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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT TO THE RECOVERING YOUNG ADULTS IN NAIROBI COUNTY

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Abstract
This study sought to assess the impact of psychosocial support services among young adults recovering from drug and substance abuse in Nairobi County. The government of Kenya, in partnership with NACADA (National Campaign against Drug Abuse), are working together to curb the practice of drug and substance abuse as well as assisting recovering young adults to reform. Despite the efforts, the drug users' recovery rate in Kenya remains low, with cases of drug relapse and discontinuation from medically assisted treatment (MAT) programs being high. The study was grounded on family therapy theory and cognitive behaviour theories. The study used a descriptive survey design. The results highlighted strengths in understanding and perceived effectiveness of psychosocial support services in the centre while also identifying areas such as relapse management and public awareness where improvements may be beneficial. The results showed that recovering drug users and psychosocial support providers perceived psychosocial support services as highly effective in supporting recovery. The study recommends that the government should deliberate on various interventions and current policies addressing drug and substance abuse and outcomes, as this will enhance the recovery process.

Key terms: Drug abuse, medically assisted treatment, methadone, psychosocial support, recovery.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term "psychosocial" refers to the dynamic connection between psychological factors affecting our feelings and cognitive development (thinking) and social factors, which can include individual relationships, family and community setups, cultural or racial differences and also country interactions {IFRC Reference Centre for psychosocial support (2022). For the purpose of this study, the words psychosocial support and psychosocial interventions were used interchangeably. According to Psychosocial Working Group (2021), the use of the word "psychosocial support" implies the interactions between psychological factors and social factors that affect peoples' psychosocial wellbeing. Therefore, combined efforts should be made to address the needs. The recovering young adults are young adults ranging from the adolescent stage to 35 years of age who have decided to stop taking drugs and substance abuse in order to reform their former productive lives when they were not drug addicts. However, it should be noted that drug addiction is a chronic disease, and therefore, treatment is a process mannered by relapses. According to (Volkow, 2023), "drug treatment is meant to assist the chronic drug abusers from drug cravings and withdrawals, and that treatment can take a specific period of time depending on an individual."

A psychosocial approach aimed at having less focus on individual clinically based diagnoses and more on holistic, broad-based preventative programs that promote resilience and develop coping strategies across the entire affected group (Mattingly, 2017). This approach has led to improvements in general management among those with and without specific disorders, and this can consequently reduce the number of those who require any special intervention. In that regard, Mattingly (2017) recommends that psychosocial programs be implemented through a complementary, integrated and multisector approach. There are various trends of psychosocial support and drug and substance abuse. There had been no recognition and response to the mental and psychosocial needs of refugees in humanitarian contexts until post-World War II (UNHCR 2023). Before then, the needs of refugees arising from traumatic events and conflicts were handled from a clinical approach. With the increase in the number of humanitarian agencies, there has been an increase in attention given to the role of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) activities within humanitarian responses. UNHCR report reviews that the recognition of MHPSS needs of refugees in humanitarian contexts grew alongside reports on the mental health concerns of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees in camps in Thailand. There was also a humanitarian response to the crisis in Bosnia–Herzegovina and Croatia. The 2004 tsunami also had an important influence on the development of the MHPSS field. The report further notes that the recognition and support from International organisations like the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and UNICEF, among others, have come to a realisation that psychosocial needs are equally important, just like basic needs and physical needs.

In Africa, psychosocial support services are increasingly being carried out, though with challenges. There are numerous cases in many African countries which call for psychosocial interventions. These cases include vulnerable children like orphans, humanitarian crises like civil wars and tribal classes, and mental sicknesses arising from drug and substance abuse, among other causes. The major challenges facing ineffective implementation of psychosocial support are inadequate training on how to go about the

process and inadequate resources. This is evident not only in rehabilitation centres but also in some cases in hospital settings. In South Sudan and Sudan, psychosocial support is offered to refugee children and young people who have been affected by frequent civil wars (Unni et al., 2023). The psychosocial support services are offered in the context of school setting. The school teachers play an important role in offering material, practical help as well as emotional needs. He notes that the program is supported by stakeholders like parents, counsellors, NGO groups and staff. The initiative has gone a long way in providing psychosocial wellbeing to the affected participants. However, Unni clarifies that the stakeholders advocate for more interactive psychosocial support where the affected children's parents are involved.

In Kenya, little is known about the provision of psychosocial support services. This was reviewed by national psychosocial support guidelines for orphans and vulnerable children in Kenya (Sitienei & Pillay, 2019). The following findings were established: There was no specific definition of the term psychosocial support (PSS), hence a lack of know-how on the usage of PSS. It was also discovered that the majority of the service providers did not employ international standards in their work. Family and community support was vital in ensuring that efficient PSS services were delivered to a holistic society. There was also a need to include the elderly and children caregivers in the PSS programme since they offer primary care to orphans and vulnerable children. According to (Katherine, 2022), psychosocial support is lacking in Kenya's national guidelines for the management of HIV/AIDS, especially for children, which is a vital aspect in coping with HIV/AIDS infection. The challenge has created gaps in both the medical professionals who directly handle HIV/AIDS treatment and health care assistants who also provide HIV/AIDS health education to the community. This calls for training on how to effectively manage HIV/AIDS patients for their psychosocial wellbeing besides treatment.

There is a wealth of information about trends in drug and substance abuse through research. The survey on drug usage in the wider population shows that young people are more involved in drug abuse as compared to adults and that further research reveals that introduction to drug abuse starts at the adolescent stage, as early as 12 years, and the trend can extend up to 25 years (Vareinte & Burofur, 2018). Vareinte and Burofur further clarify that in Western countries, the most commonly abused drug among young people is cannabis. This is because of the perception that it is less harmful and easily available and, therefore, is often the first to be introduced to adolescents in combination with other drugs and vice versa. The World Health Organisation -WHO (2000) records that there were approximately more than 185 million global consumers of illicit drugs and a billion users of alcohol as well as smokers and that in regard to disease burden, illicit drugs were seen to have negative effects in developed countries as compared to countries in central and southern Africa. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), on the other hand, statistics revealed that approximately more than 247 million people between the ages 15 and 64 had consumed drugs at least once in their lifetime by the year 2022. From the accrued literature on alcohol consumption in sub-Saharan Africa, studies show that the majority of young people have ever consumed alcohol once in their lifetime and that they might also be consuming it currently (Odejide, 2006). According to Umubyeyi et al. (2022), nearly two decades ago, there was an increasing global public health burden created by the negative effects of substance use disorders (SUD) and drug abuse. The report further reveals that 5 per cent of the world's adult population are consumers of illicit drugs and that some have been clinically diagnosed with drug addiction in the year 2015.

In Kenya, the drug menace is listed as one of the major issues affecting the economy today. According to (Chesang, 2020), the report reveals that abuse of drugs is no longer meant for specific regions or social status, but the problem rather cuts across all classes of people, from low-income areas, rich and poor, and rural and urban settings as well. According to Lelei et al. (2020), there is a cause for alarm in the way young people are getting obsessed with drugs. The report indicates that those who are being affected by drugs range between 16 to 30 years of age, and 50 per cent of the youths are residing in the city of Nairobi (Lelei et al., 2020). In Nairobi County, the majority of the young adults who had earlier been lured to drugs and substance abuse are seeking drug treatment and rehabilitation so as to reform their former productive lives. However, the current challenge is that there is a high rate of relapses and exit from the MAT program among recovering young adults recuperating from drugs and substance abuse. This necessitates the call for a study to ascertain the effectiveness of psychosocial support services offered to the enrolled young adults in the various rehabilitation Centers and Methadone clinics within the County.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

A good number of research carried out globally reviews that there are significant benefits derived from integrated treatment of mental illness and substance abuse disorders. However, the effectiveness of particular interventions is not very certain. According to Mueser et al. (2008), previous studies have reviewed the results of the usage of particular psychosocial interventions in the treatment of patients suffering from substance use disorders. The models of interventions ranged from individual approach, group and family approaches and structural approaches. The study methodology was a critical literature review, while the current study generated original findings. Mueser clarifies that the findings of the studies reviewed that group interventions were the most studied and also had different treatment approaches for specific patients suffering from substance abuse disorders (e.g. psycho-education, motivational enhancement, cognitive behavioural counselling). These approaches were found to be more effective in substance abuse patients than standard 12–step approaches.

It is estimated that about twenty per cent of the American population has been adversely affected by mental health illnesses and substance use disorders (Monica et al., 2015). The study found that counselling programmes did not significantly affect the recovery of drug users. The study contradicted the findings of (Mueser et al. (2008). The study analysed data using frequencies and percentages, making it difficult to generalise the findings. Progressive assessment reports on the effects of psychosocial interventions on the treatment of mental disorders and substance abuse review that there are various types of psychosocial interventions that are effective. However, Monica notes that the findings further review that the psychosocial interventions which are seen to be productive through research findings are rarely used in clinical practice since there are no system regulations to monitor the effective administration of psychosocial interventions to the patients. This situation is alarming and calls for further interventions with a view of embracing research findings for productive mental health treatment, not merely relying on common routine clinical practice, which is not progressive.

A systematic review was done in (U.S.) by (Brown, 2018) to determine if psychosocial interventions were effective towards relapse prevention. The research involved 14 studies comparing 9 psychosocial

interventions in concurrence with medication maintenance. This study reviewed the literature on factors hindering the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions on the recovery of drug users. The study did not analyse primary data and did not generate actual results. The study revealed that recovering drug users were dissatisfied with the psychosocial interventions. Brown explains that the findings reviewed that only two studies supported that psychosocial interventions were effective towards drug abuse management in comparison to maintenance. In my view, it should be noted that different psychosocial interventions work differently for the clients, and for effective results, therapists should employ various psychosocial interventions for their clients to determine which one works best for them.

A German study by Michael et al. (2002) was undertaken to determine the effectiveness of Appropriate drugs and different kinds of psychosocial support in the prevention of alcohol relapse. The study involved 753 patients who were to abstain for 1 to 4 weeks. Proportionate stratified random sampling was employed to determine the sample sizes in each stratum. The results of the study showed that there was notable progress in alcohol abstinence among the patients regardless of the type of psychosocial support offered. This integration of Acamprosate drug and psychosocial support seems dependable to alcohol treatment and can be embraced by hospitals and rehabilitation Centers in managing alcohol patients. However, in my view, it can only be effective if the patients are willing to stop taking alcohol before treatment. The study, however, did not explore the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions on the recovery of drug users.

At a South African hospital, a study was conducted by Pillay and Olen (2013) to investigate the views of clinical staff, their understanding and attitudes towards psychosocial rehabilitation in the provision of inpatient care for patients suffering from mental health disorders. A survey method was used, and the various clinical staff in the hospital were called upon to participate. The questionnaire was constructed in such a way that it would be able to touch on specific areas, including the understanding of psychosocial rehabilitation (PSR), its aim and goals, sufficient knowledge in PSR practice, and sufficient resources to do PSR, among other key areas. Pillay and Olien clarify that the results of the study reviewed that a good number of clinical staff investigated stated that they were not adequately trained to perform PSR interventions. The researchers recommended well-established training programs in future. In my view, it is worth noting that training psychosocial staff providers is paramount for the delivery of services and implementation of psychosocial support in any treatment setting, whether in a hospital or in a rehabilitation centre.

In Kenya, a study was carried out in Kisii County by Sereta et al. (2016) to establish the effectiveness of drug rehabilitation programs on behaviour modification of drug addicts in the selected rehabilitation centres in Kisii County. The tools for collecting data were questionnaires, one for the staff and the other with guided interviews for the rehabilitees. The researcher notes that the study found that drug users' evaluation in terms of assessment emerged from the key programs offered by rehabilitation centres in Kisii County and its surroundings. The findings also revealed that the staff members were well-trained, with the majority holding academic certificates from reputable institutions. The staff also possess proficiency in drug management and rehabilitation tasks. The rehabilitation centres were also found to be conducting personal continuing and aftercare services to their clients using psychosocial interventions and individual

personal empowerment of the rehabilitee. However, the findings also revealed that financial constraints were challenges that contributed to inadequate staff, medication, and facilities, among others. The study recommended that the challenges highlighted could only be solved by adequate funding from the relevant institutions concerned with rehabilitation centres in Kenya. The gaps in terms of management of rehabilitation Centers offering psychosocial support services are also evident in Kenya. This is in regard to the offering of services and training of psychosocial support providers. In my opinion, due to challenges that come along with mental illnesses in the Country and globally at large, the government should develop robust measures and programs geared towards equipping psychosocial support providers for effective mitigation of drug abuse and treatment.

Another study was carried out to assess if there is a correlation and support between family, self – efficacy and returning to substance use among the youths that are recuperating from addiction to drug treatment centres in Limuru in Kiambu County (Kinyua, 2019). The youths recovering from drugs in rehabilitation centres in Limuru were found to be ranging between ages 22- 35 years, with the majority being females. The study used questionnaires to collect data consisting only of closed-ended items. Kinyua clarifies that the findings of the study showed that family support and self–efficacy significantly correlate. In other words, family support contributed strongly to self–efficacy. The findings also showed that efficient family support contributed to low chances of relapse among recuperating drug addicts. Family unit support acts as a source of love and belonging to individuals. The recovering young adults require much love and concern from family members for quick recovery in their journey.

In Nairobi County, psychosocial support is seen to be productive for young adults recuperating from drugs and substance abuse. The psychosocial support services are normally offered in the context of a clinical setting for recovering young adults enrolled in the various rehabilitation centres and methadone clinics within the County. With the introduction of Methadone drug integrated with psychosocial support in the treatment and management of recovering drug abusers by the government of Kenya as a harm reduction program for drug abusers, steady steps have been realised in Nairobi County. The recovering young adults who have managed to complete their full term in the program have benefited to a large extent, not only psychologically but also physically. This is where a number of them have reunited with their families, sought jobs, opened up small businesses, and a few have volunteered to educate their former peers and the community about the dangers of drug abuse and how to walk the journey of recovery. However, there are challenges of relapse cases and premature cessation from the MAT program.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research used a descriptive survey method. The research targeted methadone clients and psychosocial support staff working in the Methadone clinics and rehabilitation centres in Nairobi County. The study targeted recovering young adults aged 18-35 years, both male and female, who have been enrolled in the medically assisted therapy (MAT) program within the rehabilitation centres and methadone clinics in the County. Respondents who did not consent or assent were excluded from the study. According to Nacada (2021), there are 10 accredited rehabilitation centres (both public and private) and two methadone clinics in Nairobi County. Participants were drawn from the 2 methadone clinics and 4 biggest rehabilitation centers in Nairobi County. A big rehabilitation centre has a minimum of two counsellors, a psychologist,

two clinicians/nurses, and a centre manager. Each methadone clinic has a minimum of two counsellors, a psychologist, three clinicians/nurses, and a centre manager. A sample of 313 was targeted for this study, consisting of 28 psychosocial staff and 285 recovering young adults. The study used questionnaires as a tool for data collection. The researcher obtained a letter of approval from St. Paul University and NACOSTI. The study obtained permission from NACADA to follow their policies. The researcher distributed the questionnaires directly to the rehab centres and Methadone clinics. The drop-and-pick method was used, where the questionnaire was dropped and picked at the agreed time after the completion. The statistical tests used were descriptive statistics of percentage, mean and standard deviation.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 presents the results on the effectiveness of psychosocial support and services offered at the centre, providing insights into perceptions of support quality and impact.

Table1. Effectiveness of the Psychosocial Support

Effectiveness of psychosocial support	N	Mean	Std. Error
I understand psychosocial support in this centre.	24	4.10	.057
The psychosocial support for recovering young adults in this centre is effective.	24	4.29	.036
The psychosocial support for relapse management of young adults in this centre is effective.	24	3.44	.067
The psychosocial support from the family members of recovering young adults in this centre is effective.	24	4.19	.050
The counselling services offered to the clients are beneficial in their recovery	24	3.94	.054
The government of Kenya has opened various rehabilitation Centers for drug and substance abuse treatment, but the society is not informed.	24	3.88	.058
Aggregate	24	3.97	0.05

Understanding of Psychosocial Support results reported a mean score of 4.10 (SE = 0.057), indicating a high level of understanding of psychosocial support services provided by the centre. Overall Effectiveness of Psychosocial Support The mean score for the effectiveness of psychosocial support to recovering young adults was 4.29 (SE = 0.036), suggesting that respondents perceive these services as highly effective in supporting recovery. Effectiveness in relapse management mean score for effectiveness in relapse management was 3.44 (SE = 0.067), indicating a slightly lower perception of effectiveness in this specific area compared to overall support. Respondents rated the effectiveness of psychosocial support from family members at 4.19 (SE = 0.050), indicating a strong perception of support from family in the recovery process. Counselling services were perceived as beneficial, with a mean score of 3.94 (SE = 0.054), suggesting they play a significant role in clients' recovery journeys. Respondents indicated a mean score of 3.88 (SE = 0.058) regarding public awareness of rehabilitation centres, suggesting a perceived need for greater societal education on available resources. These results, in collaboration with those of Dennis et al.

(2020), showed that psychosocial support providers were effective in providing service. The aggregate mean score across all aspects of psychosocial support effectiveness was 3.97 (SE = 0.05), indicating an overall positive perception of the support services provided. These findings highlight strengths in understanding and perceived effectiveness of psychosocial support services in the centre while also identifying areas such as relapse management and public awareness where improvements may be beneficial. Further exploration and improvement in these areas can enhance the overall support system for recovering young adults.

Table 2 presents the frequency and distribution of psychosocial interventions utilised in the centre, offering insights into the diverse approaches employed to support recovery among young adults.

Table 2: Psychosocial Interventions Used

Psychosocial interventions used	Frequency	Per cent
Motivational Interviewing, Contingency management	10	41.67
Contingency management	7	29.16
Brief Interventions	3	12.5
Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)	1	4.17
Self-help groups	2	8.33
Family therapy	1	4.17
Total	24	100

The most commonly utilised interventions are motivational interviewing combined with contingency management, utilised by 41.67 per cent of respondents (n=10). These approaches are known for their effectiveness in enhancing motivation and reinforcing positive behaviours through tangible rewards. Implementation of contingency management was by 29.16 per cent of respondents (n=7); contingency management focuses on providing tangible rewards to reinforce desired behaviours, such as abstinence or treatment adherence Dennis et al., (2015). Brief Interventions: These are used by 12.5 per cent of respondents (n=3). Brief Interventions involve concise sessions aimed at increasing awareness of substance use behaviours and promoting initial steps toward change. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Employed by 4.17 per cent of respondents (n=1), CBT is a structured therapeutic approach that addresses the interplay between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, aiming to modify negative patterns and promote healthier coping strategies. Self-Help Groups: Used by 8.33 per cent of respondents (n=2), Self-Help Groups provide peer support and mutual aid in a structured environment, emphasising shared experiences and accountability. Family therapy: Implemented by 4.17 per cent of respondents, family therapy involves the family member's participation in the therapeutic process, addressing familial support systems crucial to recovery. These interventions collectively reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing substance abuse issues, catering to diverse needs and preferences among recovering young adults. The selection of interventions aligns with evidence-based practices known for their efficacy in promoting sustained recovery and addressing underlying factors contributing to substance use.

The respondents responded on whether the neglecting of consistent treatment procedures hampers the effective treatment of drug abuse clients. To explore this, respondents were asked whether they believe that neglecting consistent treatment procedures hinders effective treatment.

Table 3: Neglecting Consistent Treatment Hampers Effective treatment

Neglecting consistent treatment hampers Effective treatment	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	21	87.5
No	3	12.5
Total	24	100.0

As indicated in Table 3, the findings show that 87.5 per cent of the respondents agreed that neglecting consistent treatment procedures hampers effective treatment, while 12.5 per cent disagreed. These results highlight the critical importance of maintaining consistent treatment protocols to ensure the effectiveness of drug abuse interventions. Consistent treatment is vital for establishing a structured recovery environment, which can significantly enhance treatment outcomes. Similar results have been observed in other research examining the impact of treatment consistency on recovery outcomes. Weiss et al. (2021) and Carroll (2019) emphasise that adherence to established treatment protocols significantly improves recovery rates and reduces relapse among individuals in substance abuse programs. This underscores the necessity of implementing and maintaining structured treatment procedures to achieve effective results in drug abuse treatment.

The study further sought to assess the level of satisfaction with the existing drug and substance abuse laws among the respondents. Psychosocial support providers were asked whether they were satisfied with the existing drug and substance abuse laws. This is presented in Table 3.

Table 4. Satisfaction with the Existing Drug and Substance Abuse Laws

Satisfaction with the existing drug and substance abuse laws	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	17	83.3
No	7	12.5
Total	24	100.0

As indicated in Table 4, the findings show that 83.3 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the existing drug and substance abuse laws, while 12.5 per cent were not satisfied. The high satisfaction rate indicates that a majority of respondents believe that the current laws are effective. However, the suggestions for improvement highlight areas where the laws could be enhanced to provide better support and outcomes for individuals struggling with drug and substance abuse. Similar findings have been reported in other studies assessing public opinion on drug laws. For instance, according to Kelly et al. (2020), effective drug laws require not only stringent regulations but also comprehensive support systems, including education, prevention, and rehabilitation programs, to address the multifaceted nature of substance abuse.

The study aimed to identify the key challenges and barriers that hinder drug addicts from seeking treatment. This information is crucial for developing strategies to encourage treatment and support for individuals struggling with drug addiction.

Table 5: Challenges / Barriers that Hinder Drug Addicts from Seeking Treatment

Challenges/barriers that hinder drug addicts from seeking treatment.	Frequency	Per cent
Stigma	6	25
Lack of information	5	20.8
Lack of family support	4	16.7
Lack of funds for treatment	5	20.8
Guilty	4	16.7
Total	24	100

As indicated in Table 5, the findings show that the main challenges and barriers that hinder drug addicts from seeking treatment are stigma (25.0%), lack of information (20.8%), lack of funds for treatment (20.8%), lack of family support (16.7%), and feelings of guilt (16.7%). The high prevalence of stigma as a barrier suggests that social attitudes and perceptions about drug addiction significantly impact individuals' willingness to seek help. Lack of information and financial constraints are also major obstacles, indicating the need for better public awareness campaigns and accessible treatment options. Family support plays a crucial role, as its absence can deter individuals from pursuing recovery. Additionally, feelings of guilt further compound these challenges, making it harder for individuals to seek treatment. Similar findings have been observed in other studies on barriers to drug addiction treatment. For example, according to the research by Priester et al. (2019), stigma and lack of resources are significant impediments to seeking treatment, highlighting the necessity of comprehensive approaches that address both social and economic factors.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions: The results showed that recovering drug users and psychosocial support providers perceived psychosocial support services as highly effective in supporting recovery. Based on these results, the study, therefore, concluded that there was a relationship between psychosocial support services and effectiveness in supporting recovery. This conclusion highlights strengths in understanding and perceived effectiveness of psychosocial support services in the centre while also identifying areas such as relapse management and public awareness where improvements may be beneficial.

Recommendations: The study recommends that the government should deliberate on various interventions and current policies addressing drug and substance abuse and outcomes, as this will enhance the recovery process. The study recommends that there is a need for training counsellors and refresher courses for trained ones in order to enhance counsellors' powers. The study recommends that rehabilitation centres should invest in mechanisms that enhance the effectiveness and professionalism of psychosocial support to recovering young adults in Nairobi County. This can be done by investing in psychosocial staff attending seminars/workshops/capacity building programs/ training, organised activities and staff mentorship programs, as this will improve their effectiveness in enhancing the recovery rates of

patients. The study also recommends that rehabilitation centres, the government and other stakeholders should provide appropriate and adequate resources for strategies used by psychosocial providers in addressing issues of drug and substance abuse.

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