect on academic adjustment of youths.

Hypothesis 3 & 4: Gender difference

Table 7: t-test on Gender Difference in Post-test Scores

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Substance Use	Male	60	2.08	0.75	2.14	298	.033
	Female	140	1.86	0.68			
Academic Adjustment	Male	160	3.32	0.70	2.45	298	.015
	Female	140	3.54	0.65			

Table 7 shows that for substance use, males had a higher post-test mean of 2.08 while females had 1.86, $t(298)=2.14$, $p=.033$. For academic adjustment, females had a higher mean of 3.54 compared to males 3.32, $t(298)=2.45$, $p=.015$. Since both p-values are $<.05$, we reject the hypothesis 3 and 4. This implies that there is a significant gender difference in the effect of community based counselling with females benefiting more.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed a high level of substance use behaviour among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs with a grand mean of 2.89. This confirms earlier reports by UNODC (2021) that youth substance use is prevalent in oil-producing communities due to economic and social factors. The use of alcohol, cannabis and prescription drugs was common, and peers played a major role in initiation. This finding underscores the need for urgent intervention in the area.

The study also found a low level of academic adjustment among youths, grand mean 2.66. This aligns with NIDA (2020) which stated that substance use impairs cognitive functions and school engagement. Many respondents reported poor attendance, low motivation and direct impact of substance use on performance. This suggests that substance use is not only a health issue but also an educational problem that requires psychosocial intervention.

Regarding efficacy, community-based counselling significantly reduced substance use behaviour, $F(1,297)=93.56$, $p<.05$. The experimental group showed a mean gain of 0.93 compared to 0.08 in control group. This finding supports Bandura (1986) Social Learning Theory which posits that behaviour can be modified through modeling and reinforcement within community settings. It also agrees with Igwe and Omeje (2021) who found community counselling effective in reducing substance use in South-East Nigeria because of its cultural relevance and peer involvement.

Similarly, community-based counselling significantly improved academic adjustment, $F(1,297)=86.65$, $p<.05$. The mean gain of 0.78 indicates that counselling helped youths develop better study habits and motivation. This is consistent with Corey (2017) who argued that when counselling addresses both behavioural and environmental factors, academic outcomes improve. There was also a significant gender difference with females benefiting more, $t=2.45$, $p=.015$. This may be due to higher help-seeking behaviour among females as noted by Okoye (2020).

Conclusion

Sequel to the findings of this study, the following conclusion was drawn:

1. The level of substance use behaviour among youths in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs is high.
2. The level of academic adjustment among youths in the study area is low.
3. Community-based counselling approach is efficacious in significantly reducing substance use behaviour among youths.
4. Community-based counselling approach is efficacious in significantly improving academic adjustment of youths, with females benefiting more.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions reached, the following recommendations are made:

1. Imo State Government should establish and fund community counselling centres in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs to provide continuous psychoeducation and support for youths.
2. Community Leaders and Traditional Rulers should collaborate with counsellors to integrate anti-drug messages into town hall meetings and cultural events.
3. Schools and NGOs should train peer counsellors and involve parents in community-based counselling programs to ensure sustainability.
4. Counselling psychologists should design gender-sensitive interventions that address the specific needs of male youths who showed lower gains.

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