



## **Effectiveness of Mass Media in the Fight against Drug Abuse among Undergraduates of Tertiary Institutions in Imo State**

**Okoye Loveth<sup>a</sup>, Agbim Kenneth C.<sup>a</sup>, Ohaji Kelechi M.<sup>b</sup>, Etumnu Emeka W.<sup>a\*</sup>,  
Peggy Okodogbe<sup>a</sup> and Chimeremeze U. Odionyenma<sup>b</sup>**

<sup>a</sup> Department of Mass Communication, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria.

<sup>b</sup> Department of Mass Communication, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri, Nigeria.

### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the effectiveness of mass media in the fight against drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State. The study was anchored on the theory of reasoned action and the research design adopted for this study is the survey method. The population consists of 81,000 undergraduates of the select higher institutions in Imo State. A sample size of 382 arrived after the application of the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator. The systematic sampling technique was employed in this study. The percentage method and bar chart were used for analysing the data. The findings revealed that the level of awareness among respondents towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse is moderate. Further findings showed that respondents agreed that mass media efforts have not been effective in reducing the threat of drug abuse among undergraduates in Imo State's tertiary institutions. As a result, it was concluded that mass media campaigns are ineffective in the fight against drug abuse among undergraduates of higher institutions in Imo State, because the campaigns have not succeeded in curbing the menace, as students continue to engage in it, which could be linked to a lack of awareness among these undergraduates. It was recommended that the media intensify their publicity and commitment to drug abuse in order to raise public awareness of the

\*Corresponding author: Email: [etumnuemeka@gmail.com](mailto:etumnuemeka@gmail.com);

dangers of drug abuse in society. The mass media should be more creative in their content and in some cases, they should employ persuasive communication to be able to influence a good number of youths positively and make them shun drug abuse.

*Keywords: Mass media; drug; drug abuse; tertiary institutions; undergraduates; Imo State.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

People appear to be more aware of the need to improve their health status and prevent health problems as a result of recent interest in graceful human body motions, holistic health care, physical fitness, and natural nutrition. Although individual duties and government efforts in promoting health and preventing diseases are becoming more of a daily message, people choose personal life-style choices within society on how best to live, with education, commercials, and the mass media glamorising numerous harmful behaviours [1]. Herbs, leaves, and plants have been utilised to heal and control ailments since the dawn of time. The use of drugs, in and of itself, poses no risk because drugs, when used correctly, have proven to be a boon. "Chronic use of substances can cause substantial, perhaps irreversible damage to an adolescent's physical and psychological development," according to Falco (1988), as cited by Sambo [2]. Depending on how medications are used, they might be beneficial or dangerous.

Globally, it is no more news that drug abuse is a serious public health issue [3]. Adolescent drug use and abuse has become one of the most concerning health-related issues in Nigeria and other countries of the world [4]. Several school-aged teenagers face mental health issues, which can last for a short time or for a long time. Some people become nuts, become ill-adjusted to educational conditions, and eventually quit. Fawa [5] defines a drug as "any substance utilised for the treatment or prevention of disease in humans or animals." The substance affects biological functions in either a favourable or negative way, depending on the user's body composition, the type of drug taken, the dosage, and whether it is used alone or in combination with other drugs. According to NAFDAC [6], drug abuse is the excessive and persistent self-administration of a substance without regard to medically or culturally accepted patterns," It can also be characterised as taking a drug to the point where it interferes with a person's health and social functioning. Drug abuse is defined as the non-medical use of substances in an excessive,

maladaptive, or addicted manner [7]. Abdulahi [8], in a similar vein, described drug abuse as the use of drugs to the extent where it interferes with a person's health and social function. Drug abuse is defined as the intentional overuse or misuse of a single drug, with or without a prior medical diagnosis from a qualified health expert. It's also possible to think of it as an illegal drug overdose (s). According to Adoga [9], drug abusers who show indicators of stress, concern, unhappiness, behavioural changes, exhaustion, and a loss or increase in appetite should be seen by medical professionals and counsellors to avoid dangerous diseases. The rationales and justifications for drug usage are as numerous and varied as the persons who use them. Curiosity and peer pressure are two typical ones that are utilised to induce feelings of well-being, a pleasant mood, enhanced self-confidence, removed inhibitions, made individuals more sociable, reduced anxiety, and boosted sexual desire, among other things.

People sometimes confuse substance abuse with drug abuse; however, drugs refer to prescriptions prescribed by a doctor, whereas substance abuse can involve substances other than drugs, such as gasoline, cocaine, and glue. If a substance was intentionally employed to create physiological or psychological impacts for a reason other than therapeutic purposes, it was termed abused. Substance addiction usually begins in adolescence with smoking and alcohol intake, according to Farhadinasab, Bashirian, and Mahjoub [10]. Drug abuse among students, on the other hand, may be caused by interactions across peer groups, as well as the availability and nature of the substance. Cultural influences, parental behaviour, and legislation and policies that restrict drug access are some of the environmental factors that contribute to drug abuse. The period between childhood to adolescence is a sensitive time, and substance abuse can occur in many circumstances. Adolescents may abuse substances for a variety of reasons, including a lack of knowledge about the dangers of substances, demonstrating personal freedom, peer pressure, satisfying curiosity, poor self-confidence, failure to sustain inter-personal communications, and stress relief.

One of the most important determinants of teenage substance abuse is the presence of a substance abuser in the household, among other things. According to the health educator, drug and alcohol addiction among secondary school students has been a cause of concern for Nigerians in general and Imo State in particular. These substances affect not only the body's and mind's functions, but also the various aspects of health. However, according to Encomium magazine [11], drug addiction is not a recent trend; rather, it is rapidly increasing, with more "leaders of future" adopting it for a number of reasons. Presently, addiction to drugs is one of the most pressing concerns confronting almost all country in the globe, including Nigeria. According to NAFDAC [12], illicit drug consumption is establishing a student subculture in Nigeria. Addiction, abuse, trafficking, and even cultivation can have severe implications; regrettably, youths are the most prone to heavy drugs, resulting in a slew of negative consequences for the community [13].

The media does not possess a magic wand to solve complex issues such as drugs abuse. However, given the severity of drug addiction, the mass media have a moral responsibility to educate the public about drugs, their use and abuse, de-addiction facility methods and strategies, and so on, by focusing more on the disease as well as other issues. It has the potential to set the tone and be the driving force behind national drug awareness and education. The press has an impact on public opinion all across the world. The media can assist in establishing a frequent assessment of the extent and scope of drug use and abuse, as well as drug-related issues in society [14]. The media promotes numerous sorts of drugs unwittingly through advertisements for various items and sometimes inadvertently by glamorising users. Commercial advertisements, like social, economic, or political commentary, provide information. Furthermore, commercials influence views and lifestyles just as much as other forms of information and commentary. The truth is that in any society where drug abuse is prevalent, the chances of social vices increasing and people's lives being jeopardised are high. In such a situation, the media bears a significant amount of responsibility for combating drug abuse through its content and making society a better place to live.

Therefore, this study sought to determine how effective the mass media has been in curbing the

menace of drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

According to the United Nations Office on Drug and Crimes [UNODC] [15] report, 14.4% of Nigerians are presently engaged in drug abuse. In a report by Vanguard newspaper in [16] Mr. Oliver Stolpe, UNODC country representative said 27.7% of the 14.4% those concerned were youths. The rise of drug abuse in Nigeria, particularly, Imo State, portends great danger in society because most crimes that happen are usually associated with drug abuse [17]. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in 2022 expressed concern over the high rate of drug abuse among youths in Imo State [18]. The statistics are worrisome because the more the youths engage in drug abuse; the more crimes are bound to happen.

Be that as it may, why are the youth still engaged in drug abuse? Does it mean they are not aware of the mass media messages on drug abuse? Or have mass media campaigns against drug abuse not been effective? It is against this backdrop, that this study sought to investigate mass media effectiveness in curbing the menace of drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State.

## 1.2 Research Questions

These questions served as a guide for our research.

- 1) What is the level of awareness of the undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse?
- 2) How effective have the mass media campaigns been in curbing the menace of drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State?

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### 2.1 Conceptualising Drug

Drugs are said to be as old as mankind. In many civilizations and societies, drug use and abuse has a long history [19]. Natural plants, such as opium, coca, and cannabis, have been used for centuries. A drug is defined as any natural or manufactured substance, other than food, that alters the structure or function of a living

organism due to its chemical or physical nature [20]. In pharmacology, it is described as a chemical substance used in the treatment, cure, prevention, or diagnosis of disease, or used to improve physical or mental well-being in some other way.

Pharmaceuticals, like vitamins, are also used as food supplements, and we must benefit from drugs in terms of ill health, even if they are prescribed by doctors [21]. Drugs, on the other hand, can be hazardous and even lethal if they are abused. People sometimes confuse substance abuse with drug misuse; however, drugs refer to prescription prescribed by a doctor, whereas substance abuse can involve compounds other than drugs, such as gasoline and glue. If a substance was intentionally used to create physiological or psychological effects for a purpose other than therapeutic purposes, it was termed abused. The term "abuse" refers to inappropriate or harmful behaviour. When these phrases are combined, "drug abuse" it can be defined as the improper use of drugs, the abuse of drugs, the violation of prescribed pharmacological use of medicines, or the use of drugs in a manner that differs from the accepted medical or societal norm. Substance addiction typically begins in adolescence with smoking and alcohol intake [10] Drug abuse among students, on the other hand, may be caused by interactions across peer groups, as well as the availability and nature of the substance. Environmental variables that contribute to drug misuse include cultural influences, parental behaviour, and laws and regulations that restrict drug access.

There are seven types of drugs often abused; they are classified based on their physiological effects. Stimulants, narcotics, cannabis, depressants, analgesics, sedatives, performance-enhancing drugs, hallucinogens, and inhalants are the most common psychoactive drugs. They include the following:

1. Stimulants: They are often used to boost central nervous system (CNS) activities such as heart rate, blood pressure, and brain function rate. Users report feeling more energised and less fatigued. Caffeine, cocaine, nicotine, and amphetamine are examples of stimulants.
2. Narcotics: These are highly addictive medications that are used medically to ease pain and promote sleep. Plants including opium, morphine, codeine, and heroin are used to make narcotics. They can be inhaled (snorted), injected, or smoked and are exceedingly addictive [22]. Heroin, opium, morphine, codeine, and tramadol are all examples of narcotics.
3. Cannabis: Cannabis, commonly known as pot, marijuana, hashish, and bhang, is a narcotic made from the Indian hemp plant (*cannabis sativa*). It has limited therapeutic value and is unlawful to use for non-medical purposes. Cannabis, sometimes referred as marijuana, is a widely abused narcotic in Nigeria, particularly among young people. Marijuana was first brought to Nigeria by soldiers returning from World War II [23].
4. Depressants: These are drugs that lower the natural activity of any organ or system in the body. They are also known as sedatives because they slow down CNS function. It causes abusers to develop tolerance as well as intense psychological and physical reliance. Alcohol, barbiturates, tranquilizers, and rohypnol are some of the drugs used.
5. Hallucinogens: One of the earliest chemicals used by humans, hallucinogens can cause hallucinations. Psychedelics, dissociatives, and deliriant (mind) vision are some of the terms used to describe them [24]. The effects of psychedelics are visible in the form of illusion, hallucination, and vision. At anaesthetic levels, Dissociative causes analgesia, forgetfulness, and catalepsy, causing him to become dissociated from his surroundings. Deliriant causes delirium in the user, which is characterised by acute bewilderment and the inability to regulate one's actions [25]). They are employed for ceremonies, healing, and syncretistic movement rituals all over the world in medicine, religion, and traditions: Diethylamide of lysergic acid (LSD).
6. Inhalants: These are breathable chemical vapours or gases that generate psychoactive effects when abused or misused [26]. VOCs, fuels, gases, nitrites, and anaesthetic gases (chloroform, nitrous oxide, and ether) are among them, as are industrial solvents such as gasoline, kerosene, glue, and typewriter correction fluid. Abusers inhale toxic chemicals that induce low blood pressure, dizziness, hearing loss, and lung and heart damage: Gases, solvents, and propellants are all examples of propellants.

7. Aphrodisiacs: These are chemicals that boost a person's sexual capacity or inspire sexual desire [27]. They're also referred as sexual drive boosters and are typically referred to as "labour on the streets." The chemicals improve sexual urges and contribute to increased sexual satisfaction.

## 2.2 Controlling Drug Abuse through the Mass Media

Both drug abuse and its control have always been difficult problems to solve. In reality, no single method or plan for combating this threat has been effective in the past. In general, one school of thought advocates controlling the supply side (illicit supply and trafficking), whereas the other advocates limiting the demand side. Prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation are the best options. Despite the fact that many people believe that despite vast sums of money spent, they have not been able to eradicate addiction, it is impossible to infer that drug abuse prevention is not a priority. Many people are pessimistic about their country's ability to combat drug abuse. In fact, the greatest approach is prevention, which can be accomplished through a range of strategies tailored to each community's unique characteristics, cultural diversity, and structure.

The term "mass media" refers to all technological or mechanical equipment used by a source with the goal of concurrently reaching a diverse and complex audience with messages. According to Okunna [28], mass media are multiple routes through which mass communication takes place. The media does not possess a magic wand to solve complex issues such as drugs. However, given the severity of drug addiction, the media must assume the moral obligation of informing the public about drugs and drug abuse, by focusing more on the disease as well as other problems. It has the potential to set the tone and be the driving force behind national drug awareness and education [29]. It has the potential to highlight both macro and micro factors leading to the establishment of this disease, as well as encourage community participation in preventing the problem from getting worse [1]. The media has an impact on public opinion around the world. The media can assist in establishing a regular assessment of the extent and scope of drug use and abuse, as well as drug-related problems in society. The media can assist in educating the public about the dangers of drug addiction [30].

The media's role in preventing drug misuse has rarely been recognised, and the general consensus is that it has done a lot less than it could have done, and at times, more than it could have done, but in the opposite direction [29]. Instead, it is blamed for heavily popularising drug use. In any case, there is widespread agreement that the mass media have the power to change the situation and successfully combat the malaise. The media can help to establish and maintain the drug problem on the national agenda by sending out basic and implicit messages targeted at gaining population stability [14]. The mass media have the capacity to create awareness, educate and inform people about the possible danger that the society may likely face as a result of some behaviour of people [31]. Knowledge is increased by education and exposure to the media. To tackle this problem, media advocacy could target regions for psychotherapy [1]. While underlining the dangers of drug use, the media must also provide information about available aid centres. As a result, there is an urgent need for a large-scale media campaign to disseminate information about the negative repercussions, legal provisions, and the availability of therapeutic and counselling services for the treatment and social rehabilitation of addicts who have been detoxed [29].

## 2.3 Empirical Review

Udofia [1] focuses on the administration of drug abuse among secondary school students in Nigeria. The findings revealed that secondary school pupils are aware of the presence of specific substances and their consequences if overused, primarily through available information outlets (education, radio, television, newspaper, magazines and others). Many pupils are substantially involved in drug addiction, according to the research, but harmful behaviours can be drastically decreased with efficient management and planning in schools. Fareo [32] in studya found that adolescents want an autonomous and independent life free from parental control and such lead to different delinquent activities (drug abuse, rape, robbery, cultism, and vandalism) that are harmful to the home, community, school, and nation. The impact of drug drug abuse among adolescents abuse has eaten deep into the fabric of our society; however, the government and other relevant authorities can tackle the problems through drug abuse

campaigns with effective counselling programmes.

The study of Obiechina and Isiguzo [33] found that early exposure to drug and alcohol abuse has exposed adolescents to voluntary drug consumption, smoking, drinking, and substance abuse, all of which have become a threat to our country. The goal of this research is to reduce the dangers of drug usage among students. It went over some of the drugs that are widely taken by adolescents, including their slang or popular names, routes of administration, and potential physical, psychological, social, and emotional impacts. The health consequences of adolescent drug use were also investigated.

## 2.4 Theoretical Foundation

This study was underpinned on theory of reasoned action. The theory of reasoned action was introduced and developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1967 as an improvement on Information Integration theory, and it was refined in 1980 and 1975 [34]. There are two significant modifications. To begin with, reasoned action adds a new element to the persuasive procedure: behavioural intention. Rather of attempting to predict attitudes, as Information Integration theory (and others) do, Reasoned action is exclusively concerned with behaviour. This perspective, on the other hand, recognises that certain situations (or conditions) limit the influence of attitude on behaviour. As a result, reasoned action forecasts behavioural intention, which is a compromise between anticipating attitude and accurately forecasting behaviour. Because it distinguishes behavioural intention from behaviour, reasoned action investigates the factors that limit the influence of attitudes (or behavioural intention) on behaviour. This theory is relevant to this study because it sought to find out how drug abuse and addiction can be reduced to its barest minimum among undergraduates in Imo State using the power of the media.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a survey method. This method was employed due to the fact that it is the best research design for this study; it allows respondents opinions to be sampled regarding issues of drug abuse and mass media campaigns [35]. The population of this study consists of combination 81,000 students of Imo State University Owerri, (IMSU), Federal

University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri and Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo. Specifically, they are IMSU-20,000, FUTO-22,000, FPNO-16,000, AIFCE-13,000, and Imo Poly-10,000 (Admission Units, 2020).

A sample size of 382 was derived using the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator See screenshot below:

**Sample Size Calculator**

Confidence level:  95%  99%

Margin of error (%):

Population size:

Sample size needed:

**Steps**

1. Confidence level: Click desired level
2. Margin of error: Enter desired %, such as 4.9 or 5.0
3. Population: Enter size if finite; otherwise, leave blank
4. Hit calculate button

The researchers adopted the systematic sampling technique to distribute the questionnaire to respondents at respective institutions. At first, in each of the institution the departments used were randomly selected. The departments selected were IMSU-Microbiology and Psychology, FUTO-Public Health and Agricultural and Bioresources Engineering, AIFCE-Economics and Political Science, FEDPONEK-Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Library and Information Science, ImoPoly-Medical Laboratory and Mechanical Engineering. After the selection, students at the departments were systematically sampled until 382 which is the sample size were achieved. The instrument adopted in this study was a questionnaire administered through face-to-face basis. Data were analysed using percentages and bar chart.

### 3.1 Data Analysis and Presentation

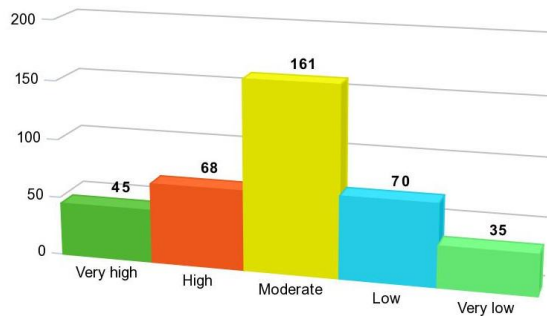
From the 382 copies of the questionnaire distributed to respondents 379 (99.2%) was retrieved meaning 3 (0.8%) copies were lost. The analysis carried out in this study was conducted

based on the 379 copies of the questionnaire that were retrieved from field work.

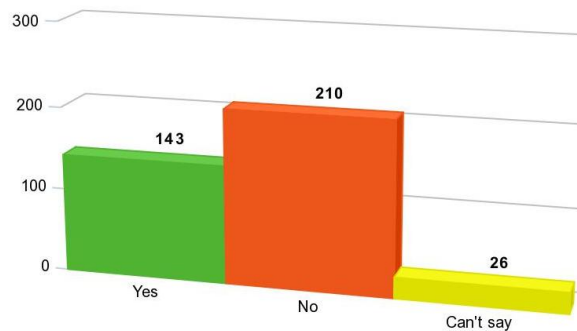
towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse is at a moderate level.

Analysis of data from Fig. 1 revealed that 42.4% of the respondents confirmed that the awareness level on mass media campaigns against drug abuse is moderate. This implies that many respondents agreed that the level of awareness

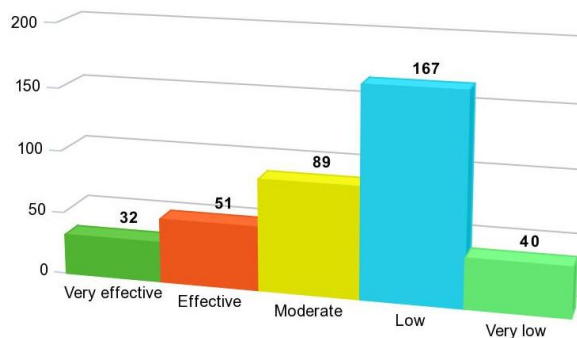
Data analysis found that 55.4 percent of respondents agreed that mass media campaigns against drug abuse have helped decrease drug abuse among undergraduates in Imo State's tertiary institutions. By implication of this, it



**Fig. 1. Respondents level of awareness towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse**  
Source: Field survey, 2022



**Fig. 2. Respondents' responses on mass media campaigns on drug abuse have helped in curtailing drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions**  
Source: Field survey, 2022



**Fig. 3. Respondents' responses on mass media campaigns have been effective in curbing the menace of drug abuse amongst undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State**  
Source: Field survey, 2022

means that mass media campaigns on drug abuse have not helped in curtailing drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions.

Analysis of the data in Fig. 3 showed that 44.4% of the respondents confirmed that mass media campaigns have not been effective in curbing the menace of drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State. This implies that many respondents affirmed that mass media campaigns have not been effective in curbing the menace of drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State.

#### **4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Findings from data analysis revealed that the level of awareness among respondents towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse is moderate, as seen in Fig. 1. From this finding, it is clear that undergraduates' level of awareness of mass media campaigns on drug abuse is neither high nor low. This implies that they are not totally ignorant of the mass media efforts in the fight against drug abuse especially among youths who are undergraduates of various higher institutions in Imo State. This finding is in consonance with that of Udofia [1] study, which revealed that students know of the existence of certain drugs and their effect if abused, mostly through the available channels of communication such as radio, television, newspaper, magazines among others. This is why Odorume [30] noted that the mass media can help expose the people to the danger of drug abuse when they engage in it. However, because respondents are moderately exposed, they may be at a disadvantage in terms of receiving all of the important messages from the media that can help them improve their attitudes toward drug use and abuse. According to the theory of reasoned action, the undergraduates of Imo State higher institutions' level of awareness of mass media campaign messages may impede their influence on attitudinal change.

Further findings from data analysis showed that an average of 49.9% of the undergraduates confirmed that the mass media campaigns have not been effective in curbing the menace of drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State. This could be a reason the issue of drug abuse is still alarming among the students of higher institutions. This finding is consistent with that of Fareo [32], who found that adolescents engage in many delinquent activities that are detrimental to society, and that the threat of drug abuse has eaten deep into the fabric of

our society. In a similar study, Obiechina and Isiguzo [33] found that early exposure to drug and alcohol abuse has exposed teenagers to voluntary drug intake, smoking, drinking, and substance abuse, all of which have become a national threat. This alarming discovery could be due to the low level of awareness among undergraduates in Imo State's various higher education institutions. According to the theory of reasoned action, which states that persuasion can drive behavioural change, if a mass media campaign against drug abuse is ineffective, it will not promote positive behavioural change among people.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Drugs are not dangerous in and of themselves, as many times with a prescription from a licenced well-trained personnel, a certain percentage of drugs is advised to be taken for one health issue or another, but drug abuse is not to be taken lightly because those who engage in it are threats to society, and when society is threatened by these drug abusers, a lot can go wrong. Based on these findings, it can therefore be concluded that the mass media campaigns are not effective in the fight against drug abuse among undergraduates of higher institutions in Imo State, because the campaigns have not helped in curtailing the menace as students still engage in it and this may be connected to the level of awareness among the undergraduates of these higher institutions in Imo State.

#### **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The mass media should intensify their publicity and commitment to drug abuse to be able to create more awareness of the danger of drug abuse in society.
2. The mass media should be more creative in their content and in some cases, they should employ persuasive communication to be able to influence a good number of youths positively and make them shun drug abuse.

#### **CONSENT**

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

#### **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.



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