



Counselling Interventions on Substance Abuse Prevention among Adolescents in Secondary Schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

Substance abuse among adolescents in Nigerian secondary schools has emerged as a critical public health and educational concern, particularly in urbanized and densely populated areas such as Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State. Adolescents are often exposed to a variety of risk factors, including peer pressure, poor parental monitoring, academic stress, and socio-economic challenges that increase their vulnerability to drug and substance abuse. This opinion paper explores the significance of counselling interventions as a preventive strategy aimed at addressing substance abuse among adolescents in selected secondary schools within Obio/Akpor LGA. Drawing insights from developmental and behavioural counselling theories, the paper discusses various counselling approaches such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), group counselling, peer education, school-based drug education programs, and parental involvement counselling. It argues that these interventions, when effectively implemented within a supportive school environment, can enhance students' decision-making skills, boost resilience, and foster healthy coping mechanisms. The role of trained guidance counsellors is emphasized in early detection, risk assessment, psychoeducation, and intervention. The paper further highlights the socio-cultural dynamics of the Obio/Akpor area, which influence both the patterns of substance abuse and the efficacy of counselling strategies. The challenges hindering effective counselling practices in schools such as inadequate personnel, stigma, limited resources, and lack of policy support are also examined. The paper concludes by recommending a multi-stakeholder approach involving counsellors, teachers, parents, policymakers, and health professionals in creating sustainable and culturally-sensitive intervention models tailored to the realities of adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescents, Counselling interventions, Peer pressure and Substance abuse

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents face a myriad of developmental challenges that can significantly influence their choices and behavior. One such critical issue is substance abuse, which poses a serious threat to their health, academic performance, and future well-being. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021), young people are especially susceptible to the allure of drugs due to curiosity, peer influence, and socio-environmental pressures. In Nigeria, the problem is increasingly evident in both urban and rural areas, including Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State. The rising prevalence of drug abuse among secondary school students in this area underscores the urgent need for effective preventive interventions. Substance abuse among adolescents has become a significant public health and psychosocial concern globally, and Nigeria is not exempted from this growing menace. Adolescence, characterized as a critical period of growth and identity formation, is often accompanied by risky behaviors, including experimentation with drugs and other

psychoactive substances (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). In recent years, the increase in the use of substances such as cannabis, codeine, tramadol, and alcohol among secondary school students in Nigeria, particularly in urban and peri-urban communities like those found in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State, has raised alarms among educators, parents, policymakers, and health professionals (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency [NDLEA], 2022).

The factors contributing to adolescent substance abuse are multifaceted, encompassing peer pressure, family dysfunction, media influence, socio-economic instability, and lack of awareness (Oshodi, Aina, & Onajole, 2010). In secondary schools within Obio/Akpor LGA, the proximity to urban centers like Port Harcourt, coupled with exposure to street culture and insufficient parental supervision, increases the vulnerability of students to substance experimentation and eventual dependence. Beyond the immediate health effects, substance abuse impairs adolescents' academic performance, mental health, decision-making abilities, and social relationships (Eze & Omeje, 2018).

In addressing this challenge, counselling interventions have emerged as a viable approach. Counselling provides a structured and therapeutic process through which students can explore their behaviors, understand the risks associated with substance use, and build resilience against peer and environmental pressures. School counselling, particularly when embedded within a comprehensive guidance and counselling program, offers adolescents a safe space for self-expression, emotional regulation, and value clarification (Egbochuku & Ekanem, 2008). Moreover, early intervention strategies in school settings can help prevent substance use before it escalates into addiction or long-term psychological issues.

There are various forms of counselling interventions that have proven effective in preventing substance abuse among adolescents. These include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), peer education, motivational interviewing, group counselling, and life skills training (Botvin & Griffin, 2007). These approaches are often tailored to address the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of substance abuse, thereby equipping students with the tools to resist drug use and make healthier life choices. Additionally, school-based prevention programs that incorporate parental involvement, teacher collaboration, and community support have shown greater success in reducing drug-related behaviors among adolescents (UNODC, 2020).

In the context of Obio/Akpor LGA, understanding the unique socio-cultural and economic dynamics of the region is crucial in designing and implementing effective counselling strategies. The local school environment, availability of counselling services, counsellor competence, and the attitude of school authorities towards drug education significantly affect the success of intervention programs. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of counselling interventions in preventing substance abuse among adolescents in selected secondary schools within Obio/Akpor LGA. It aims to identify the types of interventions used, evaluate their outcomes, and explore the challenges and prospects of school counselling in this critical area of adolescent development.

The growing incidence of adolescent substance abuse requires a proactive, evidence-based response, and counselling stands out as a powerful preventive tool. Through a detailed investigation of the current practices and their effectiveness, this study will contribute to the ongoing discourse on adolescent mental health and the role of school counselling in fostering a drug-free generation.

Problem Statement

Substance abuse among adolescents has become a growing concern in Nigeria, particularly within urban and peri-urban areas such as Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State. Adolescents in this region are increasingly exposed to psychoactive substances such as alcohol, cannabis, tramadol, codeine, and other illicit drugs, often as a result of peer pressure, family dysfunction, poor coping mechanisms, and easy accessibility to drugs. This worrying trend is not only affecting their physical and mental health but also contributes to poor academic performance, increased truancy, risky behaviours, and a rise in school-related violence and delinquency.

Despite the alarming rise in substance abuse cases among secondary school students, counselling interventions within schools appear to be inadequate, poorly implemented, or completely

absent. Many guidance counsellors lack the resources, training, or institutional support to provide effective substance abuse prevention programs. Furthermore, there is limited empirical data on the effectiveness of counselling interventions in curbing drug abuse among adolescents in the local context of Obio/Akpor LGA. This creates a significant gap in both practice and policy, as interventions are often generic and not tailored to the specific socio-cultural realities of adolescents in the area. Therefore, the study seeks to investigate the types of counselling interventions currently being used in selected secondary schools in Obio/Akpor LGA, assess their effectiveness, and recommend best practices tailored to the local environment. This inquiry is crucial for developing context-specific strategies that can prevent or reduce substance abuse among adolescents and improve their overall wellbeing and academic success.

Research Gap and Aim

Substance abuse among adolescents in secondary schools is a growing concern in Nigeria, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas such as Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State. Several studies have examined the prevalence and effects of substance abuse among youths at national and regional levels. However, there remains a noticeable gap in empirical research focusing specifically on the role and effectiveness of counselling interventions as a preventive strategy within the context of secondary schools in Obio/Akpor LGA.

While educational policies acknowledge the importance of guidance and counselling units in schools, there is insufficient data on how these services are implemented to address substance abuse issues among adolescents in this specific locality. Moreover, most existing studies tend to focus on curative approaches rather than preventive counselling techniques, such as awareness campaigns, peer education, life-skills training, and behaviour modification strategies. Additionally, limited attention has been given to the perception of students, school counsellors, and teachers on the effectiveness of these interventions, which is crucial for designing evidence-based programs. The aim of this study is to examine the counselling interventions employed for substance abuse prevention among adolescents in selected secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Substance abuse among adolescents is a growing concern in both global and local contexts, particularly in areas such as Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State, Nigeria. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable due to developmental factors, peer influence, and environmental conditions (Adejumo, 2019). The use of counselling interventions has been identified as a strategic approach to preventing and mitigating substance abuse in this demographic group. Several studies have affirmed the effectiveness of school-based counselling interventions in addressing adolescent substance abuse. School counsellors play a critical role by providing preventive education, individual and group counselling, and referrals to support services (Egbochuku & Akerele, 2020). These interventions equip adolescents with the necessary skills to resist peer pressure, make informed decisions, and cope with life's challenges without resorting to drugs.

Categories of Substances Abused by Adolescents

Drug abuse can be categorized based on the type of substance, source, or effects on the central nervous system. The most common categorization, particularly relevant for adolescents, includes the following:

1. Depressants (Downers): These are drugs that slow down the activity of the brain and central nervous system.

- i. Examples: Alcohol, barbiturates, benzodiazepines (e.g., Valium, Diazepam), codeine.

- ii. Effects: Drowsiness, relaxation, impaired coordination, and in large doses—respiratory failure or death.
 - iii. Relevance to Adolescents: Commonly abused at social events, often mixed with energy drinks or other drugs.
2. Stimulants (Uppers): These drugs increase the activity of the central nervous system, causing a boost in alertness, energy, and mood.
- i. Examples: Caffeine (in excess), nicotine, cocaine, amphetamines (e.g., tramadol, ecstasy), methamphetamine.
 - ii. Effects: Increased heart rate, alertness, reduced appetite, insomnia, possible aggression.
 - iii. Relevance to Adolescents: Sometimes used to stay awake for exams, boost athletic performance, or in party scenes.
3. Hallucinogens: These drugs distort a person's perception of reality, affecting thoughts, feelings, and senses.
- i. Examples: LSD (acid), psilocybin (magic mushrooms), PCP (angel dust).
 - ii. Effects: Hallucinations, paranoia, confusion, distorted sense of time.
 - iii. Relevance to Adolescents: Less common, but may be experimented with due to curiosity or peer influence.
4. Narcotics (Opioids): These are pain-relieving drugs that can lead to euphoria but are highly addictive.
- i. Examples: Heroin, morphine, tramadol, codeine, opium.
 - ii. Effects: Pain relief, sedation, euphoria, high risk of overdose and dependency.
 - iii. Relevance to Adolescents: Tramadol and codeine are among the most abused due to easy access through over-the-counter or illicit sales.
5. Inhalants: These are volatile substances that produce chemical vapors, which are inhaled to induce psychoactive or mind-altering effects.
- i. Examples: Glue, petrol, paint thinner, aerosol sprays.
 - ii. Effects: Dizziness, headaches, nausea, brain damage, sudden death.
 - iii. Relevance to Adolescents: Cheap and accessible, often used by street children or adolescents in low-income communities.
6. Cannabis: Often considered in its own category due to its widespread use and unique properties.
- i. Example: Marijuana (weed, Igbo), hashish.
 - ii. Effects: Euphoria, impaired memory, distorted perception, decreased motivation.
 - iii. Relevance to Adolescents: Very common in Nigerian secondary schools, often glamorized in music or peer groups.

Causes of Substance Abuse

There are several underlying factors responsible for the increasing rate of substance abuse among adolescents:

1. Peer Pressure: Adolescents often feel compelled to fit into social groups where drug use is normalized. Adolescents are highly influenced by their peers, making them vulnerable to experimenting with substances to fit in or gain approval (Awopetu & Adegboyega, 2019).

2. **Poor Parental Supervision:** In homes where parents are absent, negligent, or users themselves, children are more likely to indulge in drug use.

3. **Family Dysfunction:** Adolescents from broken homes or those experiencing domestic violence are more likely to engage in substance abuse (Akanni & Adayonfo, 2015).

4. **Socioeconomic Factors:** Poverty, unemployment, and lack of recreational opportunities can push young people toward drugs as a form of escape.

5. **Academic Stress and Failure:** Students who perform poorly or experience pressure from school authorities or parents may resort to substances as a coping mechanism.

6. **Media Influence:** Music, movies, and social media often glorify drug use, subtly encouraging experimentation among youth.

The Role of Counselling Intervention in Substance Abuse

Counselling intervention plays a crucial role in preventing substance abuse among adolescents, particularly within the context of secondary schools in areas like Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA). Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by emotional, psychological, and social changes, which can make young people vulnerable to experimenting with drugs and other substances. Counselling provides structured support that can effectively reduce this vulnerability.

1. Early Identification and Risk Assessment

Counselling interventions help in the early identification of students who may be at risk of engaging in substance abuse. Through individual and group assessments, counsellors can detect signs of behavioral changes, peer pressure influence, emotional distress, or family-related issues that often contribute to drug experimentation. Identifying these risks early allows for timely preventive measures.

2. Psychoeducation and Awareness Creation

One of the most significant roles of counselling is educating adolescents about the dangers and consequences of substance abuse. Many young people fall into drug use due to misinformation or curiosity. Counselling sessions provide age-appropriate information on the physical, emotional, academic, and legal consequences of drug use, correcting misconceptions and empowering students to make informed decisions.

3. Skill Development and Coping Strategies

Counselling equips adolescents with vital life skills such as decision-making, problem-solving, emotional regulation, assertiveness, and resistance to peer pressure. These coping strategies enhance their ability to manage stress, anxiety, or trauma without turning to drugs. This empowers students to make healthier lifestyle choices.

4. Behavioral Modification

Through techniques such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), counsellors help adolescents recognize and change negative thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors related to drug use. Interventions target not just the behavior but also the underlying beliefs and emotional triggers, leading to lasting change.

5. Peer Support and Group Counselling

Group counselling provides a supportive environment where adolescents can share their experiences, learn from others, and develop a sense of belonging. This peer interaction fosters empathy,

accountability, and reinforces positive behavior change, making students less likely to seek acceptance through drug-using peers.

6. Family Involvement

Effective counselling interventions often involve parental and family counselling. Family dynamics can significantly influence adolescent behavior. Counsellors help families understand their roles, improve communication, and create a supportive home environment that discourages substance use.

7. Referral and Collaboration

In cases where an adolescent is already experimenting or struggling with substance use, counsellors facilitate referrals to healthcare providers, rehabilitation centers, or mental health professionals. They also collaborate with teachers, school administrators, and community organizations to build a comprehensive support network for prevention and recovery.

Challenges Facing Counselling Services in Schools

1. Shortage of Professional Counsellors

This refers to a critical gap between the increasing demand for counselling services and the limited availability of qualified and licensed counselling professionals to meet those needs. In the context of secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA), this shortage significantly hampers the implementation of effective counselling interventions aimed at preventing substance abuse among adolescents. Professional counsellors are trained experts who provide guidance, emotional support, and therapeutic interventions to help individuals cope with personal, social, educational, or psychological challenges. In school settings, their roles are crucial in identifying early warning signs of substance abuse, offering preventive education, and conducting one-on-one or group counselling sessions to address risky behaviors.

However, many secondary schools in Nigeria and particularly in Obio/Akpor LGA either lack professional counsellors entirely or rely on untrained staff members such as teachers or administrative personnel to perform counselling roles.

2. Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding refers to the insufficient financial resources allocated to educational institutions, guidance and counselling programs, or public health initiatives, particularly those aimed at addressing critical adolescent issues such as substance abuse prevention. It occurs when the available funds fall short of what is required to effectively plan, implement, and sustain meaningful counselling interventions and support services in schools awareness campaigns, and limited professional development for counsellors.

3. Lack of Awareness and Support

Lack of awareness and support refers to a significant barrier in addressing and preventing substance abuse among adolescents. It highlights a situation where young people, their parents, teachers, and even the broader school community do not have sufficient knowledge, understanding, or resources to recognize the dangers of substance abuse, the signs of addiction, or how to seek help and offer timely intervention. In secondary schools within Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, this issue is particularly relevant due to several underlying factors, such as limited access to guidance counsellors, inadequate sensitization programs, and societal stigmas surrounding drug use. When there is a lack of awareness, students are often ignorant of the health, social, academic, and legal consequences of

substance abuse. They may view drug use as a harmless experiment or a coping mechanism for stress, peer pressure, or emotional problems without fully understanding the risks involved.

4. Stigma and Cultural Beliefs

Stigma refers to a set of negative beliefs, stereotypes, or attitudes that society or specific communities hold toward individuals who engage in certain behaviors or possess particular characteristics. In the context of substance abuse, stigma manifests through labeling, discrimination, and social exclusion of those who are suspected of or known to abuse drugs or alcohol. Adolescents suffering from substance use disorders are often viewed as morally weak, irresponsible, or dangerous. This societal judgment can lead to shame, self-isolation, and reluctance to seek help, thereby undermining effective intervention and rehabilitation. Cultural beliefs, on the other hand, encompass the shared values, norms, traditions, and practices that shape how a community perceives certain issues, including health and behavioral problems like substance abuse. In Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, for instance, certain cultural beliefs may attribute drug use among adolescents to poor parenting, spiritual attacks, or a lack of discipline. Some communities may also perceive discussing substance abuse openly, especially with adolescents, as taboo or disrespectful, which further limits awareness and preventive efforts.

5. Poor Infrastructure and Facilities

Poor infrastructure and facilities in the context of secondary schools refer to the inadequate, dilapidated, or non-functional physical and organizational structures that are essential for effective teaching, learning, and student well-being. This includes buildings, classrooms, counseling units, recreational centers, toilets, libraries, laboratories, and water supply, as well as equipment and materials needed to support student development and health.

6. Lack of Preventive Counselling Programs

Lack of Preventive Counselling Programs refers to the absence, inadequacy, or ineffective implementation of structured guidance initiatives aimed at educating, supporting, and empowering adolescents to make healthy life choices before the onset of harmful behaviors such as substance abuse. Preventive counselling is a proactive approach that focuses on early identification of risk factors, building protective factors, and equipping students with life skills, coping strategies, and accurate information to resist peer pressure and avoid drug use.

7. Overburdened School Curriculum

An overburdened school curriculum refers to an educational program that is excessively packed with academic content, subjects, and learning objectives, often beyond the cognitive, emotional, and physical capacity of students to effectively assimilate. In such a curriculum, students are required to cover too many topics within limited timeframes, leading to pressure, stress, and superficial learning instead of deep understanding.

8. Peer Pressure and Media Influence

This refers to the influence exerted by a peer group on its individual members to conform to group norms, behaviors, and values. Among adolescents, peer pressure is one of the strongest social forces that shape behavior positively or negatively. It can lead young people to engage in activities such as experimenting with drugs, alcohol, or other risky behaviors in order to gain acceptance, avoid ridicule, or establish a sense of belonging within their social circle.

9. Limited Collaboration with External Agencies

Limited collaboration with external agencies refers to the insufficient or minimal interaction, partnership, or coordinated efforts between secondary schools and outside bodies such as health organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), rehabilitation centers, government ministries, religious groups, community-based organizations, and law enforcement agencies in addressing substance abuse issues among adolescents.

Consequences of Adolescent Substance Abuse

The abuse of substances during adolescence can lead to severe short- and long-term consequences, including:

1. **Health Impacts:** Chronic substance use can lead to addiction, mental health disorders, and physical complications such as liver damage and respiratory issues (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018).
2. **Academic-Divide:** Adolescents involved in substance abuse often exhibit poor academic performance and higher dropout rates (Hawkins, 2017).
3. **Health Issues:** Drug use can lead to addiction, liver and kidney damage, mental disorders, and in extreme cases, death.
4. **Behavioral Problems:** Increased aggression, truancy, and involvement in criminal activities are linked to drug abuse.
5. **Family Breakdown:** Drug use can strain family relationships, leading to conflict and emotional detachment.
6. **Loss of Future Opportunities:** Drug abuse hinders the achievement of educational and career goals.

Theories of Adolescents Substance Abuse

1. Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura)

Social Learning Theory (SLT), proposed by Albert Bandura in the 1960s, is a psychological framework that emphasizes the importance of observational learning, imitation, and modeling in the development of behavior. Bandura argued that learning does not solely occur through direct experience or reinforcement (as stated by behaviorists), but also through watching others within a social context.

Key elements of SLT include:

- 1) **Observational Learning:** Learning through observing others' behaviors and the consequences.
- 2) **Modeling:** Replicating the behavior of role models such as parents, teachers, peers, or media figures.
- 3) **Reinforcement and Punishment:** Outcomes of behavior influence the likelihood of repetition.
- 4) **Self-efficacy:** Belief in one's ability to perform and sustain behaviors.

Bandura emphasized that adolescents are particularly influenced by social models, especially peers and influential adults, in shaping attitudes and behaviors, including risk-related behaviors like substance abuse.

2. Relevance of Social Learning Theory to Substance Abuse Prevention

Substance abuse among adolescents is often learned through:

- i. **Observation of peers who use drugs or alcohol.**
- ii. **Imitation of behaviors seen in the media or at home.**
- iii. **Perceived rewards associated with substance use (e.g., peer acceptance, stress relief).**
- iv. **Lack of negative consequences modeled or enforced.**

Bandura's theory offers a useful framework for understanding how adolescents begin, maintain, or stop substance abuse behaviors, and how counselling interventions can influence this learning process.

3. Application of Social Learning Theory to Counselling Interventions

In the context of secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State, where adolescents may face peer pressure, weak parental supervision, and exposure to drugs, Social Learning Theory provides several practical counselling strategies:

a. Modelling Positive Behaviors

- i. Counsellors and trained peer mentors can serve as positive role models.
- ii. Use of ex-addicts or reformed individuals to share their stories, showing the consequences of substance abuse and the benefits of abstaining.

b. Reinforcement and Incentives

- i. Counselors can implement positive reinforcement by rewarding drug-free behavior.
- ii. School-based campaigns and clubs can provide incentives for positive peer influence and healthy lifestyle choices.

c. Observational Learning through Media

- i. Incorporate educational videos, dramas, and storytelling that demonstrate the harmful consequences of substance abuse.
- ii. Showcase real-life scenarios where abstaining from drugs led to positive outcomes.

2. Person-Centered Therapy (Carl Rogers)

Person-Centered Therapy (PCT), also known as Client-Centered Therapy, was developed by Carl Rogers in the 1940s as a humanistic approach to counselling. At its core, PCT emphasizes the importance of creating a safe, non-judgmental, and empathetic environment where clients (in this case, adolescents) can explore and understand their feelings, make informed choices, and move toward positive personal development. In the context of substance abuse prevention among adolescents in secondary schools in Obio/Akpor LGA, this approach offers a valuable framework for empowering young people to make healthier decisions and develop resilience.

Core Principles of Person-Centered Therapy

Carl Rogers outlined three core conditions essential for effective therapy:

1. Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR): This involves showing complete support and acceptance of the client regardless of what they say or do. For adolescents struggling with or at risk of substance abuse, feeling accepted and not judged is critical for openness and healing.
2. Empathy: The counsellor seeks to deeply understand the adolescent's perspective, feelings, and experiences. This helps in validating their emotions and building trust.
3. Congruence (Genuineness): The therapist is open and authentic with the adolescent. Being real encourages the student to also be real and honest about their struggles.

Application of Person-Centered Therapy to Substance Abuse Prevention

Person-Centered Therapy is highly relevant in addressing substance abuse among adolescents for several reasons:

- a. Building a Safe Emotional Space: Adolescents often engage in substance use due to peer pressure, emotional stress, low self-worth, or unresolved trauma. A person-centered environment gives them the psychological safety to talk freely about these issues without fear of punishment or shame.
- b. Empowering Autonomy and Decision-Making: Rather than giving advice or instructions, the therapist helps adolescents explore their thoughts and feelings so that they can arrive at their own conclusions. This internal motivation is more sustainable in resisting peer pressure to use substances.
- c. Addressing Underlying Emotional Issues: Through empathetic listening and reflection, students often become more aware of the root causes of their substance use tendencies, such as loneliness, neglect, or low self-esteem. Understanding these causes is the first step toward change.
- d. Enhancing Self-Concept: Adolescents struggling with substance use often have a poor self-image. By experiencing unconditional positive regard and empathy, they begin to view themselves as worthy of care and capable of change.

3. Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (Aaron T. Beck)

Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT), developed by Aaron T. Beck in the 1960s, is a psychological approach that focuses on how people's thoughts (cognitions), feelings, and behaviors are interconnected. The core assumption of CBT is that maladaptive or distorted thinking patterns contribute to emotional distress and dysfunctional behaviors. By identifying and restructuring these thought patterns, individuals can develop healthier behaviors and coping strategies. In the context of substance abuse among adolescents, CBT provides a powerful tool for prevention and intervention. It addresses the cognitive distortions and behavioral tendencies that lead to substance use, helping adolescents develop self-awareness, problem-solving skills, and coping mechanisms.

Key Concepts of CBT Relevant to Substance Abuse Prevention

- 1) **Cognitive Distortions:** Adolescents may develop irrational or negative thoughts such as "Drugs help me feel better" or "Everyone is doing it." CBT helps in recognizing and correcting these distortions.
- 2) **Automatic Thoughts:** These are spontaneous, habitual thoughts that influence behavior. In adolescents, automatic thoughts like "I can't handle stress without smoking" can lead to drug use.
- 3) **Core Beliefs:** These are deep-seated beliefs often formed in childhood, such as "I'm not good enough" or "Nobody cares about me." These beliefs can drive risky behaviors like substance use.
- 4) **Behavioral Conditioning:** Adolescents may associate certain environments or emotions with substance use. CBT works to break these associations and replace them with healthier habits.
- 5) **Skills Training:** CBT incorporates teaching life skills such as refusal techniques, decision-making, emotional regulation, and assertiveness—skills that help adolescents resist peer pressure and avoid substance use.

Application of CBT in Counselling Interventions for Adolescents

1. Assessment Phase

- i. Counselors assess the adolescent's thought patterns, beliefs, triggers, and behaviors using CBT assessment tools such as thought records or ABC (Activating event, Beliefs, Consequences) worksheets.
- ii. Identify risk factors specific to adolescents in Obio/Akpor LGA, such as peer influence, community norms, or family instability.

2. Cognitive Restructuring

- i. Adolescents are taught to recognize negative thought patterns that lead to substance use.
- ii. For example, replacing the thought "I need drugs to have fun" with "I can enjoy socializing without using substances."

3. Behavioral Techniques

- i. Behavioral experiments: Adolescents test alternative behaviors (e.g., attending a party sober).
- ii. Activity scheduling: Helps them engage in positive, drug-free activities.
- iii. Exposure therapy: If anxiety or trauma is a trigger, gradual exposure may help reduce avoidance behaviors.

4. Relapse Prevention Strategies

- i. CBT teaches adolescents how to identify high-risk situations and develop coping strategies.
- ii. Techniques such as urge surfing (riding out the craving without acting on it) are introduced.
- iii. Development of a personalized relapse prevention plan.

Effectiveness of Counselling Methods

The success of counselling programs largely depends on the training of the counsellors, the support of school authorities, and the willingness of students to participate. Studies have shown that consistent counselling interventions can lead to a reduction in drug use, improvement in academic performance, and better interpersonal relationships (Egbochuku & Ugbochuma, 2013). However, success also hinges on follow-up and the inclusion of other stakeholders such as parents and healthcare professionals.

CONCLUSION

Substance abuse among adolescents poses a grave threat to the future of Nigerian youth. Through counselling interventions, schools can equip students with the tools and mindset needed to make healthy choices. By addressing the root causes of drug use, raising awareness, and promoting inclusive strategies, we can curb the spread of this menace. A joint effort involving schools, families, communities, and government agencies will ultimately ensure the holistic development and well-being of the Nigerian adolescent.

Suggestions

To effectively tackle substance abuse among adolescents in Obio/Akpor LGA, the following actions are suggested;

1. Recruitment and Training: Employing and training professional school counsellors must be prioritized by education authorities.
2. Parent Involvement: Schools should host regular seminars to sensitize parents on monitoring their children's behavior.
3. Policy Implementation: Government should enact and enforce drug-free policies in schools and regulate the sale of controlled substances.
4. Peer Education Programs: Students trained as peer educators can help identify and support their colleagues facing drug-related issues.
5. Community Engagement: Collaboration with religious leaders, NGOs, and law enforcement is necessary to create a drug-free environment.

A holistic approach is necessary to prevent substance abuse among adolescents. This includes integrating counselling programs into the school curriculum, creating awareness campaigns, and engaging multiple stakeholders. The role of school management in providing a safe, inclusive environment cannot be overemphasized. Establishing trust between students and counsellors is also critical in ensuring the success of intervention strategies.

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