

# Creating Awareness of the Health Hazards of *Mkpurummiri* among Youth: The Role of the Mass Media

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## ***Abstract***

*Recently, videos of adults being flogged for consuming a substance known as Mkpurummiri went viral on social media. The video was said to have been shot in a community in the Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State, South East of Nigeria, where many have become addicted to the substance. Soon after that, the social media space became inundated with reports of the abuse of this hard drug called crystal meth or methamphetamine otherwise known as Mkpurummiri in the Igbo parlance. From Facebook to WhatsApp to Instagram and other social media platforms, videos and pictures as well as textual reports of the havoc of the abuse of Mkpur mmiri were shared by users containing displays of the effects and symptoms of the consumption of Mkpurummiri like madness, barking, shouting and other abnormal behaviour. This work is therefore aimed at using analytical approach in prescribing the role of the media in creating awareness of the health hazards of this substance among residents of Anambra State.*

**Keywords:** *Mkprummiri, Youth, Health hazards, Drug abuse.*

## Introduction

Recently, videos of adults being flogged for consuming a substance known as *Mkpurummiri* went viral on social media. The video was said to have been shot in a community in the Aguata Local Council of Anambra State, South East of Nigeria, where many have become addicted to the substance. Soon after that, the social media space became inundated with reports of the abuse of this hard drug called crystal meth or methamphetamine otherwise known as *Mkpurummiri* in the Igbo parlance. From Facebook to WhatsApp to Instagram and other social media platforms, videos and pictures as well as textual reports of the havoc of the abuse of *Mkpurummiri* were shared by users containing displays of the effects and symptoms of the consumption of *Mkpurummiri* like madness, barking, shouting and other abnormal behavior. This condition was described by Collier and Moore (2022) as substance use disorder which are conditions that enact changes in brain chemistry causing people to misuse drugs or alcohol. They further aver that someone with a substance use disorder finds it difficult to stop using substances, even when they cause harm warranting healthcare professionals to classify substance use disorders as mental health conditions in the world.

Also, Jatau, Sha'aban, Gulma, Shitu *et al.*, (2021) describe drug abuse as an emerging global public health issue which was reflected in the United

Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) World Drug Report 2021, released ahead of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (IDADAIT), June 26, revealing that around 275 million people used drugs worldwide in the last year, while over 36 million people suffered from drug use disorders. The 2021 World Drug Report provided a global overview of the supply and demand of opiates, cocaine, cannabis, amphetamine-type stimulants and new psychoactive substances (NPS), as well as their impact on health, taking into account the possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report emphasized the importance of strengthening the evidence base and raising public awareness, so that the international community, governments, civil society, families and youth can make informed decisions, and better target efforts at preventing and treating drug use, and tackling world drug challenges (Jatau, *et al.*, 2021, Muanya 2021).

Muanya (2021) reports that recently, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) launched the War against Drug Abuse (WADA) initiative to rally Nigerians to actively partake in the war against drug abuse, which it said was taking a frightening dimension in the country, and which experts have, at various fora, also warned had risen to emergency levels. The abuse of illicit drugs among youths in the country, in particular, has been identified to have diverse and devastating effects on the

society. Aside from reports of chronic health conditions of abusers, experts have also established a nexus between the menace and rising incidences of violent crimes.

New among the hard substances that are being abused by young people is the crystal meth otherwise known as *Mkpurummiri* which is predominant among the Igbo youths of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo state. Viral videos are circulated on daily basis from various communities in the South-East, of victims of *Mkpurummiri*, with their attendant abnormal behaviours. Some of them were reported to have killed their parents, siblings or burnt their houses under the influence of the drug (Okoli, Ujamadu, Agbo and Oko 2021). Damilola (2022) who decried the rising rate of drug abuse among Nigerian youths states that one of the causes of drug abuse is peer group, with many people who end up in drug rehab citing direct negative peer pressure as one of the initial causes that started their addictive behaviour pattern. Direct negative pressure can often involve a group of friends or peers directly asking someone to do something. This pressure is very toxic and difficult to resist. He however attributed its promotion to the movie and music industries due to the fact that hardly can one watch a movie without finding scenes where drugs are being abused. He further avers that musicians also abuse drugs to conquer stage fright and suppress stress resulting to some youths abusing drugs

on the streets while many of them have become mentally unstable because of the act every day. According to Damilola (2022):

Exposure to programmes promoting drug abuse on TV and internet can also lead to drug abuse. Even the musicians themselves abuse drugs in order to manage stress and it is what they display in their music videos. They also sing songs that revolve round drug abuse and this exactly is why people are no longer afraid of abusing drugs in public places.

According to *Punch* (November 24, 2021), *Mkpurummiri* is the slang coined from the Igbo language, which is loosely translated as 'seed of water'. In reality, it is a crystal narcotic hallucinogen, medically known as Methamphetamine or by its street name Crystal Meth. It has a chalk-like crystal form and can sometimes be blue hence the name *Mkpurummiri*. It is a man-made drug developed during World War II, used by soldiers to stay awake or carry out dangerous suicidal missions. Its highly addictive nature makes a chemically similar drug, amphetamine – used to treat Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and narcolepsy, a sleep disorder – highly regulated and only available by prescription (*Punch*. November 24, 2021).

*Punch* (November 24, 2021) reports that Crystal meth or

*Mkpurummiri*, can cause a spike in a person's body temperature that they could pass out or even die. The substance can also lead to anxiety, confusion, insomnia, mood swings, and violent behaviour from the user. A user's looks can change dramatically; from ageing quickly, to dull skin. They can also develop hard-to-heal sores and pimples and may have a dry mouth and stained, broken, or rotting teeth. A person addicted to *Mkpurummiri* may also become paranoid and start hallucinating. They could also think of hurting themselves or others and may feel as though insects are crawling on or under their skin.

Anambra State has been adjudged one of the places in the Southeast Nigeria with high rate of peddling, consumption and abuse of *Mkpurummiri*. In Aguata LGA, Njoku, Odita, and Thomas-Odia (2021) report that a man called Shedrack said a South African returnee was the head of the cartel running the sale and distribution of the substance in his community. In a video that went viral, which he personally made, Shedrack, who claims to be the Chairman of Ogboifite youths in Aguta Local Council of Anambra State, lamented the danger posed to the society by the substance. Shedrack had in the video pointed at an uncompleted building in the area which was proposed for use as a high court complex by the administration of former governor Peter Obi, but could not be completed before he left office as the warehouse

of *Mkpurummiri* dealers. According to him:

This is where they sell *Mkpuru mmiri* in this area. It is a dangerous drug and it is destroying our youths. The vigilante knows about this place. It is a young man who returned from South Africa that is running the cartel. The other time, I came here with some youths and we arrested three girls. We have to do something to stop this illicit business before it will destroy our youths.

Njoku, Odita, and Thomas-Odia (2021) also report the arrest made at another location in Nsugbe, in Oyi Local Council of Anambra State, where some youths arrested two young girls that sold the deadly substance in the area. One of the girls, whose name was given as Onyinye from Isuaniofia in Awka, said she was only helping her mother to sell the substance. The group that caught her had brought two young addicts, who looked haggard and pale and asked her to identify them. Onyinye indeed identified the young men as her customers, but disclosed, "I stopped selling the substance to them when I was warned that they have become mentally deranged." She narrated that she, "usually sold the substance to them even when they didn't have money. It is not as if I force them to buy; they indicate on their own that they want it and that they will pay later." The youths that arrested her later asked her

to quit the community with her mother or be ready to face whatever might befall them if they dared to disobey their order.

As reported also by Njoku, Odita, and Thomas-Odia (2021), in Umudioka, a community in Dunukofia Local Government Area of Anambra State, also declared war on illicit drugs, including crystal meth. In a public service announcement signed by the President General of Umudioka Improvement Union, Mr. Chike Odoji, the community said the sales and consumption of these illicit drugs had been proscribed in their environment. He disclosed that they would be working with National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Police Anti-Cult Unit and other relevant law enforcement agencies to begin the arrest of defaulters, dealers and consumers within the community. Other illicit drugs proscribed alongside *Mkpurummiri* in the community were Isi na Awa Agu, AjuAchuEnwe, Stonch and India hemp. These are names of the drugs in their local parlance.

Indeed, there are worries about the rate of consumption of hard drugs by young men and women, especially in the Southeast region. The worries are further heightened by the rate at which mentally deranged able-bodied young men and women now roam the streets. Most discussions in public places in the region now centre on how youths consume *Mkpurummiri* in particular. The region has also started recording an increase in all kinds of

crime. Stories of people breaking into private apartments to look for money or missing pots of soup, including the ones on fire, are now common. Drug abuse can lead to a range of both short-term and long-term mental and physical health problems depending on the kind of drugs abused; there are many youths who are mentally unstable due to drug abuse while there are many whose organs such as liver or kidney have been badly damaged due to drug abuse. It therefore became pertinent to evaluate the awareness of the health hazards of the consumption and abuse of *Mkpurummiri* among tricycle riders otherwise known as Keke Drivers in Anambra State.

Consumption of hard drugs like crystal meth or methamphetamine otherwise known as *Mkpurummiri* can be addictive leading to abuse especially among young people who find them enjoyable and a means of highness and as a measure for boldness and might among their peers. More recently, the various social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp were inundated with pictures and videos of young people with drug related madness and other health hazards caused by the abuse of *Mkpurummiri* in Anambra State which resulted to the interventions of government agencies like the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), youth organizations, churches and individuals who fought together to see that the proliferation, peddling and consumptions of *Mkpurummiri* is stopped all over the

Southeast. What the young people seem not to know much about is the health hazards associated with the consumption and abuse of these drugs. There are numerous trending videos on social media platforms from different communities in Igbo land of young men, and in some cases, women and under-aged, being tied to beams and trees at public squares, beaten mercilessly for dealing in and taking *Mkpurummiri*. Information emanating from the zone shows that many Igbo youths are going insane, even as some have completely gone mad after drug use. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) is committed to clamping down on the production and consumption of methamphetamine, popularly known as *Mkpurummiri*, because of its consequences on mental health which are dangerous to society. What is not known therefore is the role the media can play in creating awareness about the health hazards of *Mkpuru mmiri* and how such awareness can help in tackling the abuse of *Mpurummiri* among keke drivers in Anambra State. This is the gap in knowledge this study is designed to fill.

### **Methamphetamine (Mkpurummiri) Abuse and Toxicology**

According to Yu, Zhu, Shen, Bai, and Di (2015), Methamphetamine is a potent central nervous system (CNS) stimulant that is mainly used as a recreational drug and less commonly as a second-line treatment for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and

obesity. In the views of Richards and Laurin (2021), methamphetamine is a highly addictive psycho stimulant drug that is a derivative of amphetamine. It can produce euphoria and stimulant effects like those from other stimulants such as cocaine. In addition, methamphetamine is easily synthesized from inexpensive and readily obtainable chemicals. These characteristics have led to widespread and rampant abuse worldwide, currently estimated at 33 million users based on the 2016 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime World Drug Report.

Declan (2021) also sees Crystal Methamphetamine or “Mkpurummiri” as an extremely potent and addictive stimulant that affects the central nervous system and several other systems of the body. This substance has a molecular structure that is chemically comparable to Amphetamine, a medicine used to treat Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, and Narcolepsy, a sleep disorder. It resembles glass fragments or shiny, gleaming glass shards with bluish-white boulders. Methamphetamine or Mkpurummiri is taken by smoking, swallowing the pill form, snorting or sniffing, or by injecting the powder that has been dissolved in water or alcohol. Globally, this substance has been referred to as Meth, Trash, Crank, Biker’s Coffee, Tweak, Speed, Ice, Shards, Stove Top, Yaba, Chalk, Crystal, Crank or Shabu (Declan (2021).

Tracing the history of the drug, Richards and Laurin (2021) observe that Methamphetamine was initially synthesized in the early 1900s and used unregulated as a nasal decongestant, to enhance alertness, and for weight loss. It was used extensively by myriad armed forces in World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam War. Initially, Japan experienced a high prevalence of abuse in the 1950s, followed by the United States in the 1960s. The street name “crank” refers to biker gangs’ transport of methamphetamine hidden in their motorcycle crankcase. The southwestern and west coast states (including Hawaii) reported the highest prevalence of abuse from the 1970s to the 1990s. Over the past decade, all regions of the United States have experienced a significant increase in the number of persons using the drug and emergency department visits. In the USA, methamphetamine abusers are predominantly white males in their 30s and 40s. More recently, epidemic abuse has been described in adolescents. Methamphetamine abusers tend to be mendacious and mistrustful of health care professionals when describing their drug history (Richards and Laurin, 2021). Fleckenstein, Volz, Riddle, Gibb and Hanson (2017) aver that Methamphetamine promotes the release of monoamine neurotransmitters dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine within central (CNS) and peripheral nerve endings. It also blocks re-uptake of dopamine

similar to cocaine, and it may act as a false transmitter. This explains its euphoric effects in the CNS and sympathomimetic effects such as tachycardia and hypertension. Declan (2021) avers that because of that the drug’s “high” comes on and fades very quickly, users frequently take many doses in a “run and crash” cycle, causing them to give up food and sleep, while continuing to take the drug every few hours for up to several days. He further states that Mkrummiri/Methamphetamine raises the amount of dopamine, a natural substance found in the brain. Dopamine is responsible for physical movement, motivation, and rewarding behavior reinforcement. The substance or drug’s ability to swiftly release large levels of dopamine in the brain’s reward centres powerfully encourages drug-taking behaviour. This increases the user’s desire to continuously repeat the experience

Richards and Laurin (2021) further explains that acute and long-term methamphetamine use may lead to abnormal findings on examination of the following systems: cardiovascular, CNS, gastrointestinal, renal, skin, and dental. Tachycardia and hypertension are frequently observed, and atria and ventricular dysrhythmias may occur. Chest pain from cardiac ischemia and infarction, acute aortic dissection or an aneurysm has been associated with methamphetamine abuse. Hypotension may be observed with methamphetamine overdose with

profound depletion of catecholamines. Acute and chronic cardiomyopathy results directly from methamphetamine cardiac toxicity and indirectly from chronic hypertension and ischemia; intravenous use may result in endocarditis; patients may present with dyspnea, edema, and other signs of acute congestive heart failure (CHF) exacerbation. Acute non-cardiogenic pulmonary edema and pulmonary hypertension may result from acute and chronic use, as well as from adulterants introduced during intravenous use such as talc or cornstarch (Richards, Harms, Kelly and Turnipseed, 2018)

Richards and Laurin (2021) also observe that severe abdominal pain may result from acute mesenteric vasoconstriction; methamphetamine has also been associated with the formation of ulcers and ischemic colitis. Renal failure may occur from rhabdomyolysis, necrotizing angitis, acute interstitial nephritis or tubular necrosis. Skin findings include delusions of parasitosis, and chronic skin-picking may result in neurotic excoriations and prurigonodularis ("speed bumps"). Injectors frequently present with abscess and cellulitis, which they often blame on a "spider bite." Dental examination usually reveals severe caries, especially of the maxillary teeth "meth mouth." This results from maxillary artery vasoconstriction, xerostomia, and poor hygiene. Methamphetamine use during pregnancy can be fatal to the mother and fetus from placental

vasoconstriction resulting in spontaneous abortion (Richards and Laurin, 2021).

Declan (2021) also opines that using even small amounts of methamphetamine, just like other stimulants such as cocaine or amphetamines, can cause similar debilitating health effects. Some of these include faster breathing and an increased irregular heart rate, increased wakefulness or difficulty in sleeping, increased blood pressure and temperature, stroke, restlessness, decreased appetite, and in many cases, central nervous system disturbances such as convulsion or seizures. There is also an increased risk for contracting infectious diseases such as hepatitis B and C, and HIV for people who inject methamphetamine. These diseases are transmitted through sharing sharp objects such as needles or drug equipment containing blood or body fluids. Due to its ability to alter judgment, Methamphetamine use can lead to risky behaviours, such as sexual violence and unprotected sex, which also increases risk for infection.

Some other long-term effects of methamphetamine, according to Declan (2021) may include serious dental problems, anxiety, permanent changes in brain structure and cognitive function, addiction, extreme weight loss, memory loss, hallucinations (seeing things and hearing voices that are not real), and death. While some of these changes to the brain are reversible, others are not. Recent studies have linked the use of



methamphetamine to Parkinson's disease- a disorder of the nervous system that affects movement and balance. As a result of the effect of this drug on the heart, brain and other vital organs, an overdose is treated with intent to prevent a stroke by restoring blood flow to the brain, prevent a heart attack by restoring blood flow to the heart, and by treating affected organs. Timely intervention is key to preventing further damage to the body, caused by this substance.

Declan (2021) also notes that there is currently no approved treatment for methamphetamine addiction. Medicines and other innovative treatments for methamphetamine use, including vaccinations and noninvasive brain stimulation utilizing magnetic fields, are still being researched and developed. As with other drugs, the key to preventing methamphetamine addiction is avoiding usage. Other approaches such as cognitive-behavioural treatment, which helps individuals identify, avoid, and manage events that are likely to trigger drug use, and motivational incentives, which employ vouchers or modest monetary rewards to urge patients to stay drug-free, can help manage methamphetamine addiction. People can, and do recover from methamphetamine addiction if they have ready access to effective treatments that address the multitude of medical and personal problems resulting from short or long-term use.

Crystal methamphetamine, which has suddenly barged its way to public notoriety, is the new source of concern. Known as *mkpurummiri* (seeds of water) in the South-East where it is wreaking havoc among the youth, it is highly addictive, hallucinogenic and able to condemn the user either to a mental liability or outright death. This substance is highly potent and very low in price. It can be easily made in small laboratories, with relatively cheap over-the-counter ingredients such as pseudoephedrine, which is an ingredient found in common cold medications

#### **Cases of Mkpurummiri Abuse in Southeast Nigeria**

According to recent media reports, Eastern Nigeria is facing an epidemic of crystal methamphetamine use among youths. Eastern Nigeria is made up of five states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo). The main ethnic group/language is Igbo. Methamphetamine is popularly called Mkpurummiri (Igbo name for ice) in Eastern Nigeria (Declan, 2021; National Daily Newspaper, 2021). Between October and December 2021, different media outlets framed the use of crystal meth diversely, and many reasons were suggested as influencing factors (National Daily Newspaper, 2021; Njoku et al., 2021). For example, a national newspaper reported that: '*Mkpurummiri*' is the Igbo slang for a very dangerous hard drug called

Methamphetamine or Crystal Meth. It is also known as 'Ice'.

Nowadays, thousands of Igbo youths are addicted to *Mkpurummiri*, and it has become a serious issue. If nothing is done to curb this menace, it will lead many more youths astray as it does to the present drug users (National Daily Newspaper, 2021). In a report published in the Guardian Newspaper, Crystal meth use was attributed to youth unemployment and the associated disenchantment. Of late, in a bid to evade the burden of joblessness and frustrating lifestyle, some young people treat themselves to celestial ecstasy by consuming Crystalline, Methamphetamine generally nicknamed in Igbo dialect as *Mkpurummiri* (Ozah, 2021).

Furthermore, investigative journalists with the Guardian Newspaper, who interviewed a former user, drug experts, youth and vigilante leaders, and some inhabitants of Eastern Nigerian communities, reported that Crystal meth use is becoming widespread in the region (Njoku *et al.*, 2021). One common theme in the media reports is that methamphetamine use is framed as a new phenomenon, and they also highlighted the consequences.

Another national newspaper also reported the harms associated with methamphetamine use in Eastern Nigeria. Viral videos are circulated on a daily basis from various communities in the South-East of victims of *Mkpurummiri*, with their attendant abnormal behaviours. Some

of them were reported to have killed their parents, siblings or burnt their houses under the influence of the drug (Okoli *et al.*, 2021).

Media reports also show that, in many communities, youth associations and vigilante groups are applying corporal punishment to users. Media analysis of several videos posted on social media indicates that public caning of users is the most common punishment that users receive. That is, when users are identified and apprehended by the vigilantes or youth associations, they are tied to a pillar or held by other youths and publicly beaten with canes (Njoku *et al.*, 2021). The public sanction is videoed and posted on social media to deter others (Chukwuleta, 2021; National Daily Newspaper, 2021). Although corporal punishment is popular in Nigeria, research has not examined its effectiveness in reducing drug use. Unfortunately, one beaten user was reported dead after receiving the sanction in Awka, Anambra state (Chukwuleta, 2021).

In a media briefing, the Ebonyi state Commander of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA- a government agency responsible for drug law enforcement in Nigeria) stated that between January and December 2021, "we have seized 196 pinches of methamphetamines, including the loose quantity of meth soaked with a beverage, and these bring it to 0.506kgs" (News Agency of Nigeria, 2021). Drug use attracts heightened social stigma in Nigeria

(Ugwu & Dumbili, 2021); thus, most users disguise their drug use. For instance, Dumbili *et al.* (2020) reported that young people in Eastern Nigeria mix codeine with soft drinks to avoid stigma. Given the public caning/flogging that methamphetamine use attracts and the associated stigma of being videoed, users will most likely conceal its use from the public eye, which poses a severe threat to public health.

In regard to the supply of methamphetamine, factors such as drug trafficking and increased local production of the drug in illegal laboratories are largely responsible for the growing use. While Njoku *et al.* (2021) reported that the drug is sourced from northern Nigeria, and it “is far cheaper than other illicit drugs; thus, many youths are embracing it”, a UNODC (2013) report casts light on other factors that may be responsible.

On November 24, 2021, the Vanguard Newspaper reported that in March 2019, the NDLEA discovered a residential building in Enugu that turned into a drug factory.... where Methamphetamine (*Mkpurummiri*) was being produced in commercial quantities for export overseas, particularly to South Africa (Okoli *et al.*, 2021). On November 27, 2021, another news outlet reported that the NDLEA in Enugu state had uncovered illegal laboratories and arrested three suspects (Ulasi, 2021). Announcing the arrest to journalists, the Enugu state Commander of the NDLEA stated “following intelligence report,

the Command on Saturday arrested two suspects with 100kg of Ephedrine, which is used in the production of Methamphetamine. Subsequent follow-up operation led the team to the location of the laboratory at Zion Avenue Phase 6 Trans Ekulu in Enugu East Local Government Area, Enugu, where the third suspect was arrested” (Ulasi, 2021).

Again, on December 10, 2021, the Daily Times Newspaper reported that the NDLEA had dismantled a laboratory in Asaba (a boundary city with Eastern Nigeria), arresting eight suspects:

Operatives of the NDLEA have uncovered a huge methamphetamine-making laboratory in Asaba.... Officials of the agency’s Special Enforcement Team (SET) also busted the masterminds of the major drug trafficking organization when they arrested eight suspects, four of them Mexican nationals, four Nigerians. The NDLEA stated that the suspects behind the syndicate were arrested in simultaneous operations in Lagos, Obosi, a town near Onitsha in Anambra State, and at the location of the lab in Asaba (Akenzua, 2021).

Based on the extant evidence reviewed above, it is reasonable to conclude that the local laboratories in Nigeria, particularly those set up by drug traffickers in the Eastern region and

neighbouring states, may be responsible for the current rise in methamphetamine use in the region. This is primarily because drug availability encourages consumption and associated harms (Dumbili, 2020a).

### **Awareness of Health Hazards of Drug Abuse: The Role of Mass Media**

On December 19, 2013, Members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) met, drafted and adopted an 11-point resolution, urging Asian Parliaments “to coordinate among member parliaments to review the relevant legislations to address different aspects of combating drug trafficking”, and stressing “the need to exchange information and best practices within APA Member Parliaments on combating drug trafficking, among others” (APAResolution2013, p. 76-77). As suggested by APA, effective exchange of information is an imperative factor in the efforts to eradicate drug abuse and trafficking.

Yet, studies on history of drug education have suggested that the traditional strategies such as moral objectives, fear approaches, and affective approaches have been less successful probably because the approaches did not emphasize the objective facts about the physical properties of the drugs and adverse effects of using the drugs, they were not sustained, or they failed to address the primary determinants of adolescent

drug use (Flay and Sobel 1986). This failure of the traditional strategies calls for a new, comprehensive and integrated approach in the campaigns against trafficking and use of illicit drugs in Nigeria, and central to this new approach is the mass media. The failure or success of the government agencies to combat the problems of illicit drugs depends largely on how the mass media care engaged.

The mass media, being a powerful platform for disseminating public information among the citizens, have immense roles to play in this respect. The mass media are a powerful communication platform that can be used to take development messages to the mass audience. They set public agenda and influence public opinions on crucial public matters. The media perform this agenda-setting function when they assign a significant degree of prominence to the issues by repeatedly reporting them and sometimes giving them editorial emphasis (Severin and Tankard 2001; McCombs 2004).

As submitted by Gonzenbach (1994) changing and sustained media interpretations of certain social issue culturally defines and drives the issue through time. Similarly, Armstrong *et al.* as cited by Lawhon and Herrick (2013, p. 988) posit that “the mass media play an influential role in the process of agenda setting by providing one of the primary attention arenas in the public domain, by calling attention to certain problems and by framing what are seen as the causes of and

solutions to those problems". Carroll, cited by Nicholas (2002: 4), also noted that, 'mass media campaigns have their primary effects on agenda setting, on influencing the salience of particular drug issues, on stimulating public debate and facilitating structural change.

The foregoing trend of arguments suggests that if the media continually report issues relating to illicit drugs, such issues would occupy the public discourse sphere and assume prominence. This may shape how the mass audience perceives and interprets the drug-related issues. Through their agenda-setting role and other conventional functions, the media, therefore, can be effectively used to change behaviors, or social orientation of the public, and to control or subdue socio-cultural challenges, such as drug abuse and trafficking, child labor and trafficking, corruption and other forms of social vices. As Lancaster *et al.* (2011: 398) explain, "The agenda setting function of the news media defines salient issues, captures the attention of the public and shapes public opinion."

Apart from the three fundamental functions of *information, education* and *entertainment*, the mass media still perform other crucial functions such as surveillance, correlation, status conferral, enforcement of social norms, and cultural transmission functions (Watson 2003; Sambe 2005; McQuail 2007). All these functions are crucial and if effectively deployed, they can help the various anti-drug

agencies in Nigeria to fight the problem of drug abuse and trafficking. While performing the surveillance functions, the mass media watch the environment and inform the people of events or issues that impact or affect the society. The mass media serve as the societal guards and watchdogs, which explore the environment to identify and alert the public to what is referred to as a SWOT analysis (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) as they affect the masses.

The surveillance function comes in two forms. The first form is *Warning Surveillance*, which happens when the mass media gather information and informs the public about *threats* or *dangers* in society. These threats may include impending disasters, economic depression, environmental pollution or hazards, growing unemployment, current trends of crime perpetration (for example, ATM Scam, Internet-based fraud, illicit drug trafficking and use, ritual killings), and impending industrial crises. The media warn the people of these threats so that the appropriate bodies, individuals or authorities take proper precautions or proactive measures.

The second is the *Instrumental Surveillance*, which has to do with transmission of information about events, or issues that are helpful to the people. News about new cures for malaria/ cancer/HIV/AIDS, employment opportunities, admissions, current market prices, and new products/services are instances of

instrumental surveillance. By performing these surveillance functions, the media serve as the 'eyes' and the 'ears' of the public and they are seen as modern town crier and agents of social reality construction (Eun-Ho *et al.* 2007). The mass media, through the surveillance functions (Clarke 2014), can help curtail the menace of illicit drug trafficking, and in Nigeria, by monitoring activities of drug traffickers and users and bringing such acts to the public glare. When crimes are exposed, criminals will be scared of perpetrating their heinous acts.

The mass media can help the nation watch the environment and alert citizens to dangers of illicit drug trafficking and use. Another function of mass media that is relevant to the fight against hard drug problems is the *Enforcement of Social Norms Function*. Every society has norms, which prescribe the standard of conduct. Norms are established standards of behavior maintained, widely understood and shared by members of a social group—society (Schaefer and Lamb 1983). Norms spell out the *dos* and *don'ts* in a society. The *dos* have their rewards and the *don'ts* have their punishments. Trafficking and use of illicit drugs are examples of the *don'ts* in Nigeria and other societies.

The mass media should consistently help enforce this standard by reporting punishments for violation of norms, or reward for upholding such norms. Apart from one-off

interpretive reports, matters relating to drug trafficking and use should receive constant and intensive editorial emphases by the media. It is not enough that mass media inform the public of arrest of a group of drug traffickers, the media, through unswerving investigative reporting and persistent editorial attention, should also help the nation set public agenda and assist government and its relevant agencies to expose and break the rings of the crimes. This is part of the public service and social responsibilities of the media.

To effectively perform the forgoing functions in ensuring a positive behavior change towards drug-related crimes, the news media can adopt the following campaign strategies.

#### ***Spot Announcement and Catch Phrases:***

These are short public messages by the broadcast media. They come strategically at intervals. They are short and precise. They are used to create awareness about some social issues. They always come in between or at the end of a newscast. They may come as these:

- *Stop drug trafficking, it is a menace to our society*
- *Your future is bright, don't ruin it with drugs*
- *Protect your future, don't use illicit drugs*
- *Never use drugs unless your doctor prescribes*

- *Drug trafficking aids terrorism, join government to stamp it out form our society*
- *Drug traffickers are social threats, report them to the law enforcement agent*
- *Say no to drugs,*
- *Drink Responsibly*
- *Smokers Are Liable to Die Young*
- *Use hard drugs and ruin your future*
- *Heroin has destroyed millions of young heroes, don't use it*
- *Illicit drugs are deadly and poisonous*
- *Hard drugs will kill you!!*

These are also parts of the public services and agenda-setting functions of the mass media.

***Fear Appeal/Scare Tactics:*** When other strategies seem to have produced little or no effect, anti-drug campaigns by the mass media can come in the form of fear appeal or scare tactics. This is a strategy that is used to cause fear arousal in the audience purposely to discourage the target audience from engaging in a particular negative or anti-social act or practice. Empirical studies have shown that fear appeal could be effective in discouraging adolescents from using illicit drugs, especially when such drugs are new. For instance, Flay and Sobel, (1986) while reporting Smart and Fejer's (1974) study on the effects of high and low fear appeals about drug abuse say that individuals who received the high threat appeal were less likely to attempt to use the drug and more likely to believe that possession of the drug was not lawful. Scare messages may come in these forms:

- *Don't use cocaine, it will snuff out your life*

While using the fear appeal strategy, the mass media editors must consider some factors. One, the focus must not be only on arousing fear in the audience; the message must be used in a manner that reduces the associated threat and makes the target audience change their negative behavior. Two, other social and psychological factors, such as the primary determinants of adolescent drug use, must be considered (Flay and Sobel 1986). Three, the fear appeal strategy must be combined with other strategies; it must not be used alone or overused. Nicholas (2002, p. 3) warns that fear tactics must be used with a high degree of "caution and credibility"; otherwise, the messages may have counter-productive effects.

***Edutainment:*** This is a media strategy whereby development messages are packaged with some entertainment. It is the process of purposely designing and implementing a message to educate and entertain. It is any communication strategy that employs popular culture to educate and challenge people. Edutainment is not a theory but a strategy employed to bring about individual and social change or to tackle serious social

problems through the use of popular entertainment formats (Japhet 2013). It is *entertainment education*. This is so because the strategy combines the traditional media of education with the traditional media of entertainment to harness the advantages of the two media forms (Singhal and Rogers 1999). Edutainment, therefore, is meant to entertain and educate simultaneously.

*The Soul City Model of edutainment* is a good model the Nigerian mass media could adopt. This model is considered ideal as one of the communication strategies that the Nigeria mass media can employ to address the problem of illicit drug-use and trafficking in the country. It is a model for behavioral change (Japhet 2013)

The model prescribes two phases-*the input phase* and *the output phase*. At the opening phase, the change agent (mass media experts in this context) must conduct an audience analysis and research. This would enable the content developers to be familiar with the demographic and psychographic peculiarities of the target audience and develop the media messages that accommodate these peculiarities. While doing audience research, the media experts must also forge and sustain partnerships with the relevant stakeholders such as social groups and community leaders, who are believed to have an influence on the community people. Also, the change agent must promote and market the messages in

order to make them acceptable to the people. At the output phase are (1) impact of the messages on social change, and (2) potential opportunities. The messages must be capable of evoking the desired behavior change that discourages illicit drug use and trafficking.

This change must happen at the three major layers-sociopolitical environment, community, and individual. The message must show potential opportunities by being capable of entertaining the target audience and simultaneously educating them about the danger of illicit drug use and benefits of abstaining from the drugs. Central to the two phases is the edutainment vehicle or media. In all, the media personnel as the change agents must evaluate at regular intervals the social change campaigns through edutainment in order to determine the effectiveness of the message. Short plays, drama, pantomime, songs, and role acting are examples of edutainment, and these have been successfully used in different countries. For instance, as reported by Romer (1994, p. 1077), *the Partnership for a Drug-Free America*, after starting an "Inner-City Initiative" aimed at reaching out to poor communities in the central cities of America, created a 10-minute film titled "Busted". The film could be shown in cinemas with capacities for attracting young audiences. The central message of the film is outright condemnation of illicit drug trade and adolescent involvement with traders.



This film is an example of edutainment, which is basically a behavioral modeling strategy through which an audience member is encouraged to imbibe or reject the actions of a media character.

### Conclusion

Nigerian mass media can adopt this strategy to discourage trafficking and use of illicit drugs. This may come in the form of drama series on television and radio, or serialized stories in newspapers. The Nigerian mass media must develop dramas, stories and other forms of edutainment projects from the cultural context of the audience, and make sure that the projects address contemporary social realities especially those concerning illicit drug issues, and preferably employ the local languages of the people, who are the potential targets of the messages.

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